

Cyril Welch

Reading, Talking, Writing

12 Essays in Philosophy

This version differs from the bound and published version only in that the page breaks vary slightly and I have corrected a misprint on page 137. —25 January 2008

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For Liliane

with whom I share both word and thought

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Preface

The twelve essays here selected and arranged intend to commemorate my retirement from teaching.

Retirement signals a special moment in the course of one's life. As do other first moments: leaving home, establishing a livelihood, forming a bond for life, bringing new life into being, even suffering the loss of those with whom one has shared one's life. Except for the ultimate special moment, they signal anticipation of a sequel.

And, as well, recollection. Withdrawing now from over forty years of teaching, I find these years looming all the more. (The common talk of putting matters behind one and getting on with one's life is highly misleading; indeed, very reminiscent of what modern comforters of Job might urge upon us.)

One dimension of teaching—the cornerstone and again the keystone and the capstone—is the enactment of the subject itself. Genuine teachers do not primarily impart information, do not at all instill a doctrine, do not really present ideas or even wisdom—they rather embody the ability to restart at the beginning, to address the subject matter itself; they thereby draw others into their own.

These twelve essays present relatively brief traces—four different kinds—of that one dimension: traces that lead out of school, as all essential ones do.

Cyril Welch

April 2004

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Reading

First published as “A Preface to Reading” in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, XIV, ii (1981), pp. 31-50. A complementary piece appears as the chapter “Dialogue in Reading” in my *Linguistic Responsibility* (Victoria, B.C.: Sono Nis Press, 1988), pp. 288-318. For the present edition, I have introduced minor stylistic improvements and rewritten much of the Notes.

When listening to others talking about philosophical works, or even debating a philosophical question, I often ask myself just what they expect from reflective work. For it seems clear that some rather fundamental disagreements arise in which the protagonists struggle not so much with the argument as with the assumptions about its status. And these assumptions necessarily regard the question of what one expects when embarking upon reflection.

Similarly, when reading commentaries on great works in our tradition, I often get the impression that, while the commentator may arrange quite accurately the contents and structures, something fundamental is missing in them that the originals provide. I suspect that critics generally expect from the works they consider either too much, too little, or in any case something inappropriate—and that this expectation stands as an unspoken, decisive, if not erroneous premiss in their own arguments.

From repeated experiences of this sort, I have often imagined writing a Preface that could be attached not only to any of my own writings, but also and more importantly to any contemplative writing at all—as a kind of warning to readers about what they may rightly expect and what not. Such a Preface would clear the air of misguided expectations, premisses that otherwise threaten to distort the works from the outset.

But how could anybody pretend to such a project? Does it not imply immediately a premiss of its own, namely, that reflective works all say the same thing? The greatest of such works obviously argue in directions explicitly differing from one another, and thereby require different styles of reading, arousing expectations unique to each one. And even if a latecomer can look back and detect a single decisive style implicit in all philosophical literature from the beginning to the present day, this new author would have to write not a Preface, but a lengthy book showing this direction.

Still, what we discover or fail to cover in a work, and especially whether we judge the work to map out a field rich in as yet unrecovered ore, depends largely on how we enter into it, and even more on how we comport ourselves once we are attentively engaged in the

reading. If it is clear that different books argue in differing styles, it is even more striking that the same book leads different readers in diverging directions — and indisputably intelligent readers, at that. And to suppose that there is one correct reading, or even that some readings are wrong, presupposes that some “authority” is or should be at work.

Notwithstanding the genuine dangers and likely objections, I still propose a Preface to Reading, at least as an example of what each reader and no doubt each author must do, and in effect does do, if only implicitly. Such a Preface at least serves to cast doubt on some of the more prominent assumptions about reading reflective works.

Where to begin? Evidently, with a look to reflective works themselves. But what counts as a reflective work? Most broadly: work intending to shatter our usual way of being in, thinking about, and facing up to our circumstances. A work is reflective if it casts the “human side” into doubt, into a new light. On this broad definition many scientific works in the age of discovery (e.g., the story of radium), many rhetorical works in the ages of political re-formation (e.g., Pericles' funeral oration or Lincoln's Gettysburg address), and many works of poetry (e.g., Walt Whitman's “Song of Myself”) count as reflective. But such works have other intentions as well, and are reflective only somehow “in addition.” For the sake of purity of example, let us then bear in mind mainly the obviously philosophical works of our tradition.

Do we read such works for information? We read telephone books, tour guides, and instruction manuals to find out what already is or how to make something that in form already exists. Obviously, the analogy staggers when we open a work by Plato or Kant. In desperation, however, the information-seeker reads such works to familiarize himself with his heritage. Such reading is possible, but it reduces its materials to historical occurrences and violates the intentions internal to the works themselves.

Or do we read such works to see if we can be persuaded of a truth going beyond information: a vision or a plan by which we could regulate the detail of our lives, or at least our thoughts? Plato's *Republic* and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* do indeed argue for an overall understanding of our political life and our modern scientific

life, respectively. Reflective works argue, they do not pass on information about the past or even the future. Yet argument all by itself, without something more, seems more appropriate to public assemblies, especially in law courts and parliaments, where decisions have to be made affecting people's lives and where what counts is explicit consent, often the actual vote. Philosophical arguments notoriously fail to persuade, at most they have influence. And no wonder: the mere adoption of a viewpoint advanced by another, even just an overall vision of how things are, of life itself, puts an end to reflection. Arguments do intend to persuade, but to *what* do they persuade us? Reflection persuading us primarily to consent would be a strange bird indeed. Persuasion is one of the categories of discourse that demands further thought.

Setting aside some *de facto* interpretations of philosophical debate — e.g., that it provides an opportunity to prove one's dexterity in the eyes of one's fellows or to straighten out one's personal convictions — let us proceed directly to a consideration of what happens within, what we can detect in reading itself: *inside* the reading, quite independently (at first) of what may happen as a result. This inside view requires a bold leap in reflective recollection: we have to recall what happens in reflective reading that works.

1.

First, a reflective work takes the form of a dialogue. Otherwise it is not reflective, not thoughtful, but only expository or polemical — expository if it claims to describe what has already been done and polemical if it seeks to undo the claims of other works.

One peculiarity of a dialogue is that the reader, too, is responsible for making it. A reflective work does not simply lecture at, it somehow includes the reader. But the inclusion is reciprocal: the reader must also include the text, take it up as a dialogue.

Yet, you might ask, how can a reader possibly make a dialogue out of a printed text? The words are fixed and the author himself has fled the scene, leaving merely a proxy, a *porte-parole* that can only keep repeating itself inflexibly. What can the reader possibly do to deflect this onslaught of words, this apparent monologue, into a dialogue?

Let us first consider wherein the inner force of a dialogue resides. What indeed makes a conversation, in which the participants all learn something, so markedly different from expository and polemical speech? Most obviously, each and everyone turns to the matter itself, the subject under consideration. In contrast, the procedure appropriate to exposition is one in which the speaker goes to the source and fetches back water for the others. And in polemical discourse each takes a turn at disputing whether the others have succeeded in bringing back genuine water. Arriving on the scene of either of these two modes of discourse, we find ourselves asked, if not driven, to concentrate on the words themselves. The source justifying the verbal formulations remains beyond the confines of the scene itself, present at most in the form of a faded memory. But when, of a sudden, there *is* a conversation, when we do turn toward the matter itself, our words and formulations evidence a directionality: they function as, and *are* stepping-stones toward the source in view or within hearing. The mode of discourse appropriate to dialogue is one that cedes to the matter under consideration, measures itself against what looms ahead of itself, and finally draws its strength from this looming source.

In reading a work genuinely we do in effect speak. Speaking means, basically, taking responsibility for addressing oneself to the matter under consideration. We do not here speak *to* the writer, for admittedly he has abandoned the text to its own devices. But we can speak *with* the author, even with other and unknown readers — providing only that we speak along with the text. Indeed, we must so speak; otherwise the text means nothing to us.

Dialogue is of course rare. Thus the task of encouraging it—in the case of a reflective work, the central task of authorship—weighs heavily on those who undertake it. Failure looms at every bend, and there are no easy solutions. Contrary to what one might suppose, an author discourages the reader and likely destroys dialogue if he simply describes a subject matter. For in that case he rightly endeavors to speak so well that the reader has nothing to add, nothing himself to say: the water is fetched and he is told to drink. And while a dash of polemic might serve to recall the distance between ourselves and the matter in question, infighting among speakers all too easily creates a drama distracting from the traversal to the source, a drama that itself

quickly dries up. Avoiding description and polemic, an author must still set the stage on which the reader may turn to the matter itself. How can he do this? How else but by recalling the exigencies of the matter, the ways in which the matter itself already exacts tribute? He in effect must open the door to the visitor who is already knocking. If he succeeds—if the dialogue works—the matter itself presses in and elicits response. Of course, the reader may slam the door shut. Indeed, the author of a reflective work easily appears silly: left there, jabbering away about something that remains out of sight and out of hearing—to all appearances, nothing at all.

2.

What mode of speech, if not that of description or refutation, does justice to reflection, to the imperative that a work become a dialogue? What mode would encourage the reader to stand with the writer to face the matter itself as it presses in upon them both?

If we genuinely enquire into a matter, we must genuinely *ask* about it. And if we do so with others, we direct our questions both to each other and to the matter itself: we interrogate. Interrogation is then the mode of speech appropriate to dialogue. We pose questions among ourselves, each of us being a kind of sounding board *of* the matter *for* the others.

Perhaps the determination that reflective speech interrogates comes as no surprise. At the beginning, Socrates already insisted on asking questions that violated the citizens of Athens. And today we often hear someone say that the right questions count much more than the right answers. Philosophy itself sometimes appears as an eternal recurrence of the same questions, never answered satisfactorily.

Yet what, you might ask, is gained by pursuing a question if not to settle it, to arrive at an answer? Are questions not asked because we want answers, some sort of information or the acceptance or rejection of certain views or points of view? Are not questions important only as means, as vehicles taking us someplace, whereupon we park, discard, or at least forget them? Is not a right question precisely one that leads toward a right answer?

Let us first consider what a question is, how we can genuinely ask a question, and more specifically how we undertake a genuinely reflective interrogation.

One peculiarity about a genuine question is that it already says something about us who pose it. When someone genuinely asks us a question we notice that the very asking already brings something to light: the one who asks does not know. More: the one who poses the question shows that he is willing to admit his ignorance. This willingness takes concrete form as an entering upon the scene unarmed. No wonder, then, that some people find it impossible to ask questions, or at least certain kinds of questions: the admission of ignorance exposes us. In requesting information (What time is it? or What are the requirements for the course?) the admission generally comes easy. In such cases, either it is not essentially our task to know, or our task includes such queries (as the doctor must ask the patient certain questions, e.g. about the location of pains). Similarly, the admission of ignorance comes easy when posing questions that are either idle or merely polite (I wonder how he earns his money? or Did you have a nice summer?). Such questions indicate or fill gaps, empty moments in our lives, moments that the questions themselves skirt rather than explore. And finally, shaming questions (often called “rhetorical”) actually deny one's ignorance (Are we willing to let the Russians beat us in the arms race?). Shaming questions aspire to highlight the ignorance of others — an ignorance usually of deeds in progress or impending consequences rather than of facts.

In a reflective question, the ignorance admitted and the exposure required differ radically from the ignorance and exposure coming to light in fact-searching, idle, polite, or shaming questions. We pose a reflective question only when the whole of some matter baffles us. The ignorance then appears total in regard to the matter: even if the details stand firm, the way they fit together and come to something escapes us. In posing the question we admit we have no safe place to stand. Here we see the reason that reflective questions are essentially unpopular and will always remain so: they shake not only the foundations of the matter in question (or issue from the foundations evidencing their own shakiness), but also one's own foothold. A reflective question turns against us as well as against the

matter in question. Indeed, only with remarkable artifice can we pose a reflective question without offending others. The most we seem to gain from such questioning is an unusual and not very flattering or reassuring sense of our own position and the status of the matter under consideration.

3.

Still, you might ask, what is the purpose of such radical questioning, of opening the door to an intruder who seeks, it seems, to unsettle if not destroy the very home of the host? Is this not simply intellectual masochism?

A genuine question comes upon us, we do not invent it or even detect it. The matter in question actually *appears* questionable: it addresses the question to us. Our task is to *face* a reflective question, and we may in fact choose to dodge it. Thus every question we ourselves pose in a reflective vein is already a response to an imperative, to an urgency. And a central task of a reflective work is to embody the imperative for the reader as well.

In reading even a non-reflective work we can legitimately ask what need the work articulates. A telephone book obviously answers needs, although we see immediately that in offering numbers it in no way invites us to ponder the need: the imperative is strictly ours, and no business of the telephone company's (although its advertisements might aspire to stimulate the need to make calls). Similarly, a do-it-yourself manual simply presupposes a need, although in this case it may have a kind of personal, environmental, or even social grounding (as does the need for a well-insulated house in harsh climates). A magazine essay, on the other hand, may explicitly strive to convince us of the existence and gravity of some need (e.g., for pollution-control measures), although such essays nearly always presuppose the larger needs of human beings (as our Western view of the need for hygiene presupposes needs in conflict with those of the Hindu who takes the waters of the Holy Ganges). And of course there are pompous displays of learning that succeed in camouflaging the needs to which they answer.

There is one kind of reflective work that deserves special comment. A tradition can become so well established that even the best minds increasingly presume the imperative: writers no longer

articulate it explicitly and readers either bring it into the reading or miss it entirely. For instance, during the Middle Ages the Scholastic writers came to present their thought within the unspoken framework of the need for something that we might summarily call transcendence: readers went into the work already asking not whether, but how their destiny was to approach a divine vantage point from which to view secular affairs; here we can contrast Augustine's *Confessions*, which so clearly shows the imperative to which it embodies a response, with his *City of God*, which is so filled with description and polemic. Again, during our own age, especially in academic institutions, writers and readers alike tend to argue issues within, and therefore presumptive of, a framework of concern for utility: a reader enters into a work of "non-fiction" (as we tellingly call it) with the hope of furthering established interests — goals and ways of doing things that essentially precede reflection and that locate the imperative; instead of modifying these goals and ways, the work aspires to enhance them. Thus in reading late Scholastic and late modern reflective works, we do well to return to the original works of these respective traditions, for these are more likely to show rather than to presume the imperative essential to the writing and the reading of them, and of later works, too.

Well, then, you might ask: What is an imperative? What imperative guides reflective dialogue and reflective questioning? Or you might even ask: Is there truly *one* imperative at the root of all reflective works? Or: Is there not, rather, a variety, so that it would fall to each to show its own?

The one imperative, a professor might tell his students, is that we come to understand the way things stand. Yet philosophers at all times have asked, precisely: What does it mean to understand? Understanding has located the question, not the unquestioned imperative. The best of philosophers have often aspired to draw an imperative out from the evident human desire for knowledge, to bring to light the genuine need for understanding the way things are, and thereby both to recast this understanding and to instill in the enterprise of knowledge a significance that idle curiosity and its results can never have. If we take our cues from philosophers themselves, then,

we shall not rest content with the imperative of understanding, we shall rather reconstrue this apparent imperative as a question.

Surely there are as many reflective imperatives as there are reflective questions, so we should look first of all to the questions themselves. Such questions are: What is art? What is government? What is science? What is history? What is religion? Such questions are embarrassingly general (even more so one like: "What is life?"). However, we pose one reflectively only on the basis of a prior involvement in the subject. We have been caught up by art, by government, by science, by history, or by religion, and we now wonder about the character and significance of the involvement. The general question comes upon us only as the overall thrust of a host of detail questions.

But why, you might ask, should we wonder about something in which we are already involved? It is not enough to enjoy art, participate in government, pursue science, study history, worship our God? What is there to wonder about? What more is there to desire?

Let us not be seduced by the easy answer we sometimes proffer to university administrators or to our colleagues in other departments. Reflection *on* a subject serves ill to initiate ourselves or others *into* a subject. And it is at least questionable whether we improve our official standing as artists, politicians, scientists, historians, or Christians by studying philosophy books — as though they were "how-to" manuals. If anything, reflection makes matters, and so our own position, more difficult.

If we wonder, we do so at least partly because we suspect and admit that we have missed something. We are caught up in the matter (e.g. art, government, science), it speaks to us, and yet we wonder whether we are fully with it, whether we hear all that it says. We are both within the matter and not with it — as when we are unmistakably caught up in a love affair but are baffled by it all. In short, a reflective question propels us into the matter for a "second time" — this time in search of the plenitude we have hitherto missed and might well continue to miss.

There is after all, then — in a sense — one imperative that reflective works articulate and embody: that of re-entry. Whatever its subject, a genuinely reflective consideration must bring the urgency

of re-entrance into view or within hearing, and it must embody the movement of re-entrance. A reflective work makes for difficult reading because it makes no sense except as it changes, perhaps even reverses our ordinary direction of movement. We ask and follow a reflective question about something only as we discover the necessity to enter what we might otherwise simply circumvent.

4.

The imagery of being in or moving into something contravenes the popular view according to which reflection places us outside the subject in question, providing us with a non-involving bird's-eye view of affairs, a viewpoint that naturally leads one to assume the role of grand designer if not actual ruler of affairs. This popular view catches a half-truth in flight. When we reflect on something (art, government, science, history, religion, life itself) we find ourselves outside. The matter withdraws from us, we doubt whether it is showing its full face to us. But this outside position we do not choose, we are cast into it. It is not a position of knowledge, it is one of ignorance. It means for us not a fulfillment, but rather a lack. Furthermore, the admission of this lack carries with it at least a suspicion and maybe even an implication that others are no better off than we are. Thus it comes as no surprise that the popular view sees the philosopher as one who stands at a distance from real matters and from other people, too.

You might ask, then: How can a reflective discourse embody a re-entry, a movement into the matter it questions? Once we start talking (reading or writing) about something in a questioning way, do we not leave the matter behind us (in the past) or simply prepare for it (in the future)?

Remaining on the outside *is* a hazard, perhaps the chief risk we take upon ourselves in reflecting. Although the greatest works in our tradition, both philosophical and poetical, do re-enter, i.e. embody re-entry for the reader, the moment we strike out on our own, as readers or writers, we may well find ourselves stranded—momentarily at the very least, but (alas) perhaps also permanently. We need not dwell on this danger here, since it is evident enough in any reflective reading or writing. On the other hand, we might indeed dwell for a moment on the marvel that a work does sometimes actually meet its own

imperative and take us along with it, back into matters themselves. How can this be so?

The question is one of language, of our linguistic capacity and responsibility. A good deal of our everyday talk is directed to what has been and to what will be: such talk is in a sense alienated from its subject, and we generally admit the alienation. If I fell into a well yesterday, I may speak of it in full awareness that my comments sketch out only a weak copy of the event and its terror. If, on the other hand, I talk about what the weather will be like or what I plan to do tomorrow, I am aware that only time will tell in the one case, and that actions will have to follow words in the other. By analogy, it would seem that the sustained talk of a reflective work places us at a distance, with only a tentative copy of the matter itself.

Is there no way our talk can be congruent, coincident, concomitant with its subject? On the non-reflective plane examples of congruency are in fact available. A jury foreman delivering a verdict of guilty embodies his point in his talk—the accused's being guilty is here *made* along with the utterance. Similarly, when someone promises to help me out tomorrow, the obligation of the person is made along with his words. Verdicts and promises have a *performative* dimension. They *make* the present in which they occur, or something in the present, as well as casting light on the past or arousing an expectation about the future. In any case, performative discourse is not a weak copy of a “real thing” elsewhere and therefore cannot be asked if it corresponds to such a thing. In short, performative discourse does not pass on information or predict events: it embodies its own meaning.

Now, entry into a subject matter (that of art, politics, and so on) is a performance. The question, then, is how reflective language, as a re-entry, can be performative, can coincide with what it otherwise seems merely to talk about. The experience of reading (or writing) reflective works does make us aware, often painfully so, that we cannot remain bystanders to the discourse: if we try to do so, the work magically vanishes—as Eurydice vanishes forever when Orpheus cannot resist turning to assure himself that she is there. We have to *preserve* a reflective work—by turning toward the matter itself, by allowing ourselves to be questioned, and by following up an

imperative. But to preserve the reflection of a work we must do something more: we must re-assemble the matter, articulate it, put it all together once again, reconstruct it, reconstrue it. If these formulations appear too radical, we need only think of Plato's *Republic* or Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the one explicitly re-constructing the polis, the other quite blatantly re-construing the entire modern enterprise of scientific knowledge. However, these very examples raise a further question: Does the reconstruction necessary in such reading (for that matter, also writing, listening, or speaking reflectively) constitute an *experience* of, an encounter with, an involvement in and so re-entry into the matter—or does it occur simply as a fiction, a tale told in abstraction from the matter, providing at most a kind of plan for the future or even just a plain escape from actual affairs?

If reflection is not to mean planning or escaping, much less describing what has been, refuting what others have said, or imbibing the achievements of our forefathers, it must indeed constitute an experience of the matter, so that in reading a reflective work we embark on something like what is nowadays called performative discourse: the matter must present itself in and by virtue of the work. If we remain convinced that such a presentation contravenes the very nature of language, we likely find such works saying very little if anything to us. To convince ourselves that and how it *is* possible we need perhaps only recall the power and place of *recollection* in experience itself. For the present purpose a few pointers can suffice. In *any* case we experience something only with great difficulty. Our first encounter with a matter is generally one in which the matter *eludes* us. We generally do not experience matters (of art, government, science, history, or religion, to resume the examples) except as elusive and haunting. Or at least those who reflect admit as much. And *one* way of genuinely experiencing matters is to face the withdrawal and the haunting explicitly, re-collecting rather than shunning the matter so that it will consent, on occasion, to re-present itself. A reflective work offers us the opportunity to do precisely this.

5.

Dialogue, question, imperative, recollection. What happened to *answers*? Are not answers the stock-in-trade of books? And even if questioning is already a way of facing, does not a given question pave the way toward a definite answer? And have not the great reflective books of the past as a matter of fact provided answers that have profoundly influenced their posterity, including ourselves?

Answers generally do follow upon questions. However, the answers we discover upon reading a reflective work differ remarkably from what we might have expected. Ordinarily, an answer might provide some information about what is in fact already settled: we ask what somebody's telephone number is, and the directory or the operator offers us an answer. Or it can instantiate conviction about what might happen or be done: we ask how we should proceed in the face of certain problems arising in the field of environmental protection or energy supply, and seek an answer that, if adopted, will prove itself in the course of events. Whether as providing information or instantiating conviction, answers of these sorts arise out of questions we ourselves ask prior to the discourse that answers them.

One peculiarity of reflective works is that the answers arising in them generally do not correspond to questions that we normally ask. Thus we might even believe, at least on occasion, that the answers provided by a reflective work speak to no important issue and come upon us only gratuitously, as when we are forced to hear a lecture on the finer points of some topic of no interest to us at all (perhaps, say, wigwam construction). However, a second thought reveals that the questions go unasked only and precisely because we believe we already have the answers. In fact, our first experience of a reflective work is likely to take the form of a clash between what we took to be self-evident (our own answer) and the answers (really the questions) enunciated by the work. Why, we would often like to say, do philosophers quarrel so much?

Whatever our first impressions, a reflective work basically supplies the questions underlying the answers that already crowd in upon us. In doing so, it may either undergird or undermine the answers. But it does something else as well: it shifts attention away

from the having of answers to the facing of matters. Contrary to what we might expect, these two are not only at odds with one another, but asymmetrically so. Having an answer independently of its proper question means precisely that the matter is settled, i.e. that we are not facing it. However, once facing the matter itself, answers may and often do evolve. So long as we stay with a matter, each answer really dissolves for the sake of experience itself. But once an answer congeals in and by itself, it is no friend of reflection.

What, you might ask, does it mean to say that questionless answers crowd in upon us? Those typically doing so might be: we should cultivate the inner as distinct from the outer life, we either speak objectively or subjectively, we should learn to think about what we are doing, it is desirable to start out freshly on a new life whenever possible, democratic (or authoritarian) government does most justice in human life, God created the universe, our own salvation requires that we love our neighbor, the course of history is guided by the idea of progress, science tells us the way things are, everybody works to gain a position of advantage over his fellows, artworks express the artist's personality, movies are meant to distract us from our daily worries. Normally, such answers determine in large part the ways we anticipate life, the ways we get going on things, the ways we start out each morning. They are ready-made answers that, unlike information and prediction, touch upon the whole of affairs rather than on parts. If we ask where they come from, we can only answer: they are handed over to us, they form our tradition. In fact, what appears as a platitude today might well lie deep in the thoughts articulated by a reflective work many centuries ago. Culture itself, if we drop our guard, can become little more than a pretty collection of ready-made answers, hardly differing from platitudes. Unlike information, which we must often seek out afresh, our general bearings toward matters (of art, government, science, history, religion) we already inherit. Apart from occasional collapses, these general bearings function in one of two ways: either as securing for us a safe passage around a matter, or as occasioning the kinds of questions that bring us face to face with their source, the matter itself. In reflection, then, we look to any answer not to endorse it, but to supply it with its relevant question. What we thereby lose in the way of security we

gain in the way of the matter itself, i.e. whatever can actually happen in art, government, science, history, religion, and so on.

Thus, while it appears that great works—those written by Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Kant, and many others—generate answers, from our standpoint it would be more accurate to say that they have *left* us with answers, better yet that they have *saddled* us with pre-made understandings of art, history, government, science, religion. In reading these works themselves, however, we find that the answers with which we are familiar dissolve in favor of the questions. For instance, Plato's dialogues reassert themselves as “better” than the notes we may have taken on them during previous readings, and certainly better than the traditional summaries of them that we first hear.

These observations still leave us with the question: What is the status of reflective answers? Surely they are not illusory, since our notes do not lie; nor are they incidental excrescences, since the tradition that weighs on us so heavily articulates precisely these answers and nothing much else. Even if they prove their secondary status by dissolving during the reading of the works that generated them, they must have *some* legitimacy in themselves.

Let us remember: a philosophical work *performs*—and we, too, so long as we are genuinely reading it. A performance is a making of the moment, one in which we discover a whole affair (together with its “past”) coming together, things falling into place, our pre-established habits (bearings) dissolving for the sake of an exposure to the matter itself, now emergent in its freshness. This coalescence converging on a matter that then emerges in its own right “for the first time”—this event generates a vision of art, or statesmanship, of history, of science, of the sacred. In articulating the whole as questionable, we encounter, we “see”: a vision is in the making and so becomes made. Unlike, say, Lao-tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, Western works deliberately construct their visions, so that, when we cease questioning, these remain as leftovers possibly reminding us of reflection. Such leftovers are the answers that we thereafter associate with the works we have read and that crowd in upon us as strains in our tradition.

We might well wonder, though: What makes some performances, and also their leftovers, so powerful, and others less so? This question defies response, since it suggests that there might be a recipe for reflection. However, from the considerations so far advanced we might extract *one* pre-condition of reflective power. For any great work articulates as questionable not just anything, and not even basically the answers left over from previous reflection. Rather it articulates the questionableness of its own contemporary situation. For instance, Plato's *Republic* gathers up the dilemmas of the Hellenic polity; Augustine's *Confessions* gathers up the dilemmas of Christian worship in a collapsing pagan empire; and Kant's three *Critiques* gather up the various disjointed efforts to know the universe operationally while also affirming the centrality of human autonomy. The more uncompromising the gathering, the more unflinching the facing of the matter itself. And the more unflinching, the more powerful. What we experience in the reading of such works is primarily the gathering, the facing—not really the confusions of post-Periclean Athens, the conflict of Christianity with the pagan form of life, or the struggles of establishing the new science in consonance with human dignity. Great works are constructed so that we experience the doing, not primarily the done. In the doing, there evolves a vision of the contemporary—of our own situation. In the done, we detect only ready-made answers—to old situations.

6.

One last question: *When* do we read a reflective work? Reflection by its very nature is something we do *afterwards*. That is, we are first caught up in art works, in political action, in scientific investigation, in historical enquiry, in worship of the sacred, or whatever; only then do we find ourselves able to, *called* to reflect, namely when the whole of our involvement comes back upon us, impressing us with wonder. In this single word “wonder” we can detect the various dimensions of reflection: we do not know, yet the matter itself demands attention anyway, holding something out for us. In short, reflection signals a moment of return. Reflective reading occurs always later in life, so that very young and inexperienced readers of reflective works in fact occupy themselves with something else, rather than with articulating the return: they might memorize the

salient tenets of each doctrine, comparing them along the way with the tenets of other works, or they might reduce the arguments to a form void of real reference, exercising themselves on the logic of this form.

Yet there is another, less obvious sense in which reflective reading comes late. When first perusing a philosophical work, we find ourselves called into question, the ground is taken from under our feet. On first reading we do not know what to do with the work—even after we have turned the last page. If anything is to come of the reading, we must re-read. In the case of the greatest works, we *keep* re-reading (one of the few rewards of being a professor is that one has ample excuse for doing so). But in another sense we re-read without even picking up the book: the work comes back to haunt us. More or less lost while reading, we reflect more fully on a work afterwards, by ourselves or in conversation with others. At such times we discover the strains sounding in our ears, the melody making sense as a whole: “Ah, yes, *now* I see what the book was saying!” Perhaps one day we even feel secure in our understanding of the book. But then most likely the bloom of its youth is gone, if not ours. In any case, we read it no longer.

In another sense, we read for the future. Just as we must plan ahead, so we may read ahead. We read books now so that later we may have something to understand, something that can come back for understanding. On the other hand, the insistence that reflective works make perfect sense on first reading precludes any serious reading of them: neither impatient students nor cranky old professors genuinely read.

7.

If all this is so about *reading* reflective works, the task and the difficulty of *writing* becomes clear: the reflective writer must indeed say something, work out a complex of apparent assertions, while really inserting the reader into a complex of questions, and these not as idle but as already in force, removing the ground from under the reader's feet while at the same time bringing the matter itself forward. Thus the reflective writer must develop an art of writing—an art designed to take the reader on a voyage that he would normally be loath to contemplate, the losses being all too evident and the gains anything but evident.

Notes

Perhaps the most truthful answer to the question, “Where did you find the material for your reflections?” takes the general form: “ x years of experience,” here x = one's age at the time. Certainly any author's thoughts on the event of reading stem from the agonies and delights experienced by himself and others. Also, there is today the sad experience that the “humanities” have lost their foothold in our institutions. Such experiences give special impetus to the perusal of a number of remarkable works on reading:

Marcel Proust's *On Reading* (New York, 1971; orig., 1906) remains a classic on the subject: a close and crafted analysis of reading, starting with novels but applying equally well to the reading of philosophical works: “[Books] for the author could be called ‘Conclusions’ and for the reader ‘Incitements.’ We feel quite truly that our wisdom begins where that of the author ends, and we would like to have him give us answers, while all he can do is give us desires” (p. 35). “Reading is at the threshold of spiritual life; it can introduce us to it; it does not constitute it” (p. 39).

Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen, 1960 & 1972; there exists a rather poor English translation), although slow to get going, provides the most complete analysis of reading tradition-bearing works—ones that obviously can speak to us, but do so through questions and answers that do not quite belong to us now:

Whoever wants to understand must get behind what is said, and do so in a questioning way. He must understand it as an answer to a question, to that to which the answer is indeed an answer. Having in this way gotten *behind* what is said, we have necessarily gone *beyond* it in our questioning. Indeed, we understand a text only in the sense that we achieve a horizon of questioning, an horizon that, as such, necessarily circumscribes other possible answers as well. Accordingly, the meaning of a proposition is relative to the question to which the proposition is an answer. But this entails that the meaning necessarily goes beyond what is said in the proposition. The logic of the humanities is, as becomes evident from these considerations, a logic of questioning. (p. 352)

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York, 1962; orig. 1945) often pauses to comment on reading as actually instituting a “presence in the phenomenal world” (p. 182) and on language as allowing for “a dialogue constituting between the other person and myself a common

ground,” namely a “common world” into which we find ourselves “freed” (p. 354). See the Preface and Chapter 6 of Part One (The Body as Expression, and Speech); also pp. 354 ff., 388 ff., and 400 ff. Central is perhaps the distinction between “speech that is already spoken” (*la parole parlée*) and “speech that is speaking” (*la parole parlante*)—pp. 196-7.

Jean-Paul Sartre's *What is Literature?* (New York, 1965; orig., 1947) and Roland Barthes' *Writing Degree Zero* (New York, 1968; orig., 1953) approach the question of reading through another one: What is the text (the “author”) up to? Both argue that the act of writing and so also the act of reading take us into, manifest us within, our historical situation—normatively, one must add, since either the writer or the reader can “use” the ink to deflect the claims of his situation.

Ernesto Grassi has argued in many articles and books that the abandonment of the long educational tradition based on rhetoric has entailed the demeaning of language to the status of a mere means (for scientific thinking, i.e. operation), so that we grow up asking not how we can make things happen *in* our speech (reading and writing, speaking and listening) but how we can “use” language for arriving someplace else—how we can, in effect, get rid of speech acts and get along simply with a language that is as anonymous as it is timeless and placeless. Several of Grassi's essays have been translated into English; see “Rhetoric and Philosophy,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 9 (1976), pp. 200-16, “Can Rhetoric Provide a New Basis for Philosophy? The Humanist Tradition,” Parts I and II, *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 11 (1978), pp. 1-18 and 75-97.

Martin Heidegger's works, both those working out a fundamental vision of the human condition and those offering unusual interpretations of texts from the tradition, have in one way or another inspired all the authors cited (except, of course, Proust) and have given impetus to literary critics as well, e.g., Hans Robert Jauss (Konstanz) and Jean Starobinski (Geneva). The fairly well translated collection of Heidegger's essays entitled *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York, 1971) makes especially good reading.

Obviously, all the thinkers and scholars so far mentioned agree that reading reflective works is a performative act. The question they pose is how such performance comes about and what it entails. Perhaps equally obvious is that the British school of philosophy, which has commented extensively on “performative discourse,” has gone out of its way to confine all our linguistic involvements to the ordinary world of ordinary language, reviving this languishing wraith only long enough to allow it to do its job in some “language game.” For instance, J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford, 1962) shows very well how certain speech acts actually

decide, or call into being, their own intentions. What life there may be in this work, despite its confinement to our pre-reading world of concerns, noticeably retires once again in its more “rigorous” sequel, John R. Searle’s *Speech Acts* (Cambridge, 1970).

Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford, 1953) embodies its own conception of reading, and then also comments on it. Any genuine reading is like that of a kitchen recipe or an instruction manual: one dimension of an articulation of affairs in a phenomenal context. However helpful they may be for contemplating the phenomena of pre-reflective reading, Wittgenstein’s works tempt readers to conclude that *reflective* reading serves only to ensure that everydayness remains in force—so that, if everydayness cannot be enforced in the reading of the works of others, these works must be dismissed as nonsense:

For philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*. (§38) ...if the words “language,” “experience,” “world,” have a use, it must be as humble a one as that of the words “table,” “lamp,” “door.” (§97) ... we must stick to the subjects of everyday thinking.... (§106) What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use. (§116) The confusions that occupy us arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing its work. (§132) What I want to teach is: to transform an instance of non-evident nonsense into an evident one. (§464)

This conception of our involvement in language has had an often salutary influence on the ambitions of writers. However, its influence on *readers* has proven even more influential. How might we read the works of our reflective tradition in a Wittgensteinian manner? Can we here bring “words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use”? What *is* everyday use? If we *presume* everyday use, are we not committing ourselves to criticizing, to negating traditional works, to detecting and transforming each “instance of non-evident nonsense into an evident one”?

Wittgenstein’s work responds to a wider conception of philosophy. This conception stipulates that, as philosophers, we tackle “problems.” From this one determination, it *follows* that we establish or refute positions, entering into controversy with adversaries and coming to at least tentative conclusions. This conception is, of course, self-confirming and does fit what many professors and students in fact do. Wittgenstein himself, however, argues that a philosophical problem demands no solution, but rather a reduction of its terms to everyday processes. Philosophy as anything but the

skill and practice of this reduction is illusion. As he says (§133): “The genuine discovery is one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.”

Henry W. Johnstone’s *Philosophy and Argument* (State College, 1959) takes issue with the more simplistic endorsements of the prevalent conceptions of philosophy. In the main, this work argues quite correctly that, if a debate ever come to anything, one contestant picks up on and works with the assumptions of another and thereby brings this other around to see the implications of his own position. However, Johnstone’s work endorses the basic model: philosophy as establishing or refuting a position with regard to a problem. Even if we are willing to work with another’s assumptions, we cannot read a book to get the author to see the light or shadow to which these assumptions commit him. The most we can do, as readers, is practice ourselves on spotting the assumptions of the author, a laudable activity in itself but one that hardly does justice to the experience of reading great works.

As Gadamer points out in detail (pp. 357-59), a “problem” is what we have left over when we no longer question, i.e. no longer find ourselves questioned. Indeed, philosophy as a “history of problems” arose only very recently, and precisely when philosophy lost its hold in our institutions. Furthermore, in reflective reading we find ourselves positioned: our own pre-reflective position is undone and the supposed position of the author dissolves in favor of an imperative to enter. And when we enter we *do* “do battle,” but not most fundamentally with other people. There is plenty to do simply in dispersing our own (albeit tradition founded) ready-made answers. The battle is then one between the claims of *doxa* and those of the matter itself—not one between positions. Thus there can be no conclusions—only more books to read (or to write). Whereas Wittgenstein advises us to read and write so that we have no need to do either any more, reflective reading, being performative at its core, makes us unable to stop. Perhaps both possibilities become evident from a single experience: that reflective works do not do the work for us. Thus every book must be left behind. For, as Proust says, it can only place us at the threshold. Rightly understood, each leads us to the next.

2

Talking

First published as "Talking" in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, xviii, iv (1985), pp. 216-35. For the present edition, I have combed through the original version and introduced minor stylistic improvements.

We talk all the time. That is, one of us says something and another hears it in the course of getting things done or passing one another in the intervals between. Yet we do not always succeed in talking *with* one another, and much of the time we might not even desire to do so. Sometimes, however, we do succeed, and other times we so desire but fail. Sometimes, perhaps in talking with our parents and later our children, with a friend in a pub or a colleague at work, something of significance transpires in the talk that is memorable, that might even set standards for further talk. And whatever the significance of the content, the very fact that we talked *with* another, the fact that we actually focused on something together, may engender wonder. Correlatively, the more profoundly we have talked with one another, the less easily we will settle for talk that falls short of such dialogue.

In general, reflective thought and discourse arise about something because that something occasionally works — and often does not. That cooperative human enterprise at times come off and at times does not, that some things humanly made can stand at the center of our lives rather than simply pass through them, that sometimes we seem actually to know something whereas much of our pretension to knowledge is shameful sham, that some written works embody rather than simply serve life, that there are occasions when the entire human condition and, correlatively, all creation, appear sacred and elicit devotion, while much piety dwindles into bigotry — these and suchlike contrasts lead us to think about the difference, and so give birth to philosophy of politics, of art, of knowledge, of literature, of religion, or whatever. As used to be said, reflection begins in wonder: in retrospect we behold the plenitude with astonishment and with gratitude, and ask ourselves how we might maintain it. In an age such as ours, bent upon solidifying frameworks rather than liberating the possibilities within the frameworks, we might well understand Heidegger's emendation: reflection begins in horror at the prospects of vacuity in politics, in art work, in science, in literature, in religion, or whatever. But whether in wonder or in horror, reflection genuinely begins and continues only as the contrast between plenitude and

vacuity draws us into a long, hard, and second look at the phenomena themselves.

So: What happens when we really talk with one another? Talking that manifests the with, rather than the indifferent talk evident in conducting our business and in passing the time. And talk as distinct from the speech that is written alone and in silence and that should be read alone and without the interruptions of others.

We talk with one another only when we can play with what we are talking about—with a question, with a proposal, with something real, or perhaps even with the reality of the real. Really to talk with one another, we must both speak and listen—simultaneously, even though our mouths might not all operate at the same time: just as football players on the field all play the game at once, even though only one carries the ball at any one time. Thus we do not talk to one another when one or the other persists either in asserting himself (as a professional seeking personal victory at all costs) or in affirming the speaker (as a student or disciple adulating a master). We talk with one another only on those occasions where what we are talking about hovers ahead of us and gradually takes shape for all of us—where we in effect discover only at the end of the discussion the topic that started the discussion.

A good listener, we say, must tolerate the opinions of others, must be open to new ideas. Yet tolerance and openness in themselves may be only social courtesies: one remains silent while the other speaks, and one continues to respect the speaker himself even if he seems to utter nonsense, i.e. what appears to make no sense at the time. Such courtesy may come as a welcome relief, given the hostility that often arises in discussions. But tolerance and openness with regard to our interlocutors do not decide whether we are talking with one another, whether a genuine conversation takes place. I can discipline myself in such courtesies without really entering into dialogue with others. Courteous comportment relates me to my fellows, not to the topic of discourse; it is a social rather than an ontological virtue.

We really talk with one another only when what we are talking about gradually comes into view, within hearing, for both or all us. Such discourse strains us, takes time. In effect, we cannot possibly

know what we are talking about. The virtue required to sustain one in such talk is not so much tolerance of others as tolerance of oneself: of one's own ignorance. A person absolutely incapable of living in his own ignorance, his own uncertainty, his own insecurity, can never talk with another, no matter how well he practices the social virtues. To toy with an idea, a thought, a proposal, a question, or an answer, to be open to that which it frames, one can hardly presume to know in advance what will come about or come into view—any more than in a boxing match or a football game. And if what does come about, come into view or within hearing, bodes any future, there may be no time, unlike in a boxing match or a football game, at which we could rightly claim to know absolutely what we are talking about. Genuine talk sustains us precisely inasmuch as it remains promising—provides us with a future as well as with a present, something to be pursued as much as something to be attained.

If I already know what I am talking about, I can speak only to inform, and listen only to correct: I cannot toy with anything, I cannot talk with another. The need for ignorance, for a willingness to live within one's ignorance, uncertainty, and insecurity, accounts for the rarity of good discussion. A father cannot talk with his child unless he can credit the child with seeing or hearing, thinking or imagining something he himself has so far missed. A professor can talk with a student only if he credits the student with insight that he himself lacks. Colleagues, academic or otherwise, have the greatest difficulty in talking with one another, since they severally owe their positions precisely to their claims to knowledge. On the other hand, we become friends with those with whom we can talk, with those to whom we can admit our ignorance freely and fearlessly, and whom we can generally credit with having ideas, thoughts, proposals worthy of play. Perhaps lovers go farther than friends inasmuch as each finds himself only when fully and unreservedly engaged in the talk of the other. Yet how much does talk fail in all these instances! Parents do not so much talk as bark, while children whine. Teachers lecture or assign, and students pout or fawn. Colleagues bicker or resort to chitchat, good-natured or otherwise. And lovers reproach one another.

But what is this ignorance that seems to condition our talking with one another? Certainly not just a lack of information, a gap in

the store of facts at our disposal. Precisely to talk well with a child a parent must know something, say, the rules of hygiene or of social conduct, the names and properties of plants and animals. And if a teacher is hired to teach Greek philosophy he must know what Plato said. We would even like to have something at our fingertips that can contribute to the focus of our talk with friends and lovers. The ignorance necessary for talking with one another, for playing with ideas, thoughts, proposals, questions, must be an ignorance of what might be made of it in the course of the talk. While some few do seem to experience difficulty in owning up to their ignorance about what is established (facts, names, calculations, customs, achievements of peers and ancestors), most do not. The greatest difficulty arises in owning up to one's ignorance of what to make of what is established, of the way it may take on unsuspected significance, emerge differently, appear in a new light as time goes on.

We can, of course, lack information: we may fail to inform ourselves or be informed about data and statistics, names of things and quotations from the works of authors, rules of human behavior and patterns of natural events; and even if such information has at one time come our way it may slip our minds, remain or become confused in the passage of time. When we speak of ignorance we likely have some such lack or distortion of information in view. And sometimes our talk with one another does depend on this common variety of ignorance. On such occasions talking with one another means, at least in part, informing one another. Here a good listener carefully heeds and accurately registers the formulations of another, while a good speaker must not only have the information at his fingertips but also enunciate clearly and develop a sensitivity to the listener's ability and disposition to receive the information.

But what about the *other* kind of ignorance? How can we genuinely distinguish between an ignorance of information and an ignorance of what to make of the information? Or does this other ignorance simply invite us to *organize* information, as teachers may expect their pupils to do on an examination? Is making something out of information simply another skill we may learn, a kind of knowledge that only practice could effect, and that would defy outright transfer from speaker to listener? If so, then we would have even less

occasion, need, or ability to talk *with* one another: we could only put on a display or witness one; there would be no dialogue.

If parents and children, teachers and students, friends, colleagues and lovers can indeed talk profoundly *with* one another, and if such talk presupposes a profound distinction between ignorance of information and ignorance of what to make of information, such talk must reflect a duality within the human condition itself: it must depend and feed upon, but also bring to light and nourish a distinction between how things easily and ordinarily and therefore quite "rightly" appear and how things arduously and extra-ordinarily and therefore (from the ordinary standpoint) quite "wrongly" appear. When we finally do talk with one another, things appear differently. The precondition for such talk is that we let ourselves in on that difference, that we cultivate rather than extirpate it. Yet the difference so much conditioning our talk escapes any effort to determine it fully in advance. In advance, we can only make clear the first appearance, not the reappearance. Thus we participate in such talk ignorantly. In short, we can only play with the proposal initiating the discussion, accepting our ignorance of the outcome. We must exercise our imagination long before we exercise our judgement.

Some of the most reflective discourse, what used to be called "primary philosophy," concentrates on the duality of the human condition itself, the duality conditioning any good talk. In philosophizing profoundly with one another we ask how it is that our ordinary lives, perceptions, thoughts, encounters might be pregnant with the extraordinary, how the pregnancy might run its course, and what may come of it for good or for ill. However, we can see the difference already operating in pre-philosophical ways, each of which sustains one kind of talk.

For instance, discussions of one type hinge upon the distinction between publicly announced policy within institutions (within, say, a university, a state, or a church) and behind-the-scenes intentions or power struggles. How much bar-room or club-room talk, perhaps even dining-room talk draws upon this version of the difference between appearance and reality! At a certain stage of life, generally sometime in our youth or again in old age, we become, as one says,

cynical, believing that the announced and the intended differ absolutely.

Discussions of another type draw upon the difference between the current (easy or “shallow”) ways of receiving the accomplishments of others and the pointed (difficult or “deep”) ways of understanding their accomplishments. There are current or exoteric ways of receiving the results of science, the doctrines of the church, the ideologies of nations, the texts of poets and philosophers. Much intellectual discussion explores the possibility of more pointed or esoteric ways of engaging in what these various results, doctrines, ideologies, or texts bespeak.

Yet a third kind of talk depends on the distinction between the way things happen to be and the way they should be. We talk to one another about birch trees or houses or human beings, examining given instances and commenting on how these instances should have developed. Or we look at an institution such as our own university and distinguish between the shape it has in fact taken and the shape it should rather take. With the fall of teleology intellectuals have shied away from talking about inborn purposes and have preferred to reduce the distinction between the is and the ought to the individual’s concern for his own integrity and desires. Notwithstanding this historical reduction to subjectivity, much good discussion among artisans and professionals presumes that our conception of a better tree, a better house, a better human being, or a better university has a foothold in the nature of things, and that our job is to help given instances of, say, birch trees, live up to our grounded conception of them.

Now, the life of such discussions depends upon our willingness to uphold the difference between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Talk about the discrepancy between announced policy and inner intentions turns sour the moment we assume that the two should somehow coincide immediately: such talk can only issue in disgust and resentment, not a discovery of one’s own participation in and responsibility for institutional life. Similarly, we implicitly deny the foundations of discourse if we assume that the deep or esoteric understanding of scientific work, of church doctrine, of political ideology, or of literary texts should be laid bare once and for all and

for all to see: that it should become exoteric. And all talk would come to an end if birch trees, houses, human beings, and universities automatically lived up to their potentialities. Instead of aspiring to eliminate the difference, a good talk builds it out, attends carefully to our involvement in the ordinary and our destiny to make something out of the ordinary.

It would follow that, when we really talk with one another, our talk is not so much *about* something as *of* it. We do not so much determine how things already are as make something out of prevailing determinations, show how these determinations open us out onto something. Such talk takes time: there are three things that we must talk out, the two sides of the difference and then the interplay between the two. But it not only takes time, it changes our experience of it. Time comes to mean something else when we engage in a good discussion. For one thing, we do not look at our watches: the passage of time goes unnoticed. However, in enacting the drama between the ordinary and the extra-ordinary, our talk becomes decidedly temporal in another sense: the established reverberates with the unestablished, the settled appears unsettled, the already rocks with the possible. In a word, the past becomes our context for the future, the future becomes our promise for the past, and a presence evolves in which both we ourselves and our topic can fully be, and be in unison, for the duration. Our talking with one another brings out the temporality of the human condition in its duality and in our responsibility. Clocks no longer measure the time of such talk.

It would also follow that *what* we are talking about can only become and remain a pressing issue in language — namely, in the talking, although also in reading and writing. Information, results of research, doctrines of the church, ideologies of nations, even the texts of poets and philosophers stand independently of our own talk and speech: we can refer to them in their independence. But we cannot refer to the sense we make of these, we can only talk it up, create it, maintain it. What we say can make sense only in the saying of it — once, that is, our talk enacts the drama, embodies for a while the difference, the ordinary and the extra-ordinary, the duality of the human condition itself, the past as a pregnancy, the future as a recovery, and the present as a midwifery. If to be human is to be a

zoon logon echon, to be alive by virtue of language, it is perhaps because we find ourselves ultimately destined to create and preserve a sense of various things that only make sense in our talk with another, either face to face or in reading and writing: because we *are* in making our life in language as much as or even more than in making a living with our hands. Such linguistic making, whether in our dealings with our children, our parents, our students, our teachers, our colleagues, friends, or lovers, gives momentary shape to a coalescence of past and future that has the magical property of falling apart the moment we cease putting it together—unlike, say, a house, which only gradually deteriorates once we have ceased maintaining it.

In short, talking with one another is an art that we must learn and exercise. Playing with proposals, in ignorance of where they might lead, we must still create and preserve a life in language. And we easily fail. Indeed, as in any art, whether that of talking, that of woodcutting, or that of governing an institution, we more easily point out the sure roads to failure, while success invites participation rather than description.

One elementary way of going wrong is to withdraw into the claim that the most important things defy discourse. Perhaps this claim, really a frustration, builds upon but distorts an insight into the conditions of genuine talk. If by “effable” we mean “capable of fixed and final formulation,” then, paradoxically, anything worth talking about with one another is ineffable. Talking is something we can or must do. No genuine talk puts an end to talking, it always marks a beginning. Thus we cannot formulate anything of significance in a way that can force our interlocutor to agree or applaud. Quite the contrary, in genuinely talking with one another we already encourage in our interlocutor the exercise of his freedom. And we even find that what we ourselves say we must say over and over again, in varying ways. Anything definite today becomes indefinite tomorrow. The life we create in language is temporal: we must maintain it in time.

Another way of going wrong is to insist that our interlocutor take the entire responsibility for his proposals. This is perhaps the sin of old age, or at least of fatigue. The tired speaker lards everything he says with a heavy irony, throwing the ball so much into the camp of the listener that no play is possible. On the other hand, the tired

listener lies back and presumes throughout that the speaker’s job is to work out and defend a proposal that he, the listener, can then examine for cracks or leaks, exacerbating rather than mending those discovered. Such discourse we all recognize as more or less sordid, and the implied or manifest disrespect for the autonomy of one’s interlocutor may lead us to appreciate the social virtue of courtesy. However, both heavy irony and nasty criticism presuppose a solipsism of discourse, and therefore violate the very conditions of talking with one another. Both speaker and listener are totally responsible, and the realization of this responsibility begins and stays at home.

A third sin against dialogue is to make out the extra-ordinary as a mere complicated or camouflaged ordinary—to argue that the intent to talk science, to talk religion, to talk politics, to talk art, to talk literature, or whatever, is, most genuinely, to highlight “common sense,” what goes on “all the time,” what “everyone knows.” After all, a good talk reveals something. We take up a topic, e.g. scientific research into chemical bonding, the conditions for salvation as laid down in the Gospels, the claims of modern democracy: from the immediate standpoint of the discussants, these topics are given, i.e. there is a common or ordinary way in which the results, the doctrines, the ideologies appear at any given moment to given people in history. We may then, in the course of the discussion, discover that these “common places,” like any datum, are already “syntheses” of some sort: that they are as we have already categorized them (as Kant was bent on arguing out), that we can know them (as Vico insisted). Indeed, in a good talk we can first come to the fullest realization, if only for a moment, of the synthesis—because, for the first time, we are the ones who are now making something out of it, discovering in the process that a given only *is* in such making. However, this discovery is only one of the many to which a dialogue can lead, more a platform for launching other and higher flights. For in talking with one another genuinely, in playing with proposals intently and informedly, but also ignorantly, we discover too the field on which we are playing, the topic of the discourse, emerging as again new rather than simply old and established, as sustaining rather than simply prevailing, as the prior place in which we have resided but without acknowledging its priority over us and claim upon us. Nature re-emerges as demanding certain kinds of responsible (synthetic) efforts;

all creation re-emerges as ultimately sacred; our social and political context re-emerges as entailing our current participation. In all cases, the place, our “environment,” comes into its own in varying and ever-renewed ways, whether as nature, creation, or community.

Our ancestors understood the task of talking as the task of discovering a topic, a place (in Greek) or coming into a locus, inventing it (in Latin). What we tend to forget is that the discovery or invention of a topic or a locus occurs as a resurgence of the place itself—no longer as ordinary or common (witness the change of the word “commonplace” from “shared focus” to “banal remark”). Any effort to reduce the discovery or invention to the ordinary, namely, by trying to show that whatever might be said simply builds upon or distorts “common sense” (in the contemporary sense) bespeaks an effort to put an end to the talk—a drive to talk only so long as somebody happens to advance a “weird” proposal challenging such reduction. Wittgenstein has proven most adept at such reduction in the intellectual domain, improving upon the more common propensity simply to assert and demand it. In claiming that revealing is basically unconcealing, Heidegger re-interprets, in rather forceful terms, Aristotle’s claim that the self-generating vision (*eidos*) inherent in any topic is prior to its initial presentation (*hyle*), and Hegel’s point that insight requires us to *aufheben* whatever simply prevails (go beyond it only while also retaining it). To paraphrase Heraclitus (fragment 89), while much talk lets us slip back into our established realms, a good talk leads us out into a realm, topic, or place that focuses joint attention because it is emerging. Or: talking provides the opportunity to shake monological reduction and engage in dialogical induction.

The third sin, certainly a cardinal one, begs for further illustration, being itself the background for much good talk, especially in the academic household where we ourselves run the greatest risk of committing it. The temptation arises most obviously because much intellectual talk has as its formal topic an established literature: the works of authors whose earthly remains lie buried in some far-off place and whose spiritual remains now survive in libraries, bookstores, and briefcases. We generally admit that these spiritual remains, these survivors of the spirit, also require something like resuscitation if not resurrection: the existence of educational institutions devoted to the

humanities bespeaks such an admission already. And a good deal of intellectual work during the last century, currently proceeding under the rubric “hermeneutics,” has called attention to the peculiarities of such resuscitation. Evidently, the spiritual remains of bygone ages defy our understanding either partly or absolutely. We often hear it said that the difficulty or impossibility arises because any given spirit responds to its age, either creatively or slavishly, and *is* only *as* this response, now necessarily exiled from its truest home. There is much we could talk about in these paradoxes of historicism. However, my only point here is that these paradoxes easily engender the sin in question no matter how we unravel them. For the greatest challenge in talking about the established literature of our tradition lies in the nature of great literature itself, not in historical distance: it bids us to play with proposals, therefore to accept our ignorance—not our ignorance of what already is, but our ignorance of what might be made of what already is. Whether we are reading and talking about the works of Plato or Aristotle, the Old or the New Testament, Kant or Hegel, we find ourselves challenged to think through what might be, namely, the extra-ordinary possibilities hovering over our ordinary lives. We sin against this literature the moment we talk as though there were one right way of reading it, of decoding its initial unintelligibility. For this “right way” could never be *our* answer, namely, an answering up to the topic itself. Rather, this “right way” must claim to capture the answer proffered by the text, more exactly by the author. To be sure, a *text* can be established, but never its discourse—unless we consent to reduce a discourse to an array of answers, something students initially do, and also professors who never learned the difference or who did and then gave in to student demands. In any case, once we reduce a work to a series of right readings, all talk about it henceforth presupposes that the topic is established in principle. Such talk can embody learnedness, but never learning: in it, we can lecture or take notes, but we cannot talk with one another, cannot face together a topic emerging. And given the social pressures of academia we constantly enter into the temptation to prefer a clearly stated, even if untenable answer to a darkly articulated, because thought-provoking question. For the one looks like a claim to knowledge whereas the other presupposes an acknowledgement of ignorance.

But, you might ask, how does a genuine conversation get *started*? Certainly not simply by each of us admitting ignorance and expecting help from the other. Rather, each of us must believe something, must be prepared to take the lead in proposing something. For only then can there be a ball with which to play. If, in apparent humility, all of us prefer to probe rather than present a proposal, we all sit in the bleachers to comment on a game that others have played, those with whom we do not even try to talk, those at whom we at most shout. In discourse, humility without leadership is only a euphemism for thoughtlessness and cowardice. Evidently, we must have the courage to speak up and also the courage to reply. Why courage? Well, we might get a tongue-lashing for our trouble, or fall into a fruitless exchange of fire. But perhaps the greatest danger, often unacknowledged, is that either an opener or a reply may leave one running with a ball gamelessly, so that what began as talk peters out into an assertion of a view. We damage the talk of others most effectively by casting it back on itself, cutting off what philosophers have sometimes called its intentionality — something both politeness and nastiness equally do. On the other hand, we do justice to the speech of others, preserving it as dialogue, even converting it into dialogue, by taking issue with it, taking up the issue to which it refers, thereby conserving the referred within the referring. Such taking issue requires as much leadership as does opening the discussion.

As a conversation begins, so it continues: by each becoming the leader. In talking with our children or with our students the task of leadership becomes accentuated: my job as a parent or a teacher requires me to talk in such a way that others can and will talk. Education consists in getting others to take the lead—a “getting” that itself requires leadership. Still, it is peculiar to suggest that everybody can be a leader; in typical organized human efforts some lead while others follow. However, in genuinely talking with one another the issue itself takes precedence, the topic leads. Because each of us follows what is being talked about, each steps ahead of the others. Thus the aptness, as a motto for a co-authored work, of the lines from the *Iliad*, x, 225-27:

When two go together, one sees before the other
So that the best may come to be. Alone, one might see
But one's sight is shorter and one's discernment limited.

Sounds simple, and no doubt it is. Yet it is also rare, whether in speech or in action, *logos* or *praxis*. More likely, I talk not with but to my children or my students: toward them rather than toward the issue. And listeners are not innocent either: it is easier for them to listen more to me, i.e. to my formulation, my orders, my views, perhaps even to my moods and manners, than to what I am saying, to the issues inherent in that to which I refer and that gives rise to my formulations and orders, perhaps also to my moods and manners. Speakers and listeners alike can concentrate on the finger rather than on the moon—with the result that the play of discourse becomes vacuous, and its tensions revert from ontological to social purport, from an intending of the topic possibly emerging in focus to a pretending of the status obtained by the interlocutors.

You might now wonder how one can overcome talking *to* and instigate talking *with*. Well, I imagine we *all* wonder about this—all of us who have noticed the difference and have not yet given up with our children or parents, students or teachers, colleagues and lovers, and so given up institutions themselves. Talk itself engenders the wonder—if by nothing else, then by the hollowness ringing out in instances of monologue, a vacuity tellingly locatable both in the speech of the moment and in the topic itself. Talking then has one advantage over reading and writing: it constantly recalls the difference. For, when talking, the moment we cease both to speak and listen—neither accepting nor rejecting proposals but allowing them to direct attention to the topic itself—the talk ceases to *say* anything and we either part ways, fall into dumb silence, or gird ourselves for monotony.

If we take to reading and writing we do so, perhaps, in order to enter into modes of discourse that display and encourage formulations better formed and sequences better directed than those possible in the meanderings of even the best talking. The manifest failure of much talk, its fall from *parole parlante* into *parole parlée*, sometimes drives one to the printed word, to literature. Yet reading and writing have their own pitfalls. Until talking with our fellows has initiated us into the playfulness of dialogue, namely, the profound ignorance conditioning any joint enterprise of discourse, reading and writing can appear as alternating forms of monologue: I read primarily to gather

and assess the claims of others, I write to order and present my own; in neither case do I stand together with another to focus on a topic, in both cases the view emerges at the expense of the viewed. No matter how dialogically written, a script cannot prevent a wily reader from pinning down static, apparently self-sufficient views (opinions) within it; in the markings of the books in a university library one can read the desperation of previous readers, the insistence upon reducing the text to recognizable viewpoints, no matter what the cost. And the rough-and-tumble of the publishing world easily leads the writer to defend himself rather than what demanded response in the first place. Settling down alone at my desk to read or write I forgo the steerage so readily available in live discourse: I have to enter into the dialogue, into both leading and being led, without recurrent reminders of the simultaneity of the two, without any course-corrections except those that I am willing to hear from previous conversations. Perhaps genuine reading and writing respond to earlier talk, to the fleeting emergence of a topic on occasions when we freely acknowledged our ignorance and could therefore enter into the play of conversation, momentarily abandoning our pretension to knowledge. In this one sense, then, we might agree that the genuinely spoken precedes the genuinely written word.

Notes

The claim that talking takes on ultimate significance only when we are “neither accepting nor rejecting proposals but allowing them to direct attention to the topic itself” recalls the challenge of traditional logic. We teach our students that propositions must be either affirmative or negative, and that we judge a proposition by either accepting or rejecting it. These two doctrines intend, no doubt, to wake the young from their linguistic slumber, to initiate them into their responsibility for the linguistic

formulations they attend or proffer. Yet might not these doctrines eat away at the delicate fabric of dialogue with our fellows? Only after long consideration of a matter, and of proposals intending to bring the matter into view, can acceptance and rejection have any greater significance than liking and disliking. And the whole life of language, our own linguistic responsibility in the face of what demands response, suspends the initial affirmation or negation of a predication and unfolds within the suspense. To paraphrase Solon’s comments to Croesus, a proposal may appear internally definite (affirmative or negative) and may be laid to rest externally (accepted or rejected) only when it no longer shows any signs of life. Which is not to say that we can avoid judgement in the end. But the discrepancy between dialogue and judgement should sound an alarm and send us back to reconsider the origins of our traditional logic.

In his little piece *On the Heavens*, after discussing his predecessors’ accounts of the position of the earth, Aristotle remarks:

Here’s a habit belonging to all of us, namely not directing enquiry towards the affair itself (*pros to pragma*) but toward someone saying the contrary. Indeed, one even enquires by oneself only until one has nothing more to say against oneself. In light of this, it behooves one who is to enquire well to stand up boldly to what properly stands forth in the *genos*, this happening as one contemplates all the *diaphorai*.

We could ask many questions about Aristotle’s formulation of the task of enquiring well. In what sense does the habit to which he refers belong to us all? Why does this habit (*synthes*: congealed way of living) give rise to a kind of talking (*legein*) dependent upon objections raised either by ourselves or by others? How does such enquiry preclude a direct consideration of the matter supposedly under consideration? What does it mean “to stand up boldly” and to face the matter as itself “standing forth”? And, finally, how can we translate *genos* and *diaphorai* in the context of contemplation (*theoria*)?

Still, we can note that a task of speech would be, on Aristotle’s account, to overcome our initial habit to base our talk on acceptance and rejection, on countering the objections raised by others and even by ourselves, finally acquiescing in our own formulations. Indeed, so much does Aristotle here exhort us to liberate our talk from “one who says the contrary” for the sake of directing enquiry “toward the matter itself,” that we might wonder whether “enquiring well” allows of talking *with* others at all. Does freeing oneself from the social conflicts of formulating thoughts lead one into

solitary speech, into soliloquy? Some traditional thinkers (besides the ancient and Renaissance rhetoricians, most notably Hegel) have argued that precisely “the matter itself” requires that we stand together to face it, that we talk with one another while discovering it—partly because the “it” here comes down ultimately to cooperative human enterprise: “for those who are awake the cosmos is one and shared, whereas in sleep each withdraws into his own” (Heraclitus, fragment 89). In marked contrast, Descartes’ injunctions on method set off a major strain of soliloquy in modern thinking.

So it may well be that traditional logic, at least at its origin, does not locate our linguistic responsibility in the acceptance and rejection of formulations. Yet in Aristotle’s more fundamental works we do read strong arguments that a proposition itself must be either affirmative or negative—that the inner life of a *logos* consists in the acceptance or rejection of a predicate as applied to a subject, of one or the other and not both. Indeed, the modern reader may find strange the claim that these inner battles of incompatibles, apparently merely “grammatical,” locate the battles of truth vs. falsity, being vs. non-being. Presumably, however, any given battle of affirmation and negation in “categorizing” ultimately derives from “standing up to what stands forth in the *genos*,” from “contemplating all the *diaphorai*.” If we talk with one another in this mode of contemplation the battle rages not so much between contrary viewpoints as between truth and falsity, being and non-being, as ways in which the matter itself emerges into view and claims our attention.

In considering the Aristotelian origins of traditional logic, and perhaps in considering the nature of dialogue generally, the question remains whether we can distinguish the acceptance and rejection of propositions from the affirmation and negation within proposals (the question is, of course, settled out of hand when we teach the “square of opposition” in the classroom). Students, for instance most likely read two different books or listen to two different professors, registering chiefly what one rejects or accepts of the other rather than focussing on the topic first of all and participating in the battle of its emergence (dialectic). And what academic has not experienced disappointment when speaking of what is *in itself* exacting (*peri auto takribes*, Plato’s *Statesman*, 284 D) only to discover that the ensuing discussion diverts attention onto one’s exactitudes (*akribestata*, Plato’s *Republic*, 504 E)?

Basically, the traditional claim is that talk itself becomes something only by coming up to something definite and unitary. We owe whatever definiteness and unity our talk may have to the definiteness and unity of what we are talking about. This very derivativeness of our talk defines our

recurrent, ever-current linguistic responsibility. Three “laws of thought” later evolved to structure the recurrent task. One of these laws (“excluded middle”) reads originally: “There is no between permitted for contradictory sayings; rather, it is necessary either to affirm or to deny one thing of another” (Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, 1011 b 23). Another (“non-contradiction”) appears to be more fundamental although in fact often interpreted in light of exclusion: “The same thing is incapable of at once taking hold and not taking hold of the same and in the same way” (*ibid.*, 1005 b 19); here, of course, everything depends on how one translates *hyparchein* and the repetitive *auto* (however, Aristotle goes on to paraphrase, saying no one can suppose that the same both is and is not). The third of these laws, often cited first but taken to be trivial (“identity”) seems to say that a thing is identical to itself, a horse is a horse, given any x , $x = x$; however, one formulation (*ibid.*, 1011 a 18) reads more exactly: “Not everything is in relation to something else, but something is itself by itself” (or: is the same in its own self).

While it may seem clear to some readers of Aristotle what the “origins” (as he calls them—also “axioms”) mean and how they illustrate linguistic responsibility in affirmation and negation, Aristotle himself does not assume they are principles to be formulated and then left behind as obvious. On the contrary, his arguments in favor of them stem from the question what is most worthy for a philosopher forever to ponder, and the strategy of his arguments is to display all the strong reasons for not endorsing them—in fact, for rejecting them, as he assumes his predecessors implicitly did. The essential difficulty, he notes, arises from the need to distinguish between the way the things we deal with initially come to light for us and the way we might finally discover them ultimately to be. Indeed, the “law of identity” summarily points out that we normally heed things not as they are in themselves but as they are in relation to other things; e.g., I note, appreciate, and worry about the spruce tree before my house as it provides comfortable shade in summer or blocks the sunlight in winter: the axiom states that, as a philosopher or a tree-doctor, I must be able to behold the tree as it is in itself, perhaps as I am caring for it rather than always simply relating it to my own concerns—and that the tree only fully *is* for me when I learn to behold it that way. On the other hand, the “law of non-contradiction,” although often interpreted “grammatically,” i.e. as describing the way we ourselves must ultimately manifest our reading of reality, says, in its original formulation, more about what we encounter than about how we should respond to it: each being, whether my tree or my child, my house or my country, *is* in many mutually incompatible ways (at differing times and places, in differing doings and undergoings, etc.), but all the while it *is* under

the shadow of one inability—it lacks the power both to hold its own and not to hold its own (*hyparchein* and not), to be and not to be (*einai* and not). A melancholy thought for one who takes his trees or children, house or country to heart. Yet the thought also bears upon our linguistic comportment: it is in our talk (*logos*) that we realize and actualize the potentiality of a being, that we help it emerge as distinct from its shadow.

The “law of excluded middle” is the one that does seem to demand affirmation and denial as basic linguistic duties. In Chapter 9 of his work *On Interpretation* Aristotle discusses the axiom of no-between, yet here he concludes (19 b 1): “Clearly it is not necessary in the case of all affirmations and denials of contradictories that one be true and the other false.” Why? Aristotle answers: Because individual beings *are* largely as potential, their mode of being is one of becoming (*genesis*), and the whole question is whether any such being “will be” (*estai*). To be sure, in cases where we are trying to pin down the universal and original nature of something, and also in determining individual things that already are or have already emerged, our task is primarily to affirm or negate predicates of them. However, much talk aims precisely to face what comes, what emerges. Indeed, human effort generally has the task of responding to things as they are in course, as they are coming to be. In logical terms, we must have or elicit the subject before we can relevantly categorize. —For a more detailed discussion of subject and predicate, see pp. 159-65 of my *Art of Art Works* (Victoria, B. C., 1982).

The advantage of talking generally appears to be its flexibility: each adapts what he says not only to the variable facets of the topic, but also to the varying aptitudes of his interlocutors. In contrast, delivering or attending reports in public, and also reading or writing in private, belong to occasions that seem to demand a fixed outcome, a final predication inviting acceptance vs. rejection. Perhaps, however, the flexibility of talking rests not only on our ability to gear what we say to the capacities of the interlocutors, but more fundamentally on our ability to drop the future pluperfect tense entirely, the tense of discourse structured by the “law of excluded middle.” In talking, one can savor the topic itself in anticipation rather than reduce it to professional expectation or other vested interest in the conclusion of the discourse. I say, one *can*. One might not, of course, but then the dialogue dies, sending out such signals as nastiness, boredom, or obsequy, fairly loud and difficult to ignore.

Plato and Aristotle, as well as the best of subsequent thinkers, allow for moments of emergence. In logical terms, they balk at the “law of excluded middle.” However, one might still argue that throughout our Western tradition both emergence and the talk responsive to it appear as the limiting

case, the exception that honesty requires one to acknowledge within the general rule, which is to conceive of *logos*, of our linguistic responsibility, primarily in the future pluperfect tense, so that affirmation and negation, acceptance and rejection within and of propositions, rather than what we are talking about, provide the *telos* of discourse.

—So much has the “law of excluded middle” formed our later tradition that one often turns to the Orient in search of an alternative. For instance, Lao-tzu’s *Tao Te Ching* suggests that judgement, the exercise of our Western laws of logic, destroys the judged (or something in or about the judged, perhaps its emergence). To paraphrase Chapter 1 of this Chinese classic: the way under consideration can be travelled but not entirely mapped, while the talking relevant to it is possible but not as a final definition of it. And Chapter 2: precisely the acceptance of beautiful things as beautiful, of good things as good indicates that something is wrong. And throughout the book we read that “contending” (entry 365 in *Mathew’s Chinese-English Dictionary*, 1966), so central in any Western theory of judgement, marks a departure from our essential condition, a destruction rather than a revelation of the source of the contention.

A recent article by Walter Stroll (in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 23/24 October 1982, pp. 69-70) reports that Martin Heidegger met with a Chinese philosopher every Saturday in the summer of 1946, and then again in 1947, to translate Lao-tzu’s *Tao Te Ching* into German (see also H. W. Petzet’s more recent memoirs of Heidegger, *Auf einen Stern zugehen*, Frankfurt, 1983, p. 191). I know of only two resulting commentaries Heidegger makes in his published writings: one on the translation of *tao* as “way” (*Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 198) and another on what must be Chapter 28 of the Chinese text, although it cites Chapter 18 (“Grundsätze des Denkens” in the *Jahrbuch für Psychologie, Psychotherapie und Medizinische Wissenschaft*, 1958). Yet many of Heidegger’s later essays on speech may have Lao-tzu as a silent partner in the dialogue. Heidegger’s earlier critique of our traditional logic (e.g. in *Being and Time*, §34: “If... and if..., then Aristotle’s attempt at a phenomenological analysis of *logos* falls apart into a superficial theory of judgement”) might have led nowhere if it had remained in dialogue solely with Western thinkers. In late June of 1965 I talked with Heidegger briefly about Chinese thought, at which time he showed great interest in it but remarked that the way one must talk in Chinese defies the way we must talk reflectively in Western languages. But one might go farther and wonder whether Oriental literature encourages the discursive life at all. Lao-tzu, at least, seems to say that “speaking” (Mathew’s entry 7334) ceases in genuine education (Chapters 2 and 43) and in genuine togetherness (Chapter 73, but

see also Chapters 5 and 17): “He who speaks does not know, he who knows does not speak” (Chapter 56).

—Perhaps one of the most thought-provoking statements of speech at its best lies closer to home, and in the English language. About halfway through William Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* (New York, 1940), at the beginning of the chapter entitled “The Bear,” there is an explicit account of the “best of all talking.” The single paragraph compacts so much into its few lines that breaking it up helps to bring the detail into relief:

He was sixteen. For six years now he had been a man’s hunter. For six years now he had heard the best of all talking. It was of the wilderness, the big woods, bigger and older than any recorded document:

—of white man fatuous enough to believe he had bought any fragment of it, of Indian ruthless enough to pretend that any fragment of it had been his to convey:

bigger than Major de Spain and the scrap he pretended to, knowing better; older than old Thomas Sutpen of whom Major de Spain had had it and who knew better; older even than old Ikkemotubbe, the Chickasaw chief, of whom old Sutpen had had it and who knew better in his turn.

It was of the men, not white nor black nor red but men, hunters, with the will and the hardihood to endure and the humility and skill to survive, and the dogs and the bear and the deer juxtaposed and relieved against it, ordered and compelled by and within the wilderness in the ancient and unremitting contest according to the ancient and immitigable rules which voided all regrets and brooked no quarter;

—the best game of all, the best of all breathing and forever the best of all listening, the voices quiet and weighty and deliberate for retrospection and recollection and exactitude among the concrete trophies — the racked guns and the heads and skins — in the libraries of town houses or the offices of plantation houses or (and best of all) in the camps themselves where the intact and still-warm meat yet hung, the men who had slain it sitting before the burning logs on hearths when there were houses and hearths or about the smoky blazing of piled wood in front of stretched tarpaulins when there were not

Offhand, we probably assume that hunters simply talk about what they have done and seen, their plans, hopes, and fears. And no doubt one who drops in on their talk would hear it that way. Yet we are now told that the talk is of the wilderness, of white men and of Indians, of what is bigger and older than any given individual, of men who actually engage in the wilderness, and of the things (dogs, deer, bear) encountered by such men and emerging out of the wilderness. Such talk takes place in libraries or offices or camps — after and presumably also before the engagement. And as it turns out the best game of all emerges in or as the talk in these places rather than when and where one has a gun in hand. Finally, the “best game of all” and the “best of all talking” require the “best of all listening.”

But what is the “wilderness”? Why the distinction among people, some “not white nor black nor red, but men”? And how does the “best game of all” relate to the obvious game — say, a bear? Such questions may occasion hours of discussion at a time, and even then somehow reassert themselves later. However, let me indicate how I would start off.

The wilderness. A place where nobody is? Well, the hunters are there. A place that we or our fellows have not reconstructed in the image of human enterprise — in short, not yet settled? Perhaps; both in duration and in extent the “wilderness” is that which transcends human construction, or at least “any recorded document.” Yet the transcendence provides the occasion for encounter, both in the hunt and in the talk. Indeed, one might assume (especially one who drops in on the hunt or on the talk) that the encounter engenders a construction of the environment, a humanizing if not a usurping of the initial prerogatives of the wild. We might then still wonder *where* the wilderness is — as, indeed, Ike himself does (he who was sixteen) at the end of his life. In his essay on “Walking” (1862; *Excursions*: Boston, 1863) Henry David Thoreau seems to suggest that the “wilderness” lies outside city limits: “A town is saved, not more by the righteous men in it than by the woods and swamps that surround it.” Yet in a journal entry (30 August 1856) we read:

It is vain to dream of a wildness distant from ourselves. There is none such. It is the bog in our brain and bowels, the primitive vigor of nature in us, which inspires that dream. I shall never find in the wilds of Labrador any greater wildness than in some recess in Concord, *i.e.* than I import into it. A little more manhood or virtue will make the surface of the globe anywhere thrillingly novel and wild

But is not “wilderness” still a rather vague notion, rather indeterminate, more a sentiment than a place? For some, no doubt, “natural settings” serve primarily as a respite. Yet in Faulkner’s account the wilderness not only exacts the ultimate from us — in a “contest according to ancient and immitigable rules” that declare irrelevant any admission of inadequacy and allow for no refuge whatsoever. It also gives determinate things their determination: the talk, in being of the wilderness, brings out “the dogs and the bear and the deer juxtaposed and relieved against it, ordered and compelled by the wilderness.” The beings that focus our attention and require our care in an actual engagement come out for what they are, in their definiteness, perhaps only in retrospect, when they reappear in our talk as emergent, as emerging out of their source. For only then can they be, namely as emergent; for emergence requires on our part an acknowledgement of a transcendent source — not elsewhere, but precisely as the place where we are, be it only a recess in Concord. (Perhaps we can understand Anaximander’s fragment along these lines: “the *apeiron* is the *archē* of beings,” etc.) The best of all talking relieves us of the illusory comforts of construction and sends us back to the only contest that genuinely sustains us — because it sustains what we encounter in it.

Men, not white nor black nor red, but men. What sort are these? Much talk is, of course, about the doings of people. Indeed, philosophers rightly argue that *all* talk is about human beings: precisely the effort to talk about toads or neutrons or planets requires one to recount human experiences of them, and only afterwards can one write up an “abstract” of the results, these allowing of circulation but having their legitimacy only when placed back into the account of the activity (language-game) out of which they were extracted. So how does the narrator’s account distinguish the “best of all talking” from any other?

It is of *differing* men: of those “fatuous enough to believe” and those “ruthless enough to pretend” they could lay claim to the wilderness; of nameable men (Major de Spain, Thomas Sutpen, Ikkemotubbe); obliquely also, as the narrator goes on to say, “of men myriad and nameless even to one another while the old bear had earned a name”; and finally of “men not white nor black nor red, but men.” Sounds reasonable, you might say; as there are different kinds of people, so a story displays the variety. Yet, are there different *kinds*? Certainly different people. But the very same people — those named, who were no doubt nameless before — are at one time fatuous and ruthless, white or black or red, and then *become* men, in the present instance by becoming hunters, those who rise to their circumstances not as buyers and sellers but as overseers. The best of all talking shows,

perhaps also embodies, the differentiation, the transformation from namelessness to nameability, but even more from a merely named (red and ruthless Ikkemotubbe or white and fatuous Thomas Sutpen) to a naming (acknowledging and therefore recognizing without taking the name in vain). The best of all talking embodies *the* human drama, the emergence of human responses true to themselves because true to circumstances “in themselves.”

Of the wilderness and of men. Talk must be *about* something, of course: about the hunt, about the final doom of the bear, or whatever. But Faulkner’s narration suggests a difference between “of” and “about”: the best of all talking *stems* from the wilderness and us, more exactly from the encounter between the two. We talk because, or inasmuch as, or on those occasions when and where circumstances reappear as wild and human beings reappear as rising to their circumstances as such. This origin of speech (or at least of the “best of all talking”) is evidently dual — not because it is about two topics (objects and subjects) but because the emergence of things “in themselves” is dependent upon the emergence of ourselves. There is no good talk stemming simply from the wilderness: without the human drama of transformation of the proprietary into a custodial relation, the wilderness shows only its opacity and, in the extreme, becomes a wasteland, like the surface of the moon. And there is no good talk that stems simply from people: without the focus on the unknown within the known, on that which voids all regrets and brooks no quarter, the differentiation of human response remains essentially within the proprietary relation, ultimately the topic of closet drama and soap opera. It is the encounter, anticipated because recollected, and recollected because anticipated, which recurrently both originates and tests the talk. Thus it is not speaking so much as listening that makes for the best of all talking.

— When Aristotle invites us to stop bickering and to stand up to what stands forth in the *genos*, we might wonder how the invitation differs from the encouragement to engage in “science,” where “genus” and “differentia” lead one toward the “species” or the “idea” — a procedure based on the negation and affirmation of predicates. A philologist will likely complicate our wonder, telling us that in Greek literature *genos* and *eidōs* hardly meant “genus” and “species” in our contemporary sense (based on the logic of classes). Rather, *genos* meant something closer to “region of birth” or “family” in the homey sense: the origin to which each member owes its origination; and *eidōs* still carried with it an echo of the Homeric usage: the striking presence, the glamor, or (as we would say today) the charisma of a being (for a discussion of *eidōs*, see my *Art of Art Works*, pp. 133 ff. and 262 f.). If we can read Aristotle’s comments on “prevailing habit” and

“enquiring well” retrospectively rather than prospectively, in dialogue with his predecessors rather than in dialogue with his posterity, we might even wonder about the meaning of *diaphorai*, the “differentiations” essential to proper enquiry. For us it appears easy to understand “contemplating all the *diaphoria*” as meaning “taking careful note of the differing properties of beings,” e.g. of dogs vs. bears (physics) or of pious people vs. just people (ethics). But can “contemplating” here be reduced to “listing?” And how do the distinguished beings (“species”) relate to the undistinguished beings (“genera”)? Contemplating differences — as the alternative to talking only against “one who states the contrary” — requires that we “stand up boldly to what stands forth in the *genos*”: that we become witnesses to the emergence of definite beings out of a region of being. Whatever else this requirement may entail, it suggests that we must ourselves become different. In contrast, modern science unfolds on the tacit but all-defining assumption that we can determine “how *things* are” in essential independence of the question “how *we* are.”

In pondering the development of logic in the West, with all its emphasis on affirmation vs. negation, we might well wonder whatever happened to the supposed beginning, namely, to the two Socratic principles, that only the examined life is worth living and that human wisdom is worth little or nothing (*Apology*, 38 A and 23 A). Perhaps Socrates stunned his fellow Athenians because he could talk *with* them. That is, Socrates could make every detectable difference in the “nature of things” dependent upon a dramatic difference in human being itself — so that irony (of a new sort) became an essential ingredient in the best of all talking. Notwithstanding this Socratic impetus in Western philosophy, it seems as clear as it should seem strange that our current intellectual tradition has little to do with the examined life, and even less with understanding one’s own wisdom as worth little or nothing. Perhaps Faulkner’s account hearkens to the Socratic echo ever more fading away as we assume that speech comes into its own as articulating knowledge rather than ignorance. It may be that our most recent intellectual tradition has abandoned Leibniz’s hope that a “new language” (*cette nouvelle Écriture ou caractéristique, ou bien langue si on veut*) will be one that “leads to the inside of things” (*ad intima rerum ducet*), as we read of this hope in his *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe* (II, 1: pp. 490 and 413). But is there not still implicit in our traditional interpretation of meaningful talk the hope that “this language will have one really marvelous property, namely that of shutting up those who are ignorant”? Such, at least, was Leibniz’s hope: *cette langue aura une propriété merveilleuse, qui est de fermer la bouche aux ignorans* (*Opuscules et fragments inédits de Leibniz*, p. 156). Imagine Socrates trying to *silence* his interlocutors! — But what

would the “original” talk be—if not one in which *what* we are talking about can *itself* be, can itself emerge as “juxtaposed and relieved”?

3

Writing

First published as “An Introduction to Writing” in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, xvii, ii (1984), pp. 73-97. A longer version appears as the chapter “Dialogue in Writing” in my *Linguistic Responsibility* (Victoria, B.C.: Sono Nis Press, 1988), pp. 318-53. For the present edition, I have combed through the original version and introduced minor stylistic improvements.

In any art, uniqueness of manner, if not of result, is one sign of success. It therefore sounds presumptuous to raise the question what it means to write—as though one might become clear in advance how one should write or, worse, prescribe the manner in which others should proceed in this art. Each must find his own way.

Yet most every writer, even one who has succeeded in practicing the art, finds himself bothered by the question what it means to work out in writing what he has to say. It must be admitted that most of those who have supposedly learned to write generally experience considerable difficulty when actually setting themselves to a given task of writing. Often when I talk to struggling writers, and also when I read their results, I get the impression that they compound their difficulty by refusing to acknowledge the question, What is writing? as continuously legitimate.

So allow me to offer something of an introduction to writing despite the misleading presumption of such an enterprise. If nothing else, saying something about the art of writing may lift into relief an element belonging to the art, namely the *question* that every writer must learn to raise and then answer in his own way and progressively in his own writing.

1.

When we ask ourselves what it means to write we must have something in view, in mind or memory, so that we can focus attention, have something to probe and to fathom. What kind of writing, what moments of writing should we recall? Ultimately: writing at its best. However, such writing is rare. Moreover, a writer is not only plagued by whether he can come up with the best of writing, he also finds himself asking what this best might be. So let us proceed in leisurely fashion, considering first of all the most elementary experience of learning to write, and asking gradually what might be so special about the art, how it can blossom out into the best.

When first applying ourselves to the task of learning to write, the very grip of the hand, or rather the fingers, poses the first problem.

The child must strain to trace those magic lines onto the paper, to develop a uniformity of stroke. Not only then, but also when older we take advantage of the slow pace of the movement. The shape of the words takes on ever greater definition as we learn to spell in the conventional manner. The slow pace also allows for greater attention to the peculiar syntax required by the tongue, so arbitrary in some sense and yet so contributive (we learn) to the power and the meaning of what we say. As we find ourselves increasingly at ease with the grip, the vocabulary, and the grammar, we may in later years develop a greater or lesser sensitivity to the force of figures. Finally, somebody usually tells us to organize what we have to say.

Is there any significance in the elementary experience of learning to write one's mother tongue? When I contrast writing with speaking, and notice that many who speak fluently get bogged down immediately when they try to write even the simplest things (begin to stutter on paper, as it were), I see one crucial prerequisite: in writing, we must learn how "one" writes, we must *conform* to the phonemes (for the last couple centuries: the exact spelling), the system of grammar, familiar associations, and the limitations of the reader. At various stages of learning to write, this requirement to conform appears rather stifling—at the very least distracting from the effort to say something. And no doubt a teacher can impose upon his pupils a rigor of "form" which momentarily inhibits the relevant discovery of "content." Yet if we look at the underside of this exigency to conform we notice an even more dramatic imposition: in learning to write one must learn to stand, to think, to be alone. When we talk with others the flow of words belongs to all: each both rides on and contributes to the flow, supplying words, completing constructions, building on each other's images in an organic but hardly organized way. In the give and take of live talk one is not always sure what one actually contributes, so that afterwards one can always object: "I didn't say that, not exactly!" The anonymity of much talk both eases one's own speaking at the moment of discourse and allows one to free oneself afterwards from what had been said. It is the *solitude* of writing that, I suspect, frightens many who would "set their thoughts to paper," whether in a simple letter to a friend, a narrative account, or a formal treatise addressed to fellow intellectuals. With pen and

paper one must "go it alone," channelling the flow by oneself, and one is stuck with the result.

Now you might reply that the agonies of learning the materials demanding conformity and the disposition requiring individuality—that these trials and tribulations belong to our youth only, that our riper years leave those difficulties behind and deliver us at the doorstep of another, the *real* question plaguing each of us who contemplates pen and paper: Do I have anything to say? Certainly the agraphia so evident in many if not most university students, as well as in academic and other ranks, seems in the end to stem from the lack of "ideas"; at least this is the judgement of the onlooker. The writer, it seems, must pass through and beyond the elementary stages of his craft, just as the carpenter does in his. The carpenter must familiarize himself with various woods and their properties, various methods of joining, various conventional tools and auxiliary materials, and of course the responsibility to decide what is appropriate when and where. However, he then passes on to that task of realizing a plan, say, an actual house. So, too, it would seem that the writer must get used to vocabulary and grammar, and to working on his own, but then passes on to the task of saying something.

The argument belittling the elementary stages of writing builds on such plausible-sounding distinctions as those between method and substance, subjective preliminaries and objective requirements, and (in the language of composition teachers) form and content. Do these distinctions touch the heart of writing—the *experience* of writing? I can recall a number of examples suggesting that they do. When my house-cleaning lady leaves me a note telling me that she is sorry, she must leave earlier than usual to take her child to the dentist (adding, perhaps, that she is running out of cleanser), the "form" of the note simply serves the "message"—and, interestingly, the spelling and the general construction likely arouse a smile on the lips of the educated reader. At the other extreme, when a lawyer writes me a letter stating the conditions for a transaction (whether a purchase of property or a settlement of a will) the "form" so much dominates that I have difficulty detecting the meaning—and perhaps hire another lawyer to decipher it, something he will do most intelligibly not in writing but in person. And finally I think of the ordinary journalist who must

indeed develop a style that goes hand in hand with the facts he gathers: his experience of writing takes him somewhere between that of my cleaning lady and my lawyer, worrying as he does a bit about form and a bit about content.

Now, we have all scribbled notes, drawn up formal letters, and written up reports on events that have transpired. I ask you in what sense these activities constitute *experiences* of writing—and suggest to you that the experience is nominal only, not really one of *writing*. And precisely owing to their status we find them so amenable to those easy distinctions between material and purpose, method and substance, form and content.

In scribbling out a note, I take advantage of what I have at one time learned in the way of writing, but I write so that no writing remains. I presume that what I write will find its way quickly into the wastebasket. I deny the relevance of anyone keeping it, pondering it. The “message” points to a purpose lying wholly outside the experience of writing. I borrow an instrument to accomplish something having no intrinsic relation to the instrument.

In drawing up formal conditions of employment or rental, I draw upon set phrases recalling established laws or rules. I do not so much write as copy out, repeating set formulas, filling in the exact times, places, and persons.

Finally, in writing up a report of what happened, simply for the sake of informing others, in a readable or pleasant way (say, about who won the prizes at the music camp) I alternate between enumerating an array of facts and trying to cement them together. I select the facts from the events, and thereby distort the totality of the event even if the facts I report are themselves correct. I may compensate for the distortion by arranging the facts into a whole having a specious unity, a unity based on what readers will take to be familiar (background facts, prevailing values). In case you have never practiced this kind of writing, imagine writing in the style of a weekly news magazine like *Time* in the United States, *L'Express* in France, or *Maclean's* in Canada: a bondage to a selection of facts arranged in a style both engagingly cute and familiarly uniform.

Now, either the examples so far reviewed do illustrate the essential experience of writing, or we must consider them as deficient

modes, human involvements in language that borrow from the art of writing but do not live up to the art itself. If we decide they do illustrate the art, then we decide that writing by its nature is a menial affair, a chore we learn to perform in the course of satisfying occasional needs. If, on the other hand, they essentially fall short of the art, we must abandon the assumptions on which they appear to make sense.

2.

Quick notes, formal documents, and factual reports fall short of writing at its best. To what might we turn as setting the standard of the best? In a general way, the answer might seem clear: we must turn to writing that *says how things are*. To recall an old-fashioned term: writing that can really stand on its own, the writing that exacts the utmost from the writer and that might do something essential for the reader, is writing dedicated to the truth. But let us remain with the more colloquial expression, for we may then understand immediately why the examples so far reviewed fall short. Quick notes may indicate how things are, but the saying itself disappears. Formal documents formulate very carefully, but everything depends on the saying, not on how things are. And factual reports secure what philosophers have traditionally called accidental predications, the way things happened to have fallen out, leftovers of the way things were. If we judge these kinds of writing as deficient, we may do so in reference to the same simple-sounding standard: they do not *say* how things *are*.

Well, then, you might ask, what kinds of writing *do* meet the standard? I'm sure that no *kind* does, only instances do. A letter might—think of some by Rilke or Van Gogh. Of course, many such letters probably never come into public view. Still, when we write letters we *can* choose to say, or try to say, how things are. No doubt we then find writing difficult. Why the difficulty?

Imagine writing a letter to a friend about having chosen to change something central to your life—say, your professional or marital status. You could settle for a note simply announcing the change. Or you could try to say why you made the change, in which case you might speak either around or to the point: about the differing conveniences or about the intimate changes in your way of life,

changes opening new vistas. Or imagine writing a letter to someone whom you have just hired onto the faculty, a letter confirming the appointment and describing some of the mutual responsibilities and shared projects in which he will find himself involved. Again, you could settle for a formal letter stating the conditions of employment, or you could try to say something about what the institution is like, what forces are already at work and what needs to be done within the framework of the formal conditions. Finally, imagine a letter to a friend about something that happened, something odd and haunting but not necessarily involving any decision on your part, say, a strange accident, a case of faulty judgement on someone's part, or a downright swindle. You can choose to outline the affair, even quite accurately, relying on the immediate effects of horror, hilarity, or indignation. Or you might ponder the affair, wondering how the settled facts point toward its significance for those who were, and perhaps still are involved in it.

To write, to work to say how things are, requires that one plunge into, accept one's sojourn within, a slippery distinction, a fundamental but elusive difference between two ways "things are," two modes of being: how things already are and how things might be. At least this distinction defines the chief difficulty in the examples of letter-writing so far reviewed. We might name the difference in modes of being as the difference between "how things seem" and "how things really are." However, this more customary formulation of the distinction does not do justice to the act of writing. Rather, it reflects the standpoint of consummate wisdom, perhaps that of God and his eternal silence. For the writer, on the other hand, "what *really* is" hangs over his work as "what must be gotten out"—for all intents and purposes as "what *might* be." Although a writer may know something, even a good deal, such knowledge consists of familiarity with how things already are. And since his task consists in saying how they might be, how what already is might reappear in the writing and subsequent reading, the writer knows chiefly that he is ignorant.

The best of writing is then reflexive. Or: a condition of writing is reflection—in the sense that the writer must "bounce back" or "bounce off" the way things already are, not acquiescing in this mode of being, while also moving forward, out of the safety and knowledge

with which such acquiescence tempts him, toward a possible reappearance of what already is, an appearance in which the alreadiness momentarily gives way to what one can never know and claim but only acknowledge and uphold.

A religion has an oral or written tradition which presumably already says what needs to be said, yet theologians in all ages have attempted to write out what that tradition means. A nation or a civilization has its own documents and monuments, manifest artistic, commercial, and military achievements already quite forceful in their presence, yet historiographers do not rest content with the meaning already declared by these things: they will forever write new accounts of old affairs. And the domains of poetry or philosophy provide literature that expressly says what it has to say, yet how many are the scholars who write and talk on the assumption that hardly anybody has really understood Homer or Dante, Aristotle or Hegel?

But do not the rehashings and disputings of writers, the interpretations of predecessors, actually further the process by which human knowledge improves and extends itself? Well, as readers we can choose to understand writings as claiming to make adjustments and additions: and perhaps some writings do. However, I am suggesting that, as writers, our task is not so much to add anything as to subtract something; the alreadiness, the familiarity of what has been said. This feat of subtraction becomes possible in these domains only as the writer brings forward, *rewrites* the whole, and not just the part—in the mode of what might be. Thus the theologian writes for what the Scriptures might mean, can mean, should mean—but do not, i.e., not easily, not at first, not without renewed articulation; he shows by his own example what the reader must do. Similarly with the historian of nations and the critic of literature.

The examples I have chosen for illustration may account for some of the difficulty encountered in accepting the task of the writer as I have sketched it so far. Theologians, historiographers, and critics may themselves write, but they generally focus on more original writings: they produce a secondary literature based on primary sources. Secondary literature inevitably gives the reader the impression that the writer intends to declare the simple truth. For as readers we here initially confront something that already is—the primary literature.

The contrast between primary and secondary is striking in this regard. Many readers of, say, Plato or Kant, Pindar or Shakespeare, find themselves somewhat or even completely at a loss in the texts themselves, and so they turn to some secondary source as though here, at least, the exact proposals, or the exact significance of the primary text might emerge in determinate form — along with its putative shortcomings. What tempts readers to take this turn? Do writers of primary sources leave their writings in such disarray (perhaps because of the strains associated with original investigation or exploration) that only a battery of secondary writers can actually order the findings, weeding them out if necessary and making improvements where possible? Some readers believe so. However, the limited but subtly decisive claim to a superiority of secondary over primary sources does not square with the fact that the writings claiming simply to sort out what a predecessor wrote never succeed in supplanting the original — the way even second-rate astronomers building on the aspirations of Copernicus have left his work far behind, indeed have placed it in a museum of curious antiquities.

3.

Note that we all too easily slip into the reading of works, instead of reflecting on the writing of them. Let us turn again to the question of writing. And since our understanding of the writing of secondary works depends on the nature of primary ones, let us consider this more fundamental question: What does it mean to write primary works? A difficult and even embarrassing question, of course. For who of us has succeeded in this, the best of writing? Yet whenever we do really write — say, just a letter to a friend — do we not make a try at precisely such writing? If, that is to say, we strain to say how things are. The strain may be so overwhelming that we abandon the role of the writer and assume that of a reader, and then writing becomes a mere chore, like raking up a stranger's back yard. Students, I'm sure, often find writing an exasperating experience because they engage in it as readers rather than as writers. So perhaps we should lay it down as a rule that when we do write we must engage ourselves in saying how things are, we must believe we are engaged in writing at its best. Afterwards the result may disillusion us, but the illusion functions heuristically at the time.

What kinds of writing exemplify the best? Or rather: *In* what kinds might *instances* of the best emerge? Another difficult question. However, as readers, at least, we can easily detect three: religious writing, poetic writing, and philosophic writing. In principle, instances of all three kinds address themselves directly to how things are and challenge the way we initially think things are. All three are essentially reflexive. Why three, rather than four or more, I'm not sure. After the fact it seems that the three do cover the temporal possibilities; scripture, poetry, and philosophy speak of and concentrate us onto how things *are* for us ultimately and futurally, how they *are* for us as a lingering and looming past, and how they *are* for us in any case — these various “hows” belong to the broader question of how things are — the question of being.

Now, from the standpoint of writing as something we ourselves do, we can leave one of the three kinds to one side. After all, we do not engage in writing eschatological literature. So let us remain with what appears to lie, at least in principle, within our power. What does it mean to take up pen and paper and to write in a poetic or philosophic vein? If I were to write a novel, an epic, or a play, or a poem “about” World War II or “about” the Canadian Maritimes, I would have to know about those times and places, something that “everybody knows,” something that has entered into the annals of mankind. Yet such knowledge supplies me with only a pretext, a framework in which my writing can unfold. I must not so much “see beyond” as “write beyond” that framework, bringing out more than what really is: I must write an “inside story” of those times and places. My writing, I know, will therefore violate the annals of what already is — at least gently, perhaps also violently. However, I do not claim to rewrite the annals, extend the domain of common knowledge. I find myself proposing a vision of what any annal essentially misses: I propose what might be, what might emerge within the context forever only circumscribed by annals.

Similarly, if I were to write out reflections of our involvement in art works, political efforts, or modern scientific enterprises, I would have to have experienced such involvements directly, I would have to know what already passes for art work, political effort, or scientific enterprise. Again, though, such knowledge provides only the context

or the pretext—the monocle, as it were. As a writer I must write something into view, must argue a significance of what already is, a significance beyond what already is, beyond the context already established and familiar. As a result, I write not as an historian of art, politics, or science, and not even as an artist, politician, or scientist, and even less as an exegete in these disciplines. I write as a philosopher: I recraft these original involvements as a whole, not necessarily to intrude upon the domains of these others, but rather to draw something out that perhaps *need* not be for those others but that *might* be for me and my readers.

So the best writing reverses the normal disposition to base oneself on what already is. As a writer, I move out into the realm of possibility; better, perhaps, I *become* a writer once I find myself in that realm. For once so situated, I have lost the usual ground on which theologians, critics, and scholars, artisans, farmers, and professionals, artists, politicians, and scientists stand—and yet I draw the established domains of these up into the realm of possibility. Indeed, such a writer so much subsumes what *already* is under what *might* be that he *invents* what already is. This invention the reader of scripture, poetry, or philosophy generally notices, and often finds irritating and perhaps even discrediting: so much do such writings take us into the realm of possibility that we too lose our bearings and can only note, especially at first, that what they say about what already is does not square with what we know already is. Perhaps “invention” sounds too strong, yet it was precisely this word our forebears used to describe the work of speaking and writing. It is indicative of our age, no doubt, that the word “invention” now sends us either to the domains of technological gadgetry or pathological camouflage.

I grant you, the distinction in the realm of being between what already is and what might be is a tricky one, especially if the writer so much subsumes the first under the second that he invents the one we would normally take to be the basis of the other. Let me therefore say something about the conditions under which the distinction brings its own significance home.

First of all, the distinction remains obscure so long as we insist upon our privileged status as readers. In simply reading Plato's

Republic or Marx's *Capital*, for instance, we likely assume that these authors are describing a “future state” that either should enter the realm of what already is or somehow lies already in the cards. In simply reading Homer's *Iliad*, Dante's *Comedy*, or Shakespeare's *Hamlet* we easily think that these authors are telling us a story of how things were, or pretending to do so for our amusement. If we read more carefully, however, we notice that these works escape such easy determinations and have in fact generated unending controversy among readers about what the writers meant. As an interim measure, then, we may decide that those works contain deeply buried “esoteric doctrines” or, more innocently, “personal views” of some sort—hypotheses apparently accounting for the diverse interpretations: after all, not all readers have the same talents for excavation. Yet the moment we try our hands at *writing* philosophy or poetry, our assumptions as readers simply vanish: we no longer wish to describe any state of affairs, past, present, or future, or to divert our readers for the while of their reading; nor do we slyly leak out hints of our esoteric doctrines or personal views jealously harbored. Rather, as writers we aspire quite simply to articulate the way things are. The inside task of writing demands so much energy and concentration that none remains for describing, diverting, or harboring.

But the distinction ultimately hangs on another question: What does it mean to write out how things might be? What can a writer have in view or in mind when talking about the mode of being logically called “possibility” and ontologically called “potentiality”? *What* might be, *what* can be? *What* is possible, *what* is potential? Well, I am tempted to reply that the task of the writer is precisely to discover the answer to this question, to provide an answer appropriate to and manifest within his own writing. Yet, if we confine our considerations to the kind of writing that may be called reflective, whether articulating a particular human situation or the human condition as such (to the exclusion of the universe as a whole: an affair of scripture), we can answer very generally a slightly modified question: What is the possibility or potentiality *at issue* in writing out an account of, say, life during the Second World War or in the Canadian Maritimes—or in writing out an account of what goes on in art, in politics, or in science? I hazard a rather simple statement of the issue: that we writers or readers, even “man” or “mankind,” find

a proper place within and for the phenomena. Finding ourselves in place remains forever something that might be, it never becomes something that already is. Allow me to elaborate.

As Tolstoy, for instance, argues in *War and Peace*, we may easily, in fact we most likely engage ourselves in the ruckus of a war without really being in, let alone for, the war itself. We generally ride on the very phenomena that crowd in upon us immediately. We miss something, namely, most everything, even though we appear to ourselves and to others as being “there.” Similarly, we can live, say, in the Maritimes and yet quite rightly feel that life is passing us by. Indeed, people everywhere generally sense so strongly that phenomena pass them by that they wish they were elsewhere, and very often leave their own to search for another place.

More generally, we all find the world of art, the world of politics, the world of science swirling around: cultural exhibitions (from music on the radio and dramas on television to craft shows in town and paintings in our living room), newspaper accounts of conflicts between and decisions within governments, advertisements of all sorts parading the results of modern technology. These and similar worlds do not so much superimpose themselves on phenomena as constitute them. Yet how much do we really heed what whirls by? By and large we pass through all those phenomena, and even though they make very far-reaching claims upon our lives, taking us along, as the ebbing tide, if not as the rip tide does, we can hardly be said to be swimming: at most we tread water.

Now, the writer, as one who finds it bothersome that phenomena pass us by, assumes at the outset that any given situation, the human condition itself, is essentially one of missed opportunities. What does the writer do about it, then? Or what does he argue *we* must do? You might reply: he claims to transmit, or otherwise promote knowledge. This answer may lie close to the hearts of educators, but it bothers the writer. Besides noting that knowledge is but the northern name for *episteme* or *scientia*, what for millennia has been called “science,” and that the world of science precisely hurls the phenomena by us; besides perhaps noting this bit of etymology the writer, whether poet or philosopher, raises the question what it means to know — how, what, and, most ultimately, whether we know. The

writer cannot simply endorse knowledge without promoting the very condition that he aims to overcome for a moment, namely, the condition of missed opportunities.

What, you might ask, is “missed” about phenomena, if not simply that we generally remain ignorant of them? I suggested already what I take to be fairly evident: despite the fact that we wage a battle, or hear details of it; despite the fact that we live, or at least work in the Maritimes; despite the fact that the world of art, the world of politics, and the world of science rotate around and even intrude upon us; despite this facticity and all its claims upon us we are generally not *there*. It is *possible* that we be so. And when we *are* there, what happens there, the phenomena themselves appear differently, appear even “for the first time.” What must we do, then, if not simply board a train, show up for work, turn on the television set, or read the newspapers?

Well, that is a tricky question. However, careful attendance upon our ordinary condition of missed opportunities provides a hint: if we are normally *out of it*, we are so because and to the extent that we assume war is war, life is life, art is art, government is government, science is science — that these enterprises go on of their own accord, that we are innocent bystanders, that the most we can do is to contemplate them or to use them and their results for our own purposes. As writers we undo this assumption: we show, first, how much each of us is somehow the maker of his world, and, second, how our willing participation changes the phenomena themselves, changes not necessarily the outcome of the war, of life, of art, of government, of science, but how they appear. In short, we show how things might be — if only we find our proper place in there with them, even for them. As writers, we institute a change from being out of it to being in there; we actually enter the fray — not into the scrimmages of opinion, the quarrels of those on the sidelines, but into the movement of the Battle of Being itself, the passage to and from how things already are and how they might be.

4.

Now, rather than pursuing the argument that the “might be” of interest to writers hovers as the exigency that we find our place within and for phenomena, let me turn to the *consequences* of the proposal

itself. I believe I can deduce three such consequences. Addressed to the young who contemplate the vocation of writing, the three may be formulated as rules.

First: Don't reduce what might be to something that already is. Since the writer's task is to say how things are, any effort to urge upon your readers the way things *already* are undoes the primary condition of writing. In the traditional language of rhetoric, any effort to say strictly what already is leaves no room for urging, no need for persuasion. Persuasion builds on the possibility that your readers can see things in ways that are new to them, the possibility of things and people emerging in ways differing from how they already are. To assume at the outset that what you want to say *already* is, is to bore your reader and yourself. And even if you manage to put pen to paper your reader will soon note what you perhaps failed to admit: you have nothing to say.

Of course, there are many ways one can inadvertently reduce a glimmering possibility to a feigned factuality. Most commonly, perhaps, one writes to get out once and for all what one has to say. One then assumes that what one has to say already prevails in principle: one then aspires simply to record it, to describe it, to stir up to the surface what already lies buried as fact—as though a fact were something done without entailing human agency, already done before any doing. Less obviously, perhaps, one commits the same stifling error if one assumes with more humility that someday, however far off, what needs to be said now will have worked itself into a standing condition: for instance, if one could rightly depict war, mankind would so much hate its indecencies that we would henceforth live in perpetual peace—or so much appreciate the call to courage that we would someday turn it into a perpetual sport; if one could rightly depict life in the Maritimes, future generations would forever understand their situation here—or finally change it; if one could rightly show what art is and what not, there would someday be nothing but good art—or correct judgements about art; if one could only correctly establish the individual and social nature of man, a state could arise in which all people henceforth behaved honestly and cooperatively; if one could only fathom the innermost essence of the universe, we could one day enjoy a perfect system of science where

all events would appear henceforth as already known. When a writer makes any such assumption as these he aspires, notice, to preempt all future writing in his chosen domain: as though he were a member of a last generation of writers, after which there might only be readers. He may just discover that he himself was born too late.

A second consequence: Don't assume the task of setting others straight. If the writer's task is to say how things are, his writing must issue in an emergence of how things might be—as a shimmer recalling also how they already are. The opinions of readers should leave the writer cold—or, rather, provide the contrasting background for the genesis of what the writer has to say, i.e., the genesis of being. And the writer knows all too well that the opinions readers harbor do stand guard at the gates to which the genesis will first address itself, very likely turning the caller away. But the poet or philosopher forsakes his own task if he himself turns from the address toward those guardians of the gates. He then not only abandons the field temporarily, but also assumes the strange task of trying to tell others how they should view things out there, namely, where they aren't; writer and reader alike then find themselves essentially out of it. Perhaps we here have one reason why some readers recoil in positive horror from certain writings, as though they were terrifyingly tainted simply in the reading of them. For many writers transgress the rule here—although usually not for long, since it is hard to be prolific about the opinions of one's readers.

Should the writer then ignore his readers—write for himself, as it were, and as though no reader need come forth? A tempting thought for those who have despaired of the opinions of others. However, like the efforts of a physician or a preacher, the writer's every word addresses itself to others, and a writer who ignores his readership soon desists from writing. The writer, after all, writes to elicit the way things are. This elicitation takes concrete shape as an address: the way things are, especially the way things might be, must address us. And the “us” immediately at stake for the writer is the reader: for readers and for readers alone does he write. Yet the writer cannot do the work for the reader. The writer knocks at the gates, as it were, but only in passing, and on his way. The reader himself must come out. Not at all the writer, but rather the reader

must worry about the guardians of the gates. As in so many other affairs of life where we place ourselves at the service of others, the good writer will do everything possible for the reader—except do the work for him. This last putative service would in fact amount to the greatest disservice one can do for another, as when a mother continues to stand in for her boy long after he should have assumed responsibility for himself. The writer, too, must let his readers go—although some will fault him for this apparent negligence.

You might ask at this point: Does not a poetic or a philosophic work aim to *persuade*? Certainly, if by persuasion you mean calling the reader out onto the field for an original encounter with the way things are. Yet persuasion rightly means something else in contexts where writing is not at its best, not reflective. For instance, one must sometimes submit briefs aiming to convince others to take certain decisions of an institutional sort. One then works on the opinions of others as a lawyer works on the jurors. In a less consequential context, a scholar writes an article to correct an opinion formulated by another scholar—opinions, e.g., about what Homer or Plato said or meant. In these and other contexts we try to set people straight, and we likely employ some strategies to do so. However, in reflective writing one must articulate a context in which readers can overcome opinionation, not just change their opinions.

The peculiar persuasion possible in reflective writing requires of the writer a radical respect for his readers—and for humanity at large. After all, as a writer you envision the possibility that your reader—anybody—can indeed find his place within and for phenomena: you extend credit to him individually; in old-fashioned terms, you have “faith” in your readers. This respect must be embodied in your writing, no matter how you may feel “personally,” i.e., when you do not write. Otherwise what you write says nothing, or at least nothing of a reflective nature. On the other hand, if you absolutely despair of humanity you have written your readership off as a loss: you assume henceforth that no reader, or not enough readers, will do for themselves what you leave them to do. The most common result is that one does not write.

Perhaps respect for humanity is the greatest stumbling block to reflective writing. For the more emphatically one anticipates a way

people might respond to and make something out of their situation, the more sadly one recalls the way people fall short of, even refuse to live up to, their own potentiality. In writing about life on the front during World War II, or in the boondocks of the Canadian Maritimes, one may, for instance, bring out the possibility of courage and initiative on the part of one's fellows. At the same time, though, one becomes increasingly aware that most people are generally cowards and freeloaders.

Now, these two rules addressed to the novice—don't reduce what can be to what already is, and don't try to set your reader straight—more or less follow from a direct consideration of the experience of writing reflectively. A third rule would seem to follow from the quandary in which the first two leave us: don't assume that language is a mere means of simply transmitting something. For if a writer defeats himself when he attempts to mirror what already is, and also when he turns upon his readers to correct their ways, he may well wonder what business he has at all. Yet his wonderment will debilitate him only if he assumes that the words flowing from his pen should serve as a mere means to achieve something distinct from the experience they directly configure. He then prostitutes words, as it were, and he probably finds that they in fact refuse to show up to work or (if somehow pressed into service anyway) work to rule only, thereby removing any intrinsic motive for writing and certainly leaving no delight for the reader. Somehow, the writer must understand the apparent materials of his craft as constituting in fact the very domain of his own efforts as well as of the final result deposited in the lap of his fellows. But how?

You set yourself to saying how things are. You know very well, then, that you work within the precinct of a delicate distinction between how things already are and how they might be. Whatever your direction, you find yourself working this distinction out in words. Words more or less offer themselves, and you choose among them to form a flow. What are those words? Where do they come from? You have heard or read them. Some offer themselves readily, perhaps because you have chosen them on other occasions already; others only beckon at a distance, being dubious in their power and perhaps even in their spelling. You ponder words while pondering what must be

said. What is there to ponder about words themselves? Evidently, their established meanings, the ways, the paths along which, others have used them, in connection with other issues and other words: you ponder what they already mean, what you and your readers already mean by them. You look many of them up in a dictionary: you note how a word is spelled, what archaic and what specialized meanings it has, and (in the case of most English words) what it meant in Latin, Greek, or Anglo-Saxon. You nearly always discover, then, that the word has many established meanings, no doubt because it arises in many different contexts of human enterprise. This multiplicity of meaning might bother you on some occasions, as when you want to describe how things already are and do so in a way that will not mislead your readers. On other occasions you find the multiplicity liberating, as when you articulate how things might be. In any case, your “materials,” the words of the tongue in which you are writing, appear to have a life of their own, meanings diachronically and synchronically related, shifting, and disparate. This independent life of words may exasperate you on occasion, but you learn to love them all the more because of it, as a potter loves his clay or a beekeeper loves his bees. Your task is both to conform to established meanings and to forge possible meanings—to account for powers indicative of the speech community in which you write and to stand alone in your responsibility to say unheard-of things. Thus you are always *learning* the language.

Of course, we may not always love words as philologists should. Especially when forced to write (to make a living, to satisfy a superior, to preserve our own image, or whatever) we likely treat the medium of our torture with a certain amount of disdain. In any case, even if we fail to check the degradation of words in our own writing, we seldom fail to notice it in the writings of others. So let me conclude this whole lesson on writing with a topological survey of three paths that lead away from the true love of words and eventually into a dark pit of silence.

The first and most obvious one: we take words for granted, let them trail behind us. From the handwriting and the spelling, to sentence structure and the direction of the flow, we may leave chiefly droppings behind: we rush ahead and assume words will remain

faithful to our intent without recurrent attention on our part. Such familiar sloppiness, you might say, stems from a lack of practice in the routines of the craft, a failure to conform to the established norms. You then call it a sin of omission, whereas I consider it rather a sin of commission. For the very willingness to leave droppings indicates a lethal assumption about writing itself: that what comes out of the enterprise, what lies on the page as henceforth already written, has no intrinsic claim on what one really needs to say, on what ultimately demands saying, on what most genuinely *might* be said. Writing appears to the sloppy writer as only a peripheral manifestation of inner thought.

Now, if one must, for whatever reason, write, one’s sloppiness takes on a disguised form. For one soon relinquishes any genuine hope of saying what might be and confines one’s sayings to what already is. One then scribbles off notes and letters, announcements and minutes, perhaps even articles and poems, dissertations and novels, while concentrating not on the words but on the organization. With practice, the failed writer may produce impeccably ordered sequences, with clear plot structure or logical argument. But the baby is stillborn; the words fall lifeless onto the paper, since they only record what already is and do not throb with what might be. Interestingly, the postmortem generally reveals visible proof of the collapse of the inner tissues: while the body itself looks well preserved, the sentence structure is frigid and the word count very low. Despite the many fillers (American writers specialize in redundancies), the basic verbs are “is” and “follows,” “goes” and “sees” (along with their cognates), and the basic binder the word “this” (which, being genderless in English, slips into meaning not something named in a previous sentence but rather “what I have been trying to say”). A French cadaver will display many flowery phrases, long since dried out; and a German corpse will interconnect its members into a grammatical labyrinth depriving one of all breath even if one can find one’s way through it. The mortician will, of course, employ a distinctive but very standardized vocabulary—one that he can simply use on the correct presumption that his readers will share in it. He does not, properly speaking, cultivate the vocabulary, precisely because whatever meanings the words have they already have, at least at the moment he “defines” them.

Perhaps in reaction to prevailing forms of disrespect for words we may develop a sort of liking for them that leads us into even more subtle traps. In the name of proper love, we insist that the words we use — and, even more, the words others use — enter into discourse wearing the exact garb of meaning in which they have made their previous entries. We then pamper each word as a mother might pamper her child, afraid to let it out of sight for fear it may go astray. One's every word corresponds to meanings sanctioned by, perhaps even exemplified in dictionaries, and one expects the words of others to seek such sanctity also. One falls into pedantry.

Perhaps, in response to the pedant's depletion of words, we may start off in a third direction, leading nowhere: endeavoring to detect or create secret contents just behind them. For instance, there is a whole school of criticism claiming that Plato's writings hide a secret doctrine, and adherents to this school easily ferret out a similar duplicity of exoteric and esoteric writing in Descartes, Machiavelli, and others. Critics of poetry also like to foresee a coyness in the works they study: indirect denunciation of social evils, promotion of various virtues, and of course symbolism, if not outright allegory. Finally, students of both philosophy and poetry often hope to extract from a personal interview with a living author what he "really" meant. All these propensities, whatever heuristic and passing value they may have, stem from a crucial assumption about the writer's use of words: that he makes them waver at a distance from what "really" needs to be said. Words then appear not just as tricky, but as tricks: as means. Thus, once again, one may look closely at words, but in treating them as ciphers to be decoded, one ultimately understands them as extrinsic barriers rather than as intrinsic gates.

But the search for secrets rests on a fundamental confusion of rules. To be sure, we must, *as readers*, work hard, work on and over and with a text. What a writing says escapes us — if, that is, it says how things *are* and so how they *might* be. A text is as slippery as its subject matter, and it reveals as many levels as we are willing to unpeel. Moreover, once a work has become established it takes its place in our educational institutions not only with a title (Plato's *Republic*, Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*) but also with a convenient summary composed by a librarian or other bibliographer

("advocates that philosophers should be kings" or "shows the guilt of a man who violated the gifts of nature"). A reader then not only experiences the usual difficulty in reading, but must peel back those conventions to reveal more vital vistas. Thus it is the *reader*, and the one who is not also a writer, who all too willingly consigns words to the function of structuring the coverings — and thereby assumes that the author hides something else behind his words (opinions if not realities). A reader who also writes knows all too well that written words are like those securities torn exactly in half and come out of their impotence into full power only when one adds the other half — a half which, in the case of reflective literature, is somehow ours, namely, our response, our answer, our word completing the dialogue. The joke of the entire confusion is that the "secret" is never another's, and never elsewhere.

As a writer, one harbors no secrets. On the contrary, one devotes all one's energies to the task of saying what needs to be said: this is elusive enough, and hovers always ahead. The words that flow from the pen are either genuine or ingenuine, never simply coy. Genuine words draw their strength from what might be said. Ingenuine words, those that configure themselves at a distance and have meaning only in their interrelations with one another, do not *draw*, are "mere" words, ones that might have been genuine, might still become genuine. The writer lives within the tension of a distinction that in itself nearly everyone recognizes: the word as a familiar "shape" for the ear or eye and the word as announcing something, bringing something into our presence. As shapes, words are like hammers, nails, boards, and sometimes even houses, but all simply for sale or for rent. As announcements, words present what otherwise only lingers in the corridors of our life, and elicit from us the greeting, cordial or otherwise, appropriate at the moment of entry. As readers, we must sometimes strain to appreciate this distinction and to take up a position within the tension: we tire, we pretend to read, and even fool ourselves for a while. As writers, however, we either live within the tension or suffer the silent gloom of *agraphia*.

5.

If we prostitute words either by taking them for granted, or by focusing on them in isolation, or by hoping for secrets behind them,

how might the writer then genuinely love words? Well, as in other affairs, one is either in love or not. However, once we *are* in love, we can note and affirm some of the peculiarities of the affair. Let me mention one such peculiarity: writers metaphorize — always hear in words more than already *is*, and insist upon what *might* be in them. Erasmus' Folly touches upon something essential when she claims she is the greatest blessing in love affairs, that folly and folly alone makes such affairs possible and keeps them going, since it allows us to wink at faults and even transform them into virtues: "one man showers kisses on his mistress's mole, and another is charmed by a polyp on his dear lamb's nose, a father talks about the gleam in his son's squinting eye." Like the old hag in "The Wife of Bath's Tale," mistresses, sons, and now words actually change countenance — if only we attend to them properly and if, as the Wife of Bath suggests in her prologue, we could only recall the elves and fairies we have otherwise exiled from the land.

For a writer, words share in the conflict of being, the conflict between what already is and what might be. Indeed, the drama resides most obviously in the words themselves, in the blatant conflict between what words already mean and what they might mean. Words in their flow appear to the writer primarily as metaphorical, as having their meaning neither in what they already mean nor in what he may wish them to mean, but in the movement between the two, a movement that both draws the writer and carries the reader toward the possibilities of things. As a lover of metaphor, then, the writer is always ahead of what he has already said: each word has more to say, and therefore beckons him on. Rilke is right, then, to discourage young writers from relying on irony: every genuine saying draws upon what remains to be said. Irony already belongs to words themselves, so that any effort to introduce a fabricated version may destroy the original — as a lover destroys the affair by demanding of the beloved a proof of love. Fabricated irony is either awkward, pedantic, or deceptive.

So I leave you with this commencing thought on metaphor. Of course, to one who is not a true lover, therefore not a reflective writer, metaphor ultimately appears as a kind of analogy. Indeed, writers may rightly complain that metaphor has fallen into discredit during the

last two hundred years or so. Yet even if they are right on this score, the established drift need not daunt us. Our job in any case is not to *use* metaphors, but to *create* them — and, in doing so, to show by example that we need not prostitute words.

Notes

Professor Harold Zyskind, in replying to "A Preface to Reading" (*Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 14; reprinted now as "Reading"), spoke of the "essay's claim, not usual these days, to belong to *belles lettres*." Not having intended such a claim, the assessment puzzled me. However, as I turned to the question of *writing* I began to realize the significance of the remark: if the humanities have lost their foothold and direction for many teachers and most students (and, one fears, for nearly all managers of institutions), we might attribute the *cause* of this loss not at all to the failure of society to recognize our worth, nor to the economic exigencies of our time, nor to the flooding of the schools with young people looking for occupational training only. Since these factors all lie beyond our control anyway, we might well consider them as mere symptoms of a disease the cause of which lies much closer to home: in the pretension to provide a kind of science of letters, of soul, of humanity. Besides the obvious fact that the social sciences (linguistics, psychology, sociology) have beaten us to the punch in these domains (however we may assess the intrinsic power of the punch), we might recall our own role in or at the birth of literature, the progeny formally placed in our care by the structure of educational institutions. With the finger pointed back at ourselves we might ask: If we ourselves cannot *write* reflectively, and in a way constituting an encounter, how can we expect others, those innocents who come knocking at our door, to *read* reflectively? We all too evidently run the risk of turning reading into a painful exercise, justified only because one result of performing it is that investigators, engineers, merchants, and scientists thereby learn some needed "tools of communication." In the jargon of university administrators, the humanities may well end up comprising only "service departments."

Just as reflective reading requires of us that we move *behind* the fixed words, and in this way also *beyond* them, so does reflective writing require of us that we rewrite our traditions and only in this sense write something new. Thus reading and writing in our own domain do not comprise two distinct branches: one reads only as one rewrites, one writes only as one rereads. In short, we articulate only in dialogue. I've always liked John Kenneth Galbraith's comment in his Addendum to *The New Industrial State*:

“Justice requires, no doubt, that much be left to the reader. Writing is hard enough work without having to make it comprehensible.” However, when he adds immediately that “scholarship endorses a division of labor between those who write and those who read,” I hesitate: scholarly writing endorses this division in one way, reflective writing in another. Scholars may read chiefly to exposit, correct, or extend. Writers, on the other hand, read to write—to reread and to rewrite. The life of letters, indeed the academic life of the humanities, depends on such a circular rather than on a linear movement.

Oddly, though, one distinct advantage of embarking on a career of writing is that it liberates one from the bog of books. Until we write, we are tempted into sidestepping the issues and devoting our energies to the never-ending preparatory task of squinting our eyes to discern what an *author* meant. All the while, however, fruitful reading depends on what the *words* mean. And the meaning of words depends heavily on what *we* mean. Wittgenstein's dictum in *The Blue Book* cuts both ways: “Philosophers very often talk about investigating, analyzing, the meaning of words. But let's not forget that a word hasn't got a meaning given to it, as it were, by a power independent of us, so that there could be a kind of scientific investigation into what the word *really* means. A word has the meaning someone has given to it.” And that “someone” includes the reader, an inclusion we more likely appreciate if we also write.

Who knows what Plato meant when he let Socrates deliver a speech on the freeman's *eros*, on the soul of man, on the love of *logos*, on the need for soul-luring (*psychagogia*) in any effective speech, on the speaker's commitment to generic procedure, on the inability of anything written to do for the reader what needs most to be done?

Who can say for sure what Aristotle meant in his review of nearly all the “techniques” orators had earlier employed and recommended? Was he reinterpreting these to provide an art of *logos* for philosophers, or did he aim simply to publish a better handbook for orators? And did he intend his comments on time's power of degeneration, on poetry's and philosophy's commitment to generation, on the constant relevance of the question of being—did he intend these comments to delineate the task of the *writer*?

Who knows what Longinus meant in saying that the “elevation” so essential for us depends solely on properly attuned speech—and that such *logos* works by carrying us out of ourselves rather than saddling us with another belief? Or in commenting at the end that we can only write truly “uplifting” *logos* as an affirmation and instantiation of freedom?

Who can say what the intentions of Cicero and Quintilian were? However, readers who also write will take seriously these two authors when they claim that persuasion ultimately depends not on tricks but on the responsibility of the speaker who, like the writer, must make the *res* present to and “weighty” for others, so that it can become a *res publica*.

Who knows what William Blake meant when he declared, “For man cannot unite with man but by their emanations?” (That we read or write, speak or listen, communally only when we learn to face what *might* be?) Or that “Every honest man is a prophet”? Or that “Execution is only the result of invention”?

Who can say for sure what Hegel, and Nietzsche after him, meant when deriding the concern for “being” (*das Sein*) and when advancing a “logic” of self-contradiction? Some readers think they can. However, perhaps here only the writer can make something out of what to the reader can only sound like a denial of the highest concern and a repudiation of the first principle of sound thinking. For only as we are doing something alone can we articulate what anyone knows who actually tries his own hand at something and does not wait for it to be served up: that what *is* comes upon one in two faces. A careful reader, on the other hand, should at least notice the scandal of the era that Hegel and Nietzsche tried to bring to a close: the morbidly successful effort to consign all *logos* of the *is* to the realm of the *was*. Thinkers were then driven to state out loud what writers had previously taken for granted: *Was bekannt ist, ist eben deshalb nicht erkannt*—what's familiar is just for that reason not known.

Who can say what Hölderlin meant when he wrote that we have language only because our destiny is to witness what we are? Or when he wrote that we can speak and listen to each other only because we *are* only in conversation? Who can say what Heidegger meant when he rewrites the poet's words in his own essay, “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry”?

Who can know for sure what Sartre meant when he wrote in *What is Literature?* that “the writer, a free man addressing free men, has only one subject, namely freedom” and that “writing is a certain way of willing freedom: once you have begun you are engaged, whether you like it or not”?

To the extent that we have been trained to search for an author's meaning, all reading poses a fundamental danger for us today. A close colleague of mine just recently showed me a piece by Roland Barthes that confirms this gloomy thought (“To Write: An Intransitive Verb?” in *The Structuralist Controversy*: Baltimore, 1970; original now available in *Essais critiques IV*: Paris, 1984). The opening paragraph reads:

For centuries Western culture conceived of literature not as we do today, by way of a study of works, authors, and schools, but by way of a veritable theory of language. This theory had a name: *Rhetoric*. It reigned in the Western world from Gorgias to the Renaissance — for nearly two thousand years. Threatened as early as the sixteenth century by the advent of modern rationalism, rhetoric was completely ruined when rationalism was transformed into positivism at the end of the nineteenth century. At this point there is, in a manner of speaking, no longer any common zone of reflection: literature no longer regards itself as language, except in the works of a few premonitory writers such as Mallarmé, and linguistics claimed very few rights over literature . . .

As I read on in this essay I found what “study of works, authors, and schools” might mean: studying them as readers only, on the lookout for what others have done. And the opposite, “veritable theory of language,” would then mean: contemplating language as one's own activity. Later in the essay Barthes describes how language appears to all concerned: “an instrument in the service of either reason or the heart.” As one result of the “ruin” of rhetoric, we begin to assume that writing should do the basic work for the reader. When running at full steam, this assumption makes us *minderjährig* — underage.

To declare ourselves minors we need only assume, without a word, that a script should take care of itself. As script readers we then demand that the drama unfold for, but essentially without us; no matter what else follows upon this demand, we are left with “works, authors, and schools,” mere toys for culture. And as script writers we mime this drama-at-a-distance by forever talking about the stage directions, about how to talk; writing takes the form of preliminary discussions of what one *will* say, concluding summaries of what one *has* said, and incessant qualifications of what one *is* saying. For the writer this commitment to second-order discourse is deadly. Expending all one's energies in the enterprise of “giving meaning to words” *in advance*, one has time only for pointing up missed distinctions, missed categories, and never time to get them out into the agora to help make up for missed opportunities. Once we forego our own part in the drama we can never talk *it* up, but only talk *about* it. Such talk has its own standards of competence, but they are not a freeman's standards.

How, you might ask, might we become *grossjährig* — of age? I find an ancient answer especially suggestive for understanding our task at the birth of literature:

We all share in the same habit: conducting enquiry not towards the matter itself [*pros to pragma*] but toward someone who states the contrary. And one even enquires by oneself only so long as one finds nothing to state against oneself. Thus, [recalling this habit, we can see that] it behooves whomsoever is to enquire *well* that he stand up boldly to what properly stands forth in the general field shaping what is [in the *genos*]: this mode of enquiry comes, in turn, from contemplating the diverse things that may arise in that field [from contemplating the *diaphorai*].

This statement of Aristotle's (*On the Heavens*, 294B) every writer should tack above his worktable — in Greek, perhaps, and followed by room for one's own translation.

4

Laughing

First published as “Reflections on Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*” in *Cahiers de Philosophie*, Série A, Fascicule v (Luxembourg, 1994), pp. 49-66. Also delivered as a public lecture at the Centre Universitaire de Luxembourg in May of 1991. For the present edition, I have combed through the original version and introduced minor stylistic improvements.

At the end of Umberto Eco's tale *The Name of the Rose*, Adso and William are standing in a garden, observing the conflagration without any danger to themselves. As they converse about the significance of the burning of the immense collection of books, William remarks:

Perhaps the task of one who loves human beings is to get them to laugh at the truth, *to get the truth to laugh*, because the only truth is to learn to free ourselves from insane passion for the truth.¹

Throughout Eco's tale William repeatedly suggests that laughter is *anagogical*, that it can *lead into* reality. The book itself embodies the anagogy: it takes the form of a comedy. Ideally I, who am this moment interested in pursuing the suggestion, would also proceed in a comic vein, inciting you to laughter. However, I would like to consider seriously the anagogical possibilities of laughter: more exactly, that my task as a philosopher might be to get you to laugh at the truth, or to get the truth to laugh. Plato says somewhere that the serious cannot be understood without the laughable; let us hope that the reverse is also true—that the laughable cannot be fully understood without the serious.²

§1. *Four readings*

Before pursuing the anagogy of Eco's tale, allow me to review its literalness, its allegory, and its tropology. Some medieval hermeneutical schemes recommend that we read significant literature in all four ways. Thus a careful literal reading channels us into an allegorical reading, i.e. other instances fitting the same form; a well considered allegorical reading suggests a tropological reading, i.e. rules of moral behavior; and a serious tropological reading finally *leads us into* the reality at issue.³

Literally, then: Adso, an old Benedictine monk, recounts his seven-day adventure as a teenager back in the fall of 1327 in a monastery in north-western Italy. He was accompanying his Franciscan master, William of Baskerville, who was to oversee a convention of Benedictines and Franciscans seeking reconciliation on

the question of Jesus' poverty: Did Jesus *own* anything—a purse, for instance (*una borsa*)? As William eventually explains, the question is really whether Christ's vicar on earth should himself gather wealth and its attendant secular power. Like most conventions, this one ends in a fiasco. Meanwhile, however, William takes an interest in the deaths of a number of monks. An ex-inquisitor himself, now converted to the empirical philosophies of Roger Bacon and William of Ockham, our William wishes to discover the causes of these deaths—in contrast to an actual inquisitor in service to the Church, who arrives with the delegates and simply wants to find someone to burn. William's elaborate detective work leads him to Jorge, an ancient and blind monk who has for decades denied the other monks access to the many manuscripts in the monastery's famous and extensive library. All the deaths (eventually seven, of course) revolve around one particular manuscript, the second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which deals with comedy. On the final night, after penetrating the *finis Africae*, deep in the library, and while struggling with Jorge, William and Adso drop their oil lamp, which then ignites the surrounding manuscripts, and a general conflagration ensues.

What does the literal reading contribute to our understanding of laughter? There are many jokes along the way. One in particular: While examining the relics in the crypt of the treasury—relics such as the tip of the spear that pierced the side of Christ on the Cross—William recounts how he once saw in the Cathedral of Cologne the skull of John the Baptist at the age of twelve. “Really?” Adso exclaims; and then, seized by doubt, he goes on: “But John the Baptist was executed at a more advanced age!” whereupon William replies with a grave face: “The other skull must be in some other treasury.”

Apart from the jokes, the book itself takes the form of comedy. Adso narrates the entire story without understanding a word of it himself! Typically, he reports William's instructions in one matter or another, and then promptly shows that he misunderstands it. For instance, William enjoins Adso not to try piecing together the meaning of anything by concentrating on relics; one should rather heed the matter itself and appreciate the relics only as signs—relying not on relics to understand the matter, but rather on the matter to understand the relics. Yet in

the coda to the story Adso tells of having returned years later to the site of the burnt-out monastery, having collected bits of charred furniture and scraps of disintegrated books, and for the rest of his life having puzzled over these in an effort to understand what had happened. By portraying Adso as a dumbbell, as a “straight man” both in and for the story, Eco's work nearly forces us to do the work necessary for understanding: as we fancy ourselves superior to the narrator, we can smile at him and congratulate ourselves on our own wisdom.

The *allegorical* dimension of any story lies in the suitability of its form to other instances. *The Name of the Rose* takes as its own instance a well fortified monastery inhabited by monks officially reading, copying, and illuminating books; furthermore, they congregate regularly and are surrounded by simple folk, *i simplici*, who carry on their lives both independently and within the shadow of the monastery. Does the form of this instance sound familiar? To me, it sounds very much like a university: the interlibrary loan, the power play with the central government, the private intrigues, the pretensions. And above all the strange transformation of books: whereas, in their true function, books cast us into the light, the monks, who live wholly absorbed in their book-world, simply parrot them superstitiously, hoping that some literary routine will solve their problems. *La scienza usata per occultare anziché per illuminare*. The parallels outweigh the differences, but one difference deserves notice: the libraries at North American universities, and now at many European universities, have “open stacks,” so that young scholars freely roam the labyrinth, excising with razor blades what they need to satisfy their superiors, or inscribing their marginal wisdom with ink pens for future readers. Perhaps, then, we could read *The Name of the Rose* as describing the battle for open stacks, a battle fairly recently won.

How does an allegorical reading help us understand laughter? Perhaps by both creating and overcoming distance. So long as *The Name of the Rose* describes 14th-century monks in a faraway place, it allows us to enter freely into the form; it does not threaten us. Once in the form, we can instantiate it freely, e.g. with 20th-century academics, or even with ourselves. Allegory then creates an intimacy with our own condition. Similarly, children's books and adult cartoons

both create and overcome distance by portraying various animals acting and speaking like humans. The key to successful comical allegory is freedom: we enter freely into the foolishness because it is first depicted as foreign to ourselves, and then we are left free to instantiate it as we wish. Satire apart, allegory does not insist that we *censure* the foolishness. Censure either puts us on the defensive or invites us to combat an evil wholly other than ourselves, and in either case it destroys the possibility of instantiating ourselves freely into the form. In contrast with invective, comical allegory allows us to *bear* the failure, the foolishness, because it simultaneously points the way *through* it. I detect here a fundamental movement of the human spirit, a recognition and also an acknowledgement of what we had missed. In philosophical terms: the contemplation of a sameness despite marked divergences.⁴

And what about the tropology of the story? Perhaps the most obvious moral of *The Name of the Rose* is: Don't be like Jorge — teach and learn how to laugh! However, I believe that the most sustained tropology of Eco's book lies in the question of the proper work of the monks in the monastery, or professors at a university . . .

According to Jorge, the monks should study and preserve knowledge, *not* seek it out: “. . .the preservation, I say, and not the search, because it belongs to knowledge, considered as divine, to be complete and defined from the beginning . . . [and] because it belongs to knowledge, considered as human, to be defined and completed in the course of the centuries,” a course initiated by the prophets and culminated by the Church Fathers. Or, as the Abbot states, the mission of the Benedictine Order is to “conserve, repeat, and defend the treasure of wisdom entrusted to us by our fathers” — to be “custodians of the Divine Word.” The effort to *seek* truth beyond, or even for the established treasury of knowledge and wisdom leads us into the sin of pride.

According to William, on the other hand, the monks in general (Bencio in particular) succumb to the sin of lust: not the lust of the flesh, but the lust of knowledge for the sake of knowledge. In contrast, Roger Bacon, William's hero throughout the story, had a *thirst* for knowledge; this thirst was not a lust, William says, because Bacon “wanted to engage science to render God's people happier.”

Lust for knowledge takes the form of “insatiable curiosity,” e.g. Bencio's drive to uncover the missing book. Oddly, such curiosity has the same effect as Jorge's moralistic lust for preserving knowledge. Both lusts lead the monks to forget their pastoral calling to help the simple folk, *i simplici*. This forgetfulness drives the simple folk, in their desperation, to embrace simplistic and superstitious doctrines. “I think it is an error,” William says during one of his several disquisitions on the nature of heresy, “to believe that first comes an heresy and then the simple folk who give (and damn) themselves to it. In truth, first comes the condition of the simple folk [their misery and then also their abandonment], and then the heresy.” Thus the lust of knowledge, be it that of mere curiosity or that of mere preservation, not only sullies the spirit of those committing it, but also exacerbates both the misery and the sin of those who might otherwise be helped.

The conflict between Jorge and William raises the question of how we intellectuals are to understand our involvement with books. William obviously advocates a free hand in our interpretative dealings with received literature. Why? Because, he claims, established literature *already* interprets freely. Deep in the labyrinth of the library, Adso challenges William on this point: “How can we entrust ourselves to ancient wisdom, the trace of which you are always seeking, if this wisdom is transmitted by mendacious books that have interpreted this wisdom so freely?” William replies: “Books are not made to be believed in, but to be subjected to investigation. In the face of a book, we should not ask ourselves what it says, but what it means — what it wants to say.” Jorge and William differ on the question of human responsibility in making sense out of books: Should we, *à la* Jorge, read, listen carefully, and then repeat? Or, *à la* William, look carefully, doubt the interpretations already given, and learn to speak on our own?

But how might the tropology of this book help us understand laughter? The moral of any story appears to take an essentially serious form. Indeed, to pursue the tropology of *The Name of the Rose* we might need to engage in a long, possibly very boring discourse on semiotics — “the theory of semiosis as indefinite interpretation,” the triadic relation among “sign, its object, and its interpretant” (as we read on the first page of another book by Eco:

Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language). Indeed, for all his interest in the Middle Ages, Eco himself fosters the post-modernist passion for hermeneutics. Yet *The Name of the Rose* also subjects post-modernism to the laughing eye...

For instance, William repeatedly reflects on our own responsibility to induce the dead letters of books to rise and to speak the spirit again. On one occasion he explains to Adso that, once risen to our ears, the voices of these books clearly talk among themselves as well as to us and about something else. Adso listens to this thought and then triumphantly caricaturizes it:

Until then I had thought that every book spoke of things, divine or human, that lay outside the books. Now I discern that, not infrequently, books talk of books—it is as though they talked among themselves. In the light of this reflection, the library seemed to me all the more disquieting. It was the place of a long, centuries-old whispering, an imperceptible dialogue among parchments, a living thing, a receptacle of powers not to be ruled by a human mind, a treasure of secrets emanated by many minds, and surviving the death of those who produced them or had them transmitted.

True to his role as a “straight man,” Adso forgets the essential thing: the primacy of our own voice in raising this whisper into audible form. As it stands, Adso's statement of the “theory of inter-textuality” remains compatible with Jorge's insistence on our role as custodians of the library. There will always be dozens of Jorges for every William, but William's worst enemy is his own disciple. Eco's book leaves us free to see the difference, to see the question and its issue as these are buried in the difference. Perhaps we are also left free to save William's own whisper with our own voice.

And the anagogy of *The Name of the Rose*? Just as allegory depends on a careful perusal of the literal, and just as tropology depends upon the extent of our plunge into the allegorical, so too anagogy depends on how we have understood the moral of the story. However, the anagogical reading of a story differs essentially from the other three readings in at least one respect: we may discuss the literal flow of a text, its alternative instantiations, and its moral lessons as

though we were *describing* something about the book. In contrast, the anagogy requires an *enactment*. Most if not all philosophic literature since Plato has assumed that the anagogy of a book, its enactment by the reader, consists in coupling its speech (its *logos*) with the actualization of our own speech, the *logos* naming our own innermost nature.

Yet *The Name of the Rose* clearly proposes not that *logos*, but rather that laughter actualizes our nature and leads us into reality. We fulfil the intention of a book when we laugh, not (or not only) when we reason. A challenging claim, especially if we recall that success in the present enterprise would require that we all end up laughing! Again, let us hope that a serious approach to laughter will not destroy it—will not transmute itself into antagogy... .

§2. *Some reflections on reading books*

Before proceeding, allow me to reflect on books and the human condition, since the relation between these seems to be one of the main themes in Eco's book.

Every significant work engages us in an interpretation of our condition. To each work its own interpretation, and to each of us his or her own engagement. That books exist at all, and that we read, write, and discuss them, testifies already to two basic, highly interpretable features of our condition:

First, our condition is double. On the one hand, we find ourselves enwrapped by fixity—e.g., the confines of a classroom or a university, a marriage or a city. On the other hand we find ourselves plagued by potentiality—by the possibility of making something out of our confines. Or: we are bound to the givens of a time and a place, and yet called out beyond the confines of time and space—incited to recover the given time and place in transcendence. We are all fixity, but haunted by potentiality. Or all potentiality, but burdened by fixity.

Second, our condition is unstable. Do we not read books because we need re-attunement, re-harmonization of our twofold condition? I realize that other motives often initiate the reading of a book: the desire for distraction from our finitude, the desire for instruction in other finitudes, the desire to satisfy the expectations others lay upon

us. I suspect, however, that we can make a life of reading only if it becomes anagogical.

While offering an interpretation, a book makes an issue out of truth: *il s'agit de la vérité, es handelt sich um die Wahrheit, si tratta della verità*. However, truth is also twofold: speaking of truth, we might be speaking either of truth-conditions or of truth-determinations—or of both. Truth may name the event in which we find ourselves fully living up to our condition, actualizing our ownmost potentiality, doing justice both to our given circumstances and to our ultimate transcendence. But truth can also name the faith we bestow on an assertion, on a formulation we understand to originate in a well formed response to givens and to remain serviceable in upcoming encounters.

Philosophers since Plato have insisted that truth in the second sense (asserted determinations) depends upon truth in the first sense (our own location *in* the truth). Pedagogical interests have always illustrated this insistence: the young must position themselves both to reconsider *proposals* first-hand and to determine *circumstances* first-hand. Especially the Greek philosophers abhorred the prospect of living off the atrophied world of received opinion—a second-hand life. Whatever the motivation, the desire to articulate truth-conditions as enhancing the affairs of truth-determination leads to the philosophic endorsement of positive knowledge, and has contributed immensely to the development of our technological culture. Still, the relation between the two senses of truth remains an enigma—as does, then, the notion of truth itself.⁵

These sketchy remarks on books, interpretation, and truth touch upon the heart of our Western literary tradition. I intend them simply to recall as crucial the question first raised by Plato and then by all great thinkers ever since: What can we rightly expect of a book? A *writer* asks this question reflexively, and crafts much of what he writes according to his understanding of the answer.

Readers often assume that a book's discussion of truth-conditions is itself either true or false. This assumption is understandable. A book announces that it is about truth, and it thereby encourages the reader to assume responsibility for truth-determinations: it calls out to the reader to testify directly rather than collect relics of other

testimonies, to respond first-hand rather than second-hand. Once disciplined in this critical approach, the reader inevitably turns the question back onto the book raising the question: How can I, as a reader, know that this *book*, its interpretation, is telling the truth?

The Name of the Rose invites us to reconsider how books about truth can themselves be either true or false. It thereby addresses, and helps the reader address, a question that has become increasingly bothersome since Nietzsche, although it has been with us from the beginning. As a novel, Eco's book can, happily, engage us in this question without claiming to be itself telling the truth.

§3. *A careful reading of the text*

Let us return to our two heroes. William is standing with Adso in the garden, observing the burning of the books, and he remarks that the Antichrist, the ultimate evil and the last great battle, are now truly near at hand. With the books gone up in smoke, we have lost our first line of defense—knowledge. William, as no other in the story, mourns the loss of these books. Yet he continues to muse on the nearness of evil. Jorge, he says, has shown the face of the Antichrist. Jorge, a real grump, a monk who had spent his life hoarding books and controlling their availability to the other monks, portrays in the flesh how the Antichrist “can be born of piety itself, an excessive love of God or of the truth.” The ultimate embodiment of evil does not, as we might like to believe, come from *elsewhere*, a special tribe or faraway place, it can and does spring from our own involvement in the good: from piety, from the way we love truth. It is at this point that William remarks:

Perhaps the task of one who loves human beings is to get them to laugh at the truth, *to get the truth to laugh*, because the only truth is to learn to free ourselves from insane passion for the truth.

Ever since Socrates started pestering the Athenians, our *obvious* task as intellectuals has been to examine ourselves and others, i.e. to interpret and to judge the claims we ourselves and others put forward. Typically, we assume that such examination unfolds seriously, and that the examination will expose and reject foolishness. In apparent contrast to this venerable tradition, William proposes that our ultimate task might be to present things as laughable.

But let us examine in detail the exact formulation of the challenge:

First, the task at issue bears upon one who loves human beings. If we choose, we may interpret the proposal as directed at Christians or, even more restrictively, at the various monks representing Christianity in the story (Jorge the grump, Abo the abbot, Bernardo Gui the inquisitor, etc.). Yet as intellectuals within the “humanities” we ourselves take a special interest in human being. Traditionally stated: we intellectuals love what human beings *can* be, despite the way individuals happen *in fact* to be. William had remarked that the Antichrist could spring from an excessive love of God, or of the truth. Indeed, intellectuals like Jorge can love truth while disdaining their fellow intellectuals and patronizing *i simplici*, the simple folk outside the monastery. Such intellectuals *in fact* reject the task at issue — although the *doctrine* they espouse enjoins some consideration for human beings. Even if the task at issue *in principle* belongs to all those who write and read and discuss books, it *in fact* does not belong to some of us.

Second, the task is to *far ridere della verità*, to get others to laugh at the truth. It is precisely this disposition to laugh at the highest matters that preoccupies Jorge, leads him to ban laughter from the scriptorium of the library and to argue in retrospect that Jesus never laughed. Jorge foresees the possibility that teachers would encourage students to laugh at great works like the Bible; also the possibility that writers of books would simply indulge the fantasies of readers, pandering to their inclination to forget their ultimate destiny. Yet William transmutes *far ridere della verità* into *far ridere la verità*: to get the truth itself to laugh. Indeed, perhaps the Italian of the initial version tempts one to translate more weakly into English: to get people to laugh when in the face of the truth. On this weaker interpretation, the task proposed by William is double: to get others to laugh when engaged with the truth, *and* to allow the truth to be the *source* of this laughter. Still, William himself seems to allow for a stronger kind of laughter, namely *ridicule* — as during his last interview with Jorge, when he explains in graphic detail what he would like to do with Jorge: among other things, to roll him in

honey, then in feathers, and to chase him around the courtyard so that the other monks might laugh *at* him.

Finally, William proffers a *reason* why our task might consist in engaging others in laughter: the only truth, he says, is to learn to liberate ourselves from the insane passion for truth. Our passion for truth, so much celebrated as a sign of our humanity and a road to salvation, can be unhealthy to the extreme. But how can truth be associated with inhumanity and with disease? Truth appears as the generic name for the solution to our problems: William seeks the truth about the deaths of an increasing number of monks; and he in fact finds the truth about the runaway horse, the stolen reading glasses, the access to *finis Africae*, and other matters of concern. Still, William himself notes that the *passion* for truth can become diseased: Bernardo Gui, the inquisitor, illustrates this disease in matters of the flesh, while Jorge, the grump, signals its epitome in matters of the spirit. The cure for this very contagious disease, *l'unica verità*, takes the form of a liberation: we must learn to liberate ourselves from . . . a passion that has gone bad. Truth appears as the *source* of the disease, but truth must also be its cure. From this paradoxical reason, William concludes that one who loves human beings will engage them in laughter.

The premisses needed to complete the syllogism, or rather the sorites, are: (1) a lover of human beings will address himself to what human beings most need, (2) people need, more than anything else, liberation from the insane passion for truth and, finally, (3) such passion can be cured by the proper dose of laughter — more exactly, by learning to laugh at or in the face of truth, which perhaps means laughing from or out of the truth.

Logically, the full meaning of a conclusion depends upon the meaning of the premisses. The first one sounds reasonable: one who loves human beings tries to address what they really need — often quite distinct from what they believe they need. The second premiss locates one of the chief concerns of the best thinkers between the two World Wars of our own century: liberation from unhealthy concern for truth becomes thematic in the works of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and John Dewey, for instance. The third premiss locates the question raised by William: the proposal that liberation will come through an

engagement in laughter. If truth liberates us, it does so in laughter.⁶ Any effort to address our real needs is false, even enslaving, if it precludes, or if we allow it to preclude, laughing within (perhaps even *at*) the effort.

§4. *The workings of laughter*

But what *is* laughter? Here we are discussing at great length somebody *else's* proposal without having yet asked what we are talking about! Let us pause and play with some phenomena of laughter. And we need not be ashamed. We human beings are, as Aristotle says, the only ones who laugh—just as we are the only ones conditioned by *logos*.⁷ Perusing the phenomena of laughter will help us understand human being itself, and such understanding will certainly interest those who love human beings.

Let us then *look*:⁸

A man demands of his girl friend that she love him—on the grounds that he loves her! We might laugh, depending on our own position (e.g. in the audience watching a production of Molière's *Don Juan*).

A woman nags a man for not being “her type.” We might laugh, again depending on our position, and on how the reproach unfolds.

A cartoon depicts God and His only Son quarrelling about who owes it to whom to descend to earth to straighten out those hopeless cases. We likely laugh, providing only that we don't take offense at the sacrilege.

A cartoon depicts a man dressed in a Greek toga and carrying a lamp in broad daylight, replying to a curious onlooker: “Actually, I'm looking for a two-bedroom apartment in Greenwich village.” Familiar with the story of Diogenes and the housing problems in New York, we will at least smile.

But what can we *see* in these examples—all adapted from Aristotle himself?⁹ One thing we should see looming is *trouble*! Perhaps it is just as difficult to present examples of laughter as to present examples of rationality. Most obviously, whether or not any of these scenarios actually induce laughter depends heavily on how they are filled out. And even after a clever comedian or cartoonist has choreographed one of those mini-scripts, whether or not we laugh

depends very much on our mood at the time and the place. More bothersome, perhaps: although these and other “laughables” show something being *wrong*, other examples suggest the recognition of something being *right*—as we laugh gently at a small child or a cat performing certain antics in all innocence and even with grace. At this one extreme, there is the laughter of simple joy, pure affirmation, deliverance. At the other extreme there is the laughter of scorn, a display of superior judgement, perhaps the intention to hurt others; and of course laughter here can become pathological, part of a desperate effort not to respond where help is needed, a perverse delight in things going wrong for others. And in the middle there is the laughter at the silly—as when my wife laughs at the faces I make or the caricatures I draw with bodily gestures.

Still, one feature seems to characterize every conceivable example of the laughable: the recognition of failure, of a contrast with reality. Even the laughter of pure joy might stem from a sudden deliverance from failure, and a pathological delight in the sufferings of others might stem from a short-lived relief from the awareness of one's own failure.

But such a common denominator of the laughable exacerbates our troubles. William proposes that we help people laugh at the truth: How can truth itself appear as a failure? How might truth be a laughing matter if laughter always stems from a recognition of failure? Truth, it would seem, must name the *success* most centrally at issue for human beings.

Perhaps we sail into these difficulties because we are fated to concern ourselves not only for truth-determinations but also for truth-conditions. For instance, we write and read books not only about the facts of Roman architecture but also about the truth of Christianity. As any great thinker, Augustine of Hippo presents us with an account, a *logos*, of the battle between truth and untruth. But his *Confessions* and his *City of God* also leave us saddled with the account: now we have on our hands not only our own struggle with untruth, but also an account that seems to determine what the truth is; we are then tempted either to endorse or to reject Augustine's book in the same way we might endorse or reject a book describing Roman architecture. But there is a difference. After we visit Rome and look for ourselves, no

harm ensues if we either endorse or reject the one book on the grounds of its correspondence with the facts. But even after we have, with the help of Augustine's accounts, participated in the battle of truth and untruth, even after we have stood in the front lines of this battle, harm *does* arise if we rest with the book, written or read, as though it were adequate to the truth at issue. Such resting, especially when it takes the form of an endorsement, lands us immediately in untruth: *i libri non sono fatti per crederci*—books are not made for believing in *them*.

Every account, every *logos*, of the truth becomes its own untruth: its own failure. And failing to recognize this essential possibility of truth, of our own *logos* of truth, we redouble the failure: we pass into *demonic* failure. “They lied to you,” William informs Jorge. “The devil is not the principle of matter; the devil is the arrogance of the spirit, the faith that does not smile, the truth that never gets seized by doubt.”

Jorge believes that doubting an account, doubting the *logos* of truth-conditions, signals the beginning of failure. And he may be right. But, paradoxically, the exclusion of doubt requires us to endorse one account against others, engenders a battle among accounts, bars us from entering into the battle between truth and untruth, and precipitates us into untruth. Thus we seem to preserve the truth of a given *logos* only if we allow the account, the *logos* itself, to appear as a failure—only if we renounce it in favor of what it is about. Contrary to Jorge, William would permit the monks to jest even with Holy Writ.

In somewhat technical language, the argument for laughing at the truth runs: the *phenomenon* of truth, the event of our coming into the light with our circumstances, not only delivers us momentarily, but also leaves us with *phantasms* of truth that can henceforth enslave us—*can* enslave us, because these leftovers have the attractive power of truth while at the same time supplanting the event of truth. It might follow, then, that speech in which truth is at issue, especially the speech taking the form of dead letters (books), should provide its own self-destruct mechanism for those who hear or read it. This much-needed mechanism would have to allow the leftovers of truth, the ghosts of truth past, to appear laughable—but laughable because these

leftovers present only caricatures of truth present and simulacra of truth future. When speech engenders laughter it at least dissolves its own apparent self-sufficiency: laughter helps us overcome logocentricity.

Still, not all laughter jolts us out of our own phantasms and back into truth present. Just as there is an art of speech, a *technē* of *logos*, so there is an art of laughter, namely the art of portraying phantasms as self-destructing: comedy.

Aristotle's passing definition of comedy reads: a *mimesis* of “foul,” not completely bad people, in speech and in action that is laughably shameful. A comedy portrays human failure, *hamartia*, but in a way that, unlike in tragedy, the portrayal does not appear painful to us, and does not culminate in death.¹⁰ Somehow, some forms of the shameful (the ignoble, the ugly) can rightly arouse laughter rather than disgust. Or perhaps the art lies in allowing us to see through, to *pass through* the shameful for the sake of that in comparison with which the shameful first appears as shameful. Perhaps *catharsis* consists in deliverance from reflexively generated failure (*hamartia*): for the worst human failure consists in the passion to detect human failure. We may suppose that Jorge, the grump, and Bernardo Gui, the inquisitor, do detect real evil, but they also propagate the evil they detect.

Strangely, Aristotle offers only one indication of something that is wrong yet painless and not destructive: the funny mask, the *prosopon* worn by the comic actor on the Greek stage. Still today a circus clown presents a distortion of the human face and figure, one so elementary that any adult and most children will recognize the distortion immediately. *The Name of the Rose* portrays Salvatore as distorted in face and figure, and then also as speaking and behaving in obviously distorted ways. But can we think of the art of comedy as based on such obvious devices? Or did Aristotle offer only the simplest example in order not to distract from his topic at that moment, namely tragedy? I wonder. Perhaps the *prosopon* worn by the actor serves as an allegory. In the more generic sense of the word, a *prosopon*, unlike the English “mask” is simply “what's up front,” namely a collection of features which remains constant throughout a temporal development: a “personality.” It contrasts with

the *ethos* of a human being, the basic movement of the spirit that slowly reveals itself in the course of a tragic *mimesis*. The question would then be how a *comic* portrayal might also engender a revelation of *ethos*, the needed movement of spirit in laughter.

On the hypothesis that the *prosopon* does illustrate the core of comedy I re-interpret what William asks of those who love human beings: he asks us to remember that every account of truth—whether in the Holy Bible or in Eco's own book—arrives as a mask, and that its revelation of the human spirit depends on the human ability to be jolted beyond the mask. This is a strange ability: an ability to *undergo* rather than to *do* something. As Henri Bergson reviews at great length in his little book *On Laughter*, the human spirit tends to ossify, so that it no longer responds to what it receives but only according to programs already devised. The refusal to laugh certainly signals an advanced stage of ossification. If *logos* names our ability to pursue revelations with a flexible spirit, laughter might name our ability to let go of any *logos* already given. The more we develop our powers of *logos* in our passion for truth, the more we will need laughter to liberate ourselves from the phantasms trailing behind and destroying the health of this passion.

§5. A final joke ...on us!

When we read *The Name of the Rose* we naturally understand William as solving the problem of encrusted and paralyzing tradition. With those newfangled eye-glasses, William represents the re-birth of the first-hand look, the resolve to overcome superstition, the willingness to examine circumstances as they are rather than as we would like them to be, the concern for improving and extending human life on earth—in short, the birth of the New Science.

Yet I do believe that Eco has been pulling our leg!! Even though William and his likes might have offered a solution to the problems of the 14th century, his solution is now our problem. The Once-New Science has in the meantime become a superstition: a vast network of worldly accounts which, we are led to believe, describe transcendent realities; which, we would like to believe, we can use in public to conquer nature and other enemies if only we recite the correct formulas. Already in the first decades of our own century,

thinkers like Husserl, Bergson, John Dewey, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein saw the New Science become Old—slipping into superstition—and asked us simply to look: *Denk nicht, schau!* Yet even the metaphor of looking has worn out. At the time of William, and then of Galileo and Newton, eye-glasses, telescopes, and microscopes had literal as well as allegorical and tropological significance: making the invisible visible. Since those days, we already know, or think we know, what we are supposed to see with these instruments: we no longer discover the invisible. Once again, then, we are running the most dangerous of all risks, and will have to learn to laugh all over again—this time including our own *logos* among the butts of our laughter.

Notes

1. “Forse il compito di chi ama gli uomini è di far ridere della verità, *fare ridere la verità*, perché l'unica verità è imparare a liberarci dalla passione insana per la verità.” *Il Nome della Rosa* (Milano: Bompiani, 1980, 1983), Seventh Day, Night. In general, I value the English translation by William Weaver (New York, 1983); however, the translation erroneously renders “anagogy” as “analogy” on pp. 316 and 438 (more correctly on p. 144: *via anagogica* as “by anagoge”); and in many other instances the translation softens the philosophical terminology (e.g., *valore cognitivo* becomes “instructive value”).
2. Plato's remark that “the serious cannot be understood without the laughable”: see his *Laws*, 816D. In the same work, at 934A, we find one kind of laughter prohibited by law: laughter that scoffs (vicious ridicule). In Plato's *Republic* Socrates argues that “we should encourage the young to laugh at those [representations] that show people crying, but we should prevent them from witnessing ones that show people of worth or gods overcome with laughter” (388B); later, we read a reason for the encouragement, the discouragement and the prevention: pity and laughter that are indiscriminately induced by “public representations and private talk” can lead us to forget what is shameful in our own lives (606C). During the Parable of the Cave (518A), Socrates asks us to distinguish between laughing at the failure of those who cannot get away

from the shadows and laughing at the failure of those who have been out in the light and now try to deal with the shadows.

3. About the hermeneutics of fourfold reading. I find a brief but very detailed historical account in *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. I (New York, 1952), pp. 120-21. For short essays on the topic, see Harry Caplan's "The Four Senses of Scriptural Interpretation and the Medieval Theory of Preaching" in *Speculum* 4 (1929), pp. 282-90, or E. von Dobschütz's "Vom vierfachen Schriftsinn" in *Harnack-Ehrung* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1921), pp. 1-13. Eco himself gives an account of this fourfold in his *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington, 1984), pp. 147-56 (§4.4.3). There is a *literal* interpretation of the fourfold; e.g. "Jerusalem" means historically the city, allegorically the Church of Christ, tropologically the human soul, and anagogically the Heavenly City. There is also an *allegorical* interpretation; e.g., each of the four corresponds to each of the four causes (material, movement, purpose, and form). Then, too, there might be a *tropological* interpretation; e.g., proper human conduct requires a fourfold response of decoding. And finally there must be an *anagogical* interpretation of the fourfold, something any author supposedly aspires to enact for the reader, or rather to engage the reader in.
4. About the recognition of sameness amidst divergences. See Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, 1412 a 10 ff., where he claims that, and illustrates how, jokes operate on riddles, paradoxes, homonyms, and metaphors, and where he argues that the crucial "contemplation of the same amidst divergences" is enhanced by apparent emphasis on the divergences. See also John Allen Paulos' *Mathematics and Humor* (Chicago, 1980): the author shows how many jokes depend upon alternative possibilities of instantiating form.
5. About the two senses of truth. Plato insists on some such distinction in his account of the Good and the Divided Line in his *Republic*, 509. Aristotle similarly when he claims that a bad man cannot even syllogize when it comes to practical matters (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144 a 31). Sextus Empiricus says that the Stoics held to the principle that bad people could know true things, but only good people could know truth itself (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, II, viii, 83). The concern for "truth-conditions" is most commonly associated with the logic of empirical investigation; but the conditions at issue are ultimately *ours*, i.e. how we find ourselves conditioned appropriately to be able to devise and assess

truth claims, and for all the logical talk about these conditions we must still find ourselves *so conditioned*, i.e. in the truth.

6. About truth and liberation. Heidegger argues in his essay *Das Wesen der Wahrheit* that the essence (event) of truth is freedom. It is in the Gospel according to John, of course, that we read of Jesus informing the Hebrews that the truth he tells them will free them (8:32). Truth is what frees us: anything that frees us is truth, and anything that does *not* free us is untruth.
7. About our uniqueness: see Aristotle's *Parts of Animals* (673 a 4) on laughter, and *Politics* (1253 a 10) on *logos* as distinctive of human beings.
8. On looking. Wittgenstein remarks in his *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (§66) that we should not think, but rather look: *denk nicht, schau!* Similarly William, in response to the question what we can do despite our finitude, says repeatedly: *guardare meglio*, look more carefully. This recommendation to "look first, think later" marks the phenomenological bent of post-modern thought. Yet Aristotle warns of the danger, too: a bad habit we all share, he says in *On the Heavens* (294 b 8) is that of "not directing enquiry toward the matter itself (*pros to pragma*)" but rather toward "contrary claims," whether our own or those of others. Husserl also discusses this habit in his posthumous fragment on "The Origin of Geometry" (appended to *The Crisis of the European Sciences*).
9. Translators often render *geloion* as "ridiculous" instead of "laughable," especially where the topic is not obviously that of laughter itself. Yet such translation unnecessarily instills the prejudice that we are to *scoff* at a lover who demands reciprocity (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1159 b 17), at one who nags another for not being his or her type (1162 b 15), at depictions of the gods entering into contracts with one another (1178 b 11), or at depictions of a good person engaged in low-level concerns (1123 b 33). Perhaps Aristotle is simply offering "indirect proof" of his point by sketching out a script for comedians: the fact that we *naturally* laugh at such things shows that we *already* know what Aristotle is pointing out. In any case, comedians and cartoonists do draw upon these paradigms, and instill good rather than bad humor. And Aristotle himself congratulates Homer for having freed comedy from satire and invective—for portraying the laughable as distinct from

the censurable (*Poetics*, 1458 b 34). The laughter of a free man, he says, does not scoff, nor does a free man tolerate others who scoff (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1128 a 18 ff.).

10. Aristotle's definition of comedy (*Poetics*, 1449 a 35). “Comedy is a *mimesis* of *phauloteroi*, not ones all bad (*kakia*), but as the laughable part of the ignoble (shameful, ugly). For the laughable here is a failure that is both painless and not destructive—just as the laughable mask is somehow ignoble (shameful, ugly) and distorting, without being painful.” I interpolate the thought that “the laughable is pleasant, whether about *anthropoi*, about *logoi*, or about *erga*” (*Rhetoric*, 1371 b 35). It is in this latter passage that Aristotle adds the remark “. . .as discussed in my *Poetics*” — where, however, we find no such discussion. Similarly further on, at 1419 b 2: “Gorgias is right: counter the laughable with the serious, and vice versa, although not all forms of laughter harmonize with being a free human being—as discussed in the *Poetics*.” Yet Aristotle does indeed discuss the question of the “free man's laughter” in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book Four, Chapter 8 (where he sympathizes with Plato's suggestion that we *outlaw* laughing that hurts others; yet he notes that hurts vary too much from person to person, so that it is better to give *oneself* the law, i.e. be *auto-nomous* in this regard).

5

Opening

Written in the spring of 1997. At the time, I was winding up a year-long seminar on Heidegger's works: *Being and Time*, *Letter on Humanism*, and *What is Metaphysics?*. These works engaged us in discourse configured by thoughts on the open (*das Offene*), opened-ness (*Öffentlichkeit*), and clearing (*Lichtung*).

The previous December, during a colloquium held in Luxembourg on "The Rational and the Reasonable." Jean-Paul Harpes (Luxembourg) had argued that openness might well count among the basic categories of discourse-ethics (... *le point de vue éthique ... est celui d'une ouverture dépassionnée à autrui dans son être-autre*), and Wolfgang Kuhlmann (Aachen) responded vehemently that such a category could easily lead to a tolerance of intolerance.

It occurred to me that openness, as a human disposition, retains its possibility and its integrity only as a reflection of an anterior event.

§1. Prelude

We choose to speak and listen, to write and read, in order to rectify *previous* or to anticipate *possible* understandings. These choices lead in opposing directions, to diverse styles of thinking, and to misunderstandings among ourselves. For both directions—rectification and anticipation—require that we understand, in radically different ways, *current* happenings.

Reflection on the status of togetherness brings the radical difference into relief. How are we to understand the togetherness of human beings among themselves? The togetherness of human beings with their animal, vegetable, and mineral environment? What comes first, togetherness or separation? If togetherness, then why the evident separation, and how can we restore the original? If separation, then why devise a togetherness, and how can we best fabricate historical configurations of it?

Whichever way we incline, the historical fact is that intellectual work currently commits its resources primarily to thinking after-the-fact—to belated thinking. To deny the legitimacy of this way of thinking, we would have to deny the world we live in, above all academia and also the ways and means of rectification. Yet to deny the legitimacy of thinking ahead—of forever premature thinking—we would have to deny not only the great literature forming our heritage but also all free possibility distinctively our own.

Perhaps, however, we might reconcile these two forms of thought—keep them in dialogue among ourselves, within governing bodies, and above all in our educational institutions.

§2. Premature thoughts

Our condition at home, at work, or on vacation, is predominantly one of routine. We are involved in a construction, an arrangement of means-to-ends. Plato and Aristotle restricted the analysis of our predominant condition by concentrating on one key-possibility: *technē*, craft. Karl Marx widened the analysis to include labor of any sort. Martin Heidegger broadens it further in his analysis of "world."

Detaching ourselves from routine, we may notice many features of it. We discover some belonging to routine already and inevitably, others belonging as *issues*, as loomings, pressures to be worked out futurally. Much belated thinking in the last few hundred years, from critical philosophy through the social sciences, has concentrated on eliciting both kinds of features. By its own mandate, however, such thinking merely extends or alters the routine, solidifies the attitudes in which its power and possibility appear self-evident.

Yet there are moments, sometimes quiet and sometimes stupendous, when the routine opens out. We recognize the difference in the contrast between the routines of daily work and the discipline of a sport; between the routines of daily conversation and the discipline of literature. This opening surprises us: things reveal themselves differently, our own position appears in a new light, those around us re-appear as belonging essentially to the event, and the patterns of the event become occasions rather than burdens.

Powerful thinking, literary or philosophical, speaks out of such opening. The greatest, forever premature, calls us back into it.

An account that articulates an opening appears in Stanley Crawford's *Mayordomo*.¹ The author narrates a moment in his job as “ditch boss” in a primarily Hispanic community in rural New Mexico:

We are here to put some water into the ditch as there have been delays in getting a backhoe down from a village ten miles up the mountain from us; though there's still plenty of water in the river, the flood scoured out a deeper channel and threw up a roll of gravel and rocks into the mouth of the ditch, and now very little water is entering. Everyone knows what to do without being told. Ewaldo has probably built and repaired dams for our ditch fifty or sixty times in his life, perhaps more, and everyone else here (except myself) has done this work since the time they were kids. A large cottonwood rotten at its base has fallen conveniently over the mouth of the ditch, and Orlando sets about cutting up the limbs to manageable length, to drag out into the water. Forty-five-year-old Lauriano Serna, black-bearded and bearlike in shorts and sneakers and free this day from the arthritis he has complained of ever since I have known him, moves out into the water with the

younger men and boys to begin lifting and rolling rocks into a line against which branches and logs can be buttressed. Then a couple of boys wade across the river, no more than knee-deep now, and walk up to a sandbar where some logs have beached and drag and roll them into the water and launch them down toward the dam. The bright morning grows rapidly hot and the nip of the water turns refreshing. The work progresses rapidly. Five feet at a time the crew extends the fragile barrier out into the flow, securing logs with rocks, chinking gaps with twigs and branches cut from nearby willows and junipers and held in place with more logs and rocks and brush. The moment is luminous and transparent: boys and men working together in the dancing reflections of the water to build that most essential structure, the beaver dam. And at this sweeping bend in the river course overhung by clumps of cottonwood and a clear blue sky, with the still slanting sunlight on the glaring white ribbons of sand and bleached rocks along the banks, we work to the alpine sounds of rushing water and the clacking of rocks smashing against each other, the rustle and splash of boughs being thrown and dragged into the water; for this moment men become boys again and boys at last become men, as they assemble piecemeal what backhoes and bulldozers with their powerful blades and buckets can do so much better—yet, in another sense, can never do at all. And later perhaps we will remember only that we built a beaver dam to bring water to our gardens, in the way people have built them all over the world for thousands of years, and that we came home wet and aching and satisfied far beyond what we could easily explain to those who weren't there.

Something strange happens in the midst of a simple routine. The literary account encircles this happening as a “satisfaction” inexplicable to those involved in it. While most talk about the event would simply recount the routine (its manner, its painful effects, its services to other routines), the literary narration highlights the diverse sights and sounds of the happening, gathering these into a single scene. Within this scene human being itself appears integrated into a community. And each individual is transformed in age: the old become young (Lauriano Serna no longer complains), the young

finally come of age. The entire happening contrasts with an alternative routine: that of the machine operator who could do this work alone, and much more efficiently.

In the opening, we find ourselves open. This openness on *our* part *in* the scene becomes manifest in our receptivity to the scene as a whole. While in ordinary routine we must indeed remain alert to detail, the wholeness escapes us: we simply forget it, along with the detail, as we pass on. For us today, living paradoxically in a multicultural age emphasizing individuality, such openness becomes manifest even more dramatically in our receptivity to the multiplicity of human beings: in this sense, we respect each other not as over against one another, but as we emerge, transformed, in a primordial, if passing, togetherness antedating the separations of everyday routine. All the while, though, such openness on our part derives from the opening of the routine itself, an event not ours, and not “up to us,” since it includes and transforms us.²

§3. *Before and after*

Already in our routines there *is* a society of human effort, a pressuring environment on which the routine works, an inherited procedure engulfing both the effort and the environment. There *are* duties and friendships, living organisms, laws of nature, space and time and numbers for articulating what occurs in them. These things are *there*.

Or *are* they? Each coddles us: How else could we continue? But each also eludes us: Where is that friendship without which societal effort rings hollow, the regularity of nature without which our circumstances simply defy us, the established procedure without which we have nothing to do? More, each oppresses us: What are all those duties and demands and structures but irksome impositions enslaving us to alien desires, hostile nature, and ancestral expectations?

Yet, too, on rare occasions each uplifts, transforms us, reveals a panorama of possibilities forgotten or ignored or even betrayed. But precisely on these rare occasions the being of community, of nature, of heritage, and of all their dependencies, appears essentially fickle.

Let us consider, now, what difference it makes *where* we begin our contemplation of such issues as community, nature, and heritage.

Wherein might we plant our reflections? For wherever our reflections wander, they end by re-affirming and re-enforcing our point of departure. For contemplation draws its evidence, its nourishment from an initial horizon that, far from merely serving as a means to further ends, becomes the very issue—the result revealed in its urgency.³

Contemplation takes the form of a search. Something basic to the fulfillment of our condition is missing, or in jeopardy, or generally misunderstood. And we read and write and talk to find it, secure it, or clarify it. If we understand the search as aiming to settle questions culturally, so that future generations can learn the answers with only slight acquaintance with the questions, contemplation becomes secondary: it passes into another department of the academic enterprise, and proves or loses its value in the cultural venue. Contemplation remains a vocation unto itself only if we articulate the search as belonging essentially to our condition—on the assumption that community, nature, and heritage recurrently go missing and must repeatedly re-come into their own, just as friendship and duty, landscape and city-scape, the very houses and bodies in which we live, must ever again be renewed.

So let us ponder once again: Where may we begin searching? And immediately we can discern two possibilities:

We may search results. Routine scholarship, whether historical, critical or analytic, begins with the works of others. In these works we search out distinctive features, questions leading to further consideration, or answers inviting further analysis; to these we may add the concern to explain the genesis of works (tracing them back to their era, their author, or their school). Such sifting may serve as occasion for contemplation, yet it generally belongs to pre-contemplative intellectual work, and easily neutralizes the power of the originals. It deserves the name *research*: the searching within results for further results. We may turn to such secondary work for details serving first-hand searching. But the works of others comprise only an antechamber: they can never be a *place* for original searching. On the other hand, once we do find a *place* to begin we may return to the antechamber to re-instate original works to their rightful place.

Or we may search the opening. We then begin at the beginning, at the place where community, nature and heritage, for all their fickleness and lostness, become evident—along with friendship and duty, competence and achievement, insight and vocation in tension with their opposites: dissolution, disappearance and distraction, hatred, ignorance and uselessness.

How can we search the opening? How can we talk about what *can* happen in an opening? Or can we only report that “the moment is luminous and transparent,” that human enterprise now appears as an occasion for a transfiguration of human beings and of the environment laying claim to their energies? And why talk about it at all?

Both questions—How? Why?—presuppose that our enterprises can function without an opening, that any opening is only *marginal* to well-defined exigencies within an enterprise, and that we intellectuals might address ourselves exclusively to these exigencies.

And in one very powerful sense human enterprises *do* function without opening. Openings do indeed arise only marginally, and we do relegate them to after-hours. Exigencies internal to an enterprise take over, and the alternative to total attention seems to be distraction on our part and weakening of the enterprise itself. The local enterprise of our own office, as well as global ones, require clarity above all: clear perception of detail in a situation, clear recollection of the forces at work, and clear anticipation of goals. Even routine scholarly work prepares us to meet these demands for clarification: especially wherever it employs techniques of analysis, criticism, and logical construction.

But clarification of *what?* of *which* details, forces, and goals? Every enterprise has its own pressing circumstances, inherited procedures, anticipated achievements. Moreover, within any one enterprise these differ from moment to moment: they are multiple both in number and in relation, coming into play singly and together in ever-varying configurations. Yet as *resource*, or *stock*, they remain the same. The enterprise itself not only draws upon but also forms the horizon of this stock. And only within this horizon can detail then emerge for perception, forces enter at the right moment, and goals loom as guiding the enterprise as a whole.

At any given moment, there *has been* clarification: there *are* details, forces, goals, just as there *are* friendship and hatred, competence and ignorance, laws of nature and of society. Yet whether there *will be* these things is not at all clear. We have these things only *in halves*. Their half-being evidences itself hauntingly when we ask *where* they are, and they recede even more when we insist on securing them. Yet we know that, somehow, they remain in stock, since the enterprise draws upon them at every moment.

An enterprise operates routinely on credit: the details of a circumstance, an inherited procedure, and some anticipated achievement became clear *earlier on*, and the operations continue by drawing upon that earlier stock. When the enterprise appears endangered or inadequate we search through this stock to discern both the cause and the remedy. If it confines itself to a given enterprise, such searching will also be routine. Or it may become global, i.e. philosophical.

Global searching must search the opening itself. But how? Evidently: *either* by recalling it *or* by exploiting it. For we can think the opening either as a pending event in itself, one renewing the enterprise, or as an occasion to pursue the elusive stock of details, forces, and anticipations. Either-or: we search the opening *as* the possibility of human enterprise or *for* the other half of those things on which the enterprise depends. Recalling the opening, we prepare for the resurgence of community, nature, and heritage. Exploiting the opening, we remain in hot pursuit of these as they withdraw. Each search may fail: the one, eternally before, may end in fantasies of it; the other, eternally after, may cast it into oblivion.

§4. *Enclosure*

An opening presupposes a closedness that can open up, open out on what otherwise remains closed off from us. If there is an opening, one of the revelations is precisely that the enterprise routinely takes place as a closure: as an enclosure encircling all that an opening *can* reveal, yet without delivering on its promise. Human enterprise then appears as a strategy of containment: a restriction, even a negation—also a possible destruction that only now, in the opening, shows itself unambiguously.

How can we search the interplay between the opening and closing of an enclosure? Concretely, both before and after the opening, we in fact ask whether and how the given enclosure—the one in which we find ourselves when organizing a crew to build a dam or when performing our duties as professors at an institution—*relates* to the revelations of community and nature and heritage, friendship and duty, laws and competence.

Again, an account by Stanley Crawford articulates an enclosure, along with its closure, without converting it into a thesis:

There often comes a time in summer around mid-August when a peculiar reversal can take place in my relation to fields and crops, a moment when I feel myself having become an almost unconscious instrument of that which I am more accustomed to thinking myself in control of. By this time, when the days are long and hot, in a calculating and keeping-track-of sense I have given up trying to remain conscious of the amazing multiplicity of growth that has arisen from nothing to spread out over the five or six acres under my guidance: I have no time to think about it anymore, I must simply race to keep up with it all and to maintain and hold it in that less critical area of the mind where so much of the world resides as a jumble of images and sensations and memories whose meaning in some logical or coherent sense has come to seem pointless or irrelevant to the demands of action. From then on I cease planning and simply spend as much time in my fields as I can in order to remain alert to their needs, to work for them according to their barrages of subtle hints and instructions. If I am not quite at one with my rows of corn, chile, tomatoes, onions, the white-blossoming buckwheat, or with the dust and the water, rain, the river, rocks, gravel, the swarms of insects, then I do not feel entirely distinguishable from them either, and they are much of what I am; and the distances I skipped over rapidly while walking in the winter become in summer like miles, like the distances small creatures must overcome, so many times must I traverse them to irrigate, cultivate, harvest; and all that which I now only dimly remember having planted—the result, oddly it seems now, of former plans, intentions, histories—and the distances and weights and time and space itself undergo the

distortions of the new terms under which I labor, and the faces I live amongst are the fruit of vines, their flowers, the swelling shapes on stalks, the grim expression of a stone that is always in the way in a field, trees, bushes, clumps of orchard grass, dead branches along a ditch, the glare of a shovel blade polished by hours of digging, and those mechanical faces, grill and headlights of tractor or truck, always patiently waiting for me at the edge of a field. Human faces become too quick and impatient and mocking for my field-possessed self, too cruel, too cutting for the fatigue that is the claim my fields have staked on my body, those fields within me that I dream of and rest in relation to and am always going to or coming from, the fields that live in me like the presence of a wife or child. But in all this I am also relieved in what seems to be an honest and forthright way of that burdensome and complaining and spoiled self with its desperately important habits and preferences and its weaknesses and susceptibility to all the toys and trash the industrial world can think up, its schemings for privilege and power, and its thirst above all to be relieved of its own individualistic curses: all this goes, sometimes wholly, but often only fleetingly, in August when the fields have reached a pitch of growth and leaves can grow no larger or vines no longer, as they strain to capture and hold the high blazing light.

This account of farming brings into words an example of absorption within an enclosure, one enterprise among many that may serve as a model for a contemplative account of our condition *before* the opening. The account brings the enclosure itself out into the open, and thereby allows us to recognize a complex of synecdoches for all other enterprises. Already by entering into an account of enterprise as closed, the enclosure reveals itself as what it is. Such revelation provides the bearings for a search. We can now ask how exactly an enclosure works—how it both closes down and opens up.

Absorption into an enclosure effects a “peculiar reversal”: accustomed to think of ourselves as controllers, we find ourselves the instruments. We have some “acres” under our guidance, yet whatever grows on our fields commands our every action: our own jumble of

images and sensations and memories now appears irrelevant to the demands made upon us.

Puzzling, too, is the uneasy identity of agent and circumstance: we are “not quite at one with” and yet “not entirely distinguishable from” what we cultivate and what we use, even seemingly peripheral things like dust and water, rain and river, rocks and gravel, and insects. Reality is here one, and we with it, in immediate contact. But this reality is bludgeoned together, and burdensome—not at all translucent.

Baffling are also our achievements: we have “planted” these things that now hold us tight in their “barrages of subtle hints and instructions”; yet the results seem odd, we barely remember having initiated them, they appear not as ours but as belonging to former occasions. Like our children, they have broken away, have become themselves, and at our continuing expense.

What *faces* us in the closed-down enclosure—what shows itself immediately to us, without intervening anticipations or memories, nor even any sensation distinct from the showing itself—is partial: the faces of details only. Not any one whole thing, but only some feature of it making demands upon us: the grim expression of a stone, the dead branches along the ditch, the headlight of the tractor waiting at the edge of the field. On the other hand, *human* faces appear as ghosts: field-possessed, we find others mocking us, interfering with us, out of step with the claim our fields have staked in our bodies, dissonant with visions of moments prior and subsequent to the moment of absorption.

Often, we analyze enclosure as hopeless entrapment in a means-end sequence, cursed with absence, as enslaving us to banal needs if not to supervisors. Yet we judge too quickly. True, each thing, gesture, and fellow-worker appears only partially in the enclosure, and this partiality signals a lack. Yet each *appears*. Their partiality consists in their oppressive detail. And without this detail there would be no fullness of appearance, no translucence, but only a fantasy of it. The enclosure, precisely by closing down on us, includes us in the play that may lead to an opening.

For the most part we drift, hitch a ride on enclosures that do not yet expressly enclose us, but tolerate us as vagabonds. Much vain

reflection stems from determinations based on this condition of internal exile: a hopeless kind of searching that can only sift through left-overs. Now, however, fully enclosed, we find ourselves “relieved” of a self that is “burdensome and complaining and spoiled,” of our “own individualistic curses,” i.e. habits and preferences and weaknesses, and especially of this self’s susceptibility to the “toys and trash” of the world, along with “its schemings for privilege and power.” For we now face, if only partially, circumstances and community within an inherited understanding of their interplay.

The relief occurring already in the enclosure carries over into the opening. As we understand the initial and initiating enclosure, along with its immediate relief, so we shall anticipate what might show itself fully. Whatever we presume happens *before* the opening determines what we shall find when we search the opening itself. To consider only one example: if we presume that farmers are merely groveling to satisfy their basic bodily needs, the only opening we shall recognize as legitimate will be one that clarifies ways of satisfying those needs, and relief will consist in better farming techniques.

The prime relief, or the one Crawford’s account names, is relief from the surrogate self imagined to exist outside of enclosure, or only inside it as a vagabond. Philosophically stated, the relief in question relieves us of subjectivity, and thereby also of objectivity. There *is* circumstance, community, heritage: these *loom*, partially, within an enclosure—as do nature, friendship, laws, and competencies; as do “distances and weights and time and space itself” now undergoing the “distortions” of the labor. And what *vanishes* is the presumption of a subjectivity that would define the parameters of our own reality, the illusion that minerals and plants and animals can show themselves more fully when we recede from the enclosure and peer at them in abstraction, and the false hope that human beings can back out together to form a community.

§5. *Disclosure*

Only in the opening of an enclosure do we discover that the enclosure has all along disclosed, in a safe but slumbering mode, what the opening now discloses exigently.

First of all, and all along, the enclosure has disclosed itself as establishing an horizon wherein the enterprise unfolds (whether or not successfully), things in our circumstances demand careful response (whether or not they receive it), and others work along side us (whether or not cooperatively). So much has the enterprise as a whole, the intertwining of our respective labors into a shared labor, disclosed itself to us that various ambivalences entrap us: it appears as a safe haven to be upheld at all costs, yet it also appears as a prison confining us, preventing us from discovering larger vistas; we cherish the security of the prevailing context, the daily schedules, the familiar faces, yet we also suspect that something conceals our own potentiality, that of the enterprise itself, and that of the things we daily deal with in it—and, above all, the potentiality of being with others, “too quick and impatient and mocking for my field-possessed self.”

The opening strips disclosure of its ambivalence, replaces old valences with new exigencies. Community, land and heritage loom now from the other side: rather than wondering how we might find or create them, we now recognize them as having lain fallow all along, as what we have, and may once again betray.

§5.1 *Community*

All along there have been calls to love, to respect, to tolerate others. We work our fields with others from whom we come or whom we serve. With some of these we may be extremely intimate, mutually affirming a shared being. With some we are bound in mutual respect: while a stone in the furrow must simply be removed, an injured or distracted fellow-worker claims consideration that may overrule stone-removal for a moment, or for eternity. And there are others on the periphery of our field, whose faces we barely distinguish, with whom we neither live intimately nor work cooperatively, but who nonetheless appear on the horizon as strangers—as customers, servants, or obstacles on the roadway or sidewalk, and about whom we have mainly images (from the media, or from gossip). The looming of peripherals on our horizon may recall the *possibility* of deep-seated love, or of the attention we call respect—precisely by *absence*: with these others we share no finite enterprise, and therefore no common ground for intimacy or even respect. Until, that is, they enter into our field, or we enter into theirs—perhaps

unexpectedly, or fleetingly, as when a stranger bursts into our midst, whose liveliness or endangeredness reconfigures the entire enterprise.

When a *group* of strangers appears—as when Hispanics and Whites meet in New Mexico, or Anglophones and Francophones in Quebec—*readiness* for respect is essential for living rather than warring with one another. Common names for such readiness are “tolerance” and “openness”: willingness to endure strangeness and willingness to learn from strangers. Yet these two virtues are epiphenomenal, like the beautiful complexion of a youth: suggestive, because the *result* of a basic health. We may praise these epiphenomena, but we cannot engender them directly; efforts to do so may incite others, even ourselves, to apply some sort of rouge, or ruse.

Readiness *is* a virtue, perhaps one that conditions the possibility of the Cardinal and even the Christian Virtues. Akin to patience, it allows us to wait *on* those whom we meet, as well as to wait *for* some more or less definitely pre-construed outcome. As human attitudes, openness and tolerance certainly depend on this one virtue. For without readiness, openness and tolerance degenerate into indifference, as when we simply allow anything to happen, “tolerate” all kinds of behavior only because we are unwilling or unable to decide what deserves affirmation, allegiance or cultivation.

If readiness as the human attitude at issue in openness and tolerance stands in sturdy opposition to indifference, and yet also in constant danger of degenerating into it, we will always wonder about its birthright. *After* an opening that includes us all in a translucent participation within an enterprise we may *recall* the event as standard-setting. And we may then search out conditions for its possibility, and wonder about what we might put in place *before* the event. And since we cannot engineer the opening itself, we try to put the *condition* in place—like opening the barn door after the horse has left, so that it may return.

§5.2 *Circumstance*

All along, too, there has been the land: the field on which we work, whether the soil for vegetables and fruit, or the ground for houses or machinery, or the earth, air, fire and water of fishing

expeditions or dam constructions. What serves us faces us: things we may call the tools of our work, the materials from which we fashion both these tools and the products we consume or sell. All along, we have been determining these things: immediately, as when we simply use a tool; cautiously, as when we assess the properties of something in relation to the complex of things with which we work; and reflexively, as when we must judge the quality of a tool or a product for use or exchange (especially when buying or selling). These various determinations arise together, and all refer us back to what faces us as a whole; for we already know that each of these determinations depends on the event at issue on the land. As farmers, we heed those properties of things that portend a coalescence with the process of farming; as biologists, chemists or geologists we heed those properties that portend coalescences with the phenomena defining these fields of inquiry; and as painters or novelists we heed those properties that coalesce into the story we are telling of human engagements on the land.

Determination: spotting something *as* something. Such determination enacts our ability to face things *as they are*: our “faculty” of judgement. This faculty engages us in an abiding interplay of foreground and background: up-front, things present themselves for judgement, yet every judgement draws upon a background, a wholeness of circumstance that lends significance to each determination—which kind of tool or material or product is appropriate, and the appropriateness of the one that avails itself to us at the moment. Thus there is always a *nearness* of things to be determined, but then also a *farness* embedding each nearness. The enterprise itself teaches us to interrelate the determination of the moment with its predecessors and its successors, and especially to decide the present with a view to the future. On occasion, however, we also learn that the land itself, beyond the enterprise on it, has its *own* integrity, a wholeness looming as an issue within our determinations; for our decisions may destroy circumstances, and leave our enterprises without any footing, and on the verge of collapse.

Yet the wholeness of circumstance eludes our determinations: it *is . . .*, it faces us, but remains always far way. Indeed, it often leaves us in the lurch—as though it were *not*, or we had whimsically

imagined it. The call to respect the integrity of the environment, the earth itself, or nature, can appear as vacuous as can the call to respect strangers we never meet in shared enterprise. The complexity of determinations then seems to demand only the virtue of alertness: many properties of things loom at any one moment, and we must remain awake both to the unexpected, to whatever may show itself, and to its manifold interrelations with established determinations—in a melding of future and past into a full presence of mind and circumstance.

The simplest determination depends on the virtue of alertness. All competence in handling circumstance and all genuine knowledge embodies it. *After* any moment of competence or knowledge we may ponder the conditions of its possibility, and alertness will certainly count among those conditions. Thus we rightly exhort ourselves and others *beforehand* to remain alert.

Like openness to fellowship, alertness to circumstance is a human attitude that may, in its vicissitudes, make or break us. It conditions our ability to judge things freshly, as distinct from pre-judging the properties of things in the formats of yesterday or yesteryear, and thereby missing them. Yet alertness *can* degenerate into a kind of drive for mastery betraying its own birthright: we might then be alert *only* to those properties of things that serve our control over circumstances. This form of alertness stems from an arduous recollection of what serves the enterprise, and can lead to the developments now familiar to us in our industrial and technological age: from backhoes and bulldozers to computer-governed production and electronic communication. This kind of alertness depends on unrelenting pre-selection of what reveals itself at any one moment: on a cultivated, self-imposed ignorance of circumstance as a whole.

If alertness as the human attitude at issue in competence and knowledge stands in crucial opposition to ignorance of circumstance, and yet easily degenerates into hyper-active versions of such ignorance, we will always wonder about its birthright. *After* an opening we can recall the refreshing alertness, and wonder how it happened. With a view to future occasions, we even try to determine how we might engender it—and thereby forget the primacy of the

opening itself, construing it as one more product on our field, rather than as the disclosure of the field itself.

§5.3 *Heritage*

And all along, too, the enclosure contains a destiny. Our field emerges first of all as an inherited complex of interrelated tasks. Already within the enclosure, we find ourselves overwhelmed by a sequence for these tasks, perhaps even a schedule for meeting them one at a time. Yet each morning the entirety of the complex looms on the horizon *so that* we can string out the tasks in a manageable sequence. Our labor, whether that of farmer or professor, prefigures this unitary destiny. Yet the labor need not be easily nameable, or one in which we ourselves are the obvious agents: the labor may be that of others—as children simply accept, as adolescents object, and as anyone will sometimes complain.

Destiny comprises both settledness and possibility, a paradox we experience each morning we awake to our labor. On the one hand, the past assaults us at breakfast, constraining our day, depriving us of possibilities we may have idly envisioned. On the other hand, this very past spells out a plethora of possibilities that demand attention, choice, enactment. Before we pause to analyze the event, past and future are one. Their oneness, disclosed at breakfast if not at each juncture of the day, may also display itself explicitly as linear time: within it, we can now distinguish what can be done from what is already done, as well as what may be left undone from what must be done. The distinction effects a directionality of events themselves, and then also our vision of their sequence. Within this directionality emerges an often puzzling establishment and dis-establishment of destination: as though everything that happens intended to culminate in one result, albeit elusive in its definition. Past and future alternately diverge and coalesce, weigh on us and elude us. Asunder, they leave a sometimes terrifying absence where we had expected a presence.

So long as we and our circumstances are *only* enclosed, the disclosure reveals the destiny of our labor not as a heritage but simply as a burden: a pull toward what is yet to be done, and a push from what has already been accomplished. Prior to the opening, both we ourselves and the things we deal with appear trapped in strains and

stresses. Only afterwards might we acknowledge that the labor also provides the opportunity for circumstances to arise, and for ourselves to rise to meet them; e.g. when deprived of the labor, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, we *find* ourselves and our circumstances only as a *loss*.

As the enclosure opens fully, it discloses heritage as a gift, an opportunity that may be lost, that we may either foster or betray, a framework in which things may or may not come into their own. Destiny as either a gift or a burden, a blessing or a curse, will always occasion wonder. *After* an opening of the enclosure, we can devise names for the difference, e.g. bondage vs. freedom, darkness vs. light, hate vs. love.

§6. *Discourse*

Out on the field we talk with one another about the immediate exigencies of the field. But we also talk with one another about what *did* and what *might* happen there, and about *other* fields as well—from weddings to scandals, from questions regarding heritage to questions regarding nature, from questions of technique to questions of obligation. Enclosure invites *rehearsals* of our immediate labors as well as of the past and the future diverging or coalescing at the moment.

Yet all we ever say, hear, write or read, is already ensconced within a discourse. An inherited articulation of the enterprise already encloses our talk. Our tongues are tied to, and our syntax pre-destined by, the affair itself. Thus we can listen to one another, follow each other, i.e. the coursing of the affair, well or badly. Thus, too, we can speak up, lead or mislead others through the coursing. In short, since our discourse is already shared, we can learn and teach: any transfer of information or policy, any expression of individual interest or communal concern, takes place within an already-functional discourse and embodies it performatively. In our youth, as innocent beginners, we perform it naïvely, and thereby learn it more easily, whereas in later years we must often struggle with the difference between the communicative and the performative dimensions of discourse.⁴

Since enclosed discourse already includes a community, a heritage, and a circumstance, it need make no *reference* to these. Their

inclusion may therefore remain essentially inconspicuous, and discourse seems most obviously to function in those decisions requiring immediate consideration of circumstance and consultation with others. Yet precisely here, in ordinary decision-making, an inkling of these three emerges in the acknowledgement that any one decision is intertwined with, already recalls earlier and anticipates later decisions. Still, the one decision at the moment depends on a determination of how things are: discernment and assessment of facts, followed by a judgement of how these facts fit into other determinations and ultimately into the affair at hand, out in the field. In pre-intellectual affairs, each moment of determination remains in service to the enterprise itself, and vanishes for the sake of the next. In contrast, academic discourse places a premium on these determinations—as does the political and juridical discourse inherited from our intellectual traditions. Becoming essentially adversarial, such discourse teaches us to double-check determinations, to judge *them* over again, in and for a public that, although often distinct from the community and not itself facing circumstances, must nonetheless adjudicate the opposition.⁵

The exigencies of reflexive decision inevitably tempt us to suppose that the health of discourse depends on the accuracy of the determinations at issue within it. We then detect in discourse only its power to *posit*: to position phenomena out on the field, to align ourselves in our work with them, and to realign others in co-operation. Discourse becomes power-play: the abiding, although ethereal Arena for the tangible battles familiar to us in our daily arenas. The power to posit seems to belong to the power of heritage to function as a task-master.

All the while we may yearn to begin anew: to hear and speak freshly about matters at hand, to re-assess what has already been positioned, to re-envision ways of organizing our affairs—in academia, to re-interpret the books already interpreted and integrated into the curriculum *as* interpreted. Freedom of speech then appears as a prime virtue: freedom at least to propose new beginnings. Even more, perhaps, freedom to listen: to consider new assessments, alignments, interpretations offered to us. The one freedom is as rare and difficult as the other.

Yet so long as the enclosure enclosing the discourse remains itself closed, what might possibly justify new beginnings—and thereby freedom of speaking and listening? Nothing whatsoever! Such new beginnings disrupt labor itself. They threaten the inclusiveness of communal discourse by creating factions. They unsettle the assuredness of circumstance by creating doubt about how things are out in the field. And they challenge inherited institutions, the only stable dimension in the flux of daily efforts.

What can ever *empower* new beginnings? Or can we rightly assume that we need only raise our eyes from the plough? Hardly. We must rather wonder how the positing, the positioning, the determining, the arranging can take place at all: how the prevailing structures of determination ever deserved their power.

Rebelling against the established discourse, we merely insist on inserting our own determinations: on re-positioning things. The rebellion then continues in, and insists on, the same mode of discourse. Nothing has changed except, perhaps, the imagined center of power: who wears the crown. The question still remains what empowers the discourse, what engenders the determinations. Unless we enter into the question, power appears as mere power-play within the discourse, a battle among factions, among individuals, even within individuals (multi-minded as we are!), between individuals and institutions, communities, or the land itself.

Determinations receive their warrant when the enclosure discloses the whole in which each determination names a fleeting part. Only as stemming from, and hearkening back to such opening do our determinations (discernments and judgements) become once again fully responsive to the land, a community, an inheritance—and shed their illusory status as leftovers from old openings, as routines out of which escape appears impossible.

So long as an enclosure traps our enterprise, its discourse appears to originate in positioning: in determining, aligning, and re-aligning. Liberated in an opening, this same discourse occasions the opening itself, and thereby first *allows* for positioning—freshly *provides* the field wherein positioning becomes possible. Finally, then, discourse reveals its own origin: dis-positioning, the original releasing itself.

During the last century, academic discourse has developed into a self-sufficing positional discourse. The power of our parliamentary democracies, our industrial society, and our systems of mass education depends on this discourse. Thus any suggestion that positioning might owe its power to dis-position — that discourse most primordially *releases* rather than *determines* — will meet with righteous opposition.

To overcome the prejudice of academic discourse, we might first consider what happens in any concrete discourse out on the field: for here discourse clearly remains transparent to the events themselves, and grounded in circumstance, community, and heritage. Such “natural,” i.e. pre-academic transparency stems primarily from dis-positioning: from responding in a manner, a “disposition,” that *allows* the labor to open out onto affairs, *releases* the enclosure into momentary disclosure. Thus, in what used to be called “production” (*poiesis*), the discourse unfolds largely in silence.

And we might, moreover, consider what emerges in great literature, prior to academic determinations regarding the event: here, whether in the reading and performing of Homer's *Iliad* or Aeschylus' *Prometheus*, Shakespeare's *King Lear* or Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, the discourse releases human enterprise, opens it out onto unforeseen exigencies of leadership. For in “action” (*praxis*) we are most tempted to engage in discourse as though it *primarily* required determination: discernment and judgement. Leadership most conspicuously demands decision, and responsible decision does require discernment of how things are and judgement of what is best under the circumstances, and for the community. Yet precisely here determinations can become incoherent, and decisions blind. And while we may believe that leaders need only revise their determinations and decisions, we might rather pause to ask how such revision ever becomes possible. In the discourse of great literature dis-positioning remains forever the source of all positioning, and thus relocates human capacities as essentially derivative — most obviously, the “faculties” of determination — without ever suggesting that we forsake these faculties, these *powers*: precisely here we must wonder about empowerment, and ask whether it derives from positioning or . . . dispositioning, releasing.

Although philosophy began as an insistence on the role of human determination in the formation of circumstance, community, and heritage, ancient thinkers never entirely forget the derivative status of human determination. In contrast, modern philosophy has formed a discourse that claims to stand on its own, one that can stand the test of time, passing from one generation to the next fully certified and requiring only special training to assure its re-enactment. To those who continue in the modern vein, the third form of life, “contemplation” (*theoria*), appears paltry unless it can criticize or confirm, add or revise determinations — seemingly its only possible contribution.

§7. *Searching for grounds*

Discourse belongs already to any enclosure, and the enclosure enwraps each moment, disclosing traces of community, circumstances, and heritage. Discourse itself discloses each moment as either a dispersion or a coalescence of these traces.

There — here — is certainly a *difference*: discourse may or may not involve us in presence. This difference always “touches” everything that may, or may not, happen in discourse: circumstance, community, and heritage appear or disappear, press in upon us as realities or hover as fantasies.

We tend, then, to look for a *ground*, a *reason* for the difference. Not merely as a *third* thing explaining the difference, but as what becomes evident *in* the difference: original discourse discloses its ground, and thereby the groundedness or groundlessness of derivative discourse.

Still, the search for a ground, whether for or in discourse, seems to require that we engage in positional discourse: How else can a “search” have sense? Unless it anticipates a determination, stems from an author, and aims for an audience? Unless it assumes that the ground has not been evident, and may become so? And would not all these commitments of positional discourse violate the origination itself, the opening where the ground might lurk and permit our discovery of it?⁶

We may abandon the search for ground in at least three ways. As intellectuals engaged in research, we might simply insist that we need

not concern ourselves about the difference between grounded and ungrounded discourse: the tasks of positional discourse already exact enough within any field of inquiry. Or we might claim that what sustains discourse simply escapes it; we resign ourselves in deep despair, in fluffy cheerfulness, or in a cultivated indifference enabling us to continue within our inherited enterprise.

However, we might also abandon the search for ground in a third sense: by acknowledging ground as *loss*. For loss is essential to acknowledging the primacy of the opening in which discourse occasionally resonates with its *own* ground, and to which every discourse worthy of authorship and audience *already* evidences its indebtedness. When we speak and listen *well* we do not so much respond *to* the ground as emerge *from* it. No reading or writing, listening or speaking, that acknowledges the primacy of opening, the priority of release over determination, of performance over constation, need understand itself as a search in the sense of research. Searching can consist in arduously responding to what engenders any given discourse, and has already engendered the discourse original to the enclosure: responding in full acknowledgement of its parentage, but without looking for it, or trying to certify it.

Notes

1. The first passage from Stanley Crawford's *Majordomo* (Albuquerque, N.M., 1988 & 1993) appears on pp. 124-6; the second on pp. 131-3. See also Crawford's *A Garlic Testament*, HarperCollins Publishers, 1992.

2. In Book Three of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle calls attention to things that *are* "up to us" (*eph' hēmin*): choice he defines as deliberate desire for such things (1113 a 10). See especially §5 of that Book.
3. Throughout his *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen, 1960 & 1972), Hans-Georg Gadamer emphasizes the "horizontal" nature of philosophical discourse:

In Wahrheit ist der Horizont der Gegenwart in steter Bildung begriffen, sofern wir alle unsere Vorurteile ständig erproben müssen. Zu solcher Erprobung gehört nicht zuletzt die Begegnung mit der Vergangenheit und das Verstehen der Überlieferung, aus der wir kommen. Der Horizont der Gegenwart bildet sich also gar nicht ohne die Vergangenheit. Es gibt so wenig einen Gegenwartshorizont für sich, wie es historische Horizonte gibt, die man zu gewinnen hätte. *Vielmehr ist Verstehen immer der Vorgang der Verschmelzung solcher vermeintlich für sich seiender Horizonte.* (p. 289)

Loosely translated:

In truth, inasmuch as we must incessantly put all our pre-judgements to the test, the horizon of the present is caught in constant formation. To such testing belongs not least the encounter with the past and the understanding of the traditions from which we stem. Thus the horizon of the present does not at all form itself without the past. There is no more a horizon of the present all by itself than there is an historical horizon that one must achieve. *Rather, understanding is always a process of melding of such horizons presumed to obtain all by themselves.*

4. Michel Foucault emphasizes this entrapment in discourse throughout his writings, suggesting liberation by way of critique. See his *L'ordre du discours* (Paris, 1971), which concentrates on academic discourse. Also his *Les mots et les choses* (Paris, 1966), where, in a passage key to the entire work, he speaks of *ouverture*:

Et c'est bien dans cet espace ainsi mis à découvert que la littérature, avec le surréalisme d'abord (mais sous une forme encore bien travestie) puis, de plus en plus purement, avec Kafka, avec Bataille, avec Blanchot s'est donnée comme expérience: comme expérience de la mort (et dans l'élément de la mort), de la pensée impensable (et dans sa présence inaccessible), de la répétition (de l'innocence originaire,

toujours là au terme le plus proche du langage et toujours le plus éloigné); comme expérience de la finitude (prise dans l'ouverture et la contrainte de cette finitude). (p. 395)

Loosely translated:

And it is indeed in this space thus revealed that literature, first with surrealism (though still in a very much disguised form), then, more and more purely, with Kafka, Bataille, and Blanchot, offered itself as experience: as experience of death (and in the element of death), of unthinkable thought (and in its inaccessible presence), of repetition (of original innocence, always there at the most near and yet always most distant limit of language); as experience of finitude (trapped in the opening and the constraint of that finitude).

5. Our institutions, now requiring adjudications at a distance from both circumstance and community, re-enforce the illusory demand that truth be public, i.e. take forms corresponding to domains already opened. Thus, perhaps, the relevance of Heidegger's incorporation of *Öffentlichkeit* into considerations of truth. And of Jacques Derrida's incessant reminders, as in his *Du droit à la philosophie* (Paris, 1990):

Si celles-ci [les institutions philosophiques] sont historiques de part en part, cela signifie que ni leur origine ni leur solidité sont naturelles; et surtout que les processus de leur stabilisation sont toujours relatifs, menacés, précaires. Là où elles se montrent fermes, dures, durables ou résistantes, cela trahit d'abord la fragilité d'une fondation. C'est sur le fond de cette «déconstructibilité» (théorique et pratique), c'est contre elle que l'institution s'institue. C'est ce fond que son érection *trahit*: elle le signale comme ferait un symptôme, elle le révèle donc, mais elle le trompe aussi. (p. 23)

Loosely translated:

If these [philosophical institutions] are historical through and through, this entails that neither their origin nor their solidity are natural; and above all that the efforts at stabilization are always relative, endangered, precarious. Wherever they appear firm, solid, enduring or resistant, this just betrays the fragility of a foundation. It's on the basis of this "deconstructibility" (theoretical and practical), it's *against* this, that any institution institutes itself. It's this basis that its construction *betrays*: the construction signals the basis as a symptom would—it reveals it, then, but it also misrepresents it.

6. Perhaps considerations similar to these last led Heidegger to "cross out" the word ground, writing it as ~~ground~~ (e.g., *Gesamtausgabe*, Band 9, marginalium on p. 367).

6

Amphinomos

Written in the summer of 2001, inspired partly by dismay at all-too familiar developments: not only the common efforts of some to take over the shared space, to define it exclusively in their own terms, but also the willingness of others to play along, knowing better.

In an address to graduating students in the mid-1980s, Alex Colville warned them of the exigencies lying in wait; one of these he formulated somewhat as follows: you will be asked to participate in evil, and you must learn to refuse.

Speaking of Homer's epics in a seminar during the spring of 1980, Henry Bugbee remarked on the significance of Amphinomos in this regard.

§1. Prelude

Of the three suitors receiving special attention in Homer's account, Amphinomos is perhaps the most puzzling. The other two—Antinoos and Eurymakhos—cut familiar figures of violent and arrogant ambition. Amphinomos, in contrast, appears as a peace-maker. And yet he too counts among the suitors, both at the outset and at the end.

Amphinomos enters upon the scene five times in the *Odyssey*. The first four times his is the voice of reason, of conciliation, of moderation, even of kindness. Yet Homer's final account—in the slaughter of the suitors in Book 22, makes no allowance for his earlier virtue:

Amphinomos now came running at Odysseus,
broadsword naked in his hand. He thought to make
the great soldier give way at the door.
But, with a spear throw from behind, Telemakhos hit him
between the shoulders, and the lancehead drove
clear through his chest. He left his feet and fell
forward, thudding, forehead against the ground. (89 ff.)¹

He is formally introduced already in Book 16. The suitors have just learned that Telemakhos had avoided the ambush they had planned as he was returning from Pylos, and first Eurymakhos and then Antinoos are calling them to arms. After Antinoos' fiery speech, in which the ambition and the greed of the suitors becomes especially clear, Amphinomos rises:

He led the group of suitors
who came from the grainlands on Doulikhion,
and he had lightness in his talk that pleased
Penelope, for he meant no ill.
Now, in concern for them, he spoke: "O friends
I should not like to kill Telemakhos.
It is a shivery thing to kill a prince
of royal blood. We should consult the gods.

If Zeus hands down a ruling for the act,
 then I shall say, 'Come one, come all,' and go
 cut him down with my own hand—
 But I say Halt, if gods are contrary."
 Now this proposal won them, and it carried. (396 ff.)

There is no further reference in the story to any consultation with the gods. Yet it does seem clear that Amphinomos means no ill: he speaks out against the plot to murder, and his speech wins the day.

He next appears in Book 18. Odysseus, disguised as a beggar in the great hall of his own palace, has just thrashed the insolent tramp Iros. The suitors had promised to reward the victor of the match, and they now keep their word:

Now from the fire
 his fat blood pudding came, deposited
 before him by Antinoos—then, to boot,
 two brown loaves from the basket, and some wine
 in a fine cup of gold. These gifts Amphinomos
 gave him. Then he said: "Here's luck, grandfather;
 a new day; may the worst be over now." (118 ff.)

In serving the beggar at all, in his respectful form of address, and in his good wishes, Amphinomos appears to us as a generous man. And not only to us:

Odysseus answered, and his mind ranged far:
 "Amphinomos, your head is clear, I'd say;
 so was your father's—or at least I've heard
 good things of Nisos the Doulikhion,
 whose son you are, they tell me—an easy man.
 And you seem gently bred. In view of that,
 I have a word to say, so listen." (124 ff.)

Not to his wife Penelope, nor to his son Telemakhos, nor to any of the loyal servants does Odysseus offer the holistic account of human being he now offers Amphinomos, an account repeated by Sophocles and Pindar in the centuries to come:

"Of mortal creatures, all that breathe and move,
 earth bears no frailer than mankind. What man

believes in woes to come, so long as valor
 and tough knees are supplied him by the gods?
 But when the gods in bliss bring miseries on,
 then willy-nilly, blindly, he endures.
 Our minds are as the days are, dark or light,
 blown over by the father of gods and men." (130 ff.)

We are the creatures of divine whim, Odysseus tells Amphinomos. Even our tough knees are gifts from the gods. And he illustrates the possibilities open to us by recounting his own fate and predicting that of the suitors—all this with a view to advising Amphinomos:

"So I, too, in my time thought myself to be happy;
 But far and rash I ventured, counting on
 my own right arm, my father, and my kin;
 behold me now. No man should flout the law
 but keep in peace what gifts the gods may give.
 I see you young blades living dangerously,
 a household eaten up, a wife dishonored—
 and yet the master will return, I tell you,
 to his own place, and soon; for he is near.
 So may some power take you out of this,
 homeward, and softly, not to face that man
 the hour he sets foot on his native ground.
 Between him and the suitors I foretell
 no quittance, no way out, unless by blood,
 once he shall stand beneath his own roof-beam."
 Gravely, when he had done, he made libation
 and took a sip of honey-hearted wine,
 giving the cup then back into the hands
 of the young nobleman. (138 ff.)

Amphinomos does not chide the beggar for what might be understood as an affectation to wisdom out of keeping with his station as a beggar. Rather, he takes this beggar's words to heart:

Amphinomos, for his part
 shaking his head, with chill and burdened breast,
 turned in the great hall. Now his heart foreknew
 the wrath to come, but he could not take flight from fate,

being by Athena bound there. Death would have him,
broken by a spear thrown by Telemakhos.

So he sat down where he sat before. (153 ff.)

Athena binds him there, Homer assures us. And Odysseus himself had urged the insight that the gods configure our various fates, and that the basic choice for us is whether we can keep in peace the cards the gods have dealt us. Still, Amphinomos knows. His knowledge bears on him as a burden. But what does he know? Odysseus did not tell him anything he did not already know: he *reminds* him that the actions of the suitors, among whom he counts himself, is contrary to law (*themis*)—not to any written one, but to the unwritten laws of proper behavior. So reminded, Amphinomos foreknows the wrath to come, i.e. the price he and the others will pay for betraying what they already know, what Amphinomos now remembers. Yet he proceeds to sit down where he sat before, powerless to do otherwise—because a god binds him there.

Readers today find this account of knowledge puzzling at best. And so did Plato and Aristotle. Indeed, we can know what's right and yet fail to live up to our knowledge, following a course that we half-know will lead to our ruin. Yet we likely object to the Homeric account placing the blame on some Athena. Or half-object, if we resort to more “scientific” efforts to place the blame on psychological or physiological factors. Philosophy began with the effort to consider such puzzles as summoners to understanding our own condition as the location of the bind, and so of the blame. Thus in his *Republic* Plato speaks of the soul as tripartite to account for the fact (but even more to account for the different characters we find among our fellows), and Aristotle devotes much of the seventh book of his *Nicomachean Ethics* to the question of how it is possible to know what's right and yet do what's wrong: a condition of the soul he calls *akrasia*.² Homer engages us in none of these metaphysical considerations, but simply presents Amphinomos as bound by external caprice. External but also divine: thus the Homeric “explanation” can engender a pious acceptance of not only the misfortunes but also the shortcomings of others as well as of ourselves. If gods are the causes, then we may

achieve the wisdom of what Nietzsche calls the “innocence of becoming.”

But back to Amphinomos. Still in Book 18, he serves almost as a protector of the apparent beggar. After an exchange of taunts, Eurymakhos throws a stool at him, “but now Odysseus took to his haunches by Amphinomos' knees” and thereby avoids the missile. When the suitors express their irritation at the commotion the vagabond continues to arouse, Telemakhos scolds them and bids them to go home to bed. The suitors do not take kindly to this exhortation:

Struck by his blithe manner,
the young men's teeth grew fixed in their upper lips,
but now the son of Nisos, Lord Amphinomos
of Aritiades, addressed them all:
“O friends, no ruffling replies are called for;
that was fair counsel. Hands off the stranger, now,
and hands off any other servants here
in the great house of King Odysseus. Come,
let my own herald wet our cups once more,
we'll make an offering, and then to bed.
The stranger can be left behind in hall;
Telemakhos may care for him; he came
to Telemakhos' door, not ours.” This won them over. (410 ff.)

Once again, we witness a peace-maker, and one who acknowledges where he and his peers are, namely “in the great house of King Odysseus,” and who has the power to convince the other suitors to follow, for a while, a peaceful course of action.

Finally, in Book 20, at yet another assembly, Amphinomos again reveals his character:

... the suitors in the field
had come together plotting—what but death
for Telemakhos?—when from the left an eagle
crossed high with a rockdove in his claws.
Amphinomos got up. Said he, cutting them short:
“Friends, no luck lies in that plan for us
to knife Telemakhos. Let's think of feasting.”
A grateful thought, they felt, and walking on

entered the great hall of the hero Odysseus,
 where they all dropped their cloaks on chairs or couches
 and made a ritual slaughter, knifing sheep,
 fat goats, and pigs, knifing the grass-fed steer. (241 ff.)

Here, perhaps, we may detect the source of Amphinomos' power of swaying the suitors: the call to immediate gratification, as distinct from long-range advantage (and, of course, from noble action — to recall Aristotle's threefold account of choice). Whereas knifing Telemakhos might bring who-knows-what in its train, knifing sheep, goats, pigs and steers is a “grateful thought”: Amphinomos offers a story, a *mythos*, that gratifies the suitors.

§2. *Justice*

Whatever we make of Amphinomos, we cannot help recalling that he saved Telemakhos' skin. Indeed, had Antinoos and Eurymakhos survived to tell the tale, they might well have lodged a complaint against Amphinomos for his having persuaded the suitors away from their plot to murder the heir to the throne.

Homer's account leaves no room for gradations of justice. Proper exhortation counts for nothing. Nor does meaning well. Nor does formal deference to the gods. Nor does kindness. And least of all lineage: we might remember that Amphinomos is an aristocrat, as are the other suitors as well.

What *does* count? Where he sits down, it seems. But this without any attenuating considerations of the sort our modern legal system happily includes. A hard either-or: either you are for Odysseus — as the swineherd and the cowherd are — or you are against him (cf. *Matthew*, 12:20).

Ordinarily, soft choices are the order of the day: a squeaky hinge requires *so much* lubricant, a tasty dish requires *so much* salt. In general, judgements regarding proper colors, sounds, tastes, odors and touches, and even points on the Cartesian grid require us to appreciate gradations, and such judgements have occasioned much reflection on the notion of a continuum. Similarly, we distinguish degrees of culpability and consequently of retribution.

The summary execution of Leodes the diviner parallels the fate of Amphinomos. In Book 21 we are assured that this diviner emphatically distinguishes himself from the suitors:

He kept his chair well back, retired by the winebowl,
 for he alone could not abide their manners,
 but sat in shame for all the rest . . . (144 ff.)

Still, like Amphinomos, he moves along with the suitors anyway; in fact, he is the first to try his hand at stringing the bow. When, subsequent to the slaughter of the suitors in Book 22, Leodes pleads for his life, Odysseus answers:

“You were diviner for this crowd? How often
 you must have prayed my sweet day of return
 would never come, or not for years! — and prayed
 to have my dear wife, and beget children on her.
 No plea like yours could save you
 from this hard bed of death. Death it shall be!” (321 ff.)

Again, a harsh judgement against one who “sat in shame for all the rest.”

And with no immediately apparent reason for differing the judgement, Telemakhos puts in a saving word for the other two non-combatants left in the hall after the massacre. First, for the minstrel Phemios, who pleads:

My gift is song for men and for the gods undying.
 My death will be remorse for you hereafter.
 No one taught me: deep in my mind a god
 shaped all the various ways of life in song. (345 ff.)

And then for Medon, the personal servant of Telemakhos, who had survived the massacre in a rather comical way, now emerging from “under a chair where he had gone to earth, pulling a new-flayed bull's hide over him” — a sticky and fetid hideaway, we may imagine. In these two cases it might seem that Telemakhos is simply playing favorites — unless we can distinguish the three vocations at issue: divining the future, singing lays (ways of life), and serving a master humbly.

We may review these various death-sentences and reprieves—as well as others, such as the hanging of the twelve servant girls who had slept with the suitors (“hung like doves or larks in the springèts triggered in a thicket”) and the mutilation of the goatherd Melanthios (nose and ears and hands and feet cut off, genitals fed to the dogs). We could review them while playing the judge of the judgements themselves, as many do when watching the trials of celebrities on television. This we can do, namely debate the justice at issue, but Homer's work does not itself do it, nor does it invite us to do it. Playing the judge, we remain within the familiar form of discourse, the one in which we go about our own daily business.

Except that, when reading Homer—or watching television—we are not minding our own business. Or, rather, that is a question we must consider: How can we mind our own business while contemplating the business of others? Plato first introduced this question and developed a discourse in reply to it, arguing that discourse not proceeding in full awareness of the question can ruin the souls of those engaging in it. Let us raise and pursue this question with a view to the strange figure of Amphinomos.

§3. *Reading*

The story shows *choice* in the making. And with choice, character. Within the general drive for position and power, Amphinomos stands up against its cruder forms. Yet in the end he “goes with the flow” despite his very real resistance. Whereas it is immediately clear that Eurymakhos' resistance is mere sham (as when he assures Penelope that he himself would stand by Telemakhos against the others; Book 16, 435 ff.), it becomes only gradually clear to us and perhaps to Amphinomos himself that he too is but one more suitor vying for position and power—for long-range advantage rather than for nobility.

How might we *read* this development? How one reads: this question bears on the focal point of reading, or on what we take to be the focal point. There are a number of easy, i.e. commonly accepted and self-fulfilling answers: one focuses on the intent of the author, on the expression of the author, on one's own ideas and feelings; or

perhaps on parallel literature, locating the sayings of another within an aviary of familiar sayings; or perhaps, given today's historicism, on the social, political, and economic context perhaps conditioning the formation of the text itself.

There is then the most direct answer: one reads by focusing on what is being said. And it is precisely here that we ask again: What *is* it that is being said? In regard to the episodes in which Amphinomos appears, we may plausibly answer by recalling his deeds and sayings. But how about reading “in general”: Is there something we might now, in reflection, say about this?

In Homer's account we in fact find what may comprise an answer to this more delicate question of focus (Book 22, 347 f.):

... θεὸς δὲ μοι ἐν φρεσὶν οἶμας
παντοίας ἐνέφρυσεν ...

Robert Fitzgerald's translation reads:

... deep in my mind a god
shaped all the various ways of life in song.

In each instance, the minstrel offers, or passes on as a gift from a god, an *oimē*: a “lay.” A minstrel like Homer sings lays: ones that have been implanted in the minstrel's mind by a god. But what is a lay? A path, a direction, an orientation. Of course, in the context, these directed paths are being sung. Thus the translator here ingeniously translates this one word by several: the ways of life in song. This formulation constitutes an answer to the question what we are invited to concentrate upon when reading Homer's work.³

Already in Book 8, at the court of the Phaiakians, we are presented with a lay. Into the feast is brought the minstrel Demodokos,

whom the Muse cherished; by her gift he knew
the good of life, and evil —
for she who lent him sweetness made him blind. (63 f.)

The singer then sings a particular “way of life” (*oimē*), namely that of “the clash between Odysseus and Achilleus”—indeed, this clash as engendering the story of the *Iliad* itself, but now with special focus on Odysseus, this guest of the Phaiakians travelling in disguise. At the

end of the song, toward the end of Book 8, Odysseus, still disguised as a stranger, speaks to the court about the singer's own way of life:

All men owe honor to the poets—honor
and awe, for they are the dearest to the Muse
who puts upon their lips the ways of life. (479-481)

The singer can sing the ways of life because he sees these ways—sees them not with the eyes in his head, but with the eye of the soul, as subsequent thinkers will say (by an *a priori* gift, whether from the Muse or directly from Apollo, Odysseus emphasizes).

Plato knew this answer, including the reference to good and evil (which directly applies to Demodokos' condition, but then also to any way of life). And he challenged the readers of Homer on the question whether the “ways of life” sung by minstrels were properly formulated in the singing and the writing—and, even if properly formulated, whether they were then properly detected in the hearing and the reading. The answer becomes trivialized if we translate *oimē* as song (or understand “lay” as a synonym for “song”): the recognition that a singer sings songs does not help us very much.

Other ways of life—“shaped by a god in the mind of the poet”—are those of the three herdsmen, the three non-combatants, and of course the three characters central to the development in this part of the story: Penelope, Telemakhos, and Odysseus himself. We could expand the list to include Eurykleia, the faithful servant who first recognizes Odysseus in his beggar's attire, and still others.

But is this what it means to read—or hear—the song: to register, perhaps analyze and comprehend, the various ways of life that we find around ourselves? Or, as in Plato's story of Er at the end of his *Republic*, to understand that we have already chosen one of these? If we choose to read and hear stories this way we assimilate reading to a form of spectatorship: we consider ourselves as on-lookers exercising our powers of discernment, even if we also find ourselves affected by what we discern. Reading the various episodes involving Amphinomos, we then note the various modalities of his responses, feel perhaps relieved at his virtuous resistance to violence and terrified at his ultimate demise—and perhaps these mixed feelings

engender a moment of reflection on the modalities of good and evil, so familiar to Demodokos.

The phrase “ways of life” can have another, albeit related sense. The poet—let us say: literature—focuses us on the *parting* of the ways. As Aristotle formulates it: Homer's *Odyssey* engages us not in what happened, has happened, is already happening around us, but rather in what *might*, what *can* happen: in the figure of Amphinomos we experience possibility. Not merely in the sense of “what circumstances *allow*” (*endexesthai*), for this requires of us only a certain sensitivity to the multiplicity of the roads leading from any one point, but rather in the sense of the *power* (*dunamis*) actualizing circumstances themselves. On this account, reading a literary (poetic or philosophic) work wholly, wholesomely, we engage in potentiality; in contrast, Herodotus' *Histories* focus us on what supposedly did happen, what has already happened. While what has already happened does show such happening to be *possible*, it does not at all show what is *powerful*—what is at issue for us

We should not miss the fact that Aristotle himself here proposes a parting of the ways. Indeed, in Plato's and Aristotle's works “philosophy” is primarily an adverb: we engage in discourse of any sort (mathematical, poetic, historical, even “philosophy” as an academic discipline) either philosophically or not. The philosophic manner detects, elicits, and even enacts the “dynamics” of the matter under study—rather than just moving within the dynamics, accepting the procedures and the results, or even arranging all these for inspection and criticism.

But what potentiality might we detect, elicit or enact in Homer's accounts of Amphinomos? For a contrast, let us consider how Herodotus might have told the story:

Hailing from the Island of Doulikhion, Amphinomos, the son of Nisos, arrived in Ithaka to join the suitors vying for the hand of Queen Penelope, the wife of King Odysseus, presumed dead after his absence of nearly twenty years. He often spoke up against the plans of the other suitors to murder Odysseus's son, Telemakhos. Yet in the end he sided with the suitors and, when trapped in the Great Hall,

tried unsuccessfully to force Odysseus away from the door through which he and others might have escaped. It was Telemakhos who speared him from behind, so he perished along with the others despite his gentler nature.

Plato notes that this revision of the Homeric text deletes the imitation from the narration (the *mimesis* from the *diēgēsis*). We have turned the account into pure description by eliminating the “voices and figures” other than our own.⁴

How can an account, our reading or listening, writing or speaking, bring out the power, the potentiality at its focus, rather than merely present an inventory of events supposedly past, current, or future? The potentiality at issue in the story of Amphinomos is that of character, Aristotle would say — of *ethos*, which might also be rendered as “way of life.” Character is revealed, slowly, by the choices one makes in the course of ever-changing circumstances. Odysseus himself remarks on the “capital” Amphinomos has at the outset: a clear head and gentle breeding. Yet the course of the story shows the man investing his capital in one possible way — and, in this case, losing it. The character that evolves under the name “Amphinomos” is precisely one described by his name: the character of “grazing on both sides.” In stronger political language, he knows where justice lies, speaks out against proposed injustices, and yet succumbs to the pressure to join the other party. In stronger personal terms, he's double-minded: he knows what's ultimately good, but chooses instead more tangible goods. As Plato will subsequently say, unless we are *had* by the good we spend our time *grasping* after goods.⁵ As even later thinkers say, unless we are given over to the transcendent we will get lost in the immanent.

In the case of Amphinomos, the revelation of character resolves the wavering (he does in the end take sides), but somehow “downwards” — unlike the revelation and the resolution in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Yet how might we read this revelation?

Reading examples only is very close to minding someone else's business. How might we read them in a way appropriating them as *our* business? We might look for analogies closer to home, and perhaps the one always closest to home. But what would be the

purpose of such analogies? Perhaps to pass judgement: one who behaves like Amphinomos lacks integrity. Or to predict outcomes: one who behaves like Amphinomos will perish. But we latecomers hear the Socratic question: What is it about our inventory of examples that holds them together for judgement or prediction?

In our favored example, Amphinomos struggles with the choice whether to do what others are doing or to do what is right. Odysseus himself states what's right, and then too what's wrong: “No man should flout the law, but keep in peace what the gods may give.” In this case, the law proscribes eating up another's household, dishonoring the wife of the master, and plotting the murder of the heir to the throne. Such prohibitions stem from what the law prescribes: that we “keep in peace what the gods may give” — a law we find reiterated in the Homeric poets, e.g. Pindar in his 3rd Pythian Ode (103 ff.):

If any mortal keeps in mind the way of truth, it
 behooves him to receive gladly
 the things given over to him from the blessed ones.
 One way, then another,
 blow the winds on high. Not for long does the
 prosperity of men last
 whenever it falls to them most fully.
 Small in what is small, great in what is great,
 shall I be; the forces always pressing upon me
 I shall care for within the means that are mine.

In the Homeric tradition, the laws formulated by parents and magistrates should aspire to reflect this understanding of the human condition: at any moment a *daimon*, a “force of circumstances” (or an “act of God”) is moving in upon us, and “what's right” is that we handle such (divine) force according to, and within, the *machana*, the “framework of means” already defining our business, always a finite affair. We violate this law when we lay claim to what lies outside our own respective frameworks and, correlatively, try to take more than our share.

Plato and Aristotle will contest this restriction on lawful dealings, arguing that our task, already as artisans, is precisely to envision how

circumstances themselves need to be, and to help them fulfil their own needs according to our vision of their fulfillment. On this classical account—now distinctively that of western civilization—the parting of the ways is one in which we must choose between scampering after circumstances (by turns adjusting ourselves to them and adjusting them to us), and achieving insight into their own fulfillment. Upon this latter choice we come to understand ourselves (or rather our art, our craft) as contributing to their fulfillment, and we (in our art) enter into circumstances as “sources of movement” (efficient causes).

On either account—the Homeric or the Platonic—what holds the examples together is justice. Only by understanding what's right might we understand examples in all their multiplicity. Yet the paradox remains: we begin with examples in order to understand justice—to understand how we may begin.

Reading can help us *recollect* what's right—by focusing us on the “ways of life” that “precede” the examples. Stories present examples as “functions” of ways of life—as embodying various partings of the way.

§4. Nobility

To do what's right, yet without defining what's right as what others are doing or what others have proscribed and prescribed: this imperative has elicited reflection from the beginning, and ever more explicitly in Aeschylus and Sophocles, Plato and Aristotle, and throughout western literature. And the more we reflect on it the more the imperative appears paradoxical: both in the original sense of the word (it contravenes commonly held opinion, *doxa*) and in the popular sense of the word (assessment of it engenders unhappy conflicts). Literature focusing us on this imperative—e.g., Homer's account of Amphinomos—focuses not on what did or will happen, but on what *can* happen: on power. Such power, the “can” of the “can happen,” comes into view, into focus, precisely at the parting of the ways, never as a possible future. At this parting stands a hero who has no future. Sophocles' *Oedipus* shows power happening, while the Wyss' *Swiss Family Robinson* merely shows possibility recognized and pursued into a happy future.

But how can a power not bestow a future—or not be defined as working toward a future amelioration? Of course, if we do wrong we somehow betray the power. But even doing right doesn't have much of a future—is not defined, as latter-day utilitarians would have it, by the effects it has on forging a future. Still, there is a constant element of expediency in any choice we make: we choose a course of action explicitly and reflectively by considering how we may preserve the context in which such choice is possible. Oedipus aspires to preserve Thebes. In our case, Ithaka has been without a proper leader for nearly twenty years. Everyone in and around the city knows that it cannot long survive without its leader. There are those who choose to wait and hope for Odysseus' return, and there are those who implore Penelope to choose another consort to serve as leader. Those who wait have no reason at all to believe Odysseus will return, and generally admit their hope is baseless: it merely expresses loyalty to the past. Those who want the matter settled in order to assure a future for the city do not fight among themselves over the position: on the contrary, the suitors are of one mind, agreeing that Penelope should choose. The suitors go wrong only in their insistence on living off the kingdom and in their hope to force Penelope into action by murdering her son—instead of tending to their own kingdoms, where such parasitism and violence would be self-destructive.

When preservation of the city looms as an issue, the conflict between expediency and nobility arises. Amphinomos illustrates one engagement in this conflict, one that ends by giving way to expediency—already when, after the warning articulated at length by Odysseus, “he sat down where he sat before.” The other ending, when Telemakhos' lance “hit him between the shoulders,” is not the ending essential to tragedy. His choice—or lack of it, since “he could not take flight, being by Athena bound there”—provides a foil for the choice revealing nobility, as in the cases of the cowherd and the swineherd, and Penelope herself (among others).

On Aristotle's account, there are only three basic choices—and, correlatively, three kinds of character and three kinds of friendship. While tragedy plays on the conflict between expediency and nobility, comedy plays on the conflict between immediate gratification and

long-range advantage. While Homer's *Odyssey* exemplifies tragedy, we may cite the opening speech in Aristophanes' *The Clouds* to illustrate the comic conflict. First, Strepsiades speaks:

Great gods! Will the nights never end? Will daylight never come? I heard the cock crow long ago. And the servants are still snoring! In the old days, they'd never have dared to do that. Damn this war! Has it not done me ill enough? Now I may not even chastise my own slaves. Then, too, there's my dutiful son, who never wakes the whole night, but, wrapped in his five coverlets, farts away to his heart's content. Well, let me nestle in and snore too, if it's possible. [*He tries, but sits up again.*] It's no good. It's vain to think of sleep when I'm being devoured by horses. And forking out dough. And debts. All on account of that boy, who only knows how to look after his long locks, to show himself off in his chariot, and to dream of horses. And I, I nearly die of terror at the end of the month. That's the time when things grow on you — like interest. Boy! [*A SLAVE appears.*] Light the lamp and bring my accounts. I want to see how many people I owe to, and how much the interest has got to now.

Strepsiades, too, finds himself in a bind. On the one hand, he envies his own slaves, who enjoy their nocturnal condition, and he even envies his son, Phidippides, who enjoys his long locks, his chariot, and his beloved horses — not to mention his sound sleep. On the other hand, debts are coming in, those incurred by his son and his wife obsessed with the immediate amenities of life. We find him — he finds himself — in the prototypical stance of comedy, or at least of the “old” comedy that stood in sharp but complementary contrast with Homeric tragedy.

Yet the expediency at issue in comedy takes on a personal hue that distinguishes it from the expediency at issue in tragedy. Strepsiades simply frets about his debts, his possible financial ruin. His long-range view is not very “long”: it has nothing to do with the possibility, the urgency, of preserving the city, and everything to do

with the possibility, the dread, of losing his own household, i.e. its amenities. Still, these two poles are presented together: expediency and amenity. And the work engages us in a movement, a moved-ness, between the two. Again, then, it engages us in a potentiality.

In its skeletal form, the potentiality presented in *The Clouds* has the same structure as does the tension arising when a parent exhorts a teenager to work hard now, in the present, for the sake of comfort and security in the future: to forgo some immediate pleasures with a view to fortifying the context in which such immediate gratification might become sustainable. Indeed, this same structure we may find in some ecological politics exhorting us to exploit present resources in a way consonant with future exploitation. Evidently, Phidippides' exploitation of his father's wealth is not sustainable.

Of course, Aristophanes' work does not at all *report* on the skeletal structure, i.e. engage us in the mode as anatomists. His work presents the original movedness whereupon we may afterwards detect the structure. The movedness itself engages us in laughter — whereas the skeleton, as presented to adolescents by their parents and to the public by its ecologists, is intended to frighten rather than amuse, and to incite corrective measures.

We today must exert ourselves to understand ancient comedy. The intellectual climate of the ancients endorsed the tension between expediency and nobility as basic to any genuine action in the public sphere. And therefore as basic to literature itself. Modern thinkers complained that the ancient understanding no longer worked. And they slowly, sometimes even reluctantly, but all the more surely argued that the tragic tension should be relegated to the private sphere — to the home — and that the other tension, the one anciently considered to be comic, should serve as the basis of our understanding of social organization itself (now called the state rather than the city). And eventually as the basis of understanding even our most private lives: rationality becomes the ability to balance out the two considerations, expediency and amenity, both poles now understood as Strepsiades does. Our own name for the maturation of such rationality is “enlightened self-interest.” While in Machiavelli's works nobility of a special sort remains an issue for the leader (but

not for the realm), in John Stuart Mill's work public justice gets reduced to questions of public utility, and nobility itself—the linchpin of the ancient trilogy—gets relegated to the privacy of individual sentiment.

At the end of Plato's *Symposium* we find Socrates arguing with Aristophanes and Agathon about the kinship of comedy and tragedy: that fully competent writers in either literary form are competent in the other as well. Aristodemus reports *that* this argument took place, but does not rehearse the argument itself: along with the comic and the tragic poets, he drifts off, and Socrates goes home to bathe and to start his day as usual. However, the writer of the *Symposium* lingers on, presumably illustrating, in his own work, both dimensions. But the work leaves it to us to think through the kinship.

The five episodes of Amphinomos in *The Odyssey* show the strain between nobility and expediency, while every line of *The Clouds* shows the strain between expediency and amenity. Expediency in the first strain bears on the preservation of the city, while in the second strain it bears on the preservation of the home, one's own financial solvency. The one sense of expediency opens out onto the possibility of nobility: onto the potentiality at issue in the preservation of a city—to do what's right even at the expense of survival. The other sense of expediency opens out onto the possibility of immediate gratification: onto long-term survival as the condition for pleasure at the moment. Tragedy and comedy each engage us, as readers and listeners, in basic choice. But likewise the juxtaposition of the two literary forms: together, they engage us in yet another strain, another tension, another basic choice—that between tragedy and comedy.

Such choices forever recur; they are never over, as incidental choices are. Doing what's right is forever in tension with the preservation of the community in which and for which such doing arises. Immediate gratification is forever in tension with the preservation of the home finances (economics) permitting it. Similarly, we will always have to re-choose between tragedy and comedy as the modes of engagement in circumstances. Even, or precisely, the most serious discussion is soon unstrung as it loses its roots in what is at issue in the discussion: it then becomes a caricature of itself, a

subject for comedy, whereupon the discussants either re-root the discussion or let it turn into mere diversion.

Still, it is one thing to read and write descriptions: here we attend to what has supposedly taken shape already, apart from ourselves. And it is yet another matter to read fantasies: we here divert ourselves, consent to be affected by a story again alien to ourselves, perhaps because our own story affects us unbearably. Moreover, one might read various mixtures of description and fantasy: documentaries, for instance, or works intending to inspire loyalty to a cause or indignation at an injustice. But to read *potentialities* would seem to require that we read without reference to a describable past or a desirable future state of affairs. For potentiality is precisely what *can* be. The modal verb refers to our ability. Still, the ability of a sportsman or a musician is proved in the performance, something that we in fact can describe both “objectively” (as an account of what did happen) and “subjectively” (as an account of how the performers or the spectators were affected by it). And if there is anything left out of these accounts, we moderns are at a loss to say what it might be, and even less able to account for how it might arise in a work such as Homer's.

Yet Plato and Aristotle answer in one voice that potentiality does become evident in Homer's story of Amphinomos and Aristophanes's story of Strepsiades. It becomes evident in and as *mimēsis*. With some trepidation, we may translate this term as “imitation.” Thus the answer reads: the works of Homer and Aristophanes (and of Plato, according to both Plato and Aristotle) are imitations revealing potentialities.

§5. *Imitation*

What might it mean to consider a work such as *The Odyssey* or *The Clouds* as *mimēsis*, imitation? A kind of doubling, it seems: there is the “original” and then also . . . the imitation. But how are we to understand this doubling? Or doubling in general?

Imitation-leather, for instance: a synthetic fabric intending to do the work of the original. Or caricatures of figures or gestures, human or otherwise: drawings or movements highlighting some features at

the expense of others, for purposes of ridicule or good-natured laughter. Or counterfeits intended to pass for the real items. Where there are obviously two versions, we may then compare, and judge the extent of the correspondence, the sameness and the difference. But in the case of art works need there be two, and then an invitation to compare?

Perhaps the most innocent form of imitation—doubling—is that of a very young child playing at being a doctor (with others playing at being patients), being a mother (with dolls, with kitchen instruments), at being a warrior, at being a teacher. Adults may distinguish immediately such make-believes from the originals, but children need not—not *during* the *mimēsis* (whatever they do before and after). Similarly, we adults can engage in a movie or stageplay without distinguishing, at the time, between the doubling itself and the original (whatever we might count as the original: e.g., love affairs or conflicts as we find ourselves engaged in them already at work or at home).

Indeed, the two-ness of imitation appears clearly only as we gaze on it from the outside: parents smile and forgive the difference between playing doctor and being one. Yet there is a sense in which the original exercising of the craft engages the physician, too, in imitation. Recall a typical instance of a doctor examining a patient: the doctor is repeating a routine, there is an appropriate procedure to follow. Such repetition has the structure of doubling: what one *foresees* as relevant to do is something that one *recalls* as having been done. When first learning the craft, the medical student experiences this doubleness explicitly as imitation; and the reason is clear: the apprentice stands uncomfortably, insecurely, in the actual event where the two must meet in a continuous flow, and both teacher and student recognize the difference.

One difference between playing and being a doctor (and between studying to be a doctor and performing as a doctor) is that in the playful initial imitation no intrinsic failure looms: for the child, the lack of in-built danger allows foresight and recollection to meld seamlessly, without tension in the handling of what arises for encounter; for the performing physician, the two must meld in a

present moment of danger. Perhaps the medical student splits the two apart to meet the danger, and thus appears awkward (to the trained eye, at least). And a parent may detect dangers to which the child is oblivious.

The imitation to which Plato and Aristotle refer is common to every extended involvement where competence is at issue in handling what arises for encounter—at issue, I say, because here failure essentially threatens (losing a game, losing a battle, losing face, losing one's own life or limb, or losing another's). Recalled from the inside (rather than observed from the sidelines), imitation consists in a sometime wondrous synchrony of recollection and anticipation: in handling the crisis at the moment, one finds the pattern (the rules of the game, the techniques of battle) engulfing the moment, and this pattern *is* both as settled in advance (fate, history: allotment, inheritance) and as yet to prove itself (questionable, variable: not assuredly fitting, demanding alterations).

Players and spectators, surgeons at the operating table and interns looking on from the gallery, differ in their understanding of the doubleness at work in imitation. The ones focus on what arises in crisis at the moment and find the twoness in the difference between what is recalled-anticipated and what demands response in its terms. The others focus on the gestures of the players, recalling and anticipating earlier analogues; and if these spectators retrench themselves in their spectatorship to ask themselves wherein the imitation lies, they will give an account that lacks the link (what arises for encounter in crisis at the moment) that might permit the unison of recollection and anticipation. Thus arises the inclination toward the earlier-later version of imitation: what is happening appears as a rendition of what has already happened, and what will happen (the result) will mark the difference between good and bad renditions.

On the inside, it makes sense to say, as Aristotle seems to imply, that music is quintessentially imitative: it invites no comparison, and yet consists entirely of crises and thereby engages us in modes of response (character). On the sidelines, it makes much more sense to say that painting or photography is quintessentially imitative.

§6. *Truth*

Imitation is ubiquitous. Yet precisely because every moment is one of imitation — of some sort of doubleness — the question arises whether it is *true*. Or, since there are various modes of imitation, *how* it is (or might be) true. Indeed, whether an imitation is true depends on our own mode of being — whether, for instance, we are players or spectators of the game. Thus the question of truth is inseparable from how we ourselves are: whether we who are engaged in anticipative recollection, or recollective anticipation, are true to what arises for encounter within the framework provided by the imitation. Sports-casters and musicologists have frameworks different from those of basketball players and violin players.

How can an imitation be *false*? The easy answer is that the two versions don't match up: the surgeon's half of the story doesn't square with the intestinal order or disorder of the patient, the medical student's version of human anatomy does not parallel that of human anatomy itself (or the story provided by competent anatomists). Plato and Aristotle understand the readily available imitation as the received view, as *opinion*. By definition, opinion (*doxa*) lacks grounding: it is truncated, obfuscated doubleness — what is cut off, what is obscured, is what might otherwise arise for encounter in its fullness. This fullness already locates the supportive doubleness: the patient at the moment (available immediately in perception: in *aisthēsis*) and human anatomy as such (common to and accounting for the one patient receiving attention). This latter must be painstakingly learned (because available only in intellection: in *nous* and *dianoia*). Opinion tells only the (temporally) first half of the story, fantasizing the rest: it can never be more than half true to what arises for encounter. Thus the difference, in any field of endeavor, between competency and apprenticeship. And thus, also, the possibility of fraudulence, the pretense to be able to handle, and to teach others to handle, what arises for encounter: we can make a living by focusing attention on half the story, on half truths. Each and every endeavor necessarily provides the opportunity for such a living, such a pretense. While some endeavors very soon revenge themselves (think of professional basketball players or jet fighters), others can have a high and often

even life-time tolerance (think of movie makers or university lecturers).

The question has been raised by thinkers from the beginning of our tradition, and will (I hope) be raised ever again: Wherein lies the difference between the half and the whole? between ungrounded and grounded imitation? between the false and the true? We intellectuals raise this question precisely because surgeons, ball players, jet fighters, movie makers, and sometimes even teachers raise it — each in ways relevant to a special framework of imitation.

But let's ask more simply how Homer's account of Amphinomos and Aristophanes' account of Strepsiades (both accounts being imitations) might reveal potentiality. So that these works might be true rather than false (either incompetent or fraudulent).

Or have I not already proposed an answer? Those two accounts engage us in the basic choice that otherwise appears to be somebody else's problem. Or, rather, *can* engage us: they are true when they do; half true, or unactualizedly true, very possibly false, when they do not. True in the sense of truing — as carpenters and machinists true their instruments. False in the sense of keeping *something* in view while also distorting it, or our involvement in it.

But how can such truth happen? An easy answer: the play (on stage, told out loud, or read in silence) *affects* us. And in contemplation we debate how this affecting can happen. Aristotle speaks cryptically of a “cleansing of the affects,” and this answer leads into a debate whether such cleansing cleans *out* or cleans *up* our emotional condition — a debate that postulates a difference of “domains,” that of the work and that of our own psyche, and reduces the question of their “connection” to psychology and away from the question of truth.

Yet even Aristotle's formulation (*Poetics*, 1449 b 28) can lead in another direction: the cleansing (*katharsis*) might be *of* the acts unfolding in the work. Then the work cleans “what's happening.” So that we, too, might be cleansed — but not anything we “have,” whether “thoughts” or “emotions,” or rather these only indirectly, as a result of another cleansing operation.⁶ Still, though, the scheme might easily come down to the same one: we spectators, auditors, or

silent readers are split into our active being and our passive being, and the work “activates” our passivity.

No doubt we can understand ourselves as *undergoing* something (anything, anywhere: here, a play we see and hear on the stage or a book we are reading). And no doubt we often, if not always, find ourselves — our moods — altered by what we undergo: this we especially note *afterwards*, as we rise to go about some other business and compare our recollections of *before* and *during* with our condition *now*, as we are crossing the street or doing research in the library. All of which abandons the question — or rather answers the question right off, and proceeds to other business.

Even starting with our being affected by the work we can wonder how such affects can ever take place. How can I be “interested” in the fates of Amphinomos or Strepsiades in any way more fecund, or even more “touching,” than in the mode of distraction from my own — as Augustine asks in Book Three of his *Confessions*? Moving in close to a fire on a cold night, I am obviously affected by the heat: warmed, even burnt. Perched up high on a tree limb I am, it seems certain, affected by (we now say) the pull of the earth. But how can the plights of others, portrayed over there on the stage or read in my living room, affect me at all? No doubt something *like* “being affected” does indeed happen. But *how*? There are many styles of observation that leave us “unaffected”; medical, legal, and military training intends precisely to develop such aloof observation, but most of us are rather callous to the troubles of others anyway, being preoccupied with our own. The very multiplicity of styles raises another question: Does the scheme of activity-passivity itself do justice to the event?

Now, a *mimesis* can in fact *end up* affecting us only if it *first* enwraps us: only if it *includes* us already at the outset. In the way, for instance, that a team-sport engages each member of the team, so that both the action and the affection stem from a prior unity and are therefore (when the teamwork works) shared as well. Or, as when a family can engage mother and father and children (perhaps also relatives and even servants) in a commonality that antedates and conditions every allocation of individual functions, a commonality so

pervasive that it may become conspicuous as a commonality only on very special occasions, such as marriage, birth, attack on or death of one of its members. In such situations the shared-ness reigns long before any affected-ness, and renders it possible that members be affected at all — and be allocated their respective roles.

Still, if we pursue this alternative (phenomenological) scheme, we must ask how spectators, auditors, or readers can share in any genuine commonality with Amphinomos or Strepsiades. Unlike one's part in a team or a family, one's position in works of Homer or Aristophanes seems to be that of a bystander only. But that's the question. Or, better: How can we be a part even of a team or a family?

All the while, there seems to be an immense difference between *sitting* in an audience as a spectator (sitting and *then* listening and looking in on actions elsewhere) and “actually” being there in the situation: running, talking, deciding — performing tasks on the field, in the office, at the stove. And yet, without denying the striking differences between the two — and among the various versions of each — we might detect a sameness. At issue in every case is *performance*. From the outside — in the position of aloof observation we can always assume, even in the workshop — the sameness will appear as mere likeness in regard to selected incidentals, curious analogies of no consequence. However, from the inside (if only we can “investigate” while preserving the stance of the performance itself: an art that the great works re-train us to perform), the unbounded multiplicity of performances (whether “on site” or “in the bleachers”) re-appears as sharing an ontological sameness. All are instances of “being in world” (Heidegger). Thus the football coach and the water boy pacing on the sidelines are just as much in the world of the game as are the players on the field. And while spectators in the bleachers *may* not be fully there, precisely their not being *there* is conditioned by their being in *some* world (say, that of “homecoming”), one likely even more absorbing than that of the game on the field. The “structure” of world is the same, even though the exertions required vary immensely from one endeavor to another, and serve to define them, each then receiving a name of its own.

Crucial to note is that the *ontological* difference between performing as a player on the field and as a bystander on the sidelines arises everywhere: most dramatically on *ontic* fields and sidelines themselves. Awkward and failing players appear on the field, but as “spectators” of sorts: they try to perform while merely looking on. And Odysseus appearing as a beggar in Ithaka is all the more powerful a player: his multi-layered decisions require a “distance” of recollection and anticipation, but one ever in tune with what arises for encounter. Sitting is more than leisure, while acting is more than labor.

It may seem (especially to those distressed by their condition) that leisure means freedom and labor means constraint. But what is more constraining than being in the thrall of a spectacle? Indeed, Plato and Augustine complain about such constraint, and recommend that we free ourselves from stageplays of any sort and become players ourselves.⁷ True, in leisure we may recollect and anticipate involvements whereas in labor we have to perform. Yet what is a labor but a constant *repetition* of performance, a congruence of recollection and anticipation? Indeed, what is a spectacle—once we have learned to look and listen *in* it, to read ourselves *into* it—but a recollective and anticipative *repetition* of our ontological condition for rising to what arises for encounter? In either case—in *any* case, any instance of world—we are repeating (resuming, learning, forgetting, anticipating, recollecting) a sameness. Yet only when awake does this sameness become evident (and thereby susceptible to phenomenological testimony); when asleep we retire into differences (and dream of metaphysical sameness).⁸

And works—those compositions that always seem “extra”—do their work as they wake us up and return us into the world—some “one” world, but this one becoming evident as world itself. Imitation (*mimēsis*) may or may not be the proper name of this event. But it becomes possible in ontic manifestations only because the event lurks wherever we are, in whatever we are doing—most obviously in the mode of repetition. It is—becomes—true when it trues us, wakes us into the sameness of world. It is false when it leaves us with two or more worlds inviting comparison.

§7. *Issue*

Amphinomos and Strepsiades “represent”—better, the works of Homer and Aristophanes recall and anticipate—ways of being in world. Indeed, partings in these ways. The struggle between utility and amenity leaves us in opaque worlds where it appears self-evident that cleverness consists in looking out for one's own advantages and pleasures; yet comedies portray this struggle and such self-evidence as laughable. In contrast, the struggle between nobility and utility invites us into a transparent world; tragedies (classically recognized ones as well as many great novels and popular movies) portray this struggle in ways that grip us. We are gripped precisely because these works momentarily reveal possibilities of wholesome evolvment on the side of nobility and to the detriment of one's own utility, possibilities that may linger with us, haunt us, long after we return to the busy slumber of utility.

How are we, in contemplation now, to understand the issue of such works? Where can we detect their finality? Most obviously, we may read and interpret these works in a “moral” vein: the issue seems to be the good, the better life, the path of nobility. And no doubt this issue lurks as a possibility in these works—at least in so far as they truly engage us.

But in what consists the nobility at issue? Again, philosophers from the beginning have answered: vision of the whole. Especially in the tragic hero, who comes to see the whole, we may detect a metonymy for transparency of the whole. Thus knowledge, too, is at issue, namely as the “intellectual virtue” stabilizing through time, and founding in time, “moral virtue.”

It is sometimes said that philosophy has consisted in a series of footnotes to Plato. We like to quote Whitehead on this, even though Nietzsche said as much, and Heidegger after him. To the extent that interpretations of Homer generally follow those of Plato and Aristotle, we might wonder whether the “footnoting” might go further back.

Yet we might also wonder whether, or how, nobility and knowledge are the central issues. Moderns, too, wondered—especially when nobility became discredited in considerations of the

qualities necessary and sufficient for leadership, and knowledge became a mathematical affair: non-political and non-scientific works then received their justification in reference to various kinds of emotional stimulation, and to expertise of execution. Not only do these justifications marginalize works such as Homer's and Aristophanes'; they nourish hopes for more effective, more available, less demanding forms of gratification: they reduce works to amenity.

If we attend to the works themselves, especially the ancient tragedies, we may detect issues that antecede both the moral questions of nobility and the intellectual questions of knowledge. Such works are "religious." That is, the portrayals in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* (as well as, oddly, those in comedies like *The Clouds*) are "ritual"—in the way that, in a Catholic mass, the priest re-enacts the transformation of bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ. For those engaged in the works, the issue here is the return to what is holy in their otherwise unholy world. *Their—our—return*: Homer's works still portrayed the gods as *already* there, and ourselves as failing to see them there, as missing them. But this presence, often undetected and sometimes not even acknowledged in its absence, is nowhere articulated as a doctrine to be endorsed.⁹

How then do those works articulate the holy—that to which the heroes return, and thereby themselves point the way? To be sure, Athena and Poseidon and still other gods "make their appearance" and even "effect" crucial moves within Homeric stories. But they then appear as super-heroes only, super-agents of the sort appearing in movies designed for adolescents, for minds longing for the super-parents they never had, or have lost. How can works themselves—as wholes rather than as parts—engage us in the return? Not "how" in the sense of the "means": this I have already considered. Rather: in the sense of "what's happening."

If we look to what *simply* happens we may discover a clue to what may *ultimately* happen. The up-front issue in Homer's *Odyssey* is the hero's home-coming: first of all the journey home and then the battle to reconstitute the home that is, upon his arrival, wasting away. Thus the city itself is at issue—is the issue itself, the looming possibility of communal unity, and this possibility as assured first of all by Athena

and then, derivatively, by human agency—inasmuch as this agency is embedded in and results from the divine gift. But not only the city, not even most centrally—as modern political theory since Machiavelli would have it. For the issue is even more the land itself, the earth, the possibility of "nature" (as later thinkers renamed her) supporting the city—recurrently nourishing it: this nourishment, too, requiring an acknowledgement of the gift.

There is no "theory"—no opinion, no doctrine—floating independently of the happening: the return. Contemplation, rather: *theoria*. At most, Homer's work recalls and anticipates the basic choice between nobility and utility, and this as an abiding tension. And also, within the larger context, the choice between this tension and that between utility and amenity—between the tragic and the comic.

Odysseus always appears as having already chosen nobility. And his choice nearly always remains in perfect consonance with utility—unlike that of Achilles. The one exception—his counter-productive taunting of Polyphemous, whose father Poseidon then decrees further hardships (Book 9, 502 ff.)—hardly disturbs the artful harmonization of nobility and utility. Then, too, Odysseus remains immune to the temptations of immediate gratification, as these might very well contravene the pursuit of utility. The one exception—his decision to hear the beautiful singing of the Sirens (Book 12, 37 ff.)—reveals again his ability to assure the safety of his ship in advance of the gratification, namely by having his crew tie him fast and not follow his subsequent orders to set him free. In the figure of Odysseus the tension between nobility and utility, as well as that between tragedy and comedy, are immediately resolved.

Amphinomos, in contrast, appears as caught within the tensions—mainly the tension between nobility and utility but also, in passing, between utility and feasting. This mode of tribulation differs considerably from that of Odysseus—who merely has practical problems to solve.

Thus the Homeric song introduces yet another tension—one between a way of life wherein the basic tensions appear as essentially

resolved at the outset and a way of life wherein the tensions appear as unresolved—until perhaps the end.

While the figure of Odysseus will continue to inspire popular imitations of incredible heroes solving the problems of the world, the figure of Amphinomos will continue to inspire imitations portraying human being as torn within the tensions and in need of mending.

Notes

1. For the translation of Homer's *Odyssey*, I generally follow that of Robert Fitzgerald (Garden City, N.Y., 1963). However, I also consult Richmond Lattimore's (New York, 1965 & 1967) and A. T. Murray's (Loeb edition, 1919 & 1976).
2. This crucial term, *akrasia*, is variously translated as "unrestraint," "moral weakness," "incontinence." In any case, the metaphor builds on the notions of negation (the *a-*) and mixture (*krasis*): "mixture" can apply to liquids such as wine, or to combinations, as when we describe a climate as "temperate," or when, in grammar exercises, we talk about combining distinct vowels into one sound. In the case of character we speak of being "tempered"—and so of a person's "temperament." We might then translate *akrasia* as "untemperedness."
3. Philologists consider *oimē*, "lay," to be a variation of *oimos*. Both words apparently mean "way, road, path" and then can mean, metaphorically, "course of a song." The question is whether the "of" here means "course revealed by the song" or "course taken by the song." No doubt the genitive varies in meaning according to the work in which *oimē* occurs—as well as according to the reader of the work.
4. *Republic*, 392D to 394B. Socrates is accounting for the differing kinds of diction, *lexis*. Cf. Plato's *Protagoras* (347) for a strong statement of the relevance of eliminating "extraneous voices" from a free intellectual discussion. Note also that Plato's dialogues are themselves imitations.
5. *Republic*, 509A (ἔχειν has the sense not so much of "possessing" as of "being conditioned by"—we "can have" the good the way we "can have" *logos*, not the way we might have a title to something); and 521A (ἀρπάζειν has the sense of "frenetic grasping"—the vain effort to *possess* what one can never *have*).

6. This is the direction, somewhat, of Gerald F. Else in his work *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), as well as in his translation of the *Poetics* (Ann Arbor, 1967 & 1973). The Greek text itself remains ambiguous, so every translation is an interpolation, the only justification of which lies in whether it works or not—both in Aristotle's corpus and in what that corpus is about.
7. Cf. Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, 1075 a 19: "In a household . . . the freemen are least able to act as they simply will, for all things or most things are already ordained for them, while the slaves and animals do little for the common good and for the most part live at random."
8. Cf. Heraclitus, Diels Fr. 89: "for those awake world (*kosmos*) is one and shared (while in those slumber each turns away into his own)." Also Fr. 30: "world (*kosmos*), the same for all, was not created by any of gods or men, but was always, is, and shall remain ever-living fire, kindled in measurings and quenched in measurings."
9. Neither does Shakespeare's *King Lear* articulate a doctrine, despite its Christian context. Cf. Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* toward the end of §10: religions die when their mythical presuppositions get subjected to eyes insisting on a dogma to be believed and so get systematized as enshrining historical events. Then, too, his *Anti-Christ*, §39: Christianity died the moment it became a believing, a "holding-for-true," instead of remaining a doing, a not-doing of many things, a being-different. Perhaps Plato was aware of such death when he remarks, repeatedly, that "we today" are like marooned folk who have inherited the *names* but these as devoid of the *deeds* (cf. *Critias*, 110A and, in this connection, *Timaeus*, 23B, *Republic*, 382D, *Phaedrus*, 245A, and *Laws*, Book III).

7

Henry Bugbee as Teacher

An earlier version was published in *Wilderness and the Heart: Henry Bugbee's Philosophy of Place, Presence, and Memory*, edited by Edward F. Mooney (Athens, Georgia, 1999), pp. 229-35. I have restored the Greek, and recorded the name of my mathematics teacher at the University of Montana.

For the most part, we hitch a ride. As an undergraduate, I myself had been riding over three years in mathematical work. Not only the rigor (a right way of doing things, rooted in the matter itself) but also the autonomy of agency enthralled me. Still, when I paused one day to ask Joseph Hashisaki, my mathematics teacher, where my work would lead, i.e. how I could pursue graduate work in the field, he replied that I would eventually have to engage in original research. Original! His remark brought the truth home to me: I had been hitchhiking, with no sense of either beginning or end.

In the middle, then. Middles can intimate the pressing possibility of beginning at the beginning: the very instability of puberty, for instance, or the paradigm crises of scientific work, situations where the middle ground no longer provides the security to work on toward apparent endings without recuperating beginnings anew. Also in classrooms: in retrospect, I detect intimations in Mr. Dodge's freshman English, Mr. Bier's Short Story course, Mr. Karpat's course in Totalitarianism (where we read Russian novels), and Leslie Fiedler's lectures on the Bible as Literature. Hearsay, however, as words of others become, or de-come, unless we can re-arrange them at their origin. Through no fault on their part, these men were the drivers, I the passenger. And I knew it, perhaps because my work in mathematics had clarified the difference between indicators of origins and engagement within them.

Winter quarter, 1960, at the University of Montana. Still in the middle. Mr. Marvin, my teacher in the History of Philosophy, suggested that I enrol in Philosophy of Religion, taught by the new Chairman of the Philosophy Department, Henry Bugbee. Hume's *Dialogues*, Tillich's *Dynamics of Faith*, Kierkegaard's *Sickness unto Death*, Buber's *I and Thou*—we students had to puzzle through these ourselves: the class hours offered no exposition or explanation, only—only!—a voiced engagement in the origins of those works, dissolving them so that they could rise freshly again as responses to their origins. No longer would works simply indicate, invite, leaving me in the vestibules.

It was his voice. A voice directly addressing what we listeners also had to address. Addressing the speaker genitively, the listeners datively, the matter itself accusatively, the books vocatively. As in all great works handed down to us for contemplation, such a voice bypasses forever the question whether someone else's sayings are correct or not.

Not that, at the time, I understood. In my other work I had already learned the chief mark of understanding: the ability to assemble and re-assemble, retrace another's sayings, keeping the words, my own now, in tune with their source. The voice baffled me, the source eluded me. All the more because I perceived no solid ground on which I could move, no histories to which I could revert, no formal argument I could mime. Listening to that voice, you either began at the beginning or missed the flow entirely. Or rather, not entirely. Even the most skeptical, the most middle-bound, sensed that an origin resonated within that voice. Perhaps the utter lack of middle ground in the voice itself released it from the conventional fetters of competition: I never knew anyone to take offense at Henry Bugbee's talks.

Unlike many others, I persisted. Voluntarily, I composed a one-page re-tracing, submitted it, arranged to meet him in his office, pressed him on one thing and another—I don't recall what. I do remember him steadfastly deflecting my reductive efforts. Accustomed both to patterns of intra-calculative thinking, and to neat taxonomies of philosophical positions, I would rephrase his sayings in isolation from their origins. And he kept starting over again from the beginning. Without the faintest sign of impatience (although he could, I later learned, become impatient with peers insisting on reducing great works of our tradition to middle ground).

Henry Bugbee baffled many of us—but in a way essential to any creative endeavor. Used as I was to the milder frustrations of mathematical work, I might not have pursued the matter with him over the next years had it not been for an evening's conversation with another student of his. Bill Dougherty, several years older than I, a chain-smoker with an aloof manner, commented one day in the University library that the high mark I received in Philosophy of

Religion acknowledged only my organized work, not insight. Shortly after that occasion, he came over one evening for supper. And, undoing the conventional tedium of social conversation, he took me through the Hindu story of “The King and the Corpse,” as available (I later found out) in Heinrich Zimmer's book of that title. “Imagine you are this king,” Bill said, “and this mendicant has brought you a fruit every day for many years.” At each juncture of the story Bill demanded that I decide what I myself would do. Each fruit, as it turns out, conceals a jewel. This initial revelation leads to strange engagements at night, on a funeral ground where the dead are cremated and criminals executed. Bill's account, his questions, appealed to my talents for step-by-step decision-making; I now had to respond, not just listen. I don't recall how, exactly, Bill guided me through the labyrinth of *prime facie* contradictory conditions: the rotten fruit containing, unnoticed, a gem; the hero of high station willing to engage in a low-life adventure; the patient holy man engaging in the ultimate evil; the unresolvable twenty-four riddles to which the king must nonetheless proffer whatever solutions he can imagine; the ultimate resolution through ignorance; the subsequent violence.

A decisive inkling. An origin only makes sense, comes within hearing, as it originates us—gets us going, jump-starts those who acknowledge it. Every effort to sneak up to an origin, to address others about it without allowing oneself to be addressed by it, simply chases it away, leaves us with indications, invitations, procrastinations—unresolvable conundrums. Any flow, be it that of drum playing, horse-training, or careful talking, utterly depends on our acknowledging such origination. Intellectual work likewise, although here the peculiarly modern emphasis on constructing a free-floating middle-ground detracts from the need to begin, encourages old and young alike to hitch a ride, to continue along the established itinerary without having either to begin or to end. We intellectuals may learn to say many clever things, organize many essential thoughts, discern many barely evident consequences, but our work really takes hold only when it embodies a beginning, reverberates with its own origin, ours only on trial.

Many who listen to Henry speak, even more those who read his *Inward Morning*, discern the possibility of a contemplative life attuned to, redolent with earth and air, fire and water. Myself as well. The voice, lurking even in the script, entices us into a walking life, introduces us to the shame of merely hitching a ride. Stepping out, we discover the exigencies of individuality, as well as their opposite, the comforts of anonymity. Unlike Thoreau's and Whitman's, Bugbee's voice resounds directly out of the person who in fact walks. This personal touch accounts, perhaps, for Henry's power to diffuse the resentment that the irony in other thinkers easily arouses.

Over the next two years I studied other works with him, either as enrollee or as auditor in his courses: Robert Henri's *The Art Spirit* and John Dewey's *Art as Experience*, Oriental works such as the *Bhagavadgita* and the *Tao Te Ching*, Van Gogh's *Letters* and Zimmer's *The King and the Corpse*, Augustine's *Confessions* and Marcel's *The Mystery of Being*. In the hours we met, we approached these works only indirectly, and some of the most memorable and influential moments consisted of citations from other works entirely. Already speaking out of an origin, Henry Bugbee's mere mention of another work would immediately confer upon this unknown a resonance drawing us to the bookstore or to the library. Works became testimonies, speaking from beyond the genres and the -isms academics have invented for them.

For me, Henry Bugbee's voice first ignited the faith that works of all kinds await us — await our willingness, shape our ability to respond to their, to our own beginnings. This faith reopens our literary tradition. True, each must begin at the time and place where one happens to be, and one finds oneself by finding the elements of that time and place, by participating in their various configurations. And Henry's voice always instantiated such beginning. But its greatness, at least for me, has consisted more in the propagation of this singular faith that human beings can and ultimately want to begin, rather than simply ride along. Also that the power of the traditional great works lies in their beginnings rather than in the ride they offer.

I could comprehend a mathematical proof, once I worked through it myself, and in my own way, because I had learned to ask *why* at

each moment of development. In contrast, prose works — histories, novels, essays — I could never comprehend outright. Some of my peers could: they could read through a book, listen through a lecture, in an even line, retaining the lateral structures as forming a two-dimensional whole that they could summarize and criticize with ease. Impossible for me. I needed the third dimension: coherence of line and plane became evident only when each line issued from an origin and only then, as a kind of after-thought, intertwined to form a two-dimensional web. Only the third, the epiphanic dimension fully addresses the question *why*. And, as in mathematical work, this third dimension takes shape, ever tentatively, only as we participate in the origin; summaries and criticisms lock us into the first two dimensions. Henry Bugbee's voice unlocked the two, spoke out of the third.

Still, we first find ourselves in a middle. In the midst of its elements, mowing a lawn or building a fire, investigating a problem or discussing a novel, we rightly assume that our pressing task is to comprehend the line of development, some segment of the trip, a multiplicity of lateral contributions to the moment. This assumption easily carries over from productive and practical affairs into the life of contemplation. Yet comprehension compromises contemplation. From its temporal beginning in ancient Greece, philosophy emerges as the contemplation of origins (ἀρχαί). Comprehension commits us to the middle where origins appear, ghost-like, as hearkening to an elsewhere, an elsewhen; mysterious things, long lost, to which we refer. In exact correlation, our middle position invites us to refer to *endings* as elsewhere and elsewhen, as productive or practical applications. In the name of comprehension, the middle usurps both beginnings and endings, engenders a groundless procrastination. Contemplation shatters this illusion: this we must learn, and I doubt if I would have learned it had I not chanced upon a pure instance of it.

Just as we are born with a name that we must still earn, so too we start out with a kind of comprehension, an overview that will prove lethal unless we start all over, at the beginning, and earn it — earn it not by attaching imagined beginnings and arbitrary endings to it, but rather by abandoning, by rediscovering the middle as but an outgrowth

of origins — so that these very origins become the endings, the culminations served by the outgrowth. All great thinkers from Plato to Heidegger have *said* as much. In Bugbee's words we could *hear* it.

In subsequent years, my sustained work in logic has driven home the difference between modern and classical semantics. We moderns find ourselves enmeshed within a triadic structure: our words take on meaning as they embody concepts referring to instances. In contrast, classical semantics is dyadic: we address each being as a duality of presence and completion, and our words take on meaning only as they embody our participation in the tension between these two aspects of the being. In modern scientific work and its attendant communication, we define our concepts and apply them retroactively to what we encounter. In classical philosophical work and its attendant dialogue, we define a being recollectively as a result of our participation in its emergence. Modernity has developed as a gradual, a painfully won battle between these contrasting modes of speech. And has obscured an even more originary mode.

Archaic semantics is strangely monadic. Out of some middle, not from it, an origin addresses us, and we answer. Our own speech takes on meaning as this answering. Here, the culmination, the end or purpose of talk, is none other than the origin itself, its re-emergence. Apart from its epiphany, our ephemeral response *with* it, the archaic makes no sense. Try to *study* archaic semantics, and it becomes triadic: scientific study not only requires the employment of concepts covering instances, but commits us to detecting them. Devise techniques to engage others in archaic semantics, and it becomes dyadic: dialectic engenders the assumption that there is a better way to formulate our speech, that we must embark on this journey of improvement. Works of a modern or of a classical bent tolerate, provisionally, an acquiescence in the middle. Without any whisper of the archaic, they leave us there. Henry Bugbee's voice amplifies this whisper into a resounding call.

In April of 1980, Henry came to Mount Allison University to speak about Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. For some years he had been reading these works with his students in a special humanities program

at the University of Montana. By chance, Liliane and I had undertaken a private study of them in the previous year: she on the similes, I on the recurrence of words such as *eidōs* (εἶδος) — strictly middle-ground work. For two hours early one afternoon Henry drew strand after strand of these works back to their life-giving, meaning-giving beginnings, converted both familiar and unfamiliar episodes into resounding culminations.

After the talk, the three of us embarked on a long walk along the Acadian dikes and under the red sandstone cliffs by the Westcock Marsh, here at the tip of the Bay of Fundy. I asked Henry if he was planning to commit some of his thoughts from Homer into writing, so that I and others could return to the event, re-enact the script. He trudged on for a moment, raised his eyes to the horizon, and remarked that a distant promontory looked promising. And off we hiked in that direction.

Writing throws us back onto our language. The writing life engages us in the meta-languages of modern or classical semantics. A precarious engagement, since a meta-language has an epiphenomenal, a ghostly life of its own that allows us to forget the archaic language whence the reflective forms issue and whither they must return for their substance. In its purity, archaic language engenders direct response: self, thing, world all emerge in unison for the duration. Such language remains, resounds, resonates originally in oral presentation. Henry Bugbee's work belongs first of all, at least for those fortunate to have worked with him, to the oral tradition. Without his voice, I for one would never have embarked on the literary life. Without voices like his, our entire literary tradition falls silent.

Henry G. Bugbee, Jr., was born in New York City on 19 February 1915. He died in Missoula, Montana, on 18 December 1999.

B.A. with high honors in philosophy from Princeton University, 1936.

Ph.D. in philosophy from University of California, Berkeley, 1947.

Dissertation: "The Sense and the Conception of Being"

- 1942-45: Ensign, Lt. U.S.N.R.: mine-sweeping, patrol, escort (Pacific)
- 1946-47: Ass't Prof. of Philosophy, University of Nevada, Reno
- 1947-48: Ass't Prof. of Philosophy, Stanford University
- 1948-53: Ass't Prof. of Philosophy, Harvard University
- 1953-54: George Santayana Fellow, Harvard University
- 1954-57: Assoc. Prof. and Chairman, Chatham College, Pittsburgh
- 1957-61: Prof. of Philosophy, University of Montana; Chairman 59-61
- 1961-62: Prof. of Philosophy, Pennsylvania State University
- 1962-67: Adjunct Prof., Pennsylvania State University
- 1964-67: Danforth Visiting Lecturer at 52 colleges and universities
- 1967-78: Prof. of Philosophy, University of Montana; Chairman 67-72
- 1977-78: Visiting Prof. of Philosophy, Eastern Montana College
- 1978-99: Professor Emeritus, University of Montana
- 1980-81: Resident Philosopher, Mount Allison University (Canada)

Henry Bugbee's *The Inward Morning* was originally published by Bald Eagle Press (State College, Pennsylvania) in 1958. It was re-issued twice (by Collier Books and by Harper & Row) before being re-published by The Georgia University Press in 1999 — simultaneously with the collection of commemorative essays, *Wilderness and the Heart*.

Essays by Henry G. Bugbee, Jr.:

- 1953: "The Moment of Obligation in Experience" in *Journal of Religion* (Vol. 33, no. 1; pp. 1-15).
- 1962: "Thoughts on Creation" in *Essays in Philosophy* (Pennsylvania State University Press; pp. 133-140).
- 1966: "On Starting with Love" in *Humanitas* (no. 2; pp. 149-64).
- 1967: "The Philosophic Significance of the Sublime" in *Philosophy Today* (Vol. 11, no.1/4; pp. 55-79).
- 1968: "L'Exigence Ontologique" in *Library of Living Philosophers* [Gabriel Marcel], ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Open Court).
- 1974: "Loneliness, Solitude, and the Twofold Way in which Concern Seems to Be Claimed" in *Humanitas* (no. 10; pp. 313-327).
- 1974: "Wilderness in America" in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (Vol. 42, no. 4; pp. 614-20).

8

John M. Anderson
Memoirs of the Spoken Word

In the spring of 1981, at The Pennsylvania State University, a number of students of John M. Anderson formed a colloquium on the occasion of his official retirement. Illness prevented me from attending, but Drew Hyland read these memoirs to the group on my behalf. Several of the participants, including John himself, testified that Drew somehow adopted the tone they would have expected from me, so that my absence was well compensated by his presence.

I have perused the text again and made a number of very minor emendations.

My first memory of John Anderson recalls him as a businessman. I had arrived in the fall of 1961 at Penn State and had made my way to the Philosophy Department, which was then located on the second floor of Sparks building in the wing closest to the University Library. As I entered the office I looked to the left, into the lateral office, where sat John with Henry Johnstone, at desks directly adjacent to one another, both facing the entrance. I then learned that John was in the process of passing the reins of the Department to Henry, since John himself was departing soon for a year in Berlin, where he was to teach on a Fulbright exchange program. About the interchange between myself and these two men I remember only the mood — that of everyday concerns, mine to discover where I was and what I was to do, theirs to complete the transfer of administrative responsibilities.

It was not until nearly a year and a half later, in January of 1963, that I had any other contact with John. Upon his return from Berlin he had declined to teach anything but a mathematics course. But one day, it must have been in December 1962, Dick Gotshalk told me to drop by John's office to arrange, if I wished, to pursue an Independent Study under his supervision. And so it was agreed to meet each Saturday morning for the winter term. To my surprise, there were to be no books. For ten Saturday mornings we just talked. We never once chatted: he asked, I answered, he cut through my answer, and I came back again. In retrospect, now, I can see that what I learned was the power of the spoken word.

I had not arrived at Penn State entirely innocent of the word. I had come already with a strong sense for the power of speech to constitute an encounter with reality. Indeed, until I had experienced philosophy as speech, as a re-enactment of our strange position in and for the revelation of reality, I had taken only a peripheral interest in the subject during my undergraduate studies — and would never have abandoned mathematics for any version of scholarship, committed (as any such is) to talking *about* the talk of philosophers which had in fact embodied the spirit of speech. I had been rather lucky to have chanced upon the courses of Henry Bugbee at the University of

Montana, so that Philosophy was for me already an “inside job,” one eliciting the possibilities weighing on us all. Or perhaps I should say the *necessities*. For the topic of necessity defined our ten Saturday morning discussions.

Now, at the time I had become convinced that the philosophic word aided and abetted our encounter with our circumstances, an encounter which was fraught with the stresses and strains of bringing the reality out of the fog, at least for the time of the word. In fact, I took the multiple necessities so manifest in the human condition to stem from the single necessity of this encounter. A number of works struck me, and still today strike me, as confirming this basic thought: Parmenides’ didactic poem, Aristotle’s discussions of *nous*, Kant’s discussion of the beautiful, the sublime, and the moral imperative, Buber’s *I and Thou*, a number of Oriental works, and the works of Martin Heidegger and Gabriel Marcel.

I mention my own interests at the time because my first lesson with John, the first *jolt*, came when, instead of elaborating and exemplifying the thought, he seemed simply to tune in with it—and *counter* what I said about it. This combination—assumed attunement and playful contravention—was new to me, and still today very rare in my own experience. Earlier, I found others responding to my words either with sympathy or suspicion—with simple agreement or simple incomprehension. But here was a man who was able to call into question, not his own distorted version of what I was saying but my own factual efforts to say it. Whereas most interchanges drive each interlocutor back into his own entrenched thoughts, John took my thoughts and held them out at a distance so that I had to go find them again! One obvious effect was that I ended up having a lot more to do—a lot more thinking and talking and listening ... and writing. But it was a long time before the full significance of this experience dawned on me. Right now let me extract one dimension of it: the spoken differs from the written word in that the live interchange, with such dramatic elements as tone, gesture, and timing, allows for the combination of those apparent opposites: attunement and contravention. The ulterior advantage of such a combination is that

philosophical thought appears as having a future in speech, whether written or spoken.

I suspect that John knew what he was doing, i.e. that I was sorely in need of his ministrations. For he introduced one of the Saturday topics with the question: “What are you going to do when people disagree with you?”

A simple question, is it not? Yet it is seldom really pondered. We all know that many if not most lively conversations with our fellows run a course paved chiefly with conflicts, disagreements, misunderstandings. I had assumed that such conflict was grounded only negatively, e.g. in poor intelligence, bad will, or bad education. Our own interchanges had suggested, however, that conflict between speakers might be grounded positively: in a conflict between an essentially elusive matter on the one side and the speakers on the other. After all, if the reality of the encounter is what counts, then speakers should be willing to forego the formulations of their own speech. Far from relinquishing responsibility for discourse, such foregoing might well be a prime condition for it.

Most significant about this one spoken interchange was that it remained with me as a voice to which I would have to respond for years to come. For I hardly understood it at the time. But notice that a *written* word here would have most likely failed. For when we read we tend to remember what we *agree* with; things we disagree with or fail to understand tend to get dismissed or more simply forgotten. A spoken or speaking word, on the other hand, puts us on the spot: demands response, and precisely our inability to respond adequately makes us remember the word and perhaps work out a response over time. A spoken word can become a haunting voice—as when we cannot shake off even the inane comments of colleagues at a department meeting, and so perhaps lose a night’s sleep.

Anyway, when I later came to writers who insisted that naming had the power to bring things out into the open, to call the child by its name, to call a spade a spade—in short: to *reveal*—I could easily understand the claim as pertinent to the spoken or speaking word and could avoid confusing this claim with the typical experience of the written word, which allows chiefly for a formal precision. There is all

the difference in the world between incisive and merely precise language. The naming of which Plato and Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, Rimbaud and Mallarmé, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty speak is the naming occurring on the spot, where we put each other on the spot, where we think and speak on our feet—where, in short, words drive us to face what we ordinarily only suppose.

Now, instead of elaborating an essentially written discussion on the power of the spoken word, let me record a number of interchanges I had with John in the days when we had more opportunities to talk. The very triviality of the words I can now remember and repeat suggests to me the need to recall that only the live context allowed the words to echo for nearly two decades.

When I got news that my first article was going to be published (spring of 1964), I told John about the acceptance note and said that, assuming proof was ever possible, I had proven beyond a doubt in the article that Plato understood philosophy not as a solving of problems but as a posing of aporias. John looked at me wryly and repeated simply: “Assuming that is ever possible.” Hardly a very memorable comment, you might think. But ever since then I have been skeptical about any effort to “prove”—to other scholars presumably, but perhaps also to oneself—anything about what other philosophers were doing. The whole enterprise of such “proof” apparently rests on a misunderstanding. John did not say what that misunderstanding was, but now it is obvious to me.

Sometime afterwards I was commenting about the rejections I had received in the course of my efforts to get other essays published. John replied: “Well, keep it up. You will at least learn something about the stupidity of editors... but then also something about the difficulties of communication.” While confirming something of my own suspicions about editors, John also laid the responsibility squarely on my shoulders. This exchange eventually contributed to my understanding of what it means to write: for others, certainly,—so that if they reject it I have failed in one respect. Notice how this thought counteracts a certain Romantic disposition which is certainly counterproductive in the sphere of writing.

At an APA smoker in the late 1960s, when I was already teaching, John asked me whether I had come up with anything. I replied that I had rewritten a manuscript several times but was a bit scared that what means so much to me would appear silly to others. He said in reply: “Well, you can’t wait forever to make an appearance.” This exchange meant nothing much to me until I began meeting would-be poets and philosophers who always had something in the oven but never brought it out. In the case of writing, vanity amounts to a fallacy—of misplaced trust in language, one might say.

In the hallway near the Department offices I once registered my disappointment in a talk which had been given at an APA meeting by a rather well known and respected man. John’s answer was: “He has been known to give public lectures nearly as good as the lectures he gives in class.” It suddenly occurred to me that, talk as we will about the fine philosophy we are able to work out for our professional colleagues, our day-to-day discussions with our students brings out, often if not always, our best talk.

At a meeting in the Tower at Pittsburgh somebody was asking whether Sartre or Ricoeur succeeded better on some topic. John intervened and said that: “There have always been and will always be people who like to keep track of what others are doing.” In the context John’s point, the distinction between philosophers and commentators, was very clear. And it makes a distinction which had much greater significance than its application—and yet became clear only in application.

In a conversation which evidently centered on disappointment in the performance of someone else, John remarked: “He did the best he could.” In the context, this judgement amounted, perhaps, to a weak condemnation. But it introduced a principle which I have found helpful to remember, especially in dealing with colleagues and students.

I once asked John why on earth he was engaging in political philosophy (this was back in the late 1960s again, at an APA smoker I believe). In those days I still thought of philosophy as a strictly private affair, a way of living a strictly individual life. I have since been cured of this Romanticism, but at the time I learned something

else. John replied to my question: “As Aristotle said, when things get bad enough there is always someone off in a corner thinking about them.” I have yet to find any passage in Aristotle’s works where he says anything like that. But it did occur to me that philosophical thinking, even if it is off in a corner, arises from a melancholy recognition that things are not as they might be. Later I came to realize that one thinks philosophically about political affairs not because there is a right way they should be run, but because what goes on in them, namely everything, is held hostage by them—and must always be delivered.

Over the years, John has made many brief comments which have served as clues for rereading the works of major thinkers. I here mention only one of the many I recall. When I was enrolled in his aesthetic course about 18 years ago John asked his students to read Dewey’s *Art as Experience* and Santayana’s *Sense of Beauty*. One day I found it objectionable that Santayana envisioned human experience in physiological terms, as did Dewey to some extent. John replied: “That is just their way of emphasizing our immediate involvement in the experience.” Still today I find that physiological language begs many important questions, but John’s comment led me to understand that every thinker has his own way of talking about things, and that I would, as a reader, have to develop a tolerance for the variability of categories in reflective discourse.

Somehow these various memories of the spoken word do add up to form a whole. In many instances John saw that someone was getting bogged down in determinations that, while true enough, had no future. In all cases his comments, so out of joint with the prevailing direction, pointed up the assumption bogging things down—and set a new course.

To close, I will mention one comment John dropped one Saturday morning over 17 years ago: He asked me how I envisioned my life as a teacher, and I had replied that I would no doubt get a teaching job in some out-of-the-way college. How he did it I do not know, but John somehow argued that I would find such a job the death of my soul. I should try for a *large* place (he did not even blush to mention Yale, Harvard, and the like) where other people were doing things.

Well, this advice stayed with me for ten years or so. As it turned out I did end up at a *very* out of the way college, in a place where intellectual work does not have a high profile. Yet I suppose John’s point was that one should *think* big—draw upon and think about the world at large, in whatever way one can, and above all to be a doer rather than a rider—a speaker, I suppose, rather than merely a reader. Or perhaps my interpretation here simply reflects how much we take upon ourselves the ultimate responsibility for making sense out of the spoken word.

* * * * *

John M. Anderson was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on 29 July 1914. He died near State College, Pennsylvania, on 3 December 1999.

B.A. with highest honors from the University of Illinois, 1935.

Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley, 1939.

Dissertation: “Structure and Purpose”

1940-41: Credit Manager at Sears, Roebuck and Company

1941-42: Research Engineer at Elgin Watch Company

1942-45: Design to Administrative Engineer at Minneapolis-Honeywell

1945-46: Lecturer in Mathematics at the University of Minnesota

1946-81: Assistant to Full Professor at Pennsylvania State University

1981-99: Professor Emeritus at Pennsylvania State University

1950-51: Consulting Engineer at H. R. B. Singer, Inc.

1955-56: Guest Professor at the University of New Zealand, Otago

1961-62: Guest Professor at the Free University of Berlin, Germany

Books

Industrial Management (New York: Ronald Press, 1942).

Calhoun: Basic Documents (State College, Pa.: Bald Eagle Pr.; 1952).

The Individual and the New World (State College, Pa.: Bald Eagle, 1955).

Natural Deduction (San Francisco: Wadsworth Press, 1962).

The Realm of Art (University Park, Pa.: Penn. State Uni. Press, 1967).

The Truth of Freedom (University Park, Pa.: Dialogue Press, 1979).

Essays and Articles: see *Being Human in the Ultimate: Studies in the Thought of John M. Anderson*, edited by N. Georgopoulos and Michael Heim (Amsterdam and Atlanta, Georgia: Editions Rodopi, 1995), pp. 335-39.

9

Conversations with Heidegger

The occasion for my first conversation was a letter I had written to Heidegger. At the time (during the academic year 1964-65), my wife and I were living in Freiburg—the winter and spring in a cabin near Hofsggrund, a village in Schauinsland. The second conversation, at which Liliane was present, followed upon the upheavals in Paris and elsewhere during that May of 1968.

The question I originally raised with Heidegger (Could the analysis of *Dasein* be understood as an analysis of “experience”?) stemmed from two sources: my studies with Henry Bugbee, whose reflections in *The Inward Morning* draw upon vignettes of experience, and my readings of John Dewey, whose *Art as Experience* I found helpful when studying the first half of Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

June 28, 1965

At 2:55 p.m., I rang the doorbell of Heidegger's typical-looking German house on Rotebückweg in Zähringen. An elderly woman answered, presumably his wife, and after hearing my name appeared to know who I was. Leading me quietly up a circular set of broad stairs, all wooden and perhaps never having received a final touch, she pointed at the top toward a door half open, behind which one could see a short, broad man, faced away, attending to something on his desk while remaining standing. As I pushed the door back he turned around, took a few steps forward, greeted me, shook my hand and asked me to sit down by his desk while he went to shut the door. I waited until he returned before seating myself in the deep leather armchair in front of which, to the right of him, was a tray with a bottle of Cinzanno and one of American whiskey, along with a few glasses. Slowly and shyly, he indicated the refreshments and seemed to suggest that I take the whiskey—perhaps because, as he said, he was not allowed to drink that. So he poured out both glasses while the woman came in with an unlabelled bottle of supposedly thirst-quenching, but actually, as I learned toward the end, strange tasting carbonated mineral water. After he asked about how long I had been staying in Hofsggrund, the discussion began—and lasted until some time after 4:30 p.m.

The conversation circled time and time again around the adequacy and ambivalence of his notion of *Da-sein* and its relation to his later works where the term no longer appears. Heidegger picked up my letter and repeated my question bearing on the unity of the thought running through his works, and how this unity could be retained through an adequate understanding of *Da-sein* itself. I in turn summarized my question, saying that the reader of his works always has some difficulty in coordinating an understanding of *Being and Time* with that of his later works. Usually, the difficulty comes after reading his main work and attempting then to go on to his others. In order to explain my own predilection, I remarked that his later works

first came to my attention and that my difficulty was, therefore, to get into *Being and Time* after already having, or believing to have, a foothold in these. I then briefly indicated, without saying why, the possibility of construing *experience* rather than *human being* as the starting point of reflection and development.

He always kept this suggestion at arm's length. Experience (*Erfahrung*) indicated for him an after-effect of sorts, something that (and he used the Kantian expression) is only possible on the ground of ... the world-structure as displayed in *Being and Time*. But what was most impressive about his approach to the matter was that, after casting serious doubt, he remained willing to ponder it nonetheless — as long as I continued to remind him of this or that notion which he develops here or there and wishes to be commensurable with his thought as a whole. Sometimes he would stop, after an exchange of comments upon some difficult topic, and slowly unravel a deduction from the exchanges as it would bear on my original suggestion. His willingness to return to the theme on his own accord kept the discussion together in one piece and turning in slow revolutions appropriate to my anything-but-native capacity in the German language.

The question was, as I told him, how we could relate his later works to his main one if this latter was concerned exclusively with *Da-sein* as human being (*Mensch*) and if the former concerned themselves with the positive import of what is in some sense not human being, opposed to human being, and yet crucial for the Being of human being. In order to suggest that *Da-sein* is not only methodologically, but also thematically, only speciously identical with human being, I invoked the renowned distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity: if *Da-sein* were terminologically identical with “man” (*Mensch*), how could there even be the question about the authenticity of human being? If man were just simply man, in principle self-sufficient even if in fact bound up with things in a world, what sense would it have to argue that there is still an alternative, or a set of alternatives? *Da-sein*, I thought, had to be taken as neutral ground upon which human beings *with other things* are especially called into being — therefore the suggestion that

“experience” might circumscribe this neutrality. He insisted, however, that “the they” (*das Man*) was in fact “human being” and not a neutrality, although he more than once, quite without provocation on my part, claimed he advocated no subjectivism. He distinguished himself from Husserl, who, he said, arranged everything in his thought so that it would all fall into the transcendental ego in the end. I pointed out to him that, although I agreed with him, there is nonetheless an uncanny temptation to understand *Being and Time* as an analysis of the subject such that nothing else but the subject is posited and other things are implicitly negated. He took the opportunity then to argue that Being is not, as Kant supposed, position, that Being had to be left nameless and that our task was to remain open for Being. He jumped on my suggestion that here was the distinction between *Being and Time* and Sartre’s *L’être et le néant*. He picked up his ink blotter, one of those half-moon shaped things with a grip on top, and, smacking it down on the table, said that *être-là* was understood by the French as posited, and *être* as position; Sartre then advocated nothing but the usual French Cartesianism.

Heidegger remarked emphatically that the alternatives in *Being and Time* were not those of “the they” and “the individual,” the resolute self: that would be subjectivism. Rather, he claimed that the alternatives are between the public character of human being, where man takes his being from publicness (*Öffentlichkeit*), and the definitive character, where we understand our being as readiness, openness for Being (*Bereitschaft*, *Offensein für das Sein*). Perhaps this is still only self-evident upon a careful reading of his works. But more interesting to me was that he emphasized the methodological aspect of the work: the 437 pages of *Being and Time*, he said, do not constitute a philosophical anthropology, i.e. a description of man and his fundamental attributes, but rather a methodical development of the way of man, the way by which he can attain, not to Being, but to the possibility of its revelation. Perhaps all philosophy directs itself toward the understanding of possibility rather than of actuality, but Heidegger would like the analysis in his work, understood, to be left behind as a mere method, to be forsaken for the sake of the revelation — almost as if this latter were quite independent of the situation

portrayed in *Being and Time*. This methodological nature of the work reminds one of the endeavor of Descartes and suggests the way in which the work has been understood as going beyond phenomenology into the realms of the mystical and esoteric. At this point Heidegger was quite adamant: my suggestion that experience was the region of *Being and Time*, or should be the region of philosophic thought, would require that one still begin with human being because this was the beginning of experience itself. To begin with human being and indicate the possibilities of profound experience, and to remain eternally indicating while standing on the horizon of an accomplished analysis—this seemed to be the way Heidegger understood or at least now understands the project of *Being and Time*.

I continued pressing the point about the centrality of experience by returning to the question of “the thing” (*das Ding*) and discussing how this would be crucial for his notion of *Da-sein*. If the things with which one works turned out to be of critical import for *Da-sein*, not merely a nuisance, as for Sartre, then it would seem that *Da-sein* was something more than human being, receiving its definition from things. So I asked him if the passage on page 333 of *Being and Time*, the one referring to “beings that don't take their measure from *Da-sein*” (*das nichtdaseinsmässige Seiende*) as necessarily to be analyzed for an understanding of *Da-sein*, was referring to the notion of things as this occurs, for instance, in his essay “The Thing” in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. He fetched his original edition of the work and found the passage: it was underlined in red pencil. He seemed satisfied that I had picked this passage for discussion and, laying his hand on the left side of the book as it lay open, said that everything up to that point, and I assume everything after that point, too (since nothing new is developed in the last 100 pages), was a mere preparation for this question. When I pressed him again as to what this referred to in his later works, he answered: things (*das Ding*) but, even more, art works (*das Kunstwerk*). He then talked about what he meant in his *Letter on Humanism* by his turn of thought (*die Kehre*), emphasizing that this turn was what he was working for all the time in *Being and Time*. He seemed to think that the *Letter* and his essay on *The Origin of the Work of Art* formed the proper sequels to *Being and Time*, the series

which would provide the reader with an idea of the turn (*Kehre*), already prepared in his major work, toward “what does not take its measure from *Da-sein*” (*das Nichtdaseinsmässige*).

I kept pressing him about the adequacy of beginning with human being, now no longer just because the authentic self of human being is not first and foremost (*zunächst und zumeist*) available, but now also because things distinctively non-human (*nichtmenschlich*) were of concern. When do things come up in *Being and Time*? He answered: human being was already there disclosed as necessarily involved with things in a world, things defined there as “at hand” and “on hand” (*Zu- und Vorhandenheit*). I remarked, though, that these never take on any shade of real interest in the analysis, that they remain as indifferent as Sartre's *en-soi*. Heidegger showed himself unwilling to admit that this early account of “things” justified the refusal of most readers to accept his later account of things (*das Ding*) as that to which human being necessarily dedicates itself. *Being and Time*, he said had two themes: man as dweller (bound up within *Welt*) and man as ecstatic (called to *Entschlossenheit*). Beginning with human being, he wanted to show how we discover this Being as an openness to what is other than us, and this otherness is already brought into view by the things with which we dwell. He did emphasize, however, that he did consider the analysis of *Zu- und Vorhandenheit* to be a preliminary account, one in no way settling the question. I did not press him on this question in regard to the art works, but I did in regard to things (*das Ding*). As a basic element of dwelling (*Wohnen*)—as that which focuses and gives direction to the exstasis of human being—the thing (*das Ding*) forms the correlate to the self (*das Selbst*). When I asked him, he remarked that the alternatives of authenticity and inauthenticity also apply to things, not just to human being: “Without authentic thing, no authentic self, and vice versa” (*Ohne eigentliches Ding, kein eigentliches Selbst, und auch umgekehrt*). He took this to be self-evident. I'm not so sure that it is, or at least not in *Being and Time*.

So the theme of Heidegger's thought came down to man's dwelling but ecstatic nature, a nature therefore essentially bound up with what is not itself. He expressed this paradox by speaking of the non-human

(*das Nichtdaseinsmässige* or *das Nichtmenschliche*) as nonetheless “something which belongs to the nature of man, although not to man himself” (*etwas zum Wesen des Menschen, obwohl nicht zum Menschen als solchem Gehörendes*). (The thought can be better expressed in German because of the active sense of *Wesen*, which here means not so much a static essence as a way of being.) He then remarked that man's way is to be toward otherness, initially formulated as being-toward-death. He emphasized that, since otherness cannot become an appropriation of man, but must remain such that man's task is to remain open to it *as* other, the implicit thesis of *Being and Time* was to cut through every kind of dogmatism, and for this reason he wished neither to posit nor to negate the possibility of interpreting this otherness in terms of God. Man's effort can only be directed toward his need to listen to Being (*das Hören auf das Sein*).

The final approach to the topic of experience took shape by my reminding him of his short work entitled *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*. Here the life of thinking is described as an experiencing (*Erfahrung*), just as it is bound up with action (*Handeln*) in his *Letter on Humanism*. This is an odd bedfellow of thought if you look at the history of philosophy, I said. He agreed with me that neither Descartes nor Kant would ever speak of the experience of thinking, although Hegel might. So how did his own scheme of thought allow this to be an experience? Heidegger pondered this a while, providing one of the many times of prolonged silence in our conversation, and then replied that he could now perhaps see what I meant by experience: I understood this to be already a listening to Being (*ein Hören auf das Sein*). I liked his interpretation and consented to it. After all, I said, the activities of human being which form experience are developed in *Being and Time* as more or less powerfully testifying to this tense and strenuous call of Being—even those activities, or precisely those activities, which are perverted. And that they bear such testimony is the one and only ground for their interest and importance for philosophic thought. After this there didn't seem to be too much more to say about the question of experience.

The discussion wandered freely towards the end, with more or less disconnected questions and answers. I did ask him if his notion of

historicity, or heritage (*Geschichtlichkeit*), was to be understood as a development of the analysis of our being with one another (*das Miteinander*), to which he answered, as he did so often: “Of course!” (*selbstverständlich!*)—adding that, after all, he could not say everything at once in *Being and Time*.

And then he asked me about the lectures going on at the University in Freiburg, and I told him of Fink's lectures on the ontology of labor (*Arbeit*). He seemed to be interested in what was going on: he asked what Fink was like, just as he asked me earlier what Dewey's line of thought was. He also asked about one of my professors whom I had mentioned and who had been a student of his. He took the opportunity to pull out his old classbook and show me all the signatures of his students back in the early 30's.

I also asked him about Lao-tzu's *Tau Te Ching*: how much similarity he found between his own thought and that. He answered that there was no doubt a good deal, but that the language was a problem. He read some Chinese but only enough to see that, as he said in the dialogue in *On the Way to Language*, there was such a distance between East and West already in the mode of expression.

As I started packing up my books, he asked for my copy of *Being and Time* and wrote a remembrance on the first page. He then offered me a copy of *Der Feldweg* which I hesitated to accept, saying that I already had more than one. By then we were both standing up and, not wanting to take any more of his time, I edged my way to the door of his study. He accompanied me to the door downstairs; I thanked him and walked down the short path to the street without looking back.

May 24, 1968

We checked out of the hotel and carried our bags down to the station, placing them into a lockbox. We then took in some of the fresh air across from the station and eventually hired a taxi for the two or three miles up the hill toward our destination. We were to be there at five o'clock. Since it was early, we stopped the taxi a bit below and wandered on foot along some paths for a while. At a few minutes before the hour we passed through the gate and to the door.

Heidegger himself greeted us and bade us enter. He is a very short man and wore an embarrassed look for the first fifteen minutes of the encounter: he seemed immersed in the moment, and disarmed. He was dressed up in his Sunday best. When I had seen him three years before he had worn a shirt drawn together at the collar with a Texas tie, while I had dressed myself up in full suit. This time I was dressed casually.

His wife met us almost immediately. She seems to take on the role of something like an agent. She is very perceptive with her glittering and piercing eyes, and on her guard at every moment. She led us all through a sitting room and into a tea room with a table elegantly set for the occasion.

We had brought along a bottle of Grand Marnier. I had already given it to her for the both of them and we were in the process of seating ourselves when Frau Heidegger gave her husband a mild scolding for failing to open the box. He fetched it to himself and slowly pulled the bottle out, saying nothing but acknowledging the gift with a blushing smile. Just as he was about to arrange himself once again, his wife's eyes directed him to the task of closing the large double doors of the room.

We remained downstairs for about an hour. Liliane and Frau Heidegger seemed to guide the conversation for the most part, and there was no continuous thread running through it. We discussed the recent and current upheavals in France, whereupon Frau Heidegger said that her husband had been following the unrest closely by listening to the radio. I remarked upon the conduct of the students in Freiburg (there had been a brief boycott of classes and a sit-in on the streetcar tracks in the center of town), but Heidegger just chuckled and replied that it had only been for fun.

Frau Heidegger asked us whether we were Canadians. She had assumed we were, since my letter had borne the letterhead of a Canadian university. Before we corrected her, saying we were Americans, she asked about the relations between the two countries. We must have said something about the minor problems experienced by the Canadians in that regard, for she took the opportunity to remark that nobody liked the Americans these days. She seemed to be

particularly happy (*schadenfroh*) about that, but Heidegger himself did not take the least interest in the subject. In contrast to his wife, he does not seem to like the kind of person who could take that kind of political talk seriously.

At one moment I asked him about the circumstances surrounding a recent celebrated lecture entitled "Time and Being," a title obviously meant to recall the promised but unpublished portion of *Being and Time*. He told us that this lecture had been broadcast over the radio, officially and unofficially taped, and now scheduled to appear, not in Germany but in France, in a bilingual edition from Plon—in May, he added, with a gentle laugh.

I remarked that I had translated the short piece he had read at Meßkirch. I rather liked the piece, but Heidegger seemed more interested in pursuing the question of how his works were faring in translation on the American continent. For instance, he solicited my opinion on the translation of *Being and Time*, saying that he had received varying estimates of it. He asked me then about my opinion of some of the scholarly work that had been done on his publications. Finally, we discussed the familiar fact that the influence of his thought in English speaking countries has been adversely affected owing to the earlier and easier translations of Sartre's works.

I took the opportunity to say that I had the impression his relationship with the French translators of his works was decidedly different from that with the English translators: the first seem to receive more help than the second. He agreed, saying that he could not really handle English, although he did say he could follow some things roughly. His wife broke in to make the point that he knew French very well and that the French translators often came to spend day after day for a week or so combing over a piece. The French apparently have a regular group working on the translations, and Heidegger remarked on several occasions that the French were more appreciative of his line of thought. At least two of his recent lectures are available only in France, the one on "Time and Being" and the one in *Kierkegaard Vivant* entitled "La Fin de la philosophie et la tâche de la pensée."

We each feasted on several pieces of fruit tart (*Es ist ja nur Obst*, “It’s just fruit!” Frau Heidegger insisted, when Liliane hesitated). And drank several cups of tea. I can not recall all the topics. Only once did I make an effort, unsuccessful, to steer things in a more philosophical direction. I remarked that there was a great danger lurking for those who take an interest in his work: they tend to speak German instead of their own native tongue. By this comment, I was referring to the reliance upon German words in discussion and also to the use of Germanisms. But Heidegger, or at least his wife, thought I was referring to the habit of philosophers to carry on their conversations in German — as the French groups apparently do on occasion. Thus my comment might have been interpreted as a compliment to the German language. The only remark Heidegger himself made was: yes, there is a danger here.

When his wife directed him, again with her eyes, to fetch the cigarettes, and when he slowly and carefully applied himself to the task of unwrapping the package that was destined to be left unused at the time anyway, I thought that our visit was coming to an end. However, the tea downstairs turned out to be only the prelude.

Frau Heidegger soon stood up and announced that it was time to go upstairs to the study where there would certainly be many things to talk about with her husband. On the way out the double doors and through the sitting room I was struck by the view through the open doors leading out to a sun porch. I looked down a gentle slope over something like a half-tended orchard, just beyond which and at the base of the next foothill I saw some work being done on the construction of houses, the sites of which were equipped with those high-rising mobile derricks indicative of heavy stone and concrete style, the style so typical of Europe in most places. I remarked to Frau Heidegger that the view was impressive, and she seemed to be genuinely grateful for the notice that I had taken.

Upstairs there were just the three of us, and things soon became very relaxed. Liliane was bidden to seat herself in the deep leather upholstered chair that I had occupied three years before, and I was given a wooden chair nearby. The study itself is paneled in wood, as are the entrance hall and stairway to the house. On our way out

afterwards I asked whether such construction was often to be found in Germany, whereupon Heidegger replied that it was not, and that his wife was the one who had designed the house.

The keynote of our discussion upstairs was books. We pursued ideas mainly as books suggested them, and then only briefly. Heidegger was forever leaving the room and quickly returning laden with another armload. He seemed to like to handle bound volumes, to covet and caress them as one does with keepsakes or artworks. Only occasionally did he indicate that he had read much in them, and no wonder, since he had so many. Not a few were inscribed and signed by the authors.

Liliane had already mentioned downstairs that she was involved in French literature. Since Heidegger’s fondness for the French extended into this domain also, he brought out a few armloads of recent literary criticism, including a lengthy article from a French newspaper. Heidegger himself mentioned the predominance of “structuralism” — an approach to literature hoping to understand it as “absolute”; negatively, to understand works as irreducible to social or ethical theory, great sentiment, historical determinism, metaphysical doctrine or descriptive biography; positively, to subsume the written words under grammatical categories and naming generalized types or styles. Heidegger shook his head at all this, still with something of his embarrassed and hesitant smile. He pointed out some pages with mathematical formulae and remarked: “They think they are proceeding in a truly scientific manner, while the rest of us come up with nothing but bad poetry” (*Sie glauben, sie treiben hier echte Wissenschaft, wir andere, aber, wir schaffen nur schlechte Poesie*).

Liliane spoke of her own approach to literature as one in which the aim is to let works speak for themselves, and she recalled the passage Heidegger prefaced to his essays on Hölderlin’s poetry: words of interpretation must work like snow falling on bells. Heidegger agreed, saying that access to poetry was to be achieved through a process of dissolving the analysis in favor of the event: “Literary criticism must dissolve itself” (*Die Literaturkritik muß sich abbauen*). A sense of withdrawal is contained in the colloquial meaning of *abbauen*.

Arthur Rimbaud he seemed to like very much, while Stéphane Mallarmé interested him but also made for difficult reading. Indeed, the very first book he brought out was a recent edition of Rimbaud's sketches and various pictures related to his life. But Heidegger appeared to rest content with showing his appreciation for the works of others and to remain hesitant about going into a detailed and careful discussion of them.

At one point, he picked up my short letter, passages of which he had marked in red. He wanted me to explain more fully my reference to experience as providing a region of inquiry which would allow for a double emergence of the human and the non-human. I had written this in a single sentence, intending only to recall our discussion of three years ago. It had been unfortunate that his *Being and Time* had been interpreted for the most part as an analysis of human being only. At one time I had thought that the fault lay in the choice of the dominant theme designated by the special term *Da-sein* to mean "human being." Yet the most crucial feature of human being is its commitment to find Being in terms of the non-human. When I remarked that this feature of human being I learned because I was initiated into the philosophic frame of mind by experiences of working with machinery and by being out in the woods, Heidegger's face beamed with attention. I went on to say that I have since come to see that his analysis of *Da-sein*, especially his discussion of world, was devoted precisely to this end—to show our commitment to things. I insisted, though, that I still thought his analysis of non-human things in the form of their being at hand and on hand was misleading. The term "experience" I thought referred to our involvement with things, so that experience might occur only as the formation of a world, a region, what he means by *Gegend* and *Welt*. Also, by thinking human experience, we are sure to avoid the temptation of slipping into a kind of Cartesian idealism, for experience is first of all and abidingly experience of things.

Heidegger was emphatic in expressing his regret that his work had been interpreted as a philosophical anthropology. Furthermore, he wholeheartedly—not merely politely—agreed that his analysis of non-human things in *Being and Time* was insufficient. He also

remarked that his term for region (*Gegend*), though it referred to something like world (*Welt*), was nevertheless somewhat wider in meaning. Finally, he could not see how experience, as the Greek *empeiria*, could carry the force of anything but what the empiricists meant by the term, namely reception of sense data.

We went on to talk about Heidegger's analysis of the emergence of non-human things in his essay on "The Thing" and his *Letter on Humanism*. In a rather chatty way he asked whether we were familiar with the circumstances surrounding the publication of the piece on humanism. It seems that right after the last war this young Frenchman had written him a letter asking about the possibility of humanism. Heidegger composed a lengthy reply—I think he said it was about seventy typewritten pages—and sent it off to Paris. That was in the fall. Christmas came and went, then January and February and Spring. Finally, Gabriel Marcel came to Freiburg to give a lecture and came up for a visit (he indicated that Marcel had been seated right there in the deep leather upholstered chair Liliane was now occupying). Heidegger mentioned the matter to him, whereupon Marcel exclaimed that he had of course seen the letter. Apparently Jean Beaufret had circulated it indiscriminately and then lost track of it. He was then too embarrassed to write Heidegger about what happened. Heidegger felt called upon to rewrite and publish the letter in order to relieve the situation. He seems to be rather fond of this particular piece.

He referred to *Being and Time* as the work of a beginner (*Anfängersarbeit*), while hastening to add that he in no way disavowed it. He said *On the Way to Language* was one of his favorites. He remarked that one could not abide by a style that one practiced forty years ago, and that he could never write the promised remainder of his first work for that reason. He was much interested in how the original was faring in the world, however. He showed us the Japanese translation, the translator's introduction to which contained numerous photographs of Heidegger and his surroundings—it was very artfully done. I hear from other sources, too, that the Japanese catch on to Heidegger's thought very quickly. He feels, however, that in Germany the younger students no longer even know his name. This does not

sound right to me. Three years ago the students seemed to be bewitched by his works.

He seemed interested to know whether we had read his essay entitled “The Principle of Identity.” He laid great store by this piece, in which, he said, he almost “let the cat out of the bag” (*die Katze aus dem Sack herauslassen*). We asked him why he hesitated to let it out completely, and he replied: “One should not ever do that” (*Man darf das nie tun*). When reading the piece over shortly afterwards (he gave us an outsized reprint of the essay from a volume devoted to the celebration of the fifth centennial of the University of Freiburg), I noticed that it introduces the word “event” (*Ereignis*) and the historical structuring integral to the event. He recommended it for advanced students.

Toward the end I told him that we had translated his rector's address of 1933 after having discovered it in the library at Harvard and finding it intriguing. He agreed with me that its content was strictly philosophical and that it should be published in translation — with a commentary explaining the times. He was not at all sheepish about it. His only additional comment was that the political references were actually very mild when compared to those of other rector's addresses of those years. As it was, the regime had banned the booklet in 1934 and took it out of the bookshops.

He had brought out the recent paperback editions of *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, separated into three parts according to the three divisions of the original. He dated and signed each one, including the reprint of the essay on identity and two copies of a photograph taken when he delivered a short lecture on Abraham à Santa Clara in Meßkirch a few years back. He seemed to be joking when he remarked that we could blow up the photographs for our students.

As we rose to depart I asked him whether he would ever, under any conditions, consider coming to America. He was not very vehement, but quite clear: No. He thought he was too old and should have made such a trip (and one to Japan) when he was still young. Now there were too many things to be done and, at his age, too little time left to do them. Liliane asked him if the plane trip would bother

him; he laughed and said no, he had just come back from a jet flight to Greece where he took in the sights and gave a talk.

Liliane and I paused by the door to his study when Heidegger asked us if we planned on being in Europe much in the future. He hoped to conduct a private seminar with various people; he mentioned something about a group of Yugoslavs with whom he was in touch. In this connection he recalled his more public seminar with Eugen Fink and his students at the university recently. I asked him how that had been, and he said it was all right after the students loosened up. At first they were unused to participating. He remarked that Fink had conditioned the students to be passive (saying that Fink was like Husserl in this regard: monologue only, no dialogue). However, I had noticed three years ago that both Fink and Werner Marx did their best to engage the students, to no avail; I have always assumed that the fault lay with the students and their pre-university training. Heidegger's last comment upstairs was that the blind ones speak first in these seminars, and then only gradually do the seers come out.

Downstairs Heidegger went to retrieve his wife while Liliane and I contemplated the various woodworks. Upon the first baluster was fitted a carved gnome a foot or so high, huddled up as though concealing something. We assumed that it was part of the original decor, but Heidegger came out with his wife and explained that some friends had given it to him as a birthday present. We shook hands and departed out through the garden.

It was downhill all the way to the streetcar, about a mile altogether. It was sometime after seven o'clock and we had less than an hour to get to the station, fetch our things out of the locker and board for Stuttgart. As it turned out, we had an extra ten or fifteen minutes for soup and beer in the station restaurant before the train arrived.

10

Thinking of Hannah Arendt

Talk delivered to the Phoenix Colloquium at Mount Allison University, 7 November 2003. The three passages from Hannah Arendt occur in the correspondence between Arendt and Heidegger: *Briefe 1925 bis 1975* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1999), pp. 231, 186-187, and 316-317, respectively. The passage from Heidegger I quote is found on p. 121 of that same volume.

In a letter written to Heidegger in the spring of 1972, at the age of 65, four years before her death, Hannah Arendt expressed a strange puzzlement:

About this I have wracked my head in the last while —
where we really are when we are thinking . . .

For me, too, this remains a question, all the more so in my sixty-fifth year, my fortieth year of teaching philosophy—of inviting others into a life of thinking, a life entailing strange dislocations and relocations.

After all these years I have gained a familiarity with the great works in our tradition. From these works I could extract various answers to the question. Now, however, I propose to address the question directly.

First: What might we have in mind when we talk about thinking? What *sorts* of thinking are at issue for us? Hannah Arendt refers to a special sort of thinking, that of the philosopher. Yet this particular thinking creates a vocation out of the thinking more broadly based in our condition as intellectuals—indeed, even in our condition prior to intellectual work. For the thinking celebrated in our philosophical traditions names first of all the relation we have both to ourselves and to our circumstances. Only in thinkers conveniently called Cartesians does thinking name an essentially self-enclosed activity, one contrasting starkly to our everyday dealings with circumstances.

Let's begin with simple, basic thinking. Hanging a door, for instance: we take the measure of the door frame, plot out the arrangement of the hinges and latch, calculate the clearance all around, and we keep all these considerations together with a view to what the door is *for* (it must open, often in one direction rather than another, to allow passage through it). We are here thinking (i.e., measuring, calculating, and unifying measurements and calculations), not simply registering features of the door and the doorway. Nor are we behaving in pre-fixed manners: each door must be made to fit and to work, and we must think the fitting through so that it works. —The

same could be said of any careful hands-on dealings with circumstances. Even careless dealings stem not from failure to think but rather from our thinking about other matters, to the detriment of the fitting at issue at the moment.

Other familiar examples of thinking already touch lightly upon intellectual work. Recycling what others say, for instance—as when reading a recipe for baking bread, a label for using a medication, or a manual for assembling, operating, or maintaining a household appliance. Here, too, we fit things together so that they work, except that now we work through the words formulated by others. We think through them to what they are about, namely the fitting itself—the assemblage of elements we are responsible for. Here, too, some occasions require us to take the measure of things, but the issue more clearly lies in the final fit of things in our circumstance, not just in our own thinking.

Closer yet to intellectual work is the reading of a book that intends, unlike a manual, to occupy our attention while also remaining within the scope of the attention itself. When reading a novel, we aspire not only to hold it together at each moment, i.e. understand each word or sentence or paragraph, but also to hold the whole together, i.e. its beginning and end, so that it becomes a unified work—so that our attention, our thinking, becomes unified. When we are tired, bored, or linguistically unprepared, this aspiration may not be fulfilled. And, such reading being an art, some cannot do it at all—any more than just anyone can hang a door or follow directions for assembling an appliance. Compared to following a manual, the reading of a novel brings to the fore no clear item in our circumstance against which the words can be measured, and into which our attention can dissolve, leaving the work behind. No *handy* item: for any novel will reveal a *situation* that must be comprehended as a whole, and such comprehension implicates us in understanding our own situation. Although no bread is to be baked, or medicine to be imbibed, or appliance to be assembled, something is indeed to be understood, something to which we can direct our thinking. Still, those loosely called Cartesians might suppose that thinking here means “merely” assembling images—thinking become merely “reproductive

imagination” (to borrow a term from Kant without implicating his work in this understanding of novel-reading).

There is also definitely intellectual literature: works that require us to think through the *reasons* for things being the way they are. Here, while reading or writing about reasons for things past, present, or future, we think discursively as well as intuitively. Here, again, we must both keep track of the flow, the interconnections, and open this flow of discourse out onto what it is about: the Peloponnesian War, for instance, or the human brain, or global warming. Popular versions of such discourse, may draw one in more for the entertainment than for the thought. Rigorous versions intend precisely that we think the thought through—attend critically to the calculations, measurements and the coherence of the account. This latter thinking we might call fully intellectual—even scientific. Such thinking differs from storytelling in that its discourse introduces a kind of stand-off with regard to what it talks about: we distance ourselves from the war, the brain, or the changes of climate, we make claims about one or the other of these, and we invite others to check these claims out. Such thinking departs from that of the door-hanger, reader of manuals, or the writer of novels; for none of these more ordinary activities engage us in the distancing, claim-making, and discursive judgement at issue in scientific thinking; indeed, these ordinary modes of thinking engage us in a nearness, a discourse giving way directly to what it is about—the door, the appliance, the drama.

Yet intellectual thinking emerges in other ways, some narrower and some broader than in scientific discourse. For instance logic, the study of discursive reasoning itself, is *one* dimension of any rigorous thinking, and thus “narrower” than any of the established intellectual disciplines in our universities. And yet, when logic is undertaken as a manner of *contemplating* discursive reasoning, rather than only structuring it and promoting it within our educational institutions, it draws into focus the entire enterprise of science, indeed all human enterprises, and engages us in a much “broader” thinking. Indeed, such “broader” thinking is at work in what we call philosophy: an art in itself, learned only by some, just as only some undertake to learn to hang doors. And this art is sometimes evidenced in intellectual

work outside philosophy departments. Have we not all met professors in sociology, history, psychology, theology, physics, economics, biology, politology, literature and other fields who practice this art of contemplating the human enterprise as such, as well as prominent dimensions within it? These are professors in whom the title “doctor of philosophy” has not been squandered.

Hannah Arendt asks: Where are we when we are engaged in this last kind of thinking? A strange question. For are we not, when thinking, simply wherever we happen to be at the time: in our offices at the university, in our studies at home, in a seminar talking with others, in a conference hall or in a restaurant, talking and listening — or in bed, just thinking? To be sure — and much the same can be said about where we are when hanging a door, baking bread, deciphering a manual or reading a novel or searching the library for information regarding the Peloponnesian War: we are located in some describable space. However, this space is invoked by an onlooker, or by ourselves as we turn away from the thinking and become onlookers of ourselves. In such on-looking we see ourselves not as thinking; we rather see a token of ourselves merely standing or sitting or lying there.

Where are we then when thinking philosophically? Let us first return to where we are when we engage in the more familiar activities already reviewed — suspending for a while Hannah Arendt's question.

As any hands-on activity requiring attention, hanging a door is as much a thinking as a handling. I assess relations at every moment, often with a measuring device in hand. As onlookers, we could pause to elicit the various dimensions of such assessment, relations we then explicate largely in reference to space. But the task is to consider only where one is when actually engaged in such hands-on thinking. Here, thinking directs us not just to the givens (their size and shape and weight) but also to what can, will, might, must, or should be, namely a functional door, even a functional house. Hands-on thinking immerses us in both givenness and possibility — *pressing* givenness and *pressing* possibility. Thinking here strains to mediate the two, attune the given and the possible. Such thinking evidences the door-

hanger as placed squarely within the on-going affair of hanging the door: in time, we might summarily say.

And when reading a recipe, a label, or a manual? Here too we are thinking, namely assessing, measuring, gathering. And such thinking comes into its own precisely as we are immersed in both the givenness and the possibility defining our attention to our bread, our health, or our appliance. These sorts of readings open us out onto hands-on dealings, where we are again firmly placed within on-going affairs, their pressing givenness and pressing possibility.

And when we are reading or writing a novel? Then our thinking places us “in the story” rather than in the living room or the airport waiting room where the onlooker catches sight of us. Or, rather, we are placed in the situation articulated by the story, even as a participant in the on-going affair. However, then the situation portrayed in the story seldom squares exactly with one's more familiar time and place, the givens and possibilities otherwise pressing in upon one. Still, phenomenologically speaking, a novel that works absorbs us in its own situation, making it our own, and placing us, our thinking, directly in the articulation unfolding. Children allow this to happen, whereas grown-ups might become suspicious of such absorption, deeming such thinking “mere fantasy” or even pernicious escapism — an engagement in unrealistic possibility distracting one from real givens like the practical need for doors or bread or medicine.

But what of the thinking in reading or writing or talking about the Peloponnesian War, or the human brain, or global warming? Where are we in such cases of more arduous, call it scientific thinking? If not simply confined within the four walls of our studies, we are also not engaged in any one battle as warriors on the field, or up close to any one brain as a surgeon in an operating room, or exposed to the change of temperature as those on a safari plodding from dawn to noon. Where are we then, where is our thinking, when we consider events of the past, or the present nature of things, or their trend? Somehow, the war under study, the nature under study, or the trend under study emphatically occupies our thinking. In some sense, these things are present to our thinking. Studying the war, the brain, the

future of our planet, we live them within the shared discourse embodied in the literature of the field as well as in discussions with other scholars. Indeed, one plausible answer to the question where we are in these kinds of careful thinking says precisely that we are in the field, with others, discoursing in concert, drawing upon shared thoughts and referring to shared data about the war, the brain, or the trend. How such placement is possible has been the subject of much contemplation and much debate. For we must certainly distinguish between wars and brains and trends as empirical facts and these “same” things as rational considerations. How exactly this distinction works, and especially how rational entities arise in the careful research defining a science, vary from field to field, most notably from historiography to physiology to economics.

As puzzling as the question might be apropos of scientific thinking, Hannah Arendt probes the question in regard to philosophical thinking. She asks: Where are we when we think philosophically? This question cannot here be so readily answered as we might begin answering it with reference to routine research, where it seems plausible to say that we are ensconced within the discourse defining the field. To be sure, some kinds of scholarship in philosophy do take this form—whether of the historiographical or the analytical variety, where the basic framework is pre-established and the questions bear on the detail permitted by the framework. But philosophy proper, the thinking to which great philosophical works invite us, is neither historiographical nor analytical. The works Aristotle called *primary* philosophy invite us to think *basics*—the basics of any intellectual work, indeed of any human involvement whatsoever, including those judged to be fraudulent. Hannah Arendt's question bears on where we are when thinking the basics of where we are.

Asking where we are when we are thinking the basics of where we are, we may find ourselves stymied by the need to become clear in advance what these basics are. When we ask where we are when thinking some historical event or some natural entity or some threatening development we can at least name what we are thinking and then ask how such thinking works. In the case of philosophy, however, what we are thinking and how we are thinking it cannot be

severed. This non-severing distinction is puzzling in itself—always has been and always will be.

Again here we might be tempted to recur to the various ways thinkers have named the basics and then defend one against the others, or attack one after the other, or sift through some for commonalities—all the while postponing the question where we are when we are thinking philosophically.

Instead, let us take another tack—one proposed by Hannah Arendt herself three years prior to her posing the question I have been considering. In a radio broadcast to celebrate Heidegger's 80th birthday in 1969, she elaborates on the thought that philosophical thinking has its residence in a special kind of amazement, *Erstaunen*, such being her translation of θαυμάζειν, from which she would like to distinguish what we might call surprise (*Sichwundern*). She says:

The first one and, so far as I know, the only one who has spoken of thinking as a “pathos” to be endured as overwhelming us, was Plato, who named amazement as the beginning of philosophy [*Theaetetus*, 155D]. By amazement he of course did not at all mean merely the surprise that swells up in us when we come across something that is strange but not overwhelming in the manner of a pathos. For, while surprise is probably what begins the sciences, the amazement that begins philosophy pertains to the everyday, to what seems self-evident, to what is already known and familiar. This also accounts for the fact that no achievement of knowledge can ever assuage amazement. Wholly in accord with Plato, Heidegger once spoke of “the ability to be amazed in the face of the simple,” but in contrast to Plato he added: “*and to accept this amazement as its residence*” [*Early Greek Thinking*, 104]. This addition strikes me as decisive for any consideration of who Martin Heidegger is. For we would like to hope that thinking, and the solitude essential to it, are known, if not to everyone, at least to very many people; but without any doubt most people don't have their residence in it, and when they are subject to amazement in

face of the simple and, pursuing the amazement, submit themselves to such thinking, they also know that they are being ripped out of their established place within the continuum of the affairs and occupations in which human concerns unfold, and that they will return to these after a short while. Metaphorically speaking, the residence of which Heidegger speaks lies outside of the housing people set up, and while things in this place outside can become very stormy, these storms are even more metaphorical than when we speak of a stormy age. Measured against the other places of the world, namely the places of human concerns, the residence of thinking is a “place of stillness” [*On Time and Being*, 68].

Where are we when we think philosophically? Hannah Arendt answers in a metaphor: our residence is that of amazement. But does not such an answer really say something about our own disposition in our offices or studies, or in a discussion with others? Does it intimate where we are as distinct from the room we happen to occupy when so disposed? Arendt answers that this very amazement relates us precisely to the everyday, the self-evident, to the already known and familiar. As amazement, philosophical thinking is a way of residing where we already are — just as hanging a door engages us in a thinking firmly embedded in where we are, and just as reading a manual, reading or writing a history or a novel embeds us and our thinking in their respective matters. With this crucial difference: these other modes of thinking are not *defined* as amazement but rather as various states of alertness.

But, when thinking philosophically, do we necessarily reside *in* “the everyday, what seems self-evident, what is already known and familiar”? Do we really reside “where we are,” only now in the mode of amazement — the “we” now naming all of us, even those not thinking philosophically? After all, much of the thinking done in the name of philosophy absorbs us only into our academic field, e.g. into shared questions about various puzzles regarding historical texts or current conundrums. Such thinking we may well call “institutional.” But being absorbed in an academic field, and in the institutional

thinking essential to it, does not necessarily entail being overwhelmed by amazement; indeed, such absorption is often inimical to amazement at what Hannah Arendt calls “the continuum of affairs and occupations.” However arduous the thinking arising in such absorption, it remains of a piece with the thinking required to hang a door or read a recipe. How then might philosophical thinking differ from this close cousin, institutional thinking? How does it engender a *residence* in amazement?

Engendering a residence, I just said. If the residence of philosophical thinking is amazement in the face of what happens everyday, of what appears self-explanatory and already understood, then *this* residence, unlike our accustomed housing, namely our homes and institutions, must be completely restored each day. For, overnight, it will have crumbled almost beyond recognition.

But what *happens* in the thinking that resides in amazement at the everyday, unfolds as embedded within precisely where we already are? Here, too, just as in hanging a door, reading a label, or writing an historical account, the discourse is permeated by questions. Philosophy distinguishes itself precisely because it happens as a special kind of questioning. When writing or speaking philosophically, we address special questions; when reading or listening philosophically we find ourselves addressed by special questions. What's to keep philosophical thinking, understood tentatively as residing in amazement in face of the ordinary, from *reducing* these questions to the ordinary? Some prominent twentieth century work seems to insist upon such reduction, to recycle the “big questions” of philosophy so that they evaporate and allow us to return to the “continuum of affairs and occupations” wherein recognizably everyday concerns unfold. How might we distinguish residence in amazement at the everyday from insistence on returning to the housing, domestic or institutional, within which we already move, abandoning the amazement?

We might begin answering this question by posing another: Do we even *reside* in our ordinary housing? Hardly. Indeed the question, Where are we when we are really thinking? might make more sense to those who wonder about whether we really reside where we are in

the first place. To those satisfied with their housing, the talk of residing in amazement appears to elicit a special disposition possibly modifying an already established residence — a disposition perhaps had or admired by Hannah Arendt, but one that is rather arbitrary, hardly essential to philosophical work, and certainly non-essential to intellectual work generally.

What would it be like *not* to be where we are? Most familiar answers to this question will refer again to a disposition: we are at work but thinking about other things, or we hate being where we are, or we are sleeping or drugged to the point of being unaware of where we are. Or: our efforts in serious work intend precisely to transport us out of our manifest housing and into distant lands or distant ages: the Peloponnesus or the moon, the first settlement of North America or the pending effects of globalization. Not that such intellectual work *must* entail an escape from domestic or institutional housing. But if it *can*, and sometimes *does*, it illustrates a way of not being where we are — of being “in but not of” the domestic or institutional housing most obviously locating us.

This being in several places at once, and not really in any, can be bothersome. Again, such bother may appear as a merely personal problem. But what if our intellectual traditions essentially do draw us away from being in and of our domestic and institutional housing? Then the talk of residing in amazement before the ordinary does not primarily invite us simply to be amazed, and certainly not to reduce philosophical questions to the unfolding of ordinary concerns. It rather invites us to relearn the imperatives of residence itself — of being where we are.

Yet I propose that philosophical thinking, too, is already embedded in what it thinks about — just as artisanal thinking is inlaid within the genesis of the palpable artifact, and scholarly thinking is located in the genesis of the institutional field. Would commitment to the ordinary not entail that thinking be straightaway embedded in the ordinary? Perhaps, but hardly by vanishing for the sake of everyday preoccupations — a kind of intellectual suicide. For philosophical thinking as we know it, or think we know it, has as its domain, its most palpable residence, a mode of discourse utterly alien to the

discourse of everyday preoccupations. And among the many dimensions of this discourse is precisely a dialogue with tradition. Philosophical thinking, while residing in amazement at the ordinary, finds its own location echoing with the multiple voices of its predecessors. Indeed, these voices so much dominate the inherited discourse of philosophy that we may even fail to hear what they are indeed talking about. Our traditions can distract rather than focus us, dull rather than sharpen our hearing — and those voices that neglect even to mention this danger will distract us all the more.

How then might we begin to appreciate the dimension of philosophical thinking devoted to and embedded within where we are, and now understood as arising within inherited discourse?

Hannah Arendt offers an answer to this question in a letter to the literary critic Hugo Friedrich in July of 1953, sixteen years prior to her talk about the residence of thinking. Here she responds to the familiar charge that Heidegger violates the texts he interprets. Instead of saying that, No, Heidegger captures what's essential to the works he considers, or Yes, Heidegger simply expands upon his own thinking, Arendt argues that what Heidegger's detractors judge to be violence is really an invitation to reside within a space wherein the works themselves enjoy their power — a space in which thinking and what gets thought are united once again, just as they arose in the first place. Arendt writes:

About Heidegger, I don't agree with you entirely, especially not as regards his interpretation [of texts]. The “violence” [you detect] is nothing other than the so-called “distortions” we find in Picasso. These latter arise (already in the works of Cézanne, where it all began) from the fact that the world is no longer depicted in a manner requiring that the painter let a three-dimensional space appear within a picture, all in proper perspective (photography really has liberated painting, as Cocteau said); rather, the painter now paints as though he were himself placed in the center of the picture, from which point the genuinely human three dimensions now unfold “as surfaces”: above and below, right and left, front and behind.

Heidegger, it seems to me, is no longer interpreting [texts] in the form of reportage, in which one first reports something about the work in question and then offers an interpretation. Instead of that, he places himself at the center of the work. He himself calls this [location] the unsaid in what is said (to my mind a typical self-misunderstanding on his part). In any case, the reader or listener is offered a cleared space wherein he can himself take a seat. Starting from this space, the work unfolds, moving from the result, the printed text (about which one can give a report) back into a living discourse, to which a counter-discourse is possible. What appears to you as violence appears to me as what makes for vitality; namely, once we reside in the space within which the work itself unfolds, the difference between thinking and what's thought, between composing and what's composed, disappears — exactly as this distinction does not preside originally, i.e. at the moment of origination. (Do you know Yeats? — to my mind, the greatest English poet of the 20th century, who said: Who can behold the dancer from the dance? This comment holds for Heidegger as much as it does for Picasso.) Heidegger does not say what the author left unsaid (as at times he seems to believe), he discerns the space of the unsayable, which in every great work is specifically unique, and from which, and for the sake of which, the work arose and organized itself. — In this, I believe, he's just as much a master as Picasso.

Apart from the references to Heidegger and Picasso, we can wonder what it might mean to “be placed in the center” of an inherited discourse, to re-open the space wherein the original discourse receives its life-giving breath, to enable others to enter that space, to encourage precisely a counter-discourse at the same level as the original, to overcome for a while the difference between thinking and what's thought (the dancer and the dance). These questions belong to philosophical thinking itself.

Meanwhile, the question must be asked: How might the style of interpretation outlined by Hannah Arendt bear on where we are when we are thinking? So far I have proffered an answer: thinking is located in amazement at the ordinary, even embedded within where we ordinarily are — without, however, intending to promote the preoccupations defining the ordinary. Moreover: thinking philosophically, we find ourselves located within inherited intellectual discourse. How does this location bear on where we are? Does not reading and interpreting literature — intellectual work generally — *remove* us from where we are? Such has been the traditional charge against philosophers — leveled by those preoccupied within the everyday.

But what of the other charge, that of “doing violence to texts”? What Hugo Friedrich calls “violence” Hannah Arendt calls “vitality” — namely residence within a space where thinking and what's thought are once again unified. Yet why do so many critics judge this space-making negatively — other than the fact that the discourse thereby engendered does not take the form of reportage (description supplemented by interpretive commentary)? What might be essentially violent about such space-making? If it were merely imaginary, the space engendered would be quite innocuous. However, the space created by the *thinking* of inherited texts coincides with the space of our ordinary affairs. That is, *thoughtful* interpretation re-enacts the discourses of our tradition *so that* these focus us on where we are. Such new discourse on old discourse, now focusing us on where we are, will appear violent inasmuch as it reverses the direction of the thinking that is familiar to us. And this reversal is necessary inasmuch as we are accustomed to and comfortable with interpretations focusing on where others have been, or on configurations of circumstances at other times and places, or on the opinions of others.

In a letter to Hannah Arendt, Heidegger himself complements the thought. At their first meeting after the war, in February of 1950, she had introduced the topic of Goethe's “battle with Newton.” In December of that same year Heidegger wrote her that, in consonance with Goethe's thinking, his own interpretation of the inherited concern

for truth intends to pave the way toward a new manner of “dwelling on earth” — even “saving the earth for the world.” That is, our traditions compromise our ability to dwell. And they therefore put the earth at risk. What offends many contemporary intellectuals is, I suspect, the charge that they might be party to this compromise. Be that as it may, I suggest that any budding philosopher might well ask: Does the thinking essential to the craft of philosophy focus its participants *on* or *away* from where they are? For on the answer to this question depends how we understand not only the current tasks of philosophical thinking but also the voices of the great thinkers informing our craft.

11

Rationality

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§1. *Prelude: the question*

Rationality? We humans are said to be peculiarly rational. But what does this mean?

Our tradition contrasts rational nature with non-rational nature: the needs associated with our non-voluntary bodily functions. And also with our irrational nature: our propensity to respond in rage or in love to circumstances past, present, or future. We often fall below the threshold of rationality: innocently, when we sleep; problematically, when we overeat; and self-defeatingly, when we freeze in fear.

When raising the question of rationality, we question ourselves, our own nature. A strange enterprise! Most questions focus on something *else*, something standing or fleeing *before* us. In the present instance, however, we question our own position of attending to things otherwise arising or fleeing before us. Our question is reflexive: the object of the inquiry lies and recedes behind us at every moment. Yet the question is very human. Even all *too* human: it can detract us from those engagements in which we could manifest our rationality gracefully.

Indeed: Why question rationality — ourselves? Our intellectual tradition has insisted on our rational nature in differing ways. From Plato and Aristotle we have inherited the vision of ourselves as governing our vegetative and passionate sub-natures. Descartes and Leibniz then bequeathed to us a vision of ourselves as purely rational, as coming into our own in self-sufficient constructions. And Kant bequeathed to us a vision of ourselves as doubly rational: as organizing and explaining the manifold of intuition *and* as committed to totalities that forever remain outlandish (*überschwenglich*) from the first standpoint of organization, explanation, experience, and knowledge.¹

We have inherited a layered vision of ourselves as essentially rational. Why question this inheritance? Question it *once again*? Whereas our predecessors questioned human nature to discover and enhance rationality, we today question rationality to re-discover human nature and the limits of rationality. For the vision of human being as

rational has become a vision of rationality itself: the technological vision. We then wonder where and how our humanity can re-emerge within this vision.

§2. *Manifestations of rationality*

Technological rationality is manifest in the large-scale operations of government, business, and investigation. We need only recall the ongoing creation and maintenance of practical systems for communication, welfare, warfare, and taxation; the management and financing of industrial production and distribution of goods and services; the sponsored programs of research and development essential to government and business, as well as to the consumerism they promote.

The *result* is manifest. Who today is not struck by the dominance of large-scale organization in an airport, in a steelmill, in a university? By the accumulation and processing of data, along with the effort to shape each event in the image of the organization? And, struck only by such results, we notice two features of this manifestation of rationality. *First*, technological organization establishes a distance both from the people involved in it and from the environment in which they work; people (the agents of the organization) appear replaceable, things (the materials, the tools, the products) appear fungible. *Second*, technological organization appears committed to maximizing returns; governments must maximize human convenience, business must maximize production and profits, and investigation must maximize techniques to serve government and business.

So long as we examine only the results of technological rationality we assume that human rationality consists likewise in organizing affairs and maximizing returns. And this truncated version of rationality invites us to inquire into aspects of human nature that do or should complement such rationality, especially ones accounting for the opposite of distance: intimacy with persons and with the environment.

If, on the other hand, we have learned to operate *within* an organization, so that we no longer simply *suffer* it (its results), already the outside vision of technological rationality proves illusory. Each

moment of operation exacts from the agent a marvelous alertness: careful attention devoted to determining both what shows itself and the appropriate response to the showing. Very much as in a game of chess, or tennis. Here, agency entails the ultimate of individual engagement, the ultimate of respect for things; on the inside, at any intense moment, no one is replaceable, no thing fungible. And the vision of an extraneous utility serves only as a pretense.

The results of technological rationality lie before us. Yet they elude us in their significance: they contrast with the inside experience of rational operation. Any theory of rationality based exclusively on its results not only fails to account for human rationality, it also promotes a fascination with these results — no matter how much it urges us to complement rationality with other aspects of human nature.

To contemplate the inside experience of technological rationality we must first engage in it and think it through, reflexively: *as something we do, not as something we suffer*. How would such contemplative engagement be possible? Those who engage intently in government, business, and scientific investigation usually fail to develop the art of contemplation. Those of us who think reflexively usually fail to develop the techniques required for technological work. Indeed, we might here register this further peculiarity of our technologically rational age: those engaged in the rationality do not contemplate it, while those who contemplate it all too often have no footing in it.

Can we recognize in technological rationality the workings of *human* rationality? Our tradition of logic has in fact interpreted our human rationality over the last two and one-half millennia — and contributed to our tradition of technological rationality. At first, on Plato's and Aristotle's interpretation, human rationality appears in the artisanal tension between form and instance. Eventually, it reappears in the tension between syntax and meaning. As logicians, then, we might be able to contemplate the most pristine experience of the rationality otherwise only manifest in its cultural results.

Before embarking on such contemplation, let us recall pre-technological manifestations of rationality. For how can we recognize

any other rationality if we have in view only technological manifestations?

We commonly concern ourselves about bodily health. Besides eating and drinking, sleeping and exercising, we wonder *how*: how best to do these things. Even though such concern takes many forms — some leading to indulgence and others to asceticism, for instance — already here our rationality manifests itself: we *rise above* events, we *account* for multiple factors, we *envision* possible outcomes, and we *acknowledge* inexorable givens. Transcending, accounting, envisioning, and acknowledging the inexorable are all fundamentally rational acts on our part.

Similarly, we commonly restrain our initial impulses. We not only respond to events immediately, we learn to suspend our inclination: to steel ourselves against fear, to control our rage, to constrain our love — not to mention simply minding our manners in company. Again, such concern can take various forms, many of which fail. Yet the mere concern itself manifests our rationality: transcending, accounting, envisioning, and above all acknowledging our own role in the making of circumstances.

As parents, teachers, and friends we also help others to be rational in regard to health and initial impulses. We concern ourselves for the rationality of our children, students, and intimates, perhaps also of those whom we meet on the street and at work. Again, such concern takes various forms—from dictatorial imposition to gentle persuasion. We may also concern ourselves for *their* rationality only because their behavior affects *us*. But even this self-promoting concern stems from a recognition that the human enterprise is a shared one, and that much depends on whether and how our co-humans manifest their potentiality for rational behavior. And, at the other extreme, when fully concerning ourselves for the rationality of others, we acknowledge the difference between coercion and persuasion, and the need for patience with others. Perhaps this acknowledgement, so essential to respecting others in their autonomy (as distinct from fearing them, or merely soothing them with mannerly behavior), manifests our rationality most directly: rationality allows us, urges us to *talk* with one another.

Competence especially discloses our rationality. Competent in repairing engines, in coaching teams, in raising orchids, one handles situations with admirable effectiveness. And effective handling depends on perceiving detail, interrelating a multiplicity of factors, foreseeing outcomes, and acknowledging the inner exigencies of the instances. By recurring to such competence (τέχνη) as the hallmark of rationality, Plato and Aristotle established the direction of western intellectual work.

While meeting daily with the manifestations of rationality I have cited, we also note that human efforts to actualize rationality often fail. And not only from weakness. Failure stems most commonly from rigidity. We establish a view of health, a manner of responding, a program of education, a method of handling things—and fail because our views, our manners, our program, our method take the place of reality itself: because reality re-asserts its priority over our own devices. Thus we recognize the haunting possibility of illusion. We recognize that rationality is not self-authenticating but rather indebted, beholden to reality. And this recognition, too, manifests our rationality: in this instance, reflexively, and perhaps only occasionally.

Finally, we study tradition. Initially, our parents and teachers bring tradition to our attention as past events: what our forebears did and said. We may then become curious about these events, as we might become curious about the lay of other lands and the manners of other peoples. As intellectuals, we might acknowledge that tradition makes us what we are: bequeaths to us not only material configurations of our environment and the ambitions of our institutions, but also the dominating yet languid understanding of ourselves and of our environment.

Indeed, our very concern for rationality takes root in the interpretations we have inherited. Even when aspiring to strictly contemporary configurations—such as the dominance of technology in our political, social, economic, and educational institutions—we resume a tradition, an inheritance that happens to manifest itself immediately. To *study* our tradition, we turn *back* to its origins: in our case, to the origins of our western civilization. And we look

forward to possible twists in the development of our tradition. However we may find ourselves engaged in such turning back and looking forward, we once again evidence our basic rationality: we rise above the pressures of the moment, we account for multiplicities, we envision various possible outcomes — and we acknowledge inexorable givens as well as pitfalls of illusion.

§3. *The logical core of rationality*

In each case of manifest rationality, we may detect a concern to determine *how things are*. This very effort, this concern that our determinations be *true*, reveals the inner sanctum of our rationality.

To say how things are, in truth, we must first *tell* (detect) how they are, we must find ourselves face to face with them, they must show themselves to us. The logical core of rationality lies in this tension between saying and telling, finding ourselves facing and finding things facing us.

The discipline of logic began with a crucial distinction: while all talk has meaning, only some talk raises the specter of truth. As Aristotle formulated it, logical investigation contemplates talk (λόγος) that is apophantic (“declarative”: ἀποφαντικός) in addition to being semantic (“indicative”: σημαντικός). And apophantic discourse differs from other kinds inasmuch as it either clarifies or distorts, unhides or misleads, reveals or feigns (ἀληθεύειν or ψεύδεσθαι).²

Walking together to an office, you might ask me to open the door. Your talk has *meaning* since it recalls where we are, what kinds of things avail themselves to us, how one operates in such situations as this — all of which recall a shared enterprise. It may happen, though, that I tell you the door is locked: either I tried it right now, or somebody had told me. To a bored bystander (present, perhaps, only to keep us company), there seems to be no great difference between what you said to me and what I said to you: just talk. Yet there is a world of difference.

Turning to you and saying that the door is locked I testify that the door is locked. But this testimony raises the question *whether* it is locked. Even if you are inclined to believe me, for a split second a difference protrudes between our talk and the familiar world of

meanings: our talk now *refers* to things in our world, whereas it had hitherto articulated them in the shared enterprise. Normally, of course, we quickly re-establish the enterprise: we try the door again, just to make sure, or fetch a key, or change our plans. Yet there was that momentary gap.

Into that one gap we can drive a *lethal* wedge. You might tell me that I have mistaken the situation, and emphasize my error by calling me a fool. Or you might accuse me of lying. And we might wrangle with one another over who was right. Such pathological talk, where the issue becomes who is right rather than what shows itself, freezes us in the gap between talk and world.

Investigation drives a *creative* wedge into the gap. Here, the suspension of talk awaits a careful judgement about how things are. In our civilization, judicial and deliberative proceedings formally illustrate the spirit of investigation: we consider proposals by addressing the conditions of their truth — namely, how things *were* and how they *will be*, this being determined on the basis of what *is*. As does scientific research, where we also suspend judgements to address the conditions of their truth. Although forensic, deliberative, and scientific debates may degenerate into pathological cases, our western civilization holds that the most powerful talk — rationality at its best — takes root in the gap so that we may better decide how things are in the world: are, were, and will be. It cradles the faith that we preserve the health of rationality by including in the debate representation of all sides: that truth emerges dialectically.

Within any assertion lurks a question, a peculiar gap that invites a closing. Both ends of our tradition of logic, from the works of Plato and Aristotle to those of Kant and Frege, engage us in arduous accounts of this gap. Both ends raise the question from the standpoint of our human interest in closing the gap. But *on site* we experience this gap (whether routinely, as when approaching the door, or formally, as in dialectical considerations) already as a question. Indeed, from our intellectual perspective committed to dialectic, human rationality appears as the ability to persist in questioning. And its contrary, the failure of rationality, appears as premature insistence on an answer. Questioning, we can talk with one another: we have

a commonality, a common enterprise through space and time, a common focus at a given time and place, and a common acknowledgement that any legitimate answer hovers over us all rather than issuing from one of us. By questioning, we enter into a shared language (*λόγος*): we enact our rationality.

Yet the primacy of persistence in questioning stems from our western tradition. When encountering non-westerners, we may discover that they do not respond well to our questions. We require of non-westerners that they *dwell* in the questions: that they suspend their enterprise, their direct response to circumstances, contemplate those circumstances at a distance, as objects of intellectual inquiry. In contrast, *their* questions arise incessantly, on site, within an enterprise, with regard to what presents itself—not with a view to forming an account of themselves or their circumstances. Aboriginals retain their questions in close attention to circumstances, and respond only to these latter: *their* questions are rooted in circumstance, whereas ours are rooted in human agency, in our own affairs.³

If the core of rationality consists in concern for truth, and if concern for truth stems from acknowledging a gap between talk and circumstance, and if our western tradition invites us, institutionally, to persist in questioning rather than responding immediately to the occasion of the question—then we might understand how our western tradition commits us to technological rationality.

The moment we suspend any enterprise to account for what we encounter and how we might respond to what we encounter, we shift into another understanding of both. What we encounter now appears as problematic, requires that we develop special manners of taking aim: things become *objects* . And we now concentrate on our manners of response, organize these in order *better* to take aim at objects: we become operators. Furthermore, the enterprise itself changes: it becomes the focus, the basic subject-matter of shared consideration, justified by its greater efficiency in serving the needs of the individuals involved.

From the original effort to extract truth-conditioned (apophantic) from simply meaningful (semantic) talk (*λόγος*) we end, after more than two millennia, with an interpretation of rationality highlighting

as paradigmatic the human ability to re-form human engagement with circumstances into a shared enterprise forever inviting the enhancement of its power to satisfy human needs. Today, our political institutions, our productive facilities, our investigative programs all require an understanding of ourselves as operators, of our circumstances as objects, and of our enterprise as a collective concern integrated by systems of communication.

From within any given enterprise, human beings seem to fall into irrational modes whenever they fail to evidence the hallmarks of technological rationality. Most distressingly, when their actions fail to manifest the attitude of the operator (agency based on foreseeing the consequences likely to follow from present decisions based on the facts). Also when they love something in their environment that should remain an object (as some students of animal psychology become attached to their mice). And when they refuse to join collective enterprises (as some professors refuse to communicate by electronic mail). In each of these cases, we judge human behavior to contravene the standards of rationality set by our tradition and now defining the workings of government, business, and investigation.

Yet most irrational of all is the propensity to identify rationality with its evolved form—with our destiny, manifest institutionally in technology, to turn from circumstances to organization (and thereby to turn, in advance, encounterables into objects and ourselves into operators). The evolution itself is undeniable—at least for those who actually learn to work within government, business, and research. Yet, thoughtlessly identifying human rationality with this historical evolution, we set limits to human nature that deprive us both of our original rationality and of possible historical developments.⁴ Such limitation engenders madness, and stems from ignorance.

Madness, in the form of organization for the sake of exercising and displaying the power to organize. Active madness for those enthused by it. Passive madness for those who wake up to it. Our century is replete with examples of such irrationality, both *en gros* (Europe, *circa* 1930-1945) and *en détail* (quodidian obsessions with technological devices, and debilitating neuroses in the workplace).

Ignorance, because our rational nature in fact takes other forms, both historically and contemporarily, albeit extra-institutionally. Let us return to the consideration of these forms.

§4. *Ancient rationality: dyadic semantics*

Declaration (ἀπόφρασις) highlights our rationality: our concern to tell and say, hear and receive truth as against falsehood. Yet our original rationality (λόγος) gives birth to this apophany.

By all accounts, the Greeks were talkative. Aristotle's famous remark that “alone among things living human beings have λόγος” arises within a consideration of our πόλις-bound nature. And his examples of λόγος-at-work all relate to debates over which policies might bear fruit and which might bring damage, what is just and what is unjust—in general, over what is good or bad, as distinct from what is pleasant or painful.⁵ We are rational when we talk with one another in practical urgency. Such urgency arises within an arrangement (συνθήκη, e.g. the structure of a university): engaged in such arrangements, we already exercise our logical nature, our rationality. Yet the origin of such engagement is our destiny to envision, well or badly, the purpose of the arrangements—not just the extraneous purposes of interest to outsiders, but the internal purpose, the fulfillment of what we are creating. Envisioning such fulfillment, we rise above our everyday concerns for survival, and aspire to live well—together, and in λόγος.

Inasmuch as ancient rationality remains bound to a vision of communal living, we today have difficulty experiencing it intellectually. Following modern political thinkers from Machiavelli to the founders of modern democracy, we now relegate concern for communal bonds to the realm of the pre-rational, and any concern about the good life to the private sphere. Yet we do in fact experience the rational commitment to shared life extra-academically.

Following Homer, Sophocles, Pindar, and others, Plato and Aristotle incessantly alert us to the marvels of hands-on competence.⁶ In working with natural things (especially animals and plants), as well as reworking things into artifacts, and then again in leadership (raising children and engendering friendship — φίλία — among disparate

individuals engaged in group effort), we participate in their genesis. On the Greek account, strange to our intellectual predilections and yet true to our pre-academic engagements, such participation suspends us between two aspects of the things we deal with: how they initially present themselves and how they really (telically) *are*; we participate in *their* suspension. The difference between a presented thing and its fulfillment is *its* difference, one internal to the thing itself—its power, its potentiality (δύναμις).

For our Greek forebears, the founders of western civilization, we alone among animals are rational because we alone are destined to share in the destiny of what we encounter, to *help* things in *their* dynamism.⁷ Rationality then consists in detecting, and therefore perhaps saying, the details of what presents itself, and we base our selection on a vision of the fulfillment at issue. Plato and Aristotle incessantly invite us to discuss the difference, the duality in each being, often to distinguish among *our* various powers of responding to things in their difference. But the duality at issue is *theirs*, not ours. This difference strikes us moderns as strange, especially when we read that our relation to both, to the present and to the transcendent, is one of perception (αἴσθησις): we *encounter* things in their duality—i.e., only inasmuch as we participate in their duality. By no coincidence modern thinkers later reserve αἴσθησις for the immediate presentation only, via one or more of the five senses.

On Aristotle's account, our talk has *meaning* to the extent that it rehearses the arrangement (συνθήκη) in which we are talking—as when we review the workings of the university in which we work; such talk can be correct or not. In addition, our talk may have *truth*—may clarify, reveal, unhide—namely when it leads us into the gap of the thing we are talking about: most simply, when it allows us to recognize something (e.g., a door) as essentially openable but not in fact open; more essentially, when it allows us to work up the present circumstances into a *good* (e.g., the fulfillment of the university). Apophantic λόγος calls upon, and actualizes, an original meaning: at issue in such declaration is the thing itself, in its duality. Such discourse does not focus on the arrangement (the organization), but on a reality that the arrangement masks. The things we deal with are not

objects to be confronted, they are realities having their own life and inner duality. And we ourselves, when competent, are not operators but monitors, custodians, caretakers, guardians, lovers: we develop the rationality of things by dancing with them to promote their own growth.⁸

Locating the rationality of human being in our destiny to participate in the duality of beings, Plato and Aristotle introduce a theory of meaning, but one that modern theories contravene. Whereas modern semantics are triadic, ancient semantics are dyadic.

The paradigm of dyadic semantics is declaration (ἀπόφανσις). Whereas the apprentice may learn to talk correctly about something, his words do not yet mean what they say: rather, they mean the arrangement. We all recognize the difference in the talk of others and even in our own talk: at times one knows what one is talking about, at times one *merely* talks. Plato and Aristotle structure this difference: knowing what one is talking about, one participates in the thing at issue (the university, the diseased body, the engine being repaired); one participates in the duality of the thing. And one's words, initially functions of the arrangement, *name* the thing in its nature. Or: names share the fate of everything finite: they mean something immediately and then, possibly, become fully meaningful, and our own condition of λόγος requires us to mediate the two. We mediate, our words mean what they say, as we become competent in the duality belonging to what we are working on and talking about; if we turn from this duality and attend to the words themselves as sounds and scribbles, we lose them.⁹ Musicians, too, must learn to play the music directly, and only indirectly the notes and the instrument.

Dyadic semantics finds its best illustration in live interchange between engaged speakers, the primary venue of declarative rationality. Engaging in such talk, we must struggle with the difference between words that mean something “by arrangement” (κατὰ συνθήκην) and words that mean something by revealing it, bringing us into an intimacy with the subject of the talk. And we bridge this difference by attending not to the words themselves but to what they say (τὸ ὑποκείμενον). The challenge of ancient semantics lies in the additional claim about this attendance: according to the

ancient interpretation, the attendance begins and ends with a vision of the transcendent and natural fulfillment of something finite and present.

§5. *Modern rationality: triadic semantics*

Routinely, now, we moderns prefer to think of essential words as referring to concepts, and of concepts as comprising instances. Thus we easily assume that what a speaker *means* is an idea, a thought, a feeling belonging to the speaker first of all—so that the listener might likewise appropriate the idea, thought, or feeling. Words then exhaust their function in arousing communication between separate minds, or in forming one mind out of several. Circumstance itself becomes a third thing, to be discovered again by each individual. And such discovery will either replicate our concepts, or deviate from them and lead (possibly) to rectification in one mind and then, by communication, in others.¹⁰

Triadic semantics (word-concept-thing) has its cultural venue already in academic work: teachers explain things to students in the absence of the things themselves—with at most pictures of the things. But it has its native, if not essential venue in modern national government, industrial production, and scientific research—where the formation of conceptual frameworks for handling deferred encounters precisely defines the whole enterprise.

The prime *work* of triadic semantics is the construction of concepts into dynamic systems: into frameworks wherein things can appear and for which we can operate. In Aristotelian terms, the prime *focus* of apophany is now an arrangement (συνθήκη) we carefully construct so that it may encompass whatever may appear in our circumstances—no longer a convention, convenience, a way-station beckoning us into intimacy with our circumstances.¹¹ We rightly judge politicians, business managers, or scientists to behave rationally only when they keep the exigencies of the conceptual arrangement in view, and base all their decisions on the vision of this arrangement.

We also rightly detect a failure in any decision that stems from mere inclination to avoid present conflicts (cowardice), to favor personal relations (nepotism), to take revenge (hatred)—even to seek

an immediate personal advantage in a way that weakens the framework wherein such advantage may be realized over time, or to protect one's favorite niche in the woods against the march of the collective good. In such cases the corrective seems clear: Back to the framework! From this apparent clarity we may locate the ever-lurking failure according to our modern interpretation of rationality: we fail whenever we adjust our conception to our interest in one or more instances. On the modern triadic understanding of apophany, our essential rationality requires us to develop our ability to form concepts *comprising* instances. Every suggestion, every whiff of indebtedness to instances introduces a fault line, a crack in our conceptual scheme.

Semantically triadic rationality becomes bothersome in actual encounters, i.e. whenever intimacy and indebtedness belong essentially to the occasion—as when responding to a lover or a household pet, our parents or our garden, our children or the landscape which we enjoy on a stroll—perhaps also when we dance or pray. We are bothered *if* we simultaneously wish to preserve the ideal of triadic rationality: for such circumstances not only *affect* us but also call upon us to *abide* with them in their affection. Yet the only form of response we permit ourselves is triadic—that is, we subsume the instance under a concept, overrule the power of the instance to affect us.

Bothered or not, we in fact find ourselves engulfed by institutions structured by triadic rationality. Such is our inherited condition—unavoidable, exacting, and therefore essential. It encompasses us wherever we turn: our public school system already integrates the youth into verbal formulations signifying concepts that comprise instances, and then the administrative, forensic, and deliberative structures of government presuppose such integration, as do the productive, distributive and communicative structures of modern industry, and the scientific research that serves, and is served by, education, government, and industry.

The default solution today postulates two domains: the public and the private, the triadically rational domain of our work and the personal domain of our home and recreation. In his Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson sanctified this dualism as essential to

government itself: the public domain exists to serve the private domain.¹² We generally understand this separation as protecting the privacy of individual life. And it also fosters the developments we generically call Romantic (Herder and Rousseau, Emerson and Thoreau, Charles Dickens and Jane Austin), or individualistic (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche), or critical (the rampant literature decrying the underhandedness of public officials). But the original dualism also severs the public realm from embroilments in questions of intimacy and indebtedness, and prepares the field for the rich crop of triadic semantics. Like most default solutions, our present-day dualism promotes the condition it aspires to relieve.

Do we really understand triadic rationality? Its very dominance blinds us to it. Yet every solution that does not grow out of an understanding of the problem will only exacerbate the problem. In our case, every effort to *compensate* for the evident limits of rationality—by modifications, complements, compromises—will only strengthen its dominance. A strange collusion!¹³

Meanwhile, one mark of rationality is the ability to *backtrack*, to reflect on our suppositions, to suspend our *forward* movement in order to question rather than to assert the origins bequeathed to us.

Backtracking, indeed, is essential to contemplation: we behold current events by retrieving their presuppositions, and reopening events into their possibilities. And we discover that *their* presuppositions and possibilities are also *ours*—along with the events themselves. Thus was born the classical rationality of the West, the dyadic semantics first exfoliated by Plato and Aristotle. And again the modern rationality more obviously structuring our present institutions, the triadic semantics first developed by modern thinkers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

To *study* the birth of triadic semantics, we could turn to the aspirations of Galileo, and the attendant quarrels surrounding the Copernican hypothesis.¹⁴ For Galileo, some one *representation* of the movements of the stars must *itself* be true, and the others false; and, as a consequence, there must be *one* science covering all movements. We commonly associate with this theory the collapse of the distinction between celestial mechanics and terrestrial physics, as well as the rise

of mathematical, calculative, and predictive description as the hallmark of genuine science, in uneasy conjunction with aetiology. And we then enter the debate on the power of the experimental method to establish the truth of a representation. Meanwhile, however, we have endorsed, and thereby established the truth of triadic semantics — an *historical truth*.¹⁵

We could also turn to the companion of modern triadic science, the technical development of logic from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell constructed a logical system accounting for the interrelations between concept-variable and object-variable, the formal counterpart to representation and experimentation. In their works, concept and object continue to interrelate as form and instance, in formal analogy with the duality of classical logic (essence and material manifestation). But the separation of conception as *ours* and instantiation as *outside* engenders the need for a third stance to mediate the two (as Russell acknowledged when introducing his ill-fated Hierarchy of Types). Dismissing this outdated duality entirely, David Hilbert inaugurated the school of mathematics and logic called “formalism” by introducing a duality more suitable for scientific construction and more fruitful for philosophical consideration of triadic semantics: the duality of syntax and meaning. We usually associate this new duality with the highly successful work on consistency and independence of primitives, as well as with the *Entscheidungsproblem*. But the reconstrual of systems as purely syntactical also liberates logical and scientific considerations from the concern for meaning. A purely syntactical system can take on multiple meanings, mutually exclusive. Here, the construction of systems brings us no farther than the *threshold* of truth: much as Plato and Aristotle claimed that any mere arrangement (συνθήκη) or mathematical hypothesis does.

Modern rationality finds its primary venue, and its confirmation, in scientific investigation. We then find applications for it in those specialized human efforts wherein the reconstruction of arrangements becomes the prime purpose, and where the question of truth is essentially deferred — or erroneously, perhaps even obsessively identified with the arrangement that happens to be current.

§6. *Original rationality: monadic semantics*

We rightly locate our distinctive nature, our rationality, in the ability to take stock of our circumstances *and* to declare our findings to others (while considering *their* declarations as well) *and* to acknowledge that any declaration may be true or false. Our tradition bequeaths to us at least two contrasting interpretations of these remarkable events. Let us look freshly, bearing a wide variety of examples in mind (examples ranging from the banality of declaring a door to be locked, to the complexity of deliberative, forensic, and investigative discourse).

To take stock of our circumstances: we devise accounts (λόγοι) that interrelate multiple factors. These latter derive first of all from the arrangement in force at the moment. They seem to be readily available. If we *search* for them, we distinguish various kinds: sensory factors, telic factors, material factors, kinetically causal factors.

To declare our findings: we address others, share a concern already structured by our shared circumstances. We usually believe each other — just as we believe in the enterprise as communal. If we *challenge* each other, then individuals stand alone as representatives or critics of declarations.

To acknowledge that our declarations may be true or false: we find and place ourselves in the middle — between our circumstances and our accounts. The account may remain true to, i.e. help reveal, or it may betray, i.e. help conceal our circumstances. In the middle, we already guide it in one or the other direction, quite apart from subsequent judgements of success or failure, ignorance or knowledge, carelessness or attentiveness, good or bad intentions.

Mediating accounts and circumstances, we transcend both: such is our original nature, our rationality. This mediation may appear dyadic or triadic, depending on the intellectual tradition we endorse, or the venue historically bequeathed to us. But it is most originally monadic: the situation strains us, and we respond. For our circumstances appear already as an arrangement (συνθήκη) making claims on us: the arrangement means something, means *us*, directs us,

requires us to respond; yet it also leaves us to embody that meaning in our accounts. Prior to the question whether our accounts adequately describe or explain our circumstances, dyadically or triadically, we find ourselves concerned whether circumstances reveal themselves to us, and whether we are ready for them.

Formulating our original rationality as a matter of *concern*... Does this not lead to subjectivism? Not at all, for the concern distinctive of our rationality marks the opening through which we overcome mere concern for our own private or collective interests — the reductive tendency essential to triadic semantics (and resisted by dyadic semantics). Only when concerned whether circumstances will unveil themselves to us, can we form the framework (the frame of mind) in which they can avail themselves to us. Or may not. Then, too, it becomes clear that *their* meaning requires response; only derivatively does this meaning become *our* meaning.¹⁶

Our original rationality already introduces a tension in our condition. For we may *fall back* onto established accounts of our circumstances, and may hear from others, declare to others only or primarily these familiar accounts. In short, we may fail to acknowledge that declaration may always be true or false, and thereby deny our nature, refuse to help accounts reveal or conceal. We then fall into an indifference — as when we become bored with accounts and with circumstances. Herein we may detect the original failure of rationality, a kind of non-rationality that engenders various forms of irrationality (blind or destructive or uncontrolled responses, out of tune with the address of our circumstances and with the conditions of shared discourse).

How can we *recover* our most original rationality? The touchstone of rationality, introduced by Aristotle, has since remained the same, despite differences: apophantic discourse, the *resumption* of talk as apophantic (of λόγος as ἀποφαντικός). According to our entire intellectual tradition, rationality comes of age as declarative, as making a claim to clarify circumstances while also clarifying our own engagement therein. The assumption, increasingly the *presumption*, is that we need only look (or listen or smell or touch or taste) or think (or calculate or interrelate or infer), i.e. gather the evidence, and then

declare our findings. And that the clarity at issue in the declaration can be tested by running the two in parallel, account and circumstance.

But does this traditional account of apophany do justice to the events themselves? The simple event of declaring to you that the door is locked? Or the momentous event of addressing the tensions, the possibilities, the failures embedded in human efforts to respond to circumstances?

How can I *make* it clear that the door is locked — unless the situation itself becomes clear that way? The door belongs to a situation: to a building that houses an institution wherein you and I have business together. This situation must become clear, must clarify itself and our engagement in it, so that the door has possibilities too. I *testify* to the door being locked. My testimony may bring something out about the situation, but only because this situation impresses itself upon me, upon you, upon us. A simple affair, one that hardly deserves comment. However, if we assume already here that clarity (the -phany of apophany) is something I myself devise and deliver, we not only falsify this one event but may also adopt the same reductive procedure in others. For instance, declarations that help bring our essential engagements with circumstances to light: Do these simply provide a clarity parallel to that of the matters themselves — as description of the circumstances, or expression of someone's responses to them, or explanation about how they arose, where they lead, and how we might redirect their developments? Such are the answers of triadic rationality. But perhaps such declarations, including the ones that have bequeathed to us the presumption of triadic semantics, stem from the way the arrangements engulfing us in fact become clear — in which case such declarations, all great literature and occasionally live speech as well, take the form of testimony to resurgences which bestow the clarity at issue, and without which the testimony simply vanishes, leaving a corpse that we can anatomize but never resuscitate, at best a reminder of the need for clarity once again, and for fresh testimony. Apophany recalls epiphany — or distracts us from it.

Our pre-reflective engagement with circumstances provides the pristine venue of rationality and of the monadic semantics that we can

formulate in contrast to the others. In contemplation we have the choice whether to recover the original rationality at work in our pristine condition, or to reconstrue it. Classical works encourage us to reconstrue it as dyadic, and modern works encourage us to reconstrue it as triadic. Other works, those that we now call archaic as well as those that are non-western in origin, we will then have to dismiss as nonsense.¹⁷

§7. *The problems of rationality*

We would all like to be useful. Indeed, our inclination to contribute to others, to our environment, or to our institutions, evidences our rationality. And more recently the high cost of our institutional arrangements pressures us intellectuals into proving our worth. Thus when we propose to raise questions in an intellectual manner we tend to justify ourselves by addressing problems, and by anticipating solutions that will serve as our contribution.

No one can reasonably deny that serious problems protrude in every domain of contemporary life, or that these problems stem from, or arise in parallel with modern rationality. The proliferation of academic programs testifies to these problems: medical ethics, environmental ethics, business ethics—each addresses the difficult questions arising from the development of conceptual schemes for responding to health, nature, human organizations—schemes having a life of their own and treating everything as fuel for that life. Someday soon there will be a new field called educational ethics, addressing the difficult questions that will arise as our educational institutions abandon all pretense to providing the traditional teacher-student dialogue, and retreat into structures where the teacher tends to the system that in turn serves a clientele. Indeed, what sense can it have for us teachers to *tell* students about concepts? They are left with *words*, and these may as well be recorded once and for all and played back electronically, at the convenience of the client. Yet this seems as inhuman and possibly destructive as technological practice in medicine, industry, and government.

But a technological problem, one induced by the triadic interpretation of rationality, can only be solved by technological

means. No wonder, then, that every effort to correct undesirable effects of our technology leads to more problems to be corrected.

Another tact, more consonant with intellectual work at its best, and with the contemplation traditionally engendered by philosophy, would be to raise the question of rationality precisely with a view to the inherited interpretations, each entailing an interpretation of the domains we find threatened: health, environment, organization and, as I briefly suggested, education. Here we touch upon the question of human individuality, of human indebtedness to the land, of human commitment to communal action. Above all, perhaps, the question of the nurture of human growth (“education”: παιδεία).

Perhaps our greatest contribution as intellectuals, certainly as philosophers, is to provide the opportunity to backtrack, to recall the otherwise merely presupposed sources of the rationality we alternately cherish and chastise for its supposed shortcomings. For only in such recollection may we discover possibilities of rationality that might reroot the familiar interpretations in places where they belong.

Notes

1. Kant calls the rational concept of freedom an “exorbitant concept” (*überschwenglicher Begriff: Critique of Practical Reason*, original edition, pp. 185-6); and a couple pages later he writes:

...und so [ist] uns die Wirklichkeit der intelligibelen Welt und zwar in praktischer Rücksicht bestimmt gegeben worden, und diese Bestimmung, die in theoretischer Absicht **transzendent** (überschwenglich) sein würde, ist in praktischer **immanent**.

Loosely translated:

...and so the actuality of the intelligible world is given to us in a determinate way, namely in regard to practice, and this determination—one that in theoretical considerations would be *transcendent* (exorbitant)—is in practical considerations *immanent*.

Kant's synonym for “transcendent” recalls the word's original Greek “hyperbolic” (in the colloquial sense of “excessive”: *Republic*, 558b, in a favorable sense; *Laws*, 719d, and *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1118 a, in an unfavorable sense). Rationality does indeed introduce hyperbole into our condition: a transcendence that can prove either creative or destructive.

2. In the following passage from Aristotle's *On Interpretation* (17 a), I detect a standard-setting account:

Every λόγος is σημαντικός — not, however as ὄργανον, but rather by συνθήκη. But not all are ἀποφαντικός, but only those to which ἀληθεύειν or ψεύδεσθαι belong. And these don't belong to all: prayer is a λόγος, for instance, but it is neither true nor false. Let us pass over these others, then; for consideration of them arises more in the study of poetry or rhetoric.

The work begins by proposing to distinguish between affirming and negating (concretely: between saying something and gainsaying it), and between declaration and talk (ἀπόφανσις and λόγος). Everything depends on the “semantics” Aristotle proposes: on the distinction between “meaning” (indicating, pointing out, signaling) as an “instrument” (ὄργανον) and “meaning” as occurring “by arrangement” (συνθήκη).

3. Hegel is alert to the drift of western rationality when he famously remarks (in the Preface to his *Phenomenology of Spirit*) that our destiny has been to discover substance as subject — as spirit itself:

Es kommt nach meiner Ansicht ... darauf an, das Wahre nicht [nur] als **Substanz**, sondern eben so sehr als **Subjekt** aufzufassen und auszudrücken.

Loosely translated:

In my view everything depends on grasping and expressing what's true not [only] as *substance* but also, and equally, as *subject*.

He then adds the crucial thought that such substance-subject-spirit comes into its own only at its own edge, *im absoluten Anderssein*.

4. “The limits of the soul you will not discover by travelling around, even if you tread every path; it has such an extensive λόγος.” Heracleitus, Diels fragment 45.

5. Cf. the opening pages of Aristotle's *Politics*, especially 1253 a 10: Human beings come together into communities for the sake of living well. It follows that a human being is by nature and not by chance a political animal, so that any human being *not* in a city (πόλις) is either very inferior or very superior. And our having λόγος evidences our destiny to be “political”: “For nature, we say, does not do anything in vain, and λόγος is something human beings alone have among animals.” While voice (φωνή) signals pain and pleasure, λόγος reveals what is advantageous or harmful, just or unjust. “Distinctive of human beings, as against other animals, is that they alone have perception (αἴσθησις) of the good and the bad, the just and the unjust, and such things, and it is community in these matters that makes a home (οἶκός) and a city (πόλις).”
6. As Alcibiades complains in Plato's *Symposium* (221C), Socrates had the strange habit of asking his interlocutors to contemplate “pack-asses and the work of smithies, those who work leather and those who work hides.” Why contemplate these “lowly” things? Already in the *Apology* Socrates reports that artisans, makers of tangible things, display genuine learning — unlike many poets and politicians, makers of worlds in words.
7. Recall Aristotle's famous remark that competence (τέχνη) in part follows nature in her movements and in part completes what she is unable to finish (*Physics*, 199 a 15).
8. In his *Critias*, 109D, Plato employs the image of people on mountains who survived a cataclysm and now know only the ὀνόματα (names) without the ἔργα (workings). On the theme of recurrent cataclysm requiring a rebirth of τέχνη, see *Timaeus*, 22D, and *Laws*, Book III. Aristotle provides a similar account of recurrent dissipation and regeneration in his *Metaphysics*, 1074 b 8-14; also *On the Heavens*, 270 b 20, *Politics*, 1329 b 25, and *Meteorologica*, 339 b 29.
9. Plato's *Cratylus* most famously raises the question whether names can be correct or not: whether their meaning stems from nature (φύσις) or from covenant (συνθήκη). The fact is that we start with names whose meanings are based on arrangements, and only later, as we learn what we are doing and therefore what we are talking about, do we discover names naming things: names now function as responses to things; we no longer *rely* on names, we do our work *in* them (see 440C-D).

10. On the first page of *On Interpretation*, Aristotle says of both nouns and verbs:

They are, in sound, symbols of the affections in the soul, whereas written ones are symbols of those in sound. And just as the written ones are not the same for all people, so neither are the sounds the same. But what these are originally the signs of, viz. the affections of the soul, are the same for all. And the things of which these affections are similitudes are also the same.

One must read these statements carefully. Words are “symbols”; that is, they go together with... What? With “affections in the soul”; that is, with what bears down on us. “Affections” (παθήματα) are, in precise categorial terms, our undergoings. But what do we undergo? We read: “things”; but this word (πράγματα) also has a decidedly categorial meaning: “things in the making, things in the doing” — “affairs,” we might translate. Anyway, these two, “affections” (undergoings) and “affairs” (things in the making) are, Aristotle says, the same for all — even though the sounds and the writings differ from person to person, from people to people. More: the first, our undergoings, are similitudes (ὁμοιώματα) of the second, the affairs in force: in our responses (our souls) we attune ourselves, more or less, to the things we undergo. And our talk manifests this attunement of ourselves (our undergoings) with what is happening (affairs). Our words are then *with* and not just *about* things — whenever they are really ours.

In his *Leviathan* (“Of Speech”) Thomas Hobbes in effect rewrites Aristotle's dyadic account into the now familiar triadic account. In parody:

They are, in sound, signs of conceptions in the soul, whereas written ones are signs of those in sound. And just as written ones are not the same for all people, so neither are the sounds. But what they are originally signs of, namely conceptions in the soul, are basically the same for all. But the things of which the conceptions are similitudes vary from instance to instance.

This account replaces Aristotle's “affections” with their categorially opposite, “conceptions” — taken broadly to include ideas, images, even desires and feelings. It replaces “symbols” throughout with “signs.” And it also replaces the original basis of “sameness” (the emergence of what we face as the immediate source of our undergoings) with the modern basis (with what we ourselves “have,” whether confusedly, as in the case

of our feelings, or clearly, as in the case of well structured thoughts). What we actually face — this modernity consigns to the realm of the changeable and unreliable: no “sameness” here, and therefore no anchors for our words, no solid grounds of meaning.

11. Kant was the first thinker to critique modern rationality, and to elicit the transcendental conditions of triadic semantics. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, the Transcendental Aesthetic and Analytic, through the Schematism, Kant highlights our own engagement in the construction of frameworks.

12. Jefferson's words, dated 4 July 1776, read:

We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men;...

Compare this formulation with Aristotle's, cited in Note 5.

13. For instance, Sigmund Freud's account of the irrational presumes a complete and unquestioning acceptance of modern rationality. Similarly, John Stuart Mill's account of fellow-feeling as a corrective to calculative reasoning.

14. For an early account, see Pierre Duhem's *To Save the Phenomena: an Essay on the Idea of Physical Theory from Plato to Galileo* (Chicago, 1985; original 1908). Then also Thomas S. Kuhn's well known works. For a more recent account, see *Styles of Scientific Thinking in the European Tradition*, by A. C. Crombie (1983).

15. Whereas P. Duhem, T. S. Kuhn and other critics highlight the historical relativity of scientific constructions, Martin Heidegger contemplates the significance of modern construction itself. See his talk “Die Zeit des Weltbildes” (*Gesamtausgabe*, Volume 5, p. 91):

Ganz anderes meint im Unterschied zum griechischen Vernehmen das neuzeitliche Vorstellen, dessen Bedeutung das Wort repräsentatio am ehesten zum Ausdruck bringt. Vorstellen bedeutet hier: das Vorhandene als ein Entgegenstehendes vor sich bringen, auf sich, den Vorstellenden zu, beziehen und in diesen Bezug zu sich als den maßgebenden Bereich zurückzwingen. Wo solches geschieht, setzt der

Mensch über das Seiende sich ins Bild. Indem aber der Mensch dergestalt sich ins Bild setzt, setzt er sich selbst in die Szene, d.h. in den offenen Umkreis des allgemein und öffentlich Vorgestellten. Damit setzt sich der Mensch selbst als die Szene, in der das Seiende fortan sich vorstellen, präsentieren, d.h. Bild sein muß. Der Mensch wird der Repräsentant des Seienden im Sinne des Gegenständigen.

Translated in *The Question Concerning Technology* (New York, 1977), pp. 131-2 (with modifications):

Modern representing, the meaning of which the [Latin] *representatio* first brings to its primary expression, intends something quite different from Greek apprehending. To represent here means to bring what is on hand before oneself as what stands across from oneself, to relate it to the self doing the representing, and to force it back into this relationship as the realm establishing its measure. Where this happens, man gets into a picture of what is. But inasmuch as man gets into a picture in this manner, he inserts himself into the scene, i.e. into the open sphere of what is represented universally and publicly. Therewith, man asserts himself *as* the scene in which whatever *is* must henceforth pre-sent itself, i.e. be picture. Man becomes the representor of beings as objects.

On ourselves as “representors” (or “sales representatives”), cf. Karl Marx as cited in Note 15 of the following essay “On the Question of Being”: “People here exist for one another only as (sales) representatives [representors] of commodities.”

16. I'm reminded of a passage in Heidegger's lectures on “Grundsätze des Denkens” (*Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 79, p. 100). It answers the charge of subjectivism in the effort to talk about our inherited forms of thinking: How can we talk *with*, and not just about our inheritance?

Solange man dieser Vorstellung vom Menschen als einem Subjekt oder einer Person huldigt, verschließt sich das Denken gegen die Ankunft des uns zugesprochenen Geschickes. Man kann dann folgerichtig behaupten, jedes Sprechen mit der Geschichte sei, weil es doch von einem Subjekt veranstaltet wird, stets nur ein selbstgemachter Monolog. Diese Meinung geht jedermann leicht ein, weil man es gewohnt ist, den Menschen als ein Subjekt vorzustellen. Die Loslösung aus dieser Vorstellung gelingt nicht, solange wir uns darauf verlegen, Beweisgründe dafür beizuschaffen, daß die

Vorstellung falsch sei. Die Loslösung aus dieser Vorstellung verlangt das Einfache, daß wir sie zugunsten einer Erfahrung preisgeben, in der wir uns schon aufhalten. Diese läßt sich in aller Kürze so sagen: Wir erblicken nur das, wovon wir selber schon angeblickt sind.

Loosely translated:

So long as one endorses this representation of man as a subject or a person, one's thinking closes itself off from the arrival of the shared lot lying in wait for us. One can then quite rightly assert that every speaking with heritage is always merely a self-devised monologue — because it is instituted by a subject. Everyone is susceptible to this opinion because everyone has the habit of representing man as a subject. Deliverance from this representation can never succeed so long as we insist that there be proofs that this representation is false. Deliverance from this representation requires something simple: that we give it up in favor of an experience in which we are already engaged. This experience we can state in all brevity: We discern only that which already concerns us.

17. In the Fink-Heidegger seminar on Heraclitus (*Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 15, p. 94), Fink remarks that archaic sayings allow for different meanings. Heidegger replies: “In den Sätzen der archaischen Sprache spricht die Sache und nicht die Bedeutung.” Perhaps: “In the sayings of archaic language it's the matter itself that speaks, not its meaning.”

12

The Question of Being
in
the Age of Perspectivism

This essay was first prepared for and read at a conference on perspectivism held at the University of Prince Edward Island (Canada) on 31 October 1992. It was then expanded considerably for a colloquium on environmental concerns at the Centre Universitaire de Luxembourg in May, 1993. This second version was published in *Cahiers de Philosophie*, Série A, Fascicule IV (Luxembourg, 1994), pp. 31-62.

The two appear incompatible. The question of being demands a unity of focus, a unity of the discoverable, a unity of human concern. The age of perspectivism has proceeded on the supposition that human concerns essentially vary, that to each concern corresponds its own discoverable, that there is no single focus underlying the variations. To one raising the traditional question of being, perspectivism seems to forsake reality for the multiplicity of appearances, as well as to pander to the multiplicity of human interests. To one endorsing modern perspectivism, insistence on raising the question of being seems to introduce a procrustean bed constricting human possibility, as well as to pander to some authority.

As in most mundane conflicts, each side propagates a caricature of its opponent, highlighting some feature of its subject and leaving the rest out of account. More unjustly, concentration on the caricatures induces forgetfulness of the innermost issues and thereby spawns further caricatures.

Do we understand the question of being? Do we understand our age, the perspectivism of our age? Only when we rightly understand both might we rightly understand whether and how the two complement or oppose one another.

§1. *Three dimensions of the question of being*

Two dimensions of the question of being appear clearly stated in Aristotle's famous formulation of the question:

καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸ πάλαι τε καὶ νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ ζητούμενον
καὶ ἀεὶ ἀπορούμενον, τί τὸ ὄν, τοῦτό ἐστι, τίς ἢ
οὐσία.

This passage from the *Metaphysics*, Book VII (Zeta), 1 (1028 b 2), might be rendered into English as:

And indeed, both anciently and now and always, what is searched and is always obstructed, namely what something is, is this: what the substance is.

The first order of questioning arises continuously: we are always asking τί τὸ ὄν, what something or other is. The “what” here covers

all possible predications: what the condition of my horse is, or what conditions are possible for horses in general; what size my horse is, what sizes horses come in; what color, what actions, what passions, what postures, what times, what places, what relations. Whatever our pre-philosophical involvements and vocations are, we ask what things are in these various ways. In these *nine* ways, according to Aristotle's list of categories. Moreover, and also pre-philosophically, we strain to identify things, to name what animal it is that is feeding on the vegetables in our garden, what bird it is that is singing so sweetly, what mineral it is that glistens in that rockcliff, what it is that has gotten into and clogged the fuel lines in our car. This tenth way of asking what something is often seems to rank equally with the other nine. Yet on occasion the identity of something determines the status of the other predications, as when we discover that not a mouse, but rather a hinge causes the squeaking we hear.

The second order of questioning arises sporadically: our numerous determinations about things often fail to add up. Malign ignorance consists in having an abundance of scattered predications, i.e. determinations forming no focus. Genuine knowledge consists in the ability to focus predications and to suspend judgement on those having no proven direction. Focus on... What? Formally, on a *subject*, on what underlies, on τὸ ὑποκείμενον: a metaphor suggesting that something is yet to be discovered, something that upholds the variety of determinations, something to which the squeaking can refer us. But what counts as a subject performing these various functions? What this underlying something *is*: this is the question of being, τίς ἡ οὐσία, to which we must reduce, or rather induce, the more obvious questions of the form τί τὸ ὄν. A phenomenological consideration of vocational involvements bears Aristotle's contention out: an apprentice on a farm, in a machine shop, or in a university learns many determinations but must eventually leap through them to relate directly to the workings of cows and corn, lathes and metal, students and faculty. Aristotle detects in this leap a justification for the vocation of "primary philosophy," a way of life devoted primarily to considering the intricacies of this translation of the question τί τὸ ὄν back into the question τίς ἡ οὐσία. Out of that way of life was then

born the vocation so peculiar to western intellectual history, metaphysics.

A third order of questioning whispers through all foundational literature, occidental and oriental: What does it mean (under what conditions are we able) to appropriate beings, to take substances as our own? This dimension of the question of being generally arises within the clamor of more obvious questions. The dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles, then those of Shakespeare, and also the ancient works of China and India, address this question as that of kingship and kingdom: address each of us as sovereigns who may gain or lose the domain of our sovereignty. Plato states the thought as a rhetorical question (*Theaetetus*, 174E): How could one whose concerns extend over the whole earth worry about possessing various parcels of it? This thought re-surfaces in F. Bacon and Descartes, later in Marx, as the question of mastery over the universe, over nature, as a whole. Henry David Thoreau restates the question, somewhat Platonically: in his peregrinations over the countryside around Concord, he takes possession of each farmstead, but remains free of the daily grind otherwise required to protect one's possession from intrusions and erosions (thieves, moths, rust).

As originally raised by philosophers, the question of being pertains to the human drama generally. To grow up, to thrive, human beings ask how things are in their own circumstances, wonder also about the focal point of the manifold determinations, and finally struggle with their own sovereignty. The most obvious antagonist in this drama is second-handedness. Whether as gardeners or as physicists, not to mention newspaper readers, we constantly hear about how things are, and we can rest content with such hearsay, even operate effectively within it. Once we have abandoned the task of first-hand determination we become deaf to the second order of questioning, or mishear it: the justification for determinations about how things *now* are seems to lie in the beliefs commonly accepted within the fields of gardening or physics — rather than in the reference of these determinations to a substance inviting direct testimony on our part. And until we have accepted full responsibility for testifying directly to how things are, the third order of questioning appears only as a

question of who has the right to force others into conformity: as a question of slavery rather than one of sovereignty. To untie these three knots we must be willing to ask concretely, in our own domain, how things are, τί τὸ ὄν.

Distinctive of our philosophical tradition in the West has been the propensity to offer, indeed to determine guidelines for passing from the first to the second order of questioning. Thus Aristotle not only reopens the question of being as a passage from τί τὸ ὄν to τίς ἡ οὐσία but proceeds immediately to review the palette of possible answers to the question how we are to understand what counts as ἡ οὐσία, the substance focalizing the multiple and transient determinations of things: (1) “what it is, i.e. what *this here* is”: τὸ τί ἔστι καὶ τόδε τι, (2) its “material”: ἡ ὕλη, (3) “what it was all along to be”: τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, (4) its “wholeness”: τὸ καθόλου, (5) its “familialness”: τὸ γένος, and (6) its “shapeliness”: ἡ μορφή (here, at least, interchangeable with τὸ εἶδος, “form”); elsewhere (*Metaphysics*, IX), Aristotle introduces another candidate, one distinctive of his own work: (7) its “power” that can be set “into work”: δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. Discussion of these answers became what we now call metaphysics.

Distinctive, too, of our philosophical tradition has been the propensity to raise *as supplemental* the *third* order of questioning, that of our own concrete relation to the substance, ἡ οὐσία, of things. Aristotle offers two answers that especially illustrate this question and highlight our own concrete position within, indeed our exacting responsibility for the passage from τί τὸ ὄν to τίς ἡ οὐσία.

First, as individuals we each learn to enter reality *by way of an art*:

ὅλως τε ἡ τέχνη τὰ μὲν ἐπιτελεῖ ἃ ἡ φύσις ἀδυνατεῖ
ἀπεργάσασθαι, τὰ δὲ μιμεῖται.

In English this crucial passage from Aristotle's *Physics*, Book IV (199 a 15), might be rendered:

As a whole, an art partly takes to completion what nature is unable to finish, and partly imitates [her].

Our own relation to the reality of things (their “nature,” i.e. substance) is one of τέχνη, formative knowledge which “completes” things, bringing them into their own inner intent, helping things (cows, trees, ...) to actualize themselves; even things apparently designed for human use (houses, automobiles, ...) emerge fully and as themselves, and only *are* for us, insofar as we relate formatively to the “nature” in them. From the start, already in Homer and Pindar, Aeschylus and Sophocles, and ever more clearly in Plato and Aristotle, the metaphysical concern for and answers to the question of being have encouraged the development of human power over circumstances. Modern philosophers, indeed the modern world, have accepted this encouragement unstintingly.

And, second, the sustaining context, the “society” of arts is *derived from an understanding of the performance of individuals*:

φανερόν τοίνυν ὅτι βέλτιον εἶναι μὲν ἰδίως τὰς
κτήσεις τῇ δὲ χρήσει ποιεῖν κοινάς.

This crucial passage from Aristotle's *Politics*, Book II (1263 a 36), might read in English:

It is now clear that it is best that property be private [individually owned] while [each is] making it common [shared, public] in use.

(Cf. 1330 a 1: property should not *be* common, it should *become* common—in the affectionate using of it.) The question of property is the question of substance under the aspect of our political condition. Aristotle's own argument begins with individuals needing community simply to survive and even more to practice their various arts: to be creating their circumstances both for and with others. Community requires φιλία; such “affection” derives either from individual responsibility for something (through the making of and the caring for those things one can call one's *own*), or through birth-relations (one's parents, one's children, ...). Yet individual ownership alone destroys the commonality of concern essential to community. Thus one's truest relationship with the things one makes (one's house, one's shop, one's meals, one's produce, one's land, ...) starts with individual responsibility but fulfills itself in shared use, i.e. again in φιλία: the only proper way of relating to substance, to οὐσία, is one of

combined “temperance” (restraint in one's own consumption) and “liberality” (generosity in regard to others: 1265 a 32). Since Plato, the question of the relationship, the tension between substance as individually owned and as held in common has guided the vicissitudes of political theory in the West. And not only in the question of private vs. public property, but also in the modern concern to distinguish subjective from objective judgement, and to relate rights and responsibilities. These can all be metaphysical questions deriving from our involvement in the question of being.

§2. *Three illustrations of our perspectivism*

Perspectivism appears as a challenge to the metaphysical tradition. The challenge surfaces already in Plato's account (*Theaetetus*) of Protagoras' argument that things *are* as they *appear* to each individual in his or her condition. However, the systematic concern for perspective first arose during the Renaissance as a possibility of visual artwork, and developed on into the end of the 19th century, when perspectivism became a name for the modern age, an age politically and scientifically reconstructed on perspectival principles. Today we hardly call the child by its name, no doubt because the child has now passed into its gray years.

Let us recall three ways in which perspectivism structures our modern understanding of the world we live in.

First, our understanding of democracy endorses a plurality of interest groups as the driving force for policy-making. An actual policy emerges epiphenomenally from the conflictive interactions of divergent ways of perceiving the present and envisaging the future. The epiphenomenal status of policies most obviously pertains to the domain of decisions regarding utility. However, in the domain of decisions regarding justice the same principle of plurality reigns not only in our notion of trial by jury but also in our notion of conflict between defense and prosecution.

Second, our understanding of the place of religion—of cults of the transcendent—requires that we tolerate, even appreciate the plurality of options. The *raison d'être* of a legitimate religion lies in the transcendence, therefore beyond the book formulating the

invitation to transcend. Indeed, any such book invites rather than prescribes: so we moderns would like to believe, although one who has accepted one version of the invitation must often exercise special care to maintain the distinction.

Third, we today base our understanding of competence not on insight into the way things *are* but on the development of techniques for responding to and forming what happens in our circumstances—for facing the present in a process of creating a future. In *The Quest for Certainty*, Chapter VII (New York, 1929) John Dewey formulated this understanding of technical competence succinctly and positively:

There is no kind of inquiry which has a monopoly on the honorable title of knowledge. ... In fact, the painter may know colors as well as the physicist; the poet may know stars, rain and clouds as well as the meteorologist; the statesman, educator and dramatist may know human nature as truly as the professional psychologist; the farmer may know soils and plants as truly as the botanist and the mineralogist. For the criterion of knowledge lies in the method to secure consequences and not in metaphysical conceptions of the nature of the real.

Our competence will consist in mastering procedures, and any proposed procedure proves itself only as it enables us to procure anticipated results with it. On any one field of dirt and rock many games may be played, whether football or rugby, agriculture, botany, or mineralogy.

Our understandings of social process, of divine intercession, of epistemic competence intertwine inextricably with one another: the denial of any one requires the suspension of the other two, the affirmation of any one leads to the inclusion of the other two. The perspectivism undergirding this three-fold understanding contradicts its own adolescent version: the claim or hope that one need not take any one perspective seriously. We usually call the adolescent version “relativism,” the defense of which draws upon some of the corollaries of perspectivism: any one perspective relates to a given time and place and human interest, falls short of the absolute, easily snares one in delusion, and restricts one's movements of mind and body. While adolescent relativism reflects an effort to drop out, modern

perspectivism very precisely claims that we have no choice but to reside within: that we can choose either to engage within our given situation (promoting, altering, creating a perspective) or simply suffer it (drag along within pre-existent perspectives). The choice is between activity and passivity, between freedom and slavery.

§3. *Nietzsche's challenge*

Assuming we are wise both about the question of being and about our perspectival condition, we may ask whether endorsement of the latter renders the question of being superfluous. Nietzsche has become, in retrospect, the prime spokesman for the claim that it does:

To talk as Plato did about the [pure human] spirit and about the good [in itself] was to stand truth on her head and to repudiate the *perspectival* [dimension], the fundamental condition of all life; ...¹

Nietzsche understands the question of being metaphysically: as indicating a quest for an underlying stasis in which we can find refuge from the kinesis marking our obvious condition. In this quest he detects a disease of the human spirit preventing us from accurate determinations of how things in fact appear, and also inducing a cowardliness in our destiny to appropriate the givens of our circumstances (*Will to Power*, §608: *Schwächung der Aneignungskraft*). Nietzsche's cure prescribes that we learn to deny the need to seek out such stasis: "One must deny *Being*."² In order, that is, to affirm "becoming" within and of a perspective. And in order to affirm the will to power as the central reality both of oneself and of all that one encounters: a battle for More, Better, Faster, More Often, . . .

A full critique of Nietzsche's claim would require a detailed consideration not only of his evidence for the primacy of the perspectival but also of his "deconstruction" of the intellectual traditions (especially that of his arch-rival, Plato) to reveal at the heart of each the human effort to respond, positively or negatively, to the will to power. Let us instead square him off against each of the three dimensions of the question of being.

First, the question as τί τὸ ὄν. Does Nietzsche deny that we human beings "anciently and now and always" search out what and how things are? Hardly. Rather, he argues that each determination in our work-a-day world is *conditioned* by our factual position (see e.g. *Will to Power*, §567). In itself, this argument parallels those of Plato and Aristotle, each time they refer to the practice of an art for their evidence. Yet there is a difference: Nietzsche asserts the primacy of the finite goal-in-view, treating the development of τέχνη as an incidental means toward achievements extraneous to it. Still, our destiny remains: to make determinations about how things are, and always within some finite situation, acknowledged or unacknowledged. Nietzsche himself emphasizes that *his* perspective positions him especially well to determine exactly what in fact happens in the world, freeing him (and perhaps us) from the propensity to fantasize:

I want to awaken the greatest distrust in me: I talk only about things *that are lived out*; I do not present only processes that go on in the head.³

A telling remark, strangely Socratic and embodying a reflexive awareness of the *conditioned* status of determinations.

Second, the question as τίς ἡ οὐσία. Does Nietzsche deny that we must search out a single substance unifying all the determinations we make as human beings or as philosophers? Hardly. His meta-discourse aspires precisely to ferret out what might give sense to the multiplicity of otherwise senseless determinations:

My intention: to show the absolute homogeneity in everything that happens, and the application of moral difference only as *conditioned perspectively*.⁴

Yet Nietzsche considers his own project to be non-, even anti-metaphysical. His is not the question of being, he emphatically states, but the question of process, of becoming:

One should not ask, "Who is then doing the interpreting?": the interpreting itself as a form of the will to power has as an affect definite existence (but not as some sort of "being," rather as a *process*, a *becoming*).⁵

Nietzsche identifies the question of being with the desire for stasis. But if by “metaphysics” we mean more broadly the concern to locate one principle *P* to which we might appeal when encountering the multiplicity of phenomena (saying: phenomenon *p* is really *P*), then “will to power” = *P* in Nietzsche's work.

And, finally, the question as that of sovereignty. Does Nietzsche deny that human beings are essentially agonized by the question of appropriation? True, he speaks sparingly about the “theory of the state,” and his few remarks about the factual tasks of leadership appear rather cynical (see e.g. *Will to Power*, §492). Yet his work focusses recurrently on the broader, the “metaphysical” question of appropriation (*Aneignung*): the human need to take one's circumstances as one's own. Nihilism Nietzsche understands as a diseased historical condition wherein such appropriation appears impossible — as a condition in which we feel it “natural” to declare ourselves “in it but not of it.” On Nietzsche's account this disease can only be cured by homeopathy: taking as one's own precisely the condition of nihilism. A provocative argument in favor of such homeopathy, or at least an illustration of it in operation, appears in Nietzsche's notebooks:

1. In order to conserve *myself*, I have my protective instincts of contempt, disgust, indifference, etc., and these drive me into solitude — in this solitude, however, where I *feel everything as necessarily connected*, every being is to me *divine*.

N.B. to value and to love *anything at all* I must grasp it as absolutely connected with everything that is, and thus for *its* sake I must *affirm all existence*, and be grateful to chance, where such marvelous things are possible.

2. —In order to live, one must value. Valuing something has *as a consequence* that one affirm *everything*, therefore also the deprecated, the detested: i.e. that one simultaneously value and not-value.
3. Insight: in every evaluation a determined perspective is at work: *conservation* of the individual, of a community, of a race, of a state, of a church, of a faith, of a culture.

—By virtue of *forgetting* that there is only perspectival valuing, everything teems with contradictory valuations and *thus with contradictory drives* in a *single* person. Here is the *expression of the disease of human being*, in contrast to animals, where all existing instincts serve very determinate tasks.⁶

These “personal” reflections deserve careful consideration: How does conservation require both contempt and love? How does life consist in total affirmation? How does forgetfulness saturate our lives? However we might answer these questions, Nietzsche himself is testifying to the third dimension of the question of being.

§4. *An interlude on the question*

For those of us who articulate the human drama as structured by the question of being, our age, the age of perspectivism provides the stage setting. The threefold question of being will bear on us in our finite involvements, and will receive answers reflecting the need to assume responsibility within our finite condition; also, *whether* we are assuming it, and how. And every answer, at any level, remains legitimate only so long as it recalls the finitude generating it.

The clash between the traditional version of the question of being and the exigencies of our age invites us to distinguish between the question of being and the desire for stasis, and thereby to re-read the literature traditionally understood as the source of the question in the West. It also invites us to reconsider carefully the value of the bird's-eye views we often expect intellectuals to present to us. Precisely the effort to present the significance of science, religion, ethics, education globally (often in the name of the need to appreciate the multiplicity of perspectives) undercuts the learning of our finitude, and renders the question of being apparently vacuous and even pernicious.

The clash also impels us to reassess the range of what we might mean with the word “question.” Increasingly, the intellectual understanding of this word has become confined to the first of the three levels of the question of being. Increasingly we have interpreted the question of substance and the question of sovereignty as factual questions. The original sense of “question” is closer to “concern” or “summons” than to “request for information.” And the original

correlate is closer to “oblivion” or “deafness” than to “determination.” Not the meaning of our words is the issue, but the meaning of our vocation as intellectuals. If we understand our task, as did the Enlightenment thinkers, to be that of developing our own field of inquiry, the questions we consider will pertain to our own field only. We then commit ourselves to understanding questions demanding that we provide answers overriding the questions. The alternative is to understand our vocation as eliciting the questions belonging to human vocation as such: to rescue these questions, and therewith the human vocation itself, not just ours.

§5. *The difference: form and instance*

The question of being has hitherto exfoliated as a question of our awesome commitment to subject, subsume, even subjugate what we encounter at a time and a place: to understand each instance as instantiating a form, as having an origin. Only the detection of this origin, this form, certifies our own stance regarding the instance, legitimizes our response as correct and effective.

Awesome because it locates all three exigencies of the question: proper determination of how things in fact appear, proper focalization of the multiplicity of determinations, and proper appropriation of the circumstances of such determination. Awesome because it locates the possibility of the ruination of instances and the abdication of our own responsibility, our own selves. Awesome also because we intellectuals today have inherited a cauldron of mutually conflicting, apparently incompatible interpretations of the difference between form and instance: and therewith of our own precarious position or condition in the middle.

Plato and Aristotle propose form as the completion toward which an instance is by nature driven: its τέλος. Those of us directed in ποίησις toward something Other (sheep or wild goats, corn or wild forests, soil and wind, fire and sea) must learn to participate in the particular drives that keep these things in movement. The form lies within and yet ahead: the master attunes himself to what remains hidden from the benevolent bystanders who marvel at the fluency of his response to, his movement with, his partial mastery of the

instance; the apprentice, in contrast, stumbles and fumbles, tries to milk a goat the way one milks a cow, failing to notice with the eyes and the fingers the different shapes of the teats, not yet able to adjust manipulation and desire to the good of the goat, and therefore unable to relate to instances in their form (to instances as having to realize their form and as inviting one to participate in the struggle—even, on occasion, requiring one to slaughter the instance in the mode of sacrifice).

Explicitly in parallel, Plato and Aristotle argue that those of us directed in προᾶξις to the formation of cooperative enterprises stumble and fumble until we attune ourselves to human nature as driving individuals both into their own completion and into communal concerns. Human nature is here the form, but understood as what drives us, the instances, into the Other, into the development of *its* nature.

The new vocation of θεωρία highlights human nature, the form of individual human beings, in its complexity: *our* complexity as directed to, participative in the Other—and easily failing to complete the movement. Thus the art, the τέχνη of the new vocation includes essentially that of παιδεία, the art of helping human beings move toward their natural completion—by following their nature. Essential to the new vocation is also the task of discussing the status and dynamics of the form-instance conflict. The contribution of θεωρία on this topic has since received the name of metaphysics.

In Judaic-Christian theology a shift occurs: natural form appears as divinely created. Greek εἶδος becomes Latin *forma*, interpreted as *species*: a word that, at first (certainly in Augustine⁷), resounded much like Homeric εἶδος, “glamor,” but then inevitably more like the pre-Darwinian meaning of the word—a fixed *kind* of being. Theology arises from and for those leading a strictly contemplative life, and the intellectual concern for form becomes a concern for how intellectuals fare: while horse trainers and community leaders learn form by working with instances and foreseeing the possibility of the completion *in* these instances, intellectuals must strive to foresee completions by themselves. Intellectuals draw together the essentials by hovering closely over instances (as against participating directly in

them): they devise *concepts* covering instances by accounting for what is recurrently essential about them. Thus is born a triad of concept, instance, and form. At first a concept derived its certification from its correspondence with the divinely created species (essence), later it appeared as a human fabrication only.

By conflating concept with essence, modernity returns us to the dyad of form and instance. For all their differences, Bacon and Descartes, Locke and Leibniz, Newton and Kant close ranks against form as based on the shared *τέλος* within instances: “final causes” reflect human interests only and, as expressing us rather than the Other, obstruct our understanding of what we face. Form becomes formulation: Scholastic conceptualization, but now subjected to the rigor and beauty of numerical, algebraic, combinatorial computation. The truth of formulation then frees itself from correspondence with forms embedded in nature: we relate our formulations directly to instances, try them out as rigorous accounts of their behavior. Such formulation does not imitate (follow, keep in tune with) any *τέλος* within instances. However, it *has* a *τέλος* serving as the measure of its truth: mastery of the behavior of instances. Mastery requires us to formulate their behavior as obedience to “laws”. These new scientists replace the artisans as the showpieces of the form-instance drama.⁸

The modern understanding of the status and dynamics of forms and instances pertains primarily to intellectual work, to *θεωρία*; efforts to understand *ποίησις* and *πράξις* in a similar vein lead, in the one case, to what Marx calls “big industry” and, in the other case, to the ambitions of social engineering. Modern thinking abandons the question of being as originally proposed: it raises questions for itself only, devising answers of service to itself primarily (pure research), paying its monetary and moral costs by contributing to the interests of government and industry, these interests in turn reflecting the popular interest in technological developments.

But now the modern project has imploded. After having permeated our political and educational institutions, after having irrevocably revised our cultural understanding of intellectual, practical and productive competence, the modern version of the difference

between form and instance has lost its central nervous system. The skeletons continue to inform our daily behavior from birth to death. But culturally, i.e. officially and openly, we no longer accept or understand the driving principle of modernity: God, understood in the manner of deism. Perspectivism, the result of the implosion, asserts yet another version of the form-instance tension. Still, the rigor of perspectivism, its claims upon us, easily vanish into the flabbiness of relativism unless we understand it as the rightful heir of a modernity that has lost its faith.

And faith it was. Formulations of intellectuals engaged in scientific or political work intended to fathom the intricacies of, God's Plan for . . . instances. The divinity of form appeared immediately in a cosmic, even a teleological guise: instances appeared as mechanically governed, devoid of intrinsic being (beauty or purpose); each instance appeared as a result, a pawn in the Overall Game. Wisdom then consisted in aligning oneself within the Plan and then investigating it, bringing it into human formulation of and human operation within the temporal flow of instances. Leibniz, for instance, expresses the faith for modern science, and Rousseau for the original daring of modern government.⁹

Faith in the Divine Source now appears as auxiliary. For the Clockwork of Creation, the Source set up the materials and the laws of motion, leaving the Clock to run on its own; and leaving us, the deputies of the Source, with the task to maintain it—to improve our concrete circumstances according to our insights into the Original Plan. But now the Source in fact departs. Perhaps Its disappearance was one part of the New Covenant. But the Source has vanished, for whatever reason.¹⁰

Form now emerges historically as instituted organization, as structure, as system. At first only abstractly. And concretely as the subject of academically organized study of industrially, governmentally, and militarily institutable organization. Without the Divine Source to provide a unifying point of reference and a unified purpose, the new subject comes in multiples only: an ever-changing system for understanding agriculture, another for understanding education, another for understanding tropical plants, another for understanding human

behavior under stress. Each has its own name, spawns multiple versions, spreads freely over the temporal and spatial domain of the others. There is neither any one way to understand any domain nor any one substance to understand within any given domain.

The multiplicity of perspectives first becomes evident in the multiplicity of humanly constructed ones. But then we note that *what* we aspire to understand appears *also* as a perspectively constructed system: an oyster becomes intelligible to us as a system designed to interpret its environment from its own standpoint; oysterhood becomes a particularly perspectival drive to prove itself within its environment; a molecule similarly, and so too a vast environment on earth or in outer space. Mediating the two systems, and reducing them to one, is *method*: the way we enter into, grapple with, (and necessarily never quite grasp) our circumstances, accounting simultaneously for our own and for their perspectives. Methodology emerges as the one *meta*-science expressing the primacy of method under all conditions.¹¹

We will gain a step forward if we recognize contemporary technology as promulgating an interpretation of the form-instance tension. Whenever we speak of the *structure* of a molecule or of an organism, of the environmental or ecological *system*, of the *methodology* of a research project, or of the *flow chart* of a university, we instantiate ourselves as the heirs of the modern, no longer substantial interpretation of the form-instance tension. And also as the heirs-apparent of Antiquity, of Judeo-Christianity, and of Modernity.¹²

Yet the last progeny of Antiquity differs from its progenitor in at least three remarkable ways: (1) The New Forms function not as natural guides in responding to what appears, but as humanly (albeit anonymously) contrived patterns of response, while instances appear as natural (untamed particles, whether as something named in subatomic physics or as one of ourselves, *un tout parfait et solitaire*). (2) The New Forms appear not as setting standards by which instances can grow up and flower out, but as Procrustean Beds by which we may curtail, harness, or enhance natural movement. (3) As multiple, the New Forms appear arbitrary (strangely, awesomely so, given their power); there is no reason to chose one over another: nothing is at stake except the choosing itself.

§6. *The question of being today*

Any answer to the question of being establishes the leading questions of the day. That is, of our inherited condition: the aspirations of education at home and at school (our understanding of individual growth into competence), of society (our understanding of communal cooperation), and of government (our understanding of the relation between individual and community). Once we endorse an answer to the original question, we re-establish, each day, our factual condition in the image of that answer. All other questions are led by a vested interest that itself remains undiscussed.

Once our factual condition coincides with our inherited aspirations, the original question can re-assert itself. And all the more pressingly, now that we have arrived. Perhaps the question has become so pressing today, and so unanswerable, that we initially repress it. For a while yet, responsible intellectual endeavor may have to confine itself to the task of prying it out into the open.

Even as repressed, each of the three dimensions of the question of being has engendered recognizable obstacles (“problems,” as we say).

How are things? Wanting to know the facts about gardens, about populations, about television sets — about most anything — we turn to electronically stored determinations, printed documents, the *ad hoc* testimony of an expert. Living in the information age means receiving our facts mostly second-hand. First-hand determination — the original initiation of the question of being (whether for Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Locke, or Kant) — occurs only at the outermost regions of original research and in the innermost regions of our private lives. Precisely when smoothly functioning, an enterprise installs us in a collective dream world, where original determinations are things of the past, always somebody else's, in effect nobody's: we live in an already-functioning world of settled determinations.¹³ Thus the first dimension of the question of being, the one pre-reflectively pervading all human enterprise, appears in distinctively modern enterprise as a question of how to retrieve and recycle pre-devised and already stored determinations. Yet the barest awareness of this condition sets the stage for the re-assertion of the question, albeit in a double-take form:

What authenticates these determinations, what allows their legitimate re-use?

To what do determinations refer? Any one determination arises originally within an enterprise, most formally (academically) an enterprise of research. The determination has as its context the enterprise itself, and as its occasion some pre-devised moment of measurement. Apart from these two, context and occasion, there is no reference.¹⁴ Aristotle and the long tradition he bequeathed to us insisted on a *subject* to which the determinations we make could refer: here, determinations are predicates drawing their occasion from the subject, which in turn supports the context of the enterprise. Today, the context itself has a reference: resources, both non-human (“natural”) and human. A modern enterprise searches out and builds up its resources: a resource both feeds and thwarts an enterprise, it is the basic source of the problems to which the enterprise must find solutions. The founding intent is to reshape resources, be they the ores of the earth, available personnel, or the infrastructures of the enterprise itself. Indeed, our modern sense of reality understands the infrastructures as paradigmatic: for infrastructure is simultaneously material and construction, a means which mysteriously asserts itself as the end.

The determinations we accept and interlock to focus upon some resource provide us with, i.e. engage us in a perspective: a subject-free, interest-based construction. What *is* most of all is now the construct itself; what *is*, is the perspective enshrined in the enterprise that happens to engage us. Resources *are*, too, but *which* resource *is* depends on the construct engaging us. Thus, the moment we cease to work on and with it, the reference of the enterprise, along with our own determinations and efforts, vanishes into an abstraction, a memory, or a fiction. During the work, questions clearly bear on how to enhance the use of the resource pertinent to the work. After work, another question may arise: What is *real* within our enterprise?

And then the third order of question becomes most pressing: How can we take the domain as our own? This question appears to admit of no answer, and therefore tempts us to dismiss it as nonsense. But it will not go away. For in fact human beings are haunted by it, often

destroyed by it, and tend to destroy whatever else they can as they themselves go under.

The modern form-instance dynamism requires that we participate in a form that appears decidedly human and yet descends upon each individual as prior to all individuality and therefore as strangely inhuman: it belongs to, arises from, everybody, anybody, and nobody. Within the corporation, the research, the government, or the institute, the individual is yet another anonymous and evanescent part, an instance, of the resource managed by the enterprise. Thus the helpless and hopeless sentiment that somehow “those in charge” should respect the individual. Yet an enterprise *is*, and has the power to assist us, only inasmuch as *we* can take it as our own domain. Otherwise the enterprise will always vanish, become an invisible oppressor demanding our presence, sapping our strength, usurping our sovereignty — no matter what benefits it may deliver in the process.

Compare now the Aristotelian with the modern version of the question: (1) The Aristotelian version highlights the condition of the individual artisan who must constantly determine how those things are that he actually faces. The modern version highlights the condition of the industrial (corporate, institutional) worker who must forever draw upon determinations made by others, previously and collectively. (2) The Aristotelian version highlights the extra demand acknowledged by the artisan that these determinations stem from and eventually enhance a focus on the subject encountered in *its* dynamism of form and instance. The modern version highlights the extra demand that we understand determinations as coalescing into an *a priori* form of enterprise, and this form as drawing upon, bearing down on resources: resources subsumed under the form and evident only peripherally, sustaining the enterprise but not locating the focus. The extra vision demanded by the second order of the question of being is strangely peripheral.¹⁵ (3) The Aristotelian version highlights the peculiar responsibility one has in taking one's estate as one's own: one opens up a public domain (from family to polis). In contrast, we today must *argue* for public responsibility.

Thinking through the question of being in an Aristotelian vein requires that we begin by thinking ourselves back into an artisanal

condition. Even though such an exercise might be necessary for one intent upon the question, it does not engage us fully in our own version.

How can we think through the question of being today? Evidently, we must begin by thinking ourselves back into our own inherited condition. We have inherited an office-driven organization of human effort: industrial production and commercial distribution, underground water and sewer systems, overhead and underground gas and electrical power, networks of paved roads, of airways for transportation of commodities and services, of airwaves for the dissemination of information and entertainment. On the inside of our condition loom mathematical science and technology, immediately embodied in computer-driven machinery within the offices and in the shops. The logic of these insides is summarily available in the mathematical logic proposed by thinkers like Leibniz and developed by philosophical mathematicians since the last decades of the 19th century.

In our inherited version, the first order of questioning evaporates immediately into the second, which gives way uneasily to the third. For to ask how something is we not only turn to some second-hand source but, more essentially, we recognize that any one determination of how something is receives its warranty from the system in which the determination becomes an issue. The priority of the system entails the necessity of second-handedness not simply as a convenience; a system is already at an essential remove from instances, and takes us into the same remove. No system acknowledges or asks us to acknowledge any ground other than itself. And yet every system actually engaging us is essentially finite: this one or that one. A perspective, then. And not self-fulfilling. Its very vacuity leads concretely to the third order of the question: the assumption of sovereignty.

For us today, the traditionally third order of question has become primary. Most obviously, perhaps, at the personal level: our perspectivism leaves each with the personal agony of having to take a perspective—which means a public and anonymous organization—as one's own domain. Oedipus learned to accept responsibility and to

acknowledge his own culpability within the problems initially belonging to the public realm he had adopted as his own. The modern agony consists rather in the conflict between the public realm (Monday through Friday, so to speak) and the private realm (weekends, family, friends, hobbies).

At the grand level, the modern version of the form-instance dynamism spawns an all-encompassing prowess summed up in technology. In a general way, we fear that this prowess may deplete, devastate, or at least pollute our circumstances. Also that its deployment in medicine may lead to a merely commercial interest in pharmaceuticals, surgery, and life-support systems. And, of course, that it may be deployed largely for the development of destructive instruments.

The third order of the question of being overrides the other two both in principle and in fact. In principle, because determinations and focal points now occur according to the domain in which we happen to have or lose our dominion. In fact, because the problems strongly in evidence today, and demanding incessant attention, stem precisely from our inherited condition to establish the priority of construction over encounter. As bequeathed by our own ambitions, the problems themselves are inherently insolvable. For the framework setting the standards of all solutions generates the problems: the more problems we solve, the more we produce new ones.

Addressing the third order of the question of being will remain especially difficult so long as we interpret questions as problems and answers as solutions. And Modernity has bequeathed to us precisely this interpretation: a question has meaning, our heritage now insists, only as it brings into view an obstacle to human will, and an answer has meaning only if it can sell itself as a device for removing the obstacle. Until we overcome this interpretation the question of being will betray us.

§7. *The stakes of the question*

Aristotle tells us that the first order of the question arises in every age, and that it likewise gravitates toward the second order. As founders of responsible public speech, Plato and Aristotle speak to the

human interest in competence: in effective response to given circumstances. Yet, on their accounts, within this human interest lies buried a stake that ultimately overrides such human interest: nature. For this familiar word originally means the powers of growth that belong to what we encounter. We learn to participate in these powers to the extent that we ourselves grow, i.e. come out of our dreams, our parasitical dependencies, our merely vegetable and animal nature.

And are the stakes today not, once again, competence? Competence *is* at issue for each and every one of us. Yet the competence distinctive of our age arises within an organizational framework: the competence of *one* individual receives its warranty from participation in a competence both legislated and defined by the organization. Not because the organization can set the purpose of individual endeavor. Rather, because the individual's competence depends essentially on the mass of information and calculation (databases and software programs) received on faith. Thus modern individual competence is not directly, not fully responsible for anything encountered.

Without responsibility for what is encountered, competence has no measure, no limit (ὕπερ τὸ μέτρον ὄρος οὐδεὶς ἔστιν): anciently, no reason to rein in; currently, no reason to saddle up.

Logically stated, modern competence requires one to participate in a form that encompasses instances. Economically stated, modern competence enacts a shared process of capturing, reforming, and distributing instances. Humanly stated, it serves as a means to consume instances. Now, the second order of the question of being asks us to decide what counts as an instance and what constitutes an instance. The prevalence of modern form springs from and incessantly reinstates an answer to this second-order question: an instance is whatever functions to keep the form functioning. In an iron works or a logging camp, ore and trees are the prime instances. In manufacturing industry, rolls of sheet metal or rolls of paper; in a commercial enterprise, commodities at various stages of readiness for final consumption; in a university, the available literature, databases, hardware and software. In all cases, also the personnel employed to operate the equipment and run the organization itself. Then, too,

collateral organizations: suppliers of equipment and material, infrastructures. And finally those apparently served by the organization, the clientele, whether buyers of goods and services, shoppers at a market, students at a university, patients at a hospital.

Something that functions primarily to keep an human organization functioning is called a fungible. The ores extracted from the earth and delivered to a smelter are fungible: so many carloads weighing so much are interchangeable with another set of the same kind of ore of the same amount. In contrast, I might rightly object if a neighbor borrows a hammer, a painting, or my child and returns to me another hammer, another painting, or another child: the others may be the same in kind, size, number, and weight, but I may, *in my private and personal domain*, hold to the uniqueness of the original.

The modern understanding of form commits us, on the job, to understand instances as fungibles. Understanding (facing, treating) instances as fungible, we ensure that they disappear in their own right. According to the first principle of modernity, of technology, *their* right is *our* right, the “our” being first and foremost public (only then, derivatively and frustratingly, private). Such understanding has evolved during the second half of the 20th century into the depletion, devastation, and pollution of our circumstances. These problems require *ad hoc* solutions. The *question* remains throughout both the problems and the solutions: How are we to understand the cause of the disappearance?

It may seem that technology gives rise to our understanding of instances as fungible. However, our heritage testifies to the opposite: the early modern understanding of instances set the stage for the development of technology in our political economy, our educational system, and our scientific research. Thus we will never be able to adjust our technology to account for any other understanding of instances.

In 1678 Leibniz could argue for the establishment of a universal language, such as we have today: one that would replace Latin (the traditional medium of debate), and would allow intellectuals to cooperate in the development of a system of calculation for handling all instances, whether in medicine, morality, or jurisprudence. The old

saying, perhaps a merchant's joke, that "God made everything by weight, size, and number," Leibniz immediately corrects:

There are some things that cannot be weighed, namely those that have no force or power, and there are also some things that lack parts and thus cannot be sized. Yet there is nothing that cannot be numbered. And so number is, as it were, a metaphysical figure, and Arithmetic is in a way the Statics of the Universe, that by which the power of each thing is explored.¹⁶

Anything that functions simply by weight, size, and number is fungible—by definition. And in Arithmetical and Geometrical work the instances (the apples on the table, the triangles on the board) vanish from the intelligible domain—exactly as coal and ore, lumber and sugar, commodities and money vanish (*are* as bought and sold, traded and consumed), leaving only a ghost of themselves on the ledgers of transaction.

In 1714, a third of a century later, Leibniz returns to the image in his *Principles of Nature and Grace*: the human soul, the spirit of man, differs from the simple soul of other creatures. Each and every being is a mirror of the universe, i.e. *is* in its relations with all others (becomes intelligible to us as we are able to trace such relations). But the human spirit is something more: as the image of Divinity, each of us *is* not only by perceiving the instances God has produced; rather each of us *is* as we produce something that resembles these instances. Most obviously, we dream. But in dreaming we have no control over the instances: dreams do not issue from our volition. More importantly, then, we produce things when awake. And how do we do this? Leibniz answers, following Descartes' new intellectual (rather than artisanal) paradigm:

...discovering the sciences following which God has regulated things (*pondere, mensura, numero*, etc.), she [the soul] imitates in her region, and in the little world in which she is permitted to operate, what God does in the large world.¹⁷

Our own nature appears here in the production of resemblances of God-given instances, a production receiving its license from the discovery of the divine principles of things. These principles, and the

entire intellectual production, require us to understand instances, all things that we might encounter, as fungible in essence.

To understand technology, our inheritance, we must delve into its heart and not simply concentrate on its techniques or on its results. At the heart of our troubles today lies an answer to the question of being that foretells not only what we may encounter, but also prescribes the manner in which we rise to the challenge of any encounter. To overcome technology we must return to the question, one answer to which gives rise to technology.

Each of the three burning issues of our age, the environment, human relations, and government prerogatives, has a now familiar agenda and urgency that attest to our ignorance: there is no guarantee that, even with public acceptance of the agenda, we will address ourselves to the issues.

The environment: depletion, devastation, pollution. Each of the *real* problems appears during a time and over a place: there and then it begs for a solution. The particular problem stems from a convenience: the consequences of the convenience we deplore. But is the issue here simply the greatest convenience for the greatest number? If so, then we bring the modern understanding of form and instance to bear upon the given problems. We want to spread the conveniences out into the future. We bring our expertise to bear on our environment to preserve the dominion of our heirs.

Human relations: violence on the streets, poverty in the ghettos, indignity of unemployment, abuse at the workplace, sex- or race- or handicap-based discrimination, homelessness at home and abroad, technology-driven civil wars among tribal societies. Again, each deplorable case, each particular problem cries out for a solution. No one can remain unaffected. But is the issue here simply that we prevent these problems from descending on ourselves? Does our concern for others stem from a fear that their plights might become ours? Or, recognizing the horrendous inefficiency of such states of affairs, do we wish simply to make more efficient use of human resources? In either case, we bring the modern understanding of form and instance to bear upon a given problem. In the name of enlightened self-interest we plead for efficient responses, for

awareness that long-term benefits require us to heed the problems of others and to suspend some short-term interests for the sake of these long-term ones.

Institutions: the breakdown of faith in leadership. Institutions are those public arrangements holding protective, restrictive, and helping hands over the encounter of individuals with their circumstances: from the United Nations down to the marriage of a man and a woman, with national governments, public school systems, police departments in between. The Enlightenment has left us profoundly skeptical about such arrangements. Pre-Enlightenment versions of the form-instance relation affirm government (polity and its policies) as the manifest standard-bearer of form, the paradigm governing each person's commitment to respond to instances. Our modern understanding insists that established institutions, even a marriage or a university, function properly only as empty frameworks for sustaining the structures engendered self-sufficiently by individuals in the name of Natural Science and Human Sentiment. Based on contracts, institutions provide no substance, nothing to uphold.

What is at issue in the breakdown of institutions? We can hardly answer. On the one hand, we do not want institutions telling us what to do: we refuse to be subjects (a condition we interpret as one of subjection). On the other hand, we insist that the problems regarding the natural environment and human relations be solved, or at least met. But since problems regarding natural and human resources are global, they can only be met... by institutions. The contradiction of our tradition and our condition certainly locates the heart of an often counter-productive dilemma: we cannot live within institutions, but we cannot live without them either. Efforts to think through the inability to live within institutions meet with charges of irresponsibility, while efforts to think through the inability to live without institutions meet with charges of authoritarianism. One tragic result is that we refuse to think the contradiction through at all: to *question* it, or let it call us into question. Yet a contradiction of tradition and condition may provide an opportunity for fruition—*if* we allow it to reposition our thinking of the form-instance relation.

Perhaps this is, and has always been at stake: a repositioning of our thinking, so that we may fully face what faces us.

Without the sense that *our* facing up to things depends not simply on ourselves but also on what faces us, we remain in the first order of the question of being; we aspire to determine how circumstances are (how they have been, how they might be, and how we can make them be or not be): how *they* are, without recalling ourselves as being there to face them. Since our circumstances then have no face, i.e. since they do not show their face, it makes no sense to *question* what underlies the determinations we make. Nowadays, there is already an answer: fungibility. And this answer to the second order of the question unstrings the third order: How can one take an estate as one's own responsibility if the only issue of sovereignty appears to be the promotion of fungibility? This understanding of the issue, established already early in the modern tradition as the goal of intellectual excellence, proves to be the cause of our troubles. Not a cause as a single event in the past that we may freely bewail, nor one we can extirpate from our present condition. Rather, a cause locating that aspect of our inheritance which we have so far failed to appropriate. For so long as we merely appropriate our circumstances in the modern vein we have not yet appropriated the modern understanding by which we tackle the problems which our circumstances pose, and we simply insist on sovereignty over fungibility. Once raised, the question of sovereignty leaves us with no ready-made answers.

Yet our land, our community, and our institutions can only re-become *ours* if the three-fold question becomes ours. And not merely in the guise of the now familiar problems of pollution, violence, and disrespect for institutions. For problems never belong to us but to those endorsing a particular perspective. And problems are solved not by us but by those engaged in, usually hired by some perspectival group. Global problems are always those of others, and these others provide solutions only *ad hoc*.

The question is then: Can each truly understand his or her own work as raising over and over again, and at the heart of the work, the question of sovereignty? A sovereignty allowing the land, the

community, and the institutions encasing the work to become the supportive issues of *our* work?

What might sovereignty mean? The most concrete version of the question of sovereignty is *whether*, not *how*, one can take the *domain* of one's situation as one's own. And in what sense this finite domain entails a commitment to the earth, to the land of our fathers, to our fellows engaged with us in that domain, and to the antecedent regulations of the domain.

Given the particular tasks that weigh on us all, severally, the question of being today will likely require that we begin with the third order. The “we” here being those of us, intellectuals, who *raise* the question. And perhaps we must then consider how this order of questioning bears also on the other two: on how things happen to be and on what might underlie our determinations of these happenings. In any case, we would have to consider the question as bearing down hard on all of us, regardless of our perspective. For the third order of the question of being calls into question whether we can take on a domain allowing us to develop a well formed perspective at all. And only upon taking a domain as our own may we protract the question of being into a question of what can, must, or might issue—or fail to issue—from the perspective.

Notes

1. “Es hieß allerdings die Wahrheit auf den Kopf stellen und das *Perspektivische*, die Grundbedingung alles Lebens, selber verleugnen, so vom Geiste und vom Guten zu reden, wie Plato getan hat; . . .” *Beyond Good and Evil*, Preface (1885).
2. “Man muß das *Sein* leugnen.” *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (KGA), edited by Colli and Montinari, VII₂, p. 143 (spring 1884). For a remark that the battle for existence is not one for survival, but rather one for More, Better, Faster, Oftener, see *Unschuld des Werdens II*, §291 (ed. A. Baeumler; Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1965).
3. “Ich will das höchste Mißtrauen gegen mich erwecken: ich rede nur von *erlebten* Dingen und präsentire nicht nur Kopf-Vorgänge.” KGA, VII₂,

p. 294 (summer-autumn 1884). Citations directly from KGA retain the original spelling.

4. “*Meine Absicht*, die absolute Homogenität in allem Geschehen zu zeigen und die Anwendung der moralischen Unterscheidung nur als *perspektivisch bedingt*; . . .” *Will to Power*, §272.
5. “Man darf nicht fragen: ‘wer interpretiert denn?’ sondern das Interpretieren selbst als eine Form des Willens zur Macht, hat Dasein (aber nicht als ein ‘Sein,’ sondern als ein *Prozeß*, ein *Werden*) als ein Affekt.” *Will to Power*, §556 (KGA, VIII₁, p. 138 [autumn 1885 to autumn 1886]; cf. also §481, KGA VIII₁, p. 323 [1886 to spring 1887]).
6. KGA, VII₂, pp. 178-80 (summer-autumn, 1884). The first two are collected in *Unschuld des Werdens II*, §§258 and 259; the third is collected in the canonical *Will to Power*, §259:
 1. Um *mich* zu erhalten, habe *ich* meine schirmenden Instinkte, von Verachtung, Ekel, Gleichgültigkeit usw. — sie treiben mich in die Einsamkeit: in der Einsamkeit aber, wo ich *alles als notwendig verbunden fühle*, ist mir jedes Wesen *göttlich*.
NB. um *irgend Etwas* schätzen und lieben zu können, muß ich es begreifen als absolut notwendig verbunden mit allem, was ist — also um *seinetwillen* muß ich *alles Dasein gutheißen* und dem Zufall Dank wissen, in dem so kostbare Dinge möglich sind . . .
 2. — Um zu leben, muß man schätzen. Etwas schätzen hat *als Konsequenz alles* gutheißen, also auch das Geringschätzte, Verabscheute: d.h. zugleich schätzen und nichtschätzen . . .
 3. Einsicht: bei aller Wertschätzung handelt es sich um eine bestimmte Perspektive: *Erhaltung* des Individuums, einer Gemeinde, einer Rasse, eines Staates, einer Kirche, einer Cultur.
— Vermöge des *Vergessens*, daß es nur perspektivisches Schätzen gibt, wimmelt alles von widersprechenden Schätzungen und *folglich von widersprechenden Antrieben* in Einem Menschen. Das ist der *Ausdruck der Erkrankung am Menschen*, im Gegensatz zum Thiere, wo alle vorhandenen Instinkte ganz bestimmten Aufgaben genügen. . .
7. *Confessions*, X, 6: “And I replied unto all things which encompass the door of my flesh: ‘Ye have told me of my God, that ye are not He; tell me something of Him.’ They cried out with a loud voice, ‘He made us.’ My questioning them, was my thoughts on them: and their form of beauty gave the answer [*interrogatio mea intentio mea, et responsio eorum species eorum*].” The English translation is that of E. B. Pusey,

which tellingly oscillates between “form” and “beauty” (or inserts both) for the Latin *species*. Cf. also XIII, 33.

8. The change of showpiece from artisan to scientist Descartes expressly advocates in Part Six of his *Discourse on Method* (1637), where he details his arguments for publishing his hitherto unpublished works on optics, geometry, and meteorology:

...au lieu de cette philosophie spéculative, qu'on enseigne dans les écoles, on en peut trouver une pratique, par laquelle connaissant la force et les actions du feu, de l'eau, de l'air, des astres, des cieux et de tous les autres corps qui nous environnent, aussi distinctement que nous connaissons les divers métiers de nos artisans, nous les pourrions employer en même façon à tous les usages auxquels ils sont propres, et ainsi nous rendre comme maîtres et possesseurs de la nature.

A new physics, one enabling us to master and to possess “all the bodies surrounding us” by attuning ourselves to their nature: this is a familiar theme here in Descartes as well as in Bacon. But how should we understand the comparison Descartes draws between the projected “practical philosophy” and the domain of artisanal work?

...knowing the force and the actions [of environing bodies] just as distinctly as we know the various *métiers* of our artisans ...

The new (practical) knowledge, Descartes claims, will focus us directly on the force and actions of natural events. The old (speculative) knowledge has focussed us on the *métiers* of our artisans: on their accomplishments, their services, their powers as evident in what they deliver. Descartes here acknowledges the direction of Scholastic, i.e. Aristotelian philosophy: wonder in the face of the wisdom evident in *πρόησις*. But now, he argues, we can, as intellectuals, know the force and actions of natural events *in the same way* as we know those *métiers*. And we can then employ these forces and actions (of environing bodies and their elements) “for all the usages to which they are appropriate,” i.e. “for the invention of an infinitude of artifices ... but principally also for the conservation of health,” as he directly goes on to say. In short, he intellectual vocation becomes one standing along side practical and productive vocations, competing with them in subduing nature; it ceases to be that of highlighting the dramas of human being engaged within nature.

9. Leibniz struggled fiercely to distinguish between humanly and divinely produced mechanisms; cf. “A New System of the Nature and the Communication of Substances,” §10, as well as “On Nature Herself, or On the Inherent Force and Actions of Created Things,” §§2-3 (pp. 456 and 499 in Loemker's edition, pp. 481-2 and 504-5 in Volume IV of Gerhardt's edition). Divinely produced mechanisms (those of nature) are mechanical no matter how small the parts, unlike human contrivances. —Rousseau also struggled fiercely to distinguish between human and divine sources of law. Consider one passage from *The Social Contract* (1762), II, 7 (edited by R. Grimsley, Oxford, 1972):

Pour découvrir les meilleures règles de société... il faudrait une intelligence supérieure.... Il faudrait des dieux pour donner des lois aux hommes.

...Mais s'il est vrai qu'un grand prince est un homme rare, que sera-ce d'un grand Législateur? Le premier n'a qu'à suivre le modèle que l'autre doit proposer. Celui-ci est le mécanicien qui invente la machine, celui-là n'est que l'ouvrier qui la monte et la fait marcher. ...

Celui qui ose entreprendre d'instituer un peuple doit se sentir en état de changer pour ainsi dire la nature humaine, de transformer chaque individu, qui par lui-même est un tout parfait et solitaire, en partie d'un plus grand tout dont cet individu reçoit en quelque sorte sa vie et son être; d'altérer [Geneva ms.: mutiler] la constitution de l'homme pour la renforcer; de substituer une existence partielle et morale à l'existence physique et indépendante que nous avons tous reçue de la nature.

Like Leibniz, Rousseau assumes that the envisioning of law requires the envisioning of God (in both senses of the genitive); that we distinguish the divine Source of the Plan from the humanly devised enactments taking their cue from the Divine.

10. Nietzsche summarizes the collapse of modernity in the single phrase, “God is dead.” *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, Prologue, §2: Zarathustra puzzles over the Saint's not having heard the news. *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, §125: The crazy man recognizes that the run-of-the-mill atheists understand neither that we ourselves have killed God nor that terrifying consequences of the murder lie in wait for us. Less dramatic thinkers have concentrated on one or another of the murder weapons. For example, R. G. Collingwood, in his *Autobiography* (Oxford, 1939), IX:

The reason why the civilization of 1600-1900, based upon natural science, found bankruptcy staring it in the face was because, in its passion for ready-made rules, it had neglected to develop that kind of insight which alone could tell it what rules to apply, not in a situation of a specific type, but in the situation in which it actually found itself.

Similarly, Henri Bergson, in Chapter Four of his *L'Évolution créatrice* (Paris, 1907) argues that neither the ancient nor the modern understanding of nature allows us to understand the genesis of singulars (note the phenomenological contrast between the child reconstructing the picture-puzzle and the painter before his blank canvas creating something, namely, a singularity in process; Bergson sums up the phenomenological point abstractly: *Néant de matière, le temps se crée lui-même comme forme*). And John Dewey, in Chapter Four of his *Experience and Nature* (New York, 1929) remarks on much the same crime:

The notion [inherited from the Greek thinkers] of knowledge as immediate possession of Being was retained [by modern thinkers] when knowing as an actual affair radically altered. ... If the proper object of science is a mathematico-mechanical world ... and if the object of science defines the true and perfect reality ..., then how can the objects of love and appreciation — whether sensory or ideal — and devotion be included within reality?

Collingwood, Bergson, and Dewey share with Nietzsche a common concern and a tentative solution: a concern for the individually real and for our involvement in fine art, and a solution in the re-evaluation of temporality and in historical critique. In retrospect, we might judge all these thinkers, powerful as they are, as *interregis*: they testify to the death of Modernity and prepare us for what looms ahead. Yet the looming is clear only in its thatness, not in its whatness.

11. Nietzsche insightfully remarks that the achievement of modernity was not the victory of science as the paradigm of life, but much more radically a victory *over* science: the institution of science as *method* rather than as insight (*Will to Power*, §466). Thus training in method becomes absolutely essential for proper education: each must learn one method (a science) in depth in order to break free of the illusions engendered by intellectual work when presented in public (for portraits of the educated and of the uneducated, see his *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches I*, §635).

12. In Martin Heidegger's works we find the firmest steps taken in this direction, especially in the essays collected in *Vorträge und Aufsätze und Holzwege*, some of which are translated in *Language, Poetry, and Thought* (New York, 1971) and *The Question Concerning Technology* (New York, 1977). Heidegger names the post-modern form “*Gestell*” (enframing, functional arrangement) and its counterpart “*Bestand*” (resource, whether natural or human), and argues that we must think of this condition as a fated inheritance demanding careful thought on our part. He also argues that the apparent drive for an adequate picture of the world (*Weltbild*) actually stems from our inherited understanding of the world as a picture (so that we intellectuals tend to assume that we understand something only by getting a picture of it).
13. Karl R. Popper rightly understands the primacy, in modern science, of “knowledge without a knower.” See his *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford, 1972). Both Popper and Heidegger articulate our inherited condition of knowledge, both exhort us to understand it holistically, and both extend their reflections from modern science back to modernity in general. But where the one accepts answers, poses problems, and suggests solutions, the other finds questions, intimates issues, and embodies a response.
14. Werner Heisenberg addresses this question of reference from the standpoint of modern science: whereas many have been willing to see in the developments of modern science a competitor offering a foundation incompatible with our traditional understanding of life and therefore engendering the confusions of war and the like, the power of modern science lies neither in its obvious results of science nor in its new foundations, but in its hidden teaching that there is no foundation at all — we are left with only ourselves.

Wenn man versucht, von der Situation in der modernen Naturwissenschaft ausgehend, sich zu den in Bewegung geratenen Fundamenten vorzutasten, so hat man den Eindruck, daß man die Verhältnisse vielleicht nicht allzu grob vereinfacht, wenn man sagt, daß zum erstenmal im Laufe der Geschichte der Mensch auf dieser Erde nur noch sich selbst gegenübersteht, daß er keine anderen Partner oder Gegner mehr findet. Das gilt zunächst in einer ganz banalen Weise im Kampf des Menschen mit äußeren Gefahren. [Früher, bedroht durch Naturgewalten, jetzt bedroht von anderen Menschen, wo die Erweiterung der Technik keinen Fortschritt sichert.] Der Satz, daß der Mensch nur noch sich

selbst gegenüberstehe, gilt aber im Zeitalter der Technik noch in einem viel weiteren Sinne. In früheren Epochen sah sich der Mensch der Natur gegenüber; die ... Natur war ein Reich, das nach seinen eigenen Gesetzen lebte und in das er sich mit seinem Leben irgendwie einzuordnen hatte. In unserer Zeit aber leben wir in einer vom Menschen so völlig verwandelten Welt, daß wir überall ... immer wieder auf die vom Menschen hervorgerufenen Strukturen stoßen, daß wir gewissermaßen immer nur uns selbst begegnen.

The last sentences, loosely translated:

In earlier ages man saw himself in the face of nature; ... nature was a realm that lived according to its own laws and to which man had to adjust himself and his life in some way or another. In our age, though, we live in a world so entirely transformed by man that everywhere we come up against only structures extracted by man — that, in a sense, we only encounter ourselves.

“Das Naturbild der heutigen Physik,” a talk delivered in the fall of 1953 (*Die Künste im technischen Zeitalter*, Munich, 1954). In the same series Heidegger delivered his talk “Die Frage nach der Technik.” Heidegger agrees with Heisenberg, adding that we moderns do not *in truth* encounter even ourselves, i.e. not ourselves *in our being*.

15. Karl Marx recognizes the transformation into peripheral vision, locating it in the shift from use-value to exchange-value: everything becomes a commodity. Consider *Capital* (1867), I, ii, (on “Exchange”):

Um diese Dinge als Waren aufeinander zu beziehen, müssen die Warenhüter sich zueinander als Personen verhalten, deren Willen in jenen Dingen haust. ... Die Personen existieren hier nur füreinander als Repräsentanten von Waren. ... Was den Warenbesitzer ... von der Ware unterscheidet, ist der Umstand, daß ihr [der Ware] jeder andre Warenkörper nur als Erscheinungsform ihres eignen Wertes gilt. Geborener Leveller und Zyniker, steht sie [eine Ware] stets auf den Sprung, mit jeder andren Ware ... nicht nur die Seele, sondern den Leib zu wechseln. Diesen der Ware mangelnden Sinn für das Konkrete des Warenkörpers ergänzt der Warenbesitzer durch seine eignen fünf und mehr Sinne. Seine Ware hat für ihn keinen unmittelbaren Gebrauchswert. ... Sie hat Gebrauchswert für andere. Für ihn hat sie unmittelbar nur den Gebrauchswert, Träger von Tauschwert und so Tauschmittel zu sein.

The first two sentences loosely translated:

In order to interrelate things as commodities, those who tend to the commodities must relate to one another as people whose will is lodged in those things. ... People here exist for one another only as representors [sales representatives] of commodities.

16. *Die philosophische Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, Gerhardt edition, Volume 7, p. 184 (reprinted by Olms, 1978):

Vetus verbum est, DEUM omnia pondere, mensura, numero fecisse. Sunt autem quae ponderari non possunt, scilicet quae vim ac potentiam nullam habent; sunt etiam quae carent partibus ac proinde mensuram non recipiunt. Sed nihil est quod numerum non patiat. Itaque numerus quasi figura metaphysica est, et Arithmetica est quaedam Statica Unversi, qua rerum potentiae explorantur.

Cf. Leroy E. Loemker's edition of Leibniz' *Philosophical Papers and Letters* (Boston, 1969 & 1976), p. 221.

17. The fuller passage from Leibniz' *Principes de la nature et de la grace fondés en Raison*, §14:

..L'esprit ...n'est pas seulement un Miroir de l'univers des creatures, mais encore une image de la Divinité. L'esprit n'a pas seulement une perception des ouvrages de Dieu, mais il est même capable de produire quelque chose qui leur ressemble. ...des merveilles des songes, où nous inventons sans peine (mais aussi sans en avoir la volonté) ...; notre Ame est Architectonique encore dans les actions volontaires: et decouvrant les sciences suivant lesquelles Dieu a réglé les choses (*pondere, mensura, numero*, etc.), elle imite dans son departement et dans son petit monde, où il lui est permis de s'exercer, ce que Dieu fait dans le grand.

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