

One way of engaging with the world, arguably, is to do metaphysics, in the sense of inquiring, What are the necessary conditions of the possibility both of the world and of any of the different ways, actual and possible, of engaging with it, including the metaphysical way? Anything like a complete answer to this question would yield what I mean, more exactly, by a "transcendental metaphysics" in both of the senses in which I use the term, i.e., in the strict sense, in which doing it (and taking "world" in "engaging with the world" as utterly all-inclusive) inquires as to the necessary conditions of the possibility of anything whatever; and in the broad sense, in which doing it includes also inquiring as to the necessary conditions of the possibility of the distinctive kind of thing instanced by ourselves as existing understandingly and as therefore able to engage with the world in all the many ways in which we can and do engage with it, including metaphysically.

So understood, doing transcendental metaphysics, as one way among others of engaging with the world, constitutes a distinct domain of discourse—and, insofar as its inquiries meet with success, a distinct domain of truth. The truths it pursues, however, are only necessary to, not sufficient for, the whole truth about anything, in that they describe nothing particular as such but only something universal about it. Even so, no description of anything particular is ever complete or fully explicit without them, because they are about the necessary common denominator of all possibilities, of all "possible worlds," or, better, of all conceivable kinds of world. This they are either in the strict sense excluding everything but the common core of all possibilities whatever, or in the broad sense including, in addition, the necessary common core of all of our own distinctive possibilities as those who exist understandingly and are thus able to engage with the world in all the different ways in which such engagement is either actual or possible. In this way, the truths sought by doing transcendental metaphysics in the broad sense inclusive of existentialist analysis describe only an abstract, all but empty, outline of reality, all of whose concrete contents are describable, if at all, only by other nontranscendental domains of discourse/truth.

Being one way of engaging with the world among others, doing transcendental metaphysics depends upon both a certain kind of interest and a choice to act on it, for which the individual so acting bears full

responsibility. Therefore, in this important respect, doing it neither has nor may claim to have any unconditional priority over any other interests or the choices to act on them. Depending on the conditions obtaining in the context, pursuit of transcendental metaphysical inquiry, just as of any other interest or choice, may be everything from mandatory through permissible or indifferent to forbidden.

But if doing transcendental metaphysics cannot justly claim a unique priority over other interests, choices, and ways of engaging the world, discursive or nondiscursive, there is a sense in which its discourse or vocabulary is nonetheless uniquely privileged. It is privileged, in other words, not simply because of the interests and choices of those who use it, but also and primarily because, or insofar as, it is uniquely transparent to the way things really are. Insofar as its inquiries are successful, its vocabulary cannot fail to be thus transparent because it but makes explicit what Whitehead speaks of in one place as "the premises implicit in all reasoning"—which is to say, what any and all reasoning, in any and all of the various ways of representing the world and ourselves and acting to change them—in short, in any and all of our ways of engaging with the world—is, at least implicitly, reasoning *from*.

Because, however, the strictly necessary among these "premises implicit in all reasoning" are logically necessary, not merely conditionally, but unconditionally, any explications of them, if meaningful at all, are about the way things really are, i.e., are about "reality," or, in a broad sense, "existence," as such. This means that they would be true and could not conceivably be false, not only in this, that, or any other actual world, but in any so-called possible world, or—less misleadingly—any conceivable kind of world.

One of the marks of such unconditionally necessary truths is that they are wholly positive, or noncompetitive, in that they exclude no other positive truth, either necessary or contingent. But, then, there is no possible basis on which a transcendental metaphysics seeking to explicate the strictly necessary truths implicit in all reasoning could ever become "monopolistic." It could not possibly require that the vocabularies of all other domains of truth must either prove somehow reducible to its vocabulary or else be acknowledged as

in some way defective or inappropriate. Strictly necessary truths are utterly noncompetitive, and so utterly incapable of ever being or becoming a monopoly in this sense—not least because, among such necessary truths, arguably, are "There are and must be some contingent as well as necessary truths" and "All strictly necessary truths but explicate the utterly abstract properties of anything and everything concrete, and so provide but the bare, all but empty, outline requiring to be filled in by all contingent truths."

But if transcendental metaphysical truths that are necessary unconditionally cannot, in the nature of the case, ever compete with the truths of any other domain, the converse is equally true. No other truths, and certainly not the truths explicated by an astringently analytic philosophy concerned solely with doing conceptual justice to all of our different ways of engaging with the world, can possibly compete with the truths made explicit by a transcendental metaphysics. On the contrary, such astringently analytic truths can only necessarily presuppose such metaphysical truths, together with those yielded by doing transcendental metaphysics in the broad sense inclusive of existentialist analysis. This they do most obviously when the one truth said or implied to be fundamental to all of them is that the many domains of which they are the logical analysis are just that—so many ways of engaging with the world.

20 February 2006