

Granted that one is misleading as well as misled to allow for *precritical* ways of doing philosophy and theology (cf. Notebooks, 21 September 2005), there may nevertheless be good reasons to allow that there are *more or less* critical ways of doing them. In other words, even if one assumes, as I have, that "a secondary activity" in Whitehead's sense "is *eo ipso* 'critical,'" one need not, and I now believe, should not, assume that there is only one way of being, properly, "critical." Consider the following reasoning.

"Theology' may be defined very generally as a way of appropriating more or less critically the faith and witness explicitly mediated by religion. The qualification 'more or less critically' is necessary because, in the theological context, as in others, appropriation, or reflection (the terms are here used synonymously), can occur on different levels. To appropriate, or reflect, critically on either level is to make judgments using certain criteria. But whereas, on the first, less critical level, the criteria used are simply the consuetudinary criteria established in the particular context of reflection, on the second, more critical level, they are the ultimate criteria of experience and reason as these require to be used in that particular context. Simply to say, then, that theology is a way of performing the 'second act' of critically appropriating the 'first act' of faith and witness is to pass over the possibility that there can be less, as well as more, critical ways of doing this" ("Existentialist Theology": 1).

It will be noted that this reasoning follows closely that of Habermas and Apel in allowing that the claims to validity necessarily implied by our various speech acts can be redeemed "immediately," on the primary level of "interaction," as well as "mediately," or "discursively," on the secondary level of "discourse." But "more or less critical appropriation" is an apt way to distinguish the two levels of redemption, as they understand them, because the difference between the levels is the difference between criticizing *everything*, including ^{all} consuetudinary criteria, by the relevant ultimate criteria of experience and reason, and not criticizing everything, but only *everything other than* the consuetudinary criteria that are employed in the criticism.

Of course, there may be reason enough, from the standpoint of a more critical appropriation, to think and speak of any less critical one such as is alone possible on the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis as "precritical." But thinking and speaking in this way is apt to mislead and is probably best avoided, especially since the only important and, so far as I can see, entirely justified distinction is that between "more and less critical."

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It seems clear that I was misled in allowing that there can be precritical as well as critical ways of doing philosophy and theology.

If, as Whitehead says, "philosophy is a secondary activity," then, assuming that a secondary activity is *eo ipso* "critical," philosophy can be done only in a critical way. And, for the same reasons, this must also be true of theology, which, as I define it, is likewise a secondary activity and therefore can be done in a critical way only.

But, then, is there no distinction at all to be made between different ways of doing philosophy and theology? No, this is not the correct inference, because among the further distinctions I make (or, in the case of philosophy, would make) between different ways of doing them is that between lay and professional ways. Realizing this, I would now want to say that any so-called precritical ways of doing philosophy and theology are better said to be "lay," as distinct from "professional," ways of doing them. But if either is done at all, or if what is done is properly said to be "philosophy" or "theology," then it cannot be done precritically, but only ^{more or less} critically.

It is otherwise, however, in cases of doing science, i.e., any of the special sciences, natural, human, or axiomatic, or (the science of) metaphysics. (This, in fact, may have been just what misled me!) In all such cases, one may very well allow that there can be precritical as well as critical ways of doing the science in question. For a science is constituted as such, not by a critical or theoretical question, but by an intellectual, as distinct from an existential, question. And intellectual questions, like existential questions, can be asked and answered on both levels of understanding: on the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis, where they're properly vital questions, as well as on the secondary level of critical reflection and proper theory, where they're properly theoretical questions. To be sure, as the terms "science" and "metaphysics" are ordinarily used today, they commonly refer, not to the precritical, but to the critical—not to say, professional, and even academic—ways of doing science and metaphysics. But the fact remains that it makes sense to allow that there can be precritical as

well as critical ways of doing them, whereas to allow this in the cases of philosophy and theology, as I understand them, is to fall into inconsistency.

There was good reason, then, why, when I last reflected on the issue, I did not assert but only assumed that one may indeed speak of a precritical as well as a properly critical way of doing philosophy (cf. Notebooks, 27 December 2003).

21 September 2005

On the assumption that one may indeed speak of a "precritical," as well as a properly "critical" form of philosophy, wherein, exactly, does the precritical form consist?

So far as I can see, the only thing that it could consist in is a more rather than a less explicit self-understanding/understanding of existence rationalized, insofar as it is so, by appeal to traditional grounds, or to authority. Thus such argumentation as it involves is of the first kind, or on the first level, of reasoning that I have long been wont to distinguish. In Habermas's way of putting it, it belongs to the reasoning that is sufficient where the obligations assumed in making or implying claims to validity can be discharged "immediately," on the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis, instead^{of} having to be discharged mediately, by moving to the secondary level of critical reflection and proper theory.

But whether or not reasoning even on the first level is involved, one may speak of a self-understanding/understanding of existence as a precritical form of philosophy provided that it is not merely implicit but explicit, or more explicit rather than less so.

27 December 2003