

4/27/77

John Willis' class on "History of Christian Thought"

1 You were very generous with your questions. It would take an encyclopedia to answer them.

I propose to select just one; it reads: What is sin? Is it selfishness, or a revolt against God, or what?

I propose to answer it indirectly, by talking about human development. If you get some idea of what that is, you will have a basis to figure out for yourselves some approximation to what sin is.

2 In human development there is a conscious part, but in partnership with it there also is an unconscious part. The conscious part we can come to know rather well. The unconscious part we know about by inferring from its contributions to conscious living. We must begin then from the conscious part and, first of all, say something about nature.

3 In the Physics (II 1 192^b22) nature is said to be an immanent principle of movement and of rest.

A principle of movement: a self-starter

An immanent principle of movement: you yourself are the self-starter

A principle of rest: it stops movement when the intended goal is reached
~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~

An immanent principle of rest: you are both a self-starter and a self-stopper

4 What are these conscious immanent principles? Questions of three kinds: for intelligence, for reflection, for deliberation. For the questions to occur, there is needed a certain freedom of attention

Freedom from external interference: agonistic gorillas and hedonic chimpanzees (ethology, Lorenz (Konrad), Chance)

Internal freedom: having enough sense to stop and think

5 Acquiring skills: monkey see and monkey do: everything D sees MJ doing watch, try it, fail, show me, catch on, try

Head player: comes to understand opponents strengths and weaknesses
max occasions for weakness, min occasions for strengths

Head coach: weakness and strengths of two teams

Besides direct trial and error, indirect:

insight, hypothesis, formulation, implications, series of obs exper, check, revise,....

Principle of movement: keep at it until your understanding is satisfactory

Principle of rest: you do understand, no more further relevant qq.

- 6 Questions for reflection: experim^ental process: if A then B (hypothesis);
 experim^ental results: B_1, B_2, B_3, \dots ; therefore, possibly A.
 Why only possibly: if you go out in the rain, you'll get wet; I got wet;
 therefore I went out in the rain. May be you got wet in the shower but
 Real test: no further questions relevant to the issue.
 Newman: is England an Island? Have you^x circumnavigated it? How do
 you know? Might there not be a conspiracy?
- 7 Questions for deliberation!
 Besides sensations, insights, judgments that reveal what is so,
 there are the feelings that constitute the mass and momentum of
 our lives and they urge us to ask, if that's what's so, what are
 you going to do about it.
 Such questions may be,
 what's in it for me? or
 what's in it for us? or
 what would really worth while?
 Progress from individual egoism to group egoism to objective value
 objective value: good conscience is no further questions; uneasy
 conscience keeps nagging with further questions
 Again, the criterion is you yourself, by your immanent principle of
 movement and rest, which comes to a rest only when no further
 relevant questions occur to interfere with rest.
- 8 What^x is really worth while?
 the minor question: what is worth while on this occasion
 the major question: thinking ahead, asking what is the good like,
 asking for a commitment that regards the rest of your life
 an open-eyed commitment that knows one cannot control the human
 situation, that one cannot by a present decision eliminate the
 freedom of each of the series of future acts that will implement
 the decision
 Commitment is the opposite of drifting
 when one is doing and saying and thinking what everyone else is
 doing and saying and thinking, and all of them also are just drifting
 Whence then power to plunge?
- 9 To answer this question we have to
 distinguish horizontal from vertical finality
 distinguish the unconscious and the conscious and what is beyond
 the present consciousness that has not yet the power to plunge
 Horizontal finality: qq for intelligence to full insight; qq for
 reflectin to sufficient evidence; qq for deliberation to good conscience

