

On the Distinction between "Critical" and "Speculative" Philosophy

(W. A. Christian)

1. My inclination is to say that C's distinction between "critical" and "speculative" philosophy does not correspond exactly to my distinction between the "critical-analytic" and the "constructive-synthetic" aspect or function of philosophy. (My distinction seems somewhat closer to the distinction he makes when he says, "we need to construct [sic] general theories of meaning and truth applying to all types of discourse, including moral discourse, scientific discourse, esthetic discourse, and religious discourse" even while "at the same time we need to explore more thoroughly each of the particular domains of human experience and discourse" (MTR, 8). C's distinction seems, rather, to be not unrelated to the distinction I have sometimes made between "transcendental" and "categorical" metaphysics. I.e., transcendental metaphysics undertakes to determine the purely formal logical type distinctions that any and all our uses of "reality" and related terms such as "truth," etc. necessarily presuppose. This it does by way of an attempt to construct "regional ontologies" on the basis of a critical analysis of the constitutive concepts and assertions of the several different "domains of truth," as well as the "fundamental ontology" of human existence as such. Withal, the sole concern of a transcendental metaphysics is to abstract from everything material--from any and all values of the various variables--to identify the strictly formal necessary condition(s) of the possibility of all our experience and thought, and hence the strictly first principles of reality as such. A categorical metaphysics, by contrast, undertakes an interpretation of these strictly formal principles in some material terms, in terms of some of the concepts or categories of our thought and experience in the

several domains of truth. For various good reasons, the most adequate categorial metaphysics will be the metaphysics whose interpretive scheme is derived from the "fundamental ontology" provided by an existentialist analysis of our own existence. But even that kind of an existentialist, or psychicalist, categorial metaphysics is still the attempt somehow to fill in the purely formal scheme of transcendental metaphysics with some material contents, which can be done, obviously, only by means of analogy.

2. Therefore, a categorial metaphysics is, in the nature of the case, "speculative" in a way in which a transcendental metaphysics is not. The question is relevant, then, why there is, or has to be, speculative as well as critical philosophy, categorial as well as transcendental metaphysics. On the face of it, it would appear that the answer of Nygren and others, that there is a religious interest behind speculative philosophy (or categorial metaphysics) ought not to be rejected out of hand. (The argument that must be carried against Nygren is that there not only can but must be such a thing as a critical, "scientific," because transcendental metaphysics.)

3. A related insight is that there is an important difference between the assertions of transcendental metaphysics and even the metaphysical (as distinct from the existential) aspect of religious, theological, or categorial metaphysical assertions. So, e.g., there is a difference between the transcendental metaphysical assertion that God is the integral or universal individual and the categorial metaphysical (or religious, or theological) assertion that God is the supreme person. Even though

the assertion that God is a person may appear to be the same kind of an assertion as the assertion that God is an individual, it is really very different, in that it is at one and the same time the assertion that we ourselves are given and demanded to be persons and to act as persons in all our relationships.