

This indefinite expansion of the valuing consciousness is the greatest good ever to be attained in the universe. Only in this way is the universe endowed with the values of truth, beauty, love, justice, freedom, and responsible power, because these values emerge only when some valuing consciousness brings them into being by its capacity for appreciation and responsibility. But even in human existence these values cannot be progressively created unless our existence is brought under the control of the creativity which expands the valuing consciousness. If this is to happen, our lives must be dominated by devotion to this creativity, and this can happen only by proper use of religious ritual.

## COMMENTARY ON THEOLOGICAL RESOURCES FROM THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

*by Melford Spiro*

Wallace's paper is certainly one of the finest syntheses of what we know about religion not only from anthropology but from the behavioral sciences in general. To find fault with it is difficult, and the only questions I want to raise are those not concerning the substantive and analytic aspects of the paper (with which I agree wholeheartedly) but with some of the latter parts of the paper concerning predictions for the future.

One could, of course, take issue with some minor points in the more analytic part of the paper. I am not sure I agree that ritual does take precedence over myth. Indeed, one could say that the very notion of ritual presupposes the priority of myth if only in the sense that it is the cognitive aspects of the myth upon which the efficacy of the ritual is predicated. In short, in order for me to perform a ritual, I have to believe in the first place that ritual is efficacious.

Let me move to Wallace's predictions. If the gods are dead (a conclusion I share), I then wonder to what extent the notion of a godless theology is either possible or desirable. I would ask this with respect to both the substantive and the functional aspects of religion to which he has addressed himself. If, as Wallace says, the fundamental premise of every religion is belief in some kind of spirits, an incontrovertible point when religions are viewed cross-culturally, then a godless re-

Melford Spiro is professor of anthropology, University of Chicago.

ligion by definition is not a religion. This is more than a semantic point, it is a serious substantive issue.

Second, with respect to the functional aspects of religion, I would like to suggest that a godless "religion" (this is a contradiction of terms, so we use quotes around religion), is not, except on relatively unimportant dimensions, the functional equivalent of a god religion. The latter type of religion, the real honest-to-god religion, makes promises which a godless religion cannot promise. It promises redemption—I want to use these words in some literal theological sense and not in some vague metaphorical sense—it promises redemption, it promises salvation, it promises the believer that life will conquer death, it holds up some vision as the prophet did of the end of days in which the lion will lie down with the lamb, etc. I would suggest that these characteristics of traditional religion—which despite the differences among the world religions, and even between world religions and primitive religions, to some extent characterize them all—are the objects of cathexis Wallace feels any religion must have. I can understand how a believer would cathect these goals. I do not think the equivalents of these goals in the modern religion Wallace envisages would allow such cathexis, and in that sense I would suggest that there is no functional equivalent for religion. I might in my more depressed moments defend the hypothesis that without God life becomes somewhat less viable than it is with God; and there are some who would insist that it is not viable at all. I do not know to what extent this is the case, but it certainly is the case that the quality of existence, given the promises that traditional religion holds out, will be quite different without the existence of the gods—and therefore my conclusion that there is no modern functional equivalent for traditional religion.

Third, I find it difficult, merely in terms of comprehension, to understand what this non-theistic theology will be all about. Wallace suggests six criteria for a new theology. These are admirable, and they are the criteria that most scientists and intellectuals accept as part of their own enterprise, but to think that they would either individually or collectively constitute a viable theology which would serve the same functions as traditional religion is, I think, a very dubious assumption. If they are attainable and if they could constitute a theology which would in some sense be more than the scientific ideology which we already have, then I would ask to what extent will they do what such modern religions as humanism or Ethical Culture don't already do. Ethical Culture groups, if not humanist groups, have in addition to these criteria a ritual and an *ecclesia*. Yet I doubt very much if those

who are members of Ethical Culture societies would say that the Ethical Culture society is an object of cathexis to the same degree and the same intensity as is, for example, the Catholic church for a true believer.

The notion of ritual in the absence of god is another vexatious point. In a sense what we are asked to do is to take the latent functions that characterize religious ritual—ritual addressed to supernatural beings—and convert them into manifest functions, and then to convert these manifest functions into motivational variables. I am very dubious about this kind of procedure. To be sure, the latent functions of traditional religion consist of some of the things that Wallace has talked about, but in the absence of these latent functions, traditional religionists would nevertheless perform their religious rituals in order to attain their manifest functions. Whether we can get people to perform rituals—whether it is even desirable to get them to perform rituals—on the basis of these latent functions, now become manifest, is, I repeat, a very dubious point.

I would raise one final allied question. It seems to me that many of the components of the new theology are components that are already found in a number of movements today. The student free-speech movement at Berkeley, the freedom riders in the South, and a host of other such movements mobilize the kind of energy that Wallace has been talking about, and certainly serve as objects of intense cathexis for the participants. To what extent would a new movement either have a different kind of theological content or serve a different kind of function than that which these movements are already serving? That is another question which the new theology would have to answer.

## COMMENTARY ON THEOLOGICAL RESOURCES FROM THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

*by Lawrence K. Frank*

Conferences of this kind remind me of Proust's statement that "each one can find lucidity only in those ideas which are in the same state of confusion as his own."

As Julian Huxley reminded us some years ago, the human organism

Lawrence K. Frank is an independent scholar in the psychosocial sciences, Belmont, Massachusetts.