

According to Gamwell, "the argumentative assessment of religious claims is incomplete without showing that the real ground of ultimate worth is necessarily affirmed in human existence as such" (*JR*, 82, 3 [July2002]: 364). But, surely, what has to be shown if such argumentative assessment is to be complete is not simply that the real ground of ultimate worth is necessarily affirmed in human existence as such (what else?!), but also that it is necessarily affirmed therein *as what the religious claims in question assert or imply it to be*. This, however, raises the question whether, or to what extent, specific religious claims can be critically validated—as Gamwell insists they must be—by transcendental argument.

So far as I can see, there neither are nor can be any such transcendental arguments for specifically religious or philosophical claims as such. All that one can offer transcendental arguments for are: (1) the existential affirmations that all specifically religious or philosophical affirmations as such somehow express; and (2) the metaphysical and moral affirmations that those existential affirmations in turn necessarily imply. But, then, I cannot agree with Gamwell's claim that "theology is bound to assert that the affirmation of God represented in the authoritative witness to Jesus as the Christ cannot be true unless it can be redeemed by showing that faith in this God is shared, at least implicitly, by all human individuals" (364).

Of course, I could accept his claim if by "God" in the phrases, "the affirmation of God" and "faith in this God," he meant simply the meaning of ultimate reality for us involved in affirming the authoritative witness to Jesus as the Christ, or the comparably authoritative witness of any other religion, together, naturally, with whatever it necessarily implies metaphysically about the structure of ultimate reality in itself and morally about how we ourselves are to act and what we are to do. But if "God" is to be understood, instead, as it ordinarily is, in some more determinate, specifically theistic, not to say Christian, sense, then Gamwell's claim seems to me to be mistaken.

Indeed, I judge it to be caught in the same difficulty as was created by my own argument in the title essay of *The Reality of God*, which I recognized and addressed as

such in the Preface to the second, paperback edition of the book. I sought to remove this difficulty by not only allowing but insisting that "to establish 'the reality of God' in the distinctively theistic sense of that phrase [as distinct from the completely general sense in which it means the objective ground of our basic confidence] logically requires that one establish more than 'the reality of faith' and its objective ground." Even if our basic confidence in the meaning of life can indeed be critically validated by transcendental argument, the question remains "in what terms, theistic or some other, we can most appropriately conceptualize and account for it" (xi). And to answer *this* question, as well as, of course, the further question "whether any among the historical religions is justified in claiming to be its decisive representation or revelation," seems to me beyond the competence of any properly transcendental argument to answer (39).

Because I took this to be so, I found I had to reassess my earlier resistance to the traditional theological teaching according to which certain so-called *mysteria strictae dictae*—specifically, trinity, incarnation, and grace—are beyond the competence of human experience and reason as such to validate as credible. I generally resisted this teaching because I was reluctant to accept anything as credible simply on authority. But if it belongs to the very nature of a religion, particular and insofar arbitrary as it perforce is, to lay claim to decisive authority for itself; and if all experiences of the particular are beyond human experience and reason simply as such, there was evidently reason to question my resistance.

My conclusion from such questioning is that it does indeed belong to a religion that it should be a particular and insofar arbitrary re-presentation of a universal possibility of self-understanding/understanding of existence. This means that the particularity of the re-presentation is as essential to the religion as the universality of the possibility. But, then, there will be that about any religion whose truth cannot be validated solely and simply by common human experience and reason but only by particular historical experience and critical reflection thereon.

This is not to deny, naturally, that there can be such a thing as an a priori christology, whose claim to validity can indeed be validated by transcendental argument. But whether the christological predicate explicated by such an a priori christology can be predicated truly of anyone or anything as particular and arbitrary as the historical subject, Jesus of Nazareth, is beyond the competence of common human experience and reason as such, and therefore of any valid transcendental argument, to determine.

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