

Human beings obviously differ both in their aptitude for self-reflection and in their exercise of it. But perhaps most persons seriously engaged in doing anything find themselves reflecting sooner or later on just what it means to do ~~it~~ and ~~on~~ how it ought to be done. This seems particularly true of those engaged in the various forms of the secondary activity of critical reflection that are typically institutionalized in our society today in the several fields or disciplines of the research university. In the case of most such persons, however, self-reflection on their own life-praxis as researchers in this or that field or discipline requires stepping outside of it. What it means to do biology and how it ought to be done are not questions that biology as a science even asks, much less seeks to answer. Biologists may certainly ask and try to answer them; and unless appearances deceive, most biologists, at one time or another, probably do so. But as and when they ask such questions, it is not as biologists that they ask them, nor do the findings of their science offer any particular help in answering them.

The case of philosophers is significantly different. Being a completely general and fundamental form of critical reflection, philosophy includes all questions about the constitution of any form of life-praxis, primary or secondary, including itself. Thus philosophy both critically constitutes itself as a field or discipline of research and is perforce required for the critical constitution of all other fields or disciplines. This is why biologists who must step outside of biology in order to determine just what it means to do it and how it ought to be done thereby step into philosophy. They ask their questions as, in effect, philosophers of biology, and they are helped most in answering them by the findings of the philosophy of biology as well as of the philosophy of science more generally. There are, to be sure, certain specialists even in philosophy who can hardly be said to be responsible for critically constituting their own form of research. Historians of philosophy, for example, do not as such ask what it is to do the

history of philosophy or how it ought to be done. But if asking such questions requires them to step outside of their own philosophical specialty, they still remain within the field or discipline of philosophy, which is exceptional, as compared with most others, precisely in being critically self-constituting.

The other notable exception, of course, is theology, by which for present purposes I mean specifically Christian theology. Notwithstanding that it significantly differs from philosophy in necessarily presupposing the specifically Christian witness of faith, theology, also, is significantly different from all of the special sciences and the humanities as well as the various arts. Like philosophy, it is a completely general and fundamental form of critical reflection, which must therefore critically constitute itself as a field or discipline of research. If this need not mean that theology and philosophy are mutually exclusive fields or disciplines, it definitely does mean that their respective understandings of themselves as of existential truth generally must be mutually confirming. Each must in a way critically constitute the other in critically constituting itself. But, be this as it may, the questions of what it means to do theology and of how it ought to be done are themselves theological questions, even if this need not mean and, perhaps, cannot mean that they are only theological questions.

Here, too, however, the task of asking and answering them hardly belongs to all specialists in the field. On the contrary, neither historical theologians as such nor practical theologians as such can critically constitute even their own disciplines, much less any other or theology as a field. If they are to reflect critically on the constitution either of the field as a whole or of any of its disciplines, they must step out of historical and practical theology, even if they may and must remain within the field of theology. More exactly, they must step into the other discipline of systematic theology, to which it belongs to critically constitute both the field of theology as a whole and each of the theological

disciplines, including itself. On the other hand, specialists in systematic theology are responsible, at least according to aptitude, for asking and answering all relevant questions about the constitution of theology as a field and of any of the several disciplines that it in turn may require or allow for.

For some time now, the disciplined pursuit of such questions has been designated by the term "prolegomena," which is appropriate enough, provided one construes it with Karl Barth to mean, not the things that are said before one does theology, but rather the things that are said first, as soon as one begins to do it. In any case, questions about the task(s) and method(s) of theology and of all its disciplines are among the perennial questions that systematic theologians as such bear disciplinary responsibility for asking and trying to answer.

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