I recently asked, What makes me a Christian? and, as an exact parallel thereto, What makes me a university teacher? My answers, expressed purely formally, were likewise exactly parallel. What makes me a Christian/a university teacher, I said, is a certain kind of self-understanding and life-praxis: that I understand myself, others, and the whole as I am called to do by the call to be a Christian/a university teacher; and that I then explicitly believe and actually do what is necessarily presupposed and implied by my self-understanding (as well as the call to be a Christian/the call to be a university teacher) and lead all of the rest of my life as a human being accordingly—in accordance with my self-understanding and the beliefs and actions that it necessarily presupposes and implies.

The more I reflected on my answers, the more I wondered whether they might not bear somehow on answering my continuing question about the distinctive concern of philosophy. Could it be, I asked myself, that the defining, unifying concern of philosophy, *qua* love of wisdom, is precisely self-understanding and life-praxis?

The distinction essential to an answer, I decided, is that between our self-understanding and life-praxis simply as human beings in the ultimate setting of our lives (which includes our also being situated in *some* immediate setting[s]); and our self-understanding and life-praxis as participants in all the various undertakings that Whitehead refers to as "the directed activities of mankind," and Wittgenstein calls "*Lebensformen/ Sprachspielen.*" Given this distinction between two main kinds of life-settings, ultimate and immediate, doing philosophy may be said to have a "center" as well as a "periphery." Although its peripheral (but, for all of that, important!) concern is all the different ways of understanding ourselves and leading our lives in the various regions within which they are set (some of which, notably, religion, have a direct, or explicit, connection with their ultimate setting, others of which are connected with that ultimate setting only indirectly or implicitly, their direct or explicit connection being with some region or other of our lives' immediate setting only), its central concern is self-understanding and life-praxis in our ultimate setting simply as human beings. In either kind of setting—immediate as well as ultimate—philosophy, being concerned with

wisdom, is concerned with self-understanding and life-praxis, in the sense of the normative understanding of ourselves and of leading our lives accordingly, or, as may also be said, with our identity and action, peripherally as well as centrally, in our various possible offices as well as simply as persons.

As for why philosophy inevitably turns to metaphysics and ethics, I concluded that they are indispensable to pursuing its central concern with a normative understanding of our identity and action in the ultimate setting of our lives simply as human beings. On the other hand, I concluded that philosophy includes all of the peripheral philosophical disciplines that it is ordinarily understood to include (philosophy of religion, philosophy of science, philosophy of law, etc.), because it is also concerned with normative understanding of what it is to do any of the things that we typically do as human beings, as reflected in our "directed activities," or in "the forms of life"/"the language games" that typify our engagement with reality, nondiscursive as well as discursive.

22 November 2008

Fairly recently, I have asked, What makes me a Christian? and What makes me a university teacher?—the point of my answers being that, in both cases, what's involved is a certain kind of self-understanding and life-praxis—a certain understanding of myself that guides and finds expression in how I lead my life. To be sure, the relation between the two cases is not univocal, but analogical, in that—to put it in the terms Luther often relied on—being a Christian is a matter of the *person* I am, while being a university teacher is a matter of my *office*—of one of the many offices that I as a person may fill. But it is as meaningful to speak, even if only analogically, about my self-understanding and life-praxis as a Christian as about my self-understanding and life-praxis as a university teacher (Notebooks: n.d.).

One point worth emphasizing is that, in each case—in what makes me a Christian and in what makes me a university teacher—self-understanding and life-praxis are both involved. Otherwise put: in each case, there is reason to talk both about *who I am* (my being or identity) and *what I am to do/how I am to do it* (my action or activity). In the one case, however, what I am and what I am to do/how I am to do it pertain to the very center of my being or identity, whereas, in the other case, they pertain, not to the center, but to the periphery, of my being or identity as a person—not to the *one* thing I am and am to do, but to the *many* things I (also) am and am to do.

With all this in the back of my mind, I suddenly found myself asking whether it may not shed light on how we are to understand philosophy. In general, we may say that doing philosophy is critical reflection directed toward understanding both who we are (our being or identity) and what we are to do/how we are to do it (our action or activity). But doing philosophy includes such critical reflection not only on the periphery of our lives, on who we are and what we are to do/how we are to do it in our various possible offices (in our various "*Lebensformen*" or "*Sprachspielen*," if you will), but also on the very center of our lives, on who we are and what we are to do/how we are to do it simply as persons.

The logical analysis in which such critical reflection consists is, in both cases, essentially the same: analysis of the "deep structure" of meaning, and so analysis of the presuppositions, or of the necessary conditions of the possibility, of making sense. But whereas the logical analysis of the periphery of our lives exposes the deep structure of all the various kinds of meaning that we as persons can express and understand, nondiscursively as well as discursively, the logical analysis of their center exposes the deep structure of any kind of meaning whatsoever, and so its necessary presuppositions, or necessary conditions of possibility. As such, the logical analysis of the center of our lives accomplishes the proper tasks of transcendental metaphysics in the broad sense inclusive of existentialist analysis and, in dependence thereon, transcendental ethics.

Insofar as it is logical analysis in this twofold sense, philosophy may be said to be, or to include, a science: the science of the necessary, both the relatively necessary and the absolutely necessary, in much the same way that the special sciences may be said to be the science of the actual, and logic and mathematics, the science of the possible. But although philosophy includes the science of the necessary, relative and absolute, philosophy itself, and as such, is not merely science but wisdom, not merely intellectual but existential.