

That Niebuhr commonly operates with a restricted use of the concepts "experience" and "reason" is particularly clear from the following line of argument.

"The idea of creation," he says, "is profoundly ultrarational; for human reason can deal only with the stuff of experience, and in experience the previous event and cause are seen, while the creative source of novelty is beyond experience" (*Beyond Tragedy* [BT]: 9).

Clearly, "experience" is being used here as equivalent with what I mean by "*empirical* experience," to the exclusion of anything like what I call "*existential* experience." And so, too, with "reason," which is said to be able to deal only with "the stuff of experience," and thus is used as equivalent with "*scientific* [and/or empirical-historical] reason," to the exclusion of what I should distinguish as "*metaphysical* reason."

Of course, there are some places where Niebuhr clearly implies something like "existential experience" as well as "metaphysical reason." But, while he sometimes uses "experience" and "reason" in broader senses than they have in the preceding argument, he also tends to use, if not, indeed, to favor, other terms to refer to what I distinguish as the vertical dimension of experience and reason. Thus he speaks of the "sense" or "consciousness" of "the dimension of depth," as, for example, when he says, "The dimension of depth [by which he really means, as the context shows, "The *sense* of the dimension of depth. . ."] is really prior to any experience of breadth, for the assumption [*sic!*] that life is meaningful and that its meaning transcends the observable facts of existence is involved in all achievements of knowledge by which life in its richness and contradictoriness is apprehended" (*An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*: 7 f.). Here "experience" is explicitly correlated with "breadth," while "depth" is said to be "sensed," rather than "experienced" (cf. the repeated uses elsewhere in the same text of the phrase, "the sense of depth," or "the sense of depth and transcendence," as well as "the sense of obligation in morals" [5, 8, 9, 15]). In another place, Niebuhr says that "[t]he full dimension of depth in which all human actions transpire is disclosed only in introspection" (80; cf. BT: 12: "What Christianity means by

the idea of the fall can only be known in introspection [sc. as distinct from purely external descriptions of human behavior]").

Sadly, Niebuhr slips back and forth between stricter and broader uses both of "experience" and "reason," the while employing other terms to refer to what a systematically ambiguous use of "experience" and "reason" more adequately brings to expression.

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