

I have argued that, “in the theological context, as in others, appropriation, or reflection . . . , can occur on different levels. To appropriate, or reflect, on either level is to make judgments using certain criteria. But whereas, on the first, less critical level, the criteria are simply the consuetudinary criteria established in the particular context of reflection, on the second, more critical level, they are the ultimate criteria of experience and reason as these require to be used in that particular context” (“Existentialist Theology”).

As I’ve continued to reflect on this, I’ve realized that it admits of two important inferences. First, although I have for the most part had judging credibility in mind in thinking this, I now see that it also applies just as validly, *mutatis mutandis*, to judging appropriateness—or, for that matter, fittingness. The crucial point has to do with the *criteria* of judgment, not with what is being judged. If the criteria are consuetudinary criteria only, the judgment, whatever it is about, is relatively less critical, whereas if the criteria are ultimate, the judgment is relatively more critical, again, regardless of what it is about.

The second inference is that what makes problems of systematic theology “*basic* problems” is that they arise at the relatively more critical level of determining and employing *ultimate* criteria of judgment, as distinct from the relatively less critical level on which the criteria are consuetudinary only. This is clear enough (at least now!) from my observing that systematic theology, in “[i]ts first and third phases, which I term respectively ‘historical’ and ‘philosophical,’ are both concerned, in different ways, with establishing *criteria* of validation,” whereas “[i]ts second, ‘hermeneutical’ phase is wholly concerned with interpretation” (“Theology without Metaphysics?”; italics added). What I did not bring out sufficiently in that context, however, is that problems arising in connection with the critical interpretation with which systematic theology is concerned in its second phase are also “basic,” because such interpretation is not different from the interpretation with which historical theology, along with secular history, is also concerned; i.e., it is interpretation, as I say, “not only of the ‘surface meaning’ of the speech acts, including the language acts, performed in bearing witness, but also of their

‘deep structure,’ or logical *kind* of meaning.” Because this is so, problems arising at the relatively more critical level of the second phase of systematic theology are also “*basic* problems”—both because interpretation of “deep structure” as well as “surface meaning” is “basic” to, because necessarily presupposed by, critical validation, and also because interpretation of the first is “basic” to interpretation of the second.

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