

I obviously use "action" in more than one sense.

I use it in a proper, if not a narrow, sense, when I contrast it with "self-understanding," or "existence," or use it synonymously with "life-praxis" (as I do, for instance, in *Doing Theology Today*: 116, 144, 148).

But I also use it—or clearly imply I would use it—in a broad sense. This is evident simply from my talk of "actualizing" (or, occasionally, "enacting") self-understanding, or of self-understanding "actualizing existence" in the emphatic sense of human existence, or existence that understands (see, e.g., 111, 145). But it becomes explicitly clear in the summary of my view in Notebooks, 13 November 1993, where I define "the broadly moral" as "having to do with human action in relation to, or in the context of, reality," and then go on to say that my further distinction between "the categorial" and "the transcendental" applies to "the broadly moral" as well as to "the broadly natural," because "life-praxis" refers to the categorial level of human action, even as "self-understanding" refers to its transcendental level.

—Tracking Notebooks, 23 March 2001

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I fear I have been misled and also misled others whenever I have represented belief and action simply and exclusively as matters of life-praxis.

Self-understanding is also action—specifically, transcendental action; and it necessarily implies belief—including specifically existential-transcendental belief and, therefore, ethical- as well as metaphysical-transcendental belief.

What certainly *are* matters of life-praxis, however, are the *explication/ formulation* of belief, including existential and also metaphysical and ethical belief, and the *categorial* action necessarily implied by the transcendental action of

self-understanding. The second also involves, of course, the empirical belief and action necessary to further specifying categorial action.

—Tracking Notebooks, 6 October 2005

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Our being created in God's image includes the categorial level of our *life-praxis*, of leading our lives by what we ourselves think, say, and do, and also the transcendental level of our *self-understanding*, of how we each understand ourselves in the ultimate setting of our lives. How we understand ourselves in our ultimate setting, especially in relation to strictly ultimate reality, has implications both for all that we are to believe about ourselves and everything else and for all that we are to do in relation to the interests affected by our actions, of all others as well as ourselves. The reason for this is that we are not simply selves, but *embodied selves related to others*, who exist only in a world together with other beings and kinds of beings, both human and other than human. Thus, although as selves we transcend, in an important way, both our bodies and our social relations to other selves, we are never ourselves apart from them; and how we understand ourselves has implications for what we believe and how we act, including all that we do in relation to others.

The distinction just made between understanding ourselves at the transcendental level and leading our lives at the categorial level (i.e., between self-understanding and life-praxis) is fundamental to clarifying any number of concepts and distinctions that have proved to be more or less indispensable to doing Christian theology. Thus, for example, the traditional theological concept "faith" is to be clarified, purely formally, as "authentic self-understanding," just as "good works," or "witness," are, purely formally, matters of "life-praxis." Or, again, "sin" (in the singular and in the proper theological sense) is, formally, "inauthentic self-understanding," while "sins" (in the plural) properly refers, in one use of "sin," to the expressions of inauthentic self-understanding in "life-praxis."

—Tracking *The Understanding of Christian Faith* (ms.): 67 f.

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The relation of sin to moral evil is a bit complicated because the term "moral" and its cognates are properly used in more than one sense. In a broad sense, anything may be distinguished as "moral" that involves the distinctive level of creaturely freedom called "moral freedom." Since sin involves just such moral freedom, sin is rightly understood to be one form or level of moral evil—specifically, its *transcendental* form or level, where moral freedom is involved in the fundamental option between "faith" and "sin," or authentic and inauthentic self-understanding. Conventionally, however, sin (or sins) tend(s) to be identified simply with the other *categorial* form or level of moral evil, so that one is taken to be a sinner because, or insofar as, one transgresses the moral law, or does morally evil things, in this other stricter sense of "morally evil." But this conventional view is profoundly misleading. Not only is sin in the singular, whether as original sin or as actual sin, not to be identified with moral evil in the categorial sense, but even sin in the plural, as actual sins, is not just another word for moral transgressions in this stricter sense of the term. If actual sins are rightly defined as expressions and representations of actual/ original sin, they may very well include moral observances or moral good as well as moral transgressions or moral evil in the categorial sense.

—Tracking *The Understanding of Christian Faith* (ms.): 69 f.

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Sin is a properly moral concept only in the broad sense that refers to anything involving distinctively moral freedom at either the categorial level of life-praxis or—as is true of sin—the transcendental level of self-understanding. Thus sin has to do, in the first instance, with who we *are* or how we *exist*, i.e., how we understand ourselves in relation to self, others, and the strictly ultimate whole of reality called "God," as distinct from how we otherwise *act* and what we *do* in leading our lives. As such, sin is properly understood as the negative counterpart to, because it is the lack or privation of, righteousness, in the sense of the right relation to ourselves, others, and God.

Because sin, properly understood, is a moral concept at the transcendental level of moral freedom, one's thoughts, words, and deeds at the categorial level may be actual sins "before God" even if they are judged to be morally right, either relatively or absolutely, "before human beings or before the world." Even thoughts, words, and deeds that are morally right, not merely relatively, but absolutely, can at the same time be sinful—namely, because or insofar as they are done out of sin as the faithless, idolatrous, prideful, and self-loving desire to secure the ultimate meaning of one's life, instead of out of obedient trust in God's love alone and loyalty to its cause that all things shall be and become themselves. The importance of this point, given the common identification of sin as simply moral transgression at the categorial level of action, is hard to exaggerate.

—Tracking *The Understanding of Christian Faith* (ms.): 158 f., 160 f.

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To understand myself in a certain way is to behave in a certain way. This is true not only in the sense that how I behave expresses how I understand myself, but also in the sense that understanding myself is itself already a form of behavior. It is, one may say, the primal, or transcendental, form of behavior in which all other categorial forms have both their point of origin and their abiding principle.

—Tracking Notebooks, 5 January 2009