

WHAT IS METAPHYSICS?

By R. A. Applegate, Jr., Ph.D

THE WORD metaphysics (in Greek ta meta ta physica) was coined by Andronicus of Rhodes in about 90 B.C. as the title for the second book of Aristotle on "Natural Science." The books of Aristotle had been lost for several centuries; and when they were rediscovered, they were fragmentary and without titles. Actually they were probably not written by Aristotle at all, but are the notes of his lectures made by one of his students. Anyway, one of the "books" deals with the nature of the physical world, and so it was called The Physics. Then there is a second book that is a continuation of this; and for want of a better title, Andronicus called this second book The Metaphysics, which means "the book that comes after The Physics."

In this second book - The Metaphysics - Aristotle deals with what are called the ultimate realities; that is, with the creation of the universe, with the essence of created things and with the First Cause, which he called the Unmoved Mover (because in his opinion it moved all things by being the object of desire).

Accordingly the word metaphysics came to be applied to the study of the essential realities - of the essence of things and their cause. Soon the word was construed as referring to the study of that which is above the physical. (Meta means "after," but it was taken as meaning "above.") This study was divided into two parts: ontology (the study of being) and epistemology (the study of knowledge). So metaphysics is concerned with the two questions: What is? and What can we know?

During the Middle Ages metaphysics was a branch of philosophy; and since all philosophy was religious philosophy, it was a part of the study of the church. With the dawn of the Renaissance and the rationalistic philosophies of Kant and his followers, the word fell into disrepute (except in academic circles). However, man has remained interested in the questions of what he is, where he came from, and where he is going; and he has never been thoroughly satisfied with materialistic, rationalistic answers, which tell him either (1) he cannot know, or (2) he is a concourse of atoms that came from a chance association and will dissolve again into its parts. And so the interest in metaphysics has never completely died, and recently it has had a considerable awakening.

In the last century men started to rediscover that there is a Presence in the universe whose sole purpose is to bless man; and they found that man can know, love, and obey this Presence, to his own great advantage. They did not find this taught in the orthodox churches (although they found it expressed in many of the old church fathers and in many of the pagan philosophers). So instead of using the word religion (which has come to mean the form and ritual of the churches) they appropriated the term metaphysics for this "new" study.

SPIRITICITY July 1960

ESCAPE INTO TRUTH

By Nell Truesdell

A STUDENT of Truth often is confused when he has to be polite to relatives and friends that are habitually negative in speech. All of us know persons who choose suffering to glorify themselves. They call attention to their illnesses, hurts, and lacks, to gain our sympathy. Secretly they crave our commendation for their endurance.

What to do? Nothing; that is, nothing in an effort to correct their faults or to try to convince them against their wills that they are wrong. The Way of escape is in our inward retreat to a place of conscious surety that the Truth we know will hold its own while we are being exposed to negative reports. To gain this spiritual certainty we must prepare ourselves in private. This forearming requires our definite purpose and a steadfastness to that purpose.

Unshakable awareness of Truth is gained by our practice of meditation on Truth. Truth is impervious to negation. Truth never changes. We change as our awareness of Truth expands. The more Truth we grasp, the less likely we are to be disturbed by the negative outlook of another and the less likely he is to be negative in our presence. The mightiness of the Truth we know will heal him of faults and, at the same time, shield us from exposure to those faults. Our work is to know the Truth, not to change people.

Meditation is more than a casual drifting in thought, more than a half-awake reverie. Meditation is persistent inward attention to words until the Truth in them is exposed. Words are hard nuts to crack. They will not yield their meat if we just roll them around in our intellect. We must grasp them with our attention, cleave them, then dig for the kernel. In the digging, we must not bruise or break the kernel, but draw it out whole.

Where shall we find the right words on which to meditate? Scripture is the best source: the promises in the Old Testament and the words of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Spiritual Truths expressed in modern language may be readily accepted by those of us that appreciate pithy statements. But no words, however fine or beautiful, will yield their inner essence until they are caught and then opened by our attention. One-pointed attention is called meditation.

Prayer is the handmaiden of meditation. Prayer smooths the way for the attention to quiet down and fix definitely on words of Truth. An untrained attention flits aimlessly in the intellect when no purpose to know holds it steady. Prayer may be used to lead the attention gently to rest at the heart-center where the as-yet-unrevealed Truth in words may be drawn out. The Lord's Prayer repeated over and over or a maxim or affirmation of Truth repeated will aid in settling the attention inwardly. If the attention does not come to rest at the center of consciousness during prayer, the prayer period will yield little spiritual enlightenment, though a surface physical comfort or mental relief or emotional solace may be achieved.

The Truth that is locked in words (not the words themselves) is a real defense. I had an unforgettable lesson in this when I was young both in years and in the study of Truth. Because I spent the greater part of every day in Bible study, prayer, and meditation, a well-meaning neighbor became concerned

about me. She invited me to her home for lunch and during the visit I realized that her purpose was to discourage my interest in Truth. While she chatted about things in general in what she thought was a casual manner, I searched desperately for an appropriate response, for I am not good at argument. Silently I prayed over and over, "God help me!" as she developed her thesis of the benefits of worldly rewards and the disadvantages of reliance on ethereal spiritual promises. During a dramatic pause while she expectantly awaited my response, I heard myself say, "My dear, we always criticize what we do not understand, don't we?" Instantly that trend of the conversation ended and we talked about something else. (We remained friends for years after that visit.)

Recently, in a group of women at an art center, one person challenged my silence concerning my religious belief. While the others waited in amused expectancy of hearing a hot argument, this person related now she and a university professor had had a two-hour argument about a point in philosophy. She did not say what the point was; but as she directed her attention toward me, she asked brightly, "What do you think of that Mrs. Truesdell?" I could not say that I did not think anything about it - whatever it was - but I did reply, "Sometimes we talk at length about a subject to find out just what we think." Somehow the whole group dissolved and I was left standing alone.

Truth is a defense. We need not state Truth (as such); we need know only how to escape into Truth so that we can lean on It. It will hold us up and It will hold Its own. When we have not yet learned how to move inward and to lean hard on Truth, we are uncertain and may make an awkward attempt to explain Truth, which will serve only to embarrass us.

In periods of meditation we gain skill in moving our attention from the intellect (where we do conscious thinking) to God's Sanctuary in the heart (where we let God think through us). We stop thinking and start looking; and our attention follows the direction of our gaze. We practice taking words with us as we look inward, and the Truth in the words is revealed. We know; and in that knowing we do not attempt to change others. We let Truth free them and us from false notions. Thus do we and they escape.

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SPIRITICITY July 1960

GOD IS A ROCK

By Alden Truesdell

THE LORD is stability and immovability, protection and defense, shelter and refuge. The Lord is our hope and our release; He is our quietude and our confidence; He is what all the world is seeking, what all nations desire.

God is available. One of the things that we learn early in our search for Truth is that God is readily available whenever we sincerely turn toward Him. He always found within; and so we go within to find Him where He is.

"The Lord thy God (is) in the midst of thee," wrote Zephaniah. "He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy."

God is steadfast. When we become aware of this, we realize that it is never God that is exclusive, but we that are elusive. We go in and out at will;

but God remains undiverted, trustworthy, changeless. We offer various kinds of excuses for our defections: we have vital business to attend to elsewhere; we have to marry or be given in marriage; we have the dead to bury; we need more knowledge of the world and its ways. But in meeting all these demands, we only outsmart ourselves. It is as if we had turned away from God before the meeting had begun. We rush around to be distracted from the hard sayings of Truth.

The poet Robert Burns thought it would be fine if we could see ourselves as others see us (and no doubt this would help us in all our human relations); but the goal of our study of mysticism is that we learn to look toward God until we are able to see ourselves as God sees us. This possibility is fraught with tremendous promise.

As we become diligent in our practice of looking inward toward God we gradually realize that God is watching us as steadfastly as we are watching Him. So we heed the injunctions: to pray without ceasing; to watch and pray; and if a thousand times an hour we forget God, to glance toward Him a thousand times an hour.

Every time that we look toward God - whether the first or the thousandth time - God is there for us to look to; and for every glance Godward, there is a response. The Psalmist discovered this and cried: "Thou, God, seest me, for I also have looked after Thee."

If we looked toward God once and happened to catch a glimpse of His Presence, we might feel that He was fleeting and undependable. But if we look toward God a thousand times an hour and sense a response each time, we begin to see God as substantial indeed; we understand better the statements:

"Thou art my Rock and my Fortress: therefore for Thy names's sake, lead me and guide me. . . . Into Thine hand I commit my spirit."

"From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I."

What is God's viewpoint concerning us? He has given us a hint through Isaiah and Jeremiah:

"All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people."

"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know, therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts. . . . For they have turned their back unto Me, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us."

We wonder sometimes what God sees in us that he continues not only to put up with us, but to love us enough to use every measure at His command to bring us up to our highest stature - our divine heritage.

Seers of the caliber of Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, and Jeremiah developed an inner sensitiveness that amazingly perceived the workings of the Creative Law. In the developing of spiritual character their declarations are as necessary as is a film in a camera for taking a picture. These men - and others like them -

are they to whom Jesus referred when He said: "Other men have laboured, and ye have entered into their labours."

If we could trace the record of God through the entire history of mankind we would see one and then another man getting a glimmer of the Great God that has projected Himself freely into the receptive filaments of man's consciousness, which He has created for that purpose.

The permanence of God and the stability of His creation are pointed up by the durability of the planet on which we live. For those who study the rocks place the earth's age in the billions of years. How much more permanent must be the Creator of such a structure?

Everything that appears is made out of the Element of God; for there is no other material out of which to make anything.

If one could impress his consciousness with the universality of the only creative Essence, if one could know the availability of this Essence, he would never lack for any good that he might use to advantage. There is progress from depletion to satisfaction when, through his attention, man withdraws from the external realm of illusion to the Inner Realm of Reality. Here he can rest on the Eternal Rock of his salvation.

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SPIRITICITY July 1960
WORDS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT
By R. A. Applegate, Jr.

"THE WRATH of God is revealed from heaven against all irreverence and injustice of men." (Rom. 1:18)

In the Old Testament God is frequently spoken of as being angry, but this is never so in the New Testament. Paul uses the expression "the wrath of God" three times (it occurs once in the Gospels); but he never says that God is angry. On the other hand, he quite often uses the word "wrath" in an impersonal sense, speaking of "the wrath" as we might of "the heat."

For Paul and the other writers of the New Testament who had know Jesus Christ, it was impossible to think of God as being angry. For them, God was Love; His attitude was purely one of loving. ("The Father loveth the son"; "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.")

Yet Paul and the others (chiefly John) retained the word "wrath" because they were familiar with it. But for them it designated not an attribute of God, but the result of man's turning away from God, who is the Source of all man's good.

If you jumped out of a tenth-story window, you would land with a thud. According to New Testament usage, the result could be called "the wrath of gravity." But this would be a pictorial expression and would tell you nothing about the nature of gravity. Similarly "the wrath of God" is a graphic expression for the destruction that ensues when we turn away from God.

Jesus put it all very clearly and plainly in His Parable of the Vine:

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather

them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

This is an exact and forceful description of our relation to Christ (the Source of our life, strength, power). If a branch is separated from its parent stem, it may stay green for a few days; but it will soon wither, and it will bear no fruit. If we separate ourselves from the Source of our life, we may seem to flourish for a while; but we will soon disintegrate, and we will be good for nothing.

If a branch, of its own will, separated itself from the vine that supported it, it could not blame its sad condition upon the anger of the vine and maintain that the vine was punishing it. Yet that is exactly what we do when we blame God for our mistakes and feel that He is punishing us.

If I put a plastic bag over my head and breathe in, I will suffocate because I will have shut off the supply of air. But I cannot say that the air is punishing me or is angry with me. It is I that am punishing myself. I have cut myself off from my good.

In all these cases the result is destruction - self-destruction. It is such self-destruction that is designated by the word "wrath." As Jesus said, broad is the way that leads to destruction.

Prof. C. H. Dodd writes in his commentary to the passage from Romans with which this article began:

"He (Paul) retains (from the Old Testament) the concept of 'the wrath of God' . . . he retains it, not to describe the attitude of God to man, but to describe an inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe" (i.e. in a universe governed by law).

You will notice Paul says that the "wrath is revealed" against (1) irreverence, (2) injustice. These are the two things that bring a nemesis upon us: a false attitude toward God and a false attitude toward our fellow men. (The King James Version renders it: "The wrath . . . is revealed . . . against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." This is too sanctimonious for what Paul was saying.)

Lack of reverence for God cuts us off from God, because it is a turning away from Him to ourselves. The sense of self-sufficiency is the basic error of man and the source from which all others spring. It is a lie. It is a denial of God. It is an idolizing of one's self. This sense of self-sufficiency is, of course, highly esteemed in the world. And this is an example of what was stated by Jesus Christ: "That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (another metaphorical expression, but one that conveys a truth).

Lack of reverence for God is the branch severing itself from the Vine that is its only source of life. (Ananias and Sapphira are also good examples). Injustice also brings destruction upon us, for two reasons. First, it is a manifestation of our lack of regard for Deity; for we cannot have an unjust attitude toward our fellow man when we are honestly reverent toward God (love for God and love for man are two sides of the same thing). Second, injustice brings its own nemesis because of the law that whatever a man gives out he inevitably gets back. Many people doubt the truth of this law because they do not see it working. If they only looked far enough, they would see that it never fails. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you."

We may say then that "the wrath of God" is a graphic expression for the self-destruction that is the automatic result of our turning away in our hearts from God, the only Source and Sustainer of our being.

Alphabet of
DAILY MEDITATIONS
For Every Week Day of the Month

July 1960

1. Jesus taught AS one that had AUTHORITY.
2. Shine as the BRIGHTNESS of the firmament.
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4. Know the CERTAINTY of the words of Truth.
5. Let us not be weary in well DOING.
6. Be ENCOURAGED in the law of the Lord.
7. Truly our FELLOWSHIP is with the FATHER.
8. Blessed be His GLORIOUS Name forever.
9. Faith cometh by HEARING.
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11. I have walked IN mine INTEGRITY.
12. He is near that JUSTIFIETH me.
13. Be KINDLY affectioned one to another.
14. I have LEARNED that the LORD hath blessed me.
15. MAKE MENTION that His Name is exalted.
16. Call upon the Lord while He is NEAR.
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18. OFFER up spiritual sacrifices.
19. The Lord is my PORTION, saith my soul.
20. QUIT ye like men.
21. Be more READY to hear.
22. SEEK the Lord and His STRENGTH.
23. All THINGS come of THEE.
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25. UNITE my heart to revere Thy Name.
26. God hath VISITED His people.
27. Peace be WITHIN thee.
28. Why reason YE among YOURSELVES.
29. He was ZEALOUS.
30. The Lord is good to all them that trust in Him.

* * *

"When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

SPIRITICITY is the Working Power of the Spiritual Principle
as electricity is the working power of the electrical principle.