
History as Synthesis

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Professor Roberts is correct about our having a great deal in common.¹ Indeed, certain philosophical prejudices and reflexes lead him to exaggerate our disagreement. I do differ with some of what he writes in defense of his interpretation of Croce and in criticism of my value-centered historicism, but for the most part I nod in assent wondering why Roberts thinks he is arguing *against* me. He repeatedly puts his shoulder to wide-open doors. It is puzzling that he should attribute to me some views that are clearly contradicted by my own explicit published arguments and that he, the intellectual historian, should leave his assertions largely without textual support. Although he consistently qualifies or dilutes his interpretations of my thinking by saying that I “seem” to hold the view to which he is taking exception, the combined effect of these unsupported speculations is to turn me into something rather different from what I am. Not surprisingly, the imaginary Ryn presents less of a philosophical challenge to Roberts than the real one.

Professor Roberts’s general intuition about the difference between us is not without foundation, but his attempt to pinpoint and articulate the disagreement does, in my view, miss the crux of the matter and significantly misrepresent my position. Instead of indicating every specific point of disagreement or every instance of Roberts getting me wrong I shall try to formulate in general terms where I think that he and I, despite our broad agreement,

¹ David D. Roberts, “Characterizing Historicist Possibilities: A Reply to Claes Ryn,” *Humanitas*, XIII, No. 1, 68-88; references to this article hereinafter cited in the text.

actually differ. I shall concentrate on the issue of how the inescapable historicity of human existence is compatible with recognition of enduring order. Professor Roberts and I may have not so much a fundamental philosophical disagreement as a difference of philosophical nomenclature and emphasis. Ideas in Roberts's thinking that are still only tentatively stated could well evolve in ways that will reveal further consonance between us.

It makes me a little uncomfortable that in responding to Professor Roberts I shall have no choice in places but briefly to summarize or restate ideas that are already in print in various places. I shall, however, assume that readers interested in where I really stand will consult books and articles in which I have more fully addressed the questions at issue between Roberts and me.

*Ahistorical
conception of
transcendence
inappropriate.*

Professor Roberts presents me as one arguing for something enduring "in terms of a residual transcendence" (75). In actuality, the transcendence, or universality, that I defend is not so much "residual" as it is reinterpreted in historicist terms. Let me suggest that Roberts's own conception of transcendence or universality is curiously ahistorical. He vaguely associates these terms with a Platonic way of thinking, which justifies his reserve and skepticism. He also tries to navigate within a postmodernist mind-set, and postmodernists harbor a deep prejudice against anything that might limit or structure freedom. They are often very similar to Rousseau's romanticism in their dislike of whatever stands in the way of living out spontaneity. Though Roberts reacts against the extremes of postmodernism, he is prejudiced against "transcendence" and "universality" as militating against an acceptance of radical immanence and contingency and unlimited questioning. Hence he has difficulty resisting the chaos and incoherence that postmodernism threatens. Professor Roberts recognizes the need for something to balance "disruption." He *asserts* the possibility of such balancing, but he does not go very far toward philosophically *explaining* how the needed continuities are possible. A part of the problem is his not wanting to appear unfashionable, a fate that would surely befall him if he openly resorted to universality. He "solves" this problem by formulating a notion of order and balance in which universality only lies implicit, hidden for the most part even from himself. The philosophical weakness of his approach, as I see it, is not that he resists an ahistorically conceived transcendence or universality—he should—or that he does not

want to scuttle historical contingency—he shouldn't—but that he does not give a philosophically satisfactory account of just how the ordering of contingency comes about. He asserts that the needed order can emerge within the historical process itself—and I agree that it can—but his explanation is rather tentatively and cryptically stated and glosses over a central philosophical question. He is reluctant to acknowledge and fully explore the role and meaning of universality. Eager to give credit to the postmodernist rejection of universality and stress on unlimited contingency, he is prone to seeing transcendence and universality in general as belonging to an outdated ahistorical mind-set.

Professor Roberts claims that I am accusing him of “radicalism,” but “radicalism” is in a certain sense philosophically beneficial, a necessity even, just as in a certain sense “conservatism” is beneficial and necessary. What I suggested was rather that Roberts goes so far in trying to do justice to the postmodernist themes of radical contingency and radical questioning that he talks himself into neglecting balancing insights that are necessary for the adequate articulation of his own promising intuition about historically evolved order. He may thus avoid unpleasant attention from postmodernists, but the more or less conscious suppression of “conservative” philosophical impulses also retards development of the fruitful potentialities in his thinking.

The postmodernist resistance to universality helps explain Professor Roberts's ambivalence—or should I say unease?—about Croce's affirmation of universality and Roberts's misleading characterization of my own position on this issue. For example, he tries to make sense of my view of universality by asserting that for me the task of philosophy is “getting as best we can at something given, suprahistorical” (72). He makes this claim in spite of my having argued long and hard in print against precisely such a view. This is the case, for example, in *Will, Imagination and Reason*.² Though Roberts may simply be insufficiently familiar with this writing, his misinterpretation is probably due as much to intellectual propensities, wholly dominant in postmodernism, that predispose him artificially to separate universality and history, universality and particularity. Though these are in reality implicated in each other, existing together as well as in tension, postmodern-

*Universality
and
particularity
implicated in
each other.*

² *Will, Imagination and Reason*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997; first published in 1986).

ism in its main trend will recognize only particularity and contingency, denying the reality of universality. Roberts is not consistent in this regard, but he is generally inclined to the view that we need to choose between history or universality, immanence or transcendence. To place emphasis on either universality or transcendence is for him to revert to a prehistoricist mode of thought. Roberts is of course correct that Croce opposed the notion of transcendence as the term was usually meant in earlier philosophy, and he opposed universality understood as some kind of "essence" separate from man's historical existence, but Croce embraced a reconstituted understanding of universality. Considering Roberts's familiarity with Croce and German idealism, it is rather surprising that he has not quite absorbed the insight that universality and particularity need not be incompatible, that they do in a sense presuppose and need each other. To Roberts, an immanent transcendence is presumably a contradiction in terms, which means that, for all of his stress on the need for historicism, his own historicism does not yet encompass the full range of human experience. He still holds to a somewhat old-fashioned notion of transcendence and universality, one that is more easily dismissed than the one I actually profess.

*Grasping
the idea of
synthesis
essential.*

Plato is preeminent among the philosophers in the West who created the strong presumption against an ultimate compatibility of universality and particularity. Even many thinkers who reject Plato's epistemology continue to be in this regard indirectly influenced by the intellectual tradition of which he is a leading representative. Though admirably conversant with much historicist thought, Professor Roberts, too, may be one such individual. Despite the fact that Croce places great emphasis on universality as well as particularity, Roberts would rather not dwell on this dimension of Croce's thought and fully explore its philosophical meaning. He looks away from it, going as far as to create the impression that Croce's interest in universality was a mere phase through which he passed in his younger years and that, as he matured, he moved "to something radically different" (75). I submit, and will try to show below, that this is a blatant and serious distortion, at minimum an exaggeration, and that this distortion reveals a major flaw in Roberts's understanding of Croce and more generally of the issue of universality and particularity. At the core of the deficiency is a failure really to grasp the idea of synthesis.

Understanding the possibility of synthesis between universality and particularity has always been something of a philosophical stumbling block for many, especially in the English-speaking world, but that this awkwardness in dealing with the more difficult problems of philosophy, especially as formulated by Germans, might survive even sustained study of Croce, as in Roberts's case, is discouraging evidence of how hard it can be to dislodge.

Croce *always* saw universality and particularity as existing together in union and tension. That he continued throughout his life to affirm universality should require no proof, but I will quote from his *History as the Story of Liberty* (1938), a work not of his youth but of his old age, his summary of the meaning of philosophy. In Croce's view, philosophy is synthesis of conceptual thought and historical particularity, universality and individuality. He refers to philosophy for that reason as "History-Philosophy." "The principle" of philosophy, he declares, is "the identity of the universal and the individual, of the intellect and the intuition." Philosophy, he continues, "regards as arbitrary and illegitimate any separation of those two elements, they being in reality a single element."³ [Emphasis added.] Professor Roberts needs to ponder this statement and many others like it. To preclude misunderstanding it should be added immediately that Croce does not believe that universality pertains to the intellect alone. Universality and particularity are implicated in each other also in ethics, aesthetics, and economics—the last a category that Croce elaborated with great originality.

For Croce, the universal and the individual "a single element."

Professor Roberts's truncated historicism biases his interpretation of Croce, and it also shapes the manner in which he makes sense of the disagreement between the two of us. "The difference at issue," he writes, "is not between 'enduring order and unity' and some mishmash or heap, but between residual transcendence and radical immanence, residual metaphysics and absolute historicism" (71). We have to choose, he avers, between "immanence—an absolute historicism—and transcendence, a residual metaphysics" (77–78). But this, I submit, is a wholly artificial choice, one predicated on an artificial separation of dimensions that are potentially one. The choice that Roberts places before us could seem necessary only to one whose historicism lacks, or contains in but

³ Benedetto Croce, *History as the Story of Liberty* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000), 26.

rudimentary, undeveloped form, an all-important ingredient. That missing element, I contend, is essential not only to understanding Croce but to elaborating a sound historicism: the idea of synthesis or dialectic between universality and particularity. This is the recognition that life is precisely that, life, a dynamic, in which potentialities are continually developing or imploding in a never-ending give and take.

Our human universe does not consist of separate, inert objects, interacting in an external, mechanical manner, as various reifying schemes of thought, including Aristotle's logic and modern symbolic logic, assume. Actual human life—never mind the abstract constructs of natural science or its imitations in other fields—does not conform to the wooden schema that "this" has to be "this" and not also "something else." Actual life is continual development. Reifying conceptions do not take into account that life is forever changing. They force upon us an arbitrary and abstract "either-or." This mode of thinking can be useful, is in fact indispensable in some contexts, natural science being one, but it must not be mistaken for philosophical reasoning, for it distorts, and diverts us from, living human reality. The old and deep-seated habit of nevertheless thinking this way in philosophy continues to create mischief even among some otherwise sound-thinking persons.

*Universality
and
contingency
compatible.*

Because universality and particularity are potentially but not necessarily one—the outcome depending entirely on human choice at every moment of action—contingency is always present. The will to order contingency according to the needs of morality, truth or beauty is also always potentially present, but we *choose* whether to make any of these actual in history. The universals are in the concrete actualization. Hence, the universals are not incompatible with freedom or contingency, though we pay a price in human misery, ignorance or ugliness for ignoring them. We are free to deny universality, but we cannot escape the responsibility for disregarding what is nevertheless always potentially there. The accumulation of universalizing acts in history orients and offers inspiration for ensuing activity, but it never removes the need for choice. I should add that the role of the philosopher is not to divine and prescribe norms. He is an historian of human experience. He can only try to ascertain whether values were present in concrete actions already performed. Universality does not exist in the abstract. Roberts correctly describes Croce's view when he writes

that it is only possible to show, in retrospect, if some response to a situation “was or was not an ethical response—as opposed to a ‘useful’ response stemming from ‘economic’ self-interest” (78).⁴ Since Roberts endorses this view we have an indication that in a part of himself he does accept the existence of universality, in this instance ethical and economical universality.

We do not have to choose between universality and particularity, as postmodernists insist because of their obsession with contingency and insistence on untrammelled diversity and freedom. Universality and particularity exist in synthesis and tension. The give and take between them constitutes human experience. The point of my own value-centered historicism is not, as Roberts thinks, that we humans, though inescapably immersed in history, can glimpse the universal somewhere beyond the flux and shadows of history. The point is that we discover universality *in* history. The universal becomes known to us in concrete particulars, not in the sense that ultimately irreconcilable entities are somehow jumbled or mixed like oil and water, or in the sense that ahistorical higher realities are somehow reflected in historical phenomena, but in the sense that the universal and the particular sometimes become the same, joining together because they need each other. The concrete universal—the particular good action, the particular beautiful symphony, the particular insightful idea—not some ahistorical, abstract standard, is authoritative: morally, aesthetically or logically. We cannot go outside of history to know universality. On the other hand—and this is of course exceedingly important—history contains infinitely more, has far greater depth and significance, than is assumed by an historical positivist or by the typical relativist.

*The concrete
universal
normative.*

In the middle of his response, Professor Roberts somewhat unexpectedly takes a step out of the closet, philosophically speaking, and explicitly affirms the view for which I have argued. There is universality, he concedes. He writes, “[E]thical capacity . . . is indeed universal, enduring.” But he then immediately tries to show that this point of view is different from mine by saying that this

⁴ Croce does not mean that all self-interested, economical action is immoral. Ethical action, too, must be in a sense self-interested and economical. What makes an action immoral or amoral is the absence of the ethical consideration. Roberts might have hinted at this important point by writing not “useful” but “merely” or “purely useful.”

*Transcendent
requires
creative
rearticulation.*

ethical capacity is “immanent, constantly renewed through concrete action” (79). Roberts does not realize that instead of being a criticism of my position his statement is a confirmation of it. I agree. Of course I do. Elementary! In regard to the relationship between transcendence and immanence, has he not also just quoted my words that “the transcendent reveals itself in history by becoming selectively immanent in it”? And now, has he not, if almost inadvertently and while seeming to criticize me, made precisely my own point: that the universal or the transcendent may be at the same time concrete, immanent? Thinking that he is offering yet another criticism of my position, Roberts contrasts what he believes with a dubious need for moral fixity and specificity: “To insist on the ‘transcendent’ instead does not simply afford the reassurance of a stable structure and enduring standards but suggests that we might establish the conditions of ethical response a priori, even specify ‘values’” (79). But here he is again expressing a part of my own reaction to the kind of questionable belief to which he is referring. I have actually written at length in criticism of the sort of transcendence or universality that is conceived as beyond the historical world. I have done so not least in the pages of *Humanitas*.⁵ What I think I have shown is that transcendence, historically understood, does not stand in opposition to the need for constant renewal of which Roberts speaks. On the contrary, it is only *through* creative rearticulation that the transcendent can continue to manifest itself. As we have seen, Professor Roberts is, though not consistently and systematically but cautiously and somewhat reluctantly, receptive to this point of view, but he arbitrarily assumes that I must be hankering for ahistorical, definitive standards, that I must think that we should build up “a repertoire of finished philosophical truths, getting ever closer to things as they are” (80).

That Professor Roberts should be trying to force my thinking into this clearly inhospitable category is symptomatic of his having a shaky hold on the notion of synthesis/dialectic. To understand that idea is to see no need for the artificial choices mentioned

⁵ For a recent example, see “The Politics of Transcendence: The Pretentious Passivity of Platonic Idealism,” in Vol. XII, No. 2 (1999), which criticizes a common form of political moralism as being an escape from reality and morally incapacitating. For a more general critique of ahistorical conceptions of universality and “universal values,” see my “Universality and History: The Concrete as Normative,” Vol. VI, No. 1 (1992-93).

above and to recognize that we need not associate “universality” or even “transcendence” with an ahistorical viewpoint or one that is incompatible with contingency. Roberts resists the idea that we should strive to achieve an “ever clearer grasp of the way things already are on some transcendent level” (80), and I can only say that he is right to resist. I agree with him. He would have recognized that we agree, were it not for the old prejudice that the transcendent has to be understood as separate from the immanent and hence as a figment of somebody’s ahistorical or anti-historical imagination. The fact is that I do not believe in “finished philosophical truths” or “finished” anything else. I have always argued against this notion.⁶ I do not even “imply it,” as Roberts alleges.

Thinking that he is arguing against my putative “residual metaphysics” and my belief that universality (manifested in particularity) makes possible “enduring standards,” Professor Roberts contends that we must “endlessly revivify the categories and recreate the standards” (78, 77). My reaction is: Of course. This has always been my position. Here as in other places Roberts is trying to break down wide-open doors.

I have tried to build a case that we discover universality only through concrete particulars, in experience in the broadest sense. I think that Professor Roberts, to his credit, is actually, though indirectly and circuitously, working his way towards this same conclusion. He is doing so in his attempt to locate “what endures” in the immanent. It is unfortunate that this effort should be hampered by a one-sided reading of Croce and an insufficient grasp of the possibility of synthesis.

Roberts asserts that my attitude toward Croce’s short essays is “dismissive.” This is sheer invention on his part. I hold just the opposite view. Though of necessity insufficient by themselves as philosophical statements, Croce’s short essays are often marvels of insight and felicitous expression. They frequently show Croce to be not only a great mind but a literary artist. What I pointed out in my earlier criticism of Roberts was that Croce’s philosophy needs to be understood as a whole and that the three volumes of *The Philosophy of the Spirit*, which deal with universality and particularity together, are essential to understanding that whole. A

⁶ To cite just one example among many, see Ch. 7 of *Will, Imagination and Reason*, which shows how human thought, even though it sometimes achieves admirably incisive insight, is always unfinished, less than definitive.

person not well versed in Croce's central philosophical books who concentrates on his brief and more scattered essays is apt to miss much of what holds these writings together or to miss what Croce, who assumes general familiarity with his earlier work, has left implicit. Professor Roberts's claim that in time Croce became less systematic and that universality mattered to him less and less is, to say the least, strained. Let me suggest that it is Roberts's postmodernist blinders, in combination with other factors, rather than Croce's philosophical development, that makes Roberts play down Croce's emphasis on universality and give a one-sided interpretation of his thought. Roberts's viewpoint may conceivably be affected by his studies of Giovanni Gentile, whose "actualism" sports an opposition to enduring categories in some ways similar to that of postmodernism. It is relevant that Croce and Gentile, who shared some ground as critics of positivism in the early 1900s, were soon driven apart by deepening philosophical and political disagreements.⁷

Professor Roberts asserts that I assign "privileged status" to philosophy and believe that philosophers are the supreme guides to transcendent Reality. This is a truly puzzling, even strange interpretation. That Roberts offers no textual support is not surprising, for the interpretation is just wrong, contrary to my entire philosophical emphasis. As I understand philosophy, it is "privileged" only in a very different and limited sense: it is supreme in its own sphere, which is the conceptual articulation of human experience, not the pronouncement of eternal moral principles or definitive truths. Not even within its own intellectual sphere does the need for disciplined, systematic thought imply a claim to, or a potential for, all-encompassing Truth. The work of philosophy is systematic, but philosophy does not arrogantly aspire to "elaborating enduring forms once and for all," as Roberts writes (80). Of course not, I am tempted to add. Such insight as we achieve must be forever deepened and clarified. I have never held any other view.

*Philosophy
is historical.*

Sound philosophy also does not separate itself from the concrete historical world. It does not try to ascend to a sphere "above" the historical in order to ascertain "reality." But in his own descrip-

⁷ In 1925 Croce initiated and obtained signatories for an anti-fascist manifesto. It was a counter to a "Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals" signed by Gentile.

tion of philosophy Professor Roberts gives a hint of why he regards philosophy with a degree of discomfort and ambivalence. He creates an almost Platonic and therefore misleading association when he suggests that philosophy takes “a step up” and moves to “a more abstract or theoretical layer” (79). But this is true only in that thought is an effort to rise above confusion and inarticulate intuition and in that, by its own nature, philosophy is pre-eminently conceptual, definitional, ideational, theoretical rather than merely intuitive, directly experiential. This does not mean that philosophy aspires to abstract universality. Contrary to Roberts’s terminology, philosophy is not abstract. This is one of Croce’s central points about philosophy. Philosophical reason does not lift us out of history into some sphere of abstractions. In an important sense, philosophy *is* history. It is the *conceptual expression* of historical experience. The abstract, by contrast, is empty of real life. Abstractions rule in mathematics and natural science; in philosophy, concepts are attempts to articulate concrete, living human experience. This is my own oft-stated position, consonant with Croce’s. Roberts’s description of philosophy suggests that, although it makes him uncomfortable, he vaguely associates philosophy with abstract universality. This helps explain why he is at the same time suspicious and affirming of philosophy and why he jumps to unfounded conclusions about my own view of philosophy. Again, inadequate absorption of the ideas of dialectic and synthesis creates difficulty.

That Roberts should ascribe to me the belief that the intellect plays a privileged role in uncovering meaning and value is all the more curious in that I have always stressed the centrality and the primacy of the ethical life, not the intellectual, in the effort to realize life’s higher potentialities. The heart of the matter is what we *do*, how we *choose*, not what we think. Philosophy and thought in general are ultimately for the sake of the ethical enhancement of life. I have written a great deal trying to show that, as Roberts characterizes Croce’s position, “openness to truth is ethical” (75). I have not only argued that truth is needed for the realization of ethical purposes but contended that Croce did not appreciate the extent to which openness to truth depends on moral character and imagination that is oriented by moral character. Imagination colored by self-indulgent desire can slant and debilitate the intellect. I also have always regarded the imagination, especially the imagi-

*The ethical
primary.*

nation of the great artists, as being in a sense superior to and indispensable to philosophical insight. In this area I have sought to revise or extend Croce.⁸ And, of course, I have held from the very beginning that the intellect is not morally normative, that philosophy's task is not to pronounce moral "principles" or "values." These are among the staples of my value-centered historicism. Still, Roberts awkwardly and obliquely attributes to me a kind of rationalistic position and a need for "some basis for a claim to privilege, to judge in terms of a priori rules, values, or standards alleged to have been somehow derived or elaborated philosophically" (81). The reason why Roberts ascribes to me views that I have so emphatically rejected must be that he has no other way of explaining the element in my thinking that puzzles him and makes him apprehensive. If I stress universality as well as particularity and contingency, it must be because of misplaced intellectualism and "residual metaphysics." But as any serious student of Croce should know, reason and philosophy are not our only contact with universality, and Croce is also not the final word.

I should not end this rejoinder to Roberts without reiterating that I regard my own historicism as deeply indebted to the broader human heritage. The full-fledged historical consciousness is of fairly recent vintage, but it and other human achievements did not emerge autonomously, from a vacuum. I do not think that we can afford simply to disregard the older Western traditions or the traditions of other cultures. I have a more than "residual" respect and admiration for their accomplishments. As I wrote in "Defining Historicism," I consider it willfully arbitrary and terribly arrogant as well as superficial to become wrapped up in life's element of contingency to the neglect of the continuities from which the contingency is indistinguishable. Frequently in the history of mankind moral, intellectual and aesthetical coarseness, such as dogmatism and other premature certainty, have badly distorted or clouded man's sense of goodness, truth and beauty. But none of this has obliterated these universals as forces forever stirring within humanity. The record of human weakness and blindness merely shows the need for greater openness and sensitivity to real universality. Here we cannot do without the intimations provided by the human heritage at its best, what Edmund Burke calls "the gen-

⁸ The subject occupies much of *Will, Imagination and Reason*.

eral bank and capital of nations and of ages.”⁹ This heritage should be as much as possible a living force in the present, which requires of us, not mere imitation of the past but continual creative restatement, revision and expansion.

In the final analysis, postmodernists are so concerned to “deconstruct” mankind’s traditions and liberate themselves from them not primarily because those traditions contain inhumane, capriciously oppressive elements, but because those traditions in general are uncomfortable reminders that we indulge the impulse of the moment only at our own peril. At the bottom of the one-sided postmodernist preoccupation with contingency and incoherence one detects a familiar motive, moral irresponsibility, an unwillingness to limit your own desires. Postmodernism is far too much a rationalization of irresponsibility, an example of the fact that the intellect is in an important sense at the mercy of human will. Postmodernist extremism makes a good argument for the view that intellect stands in need of morally responsible will. We do well to balance the postmodernist eruptions of self-indulgence and idiosyncrasy against what Goethe calls “masses of world history” (*weltgeschichtliche Massen*). This is just what postmodernist extremists *will not* do. Truly to take history seriously is to recognize the pervasiveness of change but also the unity of human moral, intellectual and aesthetic experience—a unity that is of course dynamic and forever evolving in the midst of change.

*Postmodernism
rationalizes
irresponsibility.*

The “residual transcendence” that Roberts thinks he has found in my thinking does not really refer to ahistorical intellectualism at all, as he suspects, but to the fact that the universality I acknowledge both is and is not of man’s own making. Universality is of our own making in that it enters experience through concrete and specific human efforts, but it is also not of our own making in that we cannot arbitrarily control or define its values. We must serve them, however much our own efforts are needed to concretize them and however much the resulting manifestations of universality will bear the distinctive imprint of our very own personalities. Yet again: the relationship between the universal and the historical, the universal and the personal, is—dialectical and synthetic. There is the additional warrant for using the word

⁹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 76.

*The ethical
first among
equals.*

“transcendence” that the ethical is in a way the most important of the human activities. In the triad of goodness-truth-and-beauty, the ethical value of goodness is first among equals, as it were, the value that ultimately orders and justifies the others. In the search for the most deeply satisfying human existence there is no substitute for moral effort. Truth and beauty are invaluable and necessary, are universals in their own right, but diligent pursuit of those values cannot make up for a lack at the moral center. In the end, intellectual and aesthetical activity depend for their own power, health and discernment on the moral integrity and depth of the personality that houses and energizes them. The ethical seems to be in this special sense central or primary, which is one reason why the word “transcendent” or some equivalent is appropriately used to describe it. Another reason is that universal values are never exhausted by their particular manifestations and that, as centered in the ethical, they connect man with an awesome mystery—not indeed with an ahistorical, empty beyond, but with the mystery of life itself. That mystery overflows at the center with the richness and variety of the historical effort to comprehend it. Roberts errs in assuming that transcendence could only be understood as some kind of intellectual depository of ahistorical truth or value. No, there is also the immanent transcendent, the concrete universal, the incarnated good. These are not contradictions in terms, as traditional and formal logicians would have us believe. These are living, existential realities pointing beyond themselves to the fuller, more abundant realization of life’s highest potential.