

On Heresy

Wrapped up the writing in August, 2017.

Subsequently fine-tuned a bit.

It was over dinner not long ago — Valerie and Brian had invited us for one of their prodigious vegetarian meals — when I blurted out “There must be heretics!” citing Saint Paul as my authority.

Each of the four of us had taught for years — Brian, Valerie and Mary Jean at Amherst High School, I at Mount Allison University. And already years ago, before our retirement, we all witnessed a change in educational climate from elitism to proletarianism: from the mission to raise the capable into the rarefied world of great thought, to insistence on the rights of everyone to his or her version of the world. Many concomitant changes bolstered this development: psychology departments shifted from Freudian to socio-biological preoccupations, philosophy departments moved from big questions to minuscule analysis, teachers resorted to power-point presentations, students and their parents began to clamor for protection from scenarios offending their sensibilities, and governments began tying their funding of schools to proofs of efficacy in producing taxpayers fit for entering the technological world. In general, something like applied sociology had displaced theoretical physics as the flagship of education, along with the supposition that legitimate intellectual work contribute to improving the conditions of mankind rather than to enhancing traditional visions of consummation.

In our talk over dinner Brian had had yet another occasion to blame post-modernists for the kind of relativism he judges to be undoing the study of great literature. I myself have heard stories of young teachers who, refusing to adopt this creed, have been denied tenure, and of tenured teachers, committed to traditional

styles of study, assigned to teaching courses in which they could not exercise their competence. Yet the post-modernists I have seen at work generally follow one of the other of the now-dead French icons, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, both of whom I have read carefully enough to know not only that they draw their basic decrees from the greater thought of Martin Heidegger, but also that those who denigrate older styles of thought in their names have missed their point. So I said to Brian that his riffraff of post-modernists don't count as thinkers at all and therefore that he, Brian, shouldn't worry about them.

But they now set the direction of education, he said.

And that's when I came out with my remark about heretics. Just imagine, I said, what it would be like to teach in a school where all colleagues and administrators happily endorsed what you considered right. Or, more generally, to live in a world where everybody was doing everything as it should be done. Assuring safe passage already at the dawn of each day, wouldn't such comfort put you back to sleep?

To answer just for myself: in my forty years of teaching, both colleagues and students seemed to me mostly off track, and I recurrently so, and I woke each morning keen on learning, in my reading, writing and teaching, how to get it right, first for myself and then (in my dreams) for them. Only very occasionally did I discover that some colleague or some student had in fact outstripped me the way books regularly do.

Anyway, the day after our conversation I searched through the New Testament for occurrences of *haireseis* (αἰρέσεις) and found the passage I had vaguely remembered — I Corinthians, 11:19:

δεῖ γὰρ καὶ αἰρέσεις ἐν ὑμῶν εἶναι,
ἵνα καὶ οἱ δόκιμοι φανεροὶ γένωνται ἐν ὑμῶν.

The Authorized King James Version renders it word-for-word:

For there must be also heresies among you,
so that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

For a while now I have been coming back to this passage, trying to understand it both word-by-word and in context, avoiding the shortcuts always available for cataloguing inherited principles.

For one thing, the passage speaks of heresies, not heretics. The key word, αἰρέσεις, although transliterated as "heresies," is, in ancient non-Biblical literature, generally translated as "choices": for instance, in his accounts of human action Aristotle discerns three basic αἰρέσεις: going for what we think will bring us pleasure, going for what we figure will advance our projects, and going for what we believe to be the right thing to do (whether the noble thing to do, as when deciding on questions of justice; or the beautiful thing to do, as when deciding on creative work). He also points out that tragedies (today we might include good novels) impress us by portraying personages as choosing courses of action and thereby revealing character ("ethos," a way of life) — either noble-beautiful, self-promoting, or immediately pleasurable. Friendship, he again says, is based on one or the other of the three: the young go for friends with whom to seek out pleasures, the middle-aged go for friends that can help them in their projects, and some few go for friends intent on the good life (friendship of contemplation, the only enduring one). Political debate, finally, depends on which basic choice governs the actions of those debating: those intent on pleasure or advantage, whether public or their own, can each argue on their own terms, but will have deaf ears to the arguments of one intent on the good — on choosing what's right.

For us today, of course, a heresy is simply a belief that runs contrary to orthodoxy: a choice that is wrong from the standpoint of officially accepted doctrine. In our day, then, translators

generally don't transliterate the Greek but rather render it as something like "sects": groups of people banding together in their opinion (*Parteiungen*, my German translation reads). On such translations, Paul's remark reads as allowing different parties to go at each other — in keeping with our present-day hope that the clash of views and viewpoints will eventually reveal the truth (as it may well do in police or laboratory investigation, or in market research). But in ancient texts αἰρέσεις are moral in meaning, as in Aristotle's various accounts. And in Galatians 5:19 you even read of heresies/choices that they, along with fornication, uncleanness, idolatry, drug-addiction, strife, jealousy, rage, drunkenness and more, are works of the flesh (τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκός).

In keeping somewhat with earlier Greek literature, Paul apparently takes the word to signal an (ultimately unhappy) disposition to go shopping — to view every idea as something you may or may not buy. On this understanding of the word, even choosing Christianity would count as a work of the flesh: recall Boccaccio's charming story of the Jew who, urged incessantly by his Christian friends to convert, finally decided to visit Rome to see directly what was going on at the source; upon his return, and to the astonishment of his Christian friends, he immediately asked for a priest to baptize him, saying that God must be on the side of the Christians no matter what — given that His representatives in Rome indulged in every conceivable work of the flesh.

Our text immediately states *why* it's necessary that there be *heresies*: according to the King James Version, it's "so that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." Otherwise formulated: there must be choices *so that* οἱ δόκιμοι come to light (φανεροί) among you. Who are these δόκιμοι?

Those who have proved themselves, — not, as a casual reading would have it, those who have met the expectations of others. The corresponding verb is δοκιμάζω: to assay (metals for purity, people for qualifications). You must keep proving yourself, we read in II Corinthians 7 — there's always the possibility of your becoming unproven (ἀδόκιμοι). And Galatians 6:3-4 embeds this exhortation in an account emphasizing the solitude of such proof:

εἰ γὰρ δοκεῖ τις εἶναι τι μηδὲν ὄν, φρεναπατᾶ ἑαυτόν.
τὸ δὲ ἔργον ἑαυτο δοκιμαζέτω ἕκαστος, καὶ τότε εἰς
ἑαυτὸν μόνον τὸ καύχημα ἔξει καὶ οὐκ εἰς τὸν ἕτερον.
ἕκαστος γὰρ τὸ ἴδιον φορτίον βαστάσει.

For if one surmises (δοκεῖ: opines, assumes, "thinks proven") to be something, one is, being nothing, fooling oneself. It's the work of one's own that each must prove, and then the exultation will come upon oneself alone and not upon anyone else. For each will carry his own burden.

First, it may be essential to note that only fools believe themselves to *be* something. It's what we *do* that must be right, and if we are *doing* it right — proving ourselves thereby — exultation ensues, independently of others. For now each has taken on the *burden* of being — rather than shifting it, as we do when complaining about the insufficiencies of others.

But, you may ask, how does one prove oneself? What is this burden? In the New Testament "burden" (τὸ φορτίον) occurs only at one other place, Matthew 11:28-30, where Jesus urges his much-burdened listeners to come to him for relief, "For my yoke is kindly and my burden is light."

Perhaps the most central burden is that of having to stand alone — alone among all the others who still believe that their dignity depends upon their ability to choose — as when others are

shopping for belief-systems they might endorse as their own, scrutinizing current speech and literature with an eye out for agreeable and disagreeable features, and expecting the loner to do the same. For all such “choosing” misses the point when we are talking of origins and destinies. One participates in such talk by attending to the matter itself, thinking along with another who is addressing the same matter — thinking neither for nor against formulations about it. And this thinking with another is itself not a choice, but a willingness, an ability stemming from the matter itself, its address, its urgency.

Still, what purpose is served by this statement of necessity: “For there must be heresies/choices”? The “for” (γὰρ) indicates that the remark formulates a principle clarifying what had previously been said. Paul had just written that he had heard there were schisms (differences, divisions) among those to whom he was writing. That “there must be . . .” then appears to state the principle justifying the fact — and differing from the fact only in its generality. But immediately after stating the fact Paul adds: “and I partly believe it” (καὶ μέρος τι πιστεύω).

How are we to understand this addendum, “believing in part?” An easy reading will take the phrase as saying Paul only partly believes the rumor: he’s not sure that the rumor is entirely correct. Such a reading may mistake the verb πιστεύω (I have faith in, I put my trust in) with the more common δοκέω (I suppose that, it seems to me that). Paul has faith in schisms, but his faith, his trust in them is only partial. Why the reservation? He does not say, but we can see it and say it ourselves: schisms *can* generate a vicious free-for-all of contrary opinions — choices — in which the matter itself disappears from view.

It’s an old, an originating question: How can unity in joint human effort emerge from differences — both numerical (many people) and moral (diverging impulses)? Just as our current

stories about natural species emphasize the role of chance (any unit has evolved fortuitously rather than intentionally), so our current understanding of any human society endorses diversity as its basis, and only afterwards seeks out what chance-events might lead to unity — at best a thin veneer, since such unity is essentially a tolerance of diversity, a personal attitude sustaining unity only for a while. Such is our experiment at the moment, which notably falters when it comes to tolerance of those who disagree with the principle of tolerance. In any case, Paul’s endorsement of diversity differs from our own in that it serves a purpose: “that the proven may become apparent among you.”

Paul had just reproached those at Corinth: “It is not for the better but for the worse that you come together.” And he gives two examples of the worse: the first is that they quarrel among themselves. The second now (introduced by οὖν, “then,” which the King James Version renders misleadingly as “therefore”) is that they don’t assemble for eating meals that recall and anticipate Christ. — Meals, the taking of bread and wine together: this topic occupies the remainder of Chapter 11.

Imagine a picnic, either that of an extended family or that of working colleagues. Note then the two possibilities: each brings his own sandwich, salad, fruit and drink to consume alone, or each brings something to be shared by all. Bringing one’s own, one may as well eat at home, unless we intend the occasion to serve amusement, and thereby to allow for competition: some bring sumptuous provender, others provender less sumptuous, some perhaps none at all, and the differences are plain to see and judge. If, on the other hand, bread and wine are to be shared, there need be no such competition: the spread of food and drink appears as a gift, the eating and drinking proceed in a shared spirit, and the occasion may serve as a consecration of that spirit.

Consider the bread. Not only will we break the loaf, it comes with a back-story: the seed was planted in the earth and under the sun, the grain first tended by rains, then harvested by human effort, then mixed with water and leaven, and finally baked; only then, after the contributions of earth, sun and rain, and of many hands and eyes, does the bread appear on the table. And for those who know its origin those hands and eyes haunt the bread.

And the wine. It too may recall its origin in the earth and sun and water, all along accompanied by shared human effort to work the vines. Yet we cannot break it, we must pour it from a common vat or jug or bottle in which it has been stored for a time, readied for the meal. Today, of course, drinks, even water, likely come to us pre-bottled, with no aura of their natural origins.

And finally the company — perhaps a family or a team. The picnic serves as an occasion for each to acknowledge the shared enterprise — a unit, a unity of spirit that might otherwise go unnoticed in the daily routines of the household or the workplace. A shared meal implies a shared origin and destiny, and for this reason we generally don't break bread and pour wine with just anybody. Indeed, in ancient times you only dined with those of your own social class. Jesus outraged Greeks, Romans and Jews alike by dining across social classes.

But then again we may each bring our own, or just stay at home. In which case we don't so much eat and drink as gulp and slurp, as some in fact do at breakfast, not yet ready to take their food and drink in full company, having not yet fully awoken and feeling themselves pressed for time — having to rush off to serve the human enterprise in some defined way, perhaps to plant some field or harvest some crop or tend to some storage capacity; or go to school to learn a place in the world; or to stay at home to tend fires.

To be human is to live in a world — in an order of space,

where things have their respective places and can be placed, replaced, lost or found; and in an order of time, where tasks are lined up as already performed, currently being performed, or having yet to be performed. It's some world that allows for the production of grains and grapes, and all the hardware and software that typifies our own generation. And while to be human is to be placed in a world, it is also human destiny to account for the world, ever again to discover our place in it: not only to produce maps and timetables, but also to view it as a whole — to be bothered by the whole and not just by the parts. Accounting for it, we get out of the world, we get released from the world, we rise above the world. It is our destiny to think and talk (read and write) about what it means to be in and out of it, how to be oneself and how being oneself entails acknowledgment of a shared spirit enveloping the world and thereby including others along with oneself.

Thus we eat and drink together. Of course such dining can merely serve the world — as when you bring your boss home for dinner, or lay out a spread in competition with the spreads your guests had previously laid out for you. But even these forms of dining reveal something special about being human: career- or status-building artificially overlaying the natural exigencies of nutrition, these now interpreted primarily as sources of sensual pleasure. More generally, these distorted forms of dining reveal the possibility of being trapped in the world, of being lost and squirming within the prevailing order — something very distinctively human.

One feature of the world we presently live in is the insistence on understanding human being as continuous with animal being. So a word on this is perhaps necessary.

Animals fascinate us: we both love and fear them, take care of some and steer clear of others. Yet cats and dogs, tigers and

foxes, don't dine together, don't recall the shared world in which their fodder is produced, don't celebrate a shared world of preparation, and don't talk about the ways the shared world might develop, weighing the possibilities on the scales of pleasure, practicality, and justice — let alone research and discuss the ways creatures around them are similar to and different from themselves. They plop into their environment and rot back into it, gulp and slurp all their way along — and incessantly remind us that this is one possibility for us as well, and often inspire us to reflect on what it means to come together for better or for worse. For one thing, we concern ourselves for proper nutrition, and note the consequences of eating and drinking improperly: in the olden days, frailty or scurvy; nowadays, obesity or diabetes.

Reductive accounts of human being have always presented themselves in counterpoint to inductive efforts. How could it be otherwise? To be human is to learn ever again how to do it right, and so there must also be background accounts defying us. Until the outbreak of our own modernity nearly all ancient works of defiance got lost in the on-going battles, and we hear of them only in existing inductive accounts. But chance has given us one reductive account that is nearly complete: Lucretius' *de rerum natura*. Required reading...

What's the difference? There must be choices among us — so that we can prove ourselves. That's the difference between reductive and inductive accounts. Choosing a reductive account, you seek approval, and you may very well find it. Choosing an inductive account, you must prove yourself while being disapproved by others.

δοκιμαζέτω δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἑαυτὸν, καὶ
οὕτως ἐκ τοῦ ἄρτου ἐσθιέτω καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ποτηρίου πινέτω.

Let each man then prove himself and
thus eat from the loaf and drink from the cup.

How else? So long as others approve, you need not prove yourself — but rather, having met established standards, settle back into the prevailing order. And, becoming an agent of the prevailing order, you lose yourself. Whereupon you may even say to yourself: Ah, to be rather a cat or a dog, a tiger or a fox!

Ours is a double life: we live first of all and abidingly within an order (κόσμος: translated well enough as “world”); but then we also stand out of that of order. And only when out of order (perhaps criminally, perhaps creatively) might we find, or let emerge, what tentatively sustains that order, as well as ourselves both within and without it. A never-ending conflict with brief interludes of resolution — as I find resoundingly thematized in Beethoven's 9th symphony. It's a conflict ever-again interpreted across the ages — interpreted the way musicians interpret a score to get it to work.

Our first years see us entirely wrapped up in the world of grown ups, where we perform assigned chores. There then comes a time when we move out into the wider world where we must labor to make our own way. Only in relatively recent times does going out into the world mean entering into an academy where, among other things, we study accounts of the world, of the earth lurking concealed underneath, and of human efforts over the ages that have made and bequeathed something of the world, and of the earth on which our world rests. Until recently, these accounts were mostly inductive: one studied Greek and Latin and Hebrew, and read the great literatures written in these tongues. Now the accounts are mostly reductive, instructing you in the materiality of your condition, both social and natural, and in ways of formulating it accurately and rearranging it effectively. Now it's from the academies that you hear cries to improve the world: to develop more effective technologies, to help those materially less fortunate than yourself, and to instill a transparent

morality in political and social dealings. In the midst of the cacophony coming upon inductive literature, you likely ask how the study of such literature contributes to improving the world — or to your understanding of it — even, perhaps, to your understanding of yourself, your emotional life. You thereby assume you already understand the basics of the world, and you need only improve the structures built on these basics. — All the while, too, the world may come crashing down, and your various understandings of the parts failing to add up to anything, and what you assumed to be basic appears as unwarranted presumption, and you start all over again — or just give up.

The two-fold of being both in and out never goes away. Mealtime is — can be — the daily occasion for recollecting it.

At the outset of Chapter 11, before coming onto the principle of choice, we find Paul instructing the Corinthians on the differing headdresses proper for men and women attending their celebrative assemblies. Playing on the word “head” — the location of the facial expression, eyes to see, ears to hear, and mouth to breathe and speak, all in contrast to the location of authority in the kitchen or on the battlefield — he says that God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of each man, and a man is the head of his woman; from which Paul infers that men should attend (“pray and prophesy”) with head bared and women with head covered (i.e., with a full head of hair: there’s no mention of hat or scarf).

To establish the difference between men and women, the inference builds on a consideration of where glory lies: a man is the glory of God, whereas a woman is the glory of her man. Which distinction in turn builds on a consideration of the provenance of each: a woman is *of* (ἐκ) her man (needs a man to be a woman) while a man is not *of* his woman (he can be a man

even if deprived of her); man (Adam) was not created *by way of* (διὰ) woman, but woman (Eve) was created *by way of* man (his rib); still, even though each woman is *of* some man, each man is *by way of* some woman (his birth-mother); all the while, though, neither is *apart from* (χωρῶς) the other; and, finally, τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ: all of them are *of* God.

One can wonder what observations, principles, or literatures justify the entire hierarchy God – Christ – man – woman. But how we decide on this matter depends essentially on our understanding of glory (δόξα): What does it mean to say of a man (ἀνὴρ) that he is the “glory of God” and of a woman (γυνή) that she is the “glory of her man.” Or to say that long hair on a woman is a glory to her (and constitutes her ἐξουσία: her “power” the King James Version has it — power in the sense of authority rooted in the matter itself, not force imposed from without: “Jesus spoke with authority, so unlike the scribes”). Or to say, as we read toward the end of Chapter 10: “Whether then ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (πάντα εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ ποιεῖτε)?

Glory? J. S. Bach considered every composition of his to be written and played for the glory of God. He might rather have done it for the glory of his prince, or of the local church, or of himself. A soldier may fight valiantly and to his death for the glory of his religion, his country, his family, or himself. A building may be built for the glory of God — or for that of the architect designing it or for that of the tycoon financing it.

Glory is imputed to the source of an achievement rightly deserving attention (infamy we impute to the source of evil unfortunately attracting attention). Commonly enough, one will glorify a soccer player or a movie star, believing that the achievement evident in the game or the movie derives from the player deserving attention outside the play. Then, too, a

composer, a soldier, an architect or a tycoon may not perform *with a view* to any glory at all: for these, the achievement follows from the performance of duty, and the attention others pay to them appears as incidental if not erroneous.

To do everything for the glory of God contrasts with doing things for the glory of oneself or others, families, institutions or nations, or out of respect for status (“God is no respecter of persons”: Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Colossians 3:25; Matthew 22:16; and already in Deuteronomy 10:17).

The word commonly translated in the New Testament as “glory” is δόξα, the opposite of which is something like “highly forgettable” or “nameless.” In the texts of Greek philosophy *doxa* gets most commonly translated as “opinion” in contrast to “knowledge” (ἐπιστήμη). From such common expressions as “In my opinion...” and “that’s merely your opinion” — expressions intending to weaken the claim to knowledge — readers may misunderstand the texts of Parmenides (“you must learn the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true faith”) — as also the works of Plato, Aristotle and the rest — where *doxa* means something closer to “appearance” in the social sense of the word: what it is that people generally expect to see, what in fact first sticks out — so that, for instance, we expect from today’s physics, biology and chemistry the most important discoveries and ameliorations, without our having any knowledge whatsoever of the sort requiring decades of study: we simply look to the eye-catching results of electronics, medicine and pharmacology as proving the truth of those studies, rather than as providing occasions for proving ourselves in actual research.

Doing all things for the glory of God might then entail that the man of a traditional household assume the responsibility of measuring up to God rather than to earthly demands, and that his woman assume responsibility for measuring up to her man as he

exercises this transcendent responsibility — and that when they assemble to pray (i.e. confess the need for help) and prophesy (i.e. testify) he bare his head and she appear in full headdress as the glory of her man — whereby she exercises her power (ἐξουσία: authority) in the satisfaction of earthly demands of the household.

But then again, there will always be quarrels: Why should I have to bare my head while she can adorn hers? Or why do I have to cover my head while he can freely expose his? And why does a woman have to consider her man to be her head — or be of her man while he be not of her?

Such quarrels arise only in arranging one’s ordinary life, one’s practical concerns. They point to choices, and assume that one’s freedom and dignity depend on having one’s own way in these earthly matters. The point, however, is to align oneself within the ordinary in order to serve the extra-ordinary — the fulfilment of our destiny. So Paul concludes: “If now anyone seems to be hankering for victory [i.e. merely wanting to argue], [tell him] we just don’t have this custom (συνήθεια) [of men and woman exchanging hairstyles; perhaps also of debating for the sake of scoring victories], neither do the churches [meeting places] of God.”

Paul’s final resort to συνήθεια, established ways of living together, will appear to some readers as despotic — as when a parent, after reasoning unsuccessfully with a child about his behavior, resorts to saying: “That’s just the way it’s done in this house — no more arguing, just do it.” However, the whole point is to learn to consecrate our life together, find a way of living together that includes the practical, the ordinary, the earthly, while enveloping it with, or allowing it to be enveloped by, the ultimate, the sacred, the heavenly. Insistence on one’s own conveniences, preferences, or whims in practical arrangements

sets profane consideration as a pre-condition for consecration and the attendant devotion — as a kind of bargaining chip. In our day we can see this same profanity, only vastly enlarged, in the insistence that each can choose his or her own sex, choose which gendered public restrooms to visit, choose to read only those works assigned in schools that do not offend one’s personal sensibilities, choose what counts as great achievement in art work, and so on. The fact is that this insistence already reflects an unbelief in *συνήθεια*, an unbelief in sharing a structured public space of any substance, and then also (as Paul mentions only in passing) an unbelief in *φύσις*, in nature as the counterpart to custom. In short, an unbelief in the sacred.

Yet that’s the background of choice-addiction against which you must show your colors ever again. Both for your own sake and for the sake of others — your children, your pupils, your friends. And not by choosing what to affirm and what to deny, let alone by trying to get others to choose what you affirm and reject what you deny. But rather by learning to respond to what has all along been addressing you, whereupon you will discover what addresses others as well. Objecting incessantly to those who are addicted to choices, as though they had made the wrong choice, you reduce your own testimony to just another choice, adding it now to the free-for-all of choices and showing no alternative at all. And that’s the one thing necessary to testimony: showing the alternative. Which would make no sense, either to you or to others, apart from the background. Perhaps that is at bottom what I was trying to tell Brian, and have often wanted to tell those distressed by the “relativism” of others.

Puzzled by a number of formulations in Chapter 11, and especially by the phrase “owing to the angels” in verse 10 (attending a meeting for prayer and testimony, a woman should

have authority symbolized by full headdress, *διὰ τοῦς ἁγγέλους*), I turned to our university library where I came across five commentaries:

The Interpreter’s Bible

Peake’s Commentary on the Bible

The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, an Introduction

Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament, I Corinthians

1 – 2 Corinthians

While none could make important sense of the reference to angels, I took the opportunity to read through all five on the whole chapter, discovering not only various background facts (e.g., that “church” took place in private homes, usually of the more well-to-do, and that Corinth at the time was the Sin City of the Mediterranean), but also divergent speculations on the intent of various passages I myself had been interpreting:

Do I “cover” (*κατακαλύτω*) my head with hair,
or perhaps also with a veil?

What’s the purport of Paul’s recourse to “custom”
(*συνήθεια*) as the final arbiter?

How are we to understand a woman’s “authority”
(*ἐξουσία*)?

Are we to take “for there must be...” (*δεῖ γὰρ ... εἶναι*)
ironically or seriously?

Not one draws attention to the phrase “in part I believe it” (*μέρος τι πιστεύω*) or to the translation of *οὖν* as “therefore” instead of “then” (so that the “In the first place” is left dangling). All five dwell eagerly on the final section of the chapter as formulating the ritual of the Last Supper. And fearful that Paul might be advising readers to understand woman as inferior to men (referring, with faint hope, to his remarks that neither is separate and both are from God), each of the five offers a more or less extensive apology for Paul’s insistence on differing headdresses.

Surfacing after a long plunge into Paul's letters, I was most struck by the non-engagement of these commentaries, their aloofness. That's what commentaries do, I know: they situate us above their subject, outside its dynamics, so that we might become clear on details (about those angels, or where Paul supposes us to be meeting), for which we must suspend for a while the involvement the text actually proposes, presumably with a view to getting back into it later, better prepared. The same sort of suspension occurs when reading textbook explanations aiming for comprehension, and even more conspicuously when reading critical essays aiming to put us on our guard. And of course these three (annotation, explanation, and criticism) may meld into one another, and sometimes even morph into something else: interpretation aiming to provide another rendering of the text, as a musician interprets a score or an actor interprets a script, re-enacting the dynamics suspended in the other three.

Still, to one who engages in works themselves, commentaries appear false. In themselves, they may be so benignly — and malignantly so only when readers get stalled in them (just as it would be perverse to remain with the most carefully anatomized corpse, considering it to illustrate the truth of human being).

Eerily, a commentary (and I mean one that has not morphed into a work in its own right) spreads out the details, and the possibilities for understanding them, as though it were our task, as readers, to pick them over, to decide whether the original author got it right, or whether the commentary has laid out the details correctly. In both ways a secondary work derives from and tends toward the suspension of engagement with what the text invites us to address.

You may still object that, clearing away possible obstacles and misunderstandings, commentaries prepare the path back into

the engagement essential to the originals, and, installing us momentarily outside, prepares us for active re-engagement in what they are about. Above all, such clearing counteracts slavish submission to the words and judgements of others.

Indeed. But such service does not detract from the tempting illusion of such texts, their temptation as works of the flesh, as it were, and the addiction they at least indirectly promote: a kind of illusion akin to that of stories about the origin of the universe that set us up outside, looking down as gods might do, on all time and all space, and then — too late! — tell us that we, who have hitherto looked inside from the outside, are really trapped on the inside, painted in at various points on the time-space continuum, no longer the ones detecting what's on the continuum but now only subjected to it.

You may also note that this ability to take an outside, an overall view is precisely what makes us distinctively human, so that works "setting us up outside" illustrate our humanity already, apart from what else they happen to do or reveal. Isn't that what education most effects, this ability to rise above, look around, see and discuss things totally in time and space, rather than only in daily and local parts?

Yes, but as finite we live and think *both* outside and inside — and great works (contemplative ones), in marked contrast to both aloof commentaries on literature and totalizing accounts of the universe, draw us not just out but also, and simultaneously, back in. Works that only suspend our involvement pretend we are gods merely looking on — and, having expended their universalist capital in situating us at a point of view outside the totality looking in, can never discover any essential universality in the landscape viewed, let alone induce us into any such: the words and dictums of Paul (of contemplative literature of any kind) can only be read and heard reductively.

It's ancient wisdom, perennially repeated, that genuine knowing goes hand in hand with self-knowing: How can we know anything, as distinct from remembering what we have heard or read about it, without knowing where we are in regard to it, and what we are doing while regarding it? Yet the pretense to know necessarily precedes self-knowing. So it should come as no surprise, even though it very often and frustratingly does, that the field is cluttered with half-baked versions of every kind of knowledge.

Cyril Weale

Appendix

Consider again, and more carefully, what I called the *C*doubleness of our condition, our being both in and out.

First, there is routine, the ways of doing things embedding our everyday lives, whether at home or in the city; it's called *κόσμος* throughout Hellenophone literature, what Heidegger was the first to analyze from one end to the other under the name "world." It's that into which we raise children, and within which they later find themselves having to work, and which, in general, provides the givens and the possibilities, in well-worn ruts, of production and action.

Second, there is aloof observation of the workings of the world, a looking-on (*σκαψις*) at the routines; it's a stance allowing us to note the world's well-worn ruts, either in wonder at its intricacies or in distress at its limitations. In this stance we aspire to understand the world, display it in its vast array, often for approval or disapproval: what has been done, and why; what can be done, and how. It is this stance that allows us to cast doubt on the claims of the world, whether it's various moral

prescriptions or it's current metaphysical suppositions regarding the "nature" underlying human effort. All in stark contrast to simply moving along within the world, as we suppose our cats and dogs to do, alternately admiring and berating animals for their uncritical stance, their ease of life.

This being-outside lies at the basis of far-flung theories about the origin of the universe. But it also allows us to recall our day's activity in search of where we might have misplaced our keys to the car; to review our household expenditures in search of ways to re-prioritize them; to devise an overview of our town's water and sewer systems in search of possible or actual breakdowns. The Greek word for this account-giving, this re-counting — this feature, this capacity, this destiny distinctive of human being — is *λόγος*.

But it's not viable all by itself, any more than routine is. For a critical account leaves us on the sidelines of actual life, at a distance from, and ultimately destitute of, the actuality of the things, the people and the places given to us initially by those everyday routines, and forming the substance of our affection — the substance that we easily forget, having taken it for granted, and that we sometimes feel we must recover at all costs. Which need of recovery may in fact have been the initial reason for our having reconsidered, from the outside, our initial involvement with things, people, and places that seem to be given outright.

While we may recognize the unviability of sheer routine in the frequently heard complaints of boredom and in stories of its various remedies (from senseless travel to profligate behavior), we may also recognize the unviability of sheer account-giving in the frequently heard calls to practical application (Marx: "Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world diversely; what's important is to *change* it") as well as less frequently heard searches for the occult (Faust: "I've thoroughly studied philo-

sophy, law and medicine, even theology . . . For all that, I have now devoted myself to magic to see whether, by craft and incantation of spirit, many a mystery might get revealed to me”).

The tensions of this doubleness may serve to remind us that we can only take up residence outside so long as we transfigure the inside into images of our ever-renewed residence — take the inside with us, so to speak, rather than leave it behind and forthwith find ourselves empty-handed. We likely need help in this project, and we can easily find offers of it — certainly in great literature of any sort, and occasionally even in face-to-face conversation. In any case, there is this third level of human engagement in which both success and failure again loom.

It’s the level of reflective art, whether taking form as philosophy or literature or any of the other arts, as in the great architecture of the late Middle Ages or in the great painting of the Renaissance. And one of the topics of reflective art is precisely . . . choice.

Marcel Proust testifies that he first learned to write — re-learned the art for literature — when he found events of his youth coming back to him unbidden, thereby inducing not only a double vision — the singular sensation of an earlier time and now again a second time, along with the image of the first time — but also the task of extrapolating and converting the power of the first to form an *équivalent spirituel*, namely a work of art. He had to learn, in effect, to re-address what had already addressed him, whereas he had for decades tried in vain to devise a composition all his own.

Shakespeare’s Portia waits upon the choices of her suitors — gold, silver, or lead — to determine who she is to marry: “O me, the word choose! I may neither choose who I would, nor refuse who I dislike; so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father.”

Literature talks of choice, but the writing stems from necessity and the reading reveals it. — So what are we talking about?

Choice at any level has recognized alternatives and now enacts a preference. For instance, at a restaurant you peruse the menu to select what to order. Here you sense no necessity — unless, too embarrassed to walk out, you feel obliged to choose something.

Not so simple when you have to come up with a finished product — as a plumber, for instance, assigned a task of installation or reparation. Someone else chose among possibilities, but at any one moment of your own work recognition of alternatives gives way to necessity: there’s a right way of laying and joining these pipes here, attaching these fixtures there, and tightening those bolts. Your options are whether you will take some easy way out to save time and energy, satisfied if the result looks for a while like what it’s supposed to be — or to lower your standards by some incidental short-cuts that no one but yourself will likely notice in the final result, at least for a long while — or to do it right from beginning through the middle to the end, starting with the design and on into the manual work and finally the billing. At this level your every move both actualizes and transcends the usual routine: you are what others may call a perfectionist, but what you yourself call doing what has to be done — you proceed out of necessity, in contrast to choosing an item listed on a menu or a film listed on cable TV.

Not so simple either when you have to choose one among several candidates for a scholarship award. Your choice here is governed not by natural exigencies but by social norms, criteria special to the desired fit (academic or personal quality, together perhaps with financial need). And not clients but colleagues will

scrutinize your choice, as you will theirs, with a view to the fit. All the while, however, the same temptations arise: to choose with a view to enhancing immediate pleasure or avoiding immediate pain (your own together with the candidate's); to choose with a view to long-term advantage or disadvantage (possible gifts of relatives to the institution, if not to you); or to choose to do what's right — constrained, as it were, by necessity: not the "free choice" regarding pain and advantage. Not so easy but with its own reward, as the movie *12 Angry Men* wonderfully depicts by showing jurors in a capital case slowly changing their minds (one poor juror had tickets to a World Series baseball game that afternoon).

Other than when choosing items on a list, choice arises mostly when we are making, arranging or repairing things of use, and then also when we are guiding or following others through institutional arrangements such as businesses and universities, sporting events and military maneuvers. Here, in production and action (as they used to be distinguished), alternatives and preferences abound, at any moment of which one super alternative looms: that of doing it right. Or, since the agony of this choice lies precisely in the initial unclarity about what 'right' means, this one alternative, in contrast to those of immediate pleasure or long-term benefit, we don't so much choose as honor. In answering to what's right we answer to necessity — as Lord Jim does at the end of Joseph Conrad's novel: he presents himself to his adversary "alone and unarmed."