

Humans are beings who not only exist and experience but also understand—who do not simply live their lives in the manner of their fellow creatures but are both given and required to lead their lives by understanding themselves in relation to their world. In fact, it is just such self-understanding at its most fundamental level that is the constitutive event of human existence. We each are or become human only because or insofar as we relate ourselves understandingly, and thus in freedom and responsibility, both to our own existence and to the world around us (cf. *On Theology*: 26).

Even the most spontaneous thought and speech involve some degree of reflection and to this extent are a reflective process or product. But there is still an important difference between the thinking and speaking involved in spontaneously experiencing reality and communicating about it and those involved in critically reflecting on the terms in which this experience is already expressed, so as to determine what they really mean and whether the claims we make or imply in using them are really valid. Even if the terms used on the second level of reflection are identical with those used on the first, they nevertheless serve a very different function: not merely to express our experience of reality but also, and primarily, to answer the questions about the meaning of the terms in which we spontaneously express it and the validity of the claims we make or imply in doing so (cf. 123).

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