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9 Dialectic

The fourth of the functional specialties is dialectic. It deals with conflicts – overt and latent – whether in religious sources, in traditions, in pronouncements of authorities, in writings of theologians, whether they regard contrary orientations of research, contrary interpretations, or contrary histories, contrary styles of evaluation, contrary horizons, contrary doctrines, contrary systems, contrary policies.

Not all opposition is dialectical. Some differences are eliminated by the uncovering of fresh data. Other differences are perspectival; they arise simply from the enormous complexity of history and from the fact that any written history is incomplete and approximate. No history reproduces historical reality in all its complexity.

But besides differences that can be ended by uncovering fresh data, by further investigation, besides differences that are perspectival, that arise from the individuality of investigators and the complexity of the material investigated, there are differences, fundamental conflicts, that arise from opposed cognitional theories, whether implicit or explicit: explicit in a philosophy, implicit in a conception of what critical history is or what interpretation is, and so on, conflicting ethical positions, conflicting religious outlooks. Such conflicts are overcome only through conversion. Conversion is not part of method or theology. Conversion is an event in one's personal life.

The function of dialectic is to bring such conflicts to light; radical oppositions – bring them to light; and to provide a technique both for objectifying such subjective differences and for promoting conversion; but simply by exhibiting – not by preaching.

Our topics on dialectic are (1) horizons, (2) conversions and breakdowns – and the conversions are intellectual, moral, and religious, (3) dialectic: the issue, (4) dialectic:

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the problem, (5) dialectic: the structure, (6) dialectic as method, and finally, (7) the dialectic of methods.

1 Horizons

The word 'horizon' comes from the Greek *ho horizon kuklos*, the bounding circle; it is the limit of one's field of vision, and it is nearer to a circle if one is out at sea. It is a circle that moves about with one; as one advances the circle moves ahead; as one goes the opposite direction, it moves backwards. It divides the world of visible objects into those that are visible to me and those that are not visible to me, that are beyond my horizon.

Now, just as our vision, so too the scope of our knowledge and the range of our interests are bounded. Such boundaries vary with one's historical period, with one's social background and milieu, with one's education and personal development.

Differences in horizon from one person to the next may be complementary: we are all members of the same society; each of us is doing a different job; each one is living, as it were, in a different world; but one knows about the other people and their worlds and that they are necessary to constitute, to round out, the whole society. Consequently, such differences in horizon are complementary: between the doctors, the nurses, the orderlies, and so on, in a hospital – they all know about the other's world and so on; again, doctors and lawyers and professors and students, and so on, form a common world. Each one has his own part in it, his own particular specialty and knowledge and so on, but together they form one society.

Again, differences in horizon may be genetic. Then they are successive stages in a single biography or in a single history; genetic differences are never simultaneous; they represent different stages either of progress or decline in a single biography or a single history.

Finally, they may be dialectical. What for one is intelligible, for another is unintelligible. What for one is true, for another is false. What for one is good, for another

is just horrid, stupid. These horizons, though dialectically opposed, can contain one another; you can know about the others. But you attribute the other fellow's views to obtuseness or mythic consciousness or ill will or a refusal of God's grace, or what not. These dialectical oppositions of horizon may be very emotional or, on the other hand, there may not be the slightest bit of passion to it at all. Astrology is just ridiculous, and we haven't got a course on it in this university; genocide is simply something to be execrated, and one's feelings about it are very violent indeed. There are all sorts of differences of feeling with regard to these dialectical oppositions.

Finally, every horizon is structured. For any statement that we make we have a whole context ready to clarify, qualify, correct interpretations of what we are saying; and any learning is not just an addition of something else to what we already know; it is an organic growth out of what we already know. Because horizons are structured, what doesn't fit into one's horizon one does not notice at all, or if it is forced on one's attention one considers it irrelevant or unimportant. As Piaget says about the child, what the child isn't ready yet to do is something just beyond the periphery of consciousness, that may cause a certain ill ease but is never properly apprehended. Consequently, the structuring of one's horizon both facilitates further development in certain directions and, on the other hand, is a limit preventing development until certain preparations have been achieved. So much for horizons in general.

2 Conversions and Breakdowns

Joseph de Finance in his *Essai sur l'agir humain* distinguished a horizontal and a vertical freedom. Horizontal freedom is the exercise of one's liberty within a horizon; one is still the same person living in the same world. But the vertical exercise of liberty is a set of judgments and decisions moving us from one horizon to another.

Now, such a movement may be a continuous, developing sequence; one is not rejecting at all, one is moving along; one is not rejecting the position one had before; one

is just filling it out, developing it, working out its full implications. On the other hand, this movement into a new horizon may involve an about-face, a radical change of direction. Moving in this direction is capable of going on indefinitely, capable of becoming fuller and fuller. It is this about-face in the vertical exercise of liberty that is the conversion; it may be intellectual, moral, or religious.

Intellectual conversion is fundamentally the elimination of a myth, of a systematically misleading image concerning reality, objectivity, human knowledge. The myth is that knowing is like looking, that objectivity is seeing what is there to be seen and not seeing what is not there, and that the real is what is out there now to be looked at. The myth overlooks the distinction between the world of immediacy – the world of objects that one sees with one's own eyes, hears with one's own ears, touches with one's own hands, tastes with one's own palate, and smells with one's own nose – that world of immediacy, and, on the other hand, the world mediated by meaning, the world as it is known through the external and internal experience of a cultural community, a community's cumulatively developing understanding, and the checked and rechecked judgments and beliefs in the community, passed on in tradition. The world mediated by meaning is a matter not simply of experiencing; it is not confined to the world of immediacy at all; it is not the sum of all the worlds of immediacy of all the individuals in the community; it is a world known through experiencing, understanding, judging, and believing. The criteria of objectivity are the compounded criteria of experiencing, understanding, judging, and believing.

Reality in the world mediated by meaning is what is given in experience to someone, organized and extrapolated by understanding, an understanding that has been educated in the community, and posited by judgment and belief. Now there is this opposition: if you apply the criteria of the world of immediacy to the world mediated by meaning, you start getting things like Berkeley's *esse est percipi*; Hume's emptying out of the world mediated by meaning of everything that isn't contained in the world of immediacy; Kant's critical idealism, saying that after all we have intelligence and there is

a use of intelligence that we can't avoid, and so on; and then on to the absolute idealists. These differences, while they are differences in technical philosophy, also name totally different horizons. There are no common objects in the world of the empiricist and in the world of the idealist; there are no identical objects. There are no identical objects in the world of the empiricist and in the world of the critical realist; there are no identical objects in the world of the idealist and in the world of the critical realist. These differences, the more radical they become, extend into everything one thinks, says, and does. A positivist notion of history is something entirely different from an idealist notion of history, and both are something different from a critical realist's notion. Similarly for myth or science or anything else. That is something extremely relevant to theological method, because unless one is aware of these differences and of their overt or covert functioning within peoples' thinking, well, one is just up against the scandal of philosophy and theology: while scientists move to agree to a certain extent, in the due course and passage of time, philosophers and theologians never get around to it. The fundamental problem is that critical problem. It is not only a problem confined to philosophy; it runs right into interpretation and history, and so on.

Secondly, moral conversion. Moral conversion is a change in the criterion of decisions and choices from satisfactions to values. This distinction between satisfactions and values we have already drawn. As children, as boys and girls, we are persuaded or cajoled or compelled to do what's right, what's good for us. The good educator allows the subject of the education more and more freedom to move towards the time, the existential moment, when he or she discovers for himself that his or her choosing affects not only the chosen or rejected objects but also the chooser or rejecter. It is up to each of us to decide for oneself what one is to make of oneself. That is the existential moment: it is the discovery of the fact that one is free and responsible for oneself and with respect to one's community. It is the time for the exercise of vertical freedom, and the moral conversion consists in opting for values, for what is truly good or what is worthwhile.

That fundamental option is fundamental, but it is not the whole story. Conversion is one thing; it is the beginning of a movement towards moral perfection; it is not the attainment of it. Deciding is one thing, doing is another; and there is the whole working out of the implications of moral conversion. With regard to the biases, one may have unconscious motivation, egoism, individual bias, group egoism, and the bias of the omniscience of common sense. To eliminate them and to refine and develop all one's apprehensions of values, of what is worthwhile, and so on, is the work of a lifetime.

Finally, religious conversion. Religious conversion is being grasped by ultimate concern, in Paul Tillich's language. It is an otherworldly falling in love; it is a total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations; one is loving God with one's whole heart and with one's whole soul, with all one's mind and all one's strength. This we set forth on the fourth day, in the chapter on religion. It is a dynamic state prior to and principle of subsequent acts. It is not a response to an object; it is response to a mystery. It is something caused by God, God's grace, sanctifying grace. It is interpreted differently in different religions, and for the Christian it is Romans 5.5: it is God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us. Just as moral conversion is a fundamental option which is one thing and its working out is another, so too the gift of grace is operative insofar as it is plucking out the heart of stone and inserting the heart of flesh, and it is cooperative insofar as the heart of flesh bears fruit.

When all three conversions occur within a single consciousness their relationship may be conceived in terms of sublation. Sublation is the English word commonly used for Hegel's *Aufhebung*. But we use it rather in Karl Rahner's sense rather than in Hegel's, which is involved in his big system. For Karl Rahner an *Aufhebung*, a sublation, is what goes beyond, what sets up a distinct new basis of operations, what does not destroy but preserves the previous set of operations. Understanding with respect to sense sets up something entirely new; it sets up a new basis of operations. Understanding is the fundamental thing, not sense. But it doesn't destroy sense. On the contrary, it preserves it; it extends enormously its range, its powers of discrimination, and so on. In that sense one

can say that moral conversion goes beyond intellectual, and religious goes beyond moral. But in both cases intellectual is not negated by moral conversion; intellectual conversion is to the value truth, and moral conversion is to all values. Similarly, moral conversion is to all values but religious conversion is to the love that makes one's devotion to values efficacious.

This relationship of sublation does not imply that first there is intellectual conversion, then moral, and then religious. On the contrary, causally it would seem, at least in ordinary occurrences, that first there is the gift of God's love, from it follows moral conversion, and from moral conversion there follow the seeds of intellectual conversion. Intellectual conversion is not conspicuous in the first centuries of Christianity. First, you have the Fathers, largely under the materialist influence of the Stoics and then under the influence of the Middle Platonists. It is only when you get problems between people that true affirmation becomes acknowledged as the key element.

Besides conversions there are breakdowns. Cognitive self-transcendence is neither easy to grasp or to verify. Values have a hard time competing with carnal pleasures, the desire for wealth, and the desire for power. Religion can be derided as an illusory comfort, opium of the people, mythic projection. Breakdowns do not occur all at once. The theorem in Newman's *Idea of a University* is that if one part of a cultural whole is omitted in the university three consequences follow. First, that part will become unknown; there will be a general ignorance with regard to that part. Secondly, the whole will be mutilated. Thirdly, the remainder, in an effort to compensate for the mutilation, will be distorted.

Now, this process of elimination, mutilation, distortion does not begin with a total rejection of religion, moral conversion, intellectual conversion. Some religion, some moral precepts, some types of metaphysics are rejected, and this rejection, simply because it brings about a mutilation and a distortion, causes obvious evils, and these evils are not met by reverting to the errors of the past; they are met by more eliminations,

mutilations, distortions. This successive process of elimination, mutilation, distortion is screened by self-deception and kept going by consistency.

Moreover, it occurs in different ways in different ages; different nations, different classes, different age groups select different objects for elimination. They produce different mutilations, different distortions. They divide the body social. The division is one of incomprehension, suspicion, distrust, hostility, hatred, and, ultimately, violence. The body social is torn apart. This is the process of breakdown. You have magnificent portrayals of it as a process in Toynbee's *A Study of History*, vols. 4-6. So much for conversions and breakdowns.

3 Dialectic: The Issue

There is a twofold issue in dialectic, because there is a twofold deficiency in the functional specialties of history, interpretation, and research.

The history we describe is a history of the Rankean type, history concerned with what was going forward, history concerned with matters of fact, judgments of fact. But besides that history there is also an evaluative history: what were the good things, what were the bad things? 1066 and all that.

There are these judgments of value, and they occur not in the specialty on the third level concerned with matters of fact, but on the fourth level concerned with values. There is also history in the sense of the individual being confronted with his past, encountering the religious figures of the past, being challenged by them to become a different subject. Similarly, besides the interpretation that finds out what was meant there also is the interpretation that appreciates what is good and criticizes what is evil. So in dialectic, history and interpretation have to be completed, and there is a further type of research relative to appreciative interpretation and evaluative history. That notion of history – let me quote from Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus* was his big work, his criticism of German history after the Second World War. He distinguishes between

history that is concerned with causes, causal history, and a history concerned with values. No history is concerned only with one but the emphasis may be entirely on the causal type or on the evaluative type, on action, entirely on the evaluative side. History is a matter of summoning before the bar of history the statesmen of the past and the thinkers of the past. Ranke wants to say what happened; he doesn't want to pass judgment, but he seems to fail in that respect sometimes.

But anyway, Meinecke says that history as concerned with values '... gives us the content, wisdom, and signposts of our lives.' See Stern, *The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present* p. 72. Carl Becker went even further. He wrote, 'the value of history is ... not scientific but moral: by liberating the mind, by deepening the sympathies, by fortifying the will, it enables us to control, not society, but ourselves, a much more important thing; it prepares us to live more humanely in the present and to meet rather than to foretell the future.' There is that aspect to history, then, and also to interpretation, that is the concern of dialectic to complete the previous specialties.

It is history in one sense of the word, as *Geschichte*, history as concerned with one's decisions, one's options. Besides potential, formal, and full acts of meaning there also are existential, constitutive, productive acts of meaning. We move from the interpretation of meaning to an appreciation of values, from a history of deeds and movements to an evaluation of the deeds and movements.

Besides completing the interpretation and the history of the earlier functional specialties, dialectic is concerned with the gross differences between standpoints arising from the fact that historians with opposed horizons endeavor to make the same sequence of events intelligible to themselves. If you have historians with dialectically opposed horizons, they can be dealing with the same data but they are trying to include within their horizons, to make intelligible to themselves, what was going forward in the past, and they get different results, and these are the fundamental oppositions in history.

The first three functional specialties are research, interpretation, history. Research makes data available; interpretation clarifies meaning; history narrates what occurs. But

there is a fourth level of encounter, which is a matter of meeting persons, appreciating their values, criticizing their defects, allowing their words and deeds to challenge the very roots of one's own living.

Such is the issue in dialectic, and it is twofold: completing interpretation and history as they were conceived in the second and third specialty, and going on to the conflicts that the methods of critical history do not resolve and that the methods of interpretation do not resolve.

In interpretation we had understanding the thing, understanding the words, understanding the author, understanding oneself. Conversion gives you a new self to understand, and insofar as understanding oneself is relevant to one's interpretation, conversion gives you a new self and a new way of interpreting. Similarly with history. We said that while critical method gives univocal results if all investigators proceed from the same standpoint, the same state of the question, and so on, it does not eliminate those divergences in the state of the question, the fundamental differences in horizon that will give you different histories. To eliminate those histories is the issue in dialectic.

4 Dialectic: The Problem

The problem is the presence or absence of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion, giving rise to eight possible different, dialectically opposed horizons, according as any one of the three, any two of the three, or all three are present or absent. There results the Babel of opposed value judgments, opposed accounts of historical movements, opposed interpretations of authors, and different selections of relevant data.

To a great extent, natural science by limiting its questions to those that can be settled through an appeal to observation and experiment and drawing its theoretical models from mathematics, escapes this trap. It does not do so completely, but only in the long run. In the long run mechanistic determinism was eliminated by Quantum Theory. And there are moral problems connected with science that come out with the

development of the nuclear bomb and, again, science in the totalitarian state. There are further questions that are not going to be solved simply by that. But there is certainly a fundamental uniformity produced in the natural sciences by the fact that its models are mathematical and by the fact that unless you are asking a question that can be settled by observation and experiment your question is not scientific by definition.

Human sciences manifest a more acute problem. You can have the human sciences as simply reductionist. In other words, you'll have psychological explanations if you can get a robot or a rat to do it. But when the human sciences go beyond the methods of the natural sciences then they very easily are captured by philosophic movements and they have a problem, then, of either being engulfed in the disarray of the philosophies or, on the other hand, neglecting to treat properly human beings.

Now, if you are going to have a theology you simply cannot have it by evading these issues. A theology is possible only if you face head-on these divergences that result from intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. You can set aside those problems in the methods of natural science, but it is very difficult to do so in the human sciences, and it is impossible in a theology. Theology is something concerned primarily with conversion, primarily religious conversion.

So, dialectic the issue and dialectic the problem. The problem is one that can be escaped in the natural sciences, fairly well; in the human sciences, to some extent; but in theology, not at all. The theologian simply has to face that problem.

5 Dialectic: The Structure

There are two levels. There is the upper level of the operators, and there is a lower level of the materials to be operated on. The operators are two precepts: develop positions; and reverse counterpositions. People may have different ideas on what the positions and the counterpositions are. But the thing is to bring out into the open what their ideas are: what for them is really worthwhile. Is it satisfactions or values? What for them is religion?

What is their position on religion? Is it opium for the people or not, something else?

What for them is what you are doing when you are knowing, why is doing that knowing, and what do you know when you do it? There are positions and counterpositions.

Dialectic asks people to select fundamental positions and name the counterpositions that guide their thinking. It is to encourage each individual to bring out into the open his horizon, his fundamental horizon.

The materials that are to be operated on are the results of research, interpretation, history. These materials have to be assembled: researches, interpretations, histories and events to which they refer. They have to be completed with evaluative interpretation and history. They have to be compared: one has to seek out affinities and oppositions in the completed assembly. They have to be reduced to basic affinities and basic oppositions that can manifest themselves in a whole series of different ways. They have to be classified: distinguish which affinities and oppositions have sources in dialectically opposed horizons. They have to be selected: you pick out these basic affinities and oppositions and dismiss others. Finally, the ones dismissed are for you counterpositions: reverse them. The ones you approve, develop them further. In other words, exaggerate, manifest to the full where you stand: gathering or scattering.

6 Dialectic as Method

Does this procedure, this structure of assembling the materials, completing them, comparing them, reducing them to their basis, classifying their basis, selecting them, taking sides, has it the property of a method? Well, it is a pattern of related and recurrent operations; the question is: Does it yield progressive and cumulative results?

One can compare the dialectic as implemented by intellectually, morally, and religiously converted persons and the dialectic as implemented by one who has experienced none of these conversions, or one of them, or two of them.

In the first case, the investigator will know from personal experience just what intellectual, moral, and religious conversion is. He will [have no great difficulty in distinguishing positions from counterpositions.

In the second case, the investigator may have only what Newman called a] notional apprehension of conversion. He will recognize the words you use when you talk about it. But he won't be naming something that he's been through. He will be able to recognize radically opposed statements but in those areas where he is personally underdeveloped he will mistake positions for counterpositions and vice versa. In reversing a counterposition he will be making the past worse than it was, and his development of positions will be making the past, again, worse than it was; because what are positions he thinks are counterpositions and what are counterpositions he thinks are positions. The subjective attitudes of each investigator or type of investigator will be brought out into the open.

These positions and counterpositions are not just contradictory abstractions. They are to be understood concretely as opposed moments in ongoing process. Further, human authenticity is not some pure quality, some serene freedom from all oversights, all misunderstandings, all mistakes, all sin. Rather it is withdrawal from unauthenticity, and the withdrawal is never a permanent achievement; it is always precarious. Human development is largely through the resolution of conflicts, and within the realm of intentional consciousness the basic conflicts are defined by the opposition of positions and counterpositions. Only by overcoming his own conflicts through cognitional and real self-transcendence can the theologian hope to discern the ambivalence at work in others and the measure in which they resolve their problems. Conversely, only through knowledge and appreciation of others can the theologian come to know himself and fill out and refine his apprehension of values.

There is to this process, then, no automatic revelation to everyone of what the right positions are and what the wrong counterpositions are. But there is an objectification that will appeal to all those moving towards fuller conversion,

intellectually, morally, and religiously, that will enable them to pass judgment on the issues. You are not going to force anyone into submission as you can by an experiment, make him ridiculous. But to those that are open, to those that are developing, this process of dialectic, of objectifying subjective attitudes, stands, horizons in their objective statements and objective oppositions, there is the possibility of bringing to a head the divisions to which theology is subjected. I think we'll take a break. Our final section, on the dialectic of methods, after the break.