

Chapter Ten

Dialectic and Foundations

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theological method theology

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Dialectic and foundations have a common feature: both are specialties that regard the proper end of the fourth level of intentional consciousness, the level of deliberation, evaluation, decision. They differ in two respects.

First, dialectic is the culmination of the first phase of theology, namely, theology as encounter with the religious past. Foundations, on the other hand, is the beginning and basis of theology in its phase, theology as responding to the religious past and assuming a determinate stand in the present for the future.

Secondly, dialectic assembles and orders materials that define basic options and ask for basic decisions. But it does not include the decisions, for the decisions pertain, not to theology, but to religion. They are personal, religious acts. On the other hand, foundations presupposes that determinate decisions have been made; it is concerned to lay the basis on which their implications are to be worked out in the further specialties of doctrines, systematics, and communications.

1. Sources of Dialectic

The same historical questions can be given different answers. The same texts can be given different interpretations. Differing historians can be supported by differing interpreters, and both can be supported by differing orientations in research.

Not all such differences are sources of dialectic. Some may be eliminated by the discovery of further relevant data. Others will disappear as methods are improved and refined. Still others are merely perspectival. They are not mutually exclusive. They arise from the complexity and the "individuality" both of the objects under investigation and of the investigators themselves. They vanish with the passage of time that eliminates old perspectives and ushers in new ones.

But besides these there are more radical differences. Already we have had occasion to indicate ~~that~~ that ~~method~~ the special methods of interpretation ~~of~~ and of history are not self-sufficient. The basic problem in hermeneutics is not understanding the mentality of another time and place and so coming to understand the text. Rather it is the exegete's achievement of an adequate understanding of himself; and ~~that~~ ~~while hermeneutics may point out that~~ while hermeneutics may point out the need of adequate self-understanding, its rules and precepts will not bring it about. ~~now is the time for all good men to come to the aid~~ while hermeneutics may show that there does exist the need for self-understanding, still its rules and precepts will not bring it about. Again, critical history yields univocal results, not unconditionally, but only in so far as historians share the same world-view, the same background, the same state of the question. Further, as we saw in the last chapter, cognitional theory is an inevitable presupposition of any statement about interpretation or historical knowledge; inadequate theories keep recurring to be attacked by some and defended by others; and the resultant confusion has its effect on historical inquiry, the advance of historical knowledge, and

Finally, methods are discovered, improved, employed, by existential subjects. Such subjects are authentic in the measure that they observed the transcendental precepts. But their authenticity is dialectical. It consists in withdrawing from inauthenticity, and the withdrawal is never a permanent achievement. It is ever precarious, ever to be achieved afresh. It is not some pure quality, a serene freedom from all oversights, misunderstanding, mistakes, sins. On the contrary, it is for the most part a matter of uncovering one's oversights, acknowledging that one has misunderstood, correcting one's mistakes, repenting one's sins.

It follows that the progress of science is itself a dialectical process

7. What is founded?

What is meant by foundations now, perhaps, is clear. There is a pre-theological element occurring in the intellectual, moral, and religious life of individuals ~~was~~ some of whom are theologians. This is the threefold conversion. There is the specifically theological element that consists in an account of the threefold conversion. Such an account was outlined at the end of chapter six

Finally, horizons are structured. The process of learning is not a mere addition to what already is known but rather an organic growth out of previous knowing and doing. In every sphere what more can be learnt, depends on what already has been learnt; and when the prerequisites are lacking, there is an inability to notice, to attend, to get the point. Conversely, our intentions, our statements, our deeds all stand within contexts, and it is to the contexts that we appeal when we explain our deeds, when we clarify, amplify, qualify our statements, when we outline the reasons for our actions and goals. Again, regulative of our knowing are our interests and values. We take the trouble to attend and learn in accord with the values we respect and the satisfactions we prize.

Finally, horizons are structured. For Edmund Husserl the account of even a single perception would be incomplete if there were no mention of the comprehensive horizon of a world as its encompassing frame of reference.

Horizons, finally, are the structured resultant of past achievement and both the condition and the limitation of further development in the future. They are structured. Our intentions, our statements, are deeds, all stand within contexts. To such contexts we appeal, when we outline the reasons for our goals, when we clarify, amplify, qualify our statements, and when we explain our deeds. Further, all learning is not just an addition to what has already been learnt but rather an organic growth ~~emerging~~ out of previous knowing and doing. Finally, just as past development paves the way for future development, so too the deficiencies of the past set boundaries to what now can be attempted. Beyond those boundaries one ~~may~~ fails to notice, to attend, to get the point. One has no notion of what is going on. And one will have no notion until one goes back, remedies past deficiencies

Finally horizons are structured. Our intentions, our statements, our deeds, all stand within contexts. To these contexts we appeal, when we explain our deeds, when we clarify, amplify, qualify our statements, when we outline the reasons for our goals. Moreover, this contextual structure not only organizes past development but also marks the limits to future development. In every sphere past development not only organizes past development but also satisfies some prerequisites for still further development. Because it satisfies not all but only some prerequisites, it reveals horizon to be a boundary. Beyond that boundary one fails to notice, to attend, to get the point. One has to go back and meet the prerequisites, if things are not to remain all Greek to me.