



Doug Porpora

The Sociology of Ultimate Concern

What I aim to do is discuss my book¹ in general, explaining my main concerns but then building toward what I suspect may be a provocative epistemological claim.

Religious sociology

Landscapes is somewhat difficult to describe because it proceeds at several different levels. At one level, it is an empirical study. It examines the loss of moral purpose in America. Toward that end *Landscapes* relies on in-depth interviews presented in the form of dialogues, and, for representativeness, on survey research.

At a more theoretical level, *Landscapes* critically engages postmodernism and social constructionism. I say 'critically engages' because it is not entirely critical. I distinguish postmodernism as a philosophy from postmodernity as a condition. I argue strongly against the philosophy, against postmodernism's denial of identity, truth, and meaning. And yet, empirically, I find that many people cannot say who they are; they have lost any overall sense of meaning and their interest in truth. Thus, however wrong postmodernism may be as a philosophy, as a phenomenological description of our age, I find postmodernism has something to say.

Finally, at a third level, in a spirit of irony, *Landscapes* subverts postmodernism in a particularly scandalous way. Postmodern multiculturalism claims to speak on behalf of silenced others, and yet there is one other that not even postmodernists care to allow into the discourse of social science. That other is religion. Yet, when we inquire about ultimate meaning, we tread on sacred ground. Thus, at some point, *Landscapes* becomes a sociology of religion. That in itself is not so scandalous. What may be scandalous is that *Landscapes* simultaneously becomes a work of religious sociology. In *Landscapes*, I treat theological concepts not just as objects of study but as explanatory resources. Against social constructionist approaches to religion, I defend the possibility that the objects of religious experience are ontologically real, alethic truths.

Ultimate concern

All these levels of analysis reflect two major concerns that motivated me to write this book. The first concern was a moral indifference of a political nature. Two books, appearing in the eighties, present this problem in context: *Whose Keeper?* by Alan Wolfe and *The Politics at God's Funeral* by the late Michael Harrington. Both books concern the demise of biblical religion and the task of finding a new moral direction without it. We are, according to the biblical tradition, our 'brother's keeper', the guardian and guarantor of the other men and women with whom we share our time on this planet. According to the biblical religions, this guardianship is one of the grand moral purposes our lives are supposed to serve. It is part of the very

meaning of life, rooted in a certain conception of God and of God's own purposes and interests. What happens, then, when this biblical tradition loses its hold? What substitute vision do we have to draw on that might lift us from moral indifference to concern for the poor and oppressed? What else might motivate us to rise as keepers of other persons' welfare? That is to ask with Michael Harrington about the nature of our politics after we have laid God to rest.

An ultimate concern is that to which we are not just committed but ultimately committed – above all else – and from which in turn we derive our ultimate fulfillment. Thus, the question posed by Wolfe and Harrington is really about ultimate concern. The question is how high our ultimate concerns reach and whether, specifically, those ultimate concerns are broad enough to encompass the plight of oppressed others. To the extent that our ultimate concerns terminate with our own families and with what in America are called family values, then the oppression of others will likely fall outside the universe of our moral concern.

From this perspective, *Landscapes* is an empirical study of ultimate concern in America, an examination of how high and how encompassing Americans' ultimate concerns are. That makes *Landscapes* a kind of empirical theology because ultimate concern is a theological concept, coined by Paul Tillich in his *Dynamics of Faith*. Tillich literally defined religion as ultimate concern, suggesting that according to this definition, we are all religious, our only differences being what we worship.

Loss of self?

The second concern motivating *Landscapes* was the debate over postmodernism. Postmodernism, we know, declares the loss of meaning, the loss of self, and the loss of truth. I wanted to make an argument against these three losses or at least against the claim that meaning, self, and truth are now impossible. Because I am a sociological theorist, accustomed to making conceptual arguments, my first inclination was to present a philosophical argument against postmodernism. Yet, I have been a sociologist long enough to know that American sociology pays little attention to conceptual argument. It is moved only by data. So I hit on the idea of wrapping a deeper philosophical argument around data. The question was what kind of data to collect.

Postmodernism's argument about the three losses – truth, meaning, and self – resides largely at the level of our cultural discourses and texts. It is largely our discourses of self that are said to have become fragmented; our discourses that have trouble fixing meaning and truth.

Perhaps meaning, truth, and self have been lost in our cultural discourses. But do these culturally discursive losses translate into the loss of meaning, truth, and self among actual, living, breathing people? In particular, do not even individuals without a sense of self nevertheless remain

selves in some more basic, ontological sense?

Postmodernism tends not to address itself directly to actual individuals. And the so-called 'cultural turn' in sociology has tended once again in Durkheimian fashion to make the study of individual people illegitimate.

Against these currents, I decided to collect data on individual people. Not discourses, not texts. As you will see in a moment, by beginning with the coherence of actual, individual selves, I was able to address myself to meaning and truth as well.

I started out by asking people an existential question, the question posed to Alice by the Caterpillar in *Wonderland*: Who are you? Like Alice, most people cannot answer this question. Like social scientists, most people approach identity entirely in terms of social space, the space of personal relations and social categories. Who we are is black or white, somebody's mother or husband and so forth. The Caterpillar's question, however, is more existential. It is asking who we are essentially, beyond social space. I was not so dense as to expect the people I interviewed all to be existential philosophers, so I had follow-up questions to help them out. I asked them what they might like to see written on their tombstones, or, if their life were a story, what would the story be about. These follow-up questions generally fared no better. The question is why not?

Social space

Postmodernists like Judith Butler would say that the Caterpillar's question cannot be answered because there is no Cartesian self there to answer it. And surely, if we confine ourselves entirely to social space, the congeries of role relationships and category memberships that define us do leave us fragmented rather than whole.

A distinction has to be made, however, between the phenomenological and ontological self. Postmodernism tends to deny both. Yet, even if phenomenologically we have no coherent sense of ourselves, it may still be that unitary selves are what we remain ontologically.

In fact, I argue, such is the case. I will not go much into my conceptual argument here. It occupies most of my second chapter. Suffice it to say that one problem that arises if we deny any centre of conscious experience is that we make conceptual orphans of emotions, feelings, thoughts and actions. If we are not to reduce emotions, for example, to emotions talk, then experiences, thoughts, and actions all need to be assigned to specific somebodies. There are no disembodied emotions, no free-floating thoughts, no resistance without resisters. Nor can emotions, thoughts, actions and experiences appropriately be assigned to person-parts, subject-positions or performances. All are appropriately assigned only to whole persons, that is to distinct selves. Conceptually, as critical realists recognise, we simply cannot do without affirming our own ontological selfhood.

Of course, in recovering the ontological self, we recover as well our original problem. If, ontologically, people really are distinct selves, then why are so many unable to articulate themselves as such? Why empirically do we find a

world that seems to correspond better to postmodernism than to critical realism? One answer is that if we are fully to identify who we are, then, in contrast with what lay people and social scientists both tend to do, we cannot confine ourselves to social space.

In the empirical research I was undertaking in *Landscapes*, there was a pressing need for me to determine how fully to conceptualise individual identities. If I wanted to argue against postmodernism that coherent identities remain, then I needed to know what a coherent identity looks like.

Moral and metaphysical space

I got help from Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*. Taylor makes the point that a key feature of our identities is determined not in social space – the space of personal relationships and group memberships – but in moral space, the space where we take our moral stands. When we speak of moral space as the space of what we morally stand for, we are not speaking principally about procedural morality. We are not speaking principally about the morality of the means we employ to pursue morally neutral ends. We are speaking, rather, of the morality of our ends themselves. We are examining the moral directions toward which our lives are moving. With theologian Paul Tillich, we must ask how ultimate the concerns are around which our lives revolve. It may be as a purely empirical matter that the whole of our lives revolve around moral concerns that are too small – too small to encompass the whole of life. In that case, our sense of identity will suffer. At the extreme, our self-portrait will be a picture painted only in a corner of life's canvas. The remaining space will be blank.

So in addition to social space, we also have to consider ourselves in moral space. Moral space is a second landscape of the soul. Once we introduce moral space, still other landscapes are disclosed. Taylor makes the further point that behind any morality there lies a moral ontology, that which conceptually grounds the morality. So it is with moral purpose. Moral purposes do not arise out of nowhere. At their most ultimate, moral purposes arise cosmogonically, from a broader understanding of the cosmos and our place in it. Thus, behind moral space lies metaphysical space, the space of alternative worldviews. Between a worldview and the moral purposes to which it gives rise, the question we approach is the meaning of life. Moral purpose is thus a pivotal concept. It connects our grand views about the meaning of life with our own personal identities.

Critical space

So far, then, we have social space, moral space, and metaphysical space. There is one further landscape of the soul: what I call critical space. I have suggested that who we are phenomenologically depends in large part on what we stand for and that what we stand for depends on our prior, ontological views of the world. Of course, our worldviews do not just differ; they often clash. In its denial of truth and in its claim of radical incommensurability, postmodernism

just leaves us at this impasse with nothing to offer each other from different worldviews but respectful silence.

Because, like positivism, postmodernism repudiates metaphysics, it fails to see that rational argument can proceed even across paradigms about even ontological matters. While religion is perhaps the toughest case, in *Landscapes* I demonstrate how much room for rational debate there is even about such matters as the existence of God or the historicity of what Jesus said and did. The fact is that we are somebody in critical space too, the space of argument and counter-argument. We are somebody, for example, fully aware of the arguments on a subject, or perhaps woefully ignorant. We are somebody who evaluates the arguments this way rather than that. Perhaps on certain matters we are a journeyer still on the road or, alternatively, someone who thinks he or she has arrived, absolute truth in hand. All are identity postures in critical space.

Much of what I do in *Landscapes* is to empirically examine where individual Americans are in these various, terraced landscapes of the soul. I quickly leave behind social space to explore moral space, metaphysical space, and critical space. I examine who people say their heroes are; to what they feel called or committed; if people think of life as a journey, I ask where they think this journey is headed. I have a chapter on what people think about the meaning of life. And, given the nature of the American population, I engage in considerable discussion of God. All of this is presented not as indented quotes but in the form of dialogue, in which I, myself, am situated as an interlocutor.

Metanarrative resources of the self

From all this, there are two empirical findings I want to present today. The first is that spiritual discourses about ultimate reality are simultaneously resources for the self. Think back to the Caterpillar's question. Although once we get beyond social space, most people, even educated ones, find it difficult to answer, there was one type of person in particular with whom I regularly could have extended, even deep, discussion about essential selfhood. If you ask them what they would like to see on their tombstone, they have a ready answer. If you ask them who they are essentially in and of themselves, they immediately reply 'a child of God' or 'a disciple of Jesus Christ'. I am speaking of course about Christian fundamentalists, who make up now perhaps a third of the US population.

If to know who we are essentially is to know our place in the cosmos, then Christian fundamentalists certainly know that. I do of course argue that Christian fundamentalists encounter serious problems when it comes to critical space. Yet, there is still something to be learned from them.

Christian fundamentalists were not the only ones to know who they were, not just locally, but cosmically. Among others, I spoke with a Tibetan Buddhist who also knew; I spoke with an atheistic environmentalist who had a completely different conception of the cosmos but for whom there was a human vocation within that scheme. I spoke with an African American man who had been both

homeless and in prison but for whom dialectical materialism had become not just a tool for political analysis but a whole philosophy of life. He, too, had a clear sense of humanity's place in the cosmos. There is a close connection in short between a strong sense of personal identity and transcendental metanarratives. We cannot lose one without losing the other. There is a connection between identity and the meaning of life.

The connections between identity, moral purpose and metanarrative are not entirely conceptual. They are also profoundly emotional. A moral purpose or ultimate concern is less something we choose than something that chooses us, something that moves us morally and holds us within its grasp. Whether we are talking about our concern for our children, a vision of utopia, or the desire to emulate Christ, we are talking about the quality of moral passion.

I will try to illustrate this point briefly. Because in contrast with us Americans, you in Britain are without the holiday of Thanksgiving, you all move into Christmas even earlier than we do. So my example may be a timely one. Think of the miser Ebenezer Scrooge. We miss the point of *A Christmas Carol* if we just vaguely think that Scrooge had a selfish personality before the ghostly visitations and an unselfish personality afterwards. What changes is not Scrooge's personality per se. What changes is what Scrooge ultimately loves, the ultimate moral purpose toward which his soul points. Before the ghosts visit him, the miserly Scrooge is an ideal type, representing the spirit of capitalism. Accumulation matters, people do not. Afterwards, Scrooge's moral compass shifts. He becomes emotionally captured or cathected to an idealised vision of Christmas, a utopian vision of the cosmic community. With this emotional shift in moral purpose, what fundamentally changes as well is Scrooge's phenomenological identity.

Clearly, I am speaking of emotions here not just as a kind of talk. Like Andrew Collier, I am speaking of emotions as experienced, as part of an inner dynamic that causally affects our behaviour. Part of what I try to demonstrate in *Landscapes* is that emotions have this effect, not just in fiction, but in real life as well.

Like Andrew, I do not oppose emotionality to rationality, and I am actually grateful for Andrew's suggestion that I make this clearer. Emotions are not just feelings. At the same time, although emotions depend on beliefs, they are not beliefs either. I understand emotions as orientations of care toward the objects of our emotions. In our anger, our fear, our grief and so forth, we state with our whole being how it is we stand in relation to the objects of those emotions. Emotions, in other words, are relations between self and world, and both return when we attend to emotion as experienced. In fact, the very category of experience returns as well.

Alienation from the sacred

This brings me to the second of the two empirical findings I want to discuss. The first, again, was that spiritual languages of ultimate concern are simultaneously languages of the consolidated self. The second finding, perhaps the

principal empirical finding of my book, is that in America, there is a pervasive, emotional detachment from the sacred, by which I mean ultimate meaning. This alienation from the sacred, I argue, manifests itself in the loss of greater moral purpose, a weakened sense of identity, and a disinterest in ultimate truth. In short, the alienation from the sacred fosters some of the principal features we associate with postmodernity.

If you know much about the United States, you may be baffled by my attributing to it an emotional alienation from the sacred. Among advanced industrialised nations, the US is known to be exceptional for its religiosity. Eighty-five percent of the American population identifies as Christian. Consistently in public opinion polls, about 95% profess a belief in God. Only two percent identify themselves as atheists or even agnostics. The United States is a religious country in which, for better or worse, when we speak of ultimate meaning, we eventually arrive at God. Stated otherwise, in the US, God is the signifier of ultimate meaning. If so, then how can I speak of an American alienation from the sacred?

Floating signifier

Recall that I spoke of an emotional rather than a cognitive alienation. I am speaking of a quality pertaining to our moral and spiritual emotions, not our moral and spiritual beliefs. In great numbers, Americans may believe in God, but a great many do not know much, or care much, about God. If in America, God tends to be the signifier of ultimate meaning, often, it turns out, God is a floating signifier. God fails to inspire any concrete moral purpose.

It is somewhat surprising that this should be so. In the mythic metanarratives of the biblical religions, God emerges as a champion of social justice who acts on behalf of the downtrodden. At the heart of the Christian tradition stands a cosmic love so great as to have offered the supreme sacrifice.

To be touched by stories of God is to be emotionally grasped by God's own moral example. It is to experience love and justice, for example, as the meaning of existence. We are emotionally touched by the stories if elicited in us is a love for the moral qualities God represents. We are touched by the stories if we experience God's own example as a call or demand, emotionally pulling us to follow. The reign of God Jesus preached is essentially a utopian vision little different from Marx's communist society. For Jesus's mustard seed to grow, there is a historical project for humanity to engage.

What I found absent is any sense of such a project, any emotional attachment either to it or to God. God remains a cipher. The same applies to God's shadow: the meaning of life. From both public opinion polls and from my in-depth interviews, I can tell you that in great numbers Americans will affirm that life has meaning. When you ask them what the meaning is, they will have no answer. Many Americans strongly affirm that everything that happens happens for a reason, but they profess no inkling of what the reason might be.

My exchange with the pseudonymous Tom Brown is illustrative. Tom has just told me that although he believes in God, his belief is shaky. In this exchange, I ask Tom whether God had some purpose in mind for humanity when he created the universe.

'Well,' Tom answers, 'I'm sure if he created it, he must have had a reason. But I don't really know what it is.'

I follow up. 'You don't know what it is?'

'I'm not God', Tom says, 'So I don't know.'

'So you don't think that human beings are here for any kind of purpose?'

'Well, they might be.'

'God didn't have any sort of master plan?'

Tom thinks about this. 'Well, I could say yes because it would seem as though he would have a master plan. I'm not God. So, you know, I don't like to say, "Yeah I know what God thinks." If you're going to say, "Well what's your best guess?" I'd say yeah, he probably did have a master plan.'

'But then if I asked you what the master plan was you would have no idea?'

'No,' Tom says, 'I wouldn't.'

Lost power to grasp reality

To be clear, I think there is value even in the bare affirmation that life has meaning. In fact, theologians like David Tracey and Hans Kung argue that this affirmation is a basic function served by the belief in God. My point is that if this is as far as the meaning of life goes, then God is not serving to morally inspire us in any larger direction. There is no moral vision associated with God to which we might emotionally cathect. For the purpose that Michael Harrington and Alan Wolfe want God to serve, God might just as well be dead.

What is going on here? If we remain exclusively at the level of discourse as does so much social theory today, we will not reach an adequate answer. In fact, if we remain exclusively at the level of discourse, we will not even see the problem. After all, in terms of spiritual discourse in America, what we have is belief without emotional engagement. Thus, it is hardly the case that the relevant discourses are absent. The discourses are there and people believe in them. They just are not emotionally engaged by the putative realities behind the discourses.

Alternatively, we could say that our spiritual discourses have, rather, lost their power. That in fact is what was said by the so-called 'death of God' theologies in the 1960s. There is nothing wrong with this way of talking – unless it is meant artificially to exclude, marginalize or ignore relevant features of the problem. If it is asserted that our spiritual discourses have lost their power, there are two questions we need to ask. The power to do what? And for whom?

The power in question is the power to apprehend or evoke a certain reality, and the whom for which the reality is evoked are individuals. If we really want to understand the lost power of our spiritual discourses then, we must examine the opposite ends that discourses mediate, individuals and reality. Both, currently, tend to be barred from analysis.

I understand that I am speaking here not of science but of religion. Thus, when I speak of a reality apprehended or evoked by religious discourse, I understand as well that I have just used fighting words. Most of us attracted to critical realism are bothered by the postmodern portrayal of science as just a social construction. In contrast, most of us, I suspect, are much less bothered to have religion portrayed as such. I have deliberately used fighting words in relation to religion, and it is a fight I take up in *Landscapes*, but in the remaining moments, let us ease into it.

No empirical proof

Let us first return to Tom Brown, who, you recall, has described his belief in God as shaky. Quite astutely, Tom tells me that the only reason he believes in God is because he was socialized to do so. I could get nowhere with Tom by asking why, given this recognition, he continues to believe in God. He just kept repeating that his belief is shaky. So instead, I explored why his belief is shaky. Here is what Tom tells me.

‘You know, I don’t see any physical evidence of God. If somebody was asking me to give logical and tangible evidence, I couldn’t do it. I just couldn’t. I don’t see any visual, tangible evidence. I don’t see any scientific evidence. You know? I don’t see God. I can’t touch him.’

Tom has actually told me two things here. First, he tells me that he knows of no public, objective evidence for God. Second, he tells me he cannot see or touch God. In other words, aside from scientific evidence, Tom has no personal experience of God. And in fact, I follow this up with Tom and confirm that he is without anything he would call an experience of God.

So absent in Tom is both objective evidence for God and personal evidence in his own life. Of the two, I would argue that the lack of personal evidence is prior. Tom is a bright individual and, for a non-academic, very well read. But Tom is not a theologian and he has undertaken no deep study of the evidence for or against God. But given his lack of any personal experience of God, why should Tom undertake such a study? Without that personal experience God is just not much of a priority for Tom. Nor should God be.

Let me recapitulate for a moment here. I have been looking in the American population for sources of more transcendental concern. Following Taylor, I have argued that larger moral purpose originates in some more cosmic vision of the good. I have argued that in America, if that larger vision is represented by anything, it is normally represented by God. Yet, I have said, it is not enough just for us to believe in the vision. We must be emotionally grasped by the vision. I have suggested, however, that in America people believe in God without being emotionally grasped either by God or the transcendental moral qualities God represents.

Now, with Tom, we begin to see something of the underlying mechanism behind the lack of emotional cathexis to God. For people to have an emotional reaction to God, they must first experience God in some way. Behind the

overlooked category of emotion, lies the even more overlooked category of experience.

If, because of lack of experiential contact with it, people lack any emotional investment in any ultimate, alethic truth, then, like Tom, they will not even be interested in questions of ultimate truth. If, as Taylor suggests, our transcendental horizons shrink, what shrinks as well is the whole question of ontological truth. Socially, then, it is less that truth has become impossible than that our interest in it has waned.

Privileging experience

There is yet, however, a dangling question that I want to conclude with. Can God or other religious realities be seen and touched?

Let us turn from Tom Brown to Hannah Gottlieb, the director of religious education at a progressive Jewish Synagogue. When I ask Hannah whether she believes in God – not a foregone conclusion among religious Jews – Hannah tells me that belief is the wrong word.

‘I think,’ Hannah says, ‘belief is what kills it for everybody. I experience God. Belief is like skip over it. What I try to do for the kids in the school, what I feel like I’ve done for myself is experience God and offer people opportunities to experience God.’

How Hannah experiences God and helps others to do so has its own interest, but I am without the time to go into it. You will have to read my book. Suffice it to say that in America, where almost everyone believes in God, the divide between believers and non-believers is less significant than the divide between Tom Brown and Hannah Gottlieb – the divide separating those who do and those who do not experience some religious reality.

In America, public opinion polls consistently show that between a third and a half of the population report some religious experience – not necessarily visions but often the more modest experiences Peter Berger refers to as intimations of transcendence. My understanding is that comparable statistics have been compiled here in England by the Religious Experience study group.

Religious nonbelief stands in as much need of explanation as religious belief. It is only a lingering bias of the Enlightenment that makes nonbelief the intellectual baseline and belief, alone, something to be explained. Treating belief and nonbelief symmetrically, the distinguishing generative mechanism is religious experience. It is doubtful that many people arrive at religious belief through dispassionate examination of the objective evidence. The objective evidence just does not point to God so conclusively. But neither does it point so conclusively against God. Thus, although atheists and agnostics may think that they, at least, are examining the objective evidence dispassionately, they tend to forget that what they are also entering into evidence is their own absence of religious experience.

I am not suggesting a relativist impasse. Ontologically, I think God either exists or does not. I think either theists or atheists – or, conceivably both – are mistaken. Not every mistake, however, is due to irrationality. At the moment,

about God, if we are not at a relativist impasse, we are at an epistemological stalemate. Prima facie, unless there are overriding considerations against us, I think it is epistemically rational for each of us to trust or privilege our own personal experience. Thus, for the time being, it is epistemically rational for those who experience God to believe in God, and equally rational epistemically for those who do not experience God not to believe in God.

Uncanny guest

That being so, it is illegitimate for sociology to decide *a priori* that Hannah's experience of God is a social construction, entirely to be explained without reference to the putative object of her experience. In any true experience, the object of experience contributes to the content of the experience. To deny that contribution is to commit a ver-

sion of the epistemic fallacy, where we try to explain what we know without consideration of what there is to know. It is also in this case, to collapse the very category of experience. If no object of experience contributes anything to the content of the experience, then what remains is hardly an experience at all.

Of course, for sociology to take seriously the possible object of Hannah's experience, it must finally admit into its own discourse, along with literary theory, a truly uncanny guest. That uncanny guest is theology. When theology is admitted into our discourse, it reaffirms a concern with alethic truth, which, ironically, recovers the Enlightenment project.

Notes

1. *Landscapes of the Soul*, forthcoming, OUP.



Roy Bhaskar

Introducing Transcendental Dialectical Critical Realism

After Doug Porpora's presentation a question was raised, in effect, whether religious sociology, as distinct from the sociology of religion, has a proper place within critical realist discourse. The corrigibility of experience is a central realist tenet, and indispensable to explanatory critique of, say, fascist experience. How can religious experience be corrigible given that there can be no agreement within the scientific community concerning its object (or whether, indeed, it has a real object)? After some discussion, Margaret Archer (in the Chair), suggested that Roy should be allowed to provide the 'hinge' on this issue, because the discussion was cutting off epistemology from ontology, which is not what Doug does in his book, and what Roy wanted to do was swing the focus away from the experiential to the ontological groundings Doug invokes.

Realism about transcendence

I would like to relate three of Doug's points in particular to what I am going to say, which isn't a sort of resumé of *From East to West*, but rather an introductory background to it. The three points I would particularly like to take up are first, the question of realism about religious experience, which I would broach under the broader category of realism about *transcendence*. Secondly, I think talk about God is eased in a dialectical critical realist context by being seen as talk about an – or the – *ultimatum*. Thirdly, I want to focus on that dialectic of *co-presence* which is the dialectic of autonomous and heteronomous – or real and unreal – determinations. I will argue that transcendence as such is a phenomenon which has been much misunderstood and is essential to science, and in particular scientific discovery.

So I am not going to argue about specifically theological or religious transcendence as such, but I would like to say a few words about the dispute into which Doug got embroiled. There are two interesting takes I would like to suggest on the *démarche* Doug seemed to get landed in. The first is that, within the continuum of being, is there really such a huge difference between realism about God and realism about any other being – for instance a galaxy which is beyond the expanse of our current most powerful microscopes? Secondly, suppose that God was in fact the self – that God was the missing

self or at least was to be included in it, i.e. that God was part of the missing self – then there might be an interesting new angle on Doug's question.

However, what I primarily want to defend in this talk is realism about transcendence. One form of transcendence is the sort of transcendence typically found – or claimed to be found – in acts of religious worship: meditation, prayer, communion or whatever. So that is one of the things I would like to pick up from Doug's talk. The second thing is really, more specifically, his realism about God and I would like to subsume this under the question of realism about *ultimata*. In *Dialectic* and other works I distinguished various levels of being, and it is clear from what Doug is saying (and I'm bouncing my ideas off Doug's now to make for dialectical continuity this afternoon) that for him and for many Americans God is an *ultimatum*. So I'm going to be talking about realism about transcendence and realism about *ultimata*. *Ultimata* have particular qualities and one of their qualities that is relevant to our discussion is that they are in some way *ingredient* in lower orders of being, so that if God did exist and if God was an *ultimatum* one would expect God, as a basic property of the universe, a basic constituent or categorial structure, to be for instance in this room – and indeed in some sense in each part or aspect of it (without however saturating the room, so that we should still have to say that there were other things besides God present in the room).