

## **646A0DTE070**

### **First part of seventh lecture, Tuesday, August 10, 1971**

#### **Dialectic**

Our fourth functional specialty is dialectic. It deals principally, not exclusively, with conflicts, whether they are overt or latent, whether they are in religious sources, religious tradition, the pronouncements of authorities, the writings of theologians, whether they regard contrary orientations of research, contrary interpretations, contrary histories, contrary styles of evaluation, contrary horizons, contrary doctrines, contrary systems, contrary policies.

Not all opposition is dialectical. There are oppositions that will be eliminated by the ongoing process of a scientific theology that understands sources better, that writes more accurate, fuller, more objective history, and so on and so forth. There are other oppositions that are merely perspectival, that depend upon the individuality of authors and the complexity of history itself. But there are fundamental conflicts, and they stem from the presence or absence of conversion, whether intellectual, moral, or religious, and they are overcome only by the occurrence of conversion. The function of dialectic is not to convert anyone. Theologians don't convert people. God converts them. But dialectic brings such conflicts to light. It eliminates the superficial elements in conflicts; it provides techniques for objectifying subjective differences and for occasioning conversion. It aims at being a methodical equivalent in the realm of value judgments to the crucial experiment in science. It isn't quite that but it moves towards it. It aims at being something methodical, but methodical in a very, very delicate area,

namely, that of value judgments. Our sections will be, in this chapter, first, horizons; second, conversions and breakdowns; third, dialectic, the issue; fourth, dialectic, the problem; five, dialectic, the structure; six, dialectic as method; seven, eight, nine, the dialectic of methods: part one, part two, and part three.

### **[Horizons]**

First, then, horizons. Literally the horizon is the bounding circle. It is most noticeable at sea. It is the limit of one's field of vision. It recedes in front if one moves forward and it closes in behind. As our field of vision so too the scope of our knowledge and the range of our interests may be bounded.

What's beyond one's horizon is what one knows nothing about and cares even less. What one's horizon will be will vary with one's historical period, one's social background and milieu, one's education, and one's response to it – one's personal development. So horizons can differ enormously.

Differences in horizon are of three kinds. There are complementary differences in horizon: doctors, nurses, supervisors, nursing assistants, orderlies, cleaners, cooks, and so on, all are in the same realm of remedial help operations, but they are in different worlds. And doctors, lawyers, professors, all the professional people, each has a world of his own, they know about the existence of the others, but they are not too familiar with it, they talk of it in a vague sort of way. These are complementary horizons. Together they make up a human community, each part of which is needed, each part of which is specialized in certain areas, and together they constitute the functioning community, the good of order.

Differences in horizon may be genetic. They represent different stages in a development or a decline. They pertain not to a single community at the same time, at the moment, but to successive stages in a biography or in a history.

One comes to dialectical differences of horizon, when what is intelligible in one horizon is considered unintelligible, sheer stupidity in another. What is true in one is considered false in another. What is considered good in one is considered evil in another. People with dialectically opposed horizons can know about the others and include them in a certain way, but they include them only to repudiate them. And their repudiation may be without any emotion whatever; you just give a wan smile to astrology. Or it can be ferocious, the occasion [?] of genocide, for example.

Finally, horizons are structured. They are not just aggregates. Any development, any increase of knowledge, is not just an addition, it is an organic growth of what one already knows. All knowledge is contextual. Any statement a person makes he is ready to qualify and clarify, and say well now what I really meant to say was this, and explain and justify. All knowledge is tied together; it is not just an aggregate of elements, odds and ends, it is a growth. And consequently, a horizon is a structured whole. And because it is a structured whole is at once the condition of further development, the possibility of further development, but also the limitation on further development; you have to go in the other fellow's door if you want to come out your own, you have to reveal to him why what you have to say will be an organic growth in what he already has. And unless you do that, the communication fails.

So much, then, for the notion of horizon. It is what the analysts call the *blik*, it is a very elegant word, but horizon is perhaps more common in theological sources.

### **[Conversions and Breakdowns]**

Joseph de Finance in his *Essai sur l'agir humain* distinguishes horizontal and vertical choices, decisions. Horizontal: you keep on, you make a choice or a decision that's within an already established horizon. Vertical decisions and choices: you are moving from one horizon to another. And this movement may be more or less a linear development, you are keeping on within the same line, you are not transforming your horizon.

On the other hand, you can have a vertical exercise of freedom that simply dismantles the previous horizon and starts building up a new one. And then you have an about face, a conversion. So much for the notion of conversion. It is a dismantling of a previous horizon and starting a new mode of development. It is not just carrying on or developing previous horizons. And such conversions may be intellectual, or moral, or religious. So on each we will have to say something, and, finally, something on the breakdown.

Intellectual conversion is the elimination of a myth concerning reality, objectivity, human knowledge. The myth is that knowing is like looking. Objectivity is a matter of seeing what's there to be seen and not seeing anything that isn't there. And the real is out there now to be looked at. This myth overlooks the distinction between the world of immediacy [and the world mediated by meaning.] That world of immediacy is the narrow strip of space and time in which one has had direct experience, in which one doesn't

attempt to understand or pass judgment on, formulate, that world of immediacy, the world of the infant. It conforms to the myth's view of reality, objectivity, knowledge.

But there is also the world mediated by meaning, the world we learn about insofar as one listens to one's parents in childhood, insofar as one goes to school and university, insofar as one travels around and reads books about history, science, and all the rest of it. That world mediated by meaning is based upon the external and internal experience of a community, of a cultural community, it is based upon the cumulatively developed understanding of the community, and it is checked and rechecked by the judgments of the community.

Knowing in the world mediated by meaning is not just experiencing; it is experiencing, understanding, judging, and believing. And the criteria of objectivity for the world mediated by meaning are the compounded criteria of experiencing, understanding, judging, and believing. And reality in the world mediated by meaning is not only given in experience but organized and extrapolated by understanding and posited by judgment and belief.

Now this is not just a technical, philosophic point of no great concern. This is separating two opposed horizons. Empiricism, idealism, realism name three totally different horizons, and there are no common identical objects in the world of the empiricist, the world of the idealist, or the world of the realist. They are totally different worlds, with no common objects whatever. 'Person' in one never means what 'person' means in another, and so on for absolutely everything else. And to dismiss such oppositions in horizon as a mere technical point in philosophy is to fail to advert to one of the most fundamental conflicts there can be. What you mean by science, what you mean by history, what you mean by myth, takes on totally different

meanings according to whether you are in an empiricist horizon, an idealist one, or a realist one.

So much for intellectual conversion. What is it? It is the elimination of the myth, the notion that questions on what is meant by objectivity, knowledge, and reality is something very simple that we can revert to childhood experience to settle. The whole trouble is that people when they are asked questions about reality what they do is go into a huddle and get back to childhood and use the criteria they then employed.

The second, moral conversion. Moral conversion changes the criteria of decisions and choices from satisfactions to values. We have already dwelt on the distinction between the satisfaction and the value. An intentional response to a value always reveals something that is truly good, but satisfaction may or may not be truly good. It may be the lack of satisfaction in this concrete set of circumstances is what is truly good. Now moral conversion is the existential moment. It is the moment when we discover for ourselves, not because someone else tells us, we find out for ourselves that our choosing affects not only the objects chosen or rejected, but most of all ourselves, that it is up to each of us to decide for himself what he is to make of himself. It is a time for the exercise of vertical freedom, and moral conversion consists in opting for the truly good. Such a decision, that existential moment, is very far from the achievement of moral perfection. Deciding is one thing, doing is another; there is the whole business of doing it that has to follow on that decision.

Thirdly, religious conversion. Religious conversion, insofar as Christianity is involved, is a matter of relating oneself to Christ Jesus and his followers. But religious conversion, generally, is being grasped by ultimate concern, in the language of Paul Tillich. It is the otherworldly falling in love;

it is total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations. You have to distinguish between the dynamic state which is prior to and the principle of the subsequent acts. It is not a matter of acts of love; it is a matter of the state of being in love. That state is interpreted differently; it is expressed differently and interpreted differently in different religious traditions. For Christians it is God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (Romans 5.5). It is the ability to obey the precept: Thou shall love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole mind and thy whole soul and all thy mind and all thy strength.

Now we have distinguished three conversions. We may now say something about the relations between them, when all three occur within a single consciousness. Now just as the successive levels of consciousness, each later one sublates what went before, it sublates in the sense that it goes beyond and introduces something entirely new. Secondly, what is entirely new sets up a new principle of operations; it takes over the previous levels and not only preserves them in their integrity but directs them to a fuller expansion, to a fuller attainment that is beyond their proper capacity, sublation in that sense that intelligence goes beyond sense, it makes sense relevant to knowing a universe and not just a habitat, it goes beyond to a world mediated by meaning. Similarly, the question of truth takes one out of any possible world of fantasy into a world of reality; and concern with what is truly good makes man not merely a knower but a doer.

Now there are similar relations of sublation in intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. Intellectual conversion is concerned with the value 'truth'; moral conversion is to all values; and religious conversion is to transcendent value. And it is the state of love that reveals values in all their fineness and all their power.

By saying that the sublation occurs in that direction does not mean that intellectual conversion comes first and then moral and then religious. Chronologically, it is far more likely that religious conversion will occur first, which will lead to moral conversion, because you do love God and your neighbor, and that will lead eventually to intellectual conversion if you are in a culture in which intellect is something of concern.

Now besides conversions there are breakdowns. Conversions are slow processes of building up; it doesn't take long to have a breakdown. Cognitional self-transcendence is neither easy to grasp or to verify. This business of the intellectual conversion, it is all very well if you have it, but if you haven't got it, what on earth is the fellow trying to talk about? Values are splendid things, and everyone can grow enthusiastic about them, but when you compete with carnal pleasure, with wealth, with power. Religion: is it not just an illusory comfort, an opium for the people, a mythic projection of man's aspirations on to the sky?

Newman's theorem, in the *Idea of a University*, as set forth by Fergal McGrath, in a book he has on Newman, I forget the title of it (*Newman's University: Idea and Reality*, London, 1951 Ed.) was that to omit a part of human knowledge in a university curriculum results in ignorance of that part in the community. Secondly, a mutilation of the rounded whole of human attainment in that field of knowledge and a distortion of the parts that are not omitted because they try to make up for the omission, they try to adjust to be able to take over the whole field. That triple effect of ignorance of a part, mutilation of a whole, and distortion of the remainder can be applied to the process of breakdown. There occurs the elimination, the mutilation, the distortion not of all but of some element in religion, some moral precepts, some types of metaphysics. And that elimination, mutilation, distortion,



because it causes unease, insecurity, and so on, calls for further remedies along the same lines; you eliminate, mutilate, distort a bit more; you don't revert to the prior stupidity that was dominant before this process of eliminating started; you keep on the same way. In other words, a civilization or a culture that is breaking down, because it is breaking down through blindness on certain points, will keep on being consistent with itself, digging its own grave in constant fashion.

Moreover, different sections in the culture will be doing so in different ways, to promote division, incomprehension, suspicion, distrust, hostility, hatred, violence; the body social is torn apart; it becomes incapable of convictions and commitments and beliefs. And such, very briefly, is the process of breakdown; I describe it at greater length in *Insight*.

So much, then, for our first two sections: first, horizons, and, secondly, conversions and breakdowns.

### **[Dialectic: The Issue]**

Thirdly, the issue in dialectic. The issue in this fourth functional specialty is twofold. Dialectic has to add to the history that grasps what was going forward a history that evaluates achievements, that discerns good and evil. There are historical judgments of value to be made. Meinecke, in an essay (see F. Stern, *The Varieties of History*, New York, 1956 Ed.) once stated that history is either mainly a causal history of the Rankean type, what was going forward, *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, or it is the evaluative type; no history is simply one or the other, it always has something of the other, but it will be dominantly one or the other. And he says of evaluative history that it gives us the content, wisdom, and signposts of our lives. Similarly, Carl Becker:

history is not a science that predicts; it is something that enables us to do something far more important than predict the future, namely, to face it.

So in the functional specialty 'dialectic' there has to be added to the history that is simply a statement on what was going forward, an evaluation of what was going forward, what was progressive, what was decline. Similarly, interpretation, as presented in the functional specialty was a matter of ascertaining what was meant in the text, but there is also the question of appreciating what was meant, of appreciating the text. And there is needed, then, a further complement to interpretation that appreciates the meanings set forth. And such appreciation and evaluation, in interpretation and in history, pertains to the fourth level of of human consciousness, and, consequently, it pertains to dialectic.

Dialectic, however, is not merely concerned to add these further components to interpretation and to history; it is also concerned with the gross differences between the standpoints arising from the fact that historians with opposed horizons endeavor to make the same sequences of events intelligible to themselves. The work of the historian is to put the past within the horizon that is intelligible to him. And because historians have different horizons they arrive at different histories. And the function of dialectic is to deal with those oppositions between historians; such oppositions, again, an interpreter; interpretation depends on one's self-understanding, one's understanding of one's own being. And that's one of the functions. You have to understand the thing, the words, the author, but also oneself. And that will be a variable in interpretations. And in dialectic one has to bore in on that source of opposition among the interpretations that are presented.

In brief, if the first phase is confined simply to research, interpretation, and history, there will not be achieved, there will be a clarification of the past, an exposition of the past, but not an encounter with the past. The first three make the data available, clarify meaning, narrate what occurred. But encounter with the past is more. It is meeting persons, appreciating their values, criticizing their defects, and allowing their words and deeds to challenge the very roots of one's living. And it is the occurrence of that challenge from the past that is the point to this. It is just allowing that encounter to occur; it's the point to dialectic.

### **[Dialectic: The Problem]**

The problem, then, in dialectic is the presence or absence of intellectual, moral, religious conversion. It gives rise to eight possible types of horizon. One in which three conversions occur; one in which no conversions occur; three in which one conversion occurs; and three in which two conversions occur.

There is a babel of opposed value judgments, opposed accounts of historical movements, opposed interpretations of authors, and different selections of relevant data, different ways in which special research is done. To a great extent natural science escapes this trap. It limits its questions that can be settled through an appeal to observation and experiment. It draws its models from mathematics, and also because its conclusions are universal and consequently have to be verified in every instance, natural science can evade the trap set by value judgments. It does not do so on ultimate levels. Its fundamental theorems can be quite mistaken. For example, the assertion of

mechanistic determinism for centuries, and perhaps the complementarity that has replaced it at the present time.

It does get involved in value judgments, however, insofar as its discoveries are applied; scientists have become rather sensitive about their responsibility for the bomb. Again, the scientists in a totalitarian state: biology in Russia had to deal with the politicians, it got around them eventually, but it discovered that the politicians can be against science. In other words, a moral responsibility as scientists, though science itself, natural science itself, can escape the problem of value judgments, by and large.

Human sciences manifest this problem in a more acute form. Most of all, insofar as reductionists try to reduce human science to exactly the same status as natural science. You have a man like Skinner at Harvard who says that you have a psychological explanation when you can get a robot to do it, or at least a rat, which rather limits what you can know about a human being.

Both natural and human sciences, then, have problems that are not to be solved by empirical method alone. However, they can more or less successfully evade them or skirt them, but theology cannot be methodical without meeting that problem head on: you have to face the problem of value judgments or you are not going to have a methodical theology. You can have religious studies. What does religious studies mean? It means that you do theology in the first three functional specialties of research, interpretation, and history but you don't attempt to settle questions of value; you leave that to the private forum of the individual, or you do it discreetly, and so on. So much, then, for the problem.

The problem is the problem of values, a problem that strictly empirical methods get around up to a point, but theology cannot be theology without facing it.

### **[Dialectic: The Structure ]**

There are two levels to this structure. There is the upper level of the operators and the lower level of the materials to be operated on.

The operators are two precepts: develop positions; reverse counterpositions. By a position is meant a statement compatible with intellectual, with moral, and with religious conversion. By a counterposition is meant a statement that is incompatible either with intellectual conversion or with moral conversion or with religious conversion or with any two or with all three.

Before being operated on, the materials have to be assembled, completed, compared, reduced, classified, selected. They have to be *assembled*: one has to assemble works of research, interpretations, histories, and the events to which they refer. They have to be *completed*: there has to be appreciative interpretation and evaluative history. They have to be *compared*: one has to seek out affinities and oppositions in the completed assembly. They have to be *reduced*: they have to be reduced to basic affinities and oppositions that manifest themselves in various ways. You say: these belong to the same class, these belong to the same class, and so on. There are affinities. They have to be *classified*: i.e., distinguish which affinities and oppositions have sources in dialectically opposed horizons. The *reduction* is putting them into schools. The *classification* is distinguishing their roots in dialectically opposed horizons. Finally, *selection*

picks out these basic affinities and oppositions and dismisses others; it picks out the ones that are due to differences in horizon.

### **[Dialectic as Method]**

Dialectic as so described is a pattern of related and recurrent operations. But the question is, Does it yield progressive and cumulative results? Is it a method that is going to get us somewhere? And to meet that question we'll compare the operations in the fourth specialty, dialectic, as implemented by an intellectually, morally, and religiously converted person, and dialectic as performed by someone who has not had any of these conversions. What will happen?

In the first case, the investigator will know from personal experience what intellectual, moral, and religious conversion is. They won't be just words to him, they will be important events in his life, in his personal development. And he will have no difficulty in distinguishing positions and counterpositions; he'll know the score. And consequently, when he is told to develop positions he will pick out the right ones as positions and develop them, reveal what fits in with them, what more can be added to them; and he will pick out the counterpositions and he will know what is wrong with them, and how to reverse them. And consequently, having reversed counterpositions and developed positions, he will have arrived at something that is far better than what really was so when you had a mixture of positions and counterpositions. He'll have a single coherent and very nice picture.

In the second case, the investigator will have not what Newman would call a real apprehension of conversion but at best a notional apprehension. It will be a rather foggy notion to him. What are they trying to talk about?

He'll probably want to not play this game. Or if he does play it, he can be able to recognize radically opposed statements, but in those areas in which is personally underdeveloped, he will mistake positions for counterpositions. It's the counterpositions that seem to be what's good to him. And the positions he'll think are the wrong ones. They're really the counterpositions. Consequently, when he tries to develop positions, really what he'll be developing are counterpositions. He'll be coming at something worse than the previous counterposition. And when he reverses counterpositions, really he'll be reversing positions, and he will arrive at a position of the past that degrades it enormously.

Now this business of developing positions and reversing counterpositions consequently acts as a sort of microscope. It exaggerates enormously one's subjectivity. It reveals where one is really revealing where one oneself stands. And at least the people who are converted will be able to recognize one another. And people that are partially converted will partially agree with them. And it's only the people that are totally unconverted that will be out on the limb. This attention to, this objectification of one's subjective stance that comes out of developing positions and reversing counterpositions will clarify the atmosphere. It's something experimental, something that enables men of good will to recognize one another, and so on and so forth.

Now in particular, note: Positions and counterpositions are not just contradictory abstractions. They are to be understood concretely as opposed moments in ongoing process. Human authenticity is not some pure quality, some serene freedom from all oversights, all misunderstanding, all mistakes, all sin. Rather, human authenticity is always a withdrawal from unauthenticity. Our advance in understanding is a correction of our

misunderstandings and our oversights. Our advance in truth is a correction of our errors and it's not merely the removal of ignorance. Our advance in religion is escape from the traps into which religions falls. Human development is largely through the resolution of conflicts, and within the realm of intentional consciousness basic conflicts are defined by the oppositions of positions and counterpositions. It's only by overcoming one's own conflicts through cognitional and moral self-transcendence that the theologian can hope to discern the ambivalence at work in others and the measure in which they have resolved 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. That confrontational moment is the point to dialectic.