

4. Dialectic

Exegetes disagree with other exegetes. Historians disagree with other historians. In part these differences may be removed by ^{further use of} the procedures we have outlined. But there exist other and deeper sources of difference. They cannot be removed by more adequate ~~research~~ research or by a fuller understanding of the relevant data. For their origin lies in different and conflicting horizons, and their removal means that a change of horizon has been effected.

So there arises the need for our fourth functional specialty, dialectic. Its function~~is~~ is advertence to differences of horizon, analysis of the consequences of such differences and, consequently, a presentation to attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible subjects of the issues involved.

Such advertence, analysis, presentation inevitably occur from within some horizon. That cannot be helped. But from this it does not follow that dialectic must always be ~~ge~~ begging the question or that it never will lead to any improvement. For ~~while~~ while advertence, analysis, presentation of issues will occur from within a horizon, it is not true that all horizons are equally capable of adverting to the issues, analyzing them successfully, and presenting them clearly. On the contrary, the mere fact that an honest attempt at dialectic is made will result in the elimination of not a few horizons, and the further the task is pushed the larger will be the number of casualties.

So from the viewpoint of the present method of theology let us attempt to illustrate the notion of dialectic. Our examples will fall under the three headings of philosophic issues, ethical issues, and religious issues.

4.1 Philosophic Issues.

One arouses ~~resentment~~ a legitimate resentment among scientists when one suggests that philosophic issues have a bearing on their disciplines. I call this resentment legitimate, because the philosophers have been the principal sinners. Natural science could break out of the Aristotelian integration of philosophy and science only deciding that its interest was limited to questions that could be settled by ^{an appeal to} observation or experiment. Ranke and his followers in the German Historical School could found modern history only by repudiating Hegel's a priori philosophy of history.

I feel, none the less, that these birth traumata can and should be cured. One need not remain neurotic. One can insist of on the proper autonomy of the natural and the human sciences. Each has its field, its methods, its cumulative results. The limits of fields may shift, methods may develop, results keep changing. But such shifting, developing, changing occur immanently. They spring from the known inadequacy of what went before. They are specific, precise, precise, consciously motivated.

Still, autonomy is not omnicompetence. It is limited to the issues that can be settled by the methods of the disciplines in question. It is not a licence for specialists in one area to pontificate on matters that call for procedures quite different from those with which they happen to be familiar.

Nor can it be said that these unfamiliar procedures have no bearing on his subject. It is true that as long as one is a practising physicist or sociologist or historian, one follows the rules of one's craft and has no need of philosophy. But the moment one attempts to say what that craft is, one is presupposing some cognitional theory. The moment one attempts to explain why it works, one is presupposing some epistemological theory. The moment one attempts to tell what is known when it works, one is entertaining metaphysical presuppositions. Of course, like M. Jourdain speaking prose, one may not be aware one is doing so. But such ignorance only heightens the risk that one is not doing it well.