

I have often said that the sciences and metaphysics have in common "a concern for the structure of reality in itself in abstraction from the meaning of reality for us." But I am amazed to realize that I never seem to have thought, much less said, that the abstraction common to the sciences and metaphysics is, in reality, twofold—not only of reality in its structure in itself from its meaning for us, but also of the structure of reality in itself from *its own content, quality, or value*.

Of course, I have long thought *and* said that the sciences and metaphysics are alike precisely in that they both abstract from the content, quality, or value of things in order to concentrate on their structure. And I have usually explained their differences as due to the fact that, whereas the theories about structure developed by the sciences are properly empirical, and so subject to empirical falsification, the theories developed by metaphysics are properly existential and transcendental, and so incapable of being empirically falsified. But what I have not said or clearly thought before is that this abstraction is no less essential to the sciences and metaphysics than their both abstracting—again, in their different ways—from the meaning of reality for us: the sciences, by abstracting from the meaning of the contingent details of reality for us, metaphysics, by abstracting from the meaning of its necessary outline.

I am still not clear, however, about just what to make of the two abstractions—or the two aspects of the abstraction—that the sciences and metaphysics have in common. At first glance, it might appear, for instance, that the symbolic language of religion is by way of disclosing the content, quality, or value of strictly ultimate reality from which metaphysics—or, at any rate, a transcendental metaphysics—abstracts, somewhat as the supposedly "analogical" language of a categorial metaphysics is supposed to be able to do. But my guess is that appearance and reality in this matter are quite different.

What the symbolic language of religion really symbolizes, insofar as it has a cognitive function, is not the content, quality, or value of strictly ultimate reality, but rather its structure—not, to be sure, in itself, but in its meaning for us. So far as religion is concerned, what strictly ultimate reality is

in itself, in its content, quality, or value, as distinct from its structure, is, simply, “mystery,” *the* mystery, the *all-inclusive, unfathomable* mystery, embracing the essential mysteriousness of each and every concrete thing, which simply as such ever remains a surd to reason. Religion’s concern in appealing to some special or decisive revelation of ultimate reality is not somehow to dispel this mystery, but only to lift the veil that keeps us from understanding the meaning of ultimate reality for us, given what it is in itself, in its essential logical/ontological structure. *That* it is unfathomable mystery does indeed belong to its essential structure, and thus also to the meaning of this structure for us. But *what* that mystery is, is precisely—unfathomable.

22 October 1998; rev. 11 August 2001