

"[M]etaphysical assertions [are] assertions which at once have objective reference to 'how things are' and yet are not empirically falsifiable as are the hypotheses of the special sciences. Such assertions cannot be thus falsifiable because their specific use or function is to represent not the variable details of our experience of reality, but its constant structure—that which *all* states of experience, regardless of their empirical contents, necessarily have in common. Thus, if a . . . metaphysical assertion is false, this is not because it fails in predicting what is disclosed by our particular external perceptions, but because it misrepresents the common structure of all of our experiences, of which we are originally aware internally, and thus is falsified by *any one* of them we choose to consider" (RG [1966]: 93).

"[M]etaphysics [is] a distinct field of inquiry, whose task it is to raise to the level of reflective self-consciousness the fundamental assertions that must somehow be made by each of us and that none of us can meaningfully deny.

"The mark of such metaphysical assertions is that they are utterly positive or non-exclusive in their application through experience, hence true necessarily rather than contingently or empirically. Thus their negations or contradictories . . . are utterly negative or exclusive of application through experience and so are not merely false but necessarily false and possible at all only verbally. Of course, like science or any other inquiry purporting to lead to claims that are meaningful and true, metaphysics is subject to the two overriding demands that its terms and assertions be (1) logically consistent, both in themselves and in relation to one another, and (2) experientially significant, by applying somehow through our common human experience. Neither of these demands can be conceived as arbitrary in the sense of admitting of coherently conceivable alternatives; nor can either of them be restricted to some distinct field or fields of inquiry, thereby excluding other possible fields from its scope. The reason for this is that both demands arise from the very nature of cognitive meaning and thus constitute the unconditionally necessary conditions of any and all rational inquiry. One implication of this is particularly important: metaphysical terms and assertions—again just like those of any other inquiry—must avoid vagueness or unclarity quite as much as they must avoid logical inconsistency and lack of application through experience. Since any term or assertion that is vague

enough can always escape the verdict that it is inconsistent or not experientially significant, compliance with the demands of reason requires that its meaning be sufficiently clear so that its consistency and application through experience may be fairly determined.

"As to the question of how metaphysical terms and assertions, which neither are nor could be empirical, must nevertheless have experiential significance, the answer is that 'empirical' as used here does not have the same meaning as 'experiential.' In its present sense, 'empirical' means applying through some but *not all* possible experience, while 'experiential' means applying through *at least some* possible experience, and perhaps all. Thus any term or assertion meets the second basic demand that it be experientially significant if there is at least some experience through which it might apply or which could serve to verify it. Naturally, in the case of metaphysics 'at least some' cannot be less than 'all,' the mark of a true metaphysical term or assertion being that any possible experience serves to verify it or give it application, whereas its negation or contradictory can be verified by no experience and so is not only false but meaningless" ("God and Philosophy" [1968]: 171 f.)

"[W]e may question . . . that scientific explanation is the only explanation or, if the word 'explanation' be pre-empted for what is attempted by science, the only way of giving a rational account (in the sense of the *λογον διδοναι*) or trying to understand and render intelligible in terms of our experience. Ever since Aristotle, metaphysics has been generally understood as the attempt to give a rational account of being *qua* being or, in less traditional terms, of the strictly universal structures of reality which experience discloses. But this means that no metaphysics is properly concerned with explaining why this is the case instead of that; metaphysics has the quite different task of understanding what it means to say that anything is the case at all. . . . [T]he metaphysician's proper question is not, 'What are the facts?' but, rather, 'What is it to be a fact?'" (174).

"[The] aim of metaphysical systems [is] to give an integral reflective account of the understanding of existence as such" ("Theology and Metaphysics" [1969]: 18).

"Any claim may be said to be factually falsifiable if there are some at least conceivable facts that would render it false. But whether any such claim is also *empirically* falsifiable is . . . another and independent question. For, even though all factual claims must somehow apply, or fail to apply, through experience, experience itself comprises more than its merely empirical aspect, strictly and properly understood. Along with the external sense perception of ourselves and the world, which is properly distinguished as 'empirical,' we also enjoy an inner, nonsensuous perception of our own existence as mutually related to others and to the inclusive whole of reality as such. Although this other properly 'existential' aspect of our experience perforce discloses more than mere fact, being the perception as well of the metaphysically necessary, some of what it discloses, including our own existence, is indeed merely factual, with the consequence that at least some of the claims that apply through it are themselves factually falsifiable. Even so, they are not empirically falsifiable, since the experience through which they apply, or fail to apply, is our nonsensuous experience of our own existence rather than such experiences as we have through our senses" ("Falsification and Belief" [1974]: 40).

"To be sure, even . . . anthropological claims . . . are, in large part, at least, broadly metaphysical. Although human existence is entirely factual or contingent, and so in principle different from the strictly necessary existence of God and, in a suitably different sense, of the world as well, it nevertheless has a unique primacy, which insofar entitles it to be included among the subjects of metaphysical understanding. It has such a primacy, namely, because, while it is certainly not constitutive of reality as such, God alone being the individual who is that, it is constitutive of our *understanding* of reality. But for the fact of our existence as human, not only would we have no understanding whatever, not even empirical or scientific, but we also would have no understanding of the inner nature of reality as such. We ourselves are the one existent whose nature we understand by being it, by understanding it, so to speak, from within as well as from without. Consequently, such knowledge as we can have of the inner nature of anything else we can have only by way of analogy with whatever we are able to know of our own existence. Because this is so, there is one sense of the word 'anthropology' in which it is properly taken, along with 'cosmology'

and 'theology,' to designate the nonempirical enquiries of special metaphysics. Nevertheless, since our own existence, unlike that of God and the world, is merely factual, such claims as we can make about it, or about the world and God as related to it, are merely factual claims that could conceivably be false" (41 f.).

"If . . . 'the intellect's self-understanding . . . is the innate, *a priori*, or metaphysical,' . . . then . . . the statement 'I exist' must be a metaphysical statement, along with the other statements, 'The world exists' and 'God exists.' And, whatever may be true of the latter two statements (and certainly for classical as well as neoclassical theism the last is factually unfalsifiable *sensu strictissimo*), the first is evidently falsifiable, since it is true and can be true only contingently, even though it could never be even meaningful, much less true, to say of oneself, 'I do not exist.' In short, if metaphysics is defined as the human intellect's self-understanding, then metaphysics comprises *contingent* as well as necessary truths—although even the contingent truths it comprises are such that in one sense they cannot be coherently denied and, therefore, must be believed, if only implicitly or nonreflectively.

"What, then, is the criterion of metaphysical truth? . . . [I]t is the criterion of unavoidable belief or necessary application through experience. Those statements are true metaphysically which I could not avoid believing to be true, at least implicitly, if I were to believe or exist at all; or, alternatively, they are the statements which would necessarily apply through any of my experiences, even my merely conceivable experiences, provided only that such experience was sufficiently reflected on" ("The Criterion of Metaphysical Truth and the Senses of 'Metaphysics'" [1975]: 47).

""[I]t is possible and necessary to distinguish between metaphysics in the broad sense, for whose truth the criterion is unavoidable belief or necessary application through *human* experience, and metaphysics in the strict sense, for whose truth the criterion is unavoidable belief or necessary application through experience as such, even *divine* experience.

"By 'metaphysics in the strict sense,' one properly means *metaphysica generalis*, or ontology, although from the standpoint of a neoclassical theism

there can be no adequate distinction between ontology, on the one hand, and theology and cosmology, as disciplines of *metaphysica specialis*, on the other. From this standpoint, ontology is also theology in the sense that its constitutive concept 'reality as such' necessarily involves the distinction/correlation between the one necessarily existing individual and the many contingently existing individuals and events. Conversely, theology can only be ontology, in the sense that its constitutive concept 'God' necessarily requires that the implied distinction/correlation between God and the world be identical with that involved in 'reality as such.' Thus 'reality as such' = 'God and the world,' which explains why from this standpoint ontology is also cosmology, even as cosmology is ontology.

"Metaphysics in the broad sense,' on the other hand, should be taken to include, in addition to ontology, and hence also theology and cosmology, the third discipline of *metaphysica specialis*, psychology, or . . . anthropology. As thus inclusive, metaphysics is integral existential truth. Conversely, integral existential truth necessarily includes metaphysics in the strict sense, as ontology and therefore theology and cosmology, even though metaphysics in the strict sense does not include anthropology, and hence is not the full truth about human existence—not even as such" (48).

"[T]here is evidently a whole class of assertions that intend, as merely mathematical and logical assertions hardly do, to assert something about existence, and thus are existential assertions, but nevertheless are not factual. I refer to the class of strictly *metaphysical* assertions, the chief defining characteristic of which is that, while they assert something to be existentially the case, they neither are nor could be factually falsifiable.

"Consider, for example, 'The universe exists,' which evidently intends to assert something about existence. What sense could it make to regard it as factual? If by 'universe' one means, as one should, 'everything there is,' then the universe, by definition, is unique; for if it includes everything there is, there can be no possibility of anything outside or alongside it. But in that case 'The universe exists' could not possibly be factually falsified. For if there cannot be even the possibility of a fact that would not be included in the universe—that being the very meaning of 'universe'—then any even conceivable fact could only verify the assertion that the universe exists, and no fact, not even a conceivable fact, could ever falsify it.

"If this reasoning is sound, it is evident not only that the class of factual assertions is smaller than the class of meaningful assertions but that it is also smaller than the class of meaningful existential assertions" ("Linguistic Analysis and Theology" [1977]: 320 f.).

"[M]etaphysics' refers to that form of critical reflection which seeks to make fully explicit and understandable the most fundamental presuppositions of all our experience and thought, or . . . the most universal principles that are the strictly necessary conditions of the possibility of anything whatever. Because these presuppositions or principles are radically more fundamental or universal than any other, they can be understood in terms of our ordinary concepts only by analogy, or by generalizing these concepts well beyond the limits of their ordinary uses. Thus one metaphysics differs from another primarily because of the concepts, especially the key concept, it chooses to generalize and because of the consistency or thoroughness of its generalizations. . . . [P]rocess metaphysics, then, . . . differs from every other because of the consistent and thoroughgoing way in which it generalizes the key concept of 'freedom.' . . .

"[O]ne may go so far as to say that process metaphysics is precisely *the* metaphysics of freedom, which insists on the applicability of its key concept to literally everything that can be actual at all, from the least particle of so-called physical matter to the God than whom, in Anselm's words, 'none greater can be conceived'" (FF [1979]: 73 ff.).

"[M]etaphysics [is] the form of critical reflection whose purpose it is to make the necessary conditions of the possibility of anything whatever, and hence the first principles of all our thought and speech, fully explicit and understandable. Because these necessary conditions or first principles are strictly ultimate, and hence radically more general and fundamental than any of the conditions or principles designated by our ordinary terms and categories, they can be made thus fully understandable in one or the other of two ways: either strictly literally, in concepts and symbols all of which apply to the different things to which they are applied in the same sense or do not apply to them at all; or else analogically as well as literally, in concepts and symbols at least some of which apply to the different things to which they are applied in different senses that are the relatively primary or the relatively

secondary senses of the terms. Insofar as one proceeds in the first of these ways, one develops a strictly literal, or . . . 'transcendental,' metaphysics, whereas proceeding in the second way involves one in developing a partly analogical, or . . . 'categorical,' metaphysics" (PC [1982]: 136).

"[M]yth is different from metaphysics, which thinks and speaks of the same ultimate reality, only not in its meaning for us but in its structure in itself" ("Myth" [1983]: 390).

"By 'philosophy' in general. . . I mean a more or less reflective self-understanding that is comprehensive in scope and generally secular rather than specifically religious in constitution. As such it properly includes, although it is not exhausted by, both a metaphysics and an ethics, by which I understand both a theory of ultimate reality in its structure in itself and a theory of how we ought to act and what we ought to do given the structure of ultimate reality and its meaning for us. Thus, in speaking of 'process philosophy' [in particular], I mean just such a reflective, comprehensive, and secular understanding of existence together with the metaphysical and ethical theories that explicate its necessary implications. And in formally identifying process theology as employing the insights, concepts, and methods of process philosophy, I intend to say that it is in terms of this self-understanding and these theories that it critically reflects on the meaning and truth of Christian witness" ("Process Theology and the Wesleyan Witness" [1984]: 20).

"1. To exist as a self at all is possible solely on the basis of faith, so that the statement, 'Unless you believe, you shall not understand,' is true in a sense not only of the Christian or of the religious believer but of every human being simply as such. . . .

"2. Philosophy in general is the fully reflective understanding of the basic existential faith that is constitutive of human existence. . . .

"3. The task of philosophical theology, which is integral to philosophy's central task as metaphysics, is so to understand our common faith as to answer the basic question of the reality of God. . . .

"4. Precisely as the task of an independent philosophy, philosophical theology is necessarily presupposed by a specifically Christian theology whose

task is the fully reflective understanding of Christian faith" (OT [1986]: 69, 73, 78, 84).

"[T]here is reason to hold that the philosophies of science, art, law, religion, etc., are all peripheral philosophical disciplines and are important, in the final analysis, only in relation to philosophy's central task of metaphysics.

...

"Historically, metaphysics has been conceived from its beginnings as the noncompressible core of philosophy, understood as an absolutely basic and comprehensive science. As such, it eventually came to be differentiated into *metaphysica generalis*, or ontology, which is the understanding of the completely general features of reality, and *metaphysica specialis*, as comprising psychology, cosmology, and philosophical (or 'natural') theology, which are devoted respectively to understanding the three basic realities of the self, the world, and God. Needless to say, this conception of the exact scope and content of metaphysics reflects the material metaphysical conclusions of the main tradition of Western philosophy. But even in the case of philosophies which reject these conclusions—which deny, say, that God is ultimately real, or else so radically reinterpret what 'God' means that philosophical theology is in effect reduced to cosmology or psychology—the essential structure of metaphysical inquiry may still be readily discerned. It invariably involves the most basic and comprehensive questions that can occur to the human mind, and the procedure it follows in answering these questions always involves some form or other of the transcendental method, by which I mean simply the raising to full self-consciousness of the basic beliefs that are the necessary conditions of the possibility of our existing or understanding at all. In other words, metaphysics is the vital center of the entire critico-constructive undertaking that is philosophical reflection. It is for its sake, ultimately, that all the special philosophical inquiries exist, for they are really so many contributions to its one central task: to reflect on the faith by which we live and in this way to understand the nature of reality as disclosed to this faith" (76 f.).

"Where God is conceived radically, as in monotheistic religions such as Judaism and Christianity, God is clearly understood as metaphysically real and so as not even possibly the object of strictly empirical modes of

knowledge. As 'the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible,' God is understood to be the ultimate creative source of anything that is so much as possible, and hence to be in the strictest sense necessary, not merely a being among others, but in some way 'being-itself.' In fact, the God of theism in its most fully developed forms is the one metaphysical individual whose individuality is constitutive of reality as such and who, therefore, is the inclusive object of all our faith and understanding.

"This explains, of course, why philosophical theology has been traditionally understood as one of the subdisciplines of metaphysics. Because 'God' is the metaphysical concept par excellence, the question of how this concept is to be understood and whether it refers to anything real can be answered only as a metaphysical question. The same reason, however, requires us to recognize a definite limitation in the traditional distinctions between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis* and between the three subdisciplines of which the second is held to be comprised. Although it may be useful for some purposes to distinguish ontology as the elucidation of strictly general features of reality, or 'transcendentals,' the fact remains that the distinction between the God of radical theism and all other things is itself a transcendental distinction, because God is conceived to be the one individual whose being and function are themselves strictly general. Consequently, if theism is true, God cannot be regarded as a third special object along with the self and the world, and ontology itself must be theology, even as theology must be ontology.

"Furthermore, on a theistic view, neither the self nor the world is a metaphysical individual in the same sense that God is. To be sure, for a neoclassical theism . . . , the world definitely is metaphysical, insofar as the reality of *some* world is no mere contingent fact but is a strictly general, and so necessary, feature of reality as such. But by 'world,' properly speaking, we refer not to an individual but to a collection of individuals, which is more than a mere collection without order or integrity, thanks only to the universal immanence of God as its sole primal source and final end. By 'self,' on the other hand, we do indeed refer to an individual that is unlike the world in being a concrete, integrated whole of reality, and to this extent an image or analogy of God. And yet the self is no more than God's image or analogy because its individuality, unlike God's, is not metaphysical in the sense of being ultimately constitutive of reality itself. True, the self is

constitutive of our *understanding* of reality, insofar as it is in its basic existential faith alone that reality so presents itself that it can be understood, whether existentially or reflectively. To this extent, therefore, the self is an object of metaphysical reflection; and psychology (or, as we would no doubt say today, anthropology) is an integral metaphysical task along with theology and cosmology—as is evident from the fact that the self's denial of its own existence shares in the inescapable self-contradiction of all denials of metaphysical truth. Even so, the theistic view of the matter is that it belongs to the self's own essential self-affirmation to distinguish both itself and the world as but fragmentary parts of the one integral whole whose individuality alone suffices to constitute the very being of reality as such" (79 ff.)

"[M]etaphysics . . . pursues the question of the ultimate whole of reality in itself in abstraction from the question of the meaning of this reality for us" (110 f.).

"[T]he existential question to which any religion claims to represent the answer is the question of the meaning of ultimate reality for us. This means, first of all, that the reality about which it asks is the ultimate reality of our own existence in relation to others and the whole. . . . [W]hatever else we may or may not find ourselves obliged to take account of, we can never fail to take account somehow of ourselves, others, and the whole to which we all belong. In this sense, the threefold reality of our existence simply as such is the ultimate reality that we all have to allow for in leading our own individual lives. But if this reality is what the existential question asks about, the second thing to note is how it does this—namely, by asking about this reality, not in its structure in itself, but in its meaning for us. This implies that in asking about ultimate reality, the existential question asks, at one and the same time, about our authentic self-understanding, about the understanding of ourselves in relation to others and the whole that is appropriate to, or authorized by this ultimate reality itself.

"Thus, by its very nature, the existential question is a single question having two closely related and yet distinguishable aspects. In one of these aspects, it asks about the ultimate reality of our own existence in relation to others and the whole. This [one may] distinguish as its *metaphysical* aspect, because, while it is distinct from metaphysics proper in asking about this

ultimate reality in its meaning for us rather than in its structure in itself, it is nonetheless closely related to metaphysics in that any answer to it necessarily has metaphysical implications. Unless ultimate reality in itself has one structure rather than another, it cannot have the meaning for us that a specific religion represents it as having. In its other aspect, which [one may] distinguish as *ethical*, the existential question asks about our authentic self-understanding. Thus, while it is distinct from ethics proper in asking how we are to understand ourselves rather than how we are to act and what we are to do, it is nonetheless closely related to ethics in that any answer to it necessarily has ethical implications. Unless acting in one way rather than another is how we ought to act in relation to others, ultimate reality cannot authorize the understanding of our existence that a specific religion represents it as authorizing.

"This means, of course, that, by the very nature of the existential question, there are also two main aspects to the procedures appropriate to determining the truth of specific religious answers to it. . . . [W]hether, or to what extent, a specific religious answer is [true] can be determined only by verifying its necessary implications, ethical as well as metaphysical. If it is true, its implications also must be true; and unless they can be verified by procedures appropriate to ethical and metaphysical claims respectively, it cannot be verified, either" (*TR* [1992]: 16-19).

"[T]here is more than one kind of question about God that human beings may be concerned to ask and answer by what they think, say, and do. Of course, any way of asking about God is a way of asking about something real beyond ourselves and the other persons and things that make up the world around us. In fact, in radically monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the term 'God' refers to the strictly ultimate reality that is the necessary condition of the possibility not only of ourselves and the world, but of anything whatever that is so much as conceivable. But characteristic of these religions precisely as religions is that they ask about this strictly ultimate reality not merely abstractly, in its structure in itself, but rather concretely, in its meaning for us. In other words, in asserting that God is the strictly ultimate reality, these religions not only answer the question of who God is, but at the same time also address the question of who we ourselves are supposed to be in relation to this strictly ultimate reality. By

contrast, metaphysics asks about God, insofar as it does so, in pursuit of its rather different, if by no means unrelated, kind of question. While it, too, asks about the strictly ultimate reality that theistic religions understand as God, it does so nonexistentially, by abstracting from the meaning of this reality for us so as to inquire simply into its structure in itself. In this respect, metaphysics is much more like science than religion, although the reality about whose structure it inquires abstractly is the same reality about which religion asks concretely—namely, the ultimate reality of our own existence in relation to others and the strictly ultimate.

"Because their questions are of different kinds, what religion and metaphysics respectively have to think, say, and do about God are also different" (*DT* [1996]: 5 f.).

"[T]he existential question [is] the question we all ask as human beings about the meaning of our own existence in its ultimate setting. As such, it has two distinct but inseparable aspects: a metaphysical aspect, in which it asks about the reality of our existence as part of the encompassing whole; and a moral aspect, in which it asks about how we are to understand ourselves realistically in accordance with this reality, and, in this sense, authentically. Therefore, while the existential question is neither the properly metaphysical question nor the properly moral question, it is nevertheless logically related to both questions, and any answer to it implies certain answers to them, even as, conversely, any answer to either of them also implies some answer to it" (49).

"[U]ltimate reality includes everything necessary in our experience or self-understanding, as distinct from all the other things that we experience or understand that are merely contingent relative to our own existence simply as such. If we already presuppose, then, that . . . theistic religious language . . . can be metaphysically justified, we can say . . . that ultimate reality includes not only the self and others, but also the encompassing whole of reality that theists refer to when they use the name 'God.'⁴

"Significantly, it is this threefold differentiation of ultimate reality into self, others, and the whole—or self, world, and God—that underlies the understanding of metaphysics that has been conventional in the Western tradition since at least the seventeenth century. In this understanding, the

scope of metaphysics includes both *metaphysica generalis*, or ontology, understood as critical reflection on strictly ultimate reality as such; and *metaphysica specialis*, comprising the three disciplines of psychology, cosmology, and theology, understood as critical reflection respectively on the three ultimate realities of self, world, and God.

"[T]his conventional scheme is still useful provided one avoids certain misunderstandings that an unthinking use of it may perhaps encourage. One such misunderstanding would be to suppose that there can be an adequate distinction between general metaphysics or ontology, on the one hand, and the discipline of special metaphysics called 'theology,' on the other. Given the concept of God necessarily implied . . . by any radical theism, God is not merely one reality among others, but is in some sense reality as such. But if this kind of theism is metaphysically true, then ontology itself must be theology, even as theology can only be ontology. Much the same would be true of the distinction between ontology and cosmology as well if, as some forms of radical theism maintain, the concepts of God and the world are correctly understood only as correlative concepts. In that case, the constitutive concept of ontology, namely, 'reality as such,' would be strictly equivalent to the distinction or correlation between the constitutive concepts of theology and cosmology, 'God' and 'the world.'

"But whether the world as well as God is in some respect a strictly ultimate reality and therefore any adequate distinction between ontology and cosmology is also impossible, there is hardly any question that the self, at least, is in every respect contingent and hence cannot possibly be a strictly ultimate reality. To be sure, the self is ultimate in that it is necessary to our experience or understanding of ultimate reality, including the self; and it is for this reason, presumably, that psychology, understood as critical reflection on the self as thus ultimate, can be represented as the third discipline of special metaphysics. But we would be misled by the scheme that so represents it if we supposed that the self is a topic of special metaphysics in the same way in which God is, and perhaps the world is as well. Because the self, radically unlike God, exists only contingently rather than necessarily, its reality is not strictly ultimate and it therefore falls within the scope of metaphysics only in a broad, rather than in the strict, sense of the word" (115 f.)

"Obviously, if theological analogies cannot be established, the same is true of metaphysical analogies generally, whether those of . . . psychicalism or those of any other categorial metaphysics necessarily involving analogies, such as materialism, or physicalism, and dualism. Consequently, if metaphysics is to be established at all, it is only as a transcendental metaphysics, whose concepts and assertions are all purely formal and literal, rather than analogical, in the sense that they apply to all the different things within any single logical type whose meaning they explicate, not in different senses, but rather in the same sense" (208).

"[T]he truth or falsity of faith's assertions about the twofold reality in which it is essentially founded in no way depends or even can depend upon the truth or falsity of any empirical-historical or scientific assertion. But this cannot be said . . . about any metaphysical assertion, at any rate, not if metaphysics is properly understood as fundamentally different logically from both history and science.

"Provided metaphysics is understood as it should be—as critical reflection on our at least implicit understanding as human beings of ultimate reality, in the sense of the necessary conditions of the possibility of our own existence and all existence—it is clear that any properly existential assertion, including any assertion of Christian faith, both implies and, to an extent, is implied by the truth of certain properly metaphysical assertions. It implies the truth of some such assertions simply because it is existential and as such has to do with the ultimate reality of our own existence and of all that our existence necessarily presupposes. Consequently, even though it itself asserts something about the meaning of this reality for us, not about the structure of this reality in itself, it nevertheless implies certain assertions about this structure that have to be true metaphysically if it is to be true existentially.

"Thus when faith asserts the possibility of existing here and now in personal trust in God and in loyalty to God's cause, it necessarily presupposes not only that anyone to whom it asserts this is the kind of being that can understand its assertion and responsibly make the decision for which it calls, but also, and crucially, that the strictly ultimate reality called 'God' is in itself such as to be the foundation for this kind of personal trust and loyalty. Unless God is ultimately real and is the kind of reality that we can both trust and loyally serve, faith's assertion of the meaning of God for us could only be

false. On the other hand, if metaphysical assertions to this effect are indeed true, then faith's existential assertions are also true, or at least can be true" (254 f.).

"If we ask . . . what the vital question orienting theology is, the only adequate answer . . . is that it is that most vital of our vital questions that I usually distinguish . . . as 'the existential question.' By this I mean the question that we human beings seem universally engaged in somehow asking and answering about the meaning of our existence in its ultimate setting as part of the encompassing whole.

"On my analysis, this existential question is a single question having two closely related and yet clearly distinguishable aspects. In one such aspect, it asks about the ultimate reality of our existence with others as parts of the whole encompassing us. And this I distinguish as its *metaphysical* aspect, because, although it is distinct from the proper question of metaphysics in asking about this ultimate reality concretely, in its meaning for us, rather than abstractly, in its structure in itself, the two questions are nonetheless closely related, in that any answer to either of them has definite implications for answering the other. Thus, either ultimate reality in itself has a certain structure rather than some other or else it cannot have the meaning for us that a certain answer to the existential question represents it as having. Conversely, if ultimate reality in itself has a certain structure, the meaning for us that a certain answer represents it as having cannot be inconsistent with its having that structure rather than some other.

"In its other aspect, which I distinguish as *moral*, the existential question asks about how we are to understand ourselves authentically, or realistically, in accordance with the ultimate reality of our existence. Thus, while it is distinct from the proper question of morals in asking about our self-understanding, rather than about our life-praxis, how we are to act and what we are to do, the two questions, once again, are nonetheless closely related, because the answer we give to one of them sets definite limits to how we have to answer the other if we are to avoid self-contradiction. Either leading our lives in one way rather than another is how we ought to act in relation to others or else ultimate reality cannot implicitly authorize the self-understanding that a certain answer to the existential question explicitly authorizes. Conversely, if leading our lives in a certain way is the way we ought to lead them, the self-understanding that

a certain answer explicitly authorizes as authentic cannot be inconsistent with this rather than some other way's being the right way for us to lead our lives.

"It is the existential question thus understood that orients theology as a special form of critical reflection" ("Paul in Contemporary Theology and Ethics" [1996]: 292 f.).

"[P]hilosophy is conceived classically as comprehensive critical reflection oriented by the existential question about the meaning of our existence and as therefore including both metaphysics and ethics. . . . If philosophy is understood in something like this classical sense, its proper business is to disclose, at the secondary level of critical reflection, the same truth about human existence that is always already disclosed at least implicitly on the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis and that . . . Christian witness . . . claim[s] to represent not only explicitly but decisively" (305).

"To ask . . . about either [the] meaning or [the] validity [of some particular way of living religiously] is to ask questions that, in part at least, are as philosophical as they are theological. To be sure, to live religiously in a particular way is to make a certain kind of history, and so any question about what it really means to live in this way can only be, in significant part, a properly historical and hermeneutical question. But insofar as the history one makes in living the religious life is history of a certain kind, and thus has a certain *kind* of meaning, to ask what it really means is also to ask a properly philosophical question. This is so, at any rate, if one understands philosophy . . . as the comprehensive critical reflection constituted by asking about human existence simply as such. For it belongs to philosophy so understood that it should consist, in one aspect, in an analysis of meaning and thus of the different kinds of meaning involved in understanding ourselves and leading our lives through all the forms of culture, religious as well as secular.

"So, too, with the question about the validity of the claim that the religious life makes or implies. Although to ask whether such a life is really appropriate to the source of authority explicitly authorizing it is again to ask a question that is primarily historical and hermeneutical, even if, in part, also a philosophical question. For insofar as it thereby asks about a certain *kind* of appropriateness it, too, asks a question that only philosophical reflection is

capable of answering. And the same is even more obviously true of the other question of whether a particular way of living religiously is really credible, in the sense of really representing the truth about every woman's and man's existence. This question can be answered affirmatively if, and only if, the necessary presuppositions and implications of this way of living, moral as well as metaphysical, can be somehow verified. But actually to verify such presuppositions and implications once again requires, at some point, properly philosophical reflection" ("Philosophy and the Religious Life" [1997]: 29).

"There are two points where professional philosophers can be of particular help. To engage in genuine dialogue about anything requires that one first understand what the dialogue is all about and, as an essential part of doing this, help to discover or devise a common language in which the several positions represented in the dialogue can all be formulated so as to avoid merely verbal differences and to render their real differences adjudicable. So, too, in the case of dialogue between religions, or between alternative ways of living understandingly and addressing the existential question. One needs an analysis of the kind of meaning constituted by asking and answering this question, its relations to and differences from other kinds of meaning, the claims to validity made or implied in answering it, and so on. And, as essential to this analysis, one also needs a purely formal language in which the materially different answers to the existential question can all be critically interpreted and the real issues between them somehow resolved by appropriate evidence and argument.

"But if professional philosophers are well positioned to provide just such a formal analysis, this is not the only point at which they can be of particular help. Philosophy is more than analysis of meaning, and in its other main aspect, it 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. In this aspect of her or his work, however, the professional philosopher does exactly what anyone who lives the religious life today also has to do, either professionally or as a lay person, to make good on the claim that this particular way of living is not only appropriate but credible. For if this way of living is really credible, it can only be because what it represents as the truth

about human existence is the same truth that the professional philosopher bears particular responsibility for critically validating by verifying its necessary presuppositions and implications, both metaphysical and moral" (30 f.).

"[A] third change in my thinking . . . was in my understanding of metaphysics. . . . I have always been concerned with critically validating the metaphysical beliefs necessarily implied by Christian faith. But the only way in which these beliefs can be validated as credible on the basis of common human experience and reason is in terms of an independent secular metaphysics. Having become convinced already as a graduate student that the classical metaphysics presupposed by traditional theology was no longer tenable, I had looked for the metaphysics I needed in certain forms of revisionary, more exactly, neoclassical metaphysics. The more I tried to work with them, however, the clearer it became to me that even these forms of neoclassical metaphysics were open to a decisive objection. Like all other forms of what I eventually came to distinguish as 'categorical metaphysics,' they, too, depended on imaginatively generalizing categories ordinarily used in thinking and speaking about *some* things into metaphysical analogies supposedly applying to *all* things. The problem with this supposition, however, is that there is simply no way of distinguishing other than verbally between a so-called metaphysical analogy and a merely symbolic or metaphorical use of the category in question. Consequently, while I am still convinced that an independent secular metaphysics—special as well as general including theology along with cosmology and anthropology—is a necessary condition of theology's critically validating the claim of Christian witness to be theoretically credible, I no longer understand metaphysics in the same way. On the contrary, I now hold that the metaphysics theology has need of is no form of the categorical metaphysics of most philosophical tradition, but only a neoclassical form of what I call 'transcendental metaphysics,' by which I mean the kind of metaphysics that, having dispensed with all forms of metaphysical analogy, at last completes the process of demythologizing metaphysics" ("Toward Bearing Witness" [1997]: 339).