

*On the Different Senses of "Transcendence," etc.<sup>1</sup>*

There are at least four senses in which we may speak of "transcendence," or "the transcendent," in some of which such other terms as "the ultimate," "the strictly ultimate," "the unconditioned," and so on might possibly be used more or less synonymously. I shall try simply to clarify these four senses, so as to bring out their differences as well as their similarities, without venturing any suggestions as to how we might wish to label them.

1. "The transcendent" may mean simply a region of experience or a kind of discourse that is "beyond" the strictly and properly empirical, in the sense that the warrants necessary for making true statements about such experience or in this kind of discourse cannot be merely empirical warrants. In this first and broadest sense of the term, even positivism (or, more generally, what I distinguish as "secularism") would in the nature of the case have to do with "the transcendent." For, in denying that statements without empirical warrants can be cognitively meaningful, positivism (or secularism) is either totally arbitrary or else is itself involved, however self-contradictorily, in making just such a statement.

2. "The transcendent" may be used in a somewhat stricter, and yet still broad, sense as it is in a certain kind of interpretation of the region of experience, or the kind of discourse, that is, in the first sense, "transcendent," or "beyond" the strictly and properly empirical. I refer to the kind of metaphysical interpretation that affirms or necessarily implies the reality or existence of transempirical, metaphysical entities. Thus any interpretation that explicitly or implicitly affirms the reality or existence of entities other than those that can be affirmed or implied by the strictly and properly empirical warrants of the sciences may be said to have to do with "the transcendent" in this second sense of the term. And this may be said even of interpretations that hold that the only differences between such actual entities or existents as there can be are merely specific differences—interpretations that deny, in other words, the reality or existence of any generically different entity or existent. Some such denial, I take it, is characteristic of any atheistic

metaphysical interpretation—not only atheistic materialism, but also an atheistic idealism such as McTaggart's or an atheistic existentialism like Sartre's.

3. A still stricter sense of "the transcendent" is that in which it is used in a significantly different kind of metaphysical interpretation of experience—one that explicitly affirms the reality or existence of an extraordinary or generically different actual entity or existent such as might otherwise be designated "God or Nature" (in the sense of Spinoza's *Deus sive natura*), "the Universe," "the Whole," "the Absolute," or "the Encompassing." Thus any interpretation that explicitly affirms the existence of an extraordinary, generically different actual entity or existent may be said to affirm "the transcendent" in this third sense of the term. And this may be said even if the interpretation denies that what it means by "God" or "Nature," "the Absolute" or "the Whole," is in all respects independent of the world of ordinary actual entities or existents. In this third sense, some forms of absolute idealism, and even of so-called neoclassical, or "process," theism explicitly affirm "the transcendent."

4. Finally, and most strictly, "the transcendent" may be used as it is in a metaphysical interpretation of the extraordinary actual entity, or existent, God that explicitly affirms God to be in all respects independent of the world of ordinary actual entities and existents. It is perhaps doubtful whether, in this strictest sense of the term, any interpretation could be said to affirm "the transcendent" except what may be properly called the classical theism of Jewish and Christian philosophy and theology originating with Philo Judæus. At any rate, this clearly is the sense of "the transcendent" that this kind of metaphysical theism is concerned to affirm in affirming the reality or existence of God.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cf., for the original of this formulation, the transcript of my lectures, "The Problem of God: A Discussion with Langdon Gilkey": 43 f.

<sup>2</sup>In the past I have characterized classical theism as "supernatural[istic] theism." What I've had in mind in doing so is the third kind of metaphysical interpretation clarified above (§ 4), according to which the extraordinary reality or existent properly called "God" is related to the world only externally, or logically, not internally, or really. At the same time, I have never been comfortable accepting "natural[istic] theism" as an

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apt characterization of my own metaphysical interpretation, which I take to be of the second kind (§ 3), according to which "God" refers to an extraordinary, generically different reality or existent that, being literally "the universal individual," is as eminently related to the world internally, or really, as externally, or logically. In other words, God, on my position, is "dually transcendent" (Hartshorne), in that, in one respect, God is eminently related to all things externally, or logically, even while, in another respect, God is just as eminently related to all things internally, or really—at once the unsurpassably concrete as well as the unsurpassably abstract.

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