

My guess is that, when Bultmann argues that theological, specifically, exegetical, work necessarily depends on the work of philosophy, and thus raises the question of "the 'right' philosophy," all that he has in mind is what I would now distinguish as philosophy in its one aspect as the purely formal analysis of meaning.

As I now understand it, philosophy is the comprehensive critical reflection constituted by asking about human existence simply as such. This means that, in one aspect, philosophy consists in an analysis of meaning, and thus of all the different *kinds* of meaning involved in understanding ourselves and leading our lives through all the forms of culture, religious as well as secular. But, in my understanding, philosophy is more than such a purely formal analysis of meaning, including discovering or devising a common, purely formal language in which the materially different answers to the existential question can all be critically interpreted and the real, as distinct from all merely verbal, issues between them, somehow resolved by appropriate evidence and argument. In another aspect, philosophy has the task of critically validating all the different answers to the existential question. implicit as well as explicit, so as to formulate its own constructive answer to this question—indirectly, at the level of critical reflection, and solely on the basis of common human experience and reason. Thus, in this other aspect of its work, philosophy formulates the truth about human existence universally disclosed by experience and reason and therefore expressed or implied by all the forms of culture, secular as well as religious.

Bultmann, in his way, also recognizes that philosophy has both of these same two aspects. But when he insists that the work of theology necessarily depends on that of philosophy—and thus raises the question of "the 'right' philosophy"—it seems to me that the only thing he has in mind is philosophy in its one purely formal aspect. This is clear enough, I should think, from his express insistence that to ask about "the 'right' philosophy" in no way means that "there is a right philosophy in the sense of some definitive philosophical system—such as idealism, say, and specifically Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's—and that exegesis has to accept the answers of such a philosophy to the existential question about the meaning of my particular existence" (*NTM*: 107). Far from having to accept the answers of

any definitive philosophical ~~s~~ystem, theology, in Bultmann's view, has the very different task of engaging all such answers (at least all that are current and important in the present situation) in critical discussion—in the way in which he himself again and again engages not only idealism(-humanism) (and, to a much more limited extent, naturalism), but also existentialism, now understood, however, not as such a purely formal analysis of meaning, and thus of all the various kinds of meaning, but as itself a definitive philosophical system offering a certain answer, or certain answers, to the existential question.

If the interpretation I am suggesting is valid, however, there is evidently an important ambiguity in what Bultmann speaks of as "the understanding of existence that is given with existence itself" (107; cf. 103). Insofar as "the 'right' philosophy" is philosophy only in its one, purely formal aspect as analysis of meaning; and insofar as the task of "the 'right' philosophy," so understood, is to develop the understanding of existence that is given with existence itself in an appropriate conceptuality, this understanding of existence itself must be understood as purely formal, as the understanding we always already have, not of this particular meaning or that, but of meaning as such, and thus of all the different *kinds* of meaning, in their similarities to and differences from one another.

Of course, Bultmann's own way of recognizing philosophy in what I distinguish as its one aspect, as purely formal analysis of meaning, is to speak of it as "ontology," or "phenomenology," as distinct from philosophy in its other aspect, as *indirectly* "genuine proclamation," insofar as it calls us back to ourselves from our lostness in the "one," to resolution to exist as a self in face of death, etc. (GV, 3: 122). But this is hardly a problem for my interpretation of what he does, and does not, mean to say. On the contrary, in my view "ontology" (or, in my term, "transcendental metaphysics") is itself precisely a matter of purely formal analysis of meaning in all its different kinds—its most completely general, and so foundational, kind being not merely "ontic," but "ontological," which is to say, "transcendental."

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