

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KURT GOLDSTEIN FOR PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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Kurt Goldstein has never written about problems of the psychology or philosophy of religion. In the immense list of his publications no article dealing with these subjects can be found. This may have contingent causes, or it may mirror the cultural situation in which Goldstein grew up and worked at the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. In any case, the title of this article, which tries to express my friendship, veneration and gratefulness to Kurt Goldstein, is somehow paradoxical. It must be understood as an attempt to derive from a work consequences which were neither outspoken nor even consciously known by the author himself. It is, of course, my hope that they will not be rejected by him.

Goldstein's concern in everything he has written is the nature of man. Therefore, if we ask about Goldstein's significance for philosophy of religion, we must change our question to the more limited one: What is the significance of Goldstein's interpretation of human nature for the understanding of religion? But immediately this form of the question proves to be too narrow, for Goldstein is quite aware of the fact that one cannot describe human nature without describing the nature of organic life generally. This is done in his largest work, *The Organism* (1), while the application to man is systematically given in his William James Lectures on *Human Nature* (2).

One can say that the significance of Goldstein for the study of religion lies in his *doctrine of human freedom*. Only a being who can transcend the concrete situation, or who has "an attitude toward the abstract" (2, p. 59), is able to transcend the whole of encountered reality. Only he who is able to deal with the merely possible (2, p. 49) can transform everything into a "possible," into something which "could have not been," and then ask the question of that which cannot *not* be, the "ground of being." Freedom, not in the obsolete sense of an indeterministic metaphysics, but in the sense that Goldstein describes it, as the ability of transcending the bondage to the concrete situation, is the condition of the religious question. It is not the religious question itself which follows from such an understanding of freedom, but it is the *possibility* of this question. And this is certainly

significant in a state of our intellectual development in which mechanistic descriptions of organic processes make not only the religious question but any question at all incomprehensible. For every question presupposes freedom from that about which it asks. It presupposes the "abstract" or "categorical" attitude, and it presupposes the possibility of speech.

Goldstein's intensive dealing with the *nature of language*, both in its pathological and its normal manifestations, is a consequence of his doctrine of man and of his understanding of human freedom. Only he who can transcend the concrete situation can have universals; or more precisely, having universals is the way of being free from the concrete situation. And having universals is having language. In many examples Goldstein shows that fully developed humanity and the power of abstract language are identical. Again it must be stated that Goldstein himself does not apply these insights to the religious problem, but it is easy to do so. According to him it is the "word" which creates the world (2, p. 83), namely a categorically structured world. Both Stoicism and Christianity (and Christianity partly dependent on Stoicism) have emphasized the creative function of the word. In both it is the word, not the spoken sound, but the abstract meaning of the word, which is expressed in the structure of reality. The high evaluation of the word is manifest in the fact that in Christian symbolism the Christ is called the word which has become "flesh," namely historical reality. The greatest thing Christianity can say about a human being is that he is the "Word," that in him the supreme human possibility, namely transcending the bondage to the concrete, is fully actualized.

Goldstein approaches human nature as a biologist. But he is interested in *man in his totality*, and he defends the "total" character of the organism and its reactions, against the attempts to explain it in terms of isolated parts and processes. Organism, in his view, not only comprises those functions which normally are called biological or vital, but also those which usually are called mental or spiritual (with a *small s!*). Goldstein rejects the philosophical tradition which sees a gap between these two groups of functions, and which establishes them as independent parts of man, conflicting with each other. He emphasizes that once such a division is asserted the unity which is man cannot be found again. This "monistic" view of human nature and of the nature of life generally is extremely important for an understanding of religion. Religion, which is one of the several functions of

man's spiritual life is, for this very reason, an expression of life on all its levels (or, as I would prefer to say, in all its dimensions). In the religious act every element and every function of the whole organism participates. Such a view contradicts effectively an interpretation of religion as a function of mind or spirit in separation from and in conflict with the bodily and psychical functions of the human organism. In religious terminology one would say that man as a whole is rooted in the eternal, that man as a whole is estranged from his source, and that man as a whole is to be reunited with it. This excludes as inhuman some dominant forms of religious asceticism and theological supranaturalism. But it agrees with genuine Jewish and Christian ideas about the relation of man to God in contrast to the dualistic elements in Indian and Greek thought.

Goldstein's doctrine of man is "monistic" in its understanding of the structure of life as it appears in man. But this monism does not exclude an acknowledgment of the powers of conflict and destruction in life processes. The source of these conflicts is not a duality of mind and body, or of spirituality and vitality, but it is the process of individualization. Goldstein has a deep feeling for the *ambiguity of individualization*. On the one hand he considers the human individual as the most perfect organization; on the other hand he derives from its perfection its potentiality of disease, of catastrophic experiences, of personal and social conflicts, and finally of death. These observations lead to many central problems of the philosophy of religion. They lead especially to a restatement of the world-historical contrast between the Western and the Eastern evaluation of the individual. Goldstein himself keeps away from a discussion of these questions. But one gets the impression that in spite of his great stress on the self-actualization of the individual, he is more impressed by the tragic than by the positive implications of the "artificial" individualization of life. In any case he forces the philosopher of religion to consider an age-old problem in the new light of his analysis of human nature and the nature of life universally.

A consequence of the individualization of life is the *state of anxiety* in every individual. Goldstein's theory of anxiety and his description of the relation of anxiety to fear belongs to the most important and most effective of his assertions about human nature. They are of extreme importance for the philosophy of religion. They decide for the general presupposition of most religions, namely, that man is in a state of anxiety by the very structure of the reality in which he par-

ticipates. As an individual he must come to terms with the world which threatens him. This can be done in two ways, either in the neurotic way of retiring from reality as a whole and anxiously defending a limited part of it, or in the creative way of "answering affirmatively the shocks of existence" (2, p. 113). This, however, does not remove anxiety. On the contrary, the more original a human being is, the deeper is his anxiety; but if he can stand it, he has preserved his freedom (2, p. 114) and reached highest self-actualization.

Philosophy of religion describes the symbols in which religion points to the ultimate source of the power to bear the unavoidable anxiety of life in the state of individualization. Goldstein does not discuss the meaning of these symbols, but he makes it quite clear that he thinks of life itself as a power which has the character of grace.

In all the points mentioned Kurt Goldstein has given empirical confirmation of the religious symbols with which the theologian and the philosopher of religion deal. But what he has given is more than a confirmation. It reaches into the subject-matter itself. I don't believe that one could talk meaningfully about religion today without entering the discussions and sharing the problems to which Goldstein has addressed himself. That is certainly the experience of this writer. Goldstein's influence on my own thinking has been shown in my book *The Courage to Be* (3), and will be even further apparent in the forthcoming chapter on "Life and the Spirit" in my third volume of *Systematic Theology* (4).

Kurt Goldstein is not a philosopher of religion, but there are few scholars to whom philosophy of religion owes more than to him.

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