On Truthtelling

A Demonstration of the Inseparability of Truth from the Telling of It

by

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But why doth "truth generate hatred" . . . unless that truth is in that kind loved, that they who love anything else would gladly have that which they love to be the truth.

— Saint Augustine, *Confessions*

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1. ***Difficult Beginning*** 1

Starting off with a both personal and philosophical project, I raise the whole issue of *why* this should be (as project). The matter of *how* it should be is a question prompting another that serves as a kind of answer.

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1. Difficult Beginning

It is a hot, muggy, overcast day and I sit here in my little room sweating profusely. At the same time I look for some sort of inspiration, some sort of meaning, some sort of direction, indeed, some sort of future for myself. For the fact of the matter is that, right now, right at this point in my life, I'm afraid of the future, afraid of my age and my aging, afraid of, to speak figuratively for a moment, putting to flight all the romantic songbirds of my soul. Afraid of – and still speaking figuratively – going out of this life not with a bang but a whimper. Is it any wonder then that, mindful of my youthful dreams and what has guided me thus far, I wish more than ever now for a bright star before me?

And what could this bright star be if not, somehow renewed and revitalized, my long-held wish to be a great writer and thinker? A wish that, in my youthful and, indeed, not-so-youthful imagination, was hardly to be distinguished from a both erotic and egoistic fantasy, from imagining a life for myself of high adventure, heroism, and romance? It was in fact upon this rather heterogeneous and even conflicting basis that I set the whole course of my life and imagined at the same time that it would turn out to be, in its own way, cumulative, solid, and substantial. I imagined that it would resemble – on the spiritual plane if not the material – a large tree with an ever-greater number of growth rings.

But for some time now it seems that a part of me has grown cold to all this and, viewing the erotic if not the romantic as being more on the side of normal pursuits than exalted ones, is ready to lurch towards them like a lecher and let go all vain longings and imaginings of the higher sort. While this tendency or temptation has always been alive in me to some extent, it is only recently that it became so strong that I finally caught sight of myself being undone in a spiritual and possibly even worldly sense. That is, by turning myself into – and this no doubt needs to be handled delicately and worked out at length – what is not heroic or not even trying to be heroic but simply successful, professional, sociable, competent, respectable, and well-off.

It is by way of countering this cold front now moving in upon me – this fear of old age, an uncertain future, the loss of a more idealistic and youthful self – that I take on a very personal yet also very philosophical task. A task which is not only one with the subject of myself but the subject of truthtelling. A task which, because of this identification of the personal and the philosophical, cannot avoid a certain amount of self-indulgence on the one hand (as the personal) and presumption, obscurity, and dilatoriness on the other (as the philosophical). A task which, because it is not just about truth but *truthtelling*, cannot be other than complicated and even over-complicated. A task therefore complicated and even over-complicated by resistance to these same negative but necessary traits.

Traits which, while being unacceptable to truthtelling in a predominantly social, polemical, formal, and idealized sense, are also – and this is the whole crux of the matter – ineluctably part of truthtelling. On this last point I can only be firm and dogmatic. I have no more possibility of escaping *this* particular trait than the ones just mentioned. I have no more possibility of being utterly free of a disputable starting point (which for me can only be *indisputable*) than other truthtellers. So it is that, if I'm to tell the truth about truthtelling, I must insist that these traits be both accomplices in the telling as well as elements resisted in it. And this must be done in the face of others who naturally and rightfully insist that these traits have no place in truthtelling.

Of course this strategy of playing both ends against the middle gives me a lot of leeway. But how else can I manage this unwieldy subject? How else can I tell the truth about something

which is by nature multi-faceted, multi-factual, conflict-ridden, changeable, often hegemonic in bearing and yet at the same time subversive and unending? How else but by simply finding out what my liberty and licence are – as well as my limits – as I go along? But of course this involves an extraordinary trust in myself which, despite many lost and wayward moments, I have managed to work up over the years. And although this trust or faith is no guarantee of doing this task well (it goes without saying I'll never do it completely), it must be, as it always is for such enterprises, the gage thrown down with the confidence or recklessness of a try me.

For some reason which should be thoroughly looked into even now, my highest ambitions and aspirations have always been in excess of my talents and abilities. For many years I have found myself acting a bit like Kierkegaard's knight of faith. To say what this means in a few words is to say that, even though I have never been able to win the princess because I have always gone about it the wrong way, I have kept believing I could win her if I went about it the right way. Which meant, as that faith that cannot properly account for itself (or, as Kierkegaard calls it, the paradoxical leap), persisting in the way that has been mine thus far.

But just as there is no easy way to determine who or what this princess is or whether she is more spiritual than material or idealistic than erotic, so there is no easy way to determine what this *thus far* is. What this crooked path I have taken up to now is or has been or whether it belongs more to the present than to the past or to the past than to the present. After all, the fact that I dignify this present by calling it *On Truthtelling* does not in any way prevent the inexorable melding of past and present. It does not do so because both the *thus far* and the past, however truthfully told, cannot be told without prejudice and filling in lacunae. This admission already makes it clear that my project is compromised or is a compromising of itself so serious and radical that, were it not for the fact that I believe that *all* truthtelling is so compromised, I would have to make a second admission and say I have no right to dignify this present way with the title I have.

This leaves me thinking that I'm forced to go on with this task simply because no one else has done it. A task which I'm not at all clear about and yet presumably clear enough about to say that it should be seen as a response to a call to duty and to something very personal. To something very particular, complex, concealed, and concealing. At one and the same time then it seems I'm taking a voyage towards a land already known and, on the other hand, putting my bark in an endless sea for which it is unfit. Were I not to think that all truthtellers are essentially in the same boat, I surely would abandon this frail bark and board some sturdier vessel.

It is shaping up already that, despite whatever sincerity I can bring to this subject, I risk parodying it. And yet I feel there is no other way to get closer to it or to what is essentially intractable about it. A seemingly more serious, sure-footed, step-by-step approach is no doubt appropriate when telling the truth about X or the truth about Truth or, for that matter, the truth about the A, B, C of Being. But when it comes to telling the truth about truthtelling, there can be no violent elimination of such complicating factors as the contradictory, the inconvenient, the illogical, and the invented. Or at least there can be no such elimination except by those who are not willing to question their faith in an admittedly indispensable part of truthtelling which goes by the name of Reason.

And now it strikes me that, with this belief I have that, however indispensable reason is to truthtelling, it is not exclusively so and not even to the point of excluding its opposite, there is something rather specific for me to look into. Obviously many people don't share this belief and, since there is no reason to think that they are any less indispensable than I am to truthtelling, it

becomes a question why they are what they are and why I am what I am.

And now it comes to me that this particular question itself is suggestive of an answer. At least it seems to suggest that, with respect to the distinction I have just given myself as a truthteller, there is a certain ego fixation, a certain ethical, psychological, or physiological orientation, a certain sign of health which can also be a maddening and even disabling affliction, and a certain desire to distinguish myself from others even to the detriment of myself. On the other hand, a contrary element is registered at the very same instant and, moreover, one which could even be called *objective*. Objective to the extent that it is one with the subject of truthtelling and, more precisely, one with its being dealt with in such a way that the inseparability of truth from the telling of it is taken very seriously. What this ultimately means is that, in order to be as thorough as possible in dealing with the matter of this inseparability, it must be treated as being inclusive of the subject which is me and the telling which is mine.

But how do I go about drawing myself into the picture without simply drawing a vulgar picture of myself? Or for that matter, how can I avoid *not* drawing such a picture if it happens to be part of what should be drawn? With this last question, I cannot help but think of Rousseau's criticism of Montaigne and the latter's presumed lack of candour. It wasn't a fair criticism because the times Montaigne was living in were not conducive to admitting the most unseemly aspects of one's private life. On the other hand, if this criticism were redirected towards somebody doing a similar project in the twenty-first century, it would surely be telling. After all, how could one nowadays claim to be painting oneself *tout nu* without revealing the most perverse, unseemly, and humiliating parts of oneself?

As far as I can see, however, the telling of the truth about myself even as a matter of telling the worst can only be guided by one principle. Dedicated as I am to having the best view of myself in a formal or objective sense, I'm at once undeniably and unavoidably ruled by the desire to take the best view of myself in a more personal sense. To think I could do otherwise, to think I could carry on without also carrying along a best view of myself as more or less flattering self-image would already be a defeat, a counter to truthtelling. Everything good or bad about me then can only come to light solely through the view of myself as the present subject struggling hard to be one with the subject of truthtelling.

It now seems appropriate to explain how I got to this subject and how it has taken hold of me the way it has. Explain it not as a preliminary or limited move, however, but as the very attempt to deal with the subject itself. For how can I explain how I got to the present subject without immediately involving myself in it? How can I explain how I arrived at it without at the same time trying to explain why others didn't or, for that matter, didn't even want to? How can I do all this without in a sense going beyond explanation and giving a subjective account which tries to have the same dimensions as an objective one?

What is required then is some line of thought always bearing on truthtelling and yet taking me from the present to the past and back again. A line of thought so unwieldy as to be best introduced by a question. A rather presumptuous, self-flattering, and egoistic question yet, as I believe, a question which goes straight to the heart of my intractable subject. A question which, as I have already intimated, should be handled delicately and worked out at length. A question such as the following: *why should the heroic, such as I named it before and presume to understand it, seem so important to my present undertaking and why should it seem to stretch out over my life and even beyond?*

If I look back towards earliest childhood, I see nothing extraordinary to account for this

state of affairs apart from my incessant, diverse, and wide-ranging fascination with the heroic or rather with something like it. Something much larger and more nebulous and which itself can be called the extraordinary. In saying this of course, I'm not really distinguishing myself from anyone else or at least, if I'm doing so, it is only to the extent that I'm able or allowed to accentuate this fascination and give it a certain trajectory.

If I ask myself what is the extraordinary and its relation to truthtelling, then I'm no better off than if I ask myself the same question about the heroic. Either question is bound up with an account of truthtelling which is also an account of telling the truth about this subject itself. Hence it is one with the subject *of* myself. If I were to start talking about the extraordinary as if I knew what it was apart from the subject *of* myself, I would be generalizing about it on the basis of an obscure area *in* myself without telling the truth about it.

But apart from pointing this area out and admitting to it, how does one tell the truth about it? It seems that one can do so only in a rather mixed or uncertain way and yet only if one chooses one of two ways which usually pass each other like two ships in the night. Two ways of truthtelling which have the distinct character of appearing totally different in the eyes of some and very similar in the eyes of others and, in both cases, with almost an equal number of trained and untrained eyes upon them. With respect to the first, a certain faith in reason holds sway and, with respect to the second, a certain non-faith. But no more does the first manifest itself solely by way of reason than does the second without it.

If I call the first way *speculation* and the second way *storytelling*, then I have already consigned the whole of truthtelling to dealing with the obscure. At the same time it must be admitted that, in speculating myself as I'm doing right now, truthtelling is not primarily understood in the sense of what it is or can be at various stations and along various paths, but only in the sense of what it is or can be as disclosure of origins and ends. Not as repetition but only as *revelation* does truthtelling run up against the obscure and only in such a way that revelation itself must be both repeated and not repeated.

In such a way then I must approach my own situation and its relation to the obscure. I must look into the origins and ends of myself as best as I can. But how do I go about this task which itself seems so obscure? Am I to use the seemingly different paths of speculation and storytelling in order to shed as much light on the subject as possible? Am I to develop some way of proceeding which would allow these two paths to run alongside each other and perhaps coincide? This is a question I don't really know how to answer except by striking out on one or both of these paths and seeing what happens.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

2. Babyhood, Infancy, Childhood

Going back then to the matter of the extraordinary and its relation to the heroic or rather to what it should be called at this time, the *egoistic*, I think both of these must have been present at the very beginning when a young goddess suddenly arose like the sun and filled up all the sky of my happiness. Irresistibly she won me over and took charge of me and covered me with kisses and dallied with me from morn till night. She loved me as no one could possibly have loved me and yet it never seemed to be enough, oh, never enough! For often she would have to leave me and, if it weren't for the promise of her quick return, how miserable I would have been. How miserable I was even on those occasions when, for some reason or other, she was delayed in coming. When she wasn't there for me as I expected. How then I would rant and rave! How I would sob and stir and cry! But then, as if by magic, she would suddenly return and straightaway wipe away all my tears and all my former grief and grievances.

If this totally captivating deity were ever my mother, the memory of it has long since vanished. Or perhaps it has even been suppressed for it is only by suppressing the memories of her right now that I can conjure up the image of myself as having no interest in anything but her. Or rather no interest in anything but that radiant face, those caressing lips, those voluptuous arms, and those enticing breasts. How long it was before the goddess finally stole off and went back to her heavenly abode I'm not sure. All I know is that at some point the woman whom I would later call my mother stepped forth and gave me the kind of care and attention for which I have always been grateful.

It was those infernal times she was absent that must have created the first breach. It was then that another world started to creep into my consciousness. One which remained cold and aloof when, after all my tears had been shed, I would look around and see what was about me as if for the first time. See how things simply stood and silently gaped at me. See how the impassive door would stay shut and not respond to my inner pleadings. See how, while waiting for it to open as of course it eventually would, I could bide my time by experimenting and wondering about this new and strange relation.

If the opening up of another world was the inevitable leaving behind of my mother, then it must have been so only as a rather complicated phenomenon. As the transferring of some element or dimension of what she was to me as the holy and remembered one to that other world. Some measure of perfect joy or pleasure or contentment which would stay with me like an eternal lure and seduction. Like a vague expectation of some overpowering happening, some fabulous encounter, some prodigious visitation, some exquisite movement, some excruciatingly tantalizing approach, arrival, takeover, and consummation.

Yes, there was an unpleasant drift and perturbation in this earliest part of childhood and yet, at the same time, one which did not go entirely without recompense. Into the first breach of the still-powerful bond between us came a growing sense of myself, of my own power and weakness, of my power *in* my weakness. The goddess who was quickly becoming the beloved but merely powerful parent was also becoming the one who was supposed to satisfy my each and every whim. But seeing as how she often displayed a will of her own and did not accommodate me as much as I desired and indeed demanded, I found myself getting more upset and intolerant. Often I would feel a mad impulse to throw off all care and constraint and rage against her helplessly.

Perhaps it was hitting this rocky patch of our relationship which made me turn more and

more to Him. It seemed that I had gotten on an emotional roller-coaster beyond the power of either one of us to stop. The goddess's strange companion had frightened me at the beginning because I mistakenly took him to be an usurper threatening our sanctuary. Later I learned to tolerate his visits and even take an interest in his face and his different-similar babble. But for a long time it was not nearly so pleasant to see or hear him as to gaze upon my mother's lips and watch her incant magical formulas which soothed me as much as her uplifting arms. Eventually this charm reached my own lips and no greater delight could there have been for either one of us than my first utterances. No greater encouragement could there have been than what I received from her excitement and joy. Nevertheless it was somewhere along this line of development that he finally stepped in and helped dispel her powerful hold on me.

I think of my father now as one who, before the time I can remember, took me in hand in his own way. This changing of the guard in a spiritual or educational sense certainly didn't leave my mother out in the cold. Nevertheless it did involve a significant shift which probably took place when I was showing the first signs of a struggling autonomy. A will to assert myself or a will to control which of course was not always self-control and which dismayed my mother at times as much as it delighted my father. More powerful, playful, and ready to amuse me than she was, less constricting and caught up in the routine affairs of life, he would frequently descend from his proud height and, by transforming himself now into a friendly giant, now into a living playground, now into my friend and ally, now into an equal partner, astound and delight me. Of course this contrasted sharply with the topsy-turvy relationship I was then having with my mother and which I'm sure made her not unappreciative of his growing participation.

With such a stalwart mother and a brilliant father and all other things being equal, I ask myself now: shouldn't I have been one of those destined for high places? Shouldn't I have been one of those who goes on to follow with ardour and skill and determination some strategy for success in life?

It seems strange to think now that two such thoroughly honest and decent people weren't made to live their whole lives together. Strange at least when I forget for a moment the fatal flaw in my father's character. A flaw which I like to think has come to me only as a tendency or orientation and which, if I'm right to flatter myself thus, is probably due to the stabilizing effect of my mother. For however close they were in such matters as child-rearing or managing a house and home, a gulf between them opened up on the ethical and emotional plane. On the level of what might be called the day-to-day business of honouring certain commitments.

But if I speak of a fatal flaw in my father's character, it is not to think of anyone being more victimized by it than him. Remembering how much he loved my mother in earliest years and how much he loved his children when I, the eldest, was of an age to pay attention to such things, I have no doubt that his influence upon me was substantial. On the other hand, if it hadn't been for two or three important factors which determined things another way, this influence would have not only been substantial but detrimental.

One of these factors, even if it didn't come into play right at the beginning, was my mother's constancy and devotion. Neither given to histrionics nor to elaborate displays of affection, she moved through the better part of my childhood like an efficient practical-minded flesh-and-blood presence. Instead of being the adored one of my infancy, she was now the multi-purpose parent: part guardian, part domestic, part disciplinarian, part nurse, part coach, part counsellor. So much of what she did was taken for granted by me that it required no small shakeup of our family before I could truly appreciate the level of her commitment.

But it would be wrong to think that, even if such an appreciation took time to actualize itself, my mother could have been the only one responsible for its development. For whatever in earliest years was errant or dysfunctional in my father was certainly well hidden from my eyes. On the contrary, he came before me like a second sun which, scattering all the clouds of infantile sorrow and discontent, poured new light into the home. It was he who, while my mother occupied herself with my newborn sister, capitalized on my natural curiosity and brought the world up close to me. It was he who, still at the time I could barely walk or talk, carried me out into the world and explained its marvels to me and read to me and guided me towards an ever-increasing comprehension of an ever-expanding universe.

Given all this and the fact that his interest in my development abated somewhat later on, I wonder now how it could possibly be that his greatest influence on me was other than during these formative years. And I also wonder how could it possibly be that this influence was not at least in part the errant side of his nature. For as many good traits as my father had and as much as I would like to think he passed them on to me, so there is this other one. So there is this warp or bend or orientation or waywardness which is there in me and which is not so easy to explain or to call good or bad. Or at least not by someone like myself who tries to live this errancy and bring it forth as a value, a goal, a meritorious event. Who believes in fact that truthtelling itself is caught up in a certain amount of errancy.

Perhaps a germ of this other trait was planted in my infant brain and then simply remained dormant for many years. Or perhaps it happened a bit later when those traits that came to me as good solid gifts from a caring mother and a tutoring father were being nurtured and cultivated. It is certain at any rate that, whenever or however it was transmitted to me, my father had long been carrying around a poison in himself. A volatile concoction of two different traits which virtually guaranteed he wouldn't carry on forever and which had already seriously hampered him in life. Two traits which are odd in themselves and yet, kept separate from one another, are not necessarily harmful or at least not to the nth degree. Two traits whose potentially maleficent nature I have often thought of in this way: that to be uncompromisingly honest and critical without being sufficiently self-critical is to have an internal strength or force not equal to the external pressures that one inevitably brings upon oneself.

If any of this reached me in the earliest stage of childhood and had an impact on me, it must have been when my parents discussed matters and forgot my presence for a while. Since my mother could also be quite critical but more in a practical than principled sense, there were at least a few scenes between them of the sort which, except for one significant difference, I witnessed later on. Scenes in which my father was far from being a pathetic figure and in fact could assert himself and argue much better than my mother. Scenes in which I daresay he showed his flair and dominance by castigating all those hypocrites and fools who interfered with him and whom my mother, for some reason, persisted in defending.

Nor was there anything in my father's physical appearance which could have given me reason not to be in awe and fascination and sometimes in fear of him. Red hair, alert eyes, aquiline nose, military moustache, and firm chin, his proud face as it comes to me now remains an enigma when I think of how much letting go and sloughing off it hid. A face of which it could be said that it radiated strength of character and firmness of will along with uncommon intelligence. A face from which I never saw a tear drop. A face which seemed the measure of all courage and nobility. A face which, when a man once warned me to step away from his moving scythe, was capable of such rage that the scythe was dropped and the man punished and chased

away.

As opposed to the growing difference I saw between my mother's and father's personalities and all those differences to be expected between a man and woman raising a family in the fifties, there was an area in which they were absolutely equal in my eyes. To think of it now is to think of what many people throughout all times have benefitted from if they were truly fortunate in their parents. And yet, when honoured in the usual way, it comes across as something rather trite and of no great significance. If I put the matter negatively then, if I say that not once in all my years of growing up was I ever given reason to suspect that either one of them had lied to me, I may be able to do justice to this singular and shared trait of theirs.

Shortly before I was of the age to start grade school, a marvellous thing happened. Taking leave of our old apartment and of the town called Greenfield Park and of even the disagreeable man with the scythe, we moved to another town called Chambly. The brand new bungalow we moved into I had first seen a few months before when we drove out in the car and paid it a visit. At that time it had barely risen out of the ground and earth was piled up all over. I can't quite remember my excitement on that occasion but I'm sure it was tied up with the illusion of leaving behind forever all boredom and discontent.

The several years that followed were of course far from being free of minor setbacks, disappointments, and discomforts. Yet I don't want to dwell on these for I find them now to be of slight importance. On the other hand, it is virtually impossible for me to exaggerate the esteem and even wonder in which I hold these years as an age of discovery. It goes without saying that this sentiment or judgement comes with a certain bias since I am forced to view this stage of my life through the teleological lens of what I am now and what I have long thought I should be.

Feeling myself warranted to express the emotional side of this matter and to counteract such dry statements as the above, I sing the following hymn of praise to my childhood:

Oh, days of childhood long and rich!
How will I ever do justice to you?
How will I ever be able to describe
the world you brought before my senses?
A world so rich and open and free and easy.
A world so challenging and interesting and promising too.
A world perfect for the adventurous and imaginative boy I was.
A boy not at all lonely and introverted as he was to become
but taken up by friends and family and school and activities.
Taken up by such a range and diversity of things
that it staggers me now to think about it.

After all, did not this boy who is so distant from me now go out regularly on botanical and biological and even geological expeditions in the vast field out back? Did he not collect stamps and coins and leaves and butterflies and bees and spiders and matchbooks and sparkling pieces of granite? Did he not build model aeroplanes of all kinds and birdhouses and tree forts and snow forts and indoor forts with his younger siblings? Did he not also invent household games with them? Did he not play baseball and football and soccer and hockey as well as take swimming lessons and go out for track and field and fish on occasion? Did he not shoot marbles and pitch cards in the schoolyard? Did he not fight with boys who were tough and thought they

could get the better of him? Did he not play cards and checkers and chess and other board games with his best friend? Did he not belong to the Wolf Cubs and go out on camping trips? Did he not go to birthday parties and play games like spin-the-bottle and even have – lucky one! – a couple of childhood sweethearts? Did he not have a bicycle on which he could ride all over? Did he not climb a distant mountain on two occasions with a friend? Did he not adventure along the banks of the Chambly Basin and the noisy, fast-flowing Richelieu River? Did he not hold down two paper routes at one time? Did he not play a musical instrument? Did he not draw and sketch? Did he not write short verse? Did he not peer avidly into three sets of home encyclopaedia? Did he not also peer through a microscope and perform experiments with his chemistry set? Did he not give a couple of speeches at the school as part of a competition? Did he not rank consistently at the top of his class and win awards every year?

Perhaps it is not so strange to look back and find one's childhood an extraordinary thing. Although unique to each and every one of us, it has that common quality, at least in retrospect, of being exorbitant and full. When I look back at mine, it takes on the semblance of rapid growth achieved along several different lines. And though I'm well aware that there are people who could vaunt their childhood much more than I, I remain bedazzled by the number of things I was willing to get into or try my hand at. Apart from what school forced me to do systematically, there was little to discourage me from being as random and wide-ranging in my activities as possible. Certainly I can see this trait carrying on later in life such that, given the norms of specialization, it could easily be considered an aberration.

It remains a question for me then why I didn't grow up imagining, valuing, or thinking about a special course more than I did. Certainly it wasn't for lack of examples or models coming to me through the school or by way of books and TV. Indeed, a veritable army of professional and accomplished types marched before my eyes and I often dreamed of being now a pilot, now a sailor, now a laboratory scientist. In this of course I was no different from millions of other children who imagine great things for themselves and then either wash out in life or learn to settle for second-best or go on to become successful people. Of these three groups it is probably a tossup whether I belong to the first or to the third but what I surely don't belong to – or at least never wanted to belong to – is the second.

From the beginning I did extremely well in school and, thanks to my father, had a head start on the others. I had also benefitted from a couple of years of pre-school in Greenfield Park. Before I entered the first grade then, I not only knew my alphabet but how to spell a number of words. My report cards full of A's were always a source of pride and personal satisfaction. At the same time I never skipped a year or was involved in any sort of accelerated program. I always did my homework on my own and my parents, as far as I can remember, were not particularly concerned about how I went about it. Being energetic and conscientious by nature, I always did what I was supposed to do and, if there was any intimidation or fear involved, it unquestionably came from what a teacher might have to say and not from anything my parents would do.

No special reason was ever given to me then to think that learning stopped at school or even that school learning was more important than learning outside it. Of course I didn't go about consciously drawing lessons from all quarters but neither was I in the habit of making a big distinction between one sphere of learning and another. While working on a problem in arithmetic or flipping through one of the *Books of Knowledge* or while going out on a field trip or playing in the field behind our house, I was aware of little more than the line which separates adult authority from free play and independence.

Apart from the usual amount of scoldings, reprimands, and restrictions, my parents pretty much gave me a free rein. At a time when one of the boys in my class wasn't allowed to ride his bicycle further than the end of his street, I was allowed to make the two-mile trip to his house. Already I had been given a bicycle for my birthday which, though a marvellous acquisition, was far too big for me. Standing on the pedals fitted with wooden blocks, I would go about determined to get bigger in order to get better. And after a couple of years had passed and I had succeeded in growing a few inches, I could not only do without the blocks but sit precariously on the seat. From then on it was a matter of spending long summer days exploring Chambly and the surrounding area.

Perhaps I should recapitulate a bit. So far I have said a few things about the extraordinary which would indicate that it first came to me like a heavenly apparition. Of course there were no words or thoughts for what I experienced then but just the wonder and pleasure and rapture of being taken up by the One and Only. But all too quickly this condition changed and I was confronted with a world which, although sometimes cold and distant, strangely beckoned to me. Not yet did I have the sense of inheriting an increasingly expanding kingdom but rather the one of still being caught in a cocoon around which there were vague noises, movements, and activities. Gradually the world changed its countenance to become a vast biodome whose roof was blue or grey or starry black while the rest down below was chequered, coloured, and chambered. The ever-changing sky was grasped and admired by me long before I knew what other marvels lay about.

Down in the basement of our house my father installed a couple of swings. Always the one to invent some sort of game, I would pretend with my oldest sister that, while swinging back and forth, we were two fighter pilots communicating by radio. Sometimes my father would come down and scare us by pretending to be the Old Man on the Mountain. But other times he was busy making things like our large kitchen table and the L-shaped bench that partially went around it. He was particularly active around the house at this time and managed not only to finish off part of the basement but do a fair bit of landscaping. First there were huge piles of sod to make our front and back lawns. Then there was a huge pile of heavy colourful rocks to make our rock garden. Finally there was a huge pile of square plates to make our patio. But one day, as the most tremendous feat of all, he brought home a TV and set it up in the living room

But it was only sometime later – perhaps when I was nine or ten – that my father spoke to me about the ancient Greeks. It is possible that he was already on the decline for I don't remember him repeating this nocturnal lecture. While pacing me back and forth under a starry sky, he talked about the search for truth. He told me it was a very noble enterprise but not always welcomed or appreciated. In particular he dwelt on a man called Socrates who wasn't afraid to ask questions. When Socrates got into trouble with some influential people and was brought to trial and told to change his ways, he refused. He continued to do just as he always did in spite of knowing he would die for it. My father told me that Socrates had character because he remained true to himself. On the other hand, his accusers, even though seeming to be dignified and respectable, were hypocrites because they were willing to tell lies and half-truths to win their case and be successful.

I certainly don't want to exaggerate the impact of this story but neither do I want to overlook it. A story which I have been forced to bring forward as the substance of his discourse on that particular night because, truth to tell, I don't remember well what he said. Did he talk about Socrates? Did he talk about him in a way which perhaps I didn't understand? Did he

nonetheless talk about him in a way which resonated in me? In a way which had something to do with his own life? With a need to prop himself up in the face of his own Athenian enemies?

It may be that on that particular night he brought me close to something which at least suggested the struggle he was involved in. The kind of struggle which usually goes undetected at the deepest level because it operates not only at the level of pitting one version of the truth against another, but at the level of pitting the value of truth against other values. Such values as are implicated in protecting the state of the world in its diverse manifestations and at any particular moment from too much truth: power, profit, position, prestige, practise, and the like.

Even if my father never had viewed himself as a great fighter, it is possible he still thought he was involved in an important battle. A battle of the kind that Socrates was involved in. A battle not only against the hypocrites of the world but all social pressures to conform. It is possible that under the starry sky my father signalled to me what he was going through. The story of Socrates then would have simply been a way of passing on to me its universal significance.

It is odd that even to this day I have no precise idea of what he did for a living. Certainly he worked for an aircraft company and at one time had a promising career there. Certainly he occupied a position of some responsibility. But beyond these bare facts all is fragmentary and uncertain. As far as I can remember, he never took me to his office (if, indeed, he had one) or brought somebody home from work or discussed what he had done during the course of a day or complained about some matter which would have prompted questions from me. And yet for several years he provided for my mother and three, four, and then five children and took us, sometimes all together and sometimes one or two of us, on various outings. All of this now puzzles me and still leads me to ask such questions as why did he take me on a tour of a newspaper plant and not to his factory? Or why did he take me to a university to meet some students and not to meet colleagues and workers?

But of course what became a question for me later was hardly one for me then. Whatever minor disturbances registered in my psyche certainly didn't make me doubt the stability of our home. Always active with friends and always doing well at school, I noticed no ominous signs on the horizon. And with five active children in the household, there were certainly no lack of distractions. On a few occasions my father got a bit rough with me but no more than many fathers do with misbehaving children. The worst I can say is that there were times I no longer viewed him as a perfect dad and perhaps even imagined some other. And although it is true he didn't spend much time with me later on, who was I then to think this wasn't perfectly normal?

Who am I now to say what was truly going on then? Did my father have a drinking problem? Yes, but to his credit he kept it out of sight and to my mother's credit she made sure it was. After the first two or three years in Chambly, he hardly ever came home for supper. Caught in a bind between hating his bosses and having to hold onto his job, he resentfully put up with this situation for a number of years. He did this by drowning his anger in alcohol and releasing it in bitter talk with cronies. But of course the drinking only created other problems and didn't address the main one. It was only a matter of time before he finally caused trouble at work and destroyed what was left of his career. Blackballed from the industry, he turned to selling insurance. Now it was apparent even at home that the times were out of joint. Suddenly macaroni and powdered milk became staples. Suddenly there were harsh words being uttered and suddenly he was taking over my sisters' bedroom while my three sisters joined my mother in the main one.

Just about the time things started to unravel for us, I was making a definite break with

childhood. Of course even at an earlier stage I had left behind the habit of confiding all to my mother. What was possible to tell her when I transgressed out of ignorance was no longer so when I transgressed at will. Slowly and often quite painfully I became aware of myself as having a social side forced to be different from a private one – a more personal, self-indulgent, spontaneous, and experimental one. Now as the bearer of necessary secrets, truthtelling became for me a more conscious, careful, and taboo-ridden affair. Society itself seemed to encourage this. Besides certain functions and parts of the body, there were other unpleasant matters everyone knew about but largely kept to themselves. But then there were these other strange impulses which I experienced and seemed unique to me. Shameful impulses such as being attracted to my sister and sneaking into her bed at night and fondling her and committing this act more than once. And of course all this in spite of fear and remorse and guilt. On the other hand, I was made aware of what I was capable of if I thought I could get away with it. And this in spite of all these thoughts and feelings which impeded me. My innermost reason and justification for exploiting my sister based themselves solely on there being no other way to appease my libidinous longings.

When I think now of the beating my father would have inflicted on me had he ever found out, it makes me wonder how I ever could have risked it. Is it possible that I sensed he was having his own problems and in a sense out of commission? Be that as it may, his taking over my sisters' room put an end to the affair. And shortly thereafter the signs of his decline became conspicuous. How else to explain my uneasiness and foreboding when he wouldn't get up until late in the morning and only after my mother had been haranguing him for some time? How else to explain the inordinate amount of time he spent in bed or around the house? Or the black insurance books not filled with appointments but doggerel verse? Or his sudden interest in improving his penmanship? Or the psoriasis which increasingly afflicted him and caused him to set up a private area out back where he would lie in the sun for hours? Or his sudden interest in religion and church-going?

At the very beginning of this growing awareness that all was not well with my father, I still didn't realize how threatened our home and family were. I was in grade seven and, as luck would have it, I was blessed with one of the best teachers I have ever had. Mr. Beach was an energetic, kind, honest, and demanding young man who wasn't afraid to stray a bit from the curriculum. Always expecting the most from his students, he told us more than once that we should develop good work habits and never be satisfied with a mediocre effort. From the very beginning he took an interest in me and I, for my part, worked hard to please him. I'm sure it was this state of affairs – my admiration for him and my devotion to school work and athletics – which kept me on track the last year in Chambly. No doubt it also helped me to deal with an incident which occurred later in the spring and shook me up quite badly.

Insisting that I accompany him to church one morning, my father waited outside on the street for me while I, hanging back in the house, refused to heed his calls. All of a sudden he came back, took hold of me, and pulled me down towards the basement. Sobbing and desperately trying to fight him off, I lost control of myself and called him some vile names. He punched me once and then went back outside as quickly as he had come. My mother, having stood by helplessly during this brief struggle, then told me for the first time that she was planning to leave him.

A certain brutality now entered my heart which turned me completely against him. To be sure, little did I see of his suffering except perhaps its most flagrant manifestation. But instead of

feeling pity for him whenever I saw this outward sign, those hideous psoriatic sores covering his body, I felt offended. I felt there was something indecent about his being naked in the backyard and flaunting his affliction and risking a neighbour or visitor seeing him. I suppose these sentiments were not unnatural for one who had been raised as I had been and then confronted with a person letting himself go so completely. After all, hadn't he been the one to teach me about character? Should he be surprised then if I now turned my back on him? Or did he think that character had nothing to do with being strong and courageous and wise? Or with being true not just to oneself but to others?

But perhaps it was not just being true to others that I had on my mind then. Perhaps it was also being true to myself in a more enlarged or imaginative sense. Is it possible that I, who at age thirteen had never been versed in the Aristotelian or Nietzschean doctrine of the great-souled type (but perhaps the Platonic or Socratic one), already had some such figure as my standard? If so, it must have developed rather idiosyncratically. For years I had been devouring comic books featuring the exploits of various superheroes. This fantasy realm of extraordinary powers and events certainly appealed to me and made me think of other worlds where the limitations of this one no longer were in force. This childish indulgence would no doubt have been insignificant except for the fact that another current of reading had swept me up at the same time. While I was gorging myself on the trials and tribulations and inevitable triumphs of the indestructible do-gooder, I was also taking in and observing a much more vulnerable, dubious, limited but in some ways more impressive type. With a series of paperback booklets called *Classics Illustrated,* I devoured such works as *The Iliad, Moby Dick*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Lord Jim*, and *Hamlet.* In this way I was continually being tossed back and forth between the realm of the fantastic and the realm of the tragic. Inevitably the latter made me think more deeply not only about death and dying, but the whole course of a life leading up to these.

On one occasion well before all the troubles engulfing my family came to pass (I was probably only eight or nine at the time), I was out with my father on a leisurely drive. At some point we passed an impressive building with spacious grounds all around it. He then informed me that it was a private school and that, if he had been able to afford it, he would have sent me to one. I'm not sure if this remark had an immediate effect on me or made me think that I had somehow missed out in life. Possibly I imagined that, if I had been able to wear a uniform and go to a distinguished school, I myself would have been more distinguished. But whatever the case, such a thought would have played but briefly on my emotions and then been consigned to the might-have-been. As in the case of other such passing thoughts and vague longings, it would have been buried in the recesses of my brain like the remainder of a dream. Like the reminder of a more privileged life being led in some stately palace with storybook surroundings.

But any element of self-pity in me at the time of the family breakup was overridden by childish notions of future glory. Having always distinguished myself at school, I expected to continue in this vein as well as open up other areas of accomplishment. In particular I imagined myself becoming a much better athlete than I had hitherto been. Lying in bed at night and dreaming of such possibilities, I was oblivious to the death of my childhood. It never occurred to me that what lay ahead could possibly turn out to be more distressing and humiliating than what was behind me or even what I was currently going through. As far as I was concerned, suffering and failing in life were not attributable to life itself. It was only weakness or error which caused them. If I did see anything inherently treacherous about this earthly condition, it was only in a dramatic or epic sense. It wasn't possible for me to think that it could be found in a daily and dull

routine. In a slow wearing down of the spirit even to the point of its being crippled and broken.

And yet already had the invisible worm of moral incertitude found its lodging in me. Found its little port of entry in that part of me which was torn between one set of values and another. It was at a time when bills weren't getting paid, when money was tight, and, despite all this, my mother was putting aside what she could for our so-called vacation out West. With my father more or less out of commission and in a kind of grotesque stupor, my mother went about making the final preparations. A few close friends and neighbours helped her in this endeavour and I myself helped by turning over my modest earnings. This money came from two paper routes I was holding down at the time as well as an additional job on the weekends. Though I felt an obligation to help her and even took pride in doing so, I didn't particularly like the weekend job which unfortunately turned out to be less honourable than lucrative. Not only did it require going door-to-door and confronting a lot of people who weren't always friendly, but also making use of a prepared spiel which was clearly misleading. Instead of revealing to potential customers that I was being paid a commission for every new subscription, I told them that I would receive a certain number of points and that, if I racked up enough points, I would then win a fabulous prize. All this nonsense was put down on paper for me to learn. Besides the opening address, various arguments were also there to deal with commonplace objections. For example, if a person were to tell me that they got all their news from the TV or radio, I was to reply, with all the wisdom of a thirteen-year-old, that only a newspaper could provide in-depth coverage.

My mother was never one to expect me to do anything against my conscience and so I'm sure she would have advised me to quit the job if it were truly troubling me. But the fact is I didn't mention the problem to her and I think the reason for this is that, if I had used it as an excuse to avoid difficulty at this critical time of our lives, I would have felt weak and ineffectual. I probably would have thought that, having not conquered my misgivings for the sake of the greater good, I myself had failed and was now following in the footsteps of my father.

But if I had truly managed to stigmatize and root out weakness and ineffectuality as I perhaps thought I had, the feeling of being weak and ineffectual had barely begun to afflict me. How much I was going to suffer over the next few years for the lack of a Mr. Beach. For the lack of someone whom I could have admired and looked up to and respected. Someone who, if things weren't going well or if I failed at some task or project or if I was simply feeling bad for no apparent reason, would have offered me good sound advice and encouragement as he had done on more than one occasion.

So it was that the move from Chambly to Winnipeg was the transition from all that I was as a child to all that I would become as a man. It was not only innocence and naivety that I left behind but also the untroubled sense of myself. In Chambly I had enjoyed for several years all the fruits of a nearly perfect childhood. I had lived in a fine house in a beautiful town with a wonderful family and plenty of friends. I had enjoyed recognition and success from a young age and was pleased with the general order of both human and natural events. Only at the very end did I experience some rough handling on the part of life. If it had been otherwise, if my family had kept together and my father had remained reasonably whole and sound, I might have gone down a much different path and not have remained so unconsciously devoted to his.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

3. Adolescence

As an adolescent I experienced my life as being ordinary only in that painfully contradictory way of living it as a destiny. Living it then on the two contrasting levels of the intellectual and the imaginative. The first was often a sense of deficiency and letdown while the second was often a burgeoning hope and dream. The first the rite of passage I took cognisance of but, despite this awareness and despite whatever tricks of radiance promised a great and glorious future, the lack of confidence and reassurance that all the heterogeneous and motley welter of things could be redeemed. This often bitter-sweet refrain of my innermost thoughts and feelings was always taking leave of but never failing to rejoin the constant key in which my fantasies were played. For despite all setbacks and disappointments, I still went about thinking some miracle was in the offing, some radical transformation, some inner movement or outer development that would revolutionize the seemingly flat, humdrum, and uninspired aspects of my life. Perhaps in saying this, I'm not saying much more than that the idea of the extraordinary was firmly planted in me and never once took its leave.

I suppose I was looking for one of those little tricks of radiance that, had it been in my power, would have gone on indefinitely (and this, as the naive turn of my thoughts towards the future, was itself the true sign of my having left childhood) when one of my uncles, shortly after our arrival in Winnipeg, suggested I go spend some time on his ranch. During the two or three weeks I was there, I was in the company of a young man who was kind to me and gave me my first experience of being treated like an adult. And this I can say despite and all the more for a small incident that didn't show him as being particularly kind on one occasion and to which I reacted with child-like tears. For whatever the cutting remark he came out with then, it was part of our day-to-day sitting in the kitchen or working outside and my being able to listen to him express his views on many subjects.

Finding out from him that my uncle was a spendthrift and a gambler was one thing. But finding out that he was with a monied woman who was largely responsible for keeping him in the chips was another. If I had never laid eyes on this decidedly unpleasant person (I can't say we met because she largely ignored me) who owned the ranch and was paying most of the bills, perhaps I wouldn't have felt as repulsed by this as I did. As it was, I could hardly believe that such a man as my uncle, virile, proud, and always carrying himself around like the proverbial cock of the walk (he was an avid hunter, had owned a small plane, and, during the Second World War, had been a deep-sea diver), would let himself get into such a – at least seemingly – humiliating position. It seems that Ross, his hired hand, inadvertently drew the picture of it and made me reflect on something I definitely didn't want as *my* destiny.

Which brings me to my second uncle who put the first one in the shade when it comes to a preoccupation with property and business. Owner of a real-estate agency and a racehorse farm, he was a man definitely in a hurry. Yet it has to be said that, despite this, he helped my mother in the beginning and took me under his wing. But this care or concern for me certainly didn't extend to my personal life or emotional well-being. He was friendly enough when the mood was upon him but could also be cold and insensitive. He never abused or exploited me the four summers I worked for him but neither did he do anything that wasn't in his interest. As for the rest, it is enough to say that, many years later, I found out what kind of tricks he could play on

innocent and helpless people.[1]

But I saw enough shenanigans of a lesser sort going on those summers at the racetrack to make me realize that honesty only stretches so far. That though it functions as an active principle most of the time and as an ideal virtually all of the time, it can be suspended whenever it gets in the way of other values. I wasn't particularly put off by this since I derived from it a sense of my own moral superiority. With a certain youthful naivety, I felt I was capable of some higher purpose or mission that would also be honest through and through. I would be able then to avoid the worst of the human lot that I took to be selling oneself off by dribs and drabs. Of course I had little understanding then of all the ramifications of such an idealization and so continued to think for a long time I could win a great deal.

On this note I should mention that a certain contradiction or tension has always been a part of my life and was even then felt by me. A tension which perhaps can best be summarized by saying that, while I imagined myself growing up straight and true so I might take up some noble pursuit, what I desired most immediately and sometimes with reckless abandon were the things of this world. In brief, I hungered for sexual gratification and social recognition as if they were the summit of all human happiness.

The sort of school and classrooms I was thrown into as an adolescent were normal enough. The teachers were invariably competent without being brilliant. The students were reasonably friendly without anyone overwhelming me with friendship. (I found no one to play Tom Sawyer to my Huck Finn.) My fellow students were divided into the usual three types: those who excel in class, those who excel outside it, and those who fall somewhere in-between. It was in this middle group I found myself because I no longer wore the laurels I had formerly enjoyed.

It strikes me now that, at an age when many people play the rebel for perhaps the one and only time in their lives, I was unquestionably conservative. Though I didn't run across much that was outrageous as a junior high and high school student, there were always at least a few students who didn't sit in class as docile as I did. That I never took it into my head to emulate them even though there were some I definitely admired is a point that, in retrospect, seems significant. Even though I continued to be devoted to physically and mentally developing myself,

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1 His name was Harry and, when I was about fifteen, my uncle brought him out to the racehorse farm. He lived in the small tack room that was in the barn and that I myself had spent a summer in. He was a man in his fifties who was very grey and grizzled and hardly spoke to anyone. He spent most of his time either in the tack room or else cleaning stalls and feeding and watering the horses. All I knew about him at the time was that he had been in the Second World War, suffered shell shock (as I remember someone telling me), and spent many years in a psychiatric hospital. Presumably my uncle was doing him a good turn by taking him on. (I certainly can't say he took him *in* because Harry never lived anywhere but in the barn.) It was not until some fifteen years later that I got wind of another side to this story. It happened when I ran into Harry shopping and reeking of horses in a downtown store. To my great surprise, he recognized me and began talking in a way that hardly reminded me of the silent figure who went about doing farm chores. Furthermore, I found out that, despite his sixty-odd years, he owned a small motorcycle and used it to get away from the farm on occasion. Living and working on the farm over a number of years had clearly done him a world of good. He gave credit to my uncle for his improved spirits and state of mind and, given what he was soon to tell me, this was a remarkable thing. In a rather offhand way, he came out with the surprising fact that, during all the time he had been living and working on the farm, my uncle had been having him sign and hand over the monthly checks that came from the Department of Veterans Affairs and were rightfully his as a disabled war vet. Presumably this arrangement was based upon the understanding that Harry should pay for his room and board. The problem with this was that, apart from being far more than what would normally be charged for a few groceries and lodging in a barn, my uncle neglected to pay Harry for any of his work.

I was now confronted with a shakeup that went very deep. Despite winning a friend or two and a modest amount of acceptance from others, I was highly conscious of desiring the complete fulfilment of desire. Indeed, there was a part of me that, if I somehow could have had it, would have sold off the other part with dismaying alacrity.

Viewed from where I stand now, the fact that I have never abandoned my childhood sense of what I should be or turn out to be is not a simple affair. It is not simply due to some durable or commanding trait that made me hold to my course despite every obstacle. No, the situation was always much more complicated and precarious because, in order to be what it was, it depended on a certain stinginess that life is often guilty of but, in retrospect, to be commended for. I think the best way to put it is to say that, had I been a bit more outgoing or physically attractive, I would have joined that group of socially assured and active teenagers who seemed to bear all happiness with them. I would have been swayed over to their values and, at least for a time, changed to fit in with them. I would have likely found less and less advantage in saying strictly what I thought and more advantage in pleasing others.

Things falling out as they did, some nugget of resistance remained in me and kept me from making the least overture to those I secretly admired and envied. To be sure, shyness and timidity played no small part in this but, important as these factors were, they should be weighed against another. Even then I had a strong sense of not wanting to let myself (or others) down and so, had it not been for an ideal or principle of this sort operating in me, I would have surely found a way to get over my hangups and be the type of person that, apart from this principle, I wanted to be.

On the other hand, I felt I was committing a transgression every time I wanted to gratify myself as well as shame that I was unable to do so. Wanting only the most beautiful and voluptuous, I more or less set myself up for a good deal of heartache. Of course there was always the outlet of imagining myself the irresistible hero who would one day win his princess. Although I was never quite clear on what sort of hero I would be, I fantasized an encounter, event, or development so wonderful and overwhelming that no material considerations would enter into it.

After having completed what was a rather unpleasant year at school, I spent the whole summer alone on my uncle's racehorse farm. Doing various chores and more or less looking after the place, I had ample time for all sorts of thoughts and daydreams. And despite the profound longing I often had for a bosom friend, this hermitage-like existence was not without its charm. Indeed, it allowed me to give my imagination free rein while I worked hard all day and felt my adolescent body grow stronger. I also had the opportunity to contemplate many diverse things as well as experience poignant moments of natural beauty. An invincible sense of optimism sometimes would descend on me because I knew I was still tender in years and had so much ahead of me. It was like a promise of being able to lift myself out of all that seemed still too mean and harsh. I naively thought that, simply by going from boyhood to manhood with a wondrous hope and expectation, I would eventually come to realize them.

But well do I know that the resemblance I bore then to a young Rousseau goes much further than simply contemplating the beauty and wonder of nature. Just as there were occasions on which that sensitive soul plunged into something crude and animal-like, so there were occasions on which I suspended all thought of becoming a hero and became instead a gross scallywag ready to employ any ruse to feel up his younger sister. And although this taking advantage of her ended without serious mishap (but this is an open question and more remains to

be said), I was nonetheless starting to get a glimmer of what a monster I could turn into.

As I grew ever more aware of how much I was kept in check by such forces as shame and humiliation, it became ever more difficult for me to think of myself as being directed solely by some *higher* nature. It seemed to me then that I was flagrantly lacking in purity and that, only if life weren't so stingy and yielded more to me, I would straightaway ascend to my proper rank and station. But while there were definitely those occasions on which I felt I was capable of communing with all that is lofty, so there were those which were not inspiring and even testified to some gross deficiency.

What I count my later wisdom of seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary was of course far from me then. On the other hand, so much of what I experienced was still new and strange that, even if it inevitably brought with it a good deal of disappointment, I remained unflaggingly hopeful. And this despite thinking that, because my life wasn't filled with the intensity and excitement of an epic film, there was something wrong with it.

I was still too young at this time to distinguish between affairs of the heart and affairs of the mind. And to know that, when it comes to the former, the greatest and most intense moments of happiness are difficult to sustain even in favourable conditions. Such being the case, on the rare occasions when some girl I was attracted to showed an interest in me, I immediately took this to be the standard of what pleasure and happiness should be. At the same time I was so sensitive to any falling off from this that a truly painful state always lay as close to my heart as shadow to sunlight.

But the truth of the matter is that some female Mephistopheles could have prompted a radical transformation. There is a degree of voluptuousness and eroticism which, had it been unleashed early in my life, would have made short work of my highest aims and aspirations. Being seduced almost against my will by such a power would have been like dying to myself. It would have conquered me almost without a struggle because it would have offered me what I desired most and without the long hard struggle of winning it. Without the exacting and demanding business of changing myself in order to win it. That is, by a certain conformity, by no longer keeping faith with what the other side of me had to offer. But the fact that no such power ever came into my life meant that I could only be tempted on a few brief occasions. Or if I go so far as to exonerate myself of blame in my worst transgressions by hypostasising this temptation, I can say that it sometimes took the form of those who became vulnerable to me. By this lapse of responsibility I'm able to describe this power as well as my weakness and at the same time the very zone where I was capable of risking all.

How much stands or falls then on these powerful influences which the world brings to us when we are very young or else keeps at a distance. I have often cursed the lack of eroticism in my life (which essentially means the lack of sex) and yet I know that, precisely because of this lack, eroticism has constantly recharged my highest aims and aspirations. Whatever I suffered on account of this lack was always tinged with a certain melancholy never far from a resurgence of hope that some day all would turn out well. Because these imaginings always remained vague yet consummate and exalting, I never thought of meeting a woman and getting married in a real down-to-earth sense. Rather, it was always as the happy stumbling upon and being swept off my feet by the perfect partner and playmate. Anything less froze my blood because it seemed to make the game of life hardly worth the candle. In this way I set my sights very early on a sort of perfection which could never be attained and which, far from being the religious or utopian visions that sweep others off their feet, manifested itself as the will to be worthy of this imagined

lover.

But whatever this will to perfect myself was in its earliest and indeed later stages, it was certainly no attempt to purge myself of the erotic. Never having been subjected to the worst of religion and always in fact free to give it the critical eye, I couldn't relate to it or at least a good part of it except as a bloodless adjunct. The short period of Bible studies forced on me when I was eight (it was an aged and very unpleasant teacher called Miss Mills who took up these early morning readings) hardly did more than introduce me to the Old and New Testaments as literature. Unlike Rousseau and other Christian thinkers past and present, I didn't grow up in surroundings filled with the ardent desire for personal salvation. The most that can be said is that the element of purity in religion, however humble and austere, had its impact on me. A church spire or a story drawn from the Bible certainly inspired thoughts of a less tawdry way of existence. By contrast to what I often felt inside and saw around me, this world of religion seemed to speak only of the simple, the pure, the purposeful, and the highly significant. Not jangly life but solemn music. Not superfluous or incoherent utterances but lofty speech and impeccable diction.

And it was a world certainly not short of the extraordinary. The creation of heaven and earth in seven days, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the parting of the Red Sea, the temptation of Christ by the devil, the miraculous curing of the sick, the walking upon water, the Crucifixion, the final Ascension with the short return to Earth – all these were stories which fascinated me without ever engendering the belief they bore the same order of truth as other stories or accounts. More than I was drawn to the Christian faith by these stories, I remained suspicious of it. I who was then but a child and who was already conditioned by some contrary ideal had no desire to be led into thinking that piety and human weakness should be paramount concerns.

But youth to the youthful imagination is almost equal to feeling invulnerable and immortal whereas in later life the looming shade makes us think twice about all the significance with which we charged our youthful lives. What is the power of the Bible if not its truth about human weakness? Human weakness not in any ordinary sense but in a cosmic one. In the sense that not only human beings but human meaning itself is imperilled. And not just on a local but on a cosmic level. And yet what we give to ourselves on this highest level is never quite identifiable with ourselves such that what is so produced comes to us only *through* us and so in fact *beyond* us. To this extent all our thoughts are a product of and participant in some infinite hyper-meaning and belong to it as much as to ourselves.

Thus all can be looked upon as a plethora of gifts fitting the various moods, shapes, and conditions of humanity. Tragic humanity! Never will it be resolved that such a bounteous condition must come at such a high price. Never, never, never and yet when I was fifteen, I read about the Second World War with as much fascination for Hitler and the war machine as revulsion at the cold-blooded extermination of innocent people. Identifying with these hapless victims at one end of the spectrum and monumental will and power at the other, I alternated between being a winged avenger of the first and an enthralled spectator of the second.

Always conscious of these inner vicissitudes, I at the same time never felt compelled to get rid of them. Or if I did, it was not for very long: the largely Christian ethic blowing in upon me at times couldn't uproot the one already in place. The one holding me more towards dutiful suspicion than dutiful trustfulness.

The further readings I undertook seemed to confirm me in this attitude. Anything which

smacked of the human was capable of the most surprising shifts and turns. Among other things, I found out that an allegedly Christian nation could go to war with other Christian nations. That a highly cultured society could descend to barbarism. That good solid townspeople were able to turn their backs on a nearby death camp. That others could risk their lives to save people from the same. That many churches and universities were capable of meekly falling into line with an anti-Christian and anti-intellectual order. And, finally, that people from these same and other milieus were later able to produce a profusion of engrossing works out of the ashes of so much that had been laid barren and waste.

Politics (W. B . Yeats)
How can I, that girl standing there,
My attention fix
On Roman or on Russian
Or on Spanish politics?
Yet here's a travelled man that knows
What he talks about,
And there's a politician
That has read and thought,
And maybe what they say is true
Of War and war's alarms,
But O that I were young again
And held her in my arms!

What if an evil genius were to come to me right now and say: "It is time to drop the pretence that going on about your years of growing up and then knocking about from pillar to post and then reading and writing and studying philosophy will add something new to what you have already said. It is time to admit that the end of your project is already at the beginning and so, philosophically speaking, you have said all you have to say and what remains is solely on the level of the personal." How should I answer this evil genius? Should I deny his criticism? Should I say that, while it is true that where I have begun is largely where I have ended up and *will* end up, there still remains the question of *why* I ended up where I have and not somewhere else? Or even the more penetrating question of why I didn't go off the rails completely? Doesn't this wavering itself pertain to the subject? For even if it is true that I'm full of confidence and courage on most occasions, it is also true that I have often felt them drain out of me. But then again, it must be admitted that, were it otherwise, I would hardly be inspired by a heroic ideal precisely in the area of truthtelling. And even though this ideal itself may waver (this happens when I consider the indomitable souls who slave away without paying much attention to it), I still think that the subject is not to be exhausted by a few simple statements, be they negative or positive, and that it demands a patient and lengthy working out.

Upon entering high school, I was acutely conscious of not being all I wanted to be. The discomfort I felt ranged from thinking of myself as a kind of social misfit to everything I chanced to envy in others. This itself ranged from wanting a better-shaped nose or a deeper voice to coveting someone else's girlfriend. But most consistently on the list of envied things were such real or imagined traits as personal attraction, masculinity, and muscularity (which went with the second). While the second and third eventually took up residence, the first eluded me

completely. When I consider now how turned in I was on myself and how carefully I kept a distance from others, it is small wonder I didn't charm many people. The desire to close the distance and yet keep it intact were forever the crosscurrents of my adolescence. Ultimately what I wanted was the *other* person to do it and in such a way that, if it had ever come about, he or she would have been little better than a willing slave.

I couldn't imagine the highest level of attraction other than as a perfect mind in a perfect body. Though I was far from having immersed myself in the world of the ancient Greeks, it nonetheless exerted its pull on me. All that it symbolized in the way of highest learning and culture fused imperceptibly in my mind with the heroic look of a muscular Zeus or Apollo or the stately figure of an Athene. To want to be as these were is of course to want to be god-like. Being young and free to think all possibilities of a promising and self-gratifying sort, I didn't stop to consider how unreasonable this desire was or that the perfecting of one part of me might interfere with that of another. Certainly there was enough evidence to show that, generally speaking, those people who seriously seek perfection concentrate in one area and in fact sacrifice much to arrive at it. Yet the thought of being so artistic or intellectual as to abandon my physical development or to be so patently narcissistic as to run away from every other concern and consideration – both of these were equally repugnant. In a way I wouldn't like to remind myself of too often, I consigned myself to a certain mediocrity that only an act of will has kept me from recognizing or tolerating to this very day.

Having already played hockey for a number of years and showing very little talent for this sport, I decided to join the high school cross-country team. Here again I was mediocre or at least at the beginning and distinctly remember being beaten in the first few practise sessions by an outstanding girl. Later I would fall in love with her and experience one of the many rejections I have suffered at the hands of the opposite sex. Although neither having the kind of body I would call voluptuous nor an intellect I would call outstanding, she was certainly attractive and, what is more, proved in competition she *had* in fact a superior mind and body. Perhaps this as well as her muscular legs won my heart for, all things considered, a certain female superiority has always been very attractive to me. Of course the legs have to be perfect too or whatever there may be of this superiority produces little or no effect.

Such fastidiousness bordering on fetishism is probably more common and more significant than generally admitted. Certainly the realm of truthtelling doesn't reflect or recognize it except as a subject among other subjects. How the truthteller arrives at his subject and how he ends up treating it are generally considered irrelevant both to the subject and the treatment. As perfectly understandable as this may be and as little as it could be any other way, it keeps truthtelling from having the transparency it forever claims for itself and indeed *must* claim for itself.

Fastidiousness of another sort is my penchant for writing with some style and my dislike of all writing that slavishly follows one. Recently reading one study, for example, I was put off by its implying it could equal or surpass others by adopting an easy accessible way of writing and thinking. Accessibility is of course a value not to be slighted or at least not if it is willing to slight itself and own up to its shortcomings.[2]

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2 Oh, what a welter of the easy and difficult there is in criticism! Nowhere is it so easy as when this criticism comes in the form of generalities and has a target not specifically identified. (Haven't I seen this at large in scholarly work and now don't I catch a glimpse of it in my own?) And nowhere is it so difficult as when this target haunts one's own work as a voice all too similar to but less authentic (as one ultimately thinks) than one's own.

But my fastidiousness in writing is also manifested in another direction which goes some way against scholarly propriety. Fairness to one's adversary as feigned politeness (how often the worthy scholar is chopped up after being praised!) and fairness to historically oppressed womanhood as inclusive but inelegant language both unsettle me. Of course the scholar's fastidiousness in this area has a certain moral correctness not to be slighted (but inevitably I'll be doing this) that has definitely had its impact on other writing including my own. At the same time this correctness is by no means free of practical and strategic considerations. Not unlike the worthy politician who is forced to ingratiate himself with as many voters as possible, the scholar seeks to be read by as many worthy readers as possible. And not offending others is certainly the right approach to this and carries the best chance of being heard in the public arena. On the other hand, if one is bent on telling the truth about truthtelling, one must go beyond such politeness because one cannot tell the truth about truthtelling apart from the telling of it. To tell the truth about truthtelling is necessarily to tell the truth about this telling. Given this state of affairs which is a task, an objective, and a dilemma all rolled into one, a sinuous, expressive, and unconstrained style, essentially a *multiplicity* of styles, is what is called for.

But getting back to my fascination with beautifully formed female legs, I can safely say it played its part in taking me out of high school. It was very difficult to sit all day in a classroom with such legs but a *bare* few feet away. With such *bare* legs *baring* themselves at me and without even the *bare* possibility of touching them. I could hardly *bear* to be in their presence because they were forever just sitting there or boldly parading about or shamelessly showing themselves off. (*Why not for me? Why for others but not me?*) Certainly my daily running was an outlet and, during the winter, it became the ritual, certainly a very rigorous one, of running in knee-deep snow and in subpolar conditions. At least I could take pleasure *in that*.

But I was disappointed the following spring, when having won some recognition as a runner, I didn't find myself surrounded by adoring girls. In fact nothing at all really changed and I remained frustrated and feeling marginal. Never being very socially active as a teenager and growing more and more discomfitted in groups or crowds, I imagined that someday I would meet the right girl in beautiful and choice surroundings. I imagined meeting her in some lonely woods or on some windswept hill, some place with no social or material ties to the outside world apart from our surroundings and our physical, emotional, and intellectual attraction to each other. My naivety and self-delusion were such that I didn't realize how much I had departed from a normal expectation and how much this perfect companion was fused in my imagination with the highest level of erotic pleasure and excitement. Of course what I was hoping for was not only incongruous in itself, but also in relation to my seeking a kind of personal integrity and purity. As inwardly guarded and constrained as I was on account of this higher calling, I wasn't capable of

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When I wrote the above criticism concerning a more or less popular style that makes popular (but only through or as itself) subjects or discourses largely unpopular because very difficult, I had no thought of commenting on the work I specifically had in mind. Instinctively I avoided an entanglement that could have gone on and taken the form of yet another essay. There was a strategic or tactical move that, although I didn't take much notice of it, caught up with me later as a discomforting sense of having done things too easily or conveniently. So it is that this footnote responds to this discomfort and seeks to return my project to some partly illusory, partly maintained purity of intent.

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance is the work I had in mind. Though I took it to be sounding depths with a largely layman's hand, I also took it to be doing so with a dexterity and level of commitment that exceeded the merely scholarly. On the other hand, I also found it to be guilty of some sleight of hand in that, not truly sifting what it lowered or put in abeyance (i.e., the whole tradition of Western thought), it presented it as one simple strain of a collective, covert, and complicated shallowness.

being roundly generous and sharing of myself. How then I could have expected to win a flesh-and-blood woman either as a perfect companion or as a perfect concubine, never mind the two together, is not something I can easily explain.

My torment persisted when, for a brief two weeks in summer, I and part of my family returned to Chambly. My father no longer lived there and so my mother, my oldest sister, and I went back to take advantage of certain invitations. At the same time we intended to take in the world's fair going on in Montreal at the time. Often walking about this fair by myself, I was so overcome by desire that, despite my habitual shyness and reserve, I approached and tried to pick up girls. My efforts (clumsy and shy ones, to be sure) met with a certain limited success but ultimately I remained disappointed and frustrated. Miniskirts and bare legs were everywhere but none were so moved by desire as to camp by me. All the rest of what I saw was terribly impressive with proud pavilions, overflowing crowds, and colourful activity. I wondrously took it all in and yet at the same time was made conscious of my own lack of flare and distinction.

In Chambly I found some solace in the company of a sixteen-year-old girl whose family had been our former neighbours. As initially grateful as I was for this and as important as it was for my self-esteem, I ultimately felt let down. Most of the details are unimportant: it is enough to say that, even though this girl was far from being unattractive, she was not as lovely or as lithe or as light-hearted as I would have liked her to be. On the other hand, her twelve-year-old sister was full of charm and hung about us while we sat in the living room. I grew uncomfortably aware of being more attracted to her, as young and physically immature as she was, than to the stolid girl next to me.

It was in grade eleven that dissatisfaction with my schooling added to the misery of being sexually frustrated and socially inhibited. Before this year I had never given a thought to doing other than finishing high school and going on to university. At the same time I had never given much thought to what I would do there. Part of the reason for this is that, during my adolescent years, I met no one – and certainly no teacher – who remotely resembled Mr. Beach. Not one soul who, like he did, took an interest in me and inspired me not only by the kind of person he was but by what he had to say about education and life. This lack of a spiritual guide meant that my thoughts rarely broke free from my most immediate concerns to offer me the advantages of a greater insight and wider viewing.

But though I probably didn't go off in a direction Mr. Beach would have approved of, at least I went off with some wind in my sails. A moral and intellectual wind in its prevailing mood is what I call it now. For though it carried me out to sea in a both scholarly and worldly sense, it eventually returned me. Who knows what part Mr. Beach played in all this: in the fact that, four years after the little exposés in his grade seven classroom, a critical attitude started to take shape in me? A critical attitude largely based on the realization that my struggle to get high grades in school was slowly stifling the spiritual side of me. And that the school itself offered nothing to remedy the situation. Nothing in the way of bolstering my flagging interest in my studies and of investing them with some purpose other than winning recognition and being stepping stones to the university. Nothing that could remind me of the excitement, adventure, and enthusiasm of learning that I had experienced as a child growing up in Chambly.

But before going on, I should note that my school was far from being ill-equipped or lacking in competent teachers or having no safety nets in place or, not to be overlooked, offering me no advantages. No, whatever was wrong with it wasn't wrong for any of these reasons but simply because all schools are systems and all systems, be they practical or theoretical, cannot

accommodate all elements. Ultimately this is a philosophical issue which is also *extra*-philosophical because, going beyond all systems, it goes beyond all philosophy. At the same time it is also very much my own issue, that is, the issue of truthtelling, and therefore not just one but all issues. It is even the issue of being one issue among many insofar as truthtelling is *without* issue.

In truth, I believe I was one of these non-accommodated elements and, if I were to say that things could have fallen out differently, I would have to allow for a vastly different set of circumstances. For example, if I had gone to the kind of school my father once dreamed of sending me to, it is possible I would have found enough intellectual stimulation as well as honour, rewards, and so on to prevent the critical side of me from developing as it did. Developing in an implicitly if not explicitly anti-institutional or anti-authoritarian way. Developing in such a way that the other agitations of my soul could eventually ally themselves to it and render it more and more like a destiny. Then the path taken by me would have been quite different and I would have become a person ready to entrust his education to the school rather than to the world outside. A person who would have found more good reasons to adapt himself to it and recognize its value than to think of it as a constraining and cooptive force.

But getting back to my actual situation: as a sensible young man who knew he was in trouble and needed help, I eventually went to see the guidance counsellor. After I had told him about my flagging interest in my studies and after having given him an explanation not differing essentially from the one I'm giving now, he advised me to slow down and not take my studies so seriously. Presumably his well-intentioned advice was meant to encourage me to spend more time cultivating other interests of a less stressful and competitive sort. Nothing he said was particularly wrong but, then again, neither was it helpful. From my present standpoint, I see him as having failed to notice that I was one who, rather than needing to find more enjoyment apart from my studies, needed to find more *in* them. Or rather one who needed to find more interest in studies *outside* school such that the ones I took up in it no longer filled up my entire intellectual horizon.

What I in fact needed then was something very difficult if not impossible. Something that would have resembled me as I am now giving advice to myself as I was then. What I needed was an advisor who would have been the most sensitive and scrupulous reader of my sixteen-year-old soul. Who instead of being oblivious to the critique of formal education that was implicit in at least part of my troubled situation at school, would have picked up on it and carried it back to me as question and commentary. Who instead of assuming that my problems were purely personal and carried no intellectual weight, would have directed my attention outside the curriculum towards studies that would have enlarged my understanding of my situation and come to me both as a philosophical turn and a great psychological relief.

So far my account has been focussed on my built-in errancy and my eventual escape or self-ejection from the system. By the time I went to the guidance counsellor for help, nothing short of an extraordinary intervention would have turned things around. For a critical mass had been reached which, even before I had physically left the school, put me outside it in an imaginative or emotional sense. In all of this there was nothing on my part of bad behaviour or flagrant resistance to authority. Nothing of missing classes or failing to do assignments. Nothing of having problems with drugs or alcohol. Nothing even of having animosity or resentment towards the school. Rather it was more like suffering a loss of confidence or faith in it while experiencing a corresponding leap of faith in or towards an out-of-school experience. Had I been

asked to give an account of this, I would have been confronted with the same problem as I am now: trying to make sense out of all the motivating factors arising out of the convergence and seeming consolidation of my erotic and idealistic fantasies.

Just as I take it for granted that this errancy is a basic part of my constitution and is continuous with my father's, so I take it for granted that, so far as its intellectual side goes, it is a will to be critical and even overly critical. I also take it for granted that this will to be critical, no less than any other drive, can run to excess and even to ruin. Excess and ruin either as self-criticism on the one hand or as criticism without it. The two types of excess are well illustrated by members of my own family: by my father who was guilty of the second (particularly when he was under the influence of alcohol) and by my second-oldest sister who was guilty of the first (particularly when she was depressed and suicidal). And if now I secretly congratulate myself for escaping their tragic fates, it is probably in the way of registering performatively as much as constatively that a robust ego such as I possess and such as I like to think I possess more positively than negatively is what constitutes the greatest difference between them and me as critical and even overly critical members of the human community.

But just as there are different ways to have a robust ego, so there are different ways *not* to have one. Take two extremely intelligent people like my father and sister who happen to falter badly in life. Suppose they had good reason to think of themselves very early as being exceptional and then good reason later on *not* to. Or at least to think they were so deficient in certain areas as to fall behind entirely. Suppose further they had always believed in telling the truth both to themselves and to others such that, upon realizing and admitting they were not what they once thought they were (at least in some important respects), they were also obliged to realize and admit they had *given up* on a part of themselves. In a certain manner of speaking, their conclusion is also a choice which bears with it a certain responsibility, a certain way of looking at themselves, a certain future vision and way of acting no longer in accord with the past way. The self-justification that would inevitably arise and base itself on the exigencies of life and all that it brings in the way of the unpredictable would then not be sufficient to efface a certain sense of self-betrayal.

In describing them thus, I not only think of my father and sister as essentially alike in character but different from all those who, for one reason or another, *start off poorly*. Nothing I have ever heard about my father's childhood nor anything I know about my sister's would lead me to conclude that *they* belong to this second group. Both in fact were petted and made much of while growing up: my father by his three older sisters and my sister by my father himself. In the case of the latter, he suffered his first major disappointments – failing in his bid to become a pilot and then later an engineer – just before marrying and starting a family. In the case of my sister, the breakup of our family home was probably the greatest upset of her life. But it was only after she herself got married and had children that things started to slip out of control. For reasons that had nothing to do with her intellectual capabilities or best intentions, she abandoned first the prospect of a career in medicine, then a master's degree in chemistry, then her role as a loving and nurturing mother, and finally her life.

Surely it must be that they both started off their lives with a sort of high-flung outlook or romantic vision. They too must have had childhood fantasies that propelled them forward and that, had they been luckier, would have constituted the leading thread and mainstay of their lives. For they too, I believe, wanted honesty and courage to be there. To be pivotal to their emotional, imaginative, and intellectual well-being. To be honoured in their hearts as something most noble

and high and thus render them honourable through and through. Wanted this despite the fact that one day they found themselves living more or less conventional lives with all the responsibilities of a middle-class home and family. Living in some sense apart from themselves. For the fact of the matter is that, in both their cases, raising a family to be proud of and having a fine home and prospects for the future were not sufficient to keep them going. Yet at the same time so extraordinary were they in their lack of artificiality and pretence and so obstinate and critical in many of their doings that I can only conclude they were fighting to maintain their self-esteem under conditions that were slowly eroding it.

It is difficult to go on now without the egoistic such as I have mentioned it already as both personal and philosophical element trying to efface itself. And yet it is difficult to go on without at the same time admitting to this selfsame trait or tendency. More precisely, admitting that taking up the task of distinguishing myself from others (including my father and sister) involves suppressing the fact that this task is also, as something quite personal, *a drive to distinction*. That telling the truth about myself is irretrievably caught up in this non-innocent telling even while it pretends or acts otherwise. This is as much as to say that ultimately I cannot refrain from treating all positions, including my own, as being contained in my own truthtelling. Or to put it another way: I'm continually advancing to the point of failing as a truthteller, to the point of reaching my own limits in this area. And this not only in the way of no longer seeing how my truth is related to the telling of it, but of presuming that, against my proper judgement, this truth can be told *without* egoism (which, to add another wrinkle, is no doubt the very height of egoism) and for the sake of itself and itself alone.

I shall now ask myself a few questions which, given their abstract or general nature, may very well hide their egoistic content. First of all, how can the critical and even overly critical suffer itself (that is, tolerate itself) if it is sufficiently *self*-critical to suffer from itself? And, secondly, how can the world suffer the critical and even overly critical if it at the same time suffers *from* it? Must it not be that, in both cases, if the critical and even overly critical is to survive and flourish, it will find in itself enough that is rewarding to make up for and even render null and void all injuries either to itself or the world? And therefore will it not, if it is to achieve victory both on the psychological and social front, turn itself into some kind of force, mission, duty, or destiny?

Or to take another tack: what happens if the critical and even overly critical become nothing more than the barking dogs in the basement of one's soul? If this internal hubbub and distress can neither be purged nor shut out completely from the upstairs quarters? If it is always such that, whatever joyous activity or bustling work goes on upstairs, the barking dogs of criticism and self-criticism can be forever heard in the background? Is there not then a slow poisoning or contamination of the whole house? An incipient loathing and contempt for all that has gone into furnishing it and trying to make of it a decent home? Is there not then something very wounding and self-incriminating in the thought that, for all one has done to both bless and enrich the upstairs of one's soul, one has placed a curse on it by neglecting the downstairs?

But I'm well aware that, if I'm to see myself not only as a truthteller but as a particular kind of truthteller and, furthermore, not only as one *in potentia* but also *per accidens*, I can't simply compare and contrast myself with those who are close to me and go awry, but also those who develop and flourish. Not an easy task given the range of possibilities but, for the moment, I can do no better than look at what I might have been had I followed a straighter path. Suppose then that an extraordinary influence had come into my life even after Mr. Beach (for I recognize

him as one) and resulted in a rapid maturing of my intellectual and emotional self. Then I would have likely been able to deal with most problems of a personal nature and carry on towards higher education and those studies of greatest interest to me. I would have in effect been carried towards all I discovered much later on and all I found in literature, philosophy, history, and so on to be inspiring. I would have been taken very early to a knowledge of the outside as well as the inside of the institutional world but without necessarily thinking that going *outside* it was preferable to staying inside. I would have then had to accommodate myself to it such that, even if my thinking pressed towards the outside, it would have borne the stamp and impress of the inside. And this in terms of not only how I would have gone about my work and studies, but of how I would have structured my life. To this extent, the rebellious side of me would have been forced to accommodate itself to the institution and, in exchange for a clear sense of mission, conform to its values and standards. Even under the best of conditions and even for the sake of the best conditions, I would have had to shut down that part of my soul which would have proved to be, under the circumstances, too much the mirror or theatre of itself. Too much a show and a distraction (not to mention a self-indulgence) in that world essentially devoted to identifying truth with itself.

It remains to be said that such a straighter path in life would not have been a curtailment of my errancy, but rather a much stricter handling of it. In other words, it would have taken much less the form of a way of life (that is, as the post-high-school period I'm about to take up) than a way of thinking already established and yet errant in relation to mainline or traditional thought. Though it is too early to move into this area as a specific concern, it might do well to signpost it now by invoking, if not without some reservations, the word *postmodernism*. A word of course that can lend itself to many interpretations but, if I were to sum it up grosso modo, I would say that, first, it refers to a form of thought that has infiltrated the university and other institutions during the second half of the twentieth century and, secondly, one which takes truth to be implicated in diverse elements that straddle both its subjective and objective poles. But for now I don't want to get into this but simply note that, instead of passing through and beyond institutionalized errancy as truthtelling, I would have rested there and made it my home. I would have followed the relatively obscure and wayward paths of other such dwellers and, if I were lucky, traced out, I hope not too obscurely, a path of my own.

Compared to this relatively straight and smooth path, the actual one was very rough, uneven, and circuitous. It started off with a number of years of being more imaginatively, emotionally, and physically active than intellectually. This is certainly not to say that I was intellectually *in*active or didn't continue to read and think deeply about many matters. No, it was just that no real discipline had to be exercised in this area because, naturally enough, there was no motivation or guidance other than what came from day-to-day. Or at least none apart from my unshakable belief that the world itself was a school and, along with books and other reading material, offered many different ways of learning. It was as if all that I had once explored as a child growing up in Chambly was now extended to many diverse fields. Of course I had already experienced enough to know that the world was not always a friendly place nor had all of its innumerable corners immaculately kept. Yet such was my romantic vision at the time that I unfailingly saw my destiny being pointed out by the most beautiful and splendid things. On the other hand, the most ugly and sordid aspects of the world seemed like the husks or dross that one could eventually shake off. At the same time I was immature or naive enough to blur the difference between the most noble and heroic path in life and the most virile or masculine one.

The shadow that inevitably fell between what I desired most for myself and what I actually found often would discomfort and disappoint me terribly. Nonetheless it was never so great as to obliterate the first or make the second seem to be less than the rather slippery stepping stones (oh, but how hard one fell sometimes!) on the way to the first.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

4. Young Manhood

How am I now to talk about myself as a truthteller *in potentia* without putting aside the question of myself as a truthteller *per accidens*? Am I to suppose that, barring some sort of catastrophe, nothing would have altered the course of my life? That no incident or accident after I quit high school would have prevented me from reaching my present situation which of course is my present project? In truth, I don't feel confident enough to answer these questions with an unequivocal yes and yet at the same time I know I'm always effectively doing so. I'm always on the way to affirming and demonstrating an *entelechy* of my imaginative, emotional, and intellectual self. And yet the fact that this process may always be threatened haunts this *other* process. This present undertaking that is complicated and even over-complicated by being the continuation of an affirming and demonstrating that has always been going on. That is barely separable from what is most uncertain about it and yet, despite this, is never quite identical with itself. That, furthermore, is always a compromising of itself because, as an attempt to overcome this uncertainty, as a *teleological retrospective,* it cannot avoid being a collusion between the arbitrary and authoritative. As rare as it may be that some chance factor obliterates the entelechy that has already gone some way to affirming and demonstrating itself, it still belongs to the world of potential being. It invests and inhabits every part of it as it does all process, growth, and development. It is difficult to imagine that, had I won a million dollars, for example, my life wouldn't have been taken down a different path. On the other hand, when I say that I have never made the slightest effort to win a million (by, for example, buying a lottery ticket), this seems to argue well for another kind of potential.

How am I now to talk about that period of my life which, as a highly erratic if not erotic zone of life and learning, took up my late teens and early twenties? It may do well to begin by noting that, however much this period seemed at least to others or even to myself on occasion like a going out of control, it never resulted in any sort of personal crisis or breakdown. This is to say that there was always in me, along with a tendency to take risks, a sense of when to stop. So much so both ways that, looking back now, I know I was bolder than most people my age and yet less so and sometimes much less so than others. With respect to the latter, there was often a romantic or voluptuous aspect which lured me on but never wrenched me from the orbit of myself. It was as if I thought there was always something there to be learned or appropriated without deflecting me from my proper path. Nothing formal or sharply conceptual ever told me what this path was but, when I look back, I see an inner control which induces in me even now a certain respect. An inner control which was *not* the psychological compartmentalization or sealing off of disorderly and deviant behaviour. It was rather more like a moral or ethical constraint or, to speak less morally, a sort of moral or ethical *elasticity* that held me to myself even while letting me take risks.

Was I not then, even well before I had read Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil,* already inhabiting his country? Already suspicious of much that was called good and interested in and titillated by much that was called bad? How else to explain the fact that I, an above-average student and athlete, not only dropped out of high school but, on the very same day (which happened to be my birthday), took off with a drug dealer to Vancouver? I who at that time had never so much as smoked a cigarette or taken a sip of beer. Who remained polite and respectful, conservative in appearance (short hair, horn-ribbed glasses, studious and virginal look), and modest in all my habits even to the point of not swearing. And this same seventeen-year-old boy

whose appearance and behaviour would certainly change over the course of a year or two was, upon arriving in Vancouver, neither so secure as not to feel a certain pang at parting from his shady companion nor so weak as to want to cling to him and go off to his world. No, after kicking around in Vancouver for a couple of days and doing nothing of great moment, he turned around and hitchhiked back to Winnipeg.

But no more was he tempted to go back to school in Winnipeg than to waste himself in Vancouver. The arguments put forward by well-meaning teachers and relatives could not reach him at the deepest level. Nothing they said was infused with fire but only spoke the practical language of the best-to-be-done with the already in place. It had the common dull ring in his ears of treating him as an average person with average ambitions. And yet it was hard for him to blame them for not being able to see what was driving him because, apart from fantasies and vague arguments as to why school was no longer of benefit to him, what did he have to show? How could he distinguish himself from others who, often quite immature and foolish, overreach themselves and then end up as under-achievers? Or those who speak a barely decipherable language when they declare they have a great mission in life? Or those who wouldn't be able come up with a concrete plan or coherent vision if their lives depended on it?

It was literature that had so far pointed out the way to him. There he saw that society and its dictates are not foolproof and can in fact be false idols. That a lack of vision or a lack of scruples, in collusion with a drive to comfort, security, and success, can haunt the best of societies. And yet the sensitivity and perspicacity of the artist, precisely among the things he admired most, seemed to him to be inversely proportional to what people handed out as best advice. The seventeen-year-old boy – the one I was then – knew at least this much: that he preferred having this sensitivity and perspicacity. And yet he was hardly against worldly success but only the loss of the first for the sake of the second. Better to be the adventurer in spirit who finds no earthly treasure than to be the treasure finder without adventure.

Along with the above, there were a couple of other guiding threads in his thought. Threads that proved to be very strong and, if I may say so, the conduits and cables of a life. Though it is difficult to give a precise explanation as to how they first got laid out, there is nothing about his earlier life that ruled out their possibility. Even then he knew that being a good observer, though it didn't rule out being a good actor, ruled out playing a part so well the actor no longer thought of it as one. He had already observed enough of the difference between ordinary people and members of a respectable and reputed profession to realize that the latter, with few exceptions, no longer saw themselves apart from their career. A uniformity of bearing and presenting themselves to the world made of their sagacity and perceptiveness a strategically limited affair. Those who, by virtue of a both well-rounded and specialized education, were most able to shed light on vast sectors of the world, seemed least able to shed light on themselves. Instrumentalized and institutionalized, these personal selves lost their suppleness as well as their multifariousness. Or at least so it was on the social and therefore superficial level for it was precisely there where clarity and order for the sake of efficiency were demanded. A Cartesian self fully confident of itself as a depth without depths, a foundation in and of itself, was the unwritten prescription here if not the description many would care to give it. To some extent, all this he saw without analysing it or thinking that an alternative could necessarily be purchased. The teachers he had come across and observed over many years were the ones he assumed had roles most open to breaking down such barriers and yet, for all he could see, they were often the ones with their professional masks most securely in place. It wasn't clear to him then as it would

be much later that everything done on a mass scale inevitably inclines the human towards the machine-like. All that there seemed to be was this human frailty and deficiency resulting from no real attempt to connect the self and all its experiences to professional means and ends. It is precisely the counter to this which he had caught sight of in Mr. Beach and so at least knew existed as a possibility. At any rate, whatever was exceptional or extraordinary in such matters took up all the foreground of the possibilities he cared to envision.

There was a second line of thought that complemented the first and gave it a certain form. As tensile and elastic as the first, there was nonetheless something of the willow or oak tree about it. Bend without breaking was more or less the doctrinal backbone of the would-be collector of diverse and sometimes dangerous experiences. Two years later he found this doctrine better expressed in a saying by the Spanish philosopher, Santayana.[3]

It is important that, for the sake of my project, I don't falsely play the hero or insinuate without justification the extraordinary in the ordinary. To be sure, the temptation is always there and I even feel I have the right to consider my past life a sort of preparation and training ground. Few there are, I think, who have gone about the task of physically, emotionally, and imaginatively testing themselves with as much curiosity and determination as I have. To be sure, great feats weren't required for all this but neither had it anything to do with being afraid to stick one's neck out. I continually felt the need to put my nerves and my courage to the test with no other end in sight but improving my self-knowledge that I no doubt confused with improving my self-image. Very rare were the occasions on which I fell short in this area and, if my self-knowledge or self-image had been based entirely on these tests, it would have been a much more stable and secure – not to mention smug – affair. But the truth of the matter is that my sexual and social hangups followed me from my late teens into my early twenties and, however obscured or reduced, could never be entirely shaken off. I remained essentially a loner even amongst others and essentially a dreamer even when active.

Given all this, my life at the time took on the aspect of a certain short-term formlessness and confusion underwritten by a long-term vision. Going out to my uncle's racehorse farm for what proved to be the last time, I continued to work hard and keep a work ethic in place. At the same time I finally got up the nerve to send a love letter to the girl whom I had longed for and admired while still in high school. It was a relief to be able to express my feelings to her but, as I soon found out, no great reward necessarily follows from such outpourings. In short, the girl was spoken for and, even if this hadn't been the case, I doubt whether I had the proper credentials. The pain and disappointment I felt must have been great and yet, as usual, I didn't speak about it or at least not much. My uncles more or less treated the matter as a joke because, as far as they were concerned, I was simply going through a phase. Neither did I react to this putdown nor to a later one that came as a remark to the effect that, because I wasn't grown up and didn't have adult responsibilities, I didn't know what it was to have real problems. But when no less than a *third* putdown rolled around, my reaction was by no means slight. It caught both me and others by surprise. What triggered it was one of those insignificant events which nonetheless can have serious consequences. It began with a group of adults, my two uncles (one the racehorse owner and the other the former ranch owner and deep-sea diver), my aunt (owner of a beauty salon and married to the racehorse owner), and a German neighbour and business partner (a stolid, dark, and hard-working contractor), sitting around a table discussing the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Very quickly they came to the conclusion that the vice-president, wanting to usurp the

3 I remember it as follows: "There is no security except that within."

position of the latter, was responsible. So vociferous and vehement were they on this point, so prone to overlooking all facts that didn't agree with it that the seventeen-year-old boy hardly could believe his ears. When he tried to intervene by saying that the chances of such a plan succeeding were very low and that, Johnson, even if he had been the devil himself, would have been a fool to carry it out, he found all the adults ranged against him. However, it wasn't this in itself that put the match to the powder keg but rather the comment that he couldn't possibly know anything about it because he was too young.

It is strange to think now how this incident, with all its violence of emotion, operated as a sort of general catharsis. Perhaps it is because these incidents are so rare that, no matter how unreasonable it is to assume that the relatively untroubled surface of a person's life is the true sign of its internal state, I and, as I suspect, many others make precisely this assumption. But what is really different between people (and here again literature is the greatest teacher) is not the existence or non-existence of hidden unrest but its underlying causes. In the case of my two uncles, my aunt, and the German neighbour and business partner, there seemed to be the need to make amends later by confiding to me something that otherwise wouldn't have been said. In the case of my older uncle, there was the long talk at bedside about his brother and the explanation as to how his hard businessman's shell was but the defence mechanism of an essentially vulnerable and insecure person. In the case of my aunt, a woman who had always struck me as being unusually cold and unfriendly, there was the story of her life and some of the trials and tribulations therein. In the case of the German neighbour and business partner, there was the general scorn and calling down of people engaged not in work but idle talk. Certainly from that time on it was much more difficult for me to believe that people, no matter what their prejudices were or what my own might be, were ever as simple as their thoughts or opinions sometimes gave out.

By the same token, the readiness of people to pass judgement on matters of which they have little knowledge has always been a bugbear of mine. This essentially means that my reaction has not infrequently been excessive and violent. It is difficult for me to be objective about the anger and intolerance I have displayed on many occasions because I know that, from a purely social or psychological standpoint, it can be fraught with negative consequences. The most I can say is that my worst outbursts have rarely been attempts to intimidate others. Rather, the reverse has more often been the case.

For those who idealize the orderly and identify truth with it, there is a natural resistance to exalting the passions. This runs as far as suppressing them and, at the most sophisticated level, denying them their constitutive role in truthtelling. Society being essentially an orderly affair, it is not difficult to see why this should be. For, after all, this order is never entirely secure and must continually be protected and propped up on many fronts. As much as all of this remains true, it is also true that society cannot be satisfied with merely prospering on the purely rational level. Every bid to look beyond itself or to look at itself from a beyond is proof of this. Herein the passions are given a certain recognition and rank which they otherwise don't enjoy. The upshot is that the truth of society, being richer than all of its conceptual schemes, is the human condition in its ultimate freedom.

This ultimate freedom, so far as I can determine it (at the individual but also at the social level), is the type of decision we make that goes beyond the reasons we can immediately give for it. Or, to put it another way, that goes against the best reasons that others have given us directly or indirectly. If reasons for this type of decision must be spoken of at all, then let them be

understood as that which is still on the way from the heart to the head even after the decision has been made. (*"Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connait point."*) In my own case, I find that all the reasons for my quitting school and living the type of life I did have barely been collected in after thirty years. Only with the present project do they fully come to light as a part of and as a means to what most dearly matters to me.

Naturally I don't consider it to be part of my task to cite the dangers of the above as a doctrine to live by. A veritable army of truthtellers (call them rationalists) already exists to combat such proclivities. As far as I'm concerned, there is no right or wrong side in this interminable war which is nonetheless fought along moral lines. In the realm where good and evil meet and are no longer easily distinguishable, there are but two perfectly counterbalanced forces: the drive to limit and possibly even eliminate all dangerous effects and the drive to limit the danger of such a limiting and possibly even eliminating drive.

It is hard to think that these contrary drives don't exist in all of us and particularly when we're young. It has always been my feeling that, however much may be said against this period of our lives, much more may be said for it. But I'm not going to take up time, at least not here, dwelling on how I have remained enamoured to youth in general. I only want to consider how I have remained enamoured to my own youth. Having no children, I strangely look back on it as if it were both father and son to me. Always deathly afraid of seeing it desert me, always trying to enrich and prolong it, I have kept up a greater contact and continuity with it than seem appropriate at times.[4] Yet for all that, I have always felt my essential self to be the one of my youth. So much so

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4 One incident sticks out in my mind. It happened not too long ago at a private language school where I was teaching English to a group of bright young ambitious people who, though they were training to be diplomats, were not the most respectful students I have ever had. The incident in question took place at a Halloween party held by this same school and in a government building where the school was set up temporarily and operating on a contractual basis. It was on this occasion – the occasion of the Halloween party – I made a ridiculous attempt to impress a twenty-two-year-old woman who was one of my students and who, if I'm not mistaken, had been flirting with me. (What a beautiful yet tormenting child she was! Only a poem could do her justice which, as it happens, did get written.*) In any event, after some initial reservations about this quasi-office event, I ended up dressing up and trying to look sexy for the young sorceress – and so she was aptly dressed – by going as a biker with bandanna, extra-tight jeans, and cowboy boots. Later I couldn't help but be disgusted with myself for, first of all, going along with this latest effort by the school to please its clientele. (In such circumstances, I always got the feeling that I was risking my personal if not my professional dignity by some obsequious act.) Secondly, for doing so in a way that made me resemble that hapless middle-aged professor in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice.*

***Marie-Eve**

She prefers to be called Marie,
this sweet cantankerous – what shall I call her? –
this child-woman of twenty-two
who sits in my English class (a francophone student)
and who can smile so sweetly at me
or scowl like the devil when she's in a bad mood,
when she's in a blue funk, which happens quite often,
and which makes her very bitchy and hard to deal with.

She prefers to be called Marie,
and be reminded of the Holy Mother
(I suspect) and not the mother of all mankind
who was the first to have truck with the Devil and who,
with her *own* power of seduction
(with her power, that is, over a weak Adam),

in fact that I have always dreaded ending up one day as someone who gives the impression he has cut all ties with it.

In the very same year that France was full of student unrest as well as intellectual ferment and activity, I began my personal odyssey. To think of it now is to think that I began it at the very antipodes of my most scholarly home or destination. For many long years would pass before I knew what Paris was all about at this time. Years which were far from being the kind of training and education I might have received had I been living in that city. Instead of reading articles on champion racehorses at my uncle's farm, I might have very well been reading texts by great philosophers living and working in Paris. For someone with intellectual interests and ambitions like my own, the thought of this possibility as a sort of missed opportunity might not only be a bit heady but also a source of anguish. For such a person might see all advantage being on the side of having lived in that cultural Mecca, of having developed artistically or intellectually in a hothouse environment where talent and ability, in order to become great, have to compete with as well as be nourished by what is already so. In such an environment, a person not so unlike myself but perhaps not so inclined to errancy would certainly have had a better chance of succeeding and, instead of ending up middle-aged, poor, and without any influential position, enjoying the fruits of his labour. And yet having only briefly flirted with being such a person, having only briefly flirted with being a true professional type, having only briefly flirted with setting aside all highest hopes and aspirations, I can say now I have no regrets whatsoever that things have fallen out as they have. For I have been taken along the only route that now counts for me. The only route that would have allowed me to end up where I am.

Having long been blessed with a robust constitution, I have often thought, even when very young, that I had a sense of being able to take my time. Not that this prevented me from, at age fifteen, imagining my life gloriously consummated and achieved by age thirty. How much then it would have shocked me to think of myself as one still trying to realize himself at fifty! Or as one who ends up looking back on his younger self not with any sense of completion but only with a sense of non-completion. No, this younger self certainly didn't carry itself around much

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brought sin into the old pre-feminist "faith-of our-fathers
-and-our-fathers-fathers" world.

She prefers to be called Marie,
this ambitious, hard, and tight-bodied creature,
this brilliant young woman whose terribly quick mind
and whose terribly quick lacerating tongue
make me stand in awe of her "great" ambition,
which is to tame this tongue for diplomatic work in overseas lands,
and thereby effectively remove the paradox now afflicting her,
combining adolescent unruliness and fierce independence of spirit
with the attempt to follow a strict government path
and straighten herself out like an arrow.

She prefers to be called Marie,
But "Marie-Eve" sounds fine to my ears.
I suppose I'm in love with the play of forces which I see in her
and which her true name evokes in a mythical way.
It doesn't hurt to see as well that she has freckles on her nose
and that her face is as fresh as an Irish rose.
O Youth, flutter your wings as long as you can
and let us older ones be thankful for it!

less carry itself off like Alexander. And the world, though certainly explored by it in diverse and sometimes offbeat ways, was not shaken by it in the least. But a question I have often asked myself is would there have been an Alexander without a Philip? Or an Aristotle without a Plato? Or a Shakespeare without a Marlowe? Or a Mozart without a Hayden? Long past is the time I naively thought that great men and events owe what they are only to themselves. And long past the time I thought they could only be measured, valued, and recognized by what has already been recognized. To go over my humble doings now and yet to see an uncommon spirit moving amidst them is to see an arrow, a straight line, and a direction despite all wayward movements of less than glorious aspect.

It is now time to deal with my personal odyssey. It began thus: nomadic and yet bent on a course, I knew nothing of what lay ahead of me except that it should be my highest hope and its fulfilment. How fragile a thing this might seem and yet, if taken to be the only way to live a life, how strong and durable. To be sure, if I had known it would cut me off from being an even moderately successful lover, I would have cursed my fate and cried out that life couldn't have held anything in store for me more cruel. For wherever I went as a teenager and young man was a place where my thoughts were saturated with sex. Of right bodies of course there were no end. But what wiles seemed necessary to win them! Ways and means of seduction that seemed entirely out of my reach. Even when having sufficiently developed my wits to presumably do what was necessary, I continued to fumble about and lacerate myself for my incompetence and seeming lack of daring.

It also began this way: moving myself into a rough working world of largely menial and low-paying jobs, I came across so many colourful characters and events that, had I been a literary genius, I would have been supplied with material for a lifetime. Why I wasn't this genius is of course an open question but I can at least say this: imaginatively extending myself to the world about me was ever only a partial move or exercise. Even before I properly knew it, I was first and foremost the student of myself. Not just the impressions I received from the outside world but my reactions to them were the constant focus of my attention. But among my sensibilities was the awareness of this narcissistic or egoistic component that I have never been able to condemn outright because it never prevented me from being the most unsparing critic of myself.

It also began this way: being very much attached to the simplicity of things – not all things but at least animals and children and straight-talking people – I have never cultivated my cynicism beyond the various manoeuvres and machinations of society. For a very long time I even considered the opposition between good and evil to be an unchallengeable axiom. Far be it from me then to argue that there was more between heaven and earth than in anyone's philosophy. As errant as I may have been, I was at least nominally on the side of those who want to see simplicity written right into the heart of things. To look at a horse or a child was no more than to see a horse or a child with perhaps a scientific description in the background. To go beyond this was to get into something called mystery and, by reason of my upbringing and force of habit, I generally thought of it as being marginal rather than central. Oh, definitely there were moods that carried me the other way but, on the whole, my thoughts conformed to popular opinion. At the racetrack I read books by good metaphysicians whether they be doctors, lawyers, or sociologists. Never was I a reader who stayed only with magnificent stories and, as far as poetry goes (which I take to be the relatively non-metaphysical), I left it alone for a good many years.

It also began this way: I was a good Cartesian well before I had read the *Meditations*. My

thinking self was a reality which I took to be wholly unto itself and separable from everything else. My thoughts and feelings were the most private of things and everybody else was in a similar situation. Most certainly language could communicate them to others but language itself wasn't thoughts or feelings. It was rather the often inept tool for catching hold of and containing the sense or meaning of them. Of course language did the same for the outside world which was no less separate from it than my inner self. Shuttling back and forth between mind and world was not only language but the body. The very personal and yet very public body. The body I was so narcissistically attached to. The body I wanted to make big and strong and muscular and sexually attractive. The body I wanted to put into action and set up high and accomplished. The body I wanted to unite with another so I could forget mine in the enjoyment and perfection of the Other.

– Up North –

I'm trying to keep this narrative on track as a cataloguing of pertinent impressions and responses. In order to trace out my path as a would-be truth seeker and truthteller, as a truthteller *in potentia* who now thinks of himself as a truthteller *in actu*, it is necessary for me to be attentive not only to the great mix of elements in my life but to those which made a particular impression on me. Perhaps I should no longer be so concerned about having to point this out – to signpost it from beginning to end. After all, isn't it clear by now that this path I'm on is two? The one which I'm now drawing and the one which has drawn me? But of course I'm thinking of the reader who will come after me. The one who has always been imagined in the background but no other place because first and foremost I wanted to be telling the truth to myself. To avoid stretching or thinning it out or pretending that it came without doubts and uncertainties. But never being entirely sure of this, there is always the temptation to reaffirm it. Even now I'm tempted to say (both to myself and to the imagined reader) that, if I had ever thought there was someone better qualified to carry it out, I would have mentioned it by now.

After passing yet another summer at the racetrack and after various developments and events that allowed me to cultivate a more forceful and, indeed, irascible personality,[5] I went up North to work at a huge hydro-electric project. Going into the correspondingly huge beverage room that lay just outside the camp (everything was built of aluminum trailers) was no less than my first attempt to drink alcohol. Being four years under the age limit, I lied vociferously to the waiter who at first didn't want to serve me. Surrounded then by camaraderie, good cheer, and congratulations for having buffaloed him, I had the feeling I had taken one more step in the direction of being the sort of brazen fellow I admired.

I drank hard liquor for the first time in one of those trailers that were set up as residences for the camp workers. Each of these trailers had a number of small rooms and each room had a couple of beds (and not much else). I became so intoxicated in one of these rooms that I did something very stupid that would have seemed utterly senseless to an outside observer. In retrospect, however, I see it as having a connection with the incident at my uncle's racehorse farm that was triggered by the argument I had had with my uncles, my aunt, and the contractor-

5 After quitting my uncle over a wage dispute, I went to work for another horse owner. Like my uncle had done when I was still a shy and introverted adolescent, he tried to chew me out on at least one occasion. He was an old man pleasant enough most of the time and certainly had a right to get angry with me when I unwittingly endangered one of his horses. However, his tone was too indignant to suit me and so, with my newfound assertiveness always ready to flare up, I gave back to him everything in good measure.

friend over the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Specifically, that act of violence, that striking of an inanimate object, that punching of the inoffensive breadbox in my uncle's kitchen that triggered a wrestling match with my uncles and much emotional turmoil and baring of breasts. Only instead of losing my head as I did then and experiencing pleasure as an after-effect, as a certain headiness over what could be called my physical violence but also my physical strength, the punching of the door up North was in some sense the result of *anticipating* this pleasure. That it was also an act of wanton destruction with possibly negative consequences was less a planned affair than a derivative one.

What was neither anticipated nor desired by me was making an enemy of one of the two occupants of the room. He was a boy about my own age who, the next morning, heard me bragging about the incident. At first nothing much came of the enmity between us apart from a few insults exchanged over the next day or so. But when he went so far as to put my sexual orientation into question, I felt obliged, after some initial confusion due to my naivety and lack of experience, to challenge him to a fight. He at first seemed anxious to accommodate me but then, sometime later, he told me he wanted to put our engagement off to the time he was due to leave the camp. Given that he was a very aggressive and tough-looking character and supposedly a redoubtable fighter (this is what somebody had told me), what happened next was unexpected. A few days before the fight was scheduled to happen, he came to my room and proposed that we call it off. No particular reason was given and, though he didn't apologize or take back his insult, I was secretly pleased by the turn of events.

Later I would end up in many fights. The question for me now is, what of it? What masculine rite was I performing and why should I think it important to the task at hand? Nietzsche was a violent combative philosopher and yet did he feel the need to engage in fisticuffs? Hemingway was a great writer who seemed to like a scrap and perhaps there were others. Socrates fought as a soldier and, according to Alcibiades, carried it off with aplomb. Thinking about Nietzsche again, did he not take pride in serving in the Franco-Prussian War? And, more recently, even such a philosopher as Paul Ricoeur (a Christian no less) disclosed that he had blown up a bridge with two German tanks on it. Is there not something here of the ambivalence with which we all regard violence and combat? Many years later, when I was driving a cab at night in the city, I witnessed on more than one occasion a great crowd of young people gathering outside a bar at closing time. Young women no less than young men standing about in excited circles and waiting for a couple of shirt-sleeved gladiators primed with alcohol to have it out in the parking lot. No, I refuse to believe that society condemns violence other than strategically which also means morally which also means – emotionally.

And yet it is not that I haven't met people who put me in mind of another order. A celestial order aligned with our earthly abode and with a traffic and communication between the two. To know such people fleetingly and from a distance is not that uncommon or at least for those of us who have imagined they have caught sight of a not-so-earthly form or figure. Here the resonances of a loftier language are heard and it is well enough if, on such occasions, actual words are minimal or not spoken at all. Much rarer than these instances, however, is the one of witnessing a celestial visitor on a day-by-day basis. Of having the chance to peer into him (or her) and discover him a bit. But even such people in their rarity come not without diversity and so, speaking from my limited vantage point, I'll mention but one: the golden boy I knew in high school The top student and athlete who was as well-mannered as could be and never showed the slightest ill-will. The sort of person I wanted to and in fact did believe in as a possibility for

humanity. The boy I ran track with who had the face of a choir boy. How tough a competitor he was and yet how tender at heart! It was his mother's horrible affliction that inspired him to become a doctor. And I know he believed in doing good (for we had talked enough on such matters) as well as the essential goodness of others and the all-consuming goodness of God. As a high school student he was perfectly good and, in a way, I'm glad I didn't know him later on when he became a doctor. For even if he had attained the eminence of a Schweitzer, he would never have equalled the perfection I bequeathed to him when he was a high school student.

We all carry around a diverse world within us which is far from being evident on most occasions. Our public faces are masks which hide the better part of ourselves and, even if this better part also contains the worst, sometimes make us feel small and reduced and restricted in relation to it. And yet if it weren't for these masks we wear on a daily basis, we would immediately clog up and paralyse our dealings with one another. So it is that we believe here or there or in this or that and, if we ever believed the contrary, we treat it as if it has been expunged forever. In my own case, it is true I'm no longer tempted as I once was to believe in a Biblical world or an anthropomorphic God. Then I was still a troubled teenager and, for no reasons clear to me, attended church on a few occasions. I even took along on one of these occasions the very sister whom I had molested. But what does this mean? First of all, it doesn't mean I'm no longer tempted to like or admire the religious story or picture. It only means I'm no longer tempted to ground all my thoughts and feelings in it.

The secular world I frequented even in the green years of my youth was only occasionally lit up by some incandescent charm. As thankful as I was for these chance occurrences, they were infrequent enough to make me feel oppressed by the contrary. Whatever the circumstances or situation, day-to-day contact with it made it seem as if it had been there for a dull eternity. Such is our attachment to the fleeting moment which more or less has the power to conjure away this inertia. Work and pleasure usually do an adequate job of this but even they, in their repetitiveness, can be less than satisfying. Yet as much as I was set on stimulating myself with new adventures and experiences, I was held as if by an invisible leash to the relatively non-reckless and controllable. The huge amount of gambling that went on in the hydro-electric camp night after night, card games where players regularly bet and lost their paychecks, had no appeal to me. Even my intake of alcohol, as abusive as it was for some years, never prevented me from doing whatever I had to. Lucky was I then to find the way before me always open and promising no matter how flat my life seemed at any particular moment.

With respect to the ravages of alcohol, one case made an indelible impression on me. It involved a young man of about thirty whom I often spotted in the huge camp dining room. Apart from his often being drunk, he stood out by virtue of his muscular build and his predilection for doing handstands. Attracting attention seemed to be important to him for he performed this feat on more than one occasion before hundreds of workers lined up at the serving counter or else seated at long tables. I soon heard that he was a former gymnast from West Germany and had even represented his country at the Olympics. One time I saw him so drunk that, after having sat down with a huge plate of food in front of him, he suddenly slumped forward, his face landing fully in his plate. For several moments he didn't move a muscle and simply rested there. When he finally sat up, his face was grotesquely painted with mashed potatoes, gravy, and whatever else he had in his plate. Such blatant self-humiliation as public spectacle, as caricature of what he had formerly been, profoundly shook me.

It was Montaigne who said there is more difference between men than between men and

animals. Although I'm not inclined to agree with this, I have never failed to wonder at the differences between human beings. I suspect a large part of this wonder is due to the fact that the vast majority of people do not enter our consciousness as narratives but rather as elliptical episodes or vignettes. Everyone I met up North (and how many other places!) was such a brief story or sketch. Men came to the camp and sometimes worked only a few weeks before quitting or getting fired. A good example of this is the forty-two-year-old ex-soldier who started working on the truck some time after me. He told me he had left the army shortly before he was entitled to receive his full pension. With his short hair, rolled-up sleeves, and brisk military gait, he seemed to be carrying over into civilian life the zeal and efficiency of his former one. All the time I worked with him loading and unloading produce (boxes of meat, vegetables, milk, eggs, ice cream, and canned goods), he was subdued, sensible, and sober. But then he didn't show up for work one day and was not to be seen again. The only word I got about him later was that he had fallen off the wagon.

Certainly not everyone I met up North was a loser. I even worked with someone who, unlike my uncles and the rest of the racetrack crowd, knew how to gamble successfully. Always in good humour, neat in appearance, and looking much younger than his years, he drove the three-ton truck that I worked on and that shuttled between the train station and the camp every day. One time we were sitting together in the cab of the truck and, perhaps casting a fatherly eye on me (I had told him about the incident of getting drunk and almost into a fight), he mentioned something about the ill effects of alcohol. Then he quickly changed the subject or so it seemed by telling me that he was a professional gambler. The card games he took part in were held in the huge camp lounge and recreational facility. It was a place I had visited a few times to play pool. He confirmed the stories I had heard about men who, having gambled away their earnings, left camp with nothing to show for months of hard work. He told me their ill luck was generally attributable to their playing under the influence of alcohol. Then he pulled out a loose bundle of one hundred dollar bills and fanned them before my eyes. It was his winnings over a two-month period.

Four more stints up North were to follow before I left for Europe at the age of twenty-four. None of them lasted longer than three months. While finding up there a world that was rough, frontier-like, and overwhelmingly male, I never experienced it as a war zone and never thought of it as a place of life-and-death struggles. On the contrary, heroics were few while talk, including the most inflated, went on everywhere. Abundance was also there in the kitchen where the amount of food thrown out was truly staggering. A couple of people died while working on the dam but I didn't know them. By and large the worst danger was a bunkhouse fire caused by a lit cigarette. Personal demons were everywhere but these were brought into the camp from other places. And like in Eugene O'Neill's play, *The Iceman Cometh,* many had their pipe dreams to comfort and entertain them as they moved from camp to camp. Some had designs on others but most calculated no further than their paychecks. Some were the hardest workers to be found while others were bone-lazy. Some were loveable rogues who broke the monotony of camp while others were complainers. Some were intelligent while others were illiterate. Some had undergone remarkable transformations and, in relation to their former selves, were unrecognizable. Some were friendly even though they had come down in life. Some were unfriendly *because* they had come down in life.

There was a man with twelve children who told me he wished he could put his brain into a twenty-year-old body. A hotshot-type whose fundamental dictum was that bullshit baffles

brains. A tough stope leader who told me all novice miners were soft. A Mexican roommate who, when he caught me on the verge of masturbating, suggested I get a girlfriend. A nearly blind Mennonite who took umbrage at the slowness of my chess game. A drunken lunatic who broke into my room one night. A not-so-ugly American who preferred Canada to his own country. A mousy-looking character who got angry when I told him a ballet dancer needed to be every bit as fit as a hockey player. A French-Canadian foreman who fired me when, following his instructions too closely, I passed the mop over the floor rather than mopping it properly. A tough-talking kitchen worker who was amazed I could read without moving my lips. A First Nations person who, working in a small camp with few facilities, regularly hired a helicopter to go cash his paycheck.

As far as what are commonly called character-building experiences, I don't suppose I have mentioned all. Amidst the welter of impressions that constituted my waking state, I was constantly pushing for a self that couldn't easily be rocked or destabilized. If there were a heroics or, better, a self-styled school of heroics in all this, then staying on my feet while being buffeted by discomfort and adversity was both my study and practise. I don't think I'm being pompous or pretentious in saying this because, right up to the present moment, few things have got the better of me.

No doubt there are people who, while displaying utmost courage in certain areas, lack it in others. It may be even be that their will to compensate for such cowardliness makes them undertake great things. They would then be a little like Lord Jim and, in secretly persecuting themselves, spur themselves on to what they otherwise wouldn't do. If such is the case, then my not succeeding at the highest level is to be explained by the fact that, until quite recently, I have never felt the need to compensate for a huge deficiency. The great exercise or exertion was lacking because I never felt the need to take away from one part of myself to concentrate all my forces on another. Never felt the need to mourn the resultant losses and redeem the ignominious defeat. What a marriage to mediocrity was my situation then because it still had yet to see itself as something to be redeemed. To be compensated for (which I take this project to be doing) because it lacked the highest reach.

– Without Direction –

My second stint up North didn't last much longer than a month. I got fired for being difficult and contrary. At the time and for some time to come, a lot of my moves seemed to lack rhyme or reason. Though I spent a lot of time imagining myself to be a person destined for all sorts of titillating adventures, I carried out virtually no amorous intrigues and shone less in the company of women than other places. Likewise I never built up a solid network of friends and acquaintances because I preferred to roam about in the image of a knight errant. Though at times I fitted myself in with people of my own age, I could never get over the feeling I was nothing more than a visitor. It is as if I were afraid of being taken over by the sameness of their society and having the distinctiveness of my thoughts drowned in theirs. Even when I got mixed up with drugs, it was a quick plunge in and out. Nothing could hold me because nothing ever came close to being the consummation of my dreams.

During the first two years of my working life, I held down some dozen jobs. The longest lasted about seven months and the shortest an hour. Along with returning to the racetrack for yet one more summer, I did brief stints as a factory worker, a miner, a kitchen worker, a cook, a

carpenter's helper, a labourer, a truck driver, a car jockey, and a salesman. During the same period I tried to enlist as a common soldier in both the Canadian and American armies. The first refused me because I was judged a person who wouldn't stick it out and the second for a technical reason having to do with my Canadian citizenship. I also made a half-hearted attempt to go back to school. Acting unruly and spurning authority the brief time I was there, I had the feeling of being a man in an environment where I had formerly been a boy.

So much of what I was doing then seems to me now a rejection of middle-class values. Certainly it was far from being politically or ideologically motivated. No, it was something much more vague because I was never formulating plans to actualize an ideal. Rather, it was more like a preoccupation with the perpetual shadow that falls between it and the real. With the middle-class denial of this shadow in its very profusion. The pretence that right-thinking society was a vector towards the highest and best. For a long time I had been sensitive to certain contradictions and falsehoods caught up with rampant materialism and its secret rule in so many sectors.

Is this the reason I chose to put adventure rather than luxury into my life? Certainly I was as dazzled by riches as others were and, if ever I had come into great wealth, I'm sure I would have turned hypocrite or else abandoned my morally more fastidious self. Self-control only goes so far and, to say it plainly, Christ's temptation in the desert is a model few will ever take to heart. But if ever I myself was tempted to do so, it was along the lines of the parable about laying up one's treasure where moths and thieves couldn't get at it.

What a confusion of violence, sexual urges, and moral compunctions I was then! Anecdotes could abound at this point but one incident in particular sticks out as being illustrative. I was walking home late one night in the summer when two young women suddenly rushed towards me from the other side of the street. Breathlessly they told me that a car loaded with young hooligans had been following them. Since an all-night coffee shop was nearby, we promptly repaired to it. Both the girls were attractive and so I was immediately aroused and excited by their company. No doubt I wanted to be helpful and make a good impression. However, I didn't have long to exercise my feeble charms before a young man came over to the table and sufficiently ingratiated himself to take up a seat. An intense anger started to well up in me but I managed to control it while we were in the restaurant. Since the girls lived in the same part of the city I did, we started off together once outside. But the situation deteriorated when the would-be gigolo decided to accompany us and, what is worse, continued to monopolize their attentions. Suddenly I swung towards him and, with considerable force, drove my fist into his stomach. He gasped, buckled over, and then, without a word, limped off. The two young women were astonished and one of them was furious. Nonetheless we continued our walk until yet one more Good Samaritan came along. This time it was an older man who pulled up with his car and offered us a lift. The girls accepted with what seemed to me dismaying alacrity. One climbed into the front while I climbed with the second into the back. Little more needs be said about this incident except that, if these young women were expecting better behaviour from this presumably more mature person, they were soon disillusioned. All of a sudden I found myself sitting aloof from the girl next to me and repelled by what I was hearing up front.

What did I know then of this eternal war between the idealized self of my childhood and the vicious one of later years? Perhaps nothing so little as that the middle course was barred to me and extremes would forever dictate my doings and desires. Yet because the educational ideal shone forth in me even when I was acting like a hooligan, even when I was carried over into the lawless territory of my libidinous desires, I managed to ward off a good deal more than I was

aware of at the time.

What is normally called bad company is perhaps what I warded off best. Not that I didn't have some dealings with violent, devious, or unworthy types but never did I make a devil's pact with them. Never did I try to ingratiate myself to some stronger, craftier, handier, more experienced, or better equipped person. It strikes me now that even though I sometimes envied and admired such types, I could never take them too seriously. As much as they may have been striking individuals in their own right, there was nothing in them of the great movement or project. For me it was enough to take in the surface of their lives and appreciate their difference from the rest of humanity. The work-a-day world that commutes from suburb to city and thinks not much further than getting along well until retirement years. Oh, I know well enough their better points, their time-outs, their stoppages of play, and even their beauty. But when I was young and had my mind so much on sexual adventures, the suburbs sometimes had the look to me of a ghost town.

Does it seem right that a blossoming eighteen-year-old man should have to play the actor and deceiver to fall into the hands of women? I ask this question not thinking of any regular activity on my part but rather isolated incidents where the limits normally in place were transgressed. To be sure, when sexual tension mounts and the eighteen-year-old in question hasn't even learned to masturbate properly. When he persists in going his own way and not following others. When he has never developed the skill of conversing agreeably with women. And, finally, when he is terribly finicky in his sexual longings and desires – then even a strapping young man can cut a poor figure.

He can cut a poor figure in his own eyes when he sees himself driven to petty ruses to attract attention. Such was the case one day when I felt particularly oppressed by my lonely and loveless state. It was in a park where nothing so much greeted my eyes as lovers lolling or strolling about. A gathering point in the park was the pavilion that looked like a Swiss chalet and housed a few small exhibits. I went up to the top of the pavilion, looked around, and then, as was commonly the case, had my eye out for any attractive females. Two were there together and somehow I managed to judge when they were ready to leave the exhibit and go downstairs. I went just a bit ahead of them and then, for no accountable reason, lost my footing on the stairs and tumbled head over heels right to the very bottom. The girls rushed to my side, picked me up, brushed me off, and, as the way with such divine creatures, petted me a bit. Soon after I tried a similar ruse at a public swimming pool. I dived into the deep end and, when I came up, pretended I had hit my head on the bottom. The young female lifeguard was solicitous enough but then a male one came along and showed little sympathy. But it wasn't this that bothered me so much. It was the feeling that he knew I was faking.

So intense was my desire for the most attractive members of the opposite sex that the whole realm of homosexuality was incomprehensible to me. As for the three minor incidents of my childhood which had homosexual overtones, they had never registered as significant events. One of them engendered more repulsion than attraction, another I was entirely ignorant of, and the third was but a mild form of titillation. I remember playing a game of catch and having a boy sit down on me while I lay prostrate on the ground. The feeling of his bare legs about me was pleasurable enough but, given that I had already experienced a more delicious feeling with older girls, it remained an isolated incident. As for the other two incidents, one was a bit disgusting and the other rather comical. In both cases, my best friend, a boy a year and half older than me, was the instigator. One time he got me up a tree and, with a ruler in hand, encouraged me to imitate

him and measure my penis. (Later I told my mother about this and she laughed.) This same friend a year or so later encouraged a younger boy to put on a tawdry show for us. With my friend, the boy's older brother, and me as audience, the younger boy darted back and forth, briefly bending over, pulling apart the cheeks of his ass, and exposing his rectum to us. Of course it was all very shocking and our nervous laughter betrayed that we had lost some of our childhood innocence. The instigator was even so malicious as to threaten to tell the younger boy's mother. Whereupon he immediately burst into tears and we all had to comfort him.

It took a poet to say that man is a soul tethered to an asshole. Few philosophers have described the union between the so-called lower and higher parts so objectively. Aristotle's definition of man as a rational animal is already a letting go of the first part. The tension between the two is, if not eliminated, reduced. A model is established which is essentially a role for everyone to act out. So necessary and successful is this model that it has come to be the touchstone of a considerable number of discourses. Indeed, much truthtelling as well as much falsehood proceeds from this point insofar as the manageability of the former requires the complicity of the latter. To treat human beings as talking heads with appendages is generally to keep silent about the ways in which the latter have their say through the talking heads. And since the ways in which they may do so are legion, truthtelling in this area can never be scientific or systematic but only *exemplary*.

I have met eighteen and nineteen-year-olds who have struck me as being very mature and yet, when I look back at myself at this age, I can only think either they weren't quite what they appeared to be or else I wasn't as immature as it seems to me now. Surely I was judged to be a rational person and conducted myself properly in most situations. Yet was that the real me, the presumably more mature and socially responsible self? Or was it the seething one within? If the first, how little it has stayed in my memory and how much more the second has kept up a life and residence.

Not much different from many other teenagers, I had already experienced enough of being responsible and sober (as well as being coerced into it) to think of it as not being the be-all and end-all of existence. Rather it seemed to be the general landscape for all sorts of opportunities including higher experiences. From my present standpoint, getting drunk or high on drugs certainly doesn't count for much but, when I was still in my teens, they were part and parcel of opening up new doors of perception. What a thing it was, the first time I got drunk, to lose all my usual reserve and speak at length and with seeming facility! In one bound I had left behind my old reticent self and, for a few hours at least, taken on a wholly new one. Thinking back, I doubt whether the headiness of that first experience was ever repeated. Only then did I exult in it with complete naivety and innocence and take it to be, like Caliban in *The Tempest*, the effects of a wondrous elixir.

It took me a while, though certainly not as long as some, to develop an abhorrence of drinking to the point of losing all control. But just as I had played the fool the first time I got drunk (when I punched the door and almost got into a fight), so did I on a few other occasions. At least two such incidents followed some months after the first and both involved exotic dancers. The first happened in a beverage room and the dancer in question was someone I didn't know. After she had finished her striptease, she sat down at a table where I was seated. Not only did I prove to be a great nuisance to her at the table by touching her legs but also by jumping up on the stage with her (which resulted in me being thrown out of the pub). The second incident involved a dancer who lived across from the apartment I shared with four fellows a bit older than

me. She was a very pleasant young woman who often dropped over. By the time the incident in question occurred, I had already got to know her quite well. Even though I had seen her dance on occasion and found her to be very attractive, she always acted like a big sister to me and the others. Her live-in boyfriend was about ten years older than her and didn't hide the fact he was a petty thief. One day he somehow got his hands on a suitcase full of expensive American liquor. There were a number of different kinds and all were high-grade alcohol. He offered me samples of these drinks and it wasn't long before I was completely drunk. Since I was working out at the track at the time and looking after some horses, I felt an obligation to go feed them at a certain hour. Given my condition, the boyfriend suggested I let him drive my car. So we all ended up piling into the front seat of this old wreck: Pete at the wheel, Sandy in the middle, and me on the right. It was a long drive to the track and, somewhere along the way, I started pawing Sandy and generally trying to make out with her. My sense of propriety was so skewed that I felt that no action of mine could be wrong if it only provoked laughter and mirth. And truth to tell, neither the striptease artist nor the con artist ever gave me reason later to think my actions were inappropriate.

– Drugs –

After I had personally experienced alcohol as a circean potion and myself as a swine, I learned eventually to drink more moderately. In the meantime I took a brief plunge into the drug world or at least that part to be found in a middle-class setting. It involved some pretty freaky experiences but no sex orgies and certainly no violence apart from one police raid. I do remember an incident where a young lady, an overnight guest, sleepwalked her way into the living room where I was bedded down. Being a light sleeper, I woke up and watched her as she slowly made her way over to some big chair or sofa. I then went over to her, picked her up and, without her ever waking, carried her back to the room she had come from. The next morning I told one of the other residents about this and he suggested she was faking.

As far as my drug experiences go, I barely touched marijuana or hashish and took the more powerful drug LSD only twice. It is necessary to distinguish between the first experience and the attempt to repeat it. All my most vivid memories of dropping acid come from the first. Long before I had read Heidegger's *Being and Time*, I experienced having the world about me and all that it contained suddenly become strange and distant. And yet it wasn't that the familiar was effaced but only shaken from its foundations of a knowing certainty.

Multi-coloured strobe lights, a darkened room, a kitten playing, some other druggies carrying on their banal chatter – all of this suddenly took on the aspect of an unrehearsed ritual. A surface with infinite depths. Glued to my own thoughts and perceptions, I was perhaps for the first time reduced to a mere shadow of myself, a small corner of consciousness peering out from its now humble home. My significance was no longer that of an actor playing on centre stage or even in the wings but rather of being interrelated in multiple ways to a passing scene which itself had the significance of millennia. This thinking, seeing, and hearing smallness of myself, this corner of consciousness, was able to cast a more appreciative eye than ever before on the miraculous presence of things. Both natural and man-made objects were illuminated as if from within. Even the very dust on the floor startled with its intrinsic beauty. Yet this mind with its reduced ego knew very well that it had altered itself and that it was contributing to the transcendent scene. It knew very well that the normal state of consciousness was considered to

be the right one and a not unwelcome point of return. It knew all this and still wasn't sure – no more than today – that all deception belonged to the altered state.

Far from staying in the apartment all night, I shortly went out with four other people. They were all as high as I was. We took the elevator from the eighth floor down to the underground parking lot. It was the longest elevator ride I have ever experienced. Some people got on at the sixth floor and, with their impassive faces and avoidance of eye contact, seemed to all of us (who were busy making faces at one another) comically inept. They got off at the main floor and we continued to the underground parking. Walking across this proved to be like traversing a wasteland. It went on without end. But finally we arrived where my car was parked. It was a humble vehicle, a '50 Dodge with a standard shift. But after I took it out, it gleamed in the moonlight and became fabulous.

Taking this car out on the road proved to be an incredible experience. As the ride in the elevator and the walk across the parking lot had shown, my perception of time and space had been immensely altered. Thus it was that, whenever I came to a stop, I would brake for what seemed like an eternity. The car would slide along the road like a cake of ice, finally coming to rest. I would then have to go through, as if in slow motion, putting the car into first gear, releasing my left foot from the clutch, and then pressing my right foot down on the gas pedal. The activity of my right arm while changing gears, a mechanical up-and-down movement upon accelerating or decelerating, had a hypnotic effect. Soon I felt that all the movements of my body were not so much in my control as being caused by the more powerful ones of the car. It was frightening enough to make me proceed with utmost caution. This and a few other strange things happened that night. The next morning I went out for a long drive by myself. Somewhere on the outskirts of the city, I rejoiced that all was back to normal.

While I was briefly inhabiting this drug world, a couple of other strange incidents occurred. There were two brothers in the apartment where I lived: one was straight and the other bent. The straight one didn't touch drugs. The bent one was not only taking drugs but medication. What was the stranger experience? To see him writhing and having convulsions on the bathroom floor or to be invited to a poetry reading in this same bathroom? Curiosity being not the least of my traits, I let him persuade me that the reading could only take place there. Thus it was that, while I sat on the toilet seat, he sat on the edge of the bathtub with a sheaf of papers. Reverently he began to read some of his poems. Every so often he would glance up and smile at me. At one point he broke off and suggested I would be more comfortable beside him. I politely refused and he continued his reading. Eventually his brother came along and knocked loudly on the door. It was time for our session to end because the salon had been booked for other engagements.

It seems noteworthy to me now that, while so much was communicated to me through the bathroom poet's looks, manners, and gestures, nothing came to me through his poems. And I doubt whether the situation would have been much different if he had written or read the best poetry in the world. And this not for the reason that I was frightened or agitated by his behaviour, but because it fascinated me. Was the sexual instinct so perfidious that it would make use of even the most personal and prized possessions? That it would risk insult, confrontation, and perhaps even worse by presuming where there was little or no reason to presume?

To judge by a casual remark of his brother later, he had tried the same stunt with others. No doubt I'll never know how soiled he felt or how soiled he was made to feel by being attracted to – and here I'll permit myself a pun with Freudian implications – the wrong kind of plumbing.

Of course the flippancy of the above remark belongs to my present attitude and not to what I was then. As an eighteen-year-old, I was still fairly ignorant and innocent. Indeed, I spent little time thinking about sexual intercourse and even less imagining intimate contact with a girl's genitalia. Only the female form, movement, gesture, and voice could arouse in me a desire which seemed limitless. Moving leisurely about the grand surfaces of a woman's body, undulating and curvaceous, filled up the bulk of my sexual fantasies. Nonetheless it can't be ruled out that even then I was secretly oriented towards the oral and anal parts as ejaculatory destinations. Yet so far was I from thinking along these lines that I was almost as virginal in my imagination as I was in fact.

Neither as a young man nor later on was I ever able to tolerate for long a situation that seemed to be exhausted of its experiential possibilities. My days in the drug world were numbered for this reason despite its light-heartedness, its headiness, and its charms. I remember a minor incident which gives an idea of my attitude or mentality and how it differed from at least some of those around me. I was driving down the highway on a beautiful summer's day in the same old Dodge that had almost got the better of me a few days earlier. Now it was totally obedient and performing wonderfully. I exulted in the machine's power and my ability to handle it. The radio was blaring out an interminably long song very popular at the time.

Give me a head with hair, long beautiful hair.
Shiny, gleaming, streaming, flaxen, waxen
Give me down to there hair, shoulder length and longer.
Here baby, there momma, ev'rywhere, daddy, daddy.

I want it long, straight, curly, fuzzy
Snaggy, shaggy, ratty, matty
Oily, greasy, fleecy, shining
Gleaming, steaming, flaxen, waxen
Knotted, polka-dotted; Twisted, beaded, braided
Powdered, flowered, and confettied
Bangled, tangled, spangled and spaghettied!

O-oh, Say can you see; my eyes if you can,
Then my hair's too short!
Down to here, down to there,
etc.

I remember these moments now as being one of those rare events where I could glory in my youth and even imagine it would go on forever. Moments which, so fleeting, would have been interpreted another way if I hadn't been so young. If I had known then that birth and death are both major and minor events running along an infinite axis. So it was that the mood of eternal youth eventually dissipated and I left the highway and drove into the city. I somehow met up with another eighteen-year-old who frequently came to the shared apartment I was living in at the time and who dropped acid the night I did. With him now in the front seat, I headed back to the highway with the hope of rekindling the euphoria I had experienced earlier. Naturally enough, we talked about our acid trip and some of the incidents that had almost freaked us out.

Such as going down the elevator with the people who, getting on after us, acted like automatons. Or such as turning into the gas station that resembled an eerie space launch on another planet. Or such as getting pulled over by a cruiser car that nearly frightened us all to death. (We thought it was on account of our being stoned but it turned out to be over a minor infraction.) These and other things we talked about until I finally ended up saying to him that our acid trip was quite an experience. To which he replied with some surprise: "Experience? It was fun!"

– The Mine –

Could anything be further removed from this scene than where I was a bit later? Surely not a pure pleasure-seeker such as I had with me that day in the car would have gone of his own free will from what was fun but hallucinatory to what was hallucinatory but not at all fun. Working eighteen hundred feet underground certainly didn't require acid to make it such an experience. I remember very clearly getting into that creaky cage every morning for the infernal descent. Men packed together like sardines and stops at every drift to let a handful out. A lunchroom way down in the bowels of the earth full of rough types who didn't have much use for acid or long hair. A windy tunnel that had been blasted out of adamantine rock. A set of narrow rails running down it and ore cars sitting or moving about. An underground cavern that looked like something out of Dante's *Inferno*. An absolute darkness everywhere there was no miner's light to breach it. A sense of time that went from minutes dragging out like hours to hours whisking by like minutes. A sense of work that put me in mind of Sisyphus. A sense of great danger and possibly even of dying when, after having been struck across the throat by a rock bolt projecting from a passing ore car and after having been knocked helmetless and lightless to the ground, I heard the wheels of the ore car rumbling close to my head.

But what bothered me more than the danger, the darkness, and the dampness was the rather haphazard and non-specific nature of the work. To begin with, it seemed that I spent half my time walking about in the dark and getting lost. Apart from a few occasions when I had help experienced miners carry some heavy object or set charges in the stope, I was either left to my own devices or shovelling sludge into an ore car. No one accompanied me when I did this highly unpleasant work and so, not being saved from the most incredible monotony I have ever experienced, it took on the allure of a truly Dantesque punishment.

Yet what ultimately drove me out of the mine was none of this but an allergic reaction to the ore. Thinking about it now, I'm a bit amazed that, had it not been for the running sores under my glasses and the rashes in the creases of my elbows and knees, I would have worked longer in that place. In any event, I was reassigned to the surface and went to work with a crew of men who, like gnomes in a workshop, thought nothing of taking a two-hour nap in the afternoon. Then for some reason I was transferred once again and given a much more active job outside. But not active enough, apparently (or maybe not gnome-like enough), because one day I was called into the boss's office and told I was redundant.

I fear now a certain loss of my subject in this narrative. Certainly not the personal one of myself but the philosophical one of truthtelling. Before these two subjects can come together more explicitly, I must traverse a number of years of being in an intellectual wilderness. A period where I bounced about from pillar to post and outwardly didn't advance much. A period where I often acted so selfishly and stupidly that even now I'm forced to ask: were these experiences so vital to the present project's coming-to-be? And, if so, are they still vital to it as recounted and

reexamined experiences?

In truth, I'm still on the track of my life-long attraction to the extraordinary and heroic. It seems to me it has carried me to a certain kind of truthtelling that most people don't do and wouldn't even deign to do. Yet I don't want to take too much for granted and so, if there be such a life-long attraction, then everything about it, the good, the bad, and the ugly, should be revealed. Given the complexity of human nature, there is no reason to assume it should be innocent, one-dimensional, entirely stable, and immune to outside influences.

Only in the way I'm proceeding can this attraction be both tested and traced out. Tested every step of the way so that, if the telling of my story is nothing more than an egoistic trip, then at least it will be exposed as such. But if it is something more than this, then to the extent that all truthtelling is inseparable from the ego, it is an area to be delved into with as much rigour as possible.

– Stupidity –

I doubt that I have ever exhibited more stupidity than during my brief stint as a truck driver. Driving a three-ton truck with an exceedingly high box, I worked with a much older man transporting oil drums to and from various refineries. The second week on the job, I extensively damaged the truck by trying to drive it under a low railway trestle. Of course the owners were upset but, instead of firing me on the spot, they had me go pick up a rental truck and use it while the damaged one was being repaired. A week later I was told to go pick up the now-repaired truck and so I drove the rental one to the repair shop and returned with the other. However, when I got back to the yard, I found it locked and so, having no car at the time, decided to take it home. Later on in the evening, I drove it to a nearby hotel and, running into old friends, got drunk in the beverage room.

Despite my recent experience with the low railway trestle, I now made the same mistake by trying to drive under the canopy of the hotel. Immediately the night clerk came running out and shouted that he was going to call the police. At the same moment my two companions (I had stupidly offered to give them a lift) jumped out without a word. I then backed up the truck and circled around the nearly torn-off canopy. I drove out of the parking lot and onto a highway and then onto a main street. But before I had gone more than a few miles, I was pulled over by the police. Ordered out of the truck, I was then taken to the police station and thrown into a holding cell. When the police officers on duty ignored my request to make a phone call, I called them a lot of names. They thereupon came into my cell and handcuffed me to the bars. With my hands secured over my head, I slept standing up most of the night.

My foolishness didn't stop there. Instead of sticking around Winnipeg for my scheduled court appearance, I hitchhiked all the way to Chambly. There I dropped in at a friend's place and made up some story to explain to his parents why I was suddenly appearing on their doorstep and in need of help. Given that I was far from being a practised liar, it is possible they didn't believe me. Immediately I set about looking for work in Montreal but when I didn't find anything after two weeks, the woman of the house seemed to lose faith in me.

When my stay with the family dragged on a bit, I noticed a certain change in their attitude. Indeed, it was the youngest member of the family, a five-year-old girl, who, like a canary in a coal mine, signalled most clearly that the atmosphere in the home was growing hostile. Without further ado, I took my leave and yet the thought that this family considered me

to be some sort of parasite continued to gnaw at me. Later I sent them a modest sum of money to rid myself as much as them of any lingering suspicion in this area.

A series of incidents then occurred with the second family I stayed with in Chambly. It involved a sixteen-year-old girl to whom I candidly recounted my flirtation with drugs. It also involved her mother to whom the girl repeated what I had told her. It also involved another woman to whom the mother of the sixteen-year-old repeated what her daughter had said. Finally, it involved my own mother to whom the second woman repeated what the first had said. From my own mother I was not at all pleased (as well as amazed) to find out I was going around with a drug problem.

All of this strikes me now as the highly prolific foolishness of well-meaning but unthinking people. Not one of the parties concerned bothered to check out the story with me. Yet it couldn't have been for the reason they weren't in regular and, indeed, friendly contact with me. It couldn't have been because they didn't have the *opportunity* to check out this story. No, it could have only been because it was something they were afraid of for reasons that had more to do with prejudice and public opinion than personal knowledge.

– Mr. O'Connor –

Not far away in a suburb of Montreal called Greenfield Park lived an old couple who had befriended my parents when they were just starting off. I visited them a couple of times and then, in order to be closer to my workplace, I asked them to take me in for a while. A number of things about this couple revealed them to be among the most kind, generous, caring, and devoted of people. Both had tended on ill parents over many years. Both had helped out many friends and neighbours. Both regularly attended church and had taken part in charitable organisations. Both were kind and hospitable to me. All this they had done and yet few people have I met with such an irascible and consistently maintained prejudice as Mr. O'Connor.

Absolutely unapologetic about having this prejudice, Mr. O'Connor seemed to have no difficulty squaring it with his Christian faith. To be sure, he was in accord with this faith insofar as he would unfailingly help out his French-Canadian neighbour. But he was in blatant contradiction of it insofar as he would repeatedly vilipend and vilify the French-Canadian people. As a member of an English-speaking minority used to exercising power, he strongly resented all attempts to erode this power and distribute it more equitably. But being relatively unschooled and ignorant, he didn't see that his attitude had less to do with Christ's Sermon on the Mount than justifying conquest and colonialism.

His bigotry was a way of discharging a lot of his anger over some unhappy personal experiences that involved having a good livelihood being taken away from him by certain union practises. Suffering from this, he came to see the first as representing the good and equitable management of the English-speaking owner and the latter as the destructive interference and false pretensions of the French-speaking worker. Absolutely blind to all historical injustices suffered by the latter, he lived his life as a harsh and unfeeling man continually redeeming himself by his unimpeachable conduct as friend, neighbour, worker, churchgoer, and tax-paying citizen.

For no reason in particular, I went one day with him to mass. The liturgy droned on in a way that seemed to make bearing the boredom of it part of doing penance. At one point the priest invited all members of the congregation to introduce themselves to the people sitting nearest

them. With a great deal of rustling and murmuring, the flock then reached out their hands to one another and some even turned around and did the same over benches. In the meantime I virtually sat on my hands because my distaste for such displays was so great that it prevented me from even being polite.

On another occasion the O'Connors had some guests over. A mother with her son and two little girls. The son was in a wheelchair suffering from muscular dystrophy. Not much older than me, he didn't speak but simply jerked about in his chair. For this reason, he was strapped down to it. The mother incessantly interrupted her conversation to reprimand the two girls for the slightest display of liveliness. At the time I thought it was all rather mean and unnecessary. But thinking about it now, it might have been a highly specific form of penance. For if this woman felt guilty about having brought her son into the world, perhaps she felt no right to take pleasure in the two normal children.

In addition to being prejudiced against French-Canadians, Mr. O'Connor was also prejudiced against Jews. As a tile contractor working in Montreal, he was often in their homes renovating their bathrooms. He believed they were always trying to get extra work done at little or no cost. Like many people with limited intellects, Mr. O'Connor reasoned from the part to the whole and, in doing so, took the part to be the essence and defining characteristic.

There are many Mr. O'Connors of one sort or another in this world and so, given certain circumstances, persecution and pogroms become possible. In ordinary circumstances, however, their good will and humanity is precisely what stands opposed to letting this genie out of the bottle.

– Loose in Montreal –

Seven Jewish brothers owned the high-rise office building whose underground parking lot was where I worked. It was situated smack downtown and had barely been erected before I got my job there. In charge of the parking lot was a middle-aged man who seemed to be well-off and have a lot of time on his hands. He would hang around the parking lot all day for no discernable reason. Because the building was new, it was far from being fully occupied. As a consequence, few cars came into the parking lot.

As one of two car jockeys with not a great deal to do, I experienced the pleasure of what is crudely called "shooting the shit." It was difficult for me to look down on this activity for, although it could be crude, distorting, and deficient, it could also be stimulating, entertaining, and informative.

To think now that I was content to do this while others my age with comparable talents and abilities were busily grooming themselves for careers! Surely I knew that, if ever I was to be one of their number, I was going about it the wrong way. Yet so far was I from dwelling on this or feeling some urgency to change the situation that the only way I can explain it now is by once again referring to my preoccupation. As one-sided and prejudicial as it may have been at times, my ongoing impression of the professional type was that he was a clever, calculating actor. Someone who sacrificed his youthful exuberance, spontaneity, charm, boldness, and candour on the altar of conformity. Who was never concerned with reaching an unreachable star and who no more put me in mind of the extraordinary and heroic than the assemblage of courtiers and councillors in a Shakespeare play.

But to be sure my life was not that of a Shakespearean hero. Apart from behaviour that

sometimes resembled a scaled-down version of Hotspur's, it was more Dostoyevskian than Shakespearian. Still troubled by my sexual desires and my inability to satisfy them, I spent a good part of my time frequenting bars. After moving out of the O'Connors' place, I took up residence in a single room. Periodically a train would go by and give it a good shake. Otherwise it wasn't very interesting. During the four or five months I was there, I brought to it but one visitor apart from a couple of co-workers. I met her one night in a bar and I suspect she belonged to a well-to-do family. Despite this, her manner wasn't in the least condescending. She was intelligent, likeable, easy to talk to, and probably curious as to what I was all about. But seeing as how this didn't involve making something of myself in the near future, I was probably out of her league in a way that she didn't quite realize. In any event, she called me up one time and said she wouldn't be able to see me again.

There was one incident I shouldn't overlook. For a reason that only an ardent adolescent or young man could appreciate, I felt it was absolutely necessary to have a car on our first date. Not being able to get one by conventional means, I decided to "borrow" one. An airline company had a fleet of cars regularly going in and out of the parking lot. But around five o'clock they were parked there and left undisturbed until morning.

> *Parked on the top of Mt. Royal in a stolen vehicle, the young couple gazed at the vast stretch of city lights below. It was not to be outdone as a romantic spot and, indeed, it was at her suggestion they came there. Didn't he act the gentleman and didn't she find him intelligent, thoughtful, and trustworthy? Perhaps he wasn't the most charming boy but certainly not unattractive. And he'd done a lot of adventurous and interesting things though it didn't seem he had a life plan. This was one of the things that distinguished him from most of the boys she knew and were part of her milieu. They all had clear plans and ambitions. And some were even well on their way to fulfilling them. But they could also be a bit vain and full of themselves and hard to put up with. They seemed to think everything revolved around money and what it could do. It was nice to get away from that for a while. He was the first goy she'd ever gone out with. It was kind of breathtaking to be up there on the mountain.*

Not having put gas in the car to make up for what I had burned that night, I got word later that its unauthorized use had been detected. The thought of getting into trouble with the police again was sufficient to make me think twice about repeating this stunt.

A word should be said about the irresponsibility I was exhibiting at this time. What prevented it from bringing me to a bad end was that I rarely compounded it by mixing one strain with another. Though I sometimes pushed my luck and even derived pleasure from this, I also had a horror of bad consequences. For this reason, there was a certain probity and caution even in my recklessness.

In Montreal I didn't take drugs and seldom drank excessively. At the same time I obtained a driver's licence by fraudulent means and gave the slip to the insurance company that was after me. I did other foolish things like trying to become a soldier in Vietnam. I even went so far as to write an excessively long and personal letter to the recruiting sergeant. To my present way of thinking, never was I closer to madness than when I tried to enlist in the American army.

Few people have I met in my life who seemed to me to have heroic stature. Ed Jones was one of those few. He came to the parking lot one day as a part-time employee. A very large man

who combined a military carriage with a free-and-easy manner, an open and friendly face with a stentorian voice, an intelligent eye with a raucous sense of humour, he literally won me over in minutes. A lieutenant in the fire department of Hampstead, Ed had come to the parking lot simply to do a bit of moonlighting. He told me and the fellow I worked with that, at the tender age of thirteen, he had tried to sign up with the American marines and in fact was accepted before his true age was discovered. Some years later, he joined the Canadian army and fought in Korea. Still later, he was part of an airborne unit and made over three hundred parachute jumps.

Ed didn't seem to be happy unless he was in a uniform. Before he got into the fire department, he had worked a year or two as a bus driver. I can only imagine him as having been one of the friendliest and most courteous. But I also can imagine him as having had zero tolerance for all troublemakers. Capable of resorting to violence when the situation called for it, he was also capable of the most touching displays of gallantry. It is difficult to convey how much I esteemed him when I witnessed his coming to the rescue of a young woman who, though not threatened or physically hurt, was crying her eyes out. Never before had I seen such a wholehearted attempt to comfort a perfect stranger.

Ed was no saint. I know he cheated on his wife and had his share of prejudices. I know his attitude to women wasn't the most enlightened. But contrary to the vast majority of people who hide their faults, Ed was entirely open about his. No school or university would ever have given me a better course in candour.

So far was I from the land of scholarship then that I remember walking by McGill University and mistaking a group of Hare Krishna for a fraternity stunt. To think I was so entirely devoid of curiosity as not to want to check out this campus. It was as if I saw it only as the place where my father had failed. But it is also true I didn't check out another nearby campus even though one of my childhood friends was a student there. The only reason I can come up with for this is that, before I dropped out of high school, I had always believed I was destined to be where he was.

The question of how intellectually active I was at this time seems to be a point to consider. If it were simply a matter of equating this with reading literature, philosophy, history, and so on, then compared to what I did later and for most of my life, little was going on. Only five books come to mind that were read during my stay in Montreal: Homer's *The Odyssey*, Marquis de Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom,* Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, and James Clavell's *Tai Pan* and *King Rat.*

In reading as in life, I sought diversity and challenge. I could no more rest comfortable with the enjoyable but easy than I could carry on a lot of small talk. Talk that is common and agreeable enough but that, unlike shooting the shit*,* is not freewheeling and eager for all sorts of controversial subjects. With no one to help me and no thought of looking for suitable introductions or commentaries, Nietzsche's poetic work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, proved too much for me. The paradoxical utterances largely escaped me because I still followed conventional thinking about the relationship between good and evil. To be sure, I saw few examples in real life of a clear opposition between them. But such examples as there were convinced me that there must be at least an essential difference.

Which brings me to the Marquis de Sade. Put sex and evil together and how bad could it get? There is no question it could get – or at least seem to get – a lot worse than anything I dared to imagine. In reading these incredible recipes for the cruelest and most disgusting forms of debauchery, did I seek justification for my own sexual deviance and animality? Such a question

isn't easy to answer because the word justification isn't necessarily simple and straightforward. If it means developing a good conscience about one's libido to the point of turning oneself into a monster, then nothing changed for me after reading Sade. On the other hand, if it means soothing one's conscience over having acted this way or something like this way in the past, I don't doubt it had this justificatory and even therapeutic effect. Dragging around a bad conscience wasn't something I thought even then a worthwhile occupation.

A few other things happened in Montreal that stick out in my memory. But I'm reluctant to go into them because they don't add much to themes already developed. Themes such as my sexual frustration, my violent temper, my foolishness, my tendency to be a loner, my hero-worshipping, and my powers of observation and self-observation. In truth, so much was I the spectator of myself that I often thought it inhibited me in my actions. This was particularly the case when I was socially interacting with people who I didn't know very well. It seemed then that I was hyper-conscious of any false moves, hesitations, exaggerations, cliched expressions, and so on. How much depends on being a good speaker and a good actor! Yet in order to be this, one needs to forgive a good deal in oneself that is false, put-on, show, quackery, deception, and downright dishonesty. Strange to think that, though I found these elements to be morally repellant in myself, I envied those who, like Rameau's nephew, went straight to their objectives without such scruples.

Dry and unpalatable, that is how I often appeared to myself. It seemed to be very difficult to reconcile wanting to be a swashbuckling hero with the desire to develop as some hitherto unknown and unnamed researcher. Fear of deceiving others sprang largely from my fear of deceiving myself. From my fear that, unlike Rameau's nephew, I wouldn't be able to keep the one from overtaking and consuming the other. So vital did it seem then to avoid falsity and deception that it was often at the cost of being heavy and lugubrious in the midst of light chatter.

My half-year stint as a car jockey came to a messy end. I got into a bitter squabble with one of the regular customers. I had reached a point where keeping the job didn't matter. It was springtime and the road beckoned. Though I loved Montreal, living and working downtown as I was had lost its savour.

– Lethargy –

There were times I didn't really know what I was doing. Painful moments that made me long for and grow nostalgic over a period of my life that had barely ended. A strange and retrograde movement of the spirit where the most recent past would take on the allure of an imagined future. Where what seemed so achingly out of joint would be mitigated by the prospect of restoring to my life a comforting and familiar content. And all this in the context of thinking that life wasn't grand enough or, more properly, that I wasn't grand enough to make it grand. So it was that two steps I took shortly after returning to Winnipeg were two conflicting desires: the one of returning to the life I had just left behind in Montreal and the one of more or less "getting a life." First there was the letter I sent off to the parking lot in Montreal. That I went so far as to ask for my old job back, particularly after I had insulted one of the regular customers, strikes me now as one of those clearly irrational moves I have only made while going through fortunately short periods of spiritual crisis. At the same time I was pulled in another direction when, no longer thinking so highly of my escapades, I sought a way, if not to reform myself in any radical sense, to go beyond them. Clearing up the business of the impaired driving charge wasn't a great

move but at least it was a move in a contary or compensating direction. The police sergeant took a fatherly attitude towards me when I showed up at the station and confessed what I had run away from.

Everywhere there seemed to be small ideas and rushed opinions. The world functioned like a huge clock. Every time someone chimed up about something not directly related to his work, it was less than edifying (except as one more sign of the all too human). Take the police sergeant efficiently doing his job. Another Mr. O'Connor when it came to the matter of expressing his opinion about draft dodgers. For him it was noble that I should try to go to Vietnam and ignoble for others to avoid doing so. It all boiled down to being patriotic and doing one's duty. Had it been up to him, they would have all been sent back to face the music.

And then, a few days later, I overheard a couple of old men running down young ones. It was clear they equated wearing long hair with a lack of masculinity. To think these dried-up old husks assumed they were in a position to judge about this! I almost had words with them but then thought better of it. It was enough to take in their worn faces to see they would have folded up like weak tents in a wind storm.

Not that I didn't have my own prejudices but, compared to what I heard from others, I thought I was pretty much free of them. The only saving grace was the candour with which they were usually expressed and the hesitations and qualifications that were quick to arise when serious challenges were made. Even the hard-bitten Mr. O'Connor would back off if truly pressed. But most of the time he wasn't pressed and so stayed like the others in his dogmatic slumber. Not that I'm sure that waking him out of it would have been a beneficial thing. It is easy to impugn a person like him but not so easy to know if, without his prejudices, he would still be able to go on.

I'm sure I'll have many more opportunities to talk about prejudice. Both my own and others. But right now I'm concerned with a period of my life that doesn't come back easily. The period just before my father showed up and ushered in a period I have no difficulty remembering. The earlier period may be misty because I was starting to repeat myself. Going up North for short spells, having no clear objectives, drinking in beverage rooms, spending a lot of money and saving little. All of this doesn't have much to recommend it. In a way that never occurred to me until now, my father stepped in and saved me from this blurry repetition. Not that a lot of my youthful aimlessness and debauchery didn't keep on even later. But what changed for me was that I started to see it under a new light. Being close to him over a relatively stable period brought me to a new awareness of my errancy and how it differed from his.

The world of the working class is more raucous and less predictable than any university campus. Yet somehow it manages to hold together. There is an astounding amount of good will going on every day and, as a commodity, it flows as freely as water. What is a noisy beverage room if not, at least nine-tenths of the time, a great commotion of good will? The drinking that goes on warms the spirit, loosens the tongue, and makes everybody seem interesting and worth talking to. Points of view are exchanged less for the sake of resolving anything than for catching sight of one's own point of view in the other or what might be in his that is worth considering. As much as there may be in this that is foolish and of no account, so there is that which is food for thought.

I was on one of my brief stints up North when my father arrived in Winnipeg. Six years had gone by since he had last seen the family. At his sister's place he met my mother, my brother, and my three sisters. Dressed in a suit and tie and with his face flushed, he played the returned

father with enthusiasm. Photos were taken that still show he had put on considerable weight. Through my aunt, my mother had already made it clear to him she wasn't interested in a reconciliation. Still she hadn't wanted to deprive him of his right to see the children.

When I came home and my mother broke the news to me, I reacted gleefully. At this she began to cry because she feared he would somehow interfere with our lives. His arrival had come at a particularly inopportune time for her. A man had come into her life who promised her more security than she had known for several years. At the same time there was little to indicate my father had turned things around for himself. First of all, he didn't seem to think it was out of the ordinary to appear out of nowhere and pick up with a family he hadn't bothered to contact in six years. Secondly, there were many indications he was still a heavy drinker. Thirdly, my oldest sister, after meeting him once, didn't want to have anything more to do with him. And, finally, there was the worrisome matter of my second-oldest sister.

A brilliant child, she had been my father's favourite. I'll never forget him making a pathetic attempt to keep her with him the time just before my mother took us all away. Like the attempt to reconcile with my mother, it was something half-hearted and quickly abandoned. Now she was fifteen and anorexic. She kept a cool enough head but also kept a lot locked up inside.

A supper was scheduled . My father was hosting it. My mother and my oldest sister decided not to come. My very thin fifteen-year-old sister and I took the bus to the restaurant.

My flush-faced, genial, overweight, children-loving father! How happy he was to see me! How heartily he clasped my hand, hugged me around the shoulder, and kissed my cheek! With what bounty, good will, and affection he directed us all to a table for a supper that would never be repeated! Little do I remember of it except the lavish affection he bestowed on my second-oldest sister. It seemed a strange form of cruelty emanating as it did from so much paternal love. Watching the pained, contorted expression on her face when he gave her long lingering kisses on the lips, I couldn't fathom how he could be so blind as not to see it was all too much for her. Six full years had gone by but, to judge by the way he was carrying on, it was no more than six months. His intentions were not dishonourable but there was still something excessive about his affection. He was far too inattentive and overcome by the event to catch a glimpse of what she was all about at the time.

Shortly after the supper was over, my still quite young brother and my two sisters left. My father and I spent the rest of a long evening together. What truths were told that night have been drowned in the river Lethe. I don't suspect he made much of an attempt to give an account of himself. But then again I could be wrong.

> *It happened and that's all there is to it. I loved your mother and I still love her. I can't give you answers to all your questions. I can't tell you why I let it all go. I can't even tell you why I came here. I've been fucked up for a long time. I get by the best way I can. I don't go in for analysing why it's the way it is. I tried that and there's always somebody missing the point. I am what I am – that's the point. They all want you to be something you're not. Even your mother was like that. "Just go along. Be like everyone else. Why can't you?" That was what she said. Make sure to put on a smiling face even when you've no reason to be smiling. And make sure to kiss ass a bit otherwise you won't get ahead. You'll be left out of the loop. And don't let those minor humiliations get to you. The ones you have to put up with every day. Like the kid fifteen years your junior they hire and put over your head. Yeah, take it all in*

stride. But then one day I couldn't. I'd taken it for a while and then I couldn't take it anymore. I blew it all right back in their faces. And so then I was out in the cold and no chance of getting back. That's the reason I ended up selling insurance. More of the same. Couldn't put on a happy face every day morning noon and night. Even to save home and family. So there it is. I fucked up and let everything go. But don't think I didn't try to keep it together for you, your mom, and the rest of the kids. It's just I couldn't play the game.

Whatever our rapport was to be later, it was good that night. No doubt the abundant flow of alcohol played its part. Without feeling the least resentment towards my mother or being aggrieved by anything she had done, I was happy to have this opportunity to renew with my father. I was also excited by the prospect of going to Kingston. Everything was settled while we were still in our cups. Only now does it strike me as being somewhat remiss on his part not to have worried about my schooling.

– Kingston –

I have sometimes the feeling that my path is more rough-strewn, doubtful, heterogeneous, and wayward than it should be. And this despite starting off with the idea that these elements could and would be absorbed into a containing whole. I have been aware of the possibility of straying from my subject in the strictest sense by more or less sticking a lot of feathers in my cap and putting on a gaudy show for myself. And this even when I attempt to dig into what I take to be the most painfully revealing aspects of my life. Of course this slippage or sloppiness in the way I go about telling the truth about truthtelling was anticipated at the beginning when I said that trying not to hide the worst about myself would inevitably be bound up with trying to give the best view of myself. Strange it is to think that, in the very desire to do as well as I can and be faithful to my subject, I could be led into fictionalizing it.

And what would be the principal danger here other than the one of overloading my past life with significance and taking it to be entirely germane to what I'm presently doing? Is it certain that all these little moves and experiences of my youth couldn't have been foregone without radically changing my destiny? *Oh, this destiny that gets so much play only for the reason that no one before has tackled this subject I call truthtelling! And only for the reason that, in order to tackle it, I must look up and down and right and left at the subject of myself!* So with respect to foregoing experiences like I had in Kingston, I know only one thing: they continued and even pushed further a certain errancy in my life that never collapsed into non-education or non-experimentation. Other settings no doubt could have provided the same and, like the Kingston one, eventually brought me around to sublimating this errancy in a more intellectual, artistic, and institutional milieu. Therein lies the arbitrary element that makes it forever uncertain that such and such set of circumstances should be credited with profound and far-reaching implications. Taken as a whole, the two and half years I spent in Kingston perhaps amounted to no more than making absolutely certain I would never follow in the footsteps of my father.

But what was I at this time? Still somebody who did just as he wished and wasn't afraid to loosen familial bonds for some obscure purpose. In this my attitude was analogous – but only in a rough and ironic sense – to Christ's sacrifice. For instead of forging a bond with my father with care and love as preeminent motives, I strengthened only the critical one that was already in

place as that part of my character I owed to him. Such a pitiless attitude, essentially a study of what I took to be both me and not me in him, was in operation almost from the beginning. On the long train ride from Winnipeg to Kingston, we drank heavily and discussed many matters. We even came close to not getting back on at one stop. Indeed, we had to run down the tracks for a couple of hundred yards before the train slowed down and came to a halt. *Secret observation number one: my father was terribly out of shape. He could barely run. I was like a deer beside him*.

On the train going out East, I took along a library book that I knew I should have returned. It was about Winston Churchill. Already I had read a great deal about Nazi Germany. Just as I had been amazed by Hitler's rise to power, so was I fascinated by Churchill's personality. A man steeped in party politics and mass propaganda and yet one who still managed to speak like a Shakespearean hero. (*"I've nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.*")

My father hated Churchill. It was all because of Ireland. I remember we argued on the train about this. I thought Churchill should be credited for winning the war against an evil regime. ("*What is our policy?" I will say: "It is to wage war by sea, land, and air with all our might, and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark and lamentable catalogue of human crime*.") My father took the view that Hitler was only interested in uniting Europe. Apparently this made him, along with being the latest proponent of a long-held dream, a world conqueror of no better or worse stamp than others.

Nothing is truly noteworthy here except that my father strayed from orthodox views to such a marked degree that I was both astonished and repulsed. Irritated as well by my apparent inability, a lifelong hangup, to argue with facility and as close to my feelings and convictions as possible. Without having all the necessary arguments and information at my fingertips, I felt that, even if he wasn't entirely wrong on some points, he was still being simplistic and one-sided. *Secret observation number two: He had the courage to go against popular opinion. But for all he had to say about Churchill and Hitler, it smacked of prejudice or politics on the one hand and outrageous offhandedness on the other.*

We arrived in Kingston, deposited our bags in his shabby one-room apartment, and immediately went to a hotel. So well known was he to the staff of the beverage room that, even though it was after-hours, they opened up to us. More drinking and now meeting of new people ensued. My father held me up like a trophy. I was in my element to the extent that this was just a continuation of my drinking up North. It was a kind of Saturnalia before it would come time to put my shoulder to the wheel. It even went so far as to see us start all over again the next morning. *Secret observation number three: The whole business of reconciling with my mother had been a pipe dream.*

I met the man, much younger than my father, who was his boss. He was willing to give me a job on condition I proved myself. Whereas my father did surveying work for the company, I would be a labourer. Unquestionably I found it satisfying that, professionally speaking, my father was above me. Not so heedless to common opinion was I that, had my father been a labourer, it would not have bothered me. To see him as I did later standing at the top of a trench and peering through a transit while I, at the bottom of it, wielded a shovel, gave me one of those few moments I truly looked up to him.

If my father could be critical of Winston Churchill, there was hardly any reason to be surprised about his criticizing ordinary people. The semi-retired owner of the excavating

company was a good man but the son-in-law in charge of daily operations was a pompous and condescending fool. The young supervisor who hired me was level and straightforward if terribly ambitious, while a few of the long-time employees acted as if they were supervisors themselves. The woman he saw occasionally had a couple of nice kids but the man she was going to marry was jealous, snappy, insinuating, and vain. And so on. Nothing of the petty, mean, pretentious, or small-minded did he tolerate well. And none of his judgements in this area did he qualify or moderate once he had formed them. *Secret observation number four: he lacked flexibility and openness. It was as if he thought a person could only be viewed from one angle.*

My father's "I am what I am" philosophy seemed to effectively bar him from dwelling on his own case. Living in an ill-kept and sometimes even filthy apartment never produced in him the smallest self-reproach. Ditto for running up his credit, for not paying his electric bill promptly (he didn't have a phone), and for failing to go to work on certain mornings. At the same time, if he did something out of the ordinary that could be called a mistake, he admitted it right away and without equivocation. For example, he told me about one blooper he had made that cost the company a lot of money. Following his calculations, a line of sewer pipe had been laid at an incorrect depth. A whole day was then spent tearing it out and re-laying it. It was by way of such accounts that I knew my father to be a strangely honest and honourable man.

Up North I had learned to drink deep but not every day. It was therefore natural for me to cut back as soon as I started working. Not so my father. Every evening he went to the La Salle Hotel and drank until closing time. Conversation and company were enjoyable to him but he could also get along without them. Often I would catch him sitting by himself and, with a large pitcher of beer in front of him, quietly drinking himself (while incessantly smoking) into a stupor. Now it was starting to dawn on me what it was to have an alcoholic father. At the same time I was unreasonably surprised and irritated by this. It was as if I thought that, given that I was now living with him and a part of his life, he should have been motivated to cut down on his drinking, that is, to set a better example or even to follow *my* example. In short, to abandon his "I am what I am" philosophy that had already been declared to me by him and sworn to.

Even then I had mixed feelings about this philosophy. On the one hand, it seemed to account for his honesty and dignity. On the other, it seemed to be not much more than an excuse for not doing much or not thinking deeply. Instead of a play and tension between the idealistic and the egoistic, instead of the first never being so self-assured as not to suffer from its impurity or the second never so blind as not to seek to rectify or at least address this matter, there was paralysis, breakdown, and lethargy. Instead of an inner dialogue carrying the world to him and showing it to be his most intimate partner in virtue as well as in vice, there was an overall resignation to or contentment with the moral distance between him and it.

More particularly, to the world most eager to appear successful and respectable. Its cheery order and good industry came at the cost of allowing a hypocritical good will to make inroads, to become entrenched at times, and sometimes even to cover up the subtlest, stealthiest, and most sinister forms of ill will. To this world my father could only relate with moral repugnance and condemnation. Whatever first inspired this revulsion in him is not known to me. Nonetheless I think it would be fair to say it did him honour while at the same time seriously handicapping him. For it rendered him not sufficiently flexible, open, and accommodating for the world towards which he thought himself destined. A world going beyond the working world of his father and therefore precisely the one which he impugned and discredited. Such a paradoxical state of affairs could only have been the result of some youthful illusion. Some thought of cutting

a new path in the professional world and conquering in an area where others had given way and acceded to the demands of circumstance and convention. Some gross self-deception and naivety, in other words, which probably came to an end along with his highest hopes as early as his university days. Forever after he was caught between the working world (which he had at first wanted to surpass) and the one to which he had never properly succeeded. While his heart led him towards the first, his head inclined him towards the second. And without ever being able to bring the two together, he remained scornful of what had not yielded ground to him, of what wouldn't change without changing him.

But little was I inclined at nineteen to analyse these matters. Living in the same single-room apartment as he, I was also too close to him not to be discomfitted by his excessive drinking and other bad habits. Still plagued by his psoriasis, he incessantly scratched away at his scaly sores and let the dried pieces of skin fall where they may. As a result, not only was the floor covered with them but so were his bed sheets and clothes. Since he made little effort to clean up these filthy leavings, it was largely left to me. Strange to think he should have accused me of being over-zealous in the matter of cleanliness. Of being too much like my mother. For the truth of the matter is that she excelled me in this as much as I my father. Our home in Chambly was kept so clean and tidy that it would have passed the most rigorous inspection. With such images in my head, I couldn't help but think that my father not only did her an injustice but had lost all sense of the insalubrious state he had fallen into.

Things might have come to a head earlier if I hadn't gotten sick for a week. Bed-ridden by a particularly bad bout of flu, I saw my father act with efficiency and consideration in tending to me. At the same time there was nothing indulgent or emotional in the way he went about it. This more professional than paternal attitude carried over to the job site where he rarely spoke to me. It was as if he didn't want to be accused of having used his influence to get me hired or in preventing me (if such were ever to happen) from being laid off. Such displays of dignity and standoffishness suited well the sober side of his character. His drunken side had other displays that in some sense made a mockery of these. One habit that particularly irritated me was his coming home late and waking me up from a sound sleep. I didn't consider this to be a small matter because I usually had to get up very early. (On the other hand, my father often slept in. The company allowed him such liberties.) Generally what he would do is noisily get himself a cup of tea. But one night he went so far as to stretch out on his bed and, still fully dressed, fall asleep with the kettle boiling. I got up to turn the element off and then noticed he was still clutching a lit cigarette. Such a degree of carelessness was too much for me. The next time he came in late I wasn't a person to be bandied with.

Though I certainly can't pass breezily over this incident, I don't want to go into a lot of unnecessary detail. Essentially what happened was that my father came in late one night with Bridget, the woman whose two kids he loved and fiancé he despised. When I interfered with their TV-watching (I had been in bed long before they came in), he made a drunken charge at me. Worked up into a white heat, I repelled the attack and then, after having picked him off his feet and thrown him to the floor, proceeded to pummel him about the head. It was a nasty business and I sensed this even while I was doing it. Thinking about it later, I wondered whether I was unconsciously getting back at him for having done something similar to me six years before. But now that I'm much more removed from the incident and can look back over my whole life (and other acts of violence), I doubt this was the case.

The issue of my predilection for violence and its relation to truthtelling shouldn't be

ignored any more now than before. Although it certainly got me into situations that most people would disapprove of, I'm not terribly put out by this. For I know well enough that, in the moral and political spheres, most people rely little on personal inquiry (either in the sense of inquiring into themselves or some particular case at hand) and a great deal on common opinion and received ideas. By using this Procrustean bed to trim down complex and varied matters, everybody can pose as an expert and, with limited knowledge at their disposal, warn, admonish, and judge with all the fervour and certitude of an Old Testament prophet.

No, what I must pinpoint is a predilection for violence in the face of any affront to my dignity. Whether this comes from a drunken father in Kingston, a would-be usurper and gigolo in Winnipeg, or a loutish kitchen worker up North matters less to me than the fact that, where my honour is at stake, I have always been prepared to do battle. From the viewpoint that such incidents as I have been involved in were not life-and-death matters, I recognize there was an excessive and sometimes even petty aspect to them. But from the viewpoint that my imagination was not divorced from these proceedings, nothing less than my sense of self was at stake. Nothing less than a willingness to die if honour required it. Of course this doesn't mean that, if I someday faced the ultimate test, I would prove worthy. It only means that every lesser situation has so far never found me wanting.

What worse affront can there be than someone saying to another: everything I have heard you tell me is false from the ground up? I know that truthtellers generally don't do this. They generally don't go out of their way to insult one another. In fact, they generally proceed with as much good will and cooperation as rivalry. I know they avoid the personal and treat the conclusions if not the convictions of others as mistakes in need of correction. I know all this and yet, because of how I'm constituted, I cannot help but take offense at it. Indeed, it rises to my gorge that so many people can hoodwink themselves and others with their certainties about what is true and what is false and what is clear and what is not clear. Individually I oftentimes have the greatest admiration and respect for them. But collectively they entwine or circle about me like a powerful, cunning, and often seductive monster. Only by worrying and thwarting this monster can I keep believing I'm a knight on a mission of sorts.

About two weeks after I had moved out of my father's apartment, I ran into him on the street. I was worried that he might still be angry over the incident. But on the contrary, he greeted me warmly and asked me only questions about where I was living. Then he invited me to come with him for a beer. It was in this way that we reconciled and put our relationship on a new footing.

Of all his children, I was the only one he got to know as an adult. His freeing himself to be himself had cost him a great deal. But I don't remember him ever bringing this up or, for that matter, complaining about life in general. He was neither an optimist nor a pessimist but simply took everything in stride. He was neither intellectual nor anti-intellectual but somebody who swung both ways according to his mood.

Approaching him one time as he sat looking out on the waters of Kingston Harbour, I fancied that he was some great artist or writer. His pose was like that of Rodin's statue except that, instead of looking down, he looked into the distance. And instead of supporting his chin, he meditatively puffed on a cigarette. No doubt at that moment I imagined my father to be what I most strongly wished he had been. Certainly I had seen him display enough wisdom, insightfulness, acuity, and tenacity to be so inspired. And also to be chagrined and saddened that he had let so much lie fallow and go to seed.

But if Mr. Beach had chanced to come across me during my Kingston days, he might have thought the same about me. Not that I wasn't a hard worker praised for the difficult and dangerous tasks I was willing to undertake. Not that I was one so abusive of alcohol as to be run down in body or spirit. Not that I didn't keep up a consistent if moderate interest in intellectual pursuits. No, not for any obvious wasting away of myself but for a wasting of time in work and play unbefitting someone who had been at the top of his class. At least so Mr. Beach might have initially been led to assess the matter. He might have even thought there was some danger in my father's influence. But on the other hand, if he had got the chance to know me better, he might have moderated his views. For as much as I was living the life of a debauchee, there was always a deeper current of thought and feeling in me. It was intimately bound up with my being observant of the world and always wanting to learn from it. So much so that even my crudest pleasure-seeking took the form of the hedonistic carried over to the heuristic. In fact, were Mr. Beach to have questioned me deeply in this area, he would have found out there was little in pleasure-seeking truly pleasurable to me unless I felt myself educated by it. Not only was this the case when drinking with my father but every other person I came across. No sentiment was stronger than this one and its nature was such that it wanted to include all other sentiments while ruling over them. As a consequence, I was both cruel and kind, feeling and unfeeling, thoughtful and impulsive, and intractable and accommodating. But what I never proved to be was a pair of blocked ears and eyes, a turned-down brain, and a laggard when opportunity struck.

But some of these opportunities were by no means golden ones. By no means beautiful apples given to me by a goddess to entice and win a princess. Sexual matters plagued me then as they have always plagued me. In constant search of the pure moment of divine pleasure, I suffered a thousand others varying from the abject to the ludicrous. Abetted by alcohol, it was more than once I went to bed with a woman I wouldn't have looked at otherwise. To think I lost my virginity to a forty-year-old who was absolutely repulsive to me! A hard-boiled tough-as-nails woman who was like one I once saw grab a much younger woman by the hair and hurl down a flight of stairs.

The next day I was with a pretty twenty-year-old dancing in the beverage room of an old rundown hotel. The woman whom I had been to bed with the night before was drinking at a table not far away. Above the sound of the loud country music I could hear her bawling out something unpleasant. At the same time I couldn't quite make it out and perhaps didn't want to. But my pretty dancing partner did and said to me in surprise: "Do you hear what that old lady's saying? She's saying '*I'm a virgin! I'm a virgin!*'"

Later I smooched at length with the twenty-year-old and then lost her. It was more or less the pattern of what would happen to me many times later. An initial interest that would cool off dramatically. No greater suffering did I undergo than on these occasions. A young attractive woman was what I coveted most and yet I was stymied by forces I could barely understand. Something about me was definitely out of step with others and yet it was precisely this I couldn't give up. Indeed, I went so far as to place all my faith in it as being the royal road to my heart's desire.

Just as my father had done in his youth, I was guarding the vision of some morally superior self. All my selfish, exploitative, and opportunistic instincts buffeted against this. It was essentially aristocratic in bearing and heroic in stature. Displaced as it was in a non-aristocratic and non-heroic setting, it was my as yet not fully realized self. Sensitive as I long had been to all the lying and deception that goes on in the world, this ideal self is where I unconsciously set up

my shrine and privately worshipped. But what was required in this area could not be anything common or conventional. Otherwise I would have been but a courtier or pretender rather than a prince in disguise.

It wouldn't be far wrong to say that, besides work, my main activity in Kingston was trying to have encounters with the opposite sex. Looking back, it seems there were a fair number of them. But at the time it seemed they were few and far between. Clearly predatory in nature, my sexual drive was nonetheless never so strong as to put aside all other compunctions. Whereas some young men can lie to women as easily as they breathe, I had trouble turning off my critical faculties even in the presence of the prettiest and most empty-headed creature. Often the only thing I could do was to say little. And this wasn't a happy alternative because it made me look, as I was only too well aware, dull, unattractive, and foolish.

What more is there to say in this area except that the longest I had a girlfriend was for a week and the rest of the women I knew were brief encounters. It is little wonder then I never came across a princess but only female bodies that excited me. Linked to and led by my own body, all went well for periods of relatively short duration. But for longer periods around these would often swirl an angry, dissatisfied, jealous, or envious devil. At such times I almost wished I could abandon my stricter, more scrupulous, and more serious self. Or, better yet, have a Jekyll-Hyde potion stronger than alcohol. Not so I would have trampled on little girls without the slightest scruple. At least not in the literal sense. But in the metaphorical sense perhaps this is what I wished for. Then I could have been a member of an elite group who, applying all craft to their trade, go about achieving their ends while scoffing at moralists.

There was one princess I saw only from afar. A young lady whom I looked up to but never dared call up. She was a parachutist like me who made a powerful impression. It was the day of her maiden jump and she was unlucky enough to have a malfunction of her main chute. But with the help of the ground instructor and the radio, she was able to get clear of it, open her reserve, and arrive safely to the ground. A sizeable crowd was at the airport that day and naturally she was the centre of attention. She was only seventeen but, despite her harrowing experience, showed considerable poise. It was then she was told that, if she wished to continue with the sport, she should follow the example of the novice rider who, thrown from his mount, gets back on. Without any hesitation, she told the instructor she was ready to go up a second time. Since I was scheduled to make a jump, it happened that she and I boarded the plane together. When we arrived at the three thousand-foot level, I went out on the first run and she went out on the second. Later I continued to think about these events. I knew I had accomplished something that day by going back to skydiving after a serious injury. But at the same time I felt humbled by what she had done.

Perhaps I had to leave her alone in order to keep her perfect. Perhaps I was simply a coward. The fact is I never called her up or made any advances towards her.

I was certainly not a moral compass always pointing true north in those days any more than I was later. Certain conditions in fact could make the needle waver considerably. Take the case of when I spotted a young woman walking unsteadily down the road. From where I was living then, a converted roadside restaurant, I could see she was lithe and appealing. I quickly jumped into my car and drove out to her. Offering her a lift, I somehow ended up taking her back to my place. Intoxicated but still in control of herself, she was ready to have sex with me. Yet she was not so loose or immoral as not to warn me she had been diagnosed with VD. In light of this, we decided to stretch out on the bed and simply play with ourselves. When I had an erection, she

started to masturbate me. Growing impatient with her less than expert technique, I finally took over the job. To my great embarrassment, she then cried out: “What do you need me for?”

So it was. There was no woman I wanted who was either not an untouchable princess or a prostitute. For me this has never been a moral problem to be corrected. It has only been a moral problem I have had to live with. A problem more similar to having a mental or physical disability than a bad habit. But it was also a problem I habitually refrained from analysing and drawing any conclusions. In this way I could continue to live with the illusion that all my strongest desires, both physical and mental, would one day come together. So too it was the way I could juggle between being a fool and a satyr on the one hand and a sage and a saint on the other.

When I look back on my Kingston days, what strikes me is the heterogeneity of my experiences. Everything from taking in a conference at a local community college and going sailing out on Lake Ontario with a well-off couple to getting into bar fights and tasting the inside of a jail. This drive to experience many different things, although modified in later years, has always been with me. It even went so far in Kingston as to take me down to ground zero at the intellectual level. To poke around, look under a few rocks, and see what forms of life there were. Perhaps no more robust specimen of ignorance did I ever come across than the tough-as-nails waiter in the rundown hotel where I danced that one time with the pretty twenty-year-old. Thirty years old, short of stature, and solidly built, he was definitely not somebody to get on the wrong side of. Yet I managed to do so on more than one occasion and for reasons which, to this day, remain vague. But a couple of things are certain. One is that Kenny had a hair-trigger temper and the other is that he took as gospel whatever anybody told him with a straight face and a confident voice. Such a mind, so oblivious to any principle of verification, moves ahead like a bulldozer. For Kenny, it was not to be denied that Canadian troops had won the Second World War. It was not to be thought that, simply because they had constituted only a small fraction of the Allied forces, they hadn’t won every decisive battle. His argument was that his uncle had fought overseas and witnessed everything firsthand.

Kenny had a friend called Carl. Carl was somebody I worked with who had become a friend of mine. Kenny looked up to Carl because Carl was even tougher and more hot-tempered than he was. But Carl was much smarter than Kenny and so kept his cool most of the time. Because Kenny was so devoted to Carl, he was jealous that I was Carl’s friend. So one day he picked a fight with me. It was shortly after I had seriously injured myself on my first parachute jump. Although Kenny was well informed about my injury, he was also well informed about some rumour I was planning to kick his butt. Since it never occurred to him I would have had to have been a fool to get in a fight with him or anyone else in the condition I was, he thought little of belting me in the mouth and sending me back to the hospital.

Then there was that fellow I met one time in the La Salle Hotel who railed against discrimination and prejudice. He bent my ear for half-an-hour telling me how blacks and natives were the best of people and how much it angered him to see the way they were treated. Although sounding a bit cliched and over-emphatic, he at least didn’t contradict himself until it came time to say something about the Chinese. Kingston was full of Chinese restaurants and it made me wince sometimes to see how the staff were treated. Yet my friend in the La Salle Hotel, so concerned about the plight of the Negro down South and the plight of the Indian up North, came out with “*But those damned Chinese!*” to express how he felt about those in Kingston.

One thing I couldn’t understand was my father’s infatuation with detective magazines. His apartment was littered with them. Their glossy covers invariably depicted a murdered

woman with her clothes in disarray. I don't remember ever questioning him about it but I do remember peeking through a few of them. But the thought of a steady diet of them was as repulsive to me as the thought of always eating junk food. Apart from the mind-numbing sameness of them was the barely disguised pornographic content. Pornography has always symbolized for me the failure of a not inconsiderable segment of the male sex to get all it wanted. Although I was most definitely part of this segment, I wasn't prepared to put a sign on my head and let everyone know it. I wasn't even prepared to let it be evident to myself. Yet here was my father, someone who had once been married to a flesh-and-blood woman, someone who had once been so good-looking as to make me envious, no longer concerned to hide the fact that he needed fantasies of women rendered inert and incommunicative.

I allowed myself a few pin-ups after I moved out of my father's place. Beautiful voluptuous women with come-on looks. Earthly goddesses who, in my fantasies, would have been to me as so many Venuses. In opposition to my father's fantasy then was the one of the wholly active female who would have overwhelmed and taken charge of me. Wouldn't it be the irony of ironies if the same woman spawned both fantasies? On the one hand, the mother who came to me as a goddess when I was still an infant. On the other, the wife who became very active precisely at the time my father was sinking and losing, in a manner of speaking, his manhood.

So far as I can remember, only once did my father physically threaten my mother. I was very young and very afraid. I don't have any memory of my parents noticing my fear but, since I was barely more than an infant, this doesn't mean too much. It is likely my father consciously refrained from ever repeating the incident.

Over and over again both in literature and life I have been struck by the intermingling of the good and the bad. To separate these two in any conclusive way seemed to me a hopeless task. Perhaps it was for this reason I stayed away from philosophy for so long. Certainly I read none in Kingston or at least nothing philosophical in the strict sense. I have difficulty remembering exactly what I did read but I suspect that, among other things, a few novels were digested. After all, this was something I had developed a taste for in childhood. I remember having received *Treasure Island* as a gift one Christmas in Chambly and, God only knows, the character of Long John Silver intrigued me. In Kingston I came across a similar character who was also a fascinating mix of the best and worst impulses.

His name was Carl and, the first time I laid eyes on him, he had just started working for the excavation company. Tall and sturdily built, his thick shoulders and powerful arms drew attention away from the bit of flab starting to collect about his waist. Along with these traits were his long hair, regular features, alert eyes, and biker's moustache. Working alongside him, I noticed he had a tattoo on his arm. It was a devil's head underneath of which was written *One-percenters*. I questioned him about it and, in the most unassuming voice, he told me it was an insignia representing his membership in a motorcycle club. The logo expressed the members' view of themselves as a sort of visible minority.

I soon learned that Carl was no longer an active member of this club that in fact was a gang of bikers. From the ages of twenty to twenty-five, he had been the president of the Kingston chapter of the Satan's Choice Motorcycle Club and then, to avoid further scrapes with the law and spending time in jail, he quit. For the past four years he had lived his life in the humbler but more respectable way of grinding out a living. But his early days as an outlaw were not forgotten by the powers-that-be. A year or so later, after I had gotten to know him much better, he revealed

to me, and with the only trace of anguish I had ever detected in him, how a request that he and his wife had made to adopt a child had been turned down.

But it wasn't long before I found out that the easy-going ex-biker who half-heartedly went about his work had another side to him. On a late Friday afternoon, after putting in our shift, I went with Carl to one of his favourite haunts. No sooner did we enter the beverage room of the rundown hotel and get to a table than I felt as if I were with another person. As if I were with the prince of thieves who everyone knew, everyone admired, and everyone had a good word for. "*Hi, Carl*!" "*Hi, Carl!*" *Hi, Carl*" "*How ya doin', Carl*?" "*What'll it be, Carl?*" "*Say, Carl, how ya keepin'?*" To everyone who spoke to him, Carl had the right answer. It was either witty or bawdy or serious or straight or sarcastic or angry but never dull. Truly I was amazed to see the energy he expended in his leisure time because it was almost in inverse proportion to what he expended at work. But even more surprising was the force of his personality. It would take me a while to realize that these downtown bars and beverage rooms were Carl's fiefdom where all paid homage to him.

Generally speaking, Carl's manner was jovial, boisterous, and friendly. So much so that I was little prepared for a brief incident that, despite its relative insignificance, was one of the most concentrated moments of violence I have ever witnessed. In fact it happened so fast it was over before I knew it. Someone at a nearby table, an older man, said something to Carl that was either deprecating or dismissive. To this day I'm not sure what it was. But what I do know is that, without warning, Carl suddenly leaped up, bounded over to the seated man, and, without the slightest hesitation, gave him a hard cuff across the face. With his hand still poised in the air and ready to strike again, he listened stone-faced while the older man babbled out an apology.

For a year and a half I saw Carl regularly both on and off the job. It wasn't that I was his sidekick but I always joined him whenever I spotted him. He took enough of a liking to me to invite me to his place a number of times. When he bought a house in the country not far from where I was living, I would sometimes drop by and, when he wasn't there, even spend an hour or so talking with his wife. She was a psychiatric nurse who worked at a local hospital and, in contrast to Carl, never went out. Though she must have known that Carl was a womanizer, she never breathed a word about it to me. Nor was there anything to indicate that, despite his violent temper, Carl was abusive towards her. Only once did I see him get angry in the house and the result, if shocking, was only a glass thrown against the wall. Instinctively Carl held back from lashing out at friends and favourites. I witnessed this myself when he became angry with me a couple of times. The worst incident took place on the job site. We had gotten into some argument and, in a fit of anger, he had cocked his arm back as if he were ready to hit me. It was then he told me that, had I met him five years earlier, we not only wouldn't have been friends but the outcome of our dispute would have been much different.

Carl had spent several months in solitary confinement and I think that, so much had he been disturbed by this experience, it put him on the path of reform. In other circumstances or settings he might have stayed outside the law and even grown more dangerous than he was. But from what I saw of him, his natural bent was less towards the unscrupulous and underhanded than towards the roguish and wild.

Soon after he got his motorcycle licence back, Carl bought a motorcycle and booted around town with one of his long-time friends who was a foreman with the excavation company and had helped to get Carl hired on. Ronnie was also very much his own man and so he and Carl treated each other with a good deal of respect. Yet they rarely drank together and the reason for

this, I suspect, is that Ronnie didn't like being put in the shade. With his long, prematurely grey hair, his biker's moustache, his extraordinary strength, and his herculean build, Ronnie wasn't someone who normally lacked attention. Yet so powerful was Carl's personality that, when he was in his own milieu, no one could resist it or take centre stage away from him.

Women no less than men were attracted to Carl and yet, on certain occasions, he could deal very roughly with them. His ability to call down someone and humiliate them in public was probably the cruelest thing about him. Detecting where his victim's weakness lay, he would then go about broadcasting it and making it the source of general amusement. For some reason he did this with a young lady whose sexual orientation was rumoured to be less than certain. At first she hotly denied this but, when Carl kept ridiculing her in front of all including her friends, she finally stopped defending herself and hurried off. Sometime later she came back and stole up to Carl while his back was turned. Kneeling down, she thrust her arm through his legs, reached upwards, and grabbed him by the genitals. Everyone of course thought this was terribly amusing.

Before I met Carl, I had certainly come across people who could by turns be both cruel and kind. My boyhood friend in Chambly was of this stamp. So was my uncle. So were a few others. But none that I met before Carl exhibited this same trait to such a marked degree. Unquestionably he derived pleasure from inflicting pain as much as he derived satisfaction from being generous and magnanimous. From playing practical jokes of the most vicious sort to refraining from taking away the prize that was in his power to take. Yes, Carl was the same fellow who thought it was funny to damage my car (actually, both he and Ronnie thought it was funny to paint swastikas on an old Volkswagen I had) and beneath him to take away the one girl I had. Yet he must have been tempted to and not without reason. It wasn't just that Dorothy was attractive and a cute oddity with her fractured English in Kingston. It was that by nature she was friendly to the point of being flirtatious.

When I first laid eyes on her, I was driving around Montreal rather aimlessly. Then I spotted her (*happy day!*) standing by the curb trying to hitch a ride. I picked her up and, after not much more than a short conversation in French (made delicious by our mutual lack of fluency), she decided to come to Kingston with me. We went to the house where she was temporarily residing, collected her few belongings, and headed out west on the highway. It seemed to me during the drive back that I had finally achieved my heart's desire. With her head resting on my lap, I pondered the delicate matter of what I was going to do with her. Since I was living at the time in a private home, there was no question of taking her there. It was clear to me that I would have to find a bigger place and as quickly as possible. To avoid being embarrassed by the situation, I gave her to understand that I was in the process of moving. Using this expedient, I had no difficulty convincing her to come with me to a motel. We spent the night together and, even though she herself was more than willing, I couldn't make love to her. It was one of those painful moments when the fantasy bubble bursts.

The next day I found an apartment for us on the outskirts of Kingston and moved her and all my other possessions into it. Yes, Dorothy was a woman to possess and, as I would soon find out, also a woman to be *dispossessed of*. Not much more than five feet tall, she was pretty without being beautiful. But her body certainly wasn't something to leave most men indifferent. More than this, however, was her manner. It was lively, flirtatious, and exciting. Although she was only eighteen, she proved to have as much prowess in bed as her astrological chart – one of the few possessions she had brought from Montreal – had intimated. (It gave different positions for all the signs of the zodiac.) She was also a woman who could unsettle me tremendously. A

woman who could stroke my leg under a table in a nightclub and at the same time strike up a conversation with perfect strangers. More precisely, two tough-looking but well-dressed gentlemen whom she had happened to overhear speaking French. Two gangster types who followed us out of the club later and trailed us in their car for several miles.

Probably in every way but physically I was a mismatch for her. Somebody older, more experienced, and at the same time less serious would have suited her better. This is not simply a thought that comes to me now but what she herself told me. She even went so far as to mention Carl to give me a better idea of the type she had in mind. Somebody whom she probably thought wasn't inclined to lose his temper as often as I did. But, truth to tell, there was never much of an opportunity for Carl to make a move on her. He only met her a couple of times and it was never in one of his haunts. But when she came to Kingston a second time, the situation was different. I didn't then simply take her to fashionable nightclubs. It is for this reason I now think he did me more honour and showed me more respect than I could have ever suspected at the time.

Of course what I'm putting down here is largely a matter of speculation. It could very well be that Dorothy didn't appeal to him. It could very well be that the reason he didn't make more of an effort to engage her in conversation the first time was simply because he didn't speak French. But this no longer mattered the second time she was in town. It all came about with the call I got from her one evening. Several months had gone by and I was far from thinking she still had me in mind. Now I was listening to her talking pleasantly away and not only telling me she wanted to see me again, but doing so in English.

Despite Carl's seeming disinterest in Dorothy, two incidents stick out in my memory that make me think he refrained from doing the worst he was capable of. The first of these incidents was quite minor and, looked at apart from the second, doesn't seem to amount to much. I had taken Dorothy to the dance hall where, like similar downtown establishments, Carl entertained and held court at whatever table he was sitting. Despite her way of dressing that made her look better suited to a more upscale place, Dorothy fitted in quite well and gave every reason to think she liked the clamour, the congeniality, and the country music. Never was she sweeter to me than on these occasions and more inclined to be the perfect companion. Along with our drinking was our dancing and, since Carl enjoyed doing both, it was natural for him to hit the dance floor with her. The strange remark he came out with later was in this context and yet, at the time, it seemed to come out of nowhere. A remark he seemed to address as much to Dorothy as to me. A vulgar sexist remark that yet did me honour. He addressed it to me or to Dorothy or perhaps to himself. He said "*Dames are a dime a dozen but a friend's a friend*."

I pretty much lost Dorothy the second time as I did the first. By way of arguing and not giving in. By way of not seeming to have a conciliatory bone in my body. All the disputes were of a petty nature. When she announced finally she wanted to clear out and go back to Montreal, I made no effort to change her mind. Rather it was with as much indifference as I could muster that I took her to the train station and left her there. The last image I had of her was of her gaily chatting away with the clerk in the ticket office.

Like other immoralists, I don't think it requires great strength of character to denounce a passion one isn't capable of or to refrain from acts totally contrary to one's nature. The most that can be said is that such widespread practises have a social value that tends to attribute to these moralists more virtue than, if they thoroughly examined themselves, they would take credit for. It is the collective voice of society that both prescribes this value and, by investing each and every member with its weight and authority, makes morality less a matter of struggling against

uncertainty than practised observation.

The second incident came as a great shock to me. It happened some time after Dorothy had gone back to Montreal. In the Grand Hotel which was anything but grand the scene unfolded. It was something to wonder at when the young couple wandered in one day. So out of place did they look that they seemed better suited to a high school prom than a rough downtown bar. The exact sequence of events escapes me but I do remember that Carl was soon seated at their table. I myself continued to drink with some regular customers all of whom were of course his friends. But every so often I would peer over at them to see what was going on. The first thing I noticed was that, contrary to his usual way of behaving or at least with those he considered friends, Carl had engaged the girl in conversation while totally ignoring the boy. Seeing him sitting there looking so forlorn, I couldn't help but put myself in his shoes. But the greatest shock and surprise was yet to come. Looking over at the table some time later, I saw that Carl was no longer simply talking to the girl. In fact he couldn't talk to her because he was too busy kissing her. Long passionate kisses on the mouth over and over again without letup while the boy simply sat there like a whipped dog. It wasn't a scene I wanted to watch to the end. Cutting out early, I went back home. I don't remember much else about this incident except that I never questioned Carl about it.

It was Nietzsche who said that every philosopher is someone who has his morality in tow. As much as I'm a philosopher when I look over and examine all that has most strongly influenced and impressed me, I do the same by focussing on my predilection for the extraordinary and heroic. Yet I have never been interested in turning this predilection into a means by which to pass these off as simple phenomena that would give themselves over either to awe and admiration or to fear and contempt. An important part of my task must be to counter this common tendency not only in the world but in philosophy.

So, from a certain perspective, Carl could simply be written off as a petty despot who decided for himself when to act nobly or ignobly. I would be hard put to refute this charge and yet, having observed him up close, I would also find it to be facile. After all, not only was he raised in a foster home but in a rough working-class environment. He was someone, in short, who had an upbringing far different from mine. Yet for all this, I could see the outline of my own character in him. I too could be kind and cruel, noble and ignoble, honourable and dishonourable. To condemn him would be like condemning myself.

Apart from this, his character and personality penetrated into my psyche more deeply than most. I think the reason for this is that not only did he reveal to me the boundaries of my own character, but also the frontier I wasn't prepared to cross. As much as I envied Carl's adroitness and audacity, I felt repelled by the crudest and most unfeeling part of his nature. For what I had always desired most from life was not some world to dominate but the largest possible world to explore and marvel at. Or if I ever did desire the first, it was hopelessly tied up with the task of trying to dominate myself.

A vague and uncertain task, to be sure. An attempt to reach into myself as deeply as I could while trying to open up this same self to as many different experiences as possible. Yet always with an imperious hold as quick to detect fault lines as veins of ore. One of these veins was my capacity to stand my ground or even push ahead while suffering from a case of bad nerves or worse. Making thirty-two parachute jumps after being seriously injured was one example. Standing my ground against Kenny, Carl's ferocious friend, was another. Mastering my claustrophobia while crawling down a twenty-inch pipe buried underground was yet another.

Overcoming my fears at such times always gave me great satisfaction. The feeling of liberation I experienced solidified in me the sense of being a hero. I, like Martin Luther, would one day be able to say *"I must take my stand; I can do no other.*" So it went in my imagination and so my actual life seemed to bear out. They were two parallel lines vastly closer to meeting than the ones tracing out my erotic dreams and my infrequent and often disillusioning encounters with the opposite sex.

It was in Kingston that I first took a stab at writing. What I came out with is only to be mentioned for the reason that, even then, I was drawn to writing about myself. After I had finished it, I made some copies and gave them to a few people in the Grand Hotel (including – it amazes me now to think of it – the barely literate Kenny). Since I had worked in Carl as a minor character in this mediocre account of my first parachute jump (which included how I botched it), it probably went down better than otherwise. Except with one fellow who, though I hadn't given him a copy (he was somebody who, when being informed of what I was doing in the Grand Hotel, made some critical remarks before finding out that I, the author, was sitting not far from him), thought this whole literary effort was out of place. Although I tried to counter his criticism, I had the sinking feeling he was right.

It was probably as much out of place as trying to straighten Kenny out about the Second World War. Or to get Carl interested in a book that, though it was rather lowbrow, I thought to be informative about sex. What prompted me to be so foolish as to think I could bring them into my world? Or was I simply trying to see if I could extend my world into theirs? If so, the bar critic's remark in the Grand Hotel brought home to me that these efforts could be read as pathetic displays of middle-class pride and presumption. Clearly I had been moving through their world and adapting to their ways while giving out signals I wasn't to be taken for one of them.

I could bring up a number of other incidents to show I was more interested in going to a school of straight talk in Kingston than learning to be a thoroughly respectable citizen. On the job and elsewhere, I was never forced to curry favour, to deal in half-truths, to feign a good will or mask its contrary. I never had to be the kind of person who says something like: "Don't get angry, get even!" Never were plots and stratagems a part of my life. Yet no more does it seem possible to argue for the moral superiority of this direction than the other one. There are no scales to measure and compare all the hypocrisy and deception to be found along one path and all the meanness and violence along the other.

Strange to think that this school of straight talk would one day lead me to think that truthtelling in its generality can be anything but straight. During the Kingston period and for some time after, I tended to view all discussion as arising out of a given context that could conclusively settle this or that. As the case with the vast majority of people, I thought that whatever elements happened to elude this context were largely unimportant. So it seemed to be for virtually all matters I came across and, since I didn't study philosophy, I had no reason to doubt this state of affairs. Nor to doubt that all opposite things were essentially different and, in most cases, wholly pure and apart from each other. Truth and falsehood were no more crossed than a dream and the real world. Carrying this doctrine into the realm of sex, I couldn't conceive of a continuum between male and female any more than between earth and water. Any other way of looking at things seemed like anarchy, overthrow, mayhem, nonsense. The thought that human beings might be writing all their history on water and building all their castles in the air was not be taken seriously.

My taking leave of Kingston was not something I had long planned out. On the contrary,

it was all settled in a couple of weeks. Again it was spring and again the road beckoned. But more than this was my growing awareness that I had exhausted the Kingston world. It was one that had more in common with the reputation the city had for its penitentiaries than for its prestigious university. Like Kipling's young hero in *Captains Courageous*, I had come to this rougher world from another and found I could make my way in it. Yet if Carl and Ronnie were captains of sorts in this world, their lives and careers were more of the ports than the high seas. Something then was falling short of bringing life to the full screen of my imagination. Something still beckoned that resembled sailing on the high seas and going where others had not dared to venture.

– A Slow Change of Direction –

After leaving Kingston and coming back home, a more regulated errancy started to come into my life. An often strained and grotesque balancing act between being true to myself and moderating my behaviour. Perhaps the clearest indication of the second was abruptly cutting back on my drinking and of the first doing so without fuss or difficulty. But of course something is always left out when I credit to myself these Prince Harry-like growths. For as true as they may be, it gives no indication of an often uncertain and sometimes floundering persona that, though not visible to the world, was more than well acquainted with the private chambers of my mind.

Various events (written in italics) that illustrate what I claim in this section or else contradict it in the manner of truthtelling

Things unfolded thus. As a student at Red River Community College, I heard tell of a speech competition. I decided to enter it for no other reason, I think, than to be a bit of a showboat. As preparation, I wrote a long windy satirical review of a movie that was then playing in theatres all around the world. Not satisfied with this treatment of a topical matter, I tried to capitalize on, for the sake of humour, a current rage for shocking people and, at the same time, putting oneself briefly in the public eye. It was called streaking and involved running nude and at top speed across a field or stage at various sporting events and spectacles. However, lacking the confidence to do all of this (or even pretend *to do some of it) at a gathering of a few hundred people, I resorted to downing a few ounces of hard liquor shortly before showtime. Then, wearing a bathrobe and taking my turn with other speech makers, I did well enough (though I flubbed the ending and didn't do anything shocking) to get the laughs I wanted. A couple of days after this, my second oldest sister's boyfriend challenged me on my reasons for doing it. What he said was sufficiently provocative that it aroused in me a stern and threatening response to which he maintained an absolute silence.*

What moves must I next make to show the moves of yesteryear as being on the road to greatness while sometimes being vain, foolish, dubious, violent, and debased? What would be the consequences of not doing so, of covering over their messiness, of underplaying the less attractive side of all my striving? Wouldn't it be the usual thing of portraying the relatively well turned out life as having nothing in common with what sometimes leads to the criminal and even monstrous? Wouldn't it be to absolve errancy as I have characterized it or characterized my life with it of any complicity in folly, in the anti-social, in ruthless ambition, or any combination of

these? How am I to understand my life as having used and yet in some sense *gone by* these elements (as practises or fixations or, for that matter, pathologies) if I don't address them as part of my subject?

There were a couple of other incidents that happened not too long after my Kingston days and were more violent and less justifiable (at least in their level of violence) than my squaring off with my second oldest sister's boyfriend. One was at our karate club's Christmas party. It involved a racial slur and a fight in a parking lot. Something to do with a black guy I was drinking with and then taking it upon myself to repair the injury. The other was up North and, although the fellow I got into a fight with was a complete fool, I myself got worked up into a white heat over nothing more than his refusal to listen to good sense and agree with me on some historical point.[6]

Yet it makes no sense to go the other way and exaggerate the foolishness of the angry young man pose. In some ways it was merely a role I was trying out and a bit of theatre I put on at odd times. It was never accompanied with visions of hurting someone seriously and, indeed, I could no more think of myself making a treacherous move than I could imagine willingly jumping off a precipice.

I seemed to have this thing about being treacherous towards my sisters though. It was the youngest one I fancied after Kingston and, of course, no longer did I have the excuse of being a mere thirteen or fourteen-year-old. She lay sleeping on the sofa one evening with her bare legs under the covers. I crept up and started feeling her. Suddenly she woke up, pulled sharply at the disturbed blanket, and, without a word, turned away from me.

There is no question I started putting some order into my life. It was nothing dramatic in the beginning but it eventually led to my going back to school and doing well. Indeed, I struggled to get the best marks in the class and even went so far as to apply to get into a two-year professional program. But I bailed out when I saw that it would have no more led to the fulfilment of my highest hope than staying in Kingston.

Indeed, it wasn't the best start in Winnipeg when I got into that accident. I had lost my licence in Kingston for impaired driving and now, after having smacked into a little Volkswagen and sent it spinning, I had some fast talking to do. Unfortunately the driver of the other car turned out to be an off-duty police officer. I was arrested and later had to go to court. It was humiliating and not something I wanted to repeat.

And certainly getting some stability in my work life didn't hurt matters. A small family-owned company whose owners ended up treating me like a member of the family! How will I ever know what this simple fact meant in terms of making me responsive to the good will and humanity of others? Here I found two fatherly types who didn't seem to resent (as my father had) having to deal with the world. In their simple society I found a fairness and friendship that I can almost say was without fault. And when, as a doctoral student many years later, I got word that one of them had died, I was more overcome by emotion than when, several years before, I had got word of my father's death.

With Gerd and Roman I got along famously right from the start. With Horst it was another matter. Whereas the first two spent their day in work clothes directing things on the job, the latter spent his day in a business suit seeing customers. Whereas the first two spoke freely, openly, and with much good humour, the third kept a certain reserve only broken by subtle and

6 More accurately, this ignorant but not-so-dumb kitchen worker refused to believe me when I told him about the Norman invasion and how French had been the official language of England for two hundred years.

sardonic remarks. Although I never got into the least altercation with him or ever was given reason to distrust him, I nonetheless felt uneasy in his presence. Certainly he smiled enough, was always friendly, and could even be flattering on occasion. Yet long was I past the age not to be aware that these traits could easily be counterfeited. It was a situation that, like many situations, goes on for some time without changing its colours. At the least significant level, it remained nothing more than observing the diamond ring on Horst's finger and the lack of one on Gerd's or Roman's. But then came the day that triggered certain developments. It started with a phone call I got from Horst while I was working up North. Very briefly he told me he had dissolved his partnership with Gerd and Roman and started up a new company. He needed a foreman and so his reason for calling me. Later I met with him and more or less accepted his offer. But very soon I paid a visit to both Gerd and Roman to make sure they had no objections to it. Then, only a day or two later, I received another call from Horst and, in a stern voice, he forbade me to have anything more to do with his brothers. Without hesitation I told him that what I did off the job was my own affair. He persisted in the matter and so I dissolved both our conversation and our agreement in a most abrupt and impolite way.

It must have been talking to the Lohre brothers that helped propel me towards planning my European trip. What a different state of mind had come upon me after a year of so back in Winnipeg! For just as had been the case when I returned from Montreal, I returned from Kingston initially suffering from a sense of having no direction. It was sometimes so acute that being back with my family gave me no pleasure. It even led me to repeat the pathetic gesture of contacting a former employer to get my job back.

How can I give a shape to this strange malaise except by saying that I often felt that my true home was some place where I had already been or was yet to go? And that when the latter seemed particularly obscure or blocked off, then the former would loom up as a nostalgia for former haunts and ways of living? So much so that, at the time of returning to Winnipeg from Kingston, it was as if Carl and Ronnie and even Kenny had become members of a family closer to me than my flesh-and-blood one.

Again, how is it that the most human or even humane sometimes comes to us from afar? Or that we ourselves can feel more at ease with strangers than members of our own family? When I was a child in Chambly, I sat at the same table every day with other children whose frame of reference was largely the same as mine. A common mother and father, a common house and home, a common school, a common number of other things. My identification with my family then was intense and seemingly without flaw. So much so that it continued to resound in me as the natural state even after it had long changed. Perhaps behind my somewhat premature or precocious nostalgia was the recognition, however reluctant, that the process of turning the foreign into the familiar is also the process of turning the familiar into the foreign. Education in the broadest sense takes us very early to different intellectual, emotional, and imaginative lands. There too we find a home and in some sense a more powerful and abiding one than all others.

My brother was sixteen and already in advance of me on at least one front. Tremendously outgoing and personable, he had no difficulty with the opposite sex. It was a new experience for me to meet him as an equal and sometimes a superior.

My oldest sister was twenty and had already acquired a lot of poise. A tall statuesque blonde who regularly dated young men moving up in the world, she was full of social grace and with an ability to talk intelligently and candidly on many matters.

My second oldest sister was eighteen and a rival to me in her intelligence. Had she been a

stronger person, I would have feared her as one to surpass me.

My third oldest sister was fourteen and, perhaps because she was still developing, didn't impress me as much as the other two.

It was my youngest sister I fancied after Kingston and, of course, no longer did I have the excuse of being a mere thirteen or fourteen-year-old. She lay sleeping on the sofa one evening with her bare legs under the covers. I crept up and started feeling her. Suddenly she woke up, pulled sharply at the disturbed blanket, and, without a word, turned away from me.

And as for my father, well, that has always been a complicated business. As complicated for me as it was for my brother to have a relationship with my mother. The long and short of it is that he was never again to be a regular presence in my life.

Before I returned to Winnipeg from Kingston, my father had gone to Ireland. Then, some time later, I received a letter from him telling me he was in good health but penniless. Then, a year of so after, he popped up in Winnipeg unannounced. During his brief stay, I met with him on a few occasions. While these encounters were agreeable enough, it was somewhat strange and unsettling to come across him in these changed circumstances. How could I ever understand what he was up to or what he was about? This person who, in middle age, had hitchhiked across Canada to get to Winnipeg and then, after only a few months working up North, went to a country where, although being born there, he had no relatives he cared about or cared about him? Who would then come back for a third and final visit to his hometown and not seem troubled by the fact that his children had all become strangers?

What remains to be said of this period except that I planned skilfully and at length for my great adventure? I who had never made an attempt to save up money now did so without difficulty. The rest can be summed up by saying I was absolutely fit in mind and body some two years after having left Kingston.

First I picked up the young man. He was about thirty and on his way to the West Coast. With a friendly air and a hippie-like but mature look about him, he told me that he and a number of other people from the Toronto area – men, women, and children – had planned and set up a commune somewhere in the British Columbia wilderness. We had a chance to talk at length before I spotted two attractive girls hitchhiking on the highway. Stopping the car with haste and excitement, I perhaps experienced as much sexual pleasure when they pulled open the car doors as I would have if they had pulled my clothes off. Little do I remember of what we talked about from that point on except that it was carried on in an amicable enough way. With this and some sixteen hours of driving still ahead of us before we arrived in Winnipeg, I eventually ended up with one of the girls in the backseat while the guy heading for the West Coast took over the wheel. At about the same time I had purchased some liquor and, in the back seat with this girl, began to drink. I can only think now I soon got loaded but without upsetting anyone or any disorder. And yet it was also without the desirable effect of seeing others, particularly the one beside me, follow me in my debauchery. No, this girl as well as the other one (not to mention the driver) must have kept a clear head all the way to Winnipeg. At any rate, when they finally got out to continue hitchhiking, I drove away from them alone in my car with the distinct feeling I was an out-and-out failure.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

5. European Trip

With a romantic outlook as my spiritual mainstay, I did all I could to ensure that my trip to and from Europe (boat instead of plane) as well around it (bicycle instead of train) would surpass the adventures and experiences I had hitherto had. It was one that was carefully thought out but with no strict itinerary to prevent me from changing my plans en route. A trip that would see me largely free of encumbrances such as luggage, hotel reservations, and train or bus schedules. A trip that would *not* see me taking my culture with me in the form of package flights, group tours, and the inability to speak more than one language.

At this point I feel compelled to preempt any tendency on my part to give to my European trip more than its due. To exaggerate it or enlarge upon it in a way that would run counter to all I'm attempting to do here. That it was rich with various encounters and experiences, that it took me into broader, milder, and more fertile regions, and that it mellowed my temperament to some degree are all things I can state with confidence.

– Oh, but what a great thing it was to be young and on the road! Despite what you're saying here, you should have gone on forever as you did then! The noblest and most uplifting time of your life!

No, this is precisely what I don't want. The fact of the matter is I suffered many moments of letdown and dissatisfaction on the road. I certainly wasn't always happy. And even if it is true I was young, strong, and carefree, so were many others. I don't see how these factors can justify painting the trip as something extraordinary.

– But what do you *know about the extraordinary? Are only Antarctic expeditions or Safari hunts extraordinary? Or quests for Holy Grails? Or conquests of mountains, deserts, jungles, and continents? Couldn't it be something like this: a near-perfect congruence of the mental and physical? Of a person's state of mind and the state of his world?*

I can remember occasions and episodes that were far from being this happy union. Such as when I was in southern Germany and fed up with over-crowded youth hostels and bad weather. For a while I was seriously thinking of packing it in and going home. Of cutting my trip short by several months. I had to spend a week in a *Fremdenzimmerhaus* just to recuperate and get back my taste for travel.

– What a narrow and constricted view! Of course there were such moments. A trip without them would have been a dream in the worst sense. It would have been nothing tangible. Nothing you could truly touch, taste, smell, feel. And nothing to exalt over because, in order to exalt, you also have to agonize. But what about the trip as a whole? Are you ready to say it wasn't a near perfect union of a traveller's head and heart?

Towards the end of it, a certain lethargy and lack of enthusiasm set in. A certain feeling of disappointment. Of the trip's having turned out to be something less than what I had hoped for. It was during my second visit to Amsterdam after having spent several months touring France and Germany. I was expecting to find my Dutch friend there but, as it turned out, she was away doing

her own bit of travelling. After hanging around the city for a week, I went to see Joy's parents. To tell them I was feeling restless and ready to move on. With his face clouding over, Mr. van der Lende told me his daughter would be disappointed if I left without seeing her. So I decided to stay on another week and then, the day Joy was due back in Amsterdam, I went with her parents to welcome her at the train station. As soon as she saw me, her face lit up and she breathlessly told me that finding me in Amsterdam made her feel very good. Especially since her three-week trip to France had proven to be less than a pleasant experience.

– Nothing extraordinary about this? That her father turned out to be prophetic? That Joy was made happy by your presence? That it proved to be the very best remedy for her? A kind of palliative for what she had suffered at the hands of some insensitive people? Then what does one call all the rest of those moments of a lifetime? The ones where one is not *predicting anything of significance or turning a person's thoughts from sadness to joy?*

I admit I had a good trip. I did the first part mostly on foot and the second part on a bicycle. By these two modes of travel, I had intimate contact with my surroundings. The kind that gave me the opportunity to climb mountains, swim in lakes, stay in youth hostels, board strangers right and left, and, generally speaking, extend my horizons in a multitude of ways. All of this I can safely attest to while at the same time claiming it was the natural outgrowth of my outlook before going to Europe. In other words, the continuation of a process of maturation already underway.

– There is a time in one's life when one writes oneself better in at least one way than at any other. At twenty-four and twenty-five you weren't mature in all respects but, as a moral person, you perhaps reached your apogee.

I don't deny I was more even-tempered in Europe than at any other time in my life. But it was the conditions and circumstances that made it so. People in general were very good to me. In every country I visited, I had the experience of a stranger taking me into their home. The first time was in Ireland. A young woman with two children in a car drove up. It was pouring rain and she wanted to know where I was headed. It turned out she had spent a year in Canada. In no time at all, I was whisked to the family home and given something to eat while my clothes dried out.

The next time was in England. Again a young woman. I had done her a favour by pumping up her bicycle tire. She lived in a small flat with her husband and four-year-old son. I spent the night in the same room as the child.

The next time also in England. An elderly woman who gave me a lift when she spotted the Canadian flag on my packsack. She too must have found me instantly trustworthy. I soon found myself eating at her table and having my wash done.

– If your theme is the extraordinary, then do you have anything less here?

My theme is truthtelling and the extraordinary only fits in as my preoccupation with it. As an element that perhaps accounts for a certain errancy, a certain orientation that afflicts truthtelling itself.

I'm deathly afraid of exaggeration. I think this is what afflicts truthtelling from the other

side. Or, to put it most tellingly, the norm of truthtelling *is* exaggeration. As that way of going about it always with the assumption that one is close to saying – or has already said – the last word on a subject.

– The European trip was as close as one gets to making the soul's confrontation with the ordinary symphonic. No battles did you witness but only battlefields long covered over by peace and quiet and both man's and nature's healing husbandry. No diplomatic missions or high-level conferences but only stately buildings keeping up the appearance that for centuries human beings have conducted their affairs one step below the angels. No five-star hotels, gaudy casinos, or expensive ski lodges but majestic breathtaking vistas, towering mountains, and the great moveable dome of heaven following you wherever you went.

I was frugal and stretched my money as far as I could. Usually I stayed in youth hostels but sometimes I slept outside. Walking for a whole day didn't bother me and, later, on the Continent, cycling hundreds of kilometres per week was routine. I ate simple fare and, while in France, drank cheap wine out of plastic bottles. I never got sick except for one time in Germany. I was eighty kilometres from Koblenz when I started to get the runs. This wasn't a pleasant experience because I had to stop many times along the way to wipe myself.

– Take yourself to the Connemara. You had arrived at the youth hostel. It was still closed. You decided to climb the heather-covered mountain directly behind it. Although the sun was shining, the mountain was steeped in low-lying clouds. Never before had you seen such a sight! At the base of it you left your orange-coloured packsack and proceeded up the mountain. At first the going wasn't too bad. Cattle grazed on the lower slopes. But as you got higher and to that part where the sheep were, the slope became very wet and slippery. Soon the boggy ground was completely saturated. With your boots and socks wet through and through, you finally reached the low-lying clouds. From the angle of ascent, they appeared to be nothing more than very high fog. But once you were above them and standing on the rocky summit, you could peer through them like a god and survey the whole glorious landscape.

Harsh reality was the hospitality of the youth hostel down below. Or rather lack of it. And yet it seemed it should have gone all the other way. For there I was in a very remote area and, all of a sudden, a party of three Canadians showed up at the hostel. What luck, I thought! Coming across my countrymen in this neck of the woods. Surely it was an occasion for exchanging stories, observations, criticisms, and the like. But once we had exchanged no more than a few greetings, the threesome retired to their room and showed by other signs they were enough company unto themselves.

– But the very next day a middle-aged couple stopped for you on the road. You weren't even hitchhiking but they offered you a lift. They were very kind, well-spoken, and gracious people. Not at all like the stereotype of Americans overseas. So if taken into consideration with the rather cold treatment you received at the hands of your countrymen, you experienced two departures from what is usually expected or might be expected. The very sort of thing your thoughts lingered on. This minor play between the exceptional and the unexceptional.

But without being able to do anything with it. I can only recount some of these departures from norms and stereotypes. I can only give proof of being sensitive to them. But I can't raise them up to the level of a commentary thematising truthtelling.

– Let me work on it. As the theme of hesitation itself. Of not always knowing. Of playing this into truthtelling as part of it. Of finding that so much hesitation is in the book of life and so little in the books on *life. Truthtelling then as the denial of itself in these books to pose as truth. To give truth value as the solid and substantial – the unhesitating and unwavering – precisely in relation to so much else. Truth then as the relatively solid and substantial that can only be done away with in its own good time. In the meantime, it stands like the pyramids forever eroding.*

Some were pleasant surprises, some were unsettling, and some were almost a joke. Take the Irish woman I met on the ferry. How she went on about the friendliness and hospitality of the Irish people! "Mark my words," she said, "they'll open their hearts as much as their doors to you." And so on. It sounded like an advertisement. And perhaps it was. She was a businesswoman who travelled frequently. Smartly dressed and well-spoken, she seemed out of place sitting there on the rude bench with other passengers. I also found it strange to hear her disparaging the English while doing business in their country.

Freshly arrived in Ireland, I was ready to taste the exceptional friendliness and hospitality of the Irish people. After I had found out that my father was no longer in Cork but living somewhere in Dublin, I left the first city and made my way towards the second. I was only on the outskirts of Cork when I had my first taste of exceptional friendliness and hospitality. It came in the form of a motorist, fat, fiftyish, and with a bearded faun-like face, parked on the side of the road. As I passed by him, he crooked a finger at me. With a road map of Ireland spread out over the steering wheel, he asked me if I knew the route to Dublin. A strange question given there was but one route and it was clearly marked on the map! After asking a few more questions, he offered me a lift.

Vincent Child, as he called himself, proved to be a very loquacious gentleman. A bit too loquacious for his own good insofar as, after only fifteen or twenty minutes, I realized he was familiar with the route we were on. Along with pointing out various landmarks, he told me he was a French teacher from Bangor, Northern Ireland. He was on a holiday trip in the Republic. As we drove along, he had the habit of clapping me on the knee to express his exceptional friendliness and hospitality. A couple of hours went by like this before we stopped for lunch. With the look of a connoisseur, he described to me the virtues of authentic Irish stew. But after trying several places and having no luck in finding any, we both settled for something more common or at least presumably so, a roast chicken dinner. After we had finished our meal and returned to the car, he asked me if I would like to take over the wheel. Though I had never driven a car with a right-hand drive, I accepted the challenge. For a half-hour or so Vincent Child chattered away as before while I focussed all my attention on the road. Not only was it very narrow and windy, but every so often huge lorries would suddenly appear from behind a blind curve and brush past me. Then came the moment I realized the atmosphere had changed. Not only did Vincent Child lapse into a profound silence but I detected some movement coming from his abdominal region. At first I thought it was simply his belly fat jostling. But then a quick glance revealed he had his right arm buried up to the elbow in one of his pockets. From underneath his very loose pants in one spot, there was a lot of activity. My first reaction was

anger but then, all of a sudden, he renewed his amiable chatter as if somebody had pulled a switch. It was enough to calm me down, make me assess the situation, and finally decide to pretend I hadn't noticed anything.

It seemed that Vincent Child was as reluctant to part with me as I was anxious to get clear of him. Although he wanted to drive me to the very door of my destination, I insisted upon being dropped off in the centre of Dublin. While I pulled out my packsack from the backseat of the car, he waddled over to my side and started to write down his address and phone number on a piece of paper. After he had given it to me, he shook my hand vigorously and bid me come visit him. By the way he conducted himself, so warm and friendly and almost, as it seemed, with a tear in his eye, an onlooker might have thought he was taking leave of his best friend.

– I want to take the high road and you want to take the low road of your trip. I want to see it consolidating you as a person who would be able to stand firm and unshaken for the rest of his life. You want to see it as a mere extension and outgrowth of what you were before. In Europe you found the balance between rounding off certain corners and keeping others sharp. An errancy of principle rather than merely a principle of errancy. A way to respect the difference of others while hallowing the as yet undefined genius residing in yourself.

Like others who distrust a genius in name only, so do I this form of solace and comfort for having fallen short. It is better to recall that, during my time in Europe, no poetry was written and, from all my experiences there, no story drawn. The best I could do was, partway through my trip, take a month or so off to write down what had thus far befallen me. It was in the dead of winter and I was in the wonderful city of York. I had found lodging in a bed and breakfast place and, in an unheated room with a rented typewriter, I began to tell the story of my trip from the day I had set out from Winnipeg.

It was an attempt to develop a prose style that agreed with me and, as I recall, this was no easy task. Words seemed to get in the way of writing as much as they helped it. Or else they kept themselves scarce so as not to help it. The vision I had of the writer pounding out his lines one after another was so far removed from what I was doing that I couldn't help but feel deficient. It was only as a war between my frustration and my stubbornness that I eventually got down a few dozen pages of script. I remember thinking at the time – oh, what a singular thought! – that it was taking me as long to record my experiences as to live them.

– Who can spell out the proper curriculum and way of proceeding for every single devotion? Who knows what twists and turns may lie in the apprenticeship of a person bent on a project he hardly knows? That still has to be worked out? That in fact still needs to be discovered or invented? To think you wasted your time because these writings were never completed and even lost years later is to think all worthwhile activity must quickly yield a finished product. But if you could see that the writing down of your trip as lived experience was the re-*writing of it on paper and if, furthermore, you could see that this rewriting etched it ever more deeply in your mind, then you wouldn't be dismissive of these seemingly ragtag efforts that didn't hit the bull's eye of a publishable manuscript.*

I suppose I'm benefiting now from what I did then. Just as I have benefited or at least my memory has benefited from having related all my adventures to the Lohre family while working

with them. Principally there was Gerd and Roman and Roman's two sons, Ralf and Frank. Our coffee and lunch breaks were largely spent in a little trailer that, besides having benches, served for storing and transporting equipment. It was in this humble place that, along with so much other enjoyable talk, my adventures in Europe were heard and appreciated. The fact that the Lohre brothers were from Europe and had their own stories to tell gave these sessions the flavour of a long followup study.

– Lucky you! To have this continuity! This lifelong apprenticeship!

Some would say too long. Too mixed and scrambled in its elements to be truly an apprenticeship.

– Let others say what they will. They speak from their own corner which might be their own prejudice.

One can't ignore the world and the world's opinion. Already I have been called a solipsist.

– Yes, but by somebody who didn't even know what the word means. What she meant to say was that you lived your life too much in isolation. She meant – well, we know very well what she meant. The only way she could see you succeeding as the author of a book on truthtelling was by getting on at a university.

She saw my errancy only as a flight that had to be corrected or straightened out. In her mind, the only literary eggs I would ever hatch would have to be laid in the great bourgeois nest of Academia.

– Journal articles. Perhaps a book, if you were lucky. A standard scholarly work of some sort or other. Do you think, if you had ever followed her advice, you would have the time, the energy, and, above all, the inclination to write on truthtelling?

With all the duties and responsibilities of a university professor, I would have lost track of my truest self. I would have been forced to create a different or even contrary one. I would have had to assimilate so much of the conventional that little room would have been left over for an intellectual, emotional, and imaginative flight. For trying to see this world from as high up as possible.

– And this doesn't mean to see it as the astronaut or scientist sees it. Unless they were willing to make their own seeing part of this world.

From where God is, I suppose. This terrible presumption of the truthteller. What can it possibly have to do with standing on a mountaintop in the Connemara or flagellating myself for my lack of creativity?

– It can only be if the high is in the low and the low in the high. Eternity in the moment

and the moment in eternity.

The mystical moment. It's always plagued truthtelling. Plato himself shows this. When he talks about the Good as that higher sun, he gives us a second mystery behind the one that already is.

– It was in Amsterdam you had your own experience. It was in August and you were at the tail end of your trip. At a time when you were feeling down, as you have already mentioned. You were staying at a Christian Youth Hostel and wondering if it was worthwhile to hang around until Joy returned. As the latest of a number of interesting but eccentric types you came across in Europe, there was this German drug dealer in the hostel. Though having resided in Amsterdam for several years, he seemed to have no fixed address. You wondered why this should be given that, as a drug dealer in that city, he shouldn't have been in too much danger of a bust. In any event, he was an agreeable fellow and you spent some time with him. He smoked up regularly himself and, on certain occasions, he would stand and stare at a spot where a minute or two before something had taken place. This gave the impression that his reflexes and powers of perception had been retarded.

One morning he asked you if you wanted to toke up with him. It was a perfect day and you were sitting on a bench outside the hostel with a vista only Europe and, more particularly, Amsterdam can offer. A tree-lined street stretched out before you with cobblestone walks, low sixteenth-century buildings bunched together, and, straight down the middle, a canal, half-shaded and half-sunlit, with numerous boats sitting motionless on either side.

The hashish, he said, was from Cambodia and very potent. He mixed it with some tobacco and then rolled two large joints. It had been a long time since you had last touched the stuff but, feeling the desire to get a lift and be at one with the summer day, you sucked greedily on the reefer and held the smoke down in your lungs for the better part of a minute.

You'll remember that, by the time you finished your second toke, you were feeling sick. You couldn't finish the joint. You gave it back to the pusher. You were feeling so rotten you finally got up and, wanting to be alone, went back into the hostel. You looked for somewhere to sit down. The best place seemed to be the little courtyard that was part of the hostel. So you entered it and sat down in a lawn chair. You felt yourself completely drained of strength. You sat there for a long time. Your chin was sunk on your chest and your arms dangled loosely at your sides. It seemed as if they had been suddenly turned to lead. In fact, your whole body was sunk in your chair like a dead weight. It was as if the Earth's gravitational pull had suddenly increased to equal Saturn's or Jupiter's.

In the sunlit courtyard was a large square-shaped flower box. There were no flowers in it but, as your nausea lifted and you felt strong enough to raise your head, you observed the sparrows that were frequently lighting on the concrete ledge. For a while you found it very pleasant, almost a delicious feeling, to watch them hop about, ruffle their feathers, peck significantly at invisible objects, and then dart off like heaven-sent messengers. After a while, it was also a pleasure to look around and take in the courtyard. It was enclosed on all sides by very old buildings that rose some twenty or thirty feet. The peaks of the roofs cut out a square patch of blue sky across which, like the remnants of a scattered fleet, two or three clouds sailed majestically.

Further overhead and towards the centre of the inverted pool was the brilliant eye of

heaven. What was the prodigy that suddenly made you lift up your eye to it and feel as if you had entered the universe? It was one of those white-robed guardians of the lower heavens that allowed it to come to pass. One of those white billowy clouds, earthly representatives of the angelic, that, moving like a giant solitary ice flow in the sky, caught your attention. Slowly it drifted towards the sun and then, catching fire, mediated its glory to your eye. For with this conjuncture of the sun, the cloud, the perceiving eye, and the inner eye came your overwhelming sense of the bond, the beauty, and the radiance inherent in all things.

I remember a solitary cloud that briefly veiled the sun in the most beautiful way. I remember looking up and watching this spectacle as if I had never seen the like before.

– The extraordinary is in the ordinary and the ordinary in the extraordinary. If your trip was more of the first than the second, it was less the extraordinary of a different degree than a different viewing.

The extraordinary thing for me about this experience was that, as much as it may have been a *unio mystica*, it was also Cartesian.

– You were enraptured! A straight line was drawn between you and the source of life. Like Zarathustra, you had this prayer: "Oh great star, what would your happiness be if you had not those for whom you shine?"

It was getting towards noon. All things tend to become clear and distinct then. I thought to myself: "I'm this thinking thing. A thing that thinks. However momentary my existence, it can't be denied that I am. That right now I see, hear, taste, touch, smell. I'm in this courtyard. I'm under this sun. I'm having these thoughts. I'm as much a part of all this as the sun and sky and cloud. I'll remain this eternal fact no matter what happens. I'll always have been at this moment."

– The thinking thing you are, usually taken so much for granted, suddenly turned into a marvel. But only in relation to a universe bestowing upon you your consciousness so you might marvel both at it and its source.

I remember asking: "Oh, why can't it be like this forever? Why? Why? Why?" And then, even while I was still enraptured, the answer came: "Because you're not just *that*. You're also thinking, planning, acting, doing. Like everyone else, you have to work. You have to struggle. You have to compete. You have to fight. . . . This can't go on. Otherwise you would have to sit here forever and do nothing more than contemplate a sunlit courtyard, a blue sky overhead, and a cloud that grows radiant as it crosses the sun."

– Never before had you experienced such a loss of ego. Do you remember saying: "Oh, what a fool I've been! Chasing around after an illusory happiness when it was always here before me!"

That's the way I felt then. It didn't last very long. I went back to being a fool. I wrote that

stupid letter full of frank sexual talk. I had just finished reading some crazy hyped-up book on sex therapy. Somehow that made me think I could be equally candid with her about my sexual desires.

– Flimflam!

My romantic dreams always torn to ratshit!

– Your romantic dreams, if ever fulfilled, would have seen you fucking your brains out with a harem of women from here to eternity!

Ah-hah! I see for once you're not playing the romantic!

– I'm the most romantic part of you. Transcending all ugly death. Including the ugly death of a relationship....You can't say you loved her. You only had sex with her. And then you wanted more sex. For God's sake, if you loved her or anyone like her, you would have settled down somewhere and cut me out! Cut me away from you! The only muse you have ever had!

I know you're right and yet I hate to think it had to be this way. There was those delicious moments in Paris with Karen and Barbara. The Two German students I met at the youth hostel. They were both in their early twenties and spoke nearly perfect English. Along with this guy from Switzerland who was also at the hostel, we spent quite a bit of time together. I remember we went to the Louvre, the Champs d'Élysées, Montmartre, Place Pigale, and a few other places. But what really stands out was that visit to the Eiffel Tower. The guy from Switzerland wasn't with us because Barbara had grown a bit tired of him. Although he was a decent enough fellow, he paid her somewhat more attention than she cared to receive from him. In any event, she and Karen were with me and we were at the Eiffel Tower and, while they decided to stay below (possibly to economize), I bought myself a ticket to go halfway up the tower. So I went up and, when I got to the platform, I looked down and waved at them. And as soon they saw me, they waved right back. Then I left the platform, climbed down the tower, and joined them at the base. We were still under that giant metal quadruped when they both decided to take me by the arm. I was very pleased by this gesture and, as we strolled down the boulevard, I felt more successful as a lover than I had ever felt before.

– To go towards where it hurts the most or feels the best is often to go towards the truth. This is where the poet excels the most fastidious teller of general or objective truths. Precisely in his determination that the nature of truth is or must be known beforehand, the latter tells us a good deal about it that is useful but ultimately misses the mark. It gives us what we need to live and know as human beings. But it touches neither the contradictory nature of ourselves nor the contradictory nature of itself *in its thousand and one tellings.*

Perhaps it is time to move on from Europe. Intellectually speaking, I fluttered around it like a butterfly. Perhaps I *am* such a butterfly. I didn't take my first university course till I was twenty-five. It was an English course on twentieth century literature. When I was in England and Ireland, I would have benefited from it. I think, for example, of the fellow I chatted with on the

ferry. He asked me if I had ever read Yeats. It would have been nice to show I was familiar with Ireland's greatest poet rather than being embarrassed because I didn't know anything about him.

– It always seems some project or work can be touched up in this or that way. The fellow on the ferry who dropped Yeats' name into the conversation might have known him well or not at all. If the latter, you would have embarrassed him if, as is your wont, you went on at length about a subject you were familiar with.

> Turning and turning upon the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

Rather why not think of it the other way? That Europe instilled in you the desire to return to it by other means. And not only Europe in the literal sense but also in the sense of a wide-open theatre full of surprises and adventures.

That's to keep with the butterfly motif. There was this sort of half-intoxication that stayed with me later and could never be shaken off. An artistic freedom I thought I could bring to everything. In such a way that, when I was working with the Lohres and taking one or two courses at university and struggling to be a playwright, I fluttered about many different intellectual flowers. Here and there I would land and, if all was to my liking, I would stay for a while. But if I landed somewhere that, however nourishing it seemed to others, disagreed with me in the least way, why then I would soon fly off and look for another flower.

– I don't want to leave the University of Europe so quickly. I don't want you to understate just as you don't want to overstate its importance. I know there are a thousand and one things that can't be talked about without becoming merely anecdotal. Without losing the thrust of your argument as both performative and constative act. As revelation of the subject of yourself bearing on the subject of truthtelling. But along with those thousand and one things that shouldn't be mentioned, there must at least be a few dozen or so that should. That speak of human nature or how the world goes and therefore cannot be irrelevant to the subject.

The subject is still in danger of getting overloaded with the insignificant. After all, what does it matter if I visited such and such cathedral or took in such and such museum? Or if I stayed in such and such youth hostel or traversed such and such river or lake or moor or mountain?

– Yes, what does it matter if you found a wallet with a lot of money in it and promptly returned it? Or what does it matter if you found your father living in a filthy little room and not only visited him at the beginning of your trip but also at the end of it?

What does it matter if I ate cheaply wherever I went? Or what does it matter if I slept outside on a number of occasions?

– What does it matter if you met many memorable people, one of whom died even before you finished your trip? Or what does it matter if Joy (the friend of this person) was a lesbian who concealed the fact from you? Who probably was testing you out when she told you her sister was gay?

What does it matter if I cycled thousands of kilometres? Or went by ship and by rail over thousands of others?

– What does it matter if you stole a fork in a youth hostel and then, when confronted by the woman in charge, at first denied the theft and then admitted it? What does it matter if you came to the aid of a man who collapsed on the street? What does it matter if you became friends with members of a religious colony whose beliefs you didn't share? What does it matter if you saw your father fraternizing with social outcasts and didn't despise him for it? What does it matter if you held your temper in check when a newspaper vendor was rude to you? What does it matter? What does it matter? What does it matter? So you could go on with these "what does it matters?" and if they don't prove your essential honesty, openness, and good will, then they prove nothing.

But am I in need of proving this to myself? For the sake of what? An uncertainty in this area? For the sake of clearing it away? Better then to be suspicious and think I'm trying to conjure away all those times I didn't come to the rescue of a person or return a stolen thing or refrain from bigotry and prejudice. For surely there were such times easily glossed over and forgotten.

– Name one time you played the bigot in Europe.

If not in Europe, then sometime later.

– Let "later" deal with itself later. Europe is where you're now being called to account.

I met a family of gypsies in County Mayo. It was the same day I got picked up by the woman who had lived in Canada and had two kids in the car. It was pouring rain and I was walking down a lonely Irish road. Nothing but bare fields and farmland on either side. Until I spotted this odd-looking makeshift tent. Smoke was issuing from a hole at the top but, as I passed by, I saw no one. After having gone a bit further, I heard a shout from behind. I turned around and saw a man kneeling under a little canopy at the entrance. He waved and called out: "Would you mind comin' over here for a minute?" So I walked over and, to my great surprise, a horde of children suddenly rushed out of the tent. They quickly surrounded me and began reaching into my pockets. "Got a copper, mister? Got a copper?" The man didn't make any effort to hold them back. Instead he proudly informed me there were ten of them. Ten dishevelled but healthy-looking boys and girls (how many boys and how many girls I'm not sure) with reddish hair and freckles across their noses. Inside the tent was a young woman (the man himself was about thirty) kneeling before a huge cauldron. She was busy stirring a thick gruel. The man said: "We're makin' porridge. Would you like some?" Feeling a bit intimidated by the primitive conditions and the swarm of importuning children, I politely declined. Then, after having asked

me where I was from, he started looking me over from head to foot. “Where did you get a hat like that? Oh, I’d love to have a hat like that! And that cape! Now there’s a good thing to have in the rain! And those boots! Whooh-h-h! That’s a bloody good pair of boots you’ve got on your feet!” And so on until he finally got to the point of all these flattering observations. But when I checked my wallet and discovered that I only had five-pound notes in it, I told him I was sorry but I wasn’t able to give him what he wanted. Quick as a wink he changed the transaction from a grant to a loan and swore that, if I gave him a fiver, he would pay me back the very next time he saw me.

A few hours later, when I was comfortably ensconced in a grand old house and getting my clothes dried, I mentioned having run into that poor but remarkable family. My hostess’s mother-in-law, a lively old woman of eighty-four, promptly informed me that the tinkers, the Irish gypsies, were good-for-nothings who stole whatever they could. The government had tried to reform their vagabond ways, she said, but it was all to no avail.

– Do you remember that hostel in Poitiers? The young woman there who criticized the French for their rudeness and unhelpfulness? You told her to imagine herself a Frenchwoman going to America and speaking nothing but French. “ What kind of reaction do you think you’d get?” you asked her.

And how about those two Canadian rednecks you met in Carlisle? Don’t you remember feeling stricken by the thought they were representing Canada overseas?

And do you remember that German youth in Koblenz who tried to apologize to you for the Second World War? Talk about being stricken! Talk about collective guilt!

And how about that middle-aged man in the Eiffel Region? The one who surprised you with the only three words he knew in English? It’s amazing to think how much he conveyed to you with those three words.

But I can’t be certain my interpretation accorded with the facts.

– Facts! Is that what’s required here? Rather aren’t we dealing with what could have happened? If it didn’t happen to him, then to someone else.

Something of the sort did in fact happen to Gerd. He was only seventeen when he was taken prisoner. He ended up in Scotland along with everyone else on board his ship. As a way to humiliate them, I suppose, they were herded through the streets of Edinburgh. Everybody was shouting, swearing, and spitting at them.

– And you have no reason to disbelieve his account. A man whom you knew and respected for over sixteen years.

I have no reason to disbelieve a word of what he told me. Especially since he admitted that, on the whole, he was treated well. The prison conditions were tolerable and later, when he was put on a farm as the last stage of his imprisonment, he was given a fair bit of liberty.

There was this story he told us. It’s rather funny and I don’t know if it serves any purpose other than to show the kind of man Gerd was. It happened just before his ship was captured. Morale on board was low. Everyone knew the war was lost. So when they got trapped in a

Norwegian fiord by a British destroyer, Gerd and the rest of the crew were more relieved than alarmed by the turn of events. It was at this point – that is, just after there had been an official surrender and they were waiting for the ship to be taken over – Gerd ran into the captain on deck. By force of habit, he gave him the Nazi salute and shouted: "*Heil, Hitler!*" The captain looked at him like he was the worst kind of practical joker and said: "*Nicht jetzt, du Idiot*!"

But getting back to my own story. I met this guy in a pub in some little picturesque town I have forgotten the name of. I was taking a break before one of those usual ascents to the highest point in town where they always put the youth hostel. A grizzled character came up to me while I was at the bar scanning the price list. He said something to me in German I didn't understand. When I responded with my usual: "*Es tut mir leid. Ich verstehe nicht,*" he glared at me fiercely. "*Ein Engländer*?" he asked. "*Nein, ich bin ein Kanadier,*" I answered. Suddenly his expression changed, his face lit up, and he sighed blissfully: "*Ah, Kanada*!" I soon found out he had family living here. But I don't remember the rest of our conversation because, besides buying me drinks and being extremely friendly, he got very drunk. So it was difficult to make out what he was saying.

– But you remember those three words.

Oh, how could I forget them! They came out of his rambling and drunken stupor just before I parted company with him and headed for the youth hostel. If I'm right in my interpretation, they explain why he looked so fiercely at me when he asked if I was English.

– And perhaps he experienced what Gerd experienced only several degrees worse.

That's the story I never got from him. I only got these three words: *Fucking Nazi Pigs!* But they already tell a story, don't they?

– A very large story.

Who cares about German soldiers that were abused by the Allies. That's at least part of it.

– And the other?

That all neat divisions between the good on one side and the bad on the other are bogus.

– I feel we're coming together. There's this underlying moral dimension to your trip.

I suspect he was taken prisoner by the English. He must have heard those words over and over.

– What other explanation can there be?

A few months later, after touring France, I visited Dachau and the Olympic Stadium where the Israeli athletes were killed. The two places are not very far apart.

– Perhaps in more ways than one.

I cycled around a good part of Bavaria. It was so beautiful. It was hard to believe it once was fertile ground for so much grotesque myth-making.

– Yes, there's this tendency to imagine beautiful surroundings producing only beautiful people.

But that's close to what they imagined, isn't it? That they were the superior race. Only, for some reason, it had to become doctrine. As if they didn't quite believe it and so needed reasons and arguments to bolster their belief. However much we rule out these reasons and arguments today as such, this is what they essentially were. And this is what formed their ugly doctrine.

– My thoughts are becoming troubled. To talk about doctrine always sounds like more doctrine. Reasons and arguments headed off in yet another direction. I don't enjoy this closeness, this consensus, this being too reasonable anymore than you relish overstating or exaggerating yourself. A state of mind, a state of being that's free and open – what do I care about the rest? Do I care that six million Jews died more than I care about this freedom? This openness?

I'm with the stars and the sun and the sky where billions upon billions have already died. I'm with the pair of eyes that communes with them, with the heart that twinges every so often at the thought of them, and with the head that takes it all in and crowns itself lord of all. I'm with the rest of humanity insofar as all hypocrisy is cut out. I'm with the pure moment of truthtelling each has within himself even if he doesn't know or care about it.

Pride and fullness are my principal qualities even when I'm taking into consideration the pathetic state of myself. I always find a way to see from above so as to be above *my paltry condition. To find a lodging that is properly not it but some vast and open domain. Some kingdom of the ego that is no more my doing, no more my ego (or yours), than the stars and the sun and the sky. And there I wander back and forth and to and fro like the devil in Job. For I know no height, no distance, no domain, no kingdom that isn't bound up with falling back into the world.*

While I'm conscious of this part of myself, it is obviously not my most social self. For me to talk about something like the Holocaust – something so evil and so terrible – is to say, first of all, that, when I approach this subject, I walk upon eggshells. So massive was the errancy of those times and so fresh the wound even today that any move to implicate it in normality and the everyday is viewed as the contrary of the "Never again!" Of the belief it was somehow a singular event and qualitatively different from all other atrocities.

Thus I protect myself. I want it to be known that I'm not an insensitive reader of these events. Even to myself. Is this hypocrisy? Is this merely a ritual chant? Is this merely curiosity enlarged to the moral sphere? Forced up there, as it were?

I have divided myself in two because there is this "yes" and this "no" to the question. Just as there is this question of whether or not my trip around Europe was extraordinary.

I wanted the freedom to equivocate because I think equivocation the most rightful route to follow. Here nothing is doctrine or at least trying to be doctrine but merely revelation and

disclosure. Thus I take it to be what is already the state of affairs and not what should be. This "should be" is what crosses out this state of affairs a thousand and one times. It is where we all are as active human beings getting on in the world.

– But you wish to force a union where there never was one. You can't separate me from you because I never was you. No less than your heartbeat am I joined to your thoughts but no less am I not them. I'm speaking through you right now but I have no voice you can properly hear. I reach towards you from where you came and where you're going. The stars, the sun, and the sky.

Is this what I picked up in Europe? Were these some of my thoughts? Or am I simply reading back into that episode of my life a later development? Certainly nothing there blocked me off from this development. A development that I take to be, if not morally superior to the one of that period, then at least in line with it. To be open and not closed off doesn't sound like much unless the subject is truthtelling. It is not something to live by unless it were divided, as is commonly the case, into the truth on one side and the telling of it on the other. It is not something to live by unless one were bent on confounding this division by exposing it to be less than truthful.

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6. Post-European Self versus European Self

– I see two dilemmas brought up in what you're saying. The first has to do with how your former self is related to your present one. And the second how the subject of yourself is related to the one of truthtelling. Let's deal with the first (for your whole project deals with the second) by bringing in the voice of your former self. Go ahead. Examine it. Question this other self that comes to you from over thirty years ago.

Are you free and open?

– I try to be.

I'm sure you do. But still you might not be as free and open as you think. [*The young man shrugs*.] What I mean is, if we never know ourselves fully, then maybe we're directed in ways we can't be conscious of.

– I can't argue with this. I just think that, if you make an effort to know yourself as well as possible, you gain control of these other factors.

But is there any guarantee that all these factors, especially the most determinant ones, lend themselves to being known? For example, if I asked you how you came to think it was important to be free and open, how would you answer? But perhaps that is not a fair question. Instead, let me play the devil's advocate. The attitude of being free and open is fine if harnessed to some study or discipline. But in your case, there has been little of that. You dropped out of high school at seventeen and, except for a brief stint at a community college, you have bounced around from pillar to post. During this same period many others of your age have submitted themselves to a rigorous, formal education. It seems to me you have been rather lax for, if I don't miss my guess, you're someone who wants to get the most out of himself.

– When I was in high school, I thought I would go to university. But when I got into the working world, I developed a rapport with rough types that encouraged me to think they were more honest than smooth ones. And since the smooth ones most commonly belonged to institutions, it seemed to me that, with respect to them, a price was being exacted and a gilded cage being forged. And so, being averse to this, I thought it better to stay with wide-open places, wide-open choices, wide-open experiences, and wide-open people.

Wide open with their prejudices, you mean. Wide open with their simplified thoughts on a host of complicated matters. You're not going to tell me this sort of free school with its barroom or barnyard talk produces anything more than highly limited displays of speaking one's mind.

– I know they have limitations. Sometimes even gross ones. But why should that be an excuse for others who, standing on the authority of their abilities – and sometimes less – keep a large part of themselves out of sight? Before I went to Europe, I worked alongside a lot of different people. I have no illusions about their virtues or the extent of their knowledge. I'm not

saying they're the best company at all times. But neither am I saying they're the worst. What I'm saying is there is something they have that, if you're halfway concerned about truth, should be paid attention to.

Do you believe in truth?

– Of course.

And should seeking after the truth proceed in an orderly or disorderly fashion?

– Orderly.

And should truth seeking be restricted to a few people or open to all?

– To all.

And so you will agree that no one should be barred from discussing a matter on which they are competent? Now if each of the competent speakers so allowed into the conversation decided to be absolutely transparent and reveal all the background processes by which they came to the subject at hand, what do you think would result?

I take it you see the problem. If all sorts of personal matters such as secret motivations, subtle influences, private likes and dislikes were tolerated as part of the discussion, what would happen to it? Wouldn't it stand a good chance of never getting off the ground?

And if such were the case, what would there be then? A bunch of people talking mostly to themselves. With few people listening and even fewer understanding. A Tower of Babel with truth in the possession of everyone and no one.

– I'm not in a position to refute your argument. I just think everything isn't said by it.

If truth is just a sort of mass commodity, a way of furnishing plans, material, and motivations for all sorts of building projects, what's that saying? What's that leaving out? Everything that's untruth? Why, then, look how much untruth there is! In a line, for instance, like: "Man doth not live by bread alone." I'm not religious and yet I tell you, I've always loved that line. "Man doth not live by bread alone." It's so deep it's bottomless. It can't be filled by any theory. It's the truth of every person and yet it can't be put in the marketplace because it's not the same for everyone. Does that make it any less the truth?

Are you entitled to use the word truth in every which way you please? To stretch it hither and yon? I come back to my main point. If everyone followed your example, there would be no discussion. There would only be isolated testimonials. Fragmented views of this and that. The word truth would be emptied of all value and meaning. The centre could not hold, to paraphrase Yeats. (Are you familiar with this Irish poet?) Mere anarchy would be loosed upon the world.

– Perhaps there is more than one way of telling the truth. Not everybody has to be doing the same thing. Take poets and writers. They don't conform to the criteria of scientific investigation. And yet they still have something to say that rings true.

What they say falls outside the bounds of the true and the false. It is neither one nor the other. Therefore it would be best not to abuse the word truth by applying it to their works.

– I don't know how to respond to this except to say it doesn't sound true. It's as if you were saying a poet or writer doesn't make any substantial contribution to understanding. As if we could dispense with them and not have something wrenched out of ourselves that would be the wrenching out of all *our understanding.*

I suppose we do need a context.

– What?

A place, a position, a centring of ourselves that comes before we know it. You're still missing out on a higher education. But I suppose you think, wanting to be a writer, you don't really need it.

– Why do you keep harping on that? It seems you think I have taken a wrong turn. That either I should have put myself on a different course or not be a writer at all.

You're not saying the second, are you? Alright then, if that is the case I ask what better course could I be on than the present one? The one of getting out into the world and experiencing it from many different angles? The one of coming into contact with many different people and learning how they live and work and think and feel? The one of following the example of many great writers who, if their works themselves count as evidence, took the wide open highway of life to be tutored and instructed?

I don't think I have made a wrong turn. Nothing has ever stopped me from picking up a book and reading whatever I liked. Nothing has ever prevented me from asking questions and trying to come up with some answers. Nothing has ever kept me from thinking deeply on a matter and being concerned about what is right and wrong, good and bad, or true and false.

In a way I don't feel I have ever left school. Just the curriculum has changed. For eight years I have been going to classes. I attend those I like and as much as I like. Those I don't like or think aren't working I skip. My greatest instructor is my interest and my highest motivation the desire to do my best. Nothing is ruled out beforehand and, if I think it best to take a course I refused to consider previously, then I take it. With these guidelines I'm open to all possibilities that have to do with finding a true path.

But will you count what you're on as the true path if you don't reach your objective? Not everyone gets to the highest rung. I know you want truth in your writing. But what happens if your writing simply falls short? What happens if the intention is good but the writing isn't?

– If I fail, I fail. But at least I must try.

There was a movie I saw when I was in Europe. Among many of its memorable scenes was one where the hero, a phony patient in a mental hospital, tries to lift a heavy drinking fountain. On one level this is just a stunt. But on another it's his way of setting an example for the other patients who, as you quickly find out, have all had something kicked out of them. They're all resigned to their personal limitations and the dehumanizing conditions of the

hospital. In any event, there is this scene where he locks his arms around this huge fountain and heaves and strains until it looks like he's ready to die in the attempt.

There is something about failing in this way that attracts me. There is a spiritual dimension to the out-of-the-ordinary that, apart from success or failure, reaches out to others and, unlike the doings of the day-to-day, inspires awe. It's as if you finally were awakened to the true value and potential of a human being. And not only with respect to others but with respect to yourself. At least this is the way it strikes me. It's a call to get the most out of myself by living my life with some risk built into it.

It is hard to imagine how harrowing life may be when your hopes are at the highest. When you feel like a hero ready to embark on an adventure.

You still have this romantic notion that others will applaud you for what you are. It is a bookish, literary, cinematic sort of illusion. Most of the time you will only have your thoughts for cold comfort. Not secret admirers in darkened movie theatres. Not women enamoured to what is noblest and most uplifting in your soul. Not friends and family willing to separate themselves from their own affairs. No, it is much lonelier, less exalting, and longer lasting than you had ever dare to imagine.

If somebody came up to you right now and offered you a better prospect, I know you would consider it. Worldly affairs, after all, are not unimportant. You still expect a good deal. House, wife, family – beautiful wife of course. You haven't given up on any of these, have you? And there are many ways to lead an honourable, adventurous, and interesting life. Truth with a capital T, if this is what you're after, doesn't have to be the only way. There are many fields of study that can be equally satisfying.

– Whatever it is you want to do in life, it takes work to get there and your heart has to be in it.

I already know what it is to feel lonely and without comfort. I can't imagine a whole life like that stretched out before me.

I suppose I could be taken in another direction. Who wouldn't be if the stakes were high enough? If they thought that, despite their greatest effort, they weren't going to succeed?

Why are you filling my ears with this depressing talk? Why are you giving me eyes to the future that would make me renounce and betray my past and present? Show me what you have to offer and then maybe I will reconsider. But if you're just talking a bungalow in the suburbs, two or three cars in the garage, a flock of happy children, and a steady job and income, well, I have seen all that. If that were where my heart is, believe me, I would be there. Like a million others.

I would have forgotten this whole business of going to Europe. I would have started doing things differently much earlier. Maybe I would have even gone into business. Then I could have been independent and had money and worked around the clock like my uncle. And maybe, like him, I would one day have a beautiful wife that eventually gets ugly and a joking disposition that eventually dries up. Yeah, when I consider a prospect like that, I'm tempted but not much.

The writing is on the wall for all of us and, if I've got to end up old and grey, let it be at least with some fire in the blood and a free spirit. The rest I will suffer from if I don't have it. But not as much as I would suffer without these.

Enough! He's already me. Only a terrible accident or the most improbable turn of events would have made it otherwise.

– We could set it up. Every Samson has his Delilah. But let's assume he's proof against all but the most unlikely temptations. Then his commitment to you, if I may say so, is virtually unshakeable.

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7. Post-European Self Revisited (as Bipolar Self)

Fallible all along the way. Shamefully forgetful of myself as if to take a rest from myself. As if even to refute myself at times. Failing more often than not at least at the highest level. All this I have borne as the writer whose reach has exceeded his grasp.

– I see you're still not ready to dispense with me. You want to register your transparency with self-contempt. I want to register it with self-esteem. You want to show the human all too human of yourself. I want to show the superhuman. You want to look into every nook and cranny of weakness. I want to look into every nook and cranny of strength. You want to be moral. I want to go beyond morality.

The course you followed after you left the University of Europe was a very mixed one. So mixed that, to bring it into view, I will say that, on the one hand, it was a vast program of remedial studies addressed to your pre-European self and a vast program of graduate studies addressed to the post-European one. Seemingly more disciplined and structured than anything you had done before, it nonetheless mixed grunt work (physical labour, blue-collar work, solitary athletics) with intellectual and artistic pains. It mixed significant failures with significant successes and moments of lowbrow behaviour with higher interests and pursuits. All in all, it was a very mixed bag and, if you're not particularly proud of this (for it wasn't a quintessentially pure operation), then at least be proud of its bringing you thus far.

Far be it from me to play coy and pretend I'm not proud of a certain steadfastness. But if I delivered up everything into your hands, I would be singing over my non-accomplishments as if they were accomplishments. As if the mere singing over them were an accomplishment.

But I can't ignore that *On Truthtelling* is a sort of singing over non-accomplishment. A treating of it as a sort of yellow brick road (or is it a treading upon it with aims and intentions similar to those of the Tin Man and Scarecrow?) on the way to *this* accomplishment. As if the latter – this Wizard of Oz of a writerly contrivance or conjuration – should justify and redeem the lack of substantial work done in the past.

This word "substantial" is already a prejudice. But calling it a prejudice doesn't make it any less hard-hitting. Any less praise or condemnation when applied to your work as being there or not.

I can make myself out to be a person of substance by focussing on the education of myself. This partly disguises the fact I failed miserably as a writer. At least thirteen years I spent writing bad plays. (*Now you've got your work cut out for you!*) Thirteen years of writing bad plays! And, what's more, it was mostly writing the same bad plays – or, rather, the same bad play – over and over again. What! Still with nothing to say?

I couldn't master plot, character, dialogue. What was lacking? A good story to tell? But I know I had this at least once. What was lacking? A sense of authenticity? But what do I mean by this? I know it has something to do with staginess. Stagy characters. Stagy action. Stagy dialogue. All showing signs of being forced from without rather than from within. A force imposed on them rather than a force being exposed in them.

You're still keeping quiet. That's good. You're not going to try to do an alchemist's trick and turn lead into gold.

Thirteen years! A big chunk of time to be spinning one's wheels. To be thrashing straw.

To be churning out stuff that doesn't hit the bull's eye of a playable, payable script.

– Just as your writing efforts in England weren't in vain, so weren't these playwriting efforts. Just as the first reinforced your memory and made possible an account of your trip that would have otherwise been less sure-footed, so the second honed your skills for writing dialogue and made possible an account of yourself that would have otherwise been less searching and well-rounded.

You said earlier I was committed to exploring every nook and cranny of weakness. It occurs to me now that this constant flattering reveals how far we are from judging others like ourselves. With others the negative judgement often falls like an axe. With ourselves, it is tempered by uplifting statements, qualifications, counter-proposals, reckonings, etc.

I don't dare to declare you wrong in your assessment. But how can I be sure this comes from thinking you're right or from wanting nothing more than this?

– Writing about yourself as truthtelling has given you a way to be clean in your writing. It's the extension of your lifelong writing of yourself as truthteller. As such, you never had a better subject to write about – or a better self – than you do now.

Why couldn't I write about other selves?

– Your failure with other selves or characters was your unseeing commitment to your character. A commitment that couldn't be seen because neither was your egoism so great as to make you think your character could ever be the centrepiece of your creativity nor your character itself so developed as to be this centrepiece. This left you with an egoism only sufficient to persist until you came to the realization that, with respect to other characters, your lack of creativity was insurmountable.

You're the advocate of my better hope, my higher purpose, my stronger self. And yet your honesty and openness are tainted with inhuman considerations that come from I know not where.

You're willing to write my present onto my past with a clear conscience. You're willing to exalt the former in order to make the latter look good as necessary passage. To go with you all the way, to make myself insufferable in my own eyes, would be a kind of blindness. Call it false modesty or an attachment to an outdated Christian ethic, but you're good company for me only as the thing I must resist.

– You're beholden to me not only for your strength but for your chance to wallow in your weakness. To play it off as the more human, sympathetic, moral part of your character.

Alright, but at least it's part of an admission of being at odds with myself. Of even wallowing in this. Of playing it out for all it's worth. Of fictionalizing it. After all, I can't deny this dividing of myself and this dialogue never took place till now.

– Tell me about the fiction that comes from not playing it out. From leaving it alone.

From pretending it doesn't exist. From burying it. From speaking with a single voice.

You have other truthtellers who do this well enough. There, as background to their truthtelling, all inner life is painted as if it were but a white page on which reason writes itself in large script. Or if some initial chaos is there, it's only as pieces of the puzzle that reason's hand must pick up and put together. An assemblage of order out of disorder that comes from an ordering principle itself left out of the picture. As if it sprang from the truthteller's forehead like Athene, fully armed, from Zeus's.

Guilty of fictionalizing? Take these others who play their social roles so well. Who conceal the private parts of their truthtelling as much as they conceal their private parts in public. Indeed, who comport themselves as celestial – or should I say cerebral? – angels having no private parts whatsoever.

By definition reason is supposed to be without private parts.

– Let him who can, prove it. Let him dig behind that word until we don't just have the word but a full understanding of it. Let him tell us why we can be so sure a dog, a cat, a rat, a horse don't reason but only human beings.

When you stop to think that reason, in countless ways, has been taken high and low, right and left, this way and that way along the most extravagant paths, then what, pray tell, is so settled and secure about it?

The philosopher doesn't consider all wayward reasoning to be reason per se. The latter is supposed to be what corrects the former.

– Why, and here I thought I was describing the course of reason as something taking in the philosopher.

People generally take it that there has been a historical development of reason.

– And so Hegel pronounced it.

This sceptical attitude towards everything makes most people grate their teeth.

– It also gives them the chance to reason a bit more.

Admittedly scepticism – as the great spur of thought – is written into the whole philosophical tradition.

– Something too much of this.

But also an excuse to reason less. It's just a question of where you are in a never-ending dialectic.

– Hume as the great sceptic who drops out of it finally. Kant as the great anti-sceptic who takes up where he left off.

Anti-intellectualism as the great spur of intellectualism. A sort of intellectual anti-intellectualism. And then intellectualism per se rebounding with its own kind of anti-intellectualism. For as soon as it raises a red flag to asking any more questions, as soon it claims there isn't time for them or that it is morally wrong to ask them or simply superfluous, there is always the arbitrary element speaking in the name of some perhaps unannounced faith.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

8. Playwrighting

My moral relation to truthtelling is perhaps implicated here. Even then I wanted this truthtelling, whatever shape or form it took, to be performative. But while all my trust and faith were on the side of the artist, my discursive leanings, when not overtly or overly poetic, were didactic. There was this impurity of intention then that didn't get acknowledged or didn't take the time to discover itself. Didn't operate on itself as a sort of rite of purification. And while this passage or rite may be wholly unnecessary to a philosophical work (where purity of intention is usually not an issue because it is taken to be the very essence of truthtelling), and, indeed, while it may be unnecessary to an artistic one (where the very essence of truthtelling usually involves going *beyond* intention to some determination proceeding from the work itself), it is absolutely necessary to a philosophically artistic or artistically philosophical work that is stretched and torn between both camps.

This whole notion of secretly wanting to stand on a soapbox is perhaps the best way to see where I was then in relation to where I am now. Now it is not so difficult to be standing on one for, in a sense, I have made it my whole stage. To tell the truth about truthtelling *is* this stage. This essay-play or, more properly, essayistic *play* that has its character, action, and everything else coming from a pontificating self that mocks itself. A voracious egoistic self that wants the best of both worlds: to chime like an authority and snub its nose at it. To reach for the brass ring and say it can't be reached. To claim its portion of folly and bless it as wisdom. By as much as I can carry this off without falling off this soapbox, so in those earlier years I was carting around one, unable to figure out where to put it.[7]

Chiefly this soapbox of earlier years got under the feet of my characters. Whatever truth they had to tell was coming not so much from them as from me. This was a false move because it was a negating or neglecting of the contextual and intentional range that should have been expressly associated with them. Whatever this or that character had to say was always being compromised by an outside intention and additional context not pertinent to his or her dramatic life. In the meantime all the secret parts and inner workings were not being evinced and, in fact, didn't exist. Having never been imagined as aspects of my own character, they remained as far from my writing as the thought that never got thought.

What great truths did I have to offer so that I should so desperately if so secretly want this soapbox in my writing? My playwrighting was so bad I'm reluctant to extract any lofty purpose or vision from it. The best that can be said is that I was struggling to bring together some objective truth with its subjective strata. Yet it seems I had no more definite idea of this truth than that life is more complicated than any objective account of it. Such being the case, what did I want to pontificate on if not what I'm pontificating on now? And what could have been more out of my reach given that, in order to pontificate with authority, it was my very own character that had to be dramatised and sounded to the uttermost?

With this blindness to myself as both writer and wanting-to-be-written thing, I was without knowing it, in addition to being an author in search of his characters, a character in search of an author. As unripe as I was for either role, it was nonetheless the account of myself that called to me across my playwrighting. All my incompetence as a playwright stemmed from this undeclared egoism. From this inability to imaginatively let go of myself and yield to

7 And even studying Bertolt Brecht didn't help. For I was didactic not in any strictly political or moral sense but, as I realize now, in the vague, heterogeneous, and errant way of truthtelling.

dispersion or dismemberment so that a trait, a leaning, a line of thought could have been severed from its source and worked out to become its own ego and destiny.

Complication and over-complication is the working out of this secret life and inner parts of the character. Precisely where my artistic faith and intention lay, my philosophical or pontificating self wanted to assert itself. But how was this to occur in a wholly artistic setting where, in order to affirm the extraordinary richness and complexity of life, nothing can be affirmed or denied but only revealed?[8]

And now it occurs to me that, unlike other playwrights who put their characters either adroitly or maladroitly on soapboxes, I left mine there with virtually nothing to say. Maladroitly they jumped from issue to issue and question to question and response to response as if their whole business was to infer that what was going on surpassed any of their accounts or any account at all. The trouble was that this was only too true. Issues that got taken up were treated thinly and incoherently not only by the characters but as part of the overall action or sequence of events. Only if the characters had been sufficiently developed would the issues themselves have been sufficiently gone into. Like the characters, they would have then been complicated and over-complicated in a contiguous and unified way.

The issues. Incest. Slander. A hodgepodge of sexually tinged items tied up with my hyper-masculine identity and the conflicting sense of being a loser with women.

My first attempts (actually all my attempts but mostly my first attempts) were amateurish affairs. Picayune was the word one critic used. It was with reference to my one attempt at a comedy. Plugged into this attempt was my fantasy of being overpowered by a sexually desirable female. The inspiration for this terrible piece was a newspaper article about a female high school wrestler.

Juvenile? Yes, it involved juvenile characters who were no more characters than Dick and Jane in a school primer. How could this arise if it weren't for my being less interested in these characters than my sexual fantasy? And what was this sexual fantasy if not, at bottom, pornography?

But where could this pornography be taken if it couldn't be cleaned up as comedy or never intended to be burlesque? Had I been a gifted dramatist, wouldn't I have taken it towards evil? Wouldn't I have examined the dominatrix fantasy as the obverse of rape fantasy? And wouldn't I have seen a connection at some deeper level between the one and the other? Between the worst of female domination and the worst of male domination? And wouldn't I have seen the former as the humiliation of the boy or man in his very maleness? And wouldn't I have kept in mind that this humiliation can be inadvertent? And wouldn't I have thought that, if someone like me who never experienced this humiliation to any marked degree could entertain erotic daydreams of vengeance, then so could others with much more elan and evil intent?

Something blocked me in the dramatisation of evil that pertained to my preoccupation with my own. Libidinous longings that, under certain conditions, had proven to be both underhanded and out-of-hand. Yet the whole business of isolating these longings and giving them

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8 But what about those dramatists who claim otherwise? Who speak of having a message in their play? Then it must surely be admitted that, for those who wish to regulate or limit this complexity, there is no strict opposition between saying and showing. For it can always be the case that, among the things said that are highly revealing of various characters and situations, there is the *one* observation or remark or speech or even series of speeches that, from an interpretative standpoint, puts things into perspective most tellingly.

a new direction, of turning them into something truly monstrous, of separating them from other preoccupations was met with a wholly inartistic resistance. A basic and primary desire, as I see it now, to tell the truth only about myself. A self not in any sense raised to be a monster and, if it were capable of being one, still would have required the most extreme or improbable of circumstances to be changed or taken over. The worst I had on my conscience was some relatively minor incidents of incestuous contact with my sisters. Along with climbing into my second oldest sister's bed when I was thirteen (there were some sequels to this), I felt up my youngest sister while she was sleeping. But with respect to this last incident, I no longer had the excuse of being a child.

There was this play on incest I wrote and then rewrote over and over again. I remember I was initially stimulated by the accessibility factor. It seemed to me that, if forbidden fruit were hanging high up the tree and well out of reach, it was ignored for the most part. Many passers by who initially wouldn't think of eating it were also ones, who, consciously or otherwise, were held back merely by their unwillingness to climb the tree. But when they happened to come across it within easy arm's reach, then the fact that it hung in a private garden grew vulnerable, as a legal or moral constraint, to their reasoning. Why was the owner so careless? Why didn't he keep his fruit out of reach? See how many trees he has. Obviously he wouldn't miss this fruit hanging so close to a parched passerby. And so on.

What kept me from taking hold of this accessibility factor and examining it in depth? What prompted me to bring in other issues such that, instead of a treatment of evil, there was some watered-down version of it? For there was not only this thing in my play about a man punishing his stepdaughter in a suspicious way. There was also this other thing where she takes advantage of this to try to repel him from the home. Couldn't I see that this man, too close to my own sexual errancy, represented a feeble, timid, and almost cowardly approach to the subject? And couldn't I see that this girl, partially a victim and partially a victimizer, was too complicated not to be without her own play? And, finally, couldn't I see that rewriting the play so that it veered more and more towards being a battle of the sexes, an ultimately violent confrontation between the man and the girl's mother, was a complicating factor of the worst sort? In short, I ended up bringing in a third large-scale issue when the play already had more than it could bear.

To answer these questions by saying that, deep down, I was less interested in how any of these issues touched my characters than how all of them touched me – to answer like this is almost to think I never wanted to be a playwright! But such a thought would take me in the direction of admitting that I didn't know myself as nearly as well as I thought I did. Wanting to be a playwright seemed no less important to me at twenty-seven than wanting to be big and strong at thirteen. But even when I was in the throes of trying to succeed at it, I was conscious of having come to it with some underlying resistance. Some carry-over from a paucity of experience, exposure, training, or inspiration.

Before I went to Europe, I had never so much as seen a play. And what I did see on the stage in Europe was, while memorable and sometimes enthralling, no epiphany. It didn't make me walk away from it in a drunken daze thinking now I had finally seen the whole course of my life set out. As with others, it touched me for the time it was there and then left me. When I took time off in England to write, my first instinct wasn't to mimic what I had seen on the stage. I wasn't beset by a mania to bring characters to life. To have them speak like real people or to develop a plot or story suitable for the stage. For at the time what was this wooden O to me compared to the vasty fields of England and Ireland? To the characters and settings I saw every

day on this European stage still rolling out before me?

Right from the beginning then it seems that my writerly ambitions were cut out for a very large and personal stage. The kind that a novel would have likely provided better than a drama. The lengthy letters I sent home that, along with the writing I did in England, took the place of the travel journal I started but didn't keep up testify to my desire to increase my powers of observation and to describe things as well as I could. But even while I was engaged in such writing, I was haunted by the difficulties I encountered as well as the niggling thought that I didn't truly enjoy writing long descriptive passages. This was in keeping with my reading where I tended to become impatient with them while delighting in finely drawn characters, precipitous actions, and strong verbal or non-verbal exchanges. So much so that, as I see it now, there was this unresolved tension between the lure of the one and the lure of the other. Between the immediacy of the dramatic and the spaciousness of the epic. Between the emotionally charged action and conflict that rules more easily in the first and the adventurous or quietly contemplative that rules in the second.

But be it novel or play, what was required was an interesting story to be told or scene to be developed. When I looked into myself, however, I saw nothing but my own story and some interesting scenes from it. At the same time I knew that a bare telling of this or that was fine as anecdote but poor as art. Poor as the most carefully circumscribed and thorough investigation of imaginative, emotional, and intellectual life. Poor as the most scrupulously defined part taken towards the undefined whole. And poor as the submersion of the ego in the greater forces, circumstances, and conditions that play kaleidoscopically with all aspects of human awareness.

I think now that my hypertrophied concern for preserving my integrity was a sort of blockage that, had I been willing to compromise it in the imaginative sense (or had I known how to), would have been a spur to creativity. To take this hypertrophied concern and plant it in a less strong or enfeebled character and then to imagine this same character falling down, suffering, struggling, and then finally winning or losing out in this area – this is something I think would have been ideal for me as a writer of novels.

But I only can say this in retrospect. Nothing at the time came close to stirring me in this direction. Had I been more sensitive to the possibilities of exploiting this formula, I might have seized upon the model or type that came my way in Belfast. She was a woman in her late twenties from Australia and, as I remember, a professional person. Two of the most striking things about her – at least on a first reckoning – were that, first, she was quite ugly and, second, she had been travelling around the world for two years. She had already trekked across Asia and Africa and only begun Europe some months before.

In addition to being impressed by this travelling feat (she was still holding to her original plan of spending three years abroad), I was impressed by her mature bearing, her cultural interests, and her hospitable manner. In fact, it was mostly due to her that I ended up seeing my first stage plays. One of these was at a professional theatre and the other was at the university. It so happened that, at the very time we met in the Belfast youth hostel, there was a week-long film and theatre festival at the university. If it hadn't been for her, I quite likely would have left the city without going to it.

During the several days that I stayed at the hostel and attended this festival, I spent a good deal of time with her and her travelling companion. The latter was a Canadian about my own age whom she had hooked up with only a month or two before. It was somewhere in County Clare that their paths had crossed. He himself told me he had been working on a farm at the time and

that, although he was paid very poorly, he had been driven to this expedience when he ran out of money.

It didn't take me long to suspect that she had been paying his way ever since. Discreet as they both were, some of his remarks betrayed a certain shallowness. But be that as it may, it is her character and not his that would have served me creatively.

That is, as I see it now, she was well aware that she was paying for his company. She knew the situation was bad and unwholesome. That it wasn't much different from hiring a gigolo. That it wouldn't last and she would be hurt. That buying the illusion of having a Prince Charming at her side was to falsify and make a mockery of her heart's desire.

I would venture to say that whatever story I could have wrought from this perception of her would have put all my playwriting efforts to shame. Even if I hadn't been able to pull it off altogether or even if I had written some terrible parts, it still would have been better than anything I attempted dramatically. The main difference between what I could have done with such a character for a novel and what I didn't do with my dramatic characters or, more properly, caricatures of dramatic characters is that I would have been able to invest her with large pieces of myself. And if I had somehow managed to rise to the occasion and be reasonably competent, I would have been able to do so while maintaining the integrity of her character in its very slide or slippage. As much as I cared about myself then, I would have been able to care about her. As much as I had known what it is to maintain an illusion in spite of all contrary reasoning and opposed judgements, I would have been able to see into her nature. And where the primary difference lay, namely, that I had never tied my highest hope to my greatest weakness, there would have been the task of imagining myself a little less secure. So that I would have been able to say of her: *There but for the grace of God, go I.*

But if I didn't tie my highest hope to my greatest weakness, surely I tied it for a long time to artistic incompetence. And it seems to me now that this happened because I didn't recognize my best artistic impulses as stemming from this concern for personal integrity. It would have been necessary to tap into this vein of psychical ore, to mine and purify it and then work it out in combination with and even as a covering for baser metal before I could have claimed to have been an artist. As it was, I forewent this hard apprenticeship and took up a much longer and more indeterminate one. Obviously I didn't feel the pressure of time or circumstance as some do. Such as the proverbial consumptive poet or tortured soul. Rather I was much more the passionate observer of myself as a series of experiences, experiments, confrontations, and the like. And infused in all this was a sense of carving out for myself a quest or mission that would at least allow me to be a hero in my own eyes.

That I drifted towards playwrighting was in some sense in accordance with my natural inclinations and in some sense against them. In accordance with them as new experience and adventure and against them as the binding of myself to the interests and activities of others. The institution, the organization, and the group had always been for me partly intimidating and overshadowing affairs. Complex whirls forever spinning out new projects and strategically binding people together. Centrifugally and centripetally directed interests, excitement, and activity circling around some barely discernable vacuity. Their collective means and ends seemed to weigh greatly in the scheme of things but also to have less comprehension of this scheme including their own place in it. Such were my thoughts at least at some level. They were more or less representative of the intellectual side of me whereas the emotional and imaginative sides were mixed up with the usual earthly desires and pursuits. Once the playwrighting (I won't say

the theatre) bug bit me, I imagined myself being swept along to glory as the result of one supreme effort arising out of the narrow provincialism that often stalks the artistic community. It would rank me with the likes of a Tennessee Williams or an Arthur Miller. Already then I secretly condescended to people who, in truth, were much more theatre-competent and theatre-impassioned than I was.

My illusion then was this: there was some pure force in me that would overcome all obstacles and deliver me to the Promised Land of a dramatic masterpiece. But the latter never did happen and so incessantly stood as a kind of placeholder for the thing so out of reach it couldn't even be seen. And the consequence of all this, namely, that I fell so short for so long, has always brought to me a strange mix of being both humiliated and gratified. The first because I was so far from the great or extraordinary in playwrighting that I was even less than the mediocre. The second because I was at least persisting and at the same time holding on to a kind of backup notion. To a kind of hope in reserve that seemed to go beyond illusion. A utilitarian belief with respect to illusions, namely, that they could be ridden on until they were ridden out. Until all errancy and uncertainty suddenly became the highest hope redeemed.

What other way for me to go is there than this teleological talk that cleans up all past messiness and reorders it as the means to the present?

At the time I was writing bad dialogue with badly conceived characters and situations, I had enough of a life apart from all of this to ward off any feelings of being a failure. Not succeeding at what I wanted to succeed at most was, although surely a thorn in my side, mitigated not only by the constant hope I had that one day I would astound the world with a great play, but also by the contradictory feeling that I still hadn't found my proper path. Of course the first took up all the foreground in the beginning whereas the second found room as a psychological buffer or safety net. In the beginning I was quite active in the organization whose mission was to promote Manitoba plays and playwrights. I frequented meetings, took on some low-key responsibilities, attended workshops, and made an effort to learn as much as I could about the theatre. The niggling thought that I was handicapped in this by not being, in addition to my involvement in the playwrights association, an active working member of the theatre itself (how much better the prospects seemed for those who were actors or directors!) was counterbalanced by the thought that my overall strategy was one of not only developing myself artistically but also intellectually (and, if I daresay so, morally). Besides, as far as I was concerned, the play was the thing and the play, the great play would surely usher me into the heart of the theatrical world once it had seen the light of day.

Such was the mixture of naivety and grandiose thoughts that both afflicted and uplifted me as a playwright. At the same time it was nothing so pathological that I wasn't aware – and sometimes almost depressingly so – of what ran counterpoint to it. This was the modest, low-key work of the playwrights association. The principal character of this work, as far as I could see, was a combination of everyone having their heads squarely on their shoulders and no one writing their dreams too large. Talk was largely confined to the politics and policies of government-sponsored art and, in relation to these, carving out a place for Manitoba playwrights. All in all these verbal forays and exchanges translated into a modest raising of funds, a modest raising of the profile of Manitoba plays and playwrights, and a modest obtaining and offering of various services. No higher aim or expectation was there than to make Manitoba theatres, and particularly the smaller ones, more receptive to Manitoba plays.

Somewhere in the heart of me I was dissatisfied with all this and wanted to grow large

before anything else. Anything that seemed to move me in this direction took priority over practical concerns about increasing the overall chances of getting a play produced. Besides taking courses at university then, I busied myself with writing and what I thought would be a whole process of developing my skills as a playwright. As much as I may want to scoff at this now, I was deadly serious about it at the time.

So it was that I soon availed myself of a reading service that the playwrights association set up. A service mainly of benefit to its members in that it consisted of a pool of competent people who were hired to read and critique scripts. But what did this ultimately avail me as a playwright (and not simply as a member) when I was incompetent from beginning to end? Who was so bold or perspicacious or, for that matter, cruel as to tell me that not only this or that was wrong with my play but the length and breadth of it? Who would have been able to say to me then, as I have only been able to say to myself recently, that I wasn't sufficiently courageous as a playwright? That one doesn't deal effectively on the stage with a subject like incest by picking it up with tongs?

Others less artistically ambitious at least fulfilled what they set out to do. Their plays were put on stage but, truth to tell, I can't remember much that was great about them. No characters were created of the order of a Hamlet or an Oedipus or a Willy Loman. Nothing was so moving that it filled me with the feeling of a vast gulf between what they had accomplished and what I was doing. And if all of this is unfair to them and their efforts, it is only to the degree that I now believe there *was* a gulf between what they had accomplished and what I hadn't. In truth, there was one writer who, coming on the scene at a time when I was no longer so involved with the playwrights association, struck me as brilliant. He wrote and performed one-man plays that were bawdy, funny, searching, sweeping, and even philosophical. If I had been less the sort of person who covets not only the high road but his own proper path, I surely would have gravitated towards him as my one chance of learning first-hand how to write for the theatre.

Thirteen years! How is it possible I could have spent so much time at what I did so badly? Over and over again the report card came in and there was a big F. Damned by faint praise or else given clear note that I had written nothing of merit. Actors and actresses taking their only delight in showing me how bad my characters were. Never moving one inch closer to the realization that my wide-ranging thoughts, however bounteous and potentially serviceable, should have never been introduced into the sanctuary of creativity except by a careful screening process and only by appointment. How much of the artist's self-discipline was lacking in me even in the midst of my most disciplined ways. How much I was missing that sense of perfecting the part so that it moves towards the whole and demands no more of it than what can be provided for this perfection.

Is it enough to say that for a long time I could view no other course for myself? No other writerly course or main direction in life? I don't know how else to explain my willingness to be such a poor student for so long at this school. To be the very inverse of a high school dropout almost to the point of parodying it. And yet even now it comes as a kind of balm to think that all those years of attending this school of hard knocks (harder than any I received in the proverbial school) have paid out at least some educational dividends. By integrating it with all the other courses I have taken, I'm able to think it was a long drawn-out lesson in humility, in patience, and in the rough honesty of the stage and its people at their best.

Why then, you princes,
Do you with cheeks abash'd behold our works,
And call them shames? which are indeed nought else
But the protractive trials of great Jove
To find persistive constancy in men:
The fineness of which metal is not found
In fortune's love; for then the bold and coward,
The wise and fool, the artist and unread,
The hard and soft, seemed all affined and kin.
But in the wind and tempest of her frown,
Distinction, with a broad and powerful fan,
Puffing at all, winnows the light away;
And what hath mass or matter, by itself
Lies rich in virtue and unmingled.

Often I thought that others were able to think in clear images while I could only think in broken images. Always there were others who understood better how things were organized. How the Manitoba Arts Council functioned or how to set up a constitution for the playwrights association or how to pull the various levers to get funding, office space, and recognition in other sectors. Always there were others who seemed to know better what they were about. For example, those who were fully oriented towards being entertainers so that they treated playwrighting as but one more arrow in their quiver. Or, from the other end, those who came from the outside like me but with sufficient talent to pass on to the playing field while I continued to watch from the sidelines.

How difficult it is to get the measure of the situation that one is fully in. Impossible, in fact, and this is the full measure of my present situation. When I look back at my playwrighting self, I think I know it better now than I knew it then because I know what followed it and I take this later development to be revealing of this self as not only what was intimately bound up with it but with all my other past selves.

Which is to say that, before the drive to write and, specifically, the drive to write plays came along, there were other drives that the first one failed to take in and transform. Such as the desire to be heroic or the desire to be a sort of universal man. Drives or desires that, were they to be dramatically sublimated in the most thorough and successful way, would have required that I had been nothing less than a modern-day Shakespeare. But I was so far from a masterly guidance coming from either within or without that I didn't even choose the material that probably would have worked best for me. Rather than a round of characters whom I didn't particularly care about (but imbedded in issues that I did), I needed one central character whom I admired. I needed the impetus and wherewithal to provide this character with all he needed in terms of action, setting, situation, and other characters to be what he properly should have been.

It is difficult to diagnose my mistake and even more difficult to diagnose it *as* a mistake. Had I been moderately successful as a playwright – and what more could I have been? – I would have been held up even longer from cutting away from it as the once bright star now grown pale.

A case could be made that I was struck by a sort of wilful blindness that kept me on track as a writer even when it was the wrong track. During the time I was devoted to writing plays and even bad plays (though I didn't recognize them as such with quite the same zeal I do now), the

usual bourgeois temptations never arose as an issue or as a reason to give up on my highest aims and aspirations. In fact they had about as much influence on me as the TV commercials I didn't watch. For neither did I ever purchase a TV nor accept one when it was offered me. TV-watching, commercials, and other such things symbolized for me a limited reach whereas I wanted to aim high. At the same time it would have been very hard to maintain this way of thinking, feeling, and going on in life if I hadn't been able to keep alive the hope that one day my efforts would pay off.

About halfway through my thirteen years of non-accomplishment as a playwright, I did totter in my hopes. I did entertain the idea of throwing in the towel and taking up teaching. But this potential drift away from my innate errancy and towards professionalism was cut short when I was no longer able to suspend the question of what the consequences of this move would be. The thought that I would be stricken for the rest of my life with a bad conscience was enough to make me see less evil in battering my head against the wall of playwrighting than in trying to live with a fractious and contrary one while teaching.

Such being the case, it was only by slow degrees that I came to the realization that, if I persisted further in this area of little reward and much punishment, I would be wasting my time irremediably.

It was a combination of three factors – giving up on the play I had been rewriting for many years, not being able to do anything with the abundance of notes I had for another one, and finding myself devoid of ideas for a third – that finally made me throw in the towel. In all human history I doubt whether anyone has spent so much time and energy on a piece of work so little deserving. What research didn't I undertake that had no proper bearing on what should have mattered most to me, namely, the internal and external life of my characters? All the wonder of the theatre is in this and particularly as the internal manifested solely through the external. Having no fixed story or plot, I should have started with one of my characters – the man or woman or girl – and built up everything else in order to reveal this character in all its facets. Then I would have been guaranteed a dramatic core guiding how everything else should have been arranged. Oh, then I would have seen that everything that mattered about my male character was bound up in his subterfuge. Everything that had to do with where it could lead and what the short or long-term consequences of it might be. But instead of taking on this task and exposing a heart of darkness in its movements and effects, I brought in other intentions and manoeuvres that, while moving the play forward, scattered and scanted everything. This left only skeletons and scarecrows as characters and gibberish as dialogue.

My principal mistake was that, in order to generate conflict, I made both the mother and girl hardy resistant types. Such a move foreclosed on the possibility of having evil enter the picture in the way that a small weed, when left alone and unhindered, grows large. As a consequence, the lure and enticement of spanking the girl never went much further than mere prurience. Both for me as the writer and the character called Victor. Once again I stayed at the soft-porn level and didn't push on to sadistic possession and repeated violations of the most ruthless sort.

As opposed to the evil I knew was in me at least potentially and yet I shied away from imaginatively, there was what I tried to capture in a second play that never got off the ground. Something of the order of the cosmic wanted to be registered here and, although I made an attempt at this, it was so amateurish that I'm ashamed to think I was nearly forty at the time. What prompted me to resort to a stage devil and thereby jump outside the particular

manifestation of evil I had in my sights? What made me so unthinkingly reach for an artifice like this when, despite whatever technical advantages or theatrical effects it offered, it took the demonic out of the psychotic where it properly belonged? What kept me from once again digging into the principal character and seeing that everything had to be seen through his eyes, heard through his ears, and thought through his head if the devil were to have any proper business onstage?

What kept me from doing the study of a charming young man, full of high hopes and high spirits, who at bottom was a coward? What? What? Did it have something to do with secretly envying him? His popularity? His success with women? Was this secret envy of mine somehow a stumbling block? A psychical distraction? A thing ultimately more interesting and more of a concern to me than his moral and physical cowardice? For there was little of this cowardice I could relate to. Even now, when I think that I was rather cowardly as a playwright, I still can't get anywhere near to this character's pusillanimity. Yet I was certainly aware that this double-whammy weakness, mental and physical, a far cry from my own petty concerns, could fuel a powerful drama. By watching myself too closely, did I make it impossible to block out things that had no pertinence to the work at hand? Or to second-rate them such that they could have at least been taken up as elements subordinate to the main action or theme? Otherwise I might have transferred my personal preoccupations to a character who would have been envious or admiring of the hero even to the point of emulating him. Indeed, it seems to me now that to have such a character doubling as the one who tells the story of the psychotic ride through hell would have been the right move. At least this friend would have had a reason to tell the story whereas my stage devil had no rhyme or reason for doing so.

Hooked on Hell in the Land of Golden Promises

> [*Darkness with spotlight on the stage. The devil enters in a stylishly cut business suit. He limps forward a few paces, betraying a congenital deformity of his left foot.*]
>
> *Devil*: I am both imposter and impersonator, real and unreal, depending upon who you are and how you look at it – evil, that is. Myth, magic, miracle: it would seem that for the vast majority nowadays my name sounds an equivalent note of unreality.

The devil as pedagogue. Apparently the soapbox syndrome was afflicting me even at this stage. How is it possible I didn't ask myself why the devil he was casting himself in this role? Couldn't I see that, if he were truly turning away from his traditional one of imposter and impersonator, it would have to be because he was planning something new? Yet so far was I from envisioning an earth-shaking event of demonic proportions that the play begins to falter almost immediately.

> [*He pulls a cigar out of his inside breast pocket and lights it. He puffs at it until it is going satisfactorily.*]
>
> *Devil*: And yet I stand before you, imposing my presence, my personality,

> my reality as it were on this lame actor who — uh, but perhaps you think the only way of viewing the matter is from the other side. The rational side. Well, so be it. I leave the rational world well enough alone these days. And rational people for that matter.

All the mistake of the play is caught here because almost immediately the devil holds back on a presumed bid to equate himself with the real and the rational. The opening lines therefore lose all weight and significance except as a broad suggestion that he is much more operative in the world than is commonly thought. But this itself is hardly new and so, when all is said and done, he proves to be a lame devil. He starts to bore rather than to intrigue. What other way could it be given that he is not supposed to be a clown or comedian and therefore cannot even take advantage of the crass symbolism of his onstage presence? Why did I keep to this devil character so long if not that I was blind to what I knew perfectly well, namely, that spectacle ranks well below plot and character? Blind then not as a thinker but as an artist following his bent as a non-artist. All the psychotic hallucinations that had tormented my brother in Los Angeles and Palm Springs filled up my thoughts and intrigued me to no end. Transferring them to the stage seemed a marvellous thing and, if handled properly, no doubt would have been. Yet the very fragility of his psyche, so outwardly robust, somehow didn't register as what should have been my primary concern. It was as if my curiosity in this area came to an end as soon I could conceptualize it. As soon as I had puzzled it out very much as a psychologist would have. But to go the way of recreating my brother's character and experiences in a drama required some level of commitment that I couldn't reach.

Too eager to tell the story rather than to show it was the problem here as well as elsewhere. Instead of revealing the inside of my characters as a movement outwards that both influenced and was influenced by events, I had these same characters simply turned to and fro, buffeted back and forth by external forces. As a consequence, they acted not as autonomous beings but as mere pawns of the playwright who set them up in their world. Rather than being committed to their personal destinies, they gave every sign of being merely his hirelings. From what second or third-rate agency of my mind they came I'm not sure. All I only know is I made a cardinal mistake by trying to fabricate them of a piece rather than draw them from characters that already existed either in literature or in life. So it was that I ended up caring little for them and, as a further consequence, for the story that these imaginative starvelings could only render trite, nondescript, and not infrequently obscure. This was the devil that had been confounding me right from the beginning. And when I finally hit upon a good story, one drawn from real life, I couldn't resist sending myself to the devil by sending this devil right up on stage to tell it.

It afflicts me now to think that I botched up a play that deserved to see the light of day. Certainly this wasn't the case with my other botched-up plays. The main difference is that I finally had interesting characters who simply needed to be set down in a dramatic context that itself was already provided. Not that this would have made the main action – the delayed reaction of one character to the marital infidelity of another – any less problematic. Evil, psychosis, demonic hallucinations, the breakdown of personal identity – all these elements were caught up in it.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

9. Telephone Call to Palm Springs

My brother got involved in a situation that was beyond his moral capacity to deal with. Sophisticated in a broad sort of way, he was nonetheless one of those who plumbed the depths only so far and no further. Only the light and agreeable commanded his attention. So had the world in fact been for him for a long time and so it seemed to be when he first ventured into the business world. Prospects looked very good at the beginning because he had a dynamic brother-in-law all set up in business and ready to take him under his wing. In my never-finished play this brother-in-law got the name of Edward Sutton. Unfortunately I also made him the devil who struts on stage at the very beginning. A very stupid move because it literally took the demonic element out of Sutton by putting him too obviously in it. By doubling him, that is, with a cardboard representation of it. All he should have been both dramatically and psychologically was thereby ruined. It astounds me now to think I could have done this because I knew very well that his darker side was the point of fusion and interplay between my brother's normal and psychotic state.

[*Late evening. Charlie's Los Angeles apartment. Jason picks up the phone and dials a number. Laura answers in Palm Springs. Sutton simultaneously picks up the extension*.]

Laura: Hello.

Jason: It's me. I'm ready to come out.

Sutton: I'm gonna ask your brother a simple straightforward question.

Jason: What's going on? What's he doing on the line?

Laura [*simultaneously*]: What question?

Sutton [*to Laura*]: I'm gonna ask him the question that cuts right to the heart of the matter.

Laura: That'll cut him to the heart, you mean.

Sutton: And what's he done to me, for Christ's sake?

Laura: Ed, charging at him like a bull won't help matters.

Sutton: Is it any worse than striking at me like a snake?

Laura: I don't want you asking him that question.

Sutton: It's gonna be asked because I want this mess cleaned up right now.

Laura: There are other ways to go about it.

Sutton: I haven't got time for other ways.

Laura: I don't want you beating up on him.

Sutton: I'm not gonna beat up on him. I'm just gonna ask him a simple straightforward question.

Laura: It's not necessary to ask him that question.

Sutton: Not necessary? He's trying to wreck our marriage and you say it's not necessary.

Jason : Laura, did you warn him I was coming out there?

Charlie [*returning from the washroom*]: What's going on?

Sutton [*to Jason*]: The question I have for you is this, buddy: are you sick?

Laura *[to Sutton*]: Please get off the phone so I can explain to him why he shouldn't come out here at this time.

Sutton: He'll find out soon enough.

Laura: Yes, but I'd rather it came from me.

Sutton: Laura, this is one time I'm gonna have to risk not pleasing you.

Jason: I'd like to speak to my sister if you don't mind.

Sutton: And you I'm definitely not interested in pleasing.

Jason: Alright, I'll call back later.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: What's going on?

Sutton: The reason I ask my indelicate question, buddy, is, if you're not sick and just saying this out of spite, it's the not the hospital you're likely to wind up in, it's the morgue.

Jason: I'll call you tomorrow, Laura, when Mr. Tough Guy can't interfere with what I have to say.

Charlie: Oh, God! It's him! I can feel it!

Sutton: Who're you with, buddy?

Jason: No one.

Sutton: Who's that little sweetheart you're with?

Jason: A friend.

Sutton: I think I know who that friend is. I think I'd call her the friend you're fucking around with.

Jason: The friend *you* were fucking around with.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: Are you crazy?

Sutton : Do you hear this, Laura? That's the woman he's been fucking around with for a month and now he says I've been fucking her.

Jason: I haven't been fucking around with her.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: Stop it or I'll unplug this telephone.

Sutton: You hooked up with my ex-secretary, you fuck. You've been poking her for a month. What're you gonna tell me now? You're just good friends?

Jason: We went to bed once. But you were fucking her for three months before you fired her.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: You said it'd only be between you and Laura.

Jason: Take it easy. I didn't know it would turn out this way.

Charlie: You take it easy!

Sutton: What's going on?

Jason: Laura, I'll call you tomorrow.

Sutton: No, you won't. You'll tell us what you and this whore are up to.

Jason: Whore? If anyone's responsible for turning her into a whore, it's you.

Charlie: [*suddenly frightened by some passing beam of light*]: Oh my God, oh my God! What was that?

Sutton: You're a fine one to talk. A guy who screws around with two and three chicks at a time. Look, Laura knows why I let her go. She's a coke fiend. She wouldn't do her job properly. And as far as me wrecking her relationship — boy, this really burned me when I heard this! — all I can say is, buddy, I don't know of any new boyfriend except you.

Jason: I don't believe this.

Sutton; What don't you believe?

Jason: These lies you're telling.

Sutton: Listen to this. He's calls up my wife, tells her I had an affair with my ex-secretary. This woman who's got serious problems and shouldn't be believed because she's got a vendetta against me. He does all this and then calls me a liar.

Jason: I don't believe this.

Sutton [*to Laura*]: Why would he take the word of a woman who was lying to me every day of the week? [*To Jason*] Listen, I can only think you're — alright, I'm gonna ease up a bit. I'm gonna say you just made a mistake.

Charlie [*returning from the window*]: Look how I'm shaking. Look!

Sutton [*to Jason*]: You've been taken in by this woman, right? This female con-artist? This junkie who'd do anything, say anything, and fuck anything for a half a gram of coke?

Jason: There's just one problem with what you're saying.

Sutton: Yeah, that's it. Of course I'm not expecting an apology right now. I can wait till you've thought the matter over more carefully.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: For a second I thought there were armed men outside.

Laura: I've stayed quiet till now because I wanted to hear something from both sides. I certainly didn't plan to have this confrontation over the phone. I would've much preferred to have talked to each of you separately. But now it's happened, well, I'm just going to speak my mind like I always do. Jason, it's my marriage that's at stake here. I want you to be aware of this. Just as I want to be fair to you and hear what you have to say. Now you've made a terrible accusation. Ed was deeply upset when I told him —

Jason: You weren't supposed to tell him.

Laura: When you called me from the beach, as I was saying, and started muttering about some wild hallucinations you were having. Then, the very next instant, you told me Charlie was on the verge of blowing the whistle. At the time I could hardly make out what you were saying and now, quite frankly, I'm not much better off. Look, I'm carrying around a child. I'm going to be giving birth in a couple of weeks. What do you expect to accomplish by all this?

Charlie: This is too freaky. This is all over my head.

Jason : I've got to clear this up. Everybody's trying to avoid the truth.

Sutton [*to Jason*]: If you keep on persisting with what you call the — Jesus, and to think he wanted to make it big in the business world!

Charlie [*to Jason*]: The truth is everyone will avoid the truth to stay alive.

Jason: [*to Sutton*]: You know very well I'm not just relying on Charlie's word.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: Everyone will say what they have to say to keep on living, breathing, working, and even snorting.

Sutton [*to Jason*]: Alright, buddy, here's what I'm gonna do. If you can find a way to come to your senses long enough to stop upsetting my wife and endangering the child that's in her body, I'm gonna make every effort to see you get the help you need.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: You think it's just a stupid rumour. You don't want to consider the possibility Sutton has a side to him you've never glimpsed.

Laura: Alright, enough. [*To Jason*] Get her on the phone.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: But what if my friends are right and you're wrong. Will you be able to say to me later: "Sorry, Charlie, I made a mistake. I didn't mean for you to wind up in a bag and thrown in the harbour." [*The sound of a car backfiring. Charlie leaps towards the phone*]: Ed, listen to me! It was all a mistake. He doesn't know what he's talking about.

Jason [*to Charlie*]: Stay out of it.

Sutton [*to Laura*] Stay out of it he tells her. [*To Jason*]: Alright, asshole! What's coming off here? What're you trying to pull?

Laura: Don't talk to him like that.

Sutton: The fucker's trying to wreck my marriage and I'm supposed to be polite to him?

Jason [*to Sutton*]: I was with you when you were screwing her.

Charlie [*shouting towards the phone*]: I'm disclaiming everything he says.

Laura: Let me speak to her.

Jason: It won't do any good now.

Charlie You're damn right it won't do any good.[*The light appears a second time*]: Oh, my God, there it is again!

Jason: Laura, listen to me. I was with Ed when he was having the affair with Charlie. We went out together. I was with Frida. Then Maria. We all went out together. More than once.

Charlie [*shouting*]: Don't believe a fucking word those whores have to say about me.

Sutton: [*to Laura*] He was dating both those broads at the same time. Making out like he was in love with both of them.

Jason : You want me to call them up, Laura? You want me to get them to vouch for what I'm saying?

Sutton: Laura, he was cheating on both of them.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: Alright, that's it. I'm out. I'll call them from another apartment.

Jason [*to Laura*]: They're honest chicks. They'll tell the truth.

Sutton [*to Jason*]: You'd better make sure your life insurance is all paid up.

Laura: I think I've heard enough.

Charlie: By the time I get through with you, Jason, Laura will think you're a basket-case.

Sutton: Laura, he thinks those bar chicks have got something against me.

Laura: Have they?

Sutton: Not on your life.

Laura: Jason?

Jason: They haven't got anything against him. But they'll tell the truth about him and Charlie.

Sutton: Alright, Laura. If you want to take his word over mine, go ahead. Talk to them. Ring 'em up.

Laura: I haven't heard from Charlie yet.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: You weren't supposed to drag me into this. You betrayed me. [*She leaves the apartment*.]

Sutton [*to Laura*]: The two of them are about as trustworthy as — well, even Charlie's a saint by comparison.

Laura: Put Charlie on the phone.

Jason: She's gone out.

Laura: Gone out? But she's supposed to be the one making this accusation.

Sutton: Where is she?

Laura: Jason?

Jason: Out, I said.

Sutton: Hah! So your fuck-friend leaves you high and dry.

Laura: Ed — !

Sutton [*to Jason*]: This was the woman who was gonna make some vile accusations against me. What happened to her? Why did she just take off? Why did she deny everything right and left?

Laura: Is this what you call not beating up on him?

Sutton: I'm trying to figure out what's going on here. Why did he insist I was fucking around with her when she was denying it right, left, and centre?

Laura: I don't know but you won't find out by hammering away at him.

Sutton: I tell you what, Laura. I think it has something to do with certain things that were said between us before he left the firm.

Laura: What're you talking about? First you said he was sick. Now you're implying he's trying to get back at you.

Sutton: If it's not sickness, what else can it be?

Laura: Jason, is there any chance of bringing her back to the phone?

Sutton: Bringing her — what?

Laura: I'd still like to talk to her.

Sutton: Forget it. We've already heard enough from both of them.

Laura: I would feel better if I could ask her some questions.

Sutton: But she's screwed up. There's nothing — alright, I understand your intentions. You want to be fair. But what else are you gonna find out from her?

Laura: I don't know but it seems the right thing to get her side of it.

Sutton: I'll tell you straight. There's nothing to get from her or anyone else. It's been a pile of bullshit from beginning to end.

Jason: Laura, call up Frida and Maria. Then you'll find how much bullshit there is.

Sutton: I don't believe this. Those chicks are — where are my rifles?

Jason: Call them up. He won't be able to terrify them like he did Charlie.

Sutton: Did you ever hear me say anything to Charlie that was terrifying?

Jason: You made a lot of threats she picked up over the phone.

Sutton: Threats? We see how terrified you are by my threats. Don't ever say I threatened her.

Jason: Alright, but she's got other reasons to be terrified of you.

Sutton: Yeah, she's got other reasons. As many as she does lines of coke every day.

Jason: Laura, call up Frida and Maria. Listen to what they have to say.

Sutton: Laura, do you remember me telling you about going into Los Angeles?

Laura: I remember but I also told you I don't want to hear that kind of talk.

Sutton: I swear to God, if it wasn't for your sake, if it wasn't for the fact he's your brother . . !

Laura: What happened to Charlie, Jason?

Jason: Charlie? It's Frida and Maria that can tell you what was going on.

Laura: I'm not interested in them. It's Charlie that's at the centre of this.

Jason: Yes, but she's out of the picture. She won't tell you anything.

Laura: She ran out because she was terrified of him. Is that what you're saying?

Jason: What of it? It doesn't matter now. It's what Frida and Maria can tell you that'll make the difference.

Laura: It matters a great deal if I'm to understand why Charlie was so vigorously denying everything and why she wouldn't even come to the phone.

Jason: Of course she ran out. Of course she denied everything. She thinks he's got mafia connections.

Sutton: It's the coke, Laura, and, if you ask me, it's behind his hallucinations and a lot of other things.

Jason: Oh, for fuck's sake!

Sutton: What about those weird hallucinations on the beach? Is he gonna tell you that was just sunstroke? The fucker's into it as much as she is.

Jason: That's crazy. I'm not the one who's saying he's got mafia connections.

Sutton: You've got a real nerve laying all this on me. I'm not speaking about all I've done for you. Let's forget about that. But to think you can put me on the side of the devil and yourself on the side of the angels when I know damn well you've cheated on women and laughed at it and had your cock sucked regularly by all those whores you've pick up.

Jason: Oh, what's the use?

Sutton: I've done so much for you it makes me sick to think about it. I gave you a well-paying position in the firm that was beyond your competence and, as you well know, I'm still paying for that. I let you eat and drink at our expense for two months before you finally booted it out of here and went to shack up with that Marla chick. I even smothered you with gifts and picked up the tab so often that George Haddock once joked you must be my girlfriend. I did all this for you and then what do you do? You turn around and stab me.

Jason: Laura —

Sutton: Don't beg to Laura. She won't deny a word of what I'm saying.

Jason: Are you so entirely on his side you won't speak up for me?

Laura: If he was telling any lies, believe me, I'd speak up for you.

Jason: Oh, what's the use? It's clear enough you don't want to see what was going on. You're satisfied to let him bluster and bully his way out of it. You're satisfied to let him divert all your attention away from what he was doing and focus it on me. You're even satisfied to let him make me out to be sick.

Sutton: Laura, when he called you this afternoon from the beach, you could hardly understand him. I suppose it's blustering and bullying to mention that.

Jason [*to Laura*]: It's pretty obvious you don't want to see what was going on.

Laura: And you seem to feel it's your right and privilege to make me see it, is that it? And not only make me see it but go to all lengths to see it. Look, Jason, if you're so concerned about telling me the truth, please explain to me why Charlìe was threatening to blow the whistle on Ed if she was so afraid of him? Why was she in your apartment at the very moment you called and decided to tell me about these things? And finally, why was she involved in all this, as she seems to have been, and then all of a sudden getting cold feet and pulling out as if she was experiencing a living nightmare?

Jason: It doesn't matter now.

Laura: It doesn't matter. You won't answer my questions and I should be blamed for not believing you.

Jason: Alright, she was expecting . . .

Laura: What was she expecting?

Jason: . . . not to become involved directly. She was expecting me to deal with it all out in Palm Springs.

Laura: Really? She was expecting a lot then, wasn't she?

Sutton: Don't encourage him. Don't make him think he's right to be accusing me of cheating on you. Laura, the woman left because she couldn't take any more of his lies.

Laura [*to Jason*]: She sounds like a very troubled woman. I'm glad I didn't speak to her.

Jason: Oh, no more troubled than I am right now. Who's being called a liar? Who's being whipped right and left for just wanting to tell the truth?

Sutton: The truth. He's got this thing about the truth. Pal, if it's so important to you, let's call a truce on what's true and what's not. But only on condition there's no more talk about me and Charlie.

Laura: That sounds reasonable. What do you say, Jason?

Charlie [*entering abruptly*]: What! Are you still on the phone? Get off it and out of my apartment.

Sutton: Now what?

Charlie [*to Jason*]: Where are my car keys?

Sutton: I'm not in the mood for any lovers' quarrel. Let's end it.

Jason [*to Laura*]: Do you think I would've hung out with this coke fiend for so long if she hadn't threatened to blow your mind over this?

Sutton [*to Jason*]: The conversation's over.

Jason: If you'd heard the way she talked about it sometimes.

Sutton: We don't want to hear the way she talked about it.

Jason: She'd say things like: what an animal Sutton is! Do you know what he made me do? He made me stretch out over his desk and beg for it.

Sutton: Alright, that's it. Hang up the phone. Hang it up before I go get my gun and shoot the fucker between the eyes. Hang it up and let me talk to him alone or else you'll be responsible for what happens.

[*Laura hangs up while Charlie grabs her car keys and goes back towards the door.*]

Charlie [*with tears in her voice*]: You're a vindictive person.

[*She exits. Jason breaks down. Sutton waits a few seconds until his anger subsides*.]

Sutton: You listen to me carefully. I don't know why all of a sudden you're going to hell or why you're trying to make a hell out of my life. But I'm so close to forgetting all family ties, all past friendship between you and me, I could easily send you down the river. Now you wanna fuck with me, go ahead. But if I end up hiring somebody to deal with you because you won't shut up about this, you'll remember what I'm telling you right now and you'll wish you never left Canada.

[*Sutton slams down the phone. Jason waits a few seconds, wipes his eyes, then puts down the receiver.*]

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

10. Hooked on Hell in the Land of Golden Promises

When I present this scene, when I consciously go about the task of improving it and bringing it to life, it is not without the feeling that I'm rescuing and even redeeming the unfinished play from which it was taken. From the collection of notes I kept over a number of years.[9] Yet such is of course how my writerly situation as a whole is being played out and, most particularly, with this essay's attempt to take it all in.[10]

This admission, the one of trying to redeem my failed career as a writer, brings to mind yet another that should be made or at least I think should be made and judged more sophisticated. Just thinking this admission should be made is of course yet another complication which is that of a doubt or hesitation. Of not being able to, in the final analysis, rule out the possibility of this admission's being, at one end of the scale, more sophistic than the first or, at the other, more sophomoric. I can't rule this out any more than I can rule out the possibility of overplaying or underplaying my intellectual hand at any moment. This second admission is perhaps only that the first doesn't necessarily cover or justify or take note of *all* incidents of attempted redemption. In which case this highly personal essay called *On Truthtelling*, despite its mandate to be personal, always runs the risk of introducing personal or perhaps what I should call *micro*-personal elements that fall outside its formal aims and intentions. To turn these elements into a tolerated and even forgotten residue is essentially what is demanded of the writerly process. A juggling act which, in the case of the quasi-play called *Hooked on Hell in the Land of Golden Promises*, combines rewriting a crucial scene with zeroing in on a strange and even aberrant form of truthtelling.

How much it amazed us all in Winnipeg when we first got word of my brother's breakdown. It came in the form of a long-distance phone call and a bizarre and piecemeal story (though my sister related it with her customary self-control), the upshot of which was that the police had found my brother wandering in the desert just outside Palm Springs, dehydrated and completely out of his mind. Then, as the first sign of what turned out to be a remarkably quick recovery, he called us two days later from the psychiatric hospital where he had been temporarily admitted and where, as I learned later, he had had some strange hallucinations. I asked him how he was getting on and received a chilling response. In a matter-of-fact voice he told me that,

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9 These notes include some roughly sketched-out scenes such as the "Telephone to Palm Springs" one. I mention this to distinguish them from mere jottings that would still be far from the first draft stage. At the same time I can't help thinking that, being as inelegant and amateurish as they are, it might be overly generous to characterise them as an unfinished play. On the other hand, it might be that I'm going too far in criticizing my playwrighting efforts. Perhaps I'm being too harsh or finicky in the hope of putting distance between them and what I'm presently doing. This in turn leads me to think that there is something indefinite here that, without shunting aside all such considerations, can only result in propositions that are tentative. On the other hand, what I have just argued and drawn to a tentative conclusion could always be turned into a dialogue that, more disputatious, would seem to do away with the tentative. It would be largely the *tonality* of the discourse that would change. With certainty implicitly held to be the goal and uppermost possibility, the conflictual and tentative in such a dialogue, evidenced in stock phrases such as "in my opinion" and "I don't agree that such and such is the case" and in rhetorical questions only *suggesting* what is the case, are treated as being insignificant.

10 And if I risk bringing this up too much, it is to avoid underplaying it. For just as I have a fear of the first, so I have a fear of the second. With respect to the first, it is the wish simply to avoid growing tiresome with the theme of redeeming myself as a writer. With respect to the second, it is the call not just to go further with it but further *into* it. I suppose it is the difference between doing it as a performative thing already exhibiting the signs of self-congratulation and redeeming even this impetuousness with cautiousness and worry.

although he had just been through hell, he knew there was a God and Jesus Christ was his Saviour.

After he was released from the hospital and sent back to Winnipeg, I had the chance to hear the full story. One of my first reactions was to lose faith in the explanation that had come from the examining doctor by way of my sister and blamed his psychosis on LSD flashbacks. To be sure, I had no reason to think that drugs weren't a contributing factor just as I had no reason to think that some comparable experiences – heat stroke while spending time with Charlie at the beach, talking to a Christian fundamentalist who ardently believed in the devil, and experiencing an earth tremor while sleeping on the tenth floor of a high-rise – hadn't broken down some of his defences. But the more I talked with my brother, the more I became convinced that something more fundamental was lurking below even the most disturbing and dramatic of these psychical shakeups. Something that he was hardly conscious of and yet was heavily freighted in a moral sense. Something that had to do with purging himself of certain lies and deceptions that had accumulated and threatened to fall on his head.

Something that ended up running its course perversely because truthtelling itself had lost its head. How else to characterize this usually vaunted principle and practise, this thing called telling the truth, when it is totally oblivious to consequences and fixed upon one point to the exclusion of all others? When it swells up at one particular instant and bears itself painfully in much the same way a boil does that needs to be lanced? When it tries to justify itself simply by claiming that it arises out of a good intention? And when it cannot relate this intention to any other, good or bad, save the one it is meant to nullify or offset? The presumably evil intention that my brother attributed to Charlie when she repeatedly threatened to tell Laura about the adulterous relationship between her and Sutton – this was, according to him, what was behind his precipitous act of forestalling her by doing it himself and, as he insisted, provided its justification.

That he should finally take the initiative and remove this threat by acting as he did seemed to him an unshakeable point of honour. His thinking on the matter, so far as I could determine it (and so far as it was thinking), was that Laura would be spared the worst if she got the news *from him*. That is, from a presumably calm rational brother as opposed to a hysterical vindictive woman. As far as his own complicity goes, both in terms of being Sutton's collaborator and party to the deception, it simply didn't register. Or at least nothing he told me bore any sign of his feeling culpable in the area where most people would have seen the greatest culpability. In truth, he had been practising the art of deceiving women for some time and so, with respect to what Sutton was up to, he was obviously not in a very strong position. What further weakened it and ultimately made it untenable was the close relationship between him and Sutton both on and off the job as well as the perks and favours the latter had bestowed on him.

It won't do to think that I can explain my brother's irrational behaviour in its entirety. Perhaps I should have been more mindful of this when I was trying to deal with it as a playwright. Then I would have seen that the devil onstage doing commentary was all wrong. I would have at the same time been more sensitive to what was truly required, namely, a portrayal of the sort of reasoning that goes off the rails well before the first signs of psychosis.

With respect to my brother's case, it would have had to be a portrayal of the sort of reasoning that can take conflicting values or principles from a relatively benign setup (where they merely collide off rather than into one another) and, in conjunction with circumstance, set them up as a powerful opposition that dares not even recognize itself.

That my brother loved and respected my sister I have no doubt. That he believed he was showing this love and respect by acting as he did I also have no doubt. Neither then nor later did I ever entertain the slightest suspicion that he didn't act with the noblest of intentions. Yet from top to bottom he carried out a false move (so I believed then and so I believe now) and, even when I brought this to his attention, he refused to recognize it.

In order to carry on the art of deceiving women with a good conscience, my brother relied on a sort of highly personalized and truncated consequentialist argument. Instead of dwelling upon the bad consequences that usually spring from acts of deception, he strictly confined himself to what seemed to flow good or ill from his relationships with women. And since he managed to pull the wool over the eyes of most without causing undue harm or mischief, the pleasure he received and gave counted for him as an overall gain and sum result.

With respect to Sutton's infidelity, it is quite likely my brother experienced an initial discomfort or embarrassment that quickly got laughed off. Then a later oppression that, on account of various elements and interests of the most heady sort, failed to arise to the forefront of his thoughts. As I imagine it now, all for him in California was a kind of fast-talking fast-paced material heaven from which the little bit of hell within him looked small and insignificant. A business chatter constantly pumping him up (but wasn't he pumped up already?), a vast array of ongoing stimuli impressing upon him the seemingly endless wealth, power, elegance, and convenience of an exciting California lifestyle. Moreover, an equally endless number of encounters with women who were not averse to his brazen and sometimes even braying way of putting himself across – all these factors must have taken him away from some part of himself that, under such conditions, he felt he had the right to disvalue and discredit.

I cannot help but think that this part of him was his love and respect for his sister. Here was something that, though he dared not recognize it, transcended sexual identity and, indeed, sexual love and was therefore closer to friendship and a principle of non-deception. Such being the case, I doubt very much that he could have avoided moments of a deeper self-examination. Moments in which it would have been a veritable agony to see how much faith his sister had in her husband. Where he would have caught a glimpse of Sutton's darker side and seen how it had infiltrated and taken possession of him.

A question that seems to pose itself now is what makes the difference between the person who is drawn into evil and maintains his equilibrium and the one who doesn't. Immediately I find myself thinking of a cherished self-identity that is ruptured because, in opposition to the numerous cases of people going off the rails morally but not otherwise, the evil that is being enjoyed or instrumentalized cannot be ritually and routinely purged of its grosser aspects. With such a delicate and vulnerable self-identity as eventually falters and possibly collapses, the evil that radically endangers it is therefore never accompanied by a camaraderie or confederacy or, for that matter, *collegiality* so powerful as to sufficiently alter it in a both damning and saving sense. Had my brother ended up with a hundred Sutton-like characters chanting around him in flowing robes the mantra of an open, hedonistic lifestyle, it is not likely he would have found it necessary to tell the truth to Laura. On the contrary, he would have been more likely to have opted for joining Sutton in the big lie that would have kept her from giving any credence to Charlie. The latter would have then become, as is so often the case, the victim of a reasoning that gives a blessing even to the worst.

And what was my brother's self-identity if not that of, apart from being an ambitious and success-oriented person, an honest, affable, and fun-loving one? Everything that went down as

lies to women was whitewashed by this fun-loving part and all the rest was credited to his good conscience as the telling of the truth to family, friends, neighbours, and the like. Not telling the truth to his sister put him then on a middle ground that was both a shaking and yet not a breaking of his self-image. The last in the sense that, so far as not telling the truth to her didn't involve telling lies, he likely kept up his robust all-around good opinion of himself. The first in the sense that, so far as he couldn't avoid knowing that he wasn't being honest with her, there was some internal discomfort and distress that he continually had to repress.

On the basis of the way I see it now, a number of factors then came into play that combined the threat of a brutal confrontation with the threat of repressed truth suddenly running amok and registering its power and authority. Specifically, a confrontation with his sister that would have had him cornered and in danger of giving himself over to the most unsettling of self-confrontations.

> *Laura: Do you mean to tell me you saw this going on for three months and not once did you say to him: "This is wrong"?*

How could my brother have blocked out all thought of such a possible confrontation? How could he not have had at least an inkling of the devastating critique and condemnation he would have been susceptible to?

> *Laura: Do you know what you've done? By going along with this, by being party to it, by not opening up your mouth even once to protest his infidelity, by not saying a word to me so that I might've at least suspected it, and by in fact doing everything in your power so that I wouldn't suspect it, you put me in the same category as those girls you cheat on. You didn't make the slightest distinction between them and me.*

Ultimately my brother did make the distinction but in such a way that, instead of its arising out of a confrontation with himself, it arose out of *avoiding* it. Presumably holding up a mirror to himself would have been intolerable without some profound shakeup and restructuring of his personality. But since he was basically content with himself and his way of life, he was ultimately driven towards a haphazard and indeed hazardous confrontation with others. Ultimately this dramatically altered his situation and made it even more extraordinary (indeed, to the point of otherworldliness) than it would have been simply as a sexual intrigue. Yet in a complicated and hardly to be expected way, this extraordinariness itself was the means by which his values and principles were never given more than a temporary shakeup.

Out of a habitual practise of deception then arose a nearly disastrous form of self-deception. The whole moral weight of his involvement in the affair was thrown into the irrational sphere by his attempt to realign himself with truth while swimming in a sea of falsity. That is, by clinging to the idea of telling the truth to his sister apart from all other considerations. Surely then a psychical movement was afoot that, being hard pressed and assaulted by other forces, was ripe for disintegration. Never having properly told the truth to himself, what navigational instruments did he have so that he could have ridden out the storm of telling the truth to others with virtually no confirmation of this truth by those to whom he was closest?

Enter the demonic element at this point. I suspect there were more than a few out-of-the-

ordinary experiences that precipitated my brother towards a vision of evil vastly more personal, intimate, and intense than anything he had imagined before. The latter no doubt was what popular culture affords to all and even the not-so-well-informed. But whereas police shows and Westerns tend to express an optimistic and even humane view of the opposition between the powers of darkness and the forces of light, science fiction and horror films tend to give it an inhuman cast (even if there is still the ultimate triumph of good over evil). War movies and gangster films, on the other hand, tend to give evil a more pervasive character. Here it often seems to gain an ascendancy in human affairs and threaten to take them over. Yet however much such harrowing visions penetrate us and stay with us at some level, we normally treat them as having little to do with the world we inhabit. This is no doubt what my brother's situation was for a long time. A middling student of life in most respects, he nonetheless kept a good head on his shoulders until the ominous signs of a great lesson gathered that put the distinction between illusion and reality on trial.

How much my brother likely believed in and counted on his good will and intentions! Had he not taken note of and approved them until they had become a kind of personal creed and ground for faith? And wasn't this creed, this faith, this feting of himself for being well-intentioned, this naive but not uncommon way of constituting a moral identity, mixed up with his conception of the world at large? If so, then the threat to this identity must have been a threat to his world. It must have functioned like the epicentre of an earthquake and sent out shock waves to all parts of it.

At the same time a sense of panic must have gripped him when, for the first time, he lost confidence in himself. When he saw his good intentions in a new and terrible light and when, however briefly, he recognized them to be false friends and flatterers. Then it must have come as a strange sort of relief when, taking his anxiety out into the world, he met with all the signs of a far greater malignancy. When the discovery of it in himself gave way to the discovery of it in the world. When the latter increased its horrifying hold on him until the former was lost to sight. When he came to view himself as being even more removed from evil and more in opposition to it than ever before. And when he came to see in the world all the signs of a general good will that was not simply naive, inept, or deceptive, but duplicitous to the very core. All that was scurrilous in business, in pleasure, in the various pursuits and diversions of his quasi-Hollywoodian existence now leapt into his imagination as the very essence of human affairs. Rapacity, exploitation, deception, collusion, betrayal, vengeance – all these elements came to the fore as primary characteristics of the world whose greatest feat was to appear otherwise. Now my brother, with a brain overheated with sun or religion or movies or drugs or earthquakes or possibly a combination of all these, started to show signs of being psychotic even before he confronted Sutton. Already it had come to him that there was a principle of evil at work and that, moreover, this principle was demonic in nature and capable of immense displays of power.

Now whether these ideas were the cause or effect of my brother's hallucinations or whether they were now one now the other in a kind of snowballing effect, they came from a tradition of thought that certainly doesn't take itself to be wayward. On the contrary, a principle of telling the truth is consistently evoked in this tradition that, however much it is grounded in faith, never goes without what is presumed to be both fact and argument. To the extent then that it abstracts and objectifies evil as a subject, it must rely on a countervailing principle that is operative or at least taken to be operative in this very telling. In my brother's case, however, this more intellectual way of coming to the phenomenon seems to have been short-circuited by the

lack of such a countervailing principle.

To have the belief in radical evil and not be entirely paralysed or taken over by it requires the belief in radical good. Up to the time that my brother accidentally encountered a fundamentalist Christian – a fellow who, as he told me later, had his master's degree in theology and who engaged him in an intense discussion on religious matters – his overall view of goodness was at best quasi-epicurean. It was essentially his willingness to go after the pleasures of life with a good-natured vivacity that seemed to be the sum total of his scruples. But with the way things turned out for him in California, such an outlook quickly ran into trouble and, along with proving to be too light for what he encountered there, was probably challenged and criticized from the outside.

All of this likely happened in such a compressed space of time that, before he could ever get around to his "Well, I know one thing, there's a God and Jesus Christ is my Saviour," his belief in radical evil had its window of opportunity to flare up, enlarge itself drastically, and assume cosmic proportions. The remarkable speed with which this storm gathered, broke, and then passed from the scene of his life is proof of its being rooted in the duplicity, adultery, and threatened disclosure that marked out his life in California. All of a sudden the greatest malignancy and danger were perceived in what was most familiar and close to him and, for at least the duration of one night's harrowing drive around Los Angeles and then out towards Palm Springs (not to mention the stay in the psychiatric hospital), associated with powerful and sinister forces of a ubiquitous nature.

At this point I feel I must register my uneasiness with respect to all I have been saying about this matter and how it seems to drift away from my subject. Although drifting *is* my subject to the extent that it belongs to both the nature of myself and the nature of truthtelling, I must fight against it to the extent that truthtelling can neither exist without order nor without the ideal of a perfect order. When the latter isn't implicated in a systematic or theoretic form of truthtelling, it must be implicated in an aesthetic one. Something like a work of art that strives for the greatest diversity in its bid for unity and completeness. So it is that taking up the case of my brother's experience in California fits in with my subject insofar as this case is a limit case, an example of truthtelling in its most aberrant form. And just as the irrational-cum-supernatural aspect of this troubled me when I first looked into it as a struggling playwright, so it does now even though I sense its proximity to the rational and natural.

My brother's nightmarish hallucinations were so vivid that, even after he had returned to Winnipeg, he continued to think – at least for a time – that they were not simply figments of his imagination. However, I suspect that, when they first started, he took them as such and attributed them to various natural causes. But when they continued to such a degree that it was virtually impossible for him to separate them from the circumstances he was in as well as ongoing events, the need for a better explanation, a rational enough move in itself, arose and precipitated him towards madness.

Perhaps this rational-cum-irrational explanation first came to him as a hypothesis even though it was presented to him in the form of a certitude. Which is to say that there was little in my brother's background or general outlook on life to make him lose all scepticism in the face of a religious explanation. An explanation that, despite this initial scepticism, must have been interpreted by him later as a preordained message. One that first came to him when, after he had experienced his hallucinations on the beach, after he had soaked up too much sun as it seems and imagined the small children who belonged to one of Charlie's friends to be talking as crudely and

vindictively as the adults, he ran into a stranger who told him there was a war going on for the possession of his soul.

> *Stranger: It's th'only way, brother. Look, yuh kin't ignore that sumpin' big has jus' happen'd in your life. It's partly on account of what's bin goin' on here in California and partly on account of what's bin left out even from the time you were livin' in Canada. Now in the first case I'd say it's 'bout a lack of prudence and – not meaning to offend you – a lack of backbone in confrontin' your brother-in-law over his immoral activities. And in the second case, well, it's clear and simple. It's a lack of Jesus.*
>
> *Jason: Let me think about it.*
>
> *Stranger: Brother, yuh'll just be givin' the devil more opportunities to drag yuh down. It's not thinkin' that's goin' to help yuh now. It's prayin'.*

One thing I tried to recapture in my dramatic reconstruction of the telephone call to Palm Springs is that he was so severely shaken and upset by the turn of events that he broke down emotionally. It was in this state of mind that he left Charlie's apartment, drove around Los Angeles for several hours, and, as his turmoil subsided, reasoned his way into madness. True to the theologian's words, things had gotten worse and with such lightening speed that his normal life was now being lived like a nightmare. Not so easy was it then to think of the hallucinations on the beach as one thing and the hallucinatory-like call to Palm Springs another. Nor to think that what was closest and most familiar to him had not become implicated in a general evil whose range and power, not to mention its source, had only begun to be revealed to him.

When danger is merely a possibility, however remote, it is enough to make us imagine it, under certain circumstances, breathing down our very necks. Usually we can escape the rising terror by taking the necessary steps to change our situation or our perspective. In my brother's case, however, neither one nor the other was possible in that, once he had become lost, once he had begun to suspect that people were giving him wrong directions, that they were doing so wilfully, that their intention was malicious, that supernatural forces were at play here and elsewhere, and that, finally, even his car was under their control, he was effectively lost every other way. For it was then that terror struck him not simply as a response to a perceived threat or imminent danger but to the growing awareness that an enemy was abroad so powerful and uncanny as to be able to peer into his very soul, play upon his worst fears, and undermine his innermost defences. Gone then all faith in some technical or psychological way of stemming the tide of horrific feelings. As the belief in being hopelessly trapped pulled into its orbit the evidence of this and as the evidence accumulated and turned belief into objective truth, he was thrown from the realm of natural explanations into the realm of supernatural ones.

If the first onslaught of terror, like a vast wave, threw up supernatural explanations and washed away natural ones, it must have also carried all other thoughts out to sea. Driving about for stretches like a maniac or lapsing into a zombie-like state, ranting and raving in his dementia or crying and sobbing in his delusions, how did my brother manage to keep control of his car except by reflex and conditioned response? But no matter how much this held good for him,

surely he would have broken down while he was driving around in the city and possibly ended up in the hospital much earlier than he did if it weren't for some mitigating factor. Some fortuitous incident or other that came along even in the depths of his despair and even when he suffered from the full horror of knowing that hell had risen from the ground and taken over the city, its nightlife, its environs, and the dark sky overhead where prayers failed to ascend. When there was no doubt in his mind that every person he asked or might think to ask for directions was a subtle and conniving agent who had betrayed his humanity at the behest of the devil. When he envisioned the same fate for himself and, panic-stricken, tried to outrun it. When his frenzy would have either exhausted him and rendered him comatose or else sent him careening off the road. Then, I suspect, something happened that diminished his terror and returned him to a kind of reason. Something like a miraculous escape that he could only put down to an intervening power, a hand from above that, according to its own good purpose, had reached into hell and shown itself.

Yet hell still remained in place for him, all its dangers extraordinarily alive, and if no longer a hopeless trap, still a no man's land to try and test him to the uttermost. What more could he have possibly needed at this critical juncture of his life than a surge of confidence and belief in himself, the will or resolution to outrun the fate of being annihilated rather than simply giving way to a mad flight from it or falling to pieces like a miserable coward? At least this is what I patch together as his experience in madness for, although he reported much to me, he gave me no thorough account of it. And since I view his madness as being tightly linked to his larger situation in California, I also view it as being a very complicated affair. So complicated in fact that it not only had its own internal logic, a reasoning of its own, but a sort of unconscious reason, purpose, or utility that took it right back to the sane and social. To some extent my brother was in a situation that simultaneously called for a confrontation and a wholesale retreat. A confrontation in the sense that, being morally stricken even before his madness, he was a person in need of recovering or rediscovering himself. A retreat in the sense that his life in California had not only become poisoned but was poisoning the lives of others.

A logic of breakdown and a logic of recovery then at one and the same time. A logic of being built up even in the midst of being torn down. A logic of being delivered even in the midst of entrapment. It is only with this double and entwining logic that I can make sense of – as far as it makes sense to do so – his mad course.

For the fact of the matter is that, despite intensifying hallucinations that ranged, as he finally wheeled out onto the freeway, from seeing sharpshooters posted at every exit ramp and overhead pass to immense fires on mountaintops, he remained sufficiently in control of himself to make it all the way out to Palm Springs. To the very place that, of all places, he could expect a hostile reception and possibly even a confrontation of the most perilous sort.

It is this difficult thing (that is, where rationalizing about madness is concerned) of seeing a personal triumph in how close he brought himself to danger and a door of escape in how he managed to avoid it. Running towards such a danger rather than away from it, exceeding his limits in at least this respect, my brother was a man who, as I see it now, needed to prove to himself that he wasn't a coward. Given such factors as that he had a natural tendency to exaggerate, that Sutton, a man who possessed guns and knew how to use them, didn't require a lively imagination to be considered dangerous, and that, as I suspect, my brother had even gone so far as to identify him with the devil, it was surely no small thing for him to rush headlong in the night towards the centre of hell.

Yes, and yet there is still a factor that complicates matters or that could be considered an objection to so much reasoning about madness as if madness were pregnant with reason itself. According to my brother's testimony, he didn't drive out to Palm Springs *willingly*. The gangsters posted at every exit ramp and the car that was acting as if it had a mind of its own were, as parts of a larger supernatural will, responsible. And yet as much as he admitted this and didn't want to take credit for his final course and destination, I'm still forced to believe that a part of him was fashioning rather than simply yielding to his fate. Not only for the reason that it wasn't until he had reached the outskirts of Palm Springs that he went out of control in the most definitive sense and his madness took its worst turn (at least from an objective or clinical standpoint), but for the reason that, when he spoke to me later about his time spent on the freeway – a time that, whatever its duration, couldn't have been less than two hours – he gave few indications that he had struggled against or lamented over being forced towards the monster's lair.

What lies before me now is to bring forth an account of my brother in the desert that compensates for and corresponds to a certain dead zone in his own account. On the one hand, this dead zone could be described as his inability to remember what happened to him there. On the other hand, it could be taken as his attaching no great significance to it. Certainly what I have been led to imagine as some sort of religious experience coming to him at the tail end of his trip has no express word of his to corroborate it. If I were to go strictly by what he told me, I would have to think that he never found God until he was in the hospital. But then the whole business of why he didn't drive straight into Palm Springs but rather stopped his car on the outskirts, why he abandoned it and started walking around in the desert, why he threw away his rings and some other personal effects – all this would be shorn of meaning. To say that madness was responsible for it is simply to say madness is madness or he did it because he did it. But for one such as myself who neither believes that the rational is heaven nor the irrational hell but that the two put together can form either one or the other, my brother's slipping into an even deeper state of psychosis followed both the internal and external logic of his madness. Or rather the two of them coming together when, as the sun rose over a desert landscape, as demonic impulsions were driven out by divine ones, the reason for coming to Palm Springs as unconscious act of putting himself to the proof was completely transformed into the act of escaping reason as the devil's very own instrument. And, at the same time, when a seen and felt danger was completely transformed into an unseen and unfelt one, when the Lord Jim-like immersion of himself into the destructive element was replaced by a beatific (but equally dangerous) releasing of himself from all earthly cares. So did my brother go out in the desert as I imagine it and so did he weep and pray and fall on his knees and know a gratefulness and joy such as he had never experienced before. On and on he walked, oblivious to all but the huge orange ball that rose ever higher in the sky, chasing away all gloom and shade while it established its glorious rule.

By the time my brother was picked up by the police, he was dehydrated and totally incoherent. The sun – the very same sun that caused him to have hallucinations on the beach only the day before – had turned not so surprisingly into a punishing god or else a confusion between god and devil. Its resplendent light had turned into torturous and life-threatening heat, its gracious presence an unbearable burden, its life-giving power an engendering of scorpions, snakes, and other desert creatures. Did it occur to him then that something was missing, that the war for the possession of his soul was still going on, that he had deceived himself by thinking he could pray to an unidentifiable god or perhaps an all too identifiable one that didn't correspond

to the god of the theologian's so recently given testimony.

When my sister arrived at the police station, she found him sitting on the floor of his cell with his eyes tightly shut and, oblivious to her presence, rocking back and forth and repeating her address in a sort of ritual chant: "1792 Pinehearst Plaza. 1792 Pinehearst Plaza." When she tried to solicit some sign of recognition from him, he merely pointed to his watch and said: "You see that? That will tell you who I am."

When I heard this account from my sister, I was shocked in more ways than one. For, as it happened, the watch had originally been mine (a gift from her and Ed) and, although I had given it to my brother, it still bore my initials.

Judged from the standard of what it is to be a functioning human being, he had reached the nadir of his psychosis. So shaken up was his self-identity even before the onset of madness that, with his fixed notion of a war going on for the possession of his soul, it must have been taken in by this struggle. Indeed his mind or sanity must have been taken in by it and if it weren't for some powerful factors offsetting this, in danger of being lost for good. If his mind at this time had been, as I suspect it was, the theatre of a close struggle between the divine and the demonic and, furthermore, if his soul, as the prize of this conflict, had become identified with his mind and, even further, if the faith that good would eventually triumph over evil had not departed him, then his mental state couldn't have been other than, on the one hand, a nightmare of confusion and, on the other, a not so unwelcome sojourn in purgatory.

By the time he came out of the psychiatric hospital three days later, he had fully woken up to his surroundings. Presumably he also came out a Christian and stayed one for a short time. He had some strange and even critical things to say about the hospital that, on the one hand, made it out to be demonic (he mentioned vague incidents of either himself or other patients being tortured, raped, and possessed by the devil) and, on the other hand, the site of his salvation (he claimed to have undergone an exorcism in this damned and dismal place).

I find myself now confronted with only one other matter in this whole affair that seems relevant to my subject: the status of Christ for my brother as the way, the truth, and the life. After his one call from the hospital when he announced that Jesus Christ was his Saviour, he made little reference to his faith. Indeed there is every reason to think that it rapidly dissipated as he got back on his feet, as he returned to his affairs, and as his belief in the devil itself dissipated. For the latter was still alive in him after he returned to Winnipeg and during the brief time he needed to convalesce. Indeed, it seemed to me then that the vividness of his demonic hallucinations was what preoccupied him the most and formed the basis of whatever religiosity he had. A change of environment and associations was presumably enough to bring back his former ways of thinking that excluded the supernatural (be it divine or demonic). It could be said then that, although my brother had seemingly more reason than most people to end up a true believer, he jettisoned his faith like a used and disposable item. And yet it is possible that he retained something not quite so blatant or specific as born-again Christianity. Something that goes beyond articulation, namely, his experience in the desert that, if I'm right in my guess, was a religious experience of the first order.

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11. Reasoning on Order

And now it strikes me how all this Byzantine reasoning about madness cuts against the grain, raises doubts and question marks largely because it doesn't address the subject in general. The ideal of truthtelling is so much the ideal of having this general or universal truth, of having the truth about madness per se that a report on the particular seems to be saying too little. Undoubtedly a prejudice is at work here of such magnitude and power that it systematically prescribes to us the presumption of thinking we can grasp the whole of which we are but a part. No greater lack of humility could there be than this and yet it runs through every human being as much as anything that could be called its opposite. There is nothing to condemn here on the one hand and yet, on the other, everything. Truthtelling takes into itself the ethics of this and is, from one point of view, the condemnation and, from another, the reprieve or pardon. So am I caught up in this same double register and, as much I want to become clear of it, condemn and am condemned.

Few have worked as hard as I to grasp the whole even while seeing before their very eyes that it rendered them null and void as an artist. The complexity of the general, the philosopher's domain, distracted me from the complexity of the particular, the artist's. It made me drastically impoverish and undernourish the latter as much as it made me overburden it.

When I look back on my collection of notes for *Hooked on Hell in the Land of Golden Promises*, I'm both surprised and dismayed by how much of what I tried to work out there is thin and underdeveloped. It is as if I wanted to say everything I could about evil, madness, and corrupting influences while ignoring the task of painting their innermost processes. Broad statements and broad thoughts cluttered up and confused what should have been the welding of thought to intention, to motivation, to situation, to upbringing, to character, to moment-to-moment emotional and environmental changes. To the level where art functions as the great truth so often kept hidden from us: that eternity is in the moment as much as the moment in eternity.

But this veering towards the big picture was my natural bent and so, as a playwright, I finally came to a dead end. When I tried to direct myself to doing less ambitious pieces – short sketches or monologues suitable for the summer fringe festival in Winnipeg – it was like looking at a blank wall. Even the recent death of my second-oldest sister by her own hand couldn't inspire me in this direction. Or, for that matter, the death of my father in Ireland that, strangely enough, occurred almost at the same time. In addition to my personal relationships with my father and sister, their lived lives and the sad situation that existed between them would have surely provided me with more than enough material. Yet these two human beings who had possibly been more akin to me than any others couldn't rouse me, even in their seemingly twinned deaths, to the feeling of great artistry. Even then I must have wanted a subject greater than any other and, not having it, I felt like a stone mason before uncut jewels. All the world continued to pour out its noisy and confused message as if I were somehow responsible for making a report on it that, at least in my own eyes, would finalize matters.

Never let it be said that order didn't have its place in my life and keep me from such plummeting falls as my brother experienced. From earliest childhood I lived and breathed it every day insofar as my mother kept a house like a well-kept ship. Impossible to find a particle of dust in that modest bungalow and even the partly-finished basement was forever in order. Coming into our house was always the mosque-like thing of taking off one's shoes and, as far as pets go, well, they didn't exist. So protective of our domicile was she that, when a fire broke out

one time and swept over the large field out back, she tried to put it out with a garden hose. And it goes without saying that my brother, my three sisters, and I were never without clean clothes, mended if need be but never threadbare. Yes, the physical environment was always orderly and, for most of my childhood in Chambly, so was the spiritual. To this day I remember the loss I felt when volume three of our twenty-volume encyclopaedia was left outside and destroyed by the rain. If there were a children's bible in our house, this was it. And along with my many hobbies there was stamp collecting. I was intrigued by sorting out little pieces of paper with pictures on them according to country, series, and date of issue. Such and other activities were ingrained in me and whatever fell into the opposite camp never was so tumultuous as to throw me off them.

Were it not for a valuation of the orderly in one's life, I doubt whether anyone would carry on a contemplation of the whole. In fact what I noticed while I was cab driving over many years was that, amongst poor people, there was a singular lack of interest in or commentary about it. Or at least amongst those who formed a definite underclass shorn of a religious perspective and middle-class prospects. Often rough-talking and dissolute in their habits, their philosophical moments were limited to a commonplace (and often crude-sounding) ethics of behaviour. So much *mis*behaviour along with its attendant problems was their lot that it blocked off all communication between innermost thought and outermost circumstances. Any attempt to bring these two together that didn't reach them at the level of a grandiose promise and concern for their personal well-being would have been doomed to look ridiculous and out of place.

An under-valuation and over-valuation of order then depending upon where you're sitting. A living room so ill-kept that it offends the eye. Another so well-kept that it bans being lived in. And if this living room is not just a room in a house but the world we inhabit, then order or orderliness is a controversy, an issue, a bone of contention, a class distinction right from the very beginning. But since power normally goes on the side of order and since part of having this order and power is having the big picture, then order is projected right into the heart of things: order is power and power order.

That the valuation of order is the movement towards its idealization is also the space for every contesting or contingent possibility. A certain breeding of disorder then that might be called the state of the well-kept living room as liveable or lived-in space. As much for those who think they can comfortably embrace all in their truth as for those who think that nothing could be more uncomfortable than to be so embraced.

But we're all one thing and another and there is much slippage. Taking in the whole, no matter how it is done, is always to some extent resistance to being taken in from some other quarter. The traditionalist, for example, fights not to be inscribed in modernity or postmodernity. As much as my sympathies may not be with him in a good many respects, I can identity with him on the basis of this simple resistance to being taken in.

So it was that with this valuation of order I stretched myself towards the future despite whatever errant track I was on. Good bourgeois notions and habits stayed with me to the extent that I could view them as being practically useful and worldly wise while at the same time as being deficient. Already then I was living my life as a critique of the order principle that was neither disrespectful of it nor idolatrous.

I was living it not as all can or should or must. This statement can only be stated in this simple way for the sake of convenience. Only degrees of difference make the difference between throwing the emphasis on difference and not doing so. Stretching from the objective to the subjective standpoint, the difference amounts to authorizing one's difference.

The idolatrous majority, were they not idolatrous, would never have the will or faith or wherewithal to do the good work of striving – however much all they do may one day come under fire or be consigned to it – for the best of all possible worlds. Which is another way of saying I'm too well aware of the limited usefulness of my own way not to think that minority status is what is best for it.

But with my incurable desire to grasp the whole, what do I see but that truthtelling as social, historical, and even biological event is immensely practical and in such a way that it enfolds disparate elements. So much so that it includes the marginalised or minority ones as well as continually escaping the more or less common or commonsense notion of practicality. The one that comes from a limited perspective and is itself an idealization. Or rather part and parcel of an even *larger* idealizing scene that it conveniently forgets while forever being in debt to it. So it is that, while things fall out this way at one end of the spectrum, they fall out differently at the other. Practicality is not borne so naively at this larger end of viewing. Not limited, that is, to seeing and recognizing things as self-evident but played out towards the theoretical as the proper grounding of these. Here is definitely the larger reach of practicality – of truthtelling as the practical – in that whatever is taken to be self-evident is continually being *reassured* of its status. But since this effort is largely the idealizing one of finding truth in and of itself, it cannot but turn its back on such extraneous motives as pertain to the practical. It cannot be or at least cannot make itself out to be other than pure act and intention.

With this bit of coverup and deceit always playing into the idealizing process, a counter-movement is called forth that is paradoxically one with this process and yet its eternal nemesis. As a striving to be pure act and intention, as a falling short of such, as the admission of the *non*-admission of forever having to fall short, the transparency to itself in all these matters is the dominant theme in at least *one* strain of truthtelling. Threatening to make pure act and intention an act of self-condemnation, it resonates throughout the whole of truthtelling as this sacrificially charged element.

Well, if I flatter myself that these thoughts are the fruit of long reflection, it is not without being aware that they themselves testify to a certain lack of order or aversion to it or prejudice against it. The perfect order in thinking doesn't exist but it certainly can be simulated and hit the mind with a rare force. In such instances it seems that all is unerring message that identifies part and whole and relates one to the other in a successful and successive way. This machine-like truthtelling is the indispensable background to a certain freedom from it. To whatever may range from simple adjustment to hostile rejection, from fine tuning to throwing in a monkey wrench. When I state it as such, when I rachet up this order principle to the status of an indispensable background, it seems to me that I'm far from having a prejudice against it. On the other hand, the fact that I describe it as machine-like inevitably slights and takes away from all who sweat and strain over precision parts and juggernaut effects. Even the most innocent and quietistic are caught up in this description that tends to associate them with spiritual narrowness and despotism.

Everything that stands against me and counts as order and hasn't been mastered by me counts against me. A gross ignorance and incompetence that all are faced with even if some reduce them in remarkable ways. It may even be as a reaction to this that I (as well as others) want to catch hold of and master the disorderly *as* disorderly. A singular illusion of course that invites ridicule as much as it allows the god-like approach to and perception of what is beyond order.

It is somewhere here that the extremely intellectual approach to truthtelling pivots one way or the other. The most common way is that of a hypertrophied order principle that sees if not realizes its freedom in its majestic force and realizes if not sees its freedom in its less than majestic *use* of force. In the first instance it is assumed innocence and purity that merely asks for a corresponding allegiance or acceptance. In the second it is a working or warring principle that seeks out acceptance tactically, strategically, and self-righteously.

But heaven forbid that the order principle should view itself as being hypertrophied or war-like. Its uncanny nature is to be itself by forever fighting to be the ideal of itself. Fighting then to be essentially a *non*-fighting or *non*-violent principle and so fighting all that would deny it as such. Fighting then with much in itself that is muted or denied. With a certain blindness that is far from being eradicable because, even though it may be pointed to and traced out indefinitely, its ideality is always one with rigorously proving the contrary.

Everything comes into play here: it is a serious charge to make out that the majority of truthtellers are blind. Their usefulness and hard work speaks to them otherwise. It castigates the nay-sayer and wants to dethrone him as much as he would seem to want to dethrone them. And of course none of this is seen by these truthtellers as a departure from principle but rather as the principle departed on a holy and just mission.

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12. Personal Mission

Many are able to see others with keen eyes but few are able to see themselves so. It is on this basis that I hold forth as I do and not because I have great expertise in even those areas most closely related to my subject.

So it is that, having studied myself closely enough to catch myself acting blindly, I feel better qualified than most who have looked into or, should I say, have *not* looked into my subject (which of course I don't treat simply as *my* subject) to offer an authoritative opinion.

But not much else than this for, whatever I may make of it or however much I esteem it, it in some sense rules against me.

My authoritative opinion is that there is a general blindness that, as much as I or anyone else would wish to escape it (by escaping the realm of mere opinion), haunts me or the other with the sharper eyes of yet *another* authoritative opinion.

And what is it to be blind to oneself in that almost wilful and practised way if not to want another thing so badly that one denies or minimizes whatever conflicts with it?

> *But why doth "truth generate hatred" . . . unless that truth is in that kind loved, that they who love anything else would gladly have that which they love to be the truth?*

In my own case I can say that this conflict between truth as thing-loved and thing-loved as truth hasn't been noticed by me too much for I have always felt, rightly or wrongly, that I have incorporated this conflict into my consciousness. Now while this probably doesn't make me *that* much different from other truthtellers, I rule – how else can I put it? – that it does.

I have never wanted anything so badly, never been tempted or put myself in a position to be tempted so badly, as to be willing to forego even for a short period the most intimate contact with myself.

What I'm doing now is navigating my ship I know not where with the never-ending hope of a brilliant success. Coupled with the desire for romantic adventures and rapturous sexual encounters that never quite came off, my whole life has been this rather tawdry combination of overreaching underachievement.

I'm condemned to play on the two registers of superiority and inferiority. As much as I could dispense with the ideal of living as a Hamlet could I dispense with this ambivalence.

There is a whole mountain before me called what others think and do. Coming back from Europe was in a sense coming to the foot of this mountain and beginning the slow climb up. What a poor man's trip and adventure lay before me! Had I viewed it in a crystal ball at the time, it would have been such a disillusionment that I doubt very much I could have borne it. Not that I look back on the second half of my life with anything like shame but, from the perspective of what I was thinking and hoping for at age twenty-five, it would have been romantically insufficient. For youth wants youth in its dreams and it would have seemed to me that all my youth was riddled with too much failure and with successes of only minor note. What consolation would there have been in knowing that I had stayed true to myself? That I had kept up the faith when all it did was bring me to an unfulfilled middle or, as it may be, old age? What consolation would there have been in knowing that I had lived heroically when such a mode of living was presumably so difficult to recognize that it never earned me the love and respect of an

earthly princess?

No, it would have seemed to me then that I hadn't scored highly enough in a worldly sense and that having pre-knowledge of this was a curse that only could be lifted by somehow forgetting or ridding myself of it. For no more could I have lived without my illusions than I could have lived without my ideals: it was the two together that gave me whatever strength I had to cut my proper path.

I contend now that this path was the one of learning all I could about truthtelling. But before going on about this (and presumably on and on), I must risk retracting this statement or at least the boldness inherent in it. For it falls into an area that is mixed and uncertain enough to lack a complete character of its own and that therefore must be presented, if it is to have such a character, with an exorbitance and recklessness that I wouldn't normally associate with truthtelling. *It is as if I had no choice but to give the past a stiffer backbone than it actually had in order to support the great lolling head of this subject.*

Which means something like, as Nietzsche said, making a virtue out of one's vices. Calling strong and good what others might very well call weak and bad. In effect, I have been doing this all along by valuing errancy more than is commonly the case and making it integral to dealing with the subject of truthtelling.

It occurs to me now that this "more than is commonly the case" must refer to errancy in its relation to formalized truthtelling. Whether the latter is strictly going to school or not, whether it is narrowly inscribed in an institution or widely out in the world, it is still adherence to a hypertrophied order principle.

In a piecemeal way I have been working up to the point where I can say that *my prejudice against professionalism is the stiffer backbone I must give to the past.* The character-strengthening treatment of the past that both comes from and returns to what I'm presently doing has a certain practicality as the latter's's way of dealing with this past. But, apart from this, it is also a force in my life that has carried me for so long and so far that, when I look back at it, when I look at it in relation to all else around me, I view it as a prodigy.

Professionalism: the non-heroic and the non-honest, the play of politics – this was and is my prejudice. It was defining my life before I even knew it, before I even half-suspected that I was the continuation and perhaps even radicalization of this same prejudice, raised to the level of a principle, in my father. Not that I remember ever thinking he wasn't a professional when I was a child growing up and when he went off to work every day at a company called Pratt & Whitney. But this rank or status so far as I understood it then and so far as I attributed it to him was like an image without definition, a mode of comportment without title or function, a thing divided against itself as quarrelsome part to resistant whole.

Professionalism: where people excelled in certain areas and progressively declined in all others. Where polished and prepared speech took the place of freshness and originality and half-lies to others the sounding of oneself. Where calculation counted for more than candour or creativity and an ignoble success a noble defeat. Where machine-like efficiency drew the blood out of people's lives, faces, and words in such a way that they resembled manikins in motion – frozen forms of an organizational identity.

With the freedom of a child growing up as I did in Chambly and with this prejudice in me in however embryonic a form, I must have at least had an inkling that I would have to find or invent for myself a different course. For to be so overtaken and constituted by this prejudice made me in some sense hostile to a straight well-demarcated route. At the same time the

ramifications of this hostility in terms of future difficulties and sacrifices were not anywhere in my sight. Accordingly the route per se, the route as road, highway, path to the future, line of development and ongoing discovery remained an illustrious opening, a glorious adventure promised to the few who were intrepid and noble of spirit.

The poet's and scholar's eye upon the world and the contention therein. The one ready to study and take its delight where it may. The other conditioned to a more disciplined and systematic approach. I'm sure that, well before I could make the distinction between these two, I was equally committed to both. Committed then to a kind of opposition whose indeterminate character was at once a calling and a challenge. Whose roots were in my father's own character and whose first fruits, if they may be called that, were whatever I had observed in or about him that seemed to have been badly planted and ill-grown.

Looking back to where I started with this project and ahead to where I still must go with it, I see the needle of the norm of truthtelling continually pointed towards excess and over-devotion. Whole institutions and schools of thought are built up on a chimaera, a holy something where hyperbole and hypostasis are the order of the day, where the modesty of a doubt or question or admission of ignorance is not tolerated. To turn away from this excess and over-devotion then must necessarily be a deviant move. One that may fly off to any quarter and have great or little effect. It is at the same time always the potentially charged moment of greatest freedom that, as reaction to the hegemonic, is ethical and idealistic and continually redemptive.

Truthtelling is complication and even over-complication but the most general simplifying move is adherence to a hypertrophied order principle. With this statement I think I have come some way to positioning myself as a truthteller in relation to other truthtellers. It also goes some way to addressing the question I posed at the beginning about heroicizing myself. If I'm not to underplay this point and if I'm to get at its significance, I must avoid being tempted to assume the admittedly more attractive role of being heroic without talking about it. For while other truthtellers can afford the luxury of being modest and discreet in their heroic and herculean undertakings, I would not only be less than truthful in following their example (if this were at all possible), but deprived of the one single admirer I can rely on, namely, myself. This last remark would be frivolous only if I were to think that I wasn't involved in a great effort or that such efforts didn't require admirers of at least an imagined sort.

An impossible-lonely mission is what I embarked on and, were I not the hero to myself, I would have long since abandoned it. To find out all I could about truthtelling was pretty much to forego the trappings of success and live my life torn between voluptuous desires and moral rectitude. To be pressed from within by a force that was not always intelligible to me and made me question why I was so obedient to it rather than to the way of the world. To jump around in all manner of discourses high and low looking for all possible signs of my barely discernible subject. To think I was now a failed artist, now a lifelong student, now an unproductive one or the other, now and forever the falling short of my highest aims and aspirations.

What had been and continued to be my strategy as a young man amounted to two deceptively simple things: learn as much I could and prevaricate as little as possible. Learning for me was never dissociated from feeling and prevaricating from half-truths and omissions. Small wonder then that, upon returning from Europe, I wasn't tempted to plunge into a profession or to take advantage of any quick opportunity to better my situation. This was true despite the fact that I was far from feeling an antipathy to one or the other, far from thinking that a good position or material gain wasn't something to be coveted. Indeed, it would be most true to

say that I wanted these things but only by virtue of following some strange irregular uncertain path. Some highly individual way of climbing to success that, as I imagined it, was integral to carrying everything off to the highest degree.

At an age where others have finished their university studies and are ready to launch their careers, I modestly launched my far from modest career as a university student. At the time I considered the taking of evening classes to be complementary to the task of developing myself as a playwright. Admittedly my thinking was fuzzy and limited on this point: it went only so far as to conceive an ever-greater fund of knowledge as an ever-greater reservoir from which to draw artistically. Here was a blindness that came from misjudging my status as a developing playwright, from thinking it was the proper direction and most thorough manifestation of my highest aims and aspirations. Considering that I evinced few signs of talent in this area and that, on the other hand, I did well at university, I suspect that I was being guided by a complicated drive or development, an intellectual, imaginative, and emotional configuration not always conscious of itself and more singular and far-reaching than anything but a retrospective or teleological view can take in.

But I feel compelled to keep reiterating that the latter is never innocent, never a complete viewing without shaping or making, without converging egoistic and idealistic elements. Hence I will say that, while whatever I desired in my life was out of proportion to what I accomplished in it, the latter was nevertheless considerable. I will even go so far as to say that, because of its ties to my highest aims and aspirations, my accomplishments have always been considerably *hidden*. First of all, as a construction worker who was happy to be one. As one who worked hard and exulted in his strength. As one who, in line with his occupations of the past, could always give free rein to his thoughts and feelings. Who didn't have to pretend that the first had no relation to the second or that truth as best argument was the whole of truth rather than a half-truth. Who rubbed shoulders and broke bread with others who told the truth even in the midst of their prejudices and their ignorance because they didn't attempt to hide these. Who kept faith with his senses as best tutor to how he should pattern his thoughts and nurture his highest hopes. Who didn't shrink from the idea of a long period of incubation and interior cultivation even at the expense of the outer. Who welcomed an honest day's work more than a holiday and seeing things through and well done more than a smooth ride and easy recompense.

Why did I fritter away my time doing manual labour when I could have been devoting it to the pure discipline of the mind? To throw out such a question is to catch various moments of my flight over long years where I would cast doubt upon my course. On all such occasions it would seem to me that to weather these doubts was part of my adventure and experiment, part of telling the truth to myself. And I don't think for a minute that I ever thought I was impervious to these doubts, that they wouldn't have directed me onto another path if such and such conditions had prevailed. For it was never far from my thinking that where a person happens to be, who he knows, and how much money he has can make all the difference between following Plan A and Plan B. In the matter of truthtelling (but not only in the matter of truthtelling), it can make the difference between being an eccentric in the unflattering or dismissive sense and converting one's eccentricity into successful work.

Not having – but only in a formal sense – an outstanding learning and working environment compatible with my sensibilities, I was more or less thrown upon my own devices. A drive to pure self-presence or self-transparency lay at the bottom of all I thought at any given moment. Whether I was acting in a most disciplined way or filled with lust and not particularly

averse to giving it free rein, the video camera of my mind rolled incessantly. At the same time I fostered a systematic approach to my studies as book learning that started on the margins and, after a very long, mixed, and interrupted run, ended up gaining the kind of play, precedence, and programming that, superficially judged, resembled the end of eccentricity.

Another strand of my loose strategy in life was to combine seeing as widely as possible with seeing certain things as close up as possible. Just how the second relates to the first is so vast and complicated that, even though or perhaps for the very reason that it is highly personal, I feel justified in taking it as the vast backyard of truthtelling. While others ignore this subjective domain in order to fill the world with reports on all manner of things (including the subjective side of everything but their own truthtelling) based on the ideal of objectivity, I must make this backyard my principal field of exploration. I must be more scrupulous than others have been in the matter of why and how and where something issues forth as the truth being told.

First of all, let us make no mistake about this "seeing things as widely as possible." Let us not pretend that it was ever something unwavering, homogeneous, and unequivocal even in a formalized sense. Let us only go so far as to think that it was more Aristotelian than it knew itself to be, more in conformity with what often passes as the common sense view of the world and is derivative of the Aristotelian tradition as much as the latter is derivative of it. For the longest time then I was no metaphysical maverick, no adherent of any doctrine but the one dividing the mental from the physical and having both the senses and language represent the second to the first.

My situation was analogous then to those many thinkers who put their thoughts on literature, poetry, and private life to the side while attempting to see the world in comprehensive detail. Like them I saw a basic discontinuity between the first and the second, between particulars that called upon reason only in a contingent way and the whole that demanded its presumably pure application. To ignore this discontinuity between two modes of thinking seemed to entail an inevitable shift to mythology or mysticism with a corresponding renouncement of the use of reason as man's historical birthright and coming into his own.

With a few simple lines one can sketch out the Western philosophical tradition and make it seem a summary affair. Perhaps this aspect of it partly explains why I didn't rush to a study of it. The feeling of ploughing through so much for so little. The feeling that the essentials were in place and that the fine points could be haggled over indefinitely. To this degree then a certain injustice and lack of gratitude, a certain unawareness of how I was constituted by what I thought I or others could contain in a nutshell.

So although I was primed with philosophy in the rough sense of the word, I first posed myself as a candidate for studies in poetry, literature, and life. The study of philosophy was deferred according to no plan I was aware of at the time and can only make out now as a more pressing concern for some outside or extra-philosophical enlightenment. Such being the case, it is as if I had already passed a judgement on philosophy without spending much time with it, without thinking that spending a lot of time with it could possibly affect this judgement. Already then I was antagonistic to it – perhaps even contemptuous of it – even while being on the road to it.

Now it could very well be that the enlightenment I was searching for was of a mythological or mystical sort and so contradictory to where I stood otherwise. Perhaps I wasn't so far off from where many or most are in this regard such that, if I take this supposition seriously, the most far-reaching difference between truthtellers may be said to depend on whether

one considers it part of one's task to recognize and articulate this contradiction or not. Not to do so would be of course to suppress it or affirm that all or at least the bulk of truthtelling is to be found in its modern-day secular or scientific form. In the case of the Christian religion and its entrance into this tradition when the latter was more receptive to resolving than dissolving problems, to contemplating origins and ends and the order of things on an equal footing rather than submerging the former in the latter, there was a systematic attempt to reconcile the two modes. But since the advent of modern philosophy the mythological or mystical mode has been driven underground where it generally resonates with more religiosity than can be admitted.

It is a fact that I couldn't articulate the contradiction then and could only in some sense live it. All I was conscious of at the time was that the suppression of it was repugnant to me. Repugnant to me and to others like me but not to all others, not to the many who suppress even the idea of any grievous suppression. For them, conditioned as they are to minute doses of suppression in everyday life, to considering this practise neither vile nor worthy of serious attention, truthtelling in its most formal aspect is the Elysium fields of saying how things are, a place where one can forget what one said about this or that in some former life. To be a hero in these fields is no small part of such a truthteller's identity and so for him to be confronted with its mythical aspect is a matter of grievous error and affront. Two griefs then eternally tossed back and forth that largely have to do with whether one puts the accent on openness or order.

The advantage of openness is mine and the disadvantage of course is disorder. Perhaps openness has never been carried so far in truthtelling and the risk of disorder been allowed to grow so great. It is both an artistic pleasure and agony to push the one as far as I can and constrain and control the other. Every small step that seems to me a step forward only comes when I have the feeling that these two objectives have been met. How painstaking my progress then and how many false steps I must take in order to arrive at the one true step! It is as if the telling I'm involved in must take in *all* my sensibilities and if the slightest one, be it intellectual, imaginative, or emotional, is overlooked or shortchanged, then it resounds in my ear like a false note. But not one that comes across as if I had committed an indubitable error on the world scene but only an error in what I'm attempting to do, namely, to tell the truth to myself. Thus it seems to me that the further I go along the more I realize that my subject is nothing but this attempt. And if the latter includes telling a few lies to myself (perhaps I just told one), well, at least I'm making every effort to note them and will continue to do so.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

13. Poetry

Now as a candidate for studies in poetry, literature, and life, I was accepted on condition that I judge myself to be a perpetual failure. Of course the contract was written up in those secret parts of the psyche that only become visible after a lifetime of their writing themselves out in the day-to-day. It is difficult to hold this dimension in tandem with – at least on a conceptual or discursive level – another dimension of my cognitive life, namely, the forever victorious truthtelling one. That the latter was and is hyperbolic by nature might go some way to explaining its shameless immodesty, its resilience to the troubling and troublesome aspects of the other dimension. For it was the part of me that saw itself as uniquely committed and conquering in a both definite and indefinite way. In the way of ignoring whether this corresponded to empirical reality or the testimony of others so long as it broke upon the waves of life like the prow of a ship. Such was the way I looked upon it even when I cast a critical eye upon it and so then in such a way that my critical eye was quickly laid claim to or hijacked by the hyperbolic and added to its collection of trophies. In fact what wouldn't this side of me drag in and claim to be a trophy? So much as I did everything to the best of my ability, so much did it claim.

Just as my thoughts swirl about, so does everything I have thought and done in the past. A poor poet is part of what I have been and, if poetry is a kind of getting hold of the swirl, then it can serve as a foothold on the mountain I'm about to climb. Why was I driven to it only thus far and no farther? Why was I not consumed with a passion for it like some who no sooner finish one poem than they must start another? Why was my attention to it rather fidgety and ambivalent in comparison with others? Why did I ask myself such questions even while I read poetry, preferring short pieces to long ones? A short answer would be that my taste ran to the narrative and dramatic as opposed to the lyric. The clash of characters as opposed to the dissonant play of sentiments. Knowing that I wasn't much different from most people in this regard didn't stop me from feeling that I fell short. Or from feeling obtuse in the face of a poem I couldn't understand. Here was the cryptic presumably intelligible to some – because it was printed out and published – but not to me. Poetry as the unintelligible was then a thorn in my side and none of its sonority struck me as particularly soothing, as the force of the thing in itself. Somewhat was I like the person who stands before a piece of abstract art and demands that it mean something. It couldn't be just as it was but had to link itself to a larger whole. Had to articulate itself on a background before I could relish it.

Poetry was supposed to tell me something about the whole. Poetry was supposed to invest itself in me, fill up my understanding, make me correspond ever more fully and perfectly with the divine whole. To be god-like while retaining my proper identity was at least outlined in this experience or expectation and relates to an ineradicable division between a desiring or status-seeking self and a duty-bound one. Even to bring this matter up is to precariously balance between these two selves, feeding self-enhancement only so much as to nourish the subject of truthtelling and doing the latter secretly and radically for the sake of the former. For the sake of what ultimately has something unmistakably illusory and illogical about it. Particularly as one gets older and feels oneself becoming one more dried husk amongst others.

But our youthful dreams commence in youth and, as youthful dreams, haven't much more than our youth in sight. Or at least the headiness of youth and having these dreams is primarily what is in sight and, even when it takes in an imagined elderliness or old age, it is with the warmth of watching a sunset rather than the coldness of having lost this very headiness. But if I

have pushed the latter a bit further than others along the track of time, it is not unrelated to a poetic bent of serviceable and even utilitarian aspect. The charge of being as open as the sky, as much as the latter is involved with exposure, risk, and uncertainty, couldn't go without some form of protection. Couldn't bear itself without some transfiguring trick of the imagination. Which is as much as to say that plates of shining armour were required to make me think myself a knight and not a knave, a superior human being and not a sophisticated worm with apertures at both ends.

O, to be like the sun in the dying day,
And fall to the earth without decay.
Or to be like the leaves in the autumn glow
And raise coloured splendour while sinking below.
Were man's end this final, flourished beauty,
I'd renounce all hope of a vague eternity.

Poetry as the revelatory leading towards the propositional, as the essential inseparability of the two, is what philosophy misses, must miss, must make its eternal foe, must make the denial or suppression of its eternal lie. Philosophy lies in this lie of a foundation or firm setting, its permanent home on loan to it from eternity. This lie springs forth as a possibility that allows for another possibility, namely, truthtelling as the manifest, the self-conscious, the awareness of itself, the control of language, the thought of even poetry itself. A wondrous gift forever fatally flawed like the rose that must wither or canker in the bud.

But let's not think that my thoughts weren't more optimistic when I was young and that I didn't believe that there were some things meant to last an eternity. In keeping with this thought in the only way that is possible, I contemplated or conceived eternity in a limited sense, that is, on a human scale and with human significance. To think it otherwise, to think it *inhumanly* was as repugnant and unsettling to me as to the vast majority of people.

At the same time I have the feeling that, if my thinking has changed over time, my sensibilities have remained relatively stable. Which makes me think that my thinking as development was embryonic in my sensibilities, was constituted by them as a particular development. To the degree that I welcomed the poetic in my thinking and put it on an equal footing with the philosophical, I was committed in advance to sounding these sensibilities. And the road to this sounding was no less than all the thinking I have done up to now that, caught up with these sensibilities, I have made my task to articulate most consummately.

Let us start off by saying, first of all, that both my poetry writing and poetry reading were modest affairs. This contrasted sharply with the poetic sense I had of myself and my life. That the one didn't interfere with the other is testimony to some logic of development, some sense of being an explorer rather than a settler in this particular area. An adventurer still working out the name and nature of his adventure. Before I took my first and only course on poetry and poetics that also happened to be my first university course, I had written only a few short poems and read a handful of others. When I look back at one of these early poems, I'm confronted with something that seems to prematurely reflect a worry about my end, a possible end for myself and how to deal with it.

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

Before I had read much about stoicism or knew anything about nihilism, I committed to memory a poem that seemed to protect me from the worst that life could offer. A talismanic quality was invested in it so that I would be able to recite it later in life to ward off less than courageous thoughts and feelings. Practically but also ethically then it helped to guide me by holding up the only image of confronting one's end in a world grown hellish that seemed elevating and ennobling.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll;
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

Perhaps such a poem has little significance for truthtelling apart from how it relates to a certain kind of truthteller. Horror as the general rout of order or the private levelling and destruction of the most personal is toxic truth. The truth abominated as much as it secretly deepens thought, draws wonder and respect after it if only reluctantly. But what is to be done with such a truth that most abominate so thoroughly as not to want to admit anything but its abomination? Should they be called to order in the name of truth? Should they be moved to abominate less by catching sight of a grand economy most brutal but most full in its deliverance of everything we value? Indeed in its deliverance of all valuing in such a way that only by being torn are we soothed and only by stars looking down on us coldly and indifferently do we look up at them without a matching indifference.

Even throughout all the years that sex seethed in me and was a major preoccupation and place of worship, I found myself married to a first love both cruel and implacable. To put it one way, poeticized sex made for little or no sex in my life or for sex that, when it came, wasn't touched with poetry. On the other hand, it wouldn't be far wrong to say that the poetic side of me was sexualized in such a way that it was drawn to violate, strip naked, and possess the virgin-seeming whore that most truthtelling is. At least now I can see it thus to square accounts, to explain my defeats and disappointments, to appreciate why I didn't go off the deep end and become a bred-in-the-bone liar and dissolute. Sex pulled with ever so strong a pull but, without the poetic side of me being pulled, it was rude, criminal, coarse, catastrophe. No middle ground ever had an allure for me and so I was consequently forced to both suppress and express it. Suppress it as what hardly needs to be explained and express it as one who couldn't remind himself too often of the temptation of letting all go over to the side of the lie.

We hug our dreams, we unloved ones;
We hold them close and tight;
We love our dreams, we unhugged ones:
We hold them in the night.

When sleep is broken and lovers part,
Dreams, sad substance, must fall apart;
Breaking day breaks dreams apart;
Waking day dreamless must start.

On night's soft wing dreams do return:
(Some passions smoke, while others burn);
All covered o'er are daytime fires
When sweet dreams bed with deep desires.

We hug our dreams, we unloved ones;
We hold them close and tight;
We love our dreams, we unhugged ones;
We hold them in the night.

In the thematisation of truthtelling I see that I'm forever confronted with the problem of expressing its heterogeneity without hyperbole, without letting its poetic, egoistic, or even hyperbolic element (so far as the latter is present and unavoidable) play about like a false friend. The poems I have written are good enough that I can't pillory them and perhaps for that reason pillage them in the name of radically telling the truth about myself. At the same time I'm tempted to use them to make good for past failures seeming or otherwise. But then of course I run the risk of acting in bad faith by letting something slip in under false pretences.

Why does one resort to writing poems if not to get at something that eludes strict truthtelling and yet seems strict for all that with respect to something that should be called the truth? Something like a rare personal experience that must attend upon the rare testimonial to make it rare? Is the latter any less of an event because of its rarity on these two fronts? Is its resistance to strict truthtelling to be used as a slur against it, as a scholarly reason to call it second-order truth or simply none at all? That I know that philosophy is and has always been this slur is to know that it has never had as its object truthtelling or the truthteller himself except as a partial or hidden subject, as one caught up in his pride, prejudice, and aloofness. Envious of the poet, the philosopher has always found in his logic and his lack of equivocation the force of entry to all things. Gifts of God these presumably are and presumably granted to everyone. But also presumably requiring a continual throwing up of experts to put them to work and to work towards a universal consensus and enlightenment.

You can see where I am, you other pair of eyes. Dissatisfied with poetry even while with it and critical and contemptuous of philosophy even before I have properly arrived at it. Yet with each having a strong claim on me and each counterbalanced by the other. Thus I was friend to nothing more than learning as much as I could from them whenever and however it came about. But in the case of poetry, to say that I learned from it is not much more than to say that some poems reached me and others didn't. That some passed on a sensibility or heightened and

articulated an already abiding one. Like the feeling of time, its passage, its both all too human and inhuman quality, its stretching too far back and too far ahead to give meaning to itself. Its nonetheless attempting to encompass all meaning in those moments of greatest intensity. In what rang true to me as the truth of all time. What came to me indistinctly yet wrote itself like my last will and testament. What told me in a rather pedantic way that we take ourselves to be too much. Too much the centre of things. Too little the wandering part of the universe.

Well, the best that can be said is that between this hyper-deflation of the ego in metaphysical terms and the hyper-inflation of it in mythical ones is an area I didn't close off to contemplation. Where I didn't refrain from going back and forth and to and fro like the devil in Job. The poetry I read and the poetic sense of myself roughly corresponded to these two extremes. Which amounts to saying that few twentieth century poets steal their light from the traditionally heroic and adventurous. Yet I wouldn't go so far as to say these elements don't exist in their work. Only that they have been effaced, narrowed down, or brought to a fine point. How much vigour and commitment one can put into shaking off life's illusions might be one way of expressing the matter. Or how much one can bear the raw truth that our historical times have thrown up to us. But so expressing this distillment of the tragic vision brings to mind another thought, namely, that there is an ethics at work drawn to negativity, pessimism, and even defeatism. An ethics essentially hostile to the ethics of everyday, to the ethics of doing, to the ethics of most truthtelling. A good many people I'm sure are conscious of this division and are even subject to being torn and oscillating between the one and the other. On the other hand, the fact that most people don't proclaim this division to be a major contradiction in their lives says something about the nature of contradiction per se. That is, that its force as obstacle, as target, as something to be overcome only has sense and significance as an ethics of optimism. An ethics then of non-seeing, of breaking away from poetic insight.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Living our own death even while we are living and so living as to shun death. The eyes focussed and then not focussed upon it as the proper end of life. This oscillation a living rhythm that poetry can pick up on but not philosophy. That inhabits us and is an intimate part of us but must be held down as if it didn't exist. As if it should be discounted in the name of the public good.

What if poetry is that private good – that most intimate coming into contact with oneself

– that is antagonistic to the public? And what if that private good is only good as a partial or half-hidden thing, a true-seeing if not true-saying so strict and relentless as to be almost intolerable?

What if the truth of poetry is the most universal truth to be found and yet too hard to bear except as a terrible truth, a terrible beauty? Would not someone concerned with the subject of truthtelling have to take it into account? And would not all concerned with telling the truth as objective truth have to ignore it?

But as someone concerned with telling the truth and in his own way objectifying it, I can't pretend that I haven't ignored it. That I haven't worked secretly with the soul of a philosopher for many years and so as one who was continually looking past or away from what he also felt compelled to take in. The poetic sense of myself was my childhood naivety, innocence, and sense of immortality allowed to pass over into adulthood. A neither logical nor rational move except from the point of view that I couldn't live without it. That it was implicated in and inseparable from my desire to tell the truth about all these contradictory and confusing matters.

Visiting
I see the proud Jaguar crouched on the front drive
and the spacious lawn with big blue spruces
pinnacling skyward.
The Tudor beams excite my eye
and the vast expanse of masonry
has an impact of which I am not certain.
Could it be (I ask myself)
that I look pleasurably upon this place
or enviously take account of the luck that has it?
The blue sky excites my eye too
and reaches right around the property.
I round the house to view it from all angles
and when I'm done and leave the house behind
I look up once again to find
that sky and senses are perfectly transportable.

I don't want to deny the element of optimism in my outlook that kept me from feeling universal mortality like others. I don't want to pretend that I didn't fill the future with fantasies that blunted any pain that might have come from it. I don't want to make out that I was already old in my youth like some with poetic insight. I merely want to make out that the study of twentieth century poetry and poetics signalled my readiness to explore some secondary roads of my psyche and leave at least temporarily the main one of erotic and romantic daydreams.

How sad it is to see
That she feels about me
In a way which makes hers
The more bitter sorrow.

Now the notion that poetry is bound up with coming into most intimate contact with

oneself invites the sort of investigation I never did and perhaps can only do now because, as it seems to me, the subject matter is too elusive and intractable to be taken up without a special reason. Relying on my memory which of course isn't foolproof but remarkable enough, I think of myself at twenty-five or twenty-six reading Yeats' *The Wild Swans at Coole*. In an instant I was catapulted some twenty years ahead in time, becoming a wistful middle-aged Irishman.

The nineteenth autumn has come upon me
Since I first made my count.

A wistful middle-aged Irishman at twenty-five? I who was still seeking the future with appetite and relish and wild expectation?

Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.

The swift identification with a self removed from me by a generation was a shock, an unsettling, a dislocation, a rude awakening. How could this have been if, imaginatively and emotionally speaking, I had already accepted aging as a personal possibility?

Even if I'm exaggerating this matter, it still indicates a lag in me that I abruptly became aware of at the time. Intellectually speaking, I knew I was at the apex of my youth and for this very reason couldn't look ahead without expecting some signs of decline. But how paralysing and self-destructive it would have been to focus on this! Thus there were these two movements of thought suddenly brought together and held in suspense. One acknowledging that until that time I hadn't looked towards the future in the most feeling and penetrating way. The other recognizing that there was a mighty and even healthy resistance to doing so.

To be sufficiently struck by these conflicting impulses not to let them slip out of sight is the drive to self-knowledge in the most intimate and personal sense. On the other hand, it is to be blocked from putting order into one's thoughts by direct and explicit theorizing. It seems to me then that I have no choice but to continue along and table more poems I have written or read. The first because they represent some of my most intimate thoughts. The second because they set in motion same or similar ones. Together they helped to keep me on track of the two subjects, myself and truthtelling, that for a long time I only dimly recognized as being conjoined.

In that first university class there was another poem that spoke to me as I was then. Just as in the case of the Yeats' poem, it evoked a repressed part of me that had escaped emotional and imaginative development. Only instead of its being about a middle-aged man linked to his past and present, it was about a young man linked to his dream.

What calls me is that lifted, rough-tongued bell
(Art, if you like) whose individual sound
Insists I too am individual.
It speaks; I hear, others may hear as well.

There are some poems that match one sentiments so perfectly that one feels as if one had written them in another life.

The trumpet's voice, loud and authoritative,
Draws me a moment to the lighted glass
To watch the dancers – all under twenty-five –
Shifting intently, face to flushed face,
Solemnly on the beat of happiness.

– Or so I fancy, sensing the smoke and sweat,
The wonderful feel of girls. Why be out here?
But then, why be in there? Sex, yes, but what
Is sex? Surely, to think the lion's share
Of happiness is found by couples – sheer
Inaccuracy, as far as I'm concerned.

Of course the sense of a two-way interference was nothing new to me. That my highest aims and aspirations and search for sexual pleasure inhibited each other. At the same time I always secretly hoped that the second would be swept up into the first without loss or remainder. It was as if I wanted to be on the dance floor – *really* on the dance floor – and outside the window at the same time. Consequently the thought of having to sacrifice, of having to be a bit of a martyr for the sake of my dream was one I couldn't entertain for long. And although it seemed to me that Larkin had some residual difficulty in deciding where he belonged, it also seemed to me that he was more unflinching in the matter of admitting what the stakes were.

But not for me, nor I for them; and so
With happiness. Therefore I stay outside,
Believing this; and they maul to and fro,
Believing that; and both are satisfied,
If no one has misjudged himself. Or lied.

To be put into most intimate contact with oneself is to be reminded that one is never fully there. That there is always a gap to be made up. It is to be involved in a largely hit-and-miss affair except insofar as one knows that poetry is the way to go and not philosophy. But what does this mean if not that there are many well-functioning individuals who live without it and who are nonetheless to be envied and admired for many good reasons? So many in fact that one can easily forget there is a hidden deficit, a perceptible loss, a boarded-up space in their psyche that inevitably results from this practical outlook. Admittedly the greater freedom of the poet is habitually taken to be a surplus of freedom, a thing not bad in itself but certainly dispensable in the ordinary run of things. Infectious as this point of view is, it is likely that I sometimes didn't realize how much I stood in need of being inoculated against it.

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,
For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.
.....

Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

That I largely restricted my reading of twentieth-century poems to one particular anthology called *Twentieth Century Poetry and Poetics* is one of those niggling facts that, simply by being niggling, summons me to confession. Of course this fact is not a problem from a scholarly or artistic viewpoint except if I were to overlook it. If I were to refrain from hauling it into this account of my poetic self and its development. For what matters from the point of view of truthtelling is not how this self stints or falls short but how it fits in to an overall development that ends in what I'm presently doing.

It is a niggling fact that I haven't read the collected works of Yeats or Auden or others only for the reason that I'm constituted to think and imagine a grand taking in of everything. Or at least everything I chance to come across that pertains to my subject and so virtually everything I come across. But it is clear as day this can't be done and so selective sampling – as one finds it in a good anthology – is what I have always had to settle for.

What other ways was I awakened to myself when I consulted this anthology of twentieth century poems in years to come? Was there not at age twenty-seven (but at other times as well) the sense of not being able to think clearly about what I was doing? Moments of wondering why I couldn't be like those who seemed to have a good grip on life and confidence in what they were doing and where they were going? Certainly establishing myself as a playwright had become a primary objective but, as I have already said, I lacked confidence in this area. Such confusion discomforted me to the point that a delicate adjustment was often required in my thinking. A sort of cognitive tacking to keep my sails full despite contrary winds. And although a poem may not be the only way to do this, I doubt whether there is anything that works so wondrously quick.

He is quick, thinking in clear images;
I am slow, thinking in broken images.

He becomes dull, trusting to his clear images;
I become sharp, mistrusting my broken images.

Trusting his images, he assumes their relevance;
Mistrusting my images, I question their relevance.

Assuming their relevance, he assumes the fact;
Questioning their relevance, I question the fact.

When the fact fails him, he questions his senses;
When the fact fails me, I approve my senses.

He continues quick and dull in his clear images;
I continue slow and sharp in my broken images.

He in a new confusion of his understanding;
I in a new understanding of my confusion.

That I continued slow and sharp in a new understanding of my confusion is what I take to have been spelt out to me even while this new understanding was still on its way.

Robert Graves' poem put me in touch with a certain certainty overriding all uncertainty. A certainty I was as certain of as Descartes of his. As certain of then as to be *very* certain. To be that Cartesian that everyone is when one's personal self is at stake. As certain of then as to think that I couldn't live without a certain ethical, aesthetic, and even epistemological orientation. Couldn't live without it not in any rhetorical sense but precisely as the inability to live without *my* particular consciousness, *my* particular source of pride, and *my* particular sense of well-being.

For to live any other way would have been to live where I had never lived, never believed, never thought of myself as myself, and never thought about a life for myself. Where order took precedence over openness, where errancy was simply error, where things were left out of the picture simply because they didn't fit in. Where there were plenty of fields to work in and hospitable homes to live in but at the price of giving up one's citizenship to a larger world.

Of course there were many other poems from *Twentieth Century Poetry and Poetics* that had this or that effect on me. That produced some subtle modification of thought or feeling hard to pin down because it was but one extraordinary moment in a flight of others. These last being so much more numerous, they tended to bear down on me with their weight and authority. I know this is the common lot of mortals just as I know that revolting against it is also common. In my own case, it amounted to trying to redeem the tawdriness of the past by making it work in the present.

We made the break
almost bloodless
you and I
Out of our brief union
came still-born pain
that shed no tear
and gave no cry
for we had wed in our
self-respect

Too many polite words
lead to emotional sterility
but...

dam up the outlets
with decorum
that she may know
and remember you
as you want her to

I visualized myself
with your eyes
and tried to act accordingly
Inwardly I retreat from

the heart of my pain
and take refuge in
contemplation

So silently do I
scream away my pain

As I moved from my mid to late twenties, the ordinary moments of life, however full and well-seasoned, however smooth and untroubled, took on an oppressive aspect new to me. No longer were they what they had been when, after dropping out of high school, I worked itinerantly or when, some years later, I travelled about Europe. Time in its generality took on a different weight and measure. It was no longer experienced by me as something light and free-floating, as a series of rising currents or updrafts that, however turbulent, carried me forever on to the place where all my dreams would be fulfilled. On the contrary, I began to identify it with a narrowing of possibilities, with a closing down of whole realms of experience, and with a series of choices already made that fitted me for certain walks of life and barred me from others.

For a long time I had lived with the conflicting fantasies of wanting to be all things – that is, all things well recognized and well received – and wanting to shine like some new star in the firmament. No doubt the first as much as the second arose in my childhood when it was easy and natural to place no restrictions on all the attractive pursuits and occupations that promised themselves as future possibilities. Of course this outlook dissipated as I got older and grew more attentive to what could and could not be done in a lifetime. Nonetheless I suspect that, just as in the case of my attitude towards aging and having to make sacrifices, there was a lag between my intellectual acceptance of limited possibilities and what registered with me on the imaginative and emotional plane. In fact I would say that my vagabonding years made this lag persist in me and become so ingrained that, while it definitely closed over time, it never went away completely. Therefore it was always the case that I was less anxious than most people to plan and prepare for the future if I construed such practicalness as a drastic limiting of my horizons.

Still the time came when my longstanding habit of fantasizing my life as an upward spiral without retrograde motion couldn't be borne so naively and, as in the case of other aspects of my cognitive life, needed to be readjusted.

Time withers, time mocks
The early vanities of youth.
They who suffer age know it!
Time takes away, seldom restores;
Nay, not in this life.

But to say that I was stricken by some new sensibility regarding time is not to say that it came all at once or that it could rival in intensity certain other sensibilities or that it wasn't put in the shade by my longstanding hangups about sex. No, it was more like a new awareness that slowly crept into my consciousness during those mild and mellow moments relatively free from egoism and devoted to pure observation and speculation. At least this way of reporting the matter allows me to bear witness to what is difficult to recount on the basis of memory alone, namely, that a key thought came to me rather late and required a poem to get it out.

Before I had read Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill," did I ever think that time had already brought death and destruction to me? Did I ever think that the end of my childhood was the end of a life qualitatively better than what would follow? Perhaps I did but not so much as to be troubled by this thought that even now troubles me and whose truth I don't doubt any more than I doubt its limitations. But, having said this, I certainly don't want to get bogged down in proverbial questions about happiness and what constitutes a good life. I only want to say that, before having read this poem and perhaps for some time after, I gave little or no thought to incremental loss, to unconscious loss, to all the various deaths in a life, to all things of this nature that may or may not be missed and lamented.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

14. Melancholic Sister

Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

Yet again it must be said that this particular consciousness of time as mortal affliction, as bringing death not just at the end of a life but along its whole course, as bringing it not just in the form of one grand finale but as a series of endpoints in imbricated and vastly diverse processes of dissolution, was both a marginal and drawn-out affair in my life. It consequently left me room for celebrating my youth even when it was on the wane and thinking myself, due to my good health, strength, and overall well-being, an excellent candidate for resisting the worst effects of time. If not quite gripped by the not-so-uncommon illusion of remaining the same and unchanging over the years while others, poor unfortunates, took a turn for the worse, then surely I was involved in some similar fantasy. In truth I was happy to remove myself from the common order of things and imagine that I stood like an oak tree in the face of time's withering blasts.

Not to be stricken but to watch others being stricken by time: was this my illusion, my entertainment, my sense of superiority, my compensation for being sexually frustrated, my morbidity as a heightened or degraded form of curiosity? Were the times that, as an adult, I watched a person struggle and die much different from the times that, as a child, I watched an insect in its death throes? How in the name of humaneness could I answer no to this question especially if it were a case of my mother's and sister's dying? How in the name of honesty, in the name of recognizing what is not particularly humane either in myself or others, could I answer yes?

Two ideals at loggerheads, humaneness and honesty, with one worth no more than the other and neither worth anything without the other. Yet I personally gravitated towards the second and, given my awareness of this, I feel an obligation to take it into account. To take into account what is normally left out by philosophers but certainly not by poets: the inhumane as it stealthily registers in one's thoughts and feelings.

To take it into account and consider it but not to take it beyond a certain point or measure. For I was humanely inhumane like most others and did not make a show of my less-than humaneness. To take it into account in the way of taking both sides into account – this is more the thing I have to do than justify being less than humane.

What is often ugly, unsettling, and distasteful in life has this strange character of allowing itself to be beautifully metamorphosed as well-told truth. As the meticulous and many-sided account of the particular that, however poor and humble, however debased and wretched, however violent and unfeeling, is somehow enveloped in – I won't say invested by – a barely expressible grandeur. It is this with which we, as readers, identify and certainly not the pettiness of this or that element or what may even take up the foreground as unseemly, repulsive, and detestable behaviour. And what does this mean if not that, in doing this, we follow the path of the poet who, with a reflective and retrospective effort of unusual reach and convergence, reestablishes contact with the sun's glory in even the things that have most appalled and upset him?

Sharon's Story: Part I

I am summoned from the shades by a brother who, if I hadn't got over some of my anger and bitterness, I would've been loathe to give over my spirit to. Independence has always been a marked trait of mine and therefore I don't relish the thought of his memory and imagination substituting themselves for what I actually was. There is also another matter that hinders the smooth passage and negotiation of myself onto these pages. Again I say it's a good thing I've gotten over some of my anger and bitterness and am no longer thinking and feeling the way I was some weeks before my death. Then I considered his disdain for me as a supposedly weaker person a form of abuse as well as his singular lack of sympathy.

I suppose I'm supposed to keep on the track of defining his character by bringing into its proximity my own. Of course it's his ego that's in operation here and not mine. Ego is perhaps what distinguished us most: mine was – I can say it now – infected. It was like a balloon that a pinprick could deflate and render null and void. But if it hadn't been this way, if it hadn't been ruptured at so young and tender an age, then God only knows but it might've surpassed his. It might've succeeded in some of the very areas he most desired to succeed in or at least in areas close to these. And if this had been the case, if it had shone so brightly in the arts as in the sciences (and there were many indications of this even in my most delicate and abject state), then perhaps I would've also succeeded in, I dare to say, rupturing his ego.

Well, if I'm to have room for my own sort of analysis, let me take it from the point of claiming that life was fair to me and fair for me up to a certain point and no further. At the tender age of nine I no longer had a father in my life and, as I see it now, I went into a permanent state of mourning. My attachment to life itself was fundamentally weakened in a way that unsympathetic people ascribe to a lack of character. It's as if one were gored by a bull in a life-and-death struggle and then, while lying bloodied and helpless in the arena, jeered at for not having put on a good show.

I guess I've got over some of my anger and bitterness but not all. How would it have been possible to get over all of my anger and bitterness when these supposedly negative traits defined my character as a "sick" person? It's easy enough, especially when you're a man, especially when you haven't gone through all that I did, to get angry and find it invigorating and even healthful. It's easy enough to walk away from resentment when you feel like a bull inside and not the gored person who's jeered at for not carrying himself around like a healthy person. It's easy to think that anger and resentment should be washed away with a better attitude when a "better attitude" is all one's ever known in one's life. Oh, it's so easy for the strong to be strong and assign it all to themselves and not to luck, not to the difference between that one mortal strike that comes before one has even had the chance to grow strong and the thousand strikes that come after and, as usually happens, add to one's honour and ego-satisfaction. Those charges by the bull, if I can put it this way, that come after one has been fully armed, trained, and prepared to enter the arena and be, as I most definitely was not, the hero to oneself even if one happens to go down.

My brother was the lucky one and I was not. He shed his childhood like an old skin too tight for him while I had mine ripped off prematurely. It's strange to think how little anyone thought of this, how it was assumed that, because it was irreparable on the level of event, it was surmountable on the level of right attitude and willpower. The damage to myself as a child was unconsciously minimized by all, including myself, and so I was left to spend the rest of my life

feeling guilty – consciously or otherwise – for trying to "maximize" it.

Oh, if people only could've seen what I accomplished! If only they could've seen how much willpower and right attitude I put into effect to accomplish what I did. To win the honours that did accrue to me in my short life. At fourteen I was already a depressive with a world-weary attitude. And yet such was my courage and determination that I overcame all this, overcame my anorexia, overcame my father's coming back into my life, overcame my having to go through an abortion, overcame other problems psychological, physical, marital, and emotional – overcame all this and won highest honours year after year in high school, in university, and even later towards the end.

But none of them saw it or, if they did, it was overshadowed by what they saw as the person who seemingly faltered for no good reason. Who was no more afflicted and even a lot less afflicted than many others who picked themselves up by the bootstraps and got on with life. The internal haemorrhaging that had been going on ever since I'd been ripped out of my childhood and prematurely exposed to the world went without a diagnosis and so without recognition.

I was a depressive: that was the diagnosis. From the age of twenty-five on. Everything was reduced to chemical imbalances and I accepted this. I accepted the idea that I'd eventually get better over time, that the drugs would pull me out of it, that I'd live long enough to see my children grow up and become responsible adults. I accepted all this and had this sort of faith I fanned over and over again. In friends, in family, in my husband, in science, in medicine, indeed, in life itself. Truly I went for a long time wanting to get better – believing in it. To think how long I went with this belief despite recurring bouts of disbelief so strong they completely annulled all my good intentions.

Where I'm the artful assessor of my own egoism, afflicting it in the wilful, calculating, and even self-gratifying way of the truthteller; where I can conjure up a different set of circumstances that might have ruined this course or made it self-destructive; where I can strip myself of the habitual belief that *I'm* responsible for it, for its being, to use Nietzsche's words, one of those human experiments that turns out well (as opposed to countless others that fail); where I can do all this without foregoing a certain self-enlargement that, in the final analysis, is *not* something to afflict myself with; where, finally, I go beyond the merely personal or grossly egoistic and towards a state of perfection more commonly sought than realized – this is where I find her.

Sharon's Story: Part II

There was a time I would've reacted harshly to anyone who was trying to pluck out the heart of my mystery. Who presumed to think they knew me better than myself or had insights into my affliction more helpful than – so it went for a long time – certain presumed experts and doctors. After all, wasn't I one who was caught up in the treachery of the world at a very young age? Who existentially and I dare say even intellectually took it on when others, full of hopes and dreams and everything else that's youthful and naive, lived happily? Wasn't I one who, while still in my teenage years, could stare directly into the abyss, into the meaninglessness of the world? Who saw clearly what was written deep down in it? And didn't I know then, at some point, that I had to effect a sea change in my way of thinking? To turn away from the arts and towards the sciences? To get rid of the quasi-religious thoughts that, instead of being uplifting,

were like a metaphysical protest? And then to turn towards a sort of earthly salvation, an earthly happiness? What did this mean other than to turn towards the common, the normal, the everyday, the routine? For this was where I had the best, indeed, the only chance of avoiding the voluptuous desire not to go out of the world piece by piece.

But as it turned out, I avoided neither one nor the other. Neither going out of the world piece by piece nor the voluptuous desire not to. Fifteen years of adult living wore away at me like fifty another. Not because my physical being, although sadly abused, had broken down. But because the will to struggle courageously on, despite repeated collapses, repeated revivals as anger and energy and protest and I dare say love, finally gave way to such an indescribable fatigue (not that I hadn't already experienced this fatigue but now it was the fatigue of having experienced it so many times) that I never wanted to see the light of the world again.

There was much that was messy in the way I encountered my fragile brilliant sister who, as a child, I was sexually drawn to and who later, as an adult, I was both intrigued and repulsed by.

Sharon's Story: Part III

He broke into my childhood not by initiating me into sex but into a strange sense of complicity, secretiveness, and tingling sensations. It didn't last long enough to be a scarring thing and later, when he started it again – I mean after we had settled in Winnipeg – it didn't take too long before I realized it was wrong. I finally rejected his advances. I didn't think his argument about brother-sister incest in ancient Egypt a very good reason for letting him carry on as he was. Most of it was rather harmless but only because I put a stop to it before it ever went on to another stage.

The next person who touched me intimately, many years later, was my first boyfriend. We were both second-year university students. He who was my oldest brother had returned home about this time. He was hard, unschooled, ruffian-like, and fearless. The prodigal son, it seemed, who would make good one way or another.

It would be wrong to say I didn't think highly of him. I told him as much on a particular occasion that calls for a revelation of sorts. It's about something I never breathed a word to anyone. However, if I'm here not simply as a shadow of myself and truthtelling is the subject along with or as part of my character and its similarity to his, then I'll show quickly enough the kind of person I was. Truly, I never stood in need of lessons from anyone to know what it is to be honest and truthful.

It was in the basement of our house on Glenlawn Crescent in Winnipeg. The two of us happened to be alone there one evening and feeling intimate as brother and sister. I remember I said something to him that was extremely frank, flattering, and out-of-character all at once. I said something to the effect that he was the image – I think it went so far – of all that I admired and respected in a man. Perhaps this over-exuberance, this outpouring on my part had something to do with comparing him to my boyfriend of the time. Ido was bright and thoughtful but he also had the habit of looking down on people. At the same time he showed himself to be rather pusillanimous. I mean to say that, if strongly challenged, he would invariably back down. In any event, this particular evening with my oldest brother in the basement of our house on Glenlawn Crescent was a rare thing for me because I didn't feel him as a brother. If he'd

happened to be a little warmer, a little more tender, a little smoother, a little less truly himself in other words, it's possible he would've done something I wouldn't have been able to call abuse.

To be sure, I have never felt myself like a bird with a broken wing. I naturally interpret this state of affairs as one of being lucky in life but also as one of never having *allowe*d myself to feel so. It is this last part that looms up large and cuts off sympathy at a certain point. There is all this help and support the person is getting and you feel at some point it should compensate for the bad breaks they have had. Especially when it drags on and on over the years and every sort of treatment is tried and the person flies well and high only to keep crashing. Yes, it is this repeated crashing like a bird into a window that does it. You end up blaming the bird – just as you end up blaming the person – for not having the sense to fly elsewhere.

Sharon's Story: Part IV

I was planted in good soil in Chambly and grew up straight and smart and shining and giggly all at once. A home in the fifties that, though it didn't allow me to think that boys and girls or men and women were equal in their power to conquer the world, didn't discourage me from imagining myself a brilliant scientist. Indeed, it's amazing how early such a thought came to me.

I liked learning; I liked school so much. I liked The Books of Knowledge *that were always in our living room I loved our house and the neighbours and my brothers and sisters and my mother and father. I loved the field out back, the games we used to play, the stories Daddy would read us, the freckles on his face and hands, the turning pages, the sense of being secure and happy in a sweet little nest, as one song went, for all time.*

I loved his lap, his arms, his kisses, his swooping me up when he got home and his hugging and kissing me with his bristly moustache. I loved the dancing look in his eyes, the good feeling he gave me, the feeling that I'd never be without his love and guidance. No, not even when the time came – oh, still so far away! – that I'd have to venture forth, a full-grown woman, and find my own place in the sun.

I grew up swift and straight, in good soil, but my roots weren't deep-set. Hence I ended up suffering the same fate as that transplanted apple tree out back. They chopped off so much of the root that it wouldn't grow. It stood there the last year like an ominous sign of death.

The attempts. The first was with Tylenol. She was rushed to the hospital to get her stomach pumped. The second, a couple of years later, was with her own medicine and nearly killed her.

Sharon's Story: Part V

There's this poem by Yeats that always had a gripping effect on me. It's called "Leda and the Swan." The last stanza goes: "Being so caught up / So mastered by the brute blood of the air / Did she put on his knowledge with his power / Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?"

Transposing this question to my own case, the answer is no. I had no time to put on knowledge and power before the sudden blow, before the feathered glory could push itself between my thighs, before the indifferent beak could let me drop. I had no time to think that life wasn't always fair, that it could play cruel tricks on you, that it could give so much and then take

it away. I had no time to think that the dearest most precious things in life were really hobgoblins ready to leer out and laugh at your naivety and innocence. Or that the most profound feelings of your heart could be abandoned and allowed to dry up. Or that the strength and steadfastness that you'd so much depended on could suddenly go tottering down the street without so much as a backward glance.

I had no time to know that a child's heart and dreams could be fattened up like sacrificial beasts dumbly awaiting the knife that would slaughter them.

It was at the time of this second attempt that I was earnestly reading Sylvia Plath's poems. I was struck by all the parallels between Plath and my sister. I wrote a poem in memory of the first that, despite my sister's still being alive (albeit unwillingly), was also in memory of her.

A formidable mood infects
The poems. The precision words
March to the dirge of meaning.
Behind them lies a menace
Like a blank page. An empty
Parade square.

Dead hands, dead stringencies
Aloft in the dew of Ariel's flight
Return to the earth of memory.
Her strict art blood-nourishes
A sweet recall.

O melancholy sister, fragile storm-scudded vessel,
You broke yourself upon the sharp cliffs of Elsinore.
Ophelia-like, the narrowing branch beckoned and
You balanced ticklishly between two watery courses
Until the fretful game seemed hardly worth
The candle.

Class-achiever, conformist-girl,
What ill-bred muse was it that
Made you wear your hard-won
Laurels like cast-off seaweed?
No mermaid-change, your legs
Grew scales all the same;
Your scrubbed looks as wholesome
As American pie encased a dying
Starfish-life.

Lorelei, put down your white arms.
Though they be moonstruck I am not.

O how fairly they entreat me to
The watery bed!
I embrace the heaven-sweeping spar
that never touches but
Points and point and points.
Your song contracts my heart;
It's all I can give you.

Sharon's Story: Part VI

I eventually got married, bore a child, became pregnant with a second, and then for the first time bore the full weight of not caring about life. At least this is one way of putting it, more conventional than saying that for the first time I let the weight I'd been carrying around for so long slide completely off me. All that caring and carrying around that people think is so healthy but really was part of my sickness because, deep down, I didn't believe in it. Or at least I didn't believe in it in the way of thinking it would ever succeed in restoring to me the happiness I'd once known. No, if there was anything great and true and glorious that I could still pay homage to, that I could still truly believe in, it was ethical. I carried my burden around out of a sense of honour and duty. I was strong, psychologically speaking, only in this way. As a consequence, I had something rather mixed and diluted, something even contradictory, something that perhaps was bound to collapse as a personal philosophy. Something like being a Kantian on the one hand and a Nietzschean on the other. Something like accepting essentially bourgeois values by viewing them in a heroic light. All this worked for a time and even my repeated collapses could be – always after the fact of course – viewed as a kind of personal triumph. To be thrown in hades time and time again and, just as many times, climb back out, what wasn't there about this that shouldn't have been viewed by me as being – extraordinary?

To imagine a wretchedness so great and prolonged as to take one finally over to the other side of not caring. Of not feeling. What else could it be?

Sharon's Story: Part VII

Lazarus-like, I came back from deep depression many times. The body's own strength brought me back. Stays in a tomb-like hospital resuscitated me. Systems of support, social and familial, reminded me of my indebtedness and the espoused value of a human life.

I came back like a knocked-down fighter willing to try one more round in the ring. I came back even after my corner had thrown in the towel but it was ruled out on a technicality. Something about only feigning to go down and lie still on the mat. I was made to get up.

She struggled for six more years after the attempt on her life that nearly succeeded. The children had a chance to grow up a little with their mother. There were times we thought her sickness was never going to end just as there were times we thought she was finally on the road to recovery.

Sharon's Story: Part VIII

You can't feel well simply for the sake of others. A common thought perhaps commonly accepted but so inimical to what a mother is supposed to be about that I know it's denied over and over again. I myself denied it and I gathered my forces over and over again to place my heart where I thought my head was even though my head was always secretly with my heart. An infinite desire to crawl back into the womb myself, to go back to where I'd come from, surpassed all other desires. To do that impossible thing of reversing time and going back back back – towards happiness and then nothing.

She knew what she was doing the third time. There would be no chance of being propped back on her feet and asked to fight another round. No, all the will and strength of mind she had managed to muster over the years finally reversed themselves and she sped towards death with a now practised aim and calculated intent. Her navigational skills on this particular course had been honed to perfection. She crashed through the window and, with broken wings, flew to where I know not if not into the hearts and minds of others.

Sharon's Story: Part IX

It came quickly and inexorably. The decision. And then the action. No longer was it for me a case of "To be or not to be." No longer a hedging on life and death, a playing off of one against the other. It was clear and distinct, Cartesian, eminently sensible as the answer to the contradictions that had entangled my life. It came to me like a piece of wisdom that moved beyond regret and resentment, beyond this rough world that had borne me. It came from a far-off country I cared not to know except that it's embrace was love – complete and total love. I took the medication. I overdosed. I went to lie down in the cool of the basement. I knew I was into something bigger and more momentous than I'd ever been before. I felt completely understood.

I touched her stiff body in the cool dark basement. The sun's heat was torrid outside. My oldest sister wailed in the background. It was very eerie and sickly-smelling in that mildewed basement that had never smelled right. I brought the world in with a phone call. Initial shock gave way to that sort of voluptuous feeling that dares not speak its name.

"**Sharon's Statement (1989**)"
(**A presumption on the part of one who feels he's seen a little way down the road she took**)

"All my adult years I struggled mightily to create a fairly normal but fulfilling life for myself. This despite the fact that at age fourteen I came to the conclusion that life is essentially hell and hope its most refined, most insidious, and most subtle torment.

"How could I bear this revelation at age fourteen? Who was there around me who would understand? Did they, who were older and presumably wiser than I, not see the painful, soul-wrenching, soul-destroying meaninglessness of it all? Where were those mentors who might have lit lamps and guided my thoughts in this oppressive labyrinth and tomb-like state? Did I, at age fourteen, see more keenly what others, on their deathbeds and in the final throes of shaking

off life's restraining hand, set their teeth against but nonetheless taste foully, bitterly, and, yes, perhaps, even with final flashes of anger and resentment?

"Oh, I weep over all this! I weep over this strange, unwarranted seasoning of my tender years! I cry out at the injustice of this terrifying visitation upon a too tame and timid soul! I grieve over the all too early oppression of my youthful spirits: – gaiety, spriteliness, awe, wonder, and all the romantic songbirds of my soul fled, fled! – the dying light! (Lost in a dark woods with neither a wicked stepmother to blame for leaving me there nor a beneficent, knowing spirit to guide me out – this was my fate in the year that caught me between childhood and growing up.)

"So what was I to do now – I who at age fourteen was forced to bear this crushing load? I who at a very young age already felt stooped shoulders set in, pain with every step, and a collapse to the earth as something welcoming, inviting? To be shunned and held at arm's length of course but still held, held! – as both terror and temptation, don't you see?... I found the strength to carry this martyr's cross (so I wished to look upon it and so you may wish to look and find what answers you will here) and whatever tricks of mind or fanciful deceits I used to lighten this burden should not be judged too harshly. When the way seemed to lead less and less towards the darkening, storm-rent clouds of Golgotha and more and more towards the blue suburban niceties of day-to-day existence, I even forgot for a time I carried a great burden. I even forgot for a time the flickering yet lengthening shadows – ominous, omni-present yet quietly, queerly, quixotically seductive – while gambolling in the noontide sunlight."

I followed my sister's course – the physical side of it – right to the time she was put in the oven. The attendant explained to me how it worked and showed me the bags of white powder. It was all over in a few minutes.

The day she visited the dissecting room
They had four men laid out, black as burnt turkey,
Already half unstrung. A vinegary fume
Of the death vats clung to them.

We come from a country stranger than all rationality and all animality. This is the saving grace. That we can look a bit past ourselves to what we both are and are not is the religious reflection in its most obscure profundity.

But more satyr than saint am I for having such a thought. No religion do I hold to per se. If I have strength, I gain it from a land that is well beyond me and a rough sort of gratitude is my worship. My daily rites are being as free as possible as well as always being at the service of my freedom. My confession is this long drawn-out thing called *On Truthtelling* and my liturgy the world in its utmost diversity.

I continued to live after my sister's death, write poems, and play the indestructible. A strong libido no doubt helped to propel me in this direction. A world full of attractive females was not a world that would easily lose its charm and piquancy. Indeed, it was invariably one of these delightful creatures that would inspire me to write a poem from time to time.

She makes me – feel happy;
She can warm with a smile;

Her charm is quite simple –
Without woman's guile.

She makes me – feel happy;
I go away so.
After the small-talk between us
There's a warm after-glow.

She makes me – feel happy;
It can't be denied.
She's so pleasant and playful,
It's like spring-time inside!

She makes me – feel happy;
She's so straight, good, and true.
That such creatures do exist
Alone good feelings does imbue.

She makes me – feel happy.
She can warm with a smile;
But to feel myself old
Is a little sad – meanwhile.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

15. Erudition and Earthy Experience

Apart from giving myself poor reviews as a playwright and favourable mention as a poet, I should say something about the balancing act I did for so many years between erudition and earthy experience. Having a foot in both camps was never something I simply endured or did unconsciously but rather cultivated as a sort of long-term experiment. The high in the low and the low in the high was what I tried to sustain or take in or bring out as much as possible as observable phenomena. To be thoroughly grounded in both camps was a way to keep the field open: to keep as far as possible from a thoroughgoing prejudice that, be it of such a nature as to take sides with erudition (in which case I would have felt much more obliged than otherwise to uphold the order principle) or to take sides with earthiness (in which case I would have slandered this principle), would have skewed my findings as one who, though he hardly knew it at the time, had the subject of truthtelling in his sights.

When at the age of twenty-five and freshly back from Europe, I took up residence in a seedy, cockroach-infested apartment, I was not put out by this. For having become more attuned to the errancy in my life as veritable sign or prodigy, I knew I couldn't become overly attached to comfort, security, appearance, and the like. In this respect I was like my father who, although he had grown up in a very respectable home and had been, as I suspect, oriented towards professionalism and material success as well as getting married and raising a family in the suburbs, eventually turned his back on all this as much as he let everything else go.

I think this matter of living in substandard conditions provides a touchstone for understanding how I carried on as my father while distinguishing myself from him. From the beginning I chose my living conditions on the basis of economizing and granting to myself the greatest possible freedom. Neither playwrighting nor studying at the university brought me an income and yet there was nothing I wanted to do more than these. Furthermore, they were long-term projects with no guarantee of, in the case of playwrighting, leading to success and, in the case of university (for I went about it without a definite plan or goal) leading to professional status and rewards.

But apart from studying and playwrighting, I was committed to the great project almost unbeknownst to me. The one that was vague and indefinite but somehow took in these activities as well as much else. Deep down I sensed that this great project was something that had to be carried out with highest honour and integrity, with passion, with skill, with endurance and fortitude, with an openness and willingness to experiment beyond the ordinary. Any other future course or career played very dimly in my mind and, if I don't miss my guess, herein lies the difference between what I envisioned for myself and what my sister and father did. For I'm quite sure they were very much like me in having some great project in mind but then fell under the sway of a more common vision. One that had them mixing their highest aims and aspirations with what is generally thought to be most natural, fulfilling, satisfying, and rewarding. That is, one that had them imagining their secret souls as being perfectly compatible with the marital, the domestic, and the professional.

But why shouldn't the first be reconcilable with the others? Why should their natural inclination to the hearth, to matters of the heart, to the attendance upon these in good and due form be considered a barrier to some striving for perfection? Isn't it the case that a long list could be drawn up of people who have achieved great things while maintaining a home and family? Or of people who have fulfilled themselves admirably while pursuing a professional career? Time

and again I have thought of this and, with respect to my own case but also my sister's and father's, the difference seemed to be that these successful artists, scientists, thinkers, and the like knew very well what road they were on and, and as jugglers of a sort down this road, what balls they had to keep up in the air and why. It seemed to me then that a great project could be achieved in complicated and even over-complicated circumstances as long as the project itself was not an over-complicated affair. A project barely known, a project still *on its way to being known* would be, in such circumstances, over its head.

It was in a miasma of such thoughts, feelings, and memories that I instinctively directed myself towards a sort of material minimalism while maximizing what I took to be my spiritual or mental capabilities. No life pursuit appeared more important to me than this and no act more shameful or distressing than to give way through weakness and abandon it. While it was grandiose enough to allow me to think of myself as a sort of knight errant on a noble quest and even a sort of Prometheus having to put up with day-to-day torments, it was also down-to-earth enough to prevent me from being a sort of Don Quixote tilting at windmills. On the other hand, I was conscious of the overwhelming power and enveloping nature of the monster I was contending with as well as its innermost proximity.

I don't suppose I can leave out another obsession that had already been with me a long time, namely, maintaining a robust constitution. Years of manual labour as well as activities such as running, cycling, skating, and so on had bequeathed to me a certain strength, confidence, and sense of being able to handle myself in most situations. But to bring this up now is simply to note that, given this preoccupation with physical strength and stamina, I was probably in a better position to rebuff the more materialistic ways of elevating one's status.

So it was that, after returning from Europe, I purposely did without a car, a nicely furnished apartment, and other amenities. I also did without a girlfriend yet this last was far from being a situation sought out and desired. When I look back at it now, I cannot help but think I was somewhat naive, even somewhat stupid in the matter of sexual relations. In other words, it still surprises me I didn't have it in mind more than I did that, by not acquiring the more recognized signs of having good prospects and a hold on the future, I had made it much more difficult for myself. But, then again, what didn't I aspire to in this area that wasn't ridiculously difficult to the point of being utterly vain and unrealistic?

Is it possible for me ever to know how much my thoughts, the seemingly non-sexual ones, the seemingly disinterested, objective, and non-egoistic ones, were spurred on by the stick of sexual frustration and lured on by the carrot of sexual fantasy? Or how much this dynamic infiltrated and took possession of the dreams and visions of my earliest childhood? Certainly it is strange to think how this process resembles a lifelong courting ritual, an elaborate flirting around and with a desired object of both earthly and mythical proportions. To say that I hungered for young female flesh is true but I also had the desire for it only as something forever enduring or replenishing itself and not as something that would eventually wrinkle, wither, or sag. Secondly, I wanted this flesh only on condition that it wouldn't shake or disturb me too much or, if it did move me cataclysmically, it would do so only towards a greater understanding of myself. Just as the first then barred me from enthroning in my imagination a sustained coupling, a lifelong union, so did the second. For to bring me closer to myself as a truthteller was not to play the sentimentalist or deceiver but rather to confront my animality *tout nu.*

(The kind of critical remark that's so easy to imagine at this stage and the kind

of retort that, because I never have it on my lips, I hasten to write down)

A. Sir, say what you will about confronting your animality, there are many who'll think you're only justifying your immorality.

B. True, but the many who'll think that way are precisely those who don't openly confront their animality.

A. Tut, tut, sir! That's an ad hominem argument.

B. Precisely.

Be that I was of less than immaculate bearing, be that I was a sort of moral hybrid, a repressed voluptuary or a restrained sensualist, the upshot of my diverse drives was that, while having a trainer's eye for a good regime, I had a gourmet's or voluptuary's eye for varied experiences. Of course this sort of thing had characterized my earlier years but, after returning from Europe, it was a much more refined and conscious part of my day-to-day. It spanned both sitting in a classroom and sitting in a theatre as well as much else that could be spanned by these in a figurative sense. Being refined enough to let me know how unrefined I was in this or that circumstance, it was also such as to let me bob up and down in these circumstances without excessive agitation. I was never so chagrined as to lose my essential enthusiasm nor so cocksure as to close off all internal debate and questioning. Even the sense that I was sailing into an area of personal weakness didn't always make me change course even if it often made me flinch and in fact quite often produced the opposite effect. The one of rallying me to do my best even when I knew my best was less than a shining affair.

What kind of rapport can there be between erudition and earthiness other than the one between order and errancy? To value the first is to value knowledge of the whole of something including knowledge *of the whole*. But by itself, strictly by itself, order or erudition is always mechanical and on the way to becoming moribund. But of course it is never strictly by itself and so it only has this tendency.

This tendency that is nonetheless very old and very tendentious and, with the long-held faith in God or reason or the two together grounding it and running along its whole base and taking it from broad base to highest peak, a veritable mountain exposing itself to the blasts of the four winds. As such, it gives the appearance of being old and young at the same time: unmoveable, unshakeable, unchangeable. A thing born anew every day. A towering backdrop casting long shadows over more ephemeral things.

Mechanical, mountainous, moribund, tendentious: these are no doubt incongruous elements that mix together magnificence and meanness with a flat efficiency that can run either way. Yet such mental and emotional traffic, such a confused bustling of thoughts and feelings, is what we have from the cradle to the grave and it would be hard to dignify it were it not for something else that infiltrates it and makes it act like a spur on us. That makes it already the question, the thing to be questioned, the way of demanding something better from and for ourselves as well as from it. Something like the transformation or transfiguration of it or something like a true sign that the best of all possible worlds has already manifested itself in one way or another and that its proximity to us is real and perhaps only a few steps away.

Well, of course I have in mind here the greatest reach of all things, all human striving and not simply my own. Not simply my own poor way that may very well be a spoke in the wheel of others. But to confess this is not much more than to note that, given what a great wheel the world or, for that matter, an institution is, I tend to be more of an irritating straw, if anything at all, than an obstructing spoke. And so, as a consequence, more protective of my own personal freedom (not to mention survival) than tender in my conscience with respect to any threat I might pose to that greater freedom. More protective then of a paradoxically greater freedom than the greater freedom just mentioned insofar as the former, qualitatively speaking, outranks the latter.

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16. The Scholarly Climb

From the very first I looked upon the university as a kind of mountain to be climbed and as a kind of spiritual temptation or tendency to be resisted. Years of treating the world itself as a sort of university had made me both covetous of what it had to offer as well as suspicious of its operation. Principally I had my eye on the fault line that runs along all thought evaluated and credited such that it may be influenced by outside interests. Of course the university holds up an ideal of thought opposed to this and, like the average promise maker, holds good in the main. On the other hand, it is also very much like him when it comes to transgressions of the more minor sort.

I couldn't be tolerant of the university's lapses as I could of the average promise maker's because, in the case of the former, a formal position was taken up with respect to truthtelling. The university was the institution that declared itself to be interested in virtually no other operation or, if it did offer benefits and services of another sort, haled these unquestionably valued attributes as being dependent on and subordinate to its one great operation. In a rough sort of way this was true but, on account of this very roughness, I found it to be unsatisfactory. I sensed a danger in being so caught up in the university's ways and means, so caught up in its mentality, that its loose integrity – loose from where I was sitting – would have been correspondingly taken up.

Such was the situation for me in the beginning and such would it be for me for many years to come. So little of the social crusader was there in it and yet so much of the spiritual that I longed for nothing more than internal change and growth as befit understanding this situation. Putting myself in the belly of the whale, so to speak, was an experiment to see if it would regurgitate me or if I would have to escape it like Odysseus from the cave of the Cyclops. Or, if on the contrary, I would be able to succeed with a certain amount of wiliness in making some part of it my chosen domicile.

Well, it was clear I was in no hurry, careful in my own way, and yet careless in the way of the world for not being more pressed and less fastidious. The importance that the average bourgeois attaches to keeping their house clean or at least to that part most on display was what I attached to my studies. Indeed, it unquestionably belonged to that part of my life where I was most hygienic and proper, most scrupulous not to let anything slip that I judged to be false or second-rate. Only on one occasion do I recall doing something a bit out of keeping with this, a bit contrary to what I had always attempted to do. It was an exercise in a course that I took directly after the one called *Twentieth Century Poetry and Poetics*. I ended up doing very well in it but, with respect to the exercise in question, I wrote a short piece on a subject I didn't know very well and didn't feel very deeply. As a piece of creative writing, it failed and the good professor let me know.

But what am I to make of the fact that the only short story I ever wrote in my life came out of the same course and that, furthermore, its nature, although not strictly autobiographical, was close to it? And that this same short story, although a very modest thing, was more successful than any play I wrote in the following years?[11]

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11 **My Youthful Social Conformity and Its Tragic Consequences**

When I was very young and very innocent, ignorant of myself and the world, vulnerable to unruly circumstance, and desperately in need of stability and certainty in

Why did I spend thirteen years writing plays that didn't succeed after writing a short story that did? Why did I write this story in the autobiographical mode and then not follow up with similar ones? Why continue to belabour these points if not to keep roughly to the task at hand while giving me one more opportunity to posit a greater project stretching throughout my life and subterraneously at work? One of extended errancy, diversity, and self-examination that, by being able to be posited over and over again, allows me to think I wasn't a complete fool during those years.

One thing is certain: that university studies attracted me and, like my European trip at its best, gave me no small satisfaction. I was lucky enough to find, as well as judicious enough to

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life, older and wiser minds set down the rules and guidelines which I, for the most part, adhered to – if not entirely without resistance, then without questioning their validity. From the earliest age my parents instructed me, often with praise or admonishment, to be honest with everybody, including myself, to be respectful of other people, and not to trespass on the rights of others. From my teachers I learned to recognize and obey those in authority, to assume good behaviour, and to value hard work. All of this was meant to lay the groundwork for my development as a person and to help me find my rightful place in society.

When I was somewhat older, less of an innocent, and more cognizant of myself and my surroundings, the pressure to conform took a radically different turn. My parents and teachers no longer held complete sway over me; they still had their influence but now there came to the fore an outside will which wielded no visible authority yet was stronger than they were. It did not have to shout or scold me into submission but commanded without articulation and came from no one direct source. Its voice was the lure of social acceptance and its command was to alter one's self, if necessary, to achieve it.

In my early adolescent years I had a problem of not being able to win acceptance from my classmates because of an inherently shy and introverted nature. I used to spend most of my time reading and doing homework. Rarely was I a part of a crowd of laughing, jostling girls and boys. How I longed for the shared intimacy I saw among them! How I anguished over the shortcomings I saw in myself which impeded me from becoming as they were! Gradually I devoted less time to studies, books, and personal daydreams, and became a hanger-on with one group of classmates. I learned to talk as they talked and act as they acted. As they scorned books and studies, so did I. As they saw amusement in everything, so did I. Their ideas became my ideas, and their values became my values. The teacher was an enemy; the school was a prison. Parents were a nuisance, worse, a confounded annoyance intruding upon your privacy and interfering with your fun and freedom. Having friends over to your house and playing records was really the thing to do and everything else mattered about as much as an obscure date in a history text.

When my interest turned sharply towards the opposite sex, it was even more important that I be 'in'. Two from my group of male friends began carrying on coy conversations with a couple of the prettiest girls in class. This soon progressed to open flirtation and before long the four of them were announcing that they were going steady. The rest of us in the group, not having girlfriends, enviously regarded our former peers who were now a peg above us, and we sought to emulate them. We hung around our successful friends as much as we could, badgering them with anxious questions about sex and romance, identifying our needs with their needs, our desires with their desires, our selves with their selves. Their girlfriends were quickly incorporated into our group and, as was natural, they brought a few of their female friends along with them. Even so, one and a half years of heartache and feeling dreadfully abnormal went by before I had the desired feature of a girl walking by my side in the school hallway.

set up, conditions that were nearly perfect for me. Part-time studies, small classes, courses carefully chosen (as well as rejected), no sense of haste – these were some of the factors that made my first years at university so enjoyable. Never was I one who had to complain about being bored by a course or, with a few minor exceptions, some aspect of it. As much as I should give credit to the university for this, so I should give credit to the commitment I had made even before I entered it. In effect, I had vowed to myself that my studies there would proceed with pleasure and passion or not at all.

Even to this day I find this zero tolerance for boredom in education striking. Apart from never having met anyone in university who held to it to the same degree I did, it sums up how much I strove to have the alignment of head and heart as perfect as possible. In truth, it was an ideal I kept on realizing in much the same way that a respectable, law-abiding citizen does his. That is, it was so infused with the image I had of myself that any abuse of it would have seemed an outrage that required immediate remedy or retaliation.

Yet though I had some difficulties along this path, they never took a critical turn. At least this was the case all the long years I was a part-time student at the University of Winnipeg and then, for a couple of years later, a full-time one. This period of my life therefore invites, contrary to a later period, a story not of high drama but rather one of simply crossing swords from time to time with the powers that be.

If I were to carry on from this point with a section that had the look of wanting to be

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My male friends now talked in a certain way about girls which I felt compelled to imitate. Its vocabulary included such terms and expressions as 'scoring', 'easy lay', 'how many times?', and 'was she good?' Never having done more than neck with my girl didn't prevent me from, as can be imagined, holding my own end up in these conversations.

When I left junior high for high school, there occurred a big shakeup of friends and groups of friends. I retained no ties with anybody I had known in junior high. I belonged now to a group of sometime students who were basically a rude, coarse lot. Drinking beer, driving fast cars, fighting, going to weekend bashes, and making as many girls as possible were our main activities and what practically all our free-time thoughts centred on.

Although I did not fit in well with this group, I struggled to assume their attitudes of mind, habits of living, and priorities in life. I grew rough and surly with whoever was outside our group and whom I took a casual dislike to. I treated girls only as I thought they should be treated in order to win favours from them. I was forever skipping classes and, in those I did attend, I was inattentive and given to being smart with the teachers.

Thus it should have come as no surprise to me when I learned that I had failed my final year. Yet it did. The distressing thought of having to repeat a year served me well in one way. I began to rethink the course my life had taken, to weigh the consequences it was having for me, and to question the results I was looking for.

Everything that I had been earliest taught was contradicted and undermined by my efforts to win social acceptance. These efforts had retarded my growth as a person and diminished my chances of being successful in later years. Instead of trying to develop myself as a unique and independent person, I had hastened to identify myself with those around me whom I thought better off than I. I had changed my true thoughts and feelings, interests, and values that they might conform to those of the group. I had suffered a loss in myself of myself that no circle of friends, no association with others, and no family member or loved one could ever restore to me.

entitled *My Struggles,* I would risk not only a presumption that goes without being punctured by criticism but also a simplification of matters that, so far as I can see, I have managed to avoid up to now. And yet however complicated things are, it can't be said that one shouldn't try to express them as simply as possible. This involves a constant negotiation that I never feel done with. In the case at hand, it is a matter of keeping in mind the close proximity between what one detests in scholarship and what one is indebted to. Between being repulsed, discomforted, and even unhinged at times and having the motivation, inclination, and handful of reasons to think long and hard about a subject.

But detesting something is, on the one hand, a much more immediate state of affairs and feeling one's indebtedness, particularly towards the thing detested, is, on the other hand, a much more deferred and drawn-out one. Once-bitter enemies often become old friends who look upon their former differences no longer as a war-like struggle but rather as one that, fought against some third party, was unfortunately marred and misunderstood by differing strategies. It takes time for such a situation to develop though. It takes time for various war-like attitudes and postures to break down because, once one takes up a position, it is very difficult to do other than defend it. To reinforce it over and over again and attack those who would dare to attack it. At least it is difficult if not impossible to make other moves than these at bottom for, as it must be admitted, there is a ceremony of innocence that goes along with them. A strong and no doubt necessary tendency on the part of thinkers to obscure or subordinate them by stressing a collective objective called truth.

All of this I'm concerned to map out as best I can along with what runs cross-current to it, namely, the war of words that never ceases but only undergoes various permutations. Speaking close to home where I speak best, I should say that *On Truthtelling* could be viewed as an act of war despite all the talk about being indebted to the enemy and, as it might seem, wanting to be reconciled with him. For the enemy, more often than not, sees the olive branch being held out to him as a gesture merely disguising another one of less amiable and altruistic bent. True enough, there is seldom an open avowal of this since a large number of truthtellers pay homage to an etiquette barring a *procès d'intention.* A whole area of truthtelling, understood of course in the expanded sense, is thereby blocked off and, along with it, whatever inclination there may be to declare that the above-mentioned olive branch is in effect a laurel wreath with which one or another opponent of good will wishes to crown himself.

All right, let it be admitted that there is this resistance of sorts that has followed a long and winding path and finally culminated in this long and winding, not to mention windy, report on it. Virtually everything that pertains to this largely defensive strategy points to preserving an integrity of sorts that is assailed on all sides and neither wholly right nor wholly wrong in itself. All that is wholly right is that things of this nature should have their exceptional moment, should have what keeps their value high and even what allows them to keep any value at all. If I had never believed myself to be one of these moments, it is not likely I could have propelled myself this far. How I have managed to do so has of course already been a good part of my task and, if I don't miss my guess, I will have to continue to bear down on this task even more than previously. One thing is certain: it is as heterogeneous as can be and only homogeneous to the extent that it focuses on a major preoccupation.

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17. The Critical Voice

– But this flagrant beating of the drum for yourself is irksome and tiresome. It's like a continual circling around a subject of second-rate importance. Long before you reached this point of your autobiographical essay, the question of where you stood or, for that matter, stand in relation to such and such a thinker, theory, or line of thought stood open and in need of response. It can't go very well for the subject of truthtelling if all but the voice of one truthteller is heard and countless others are relegated to a mute background.

Whose voice is this that is both mine and not mine? That is both sympathetic enough to attach me to it and unsympathetic enough to seem like the enemy? No doubt it is part and parcel of a common enough practise, seen very much amongst scholars, of imagining others raising objections to their work in order to, in quasi-dialogue fashion, take on all comers and come out the victor. Indeed, I can't fail to be part of their company insofar as I share a sufficient number of their values not to want to be ignored by them.

It would do well perhaps to let this inner critic, this consciousness of being able to be criticized from all sides, show his horns and get his oar in on occasion. Such a move would be close to capturing all aspects of the truthteller whereas the latter as pure monologue is already operating with the presumption that the truth can be told separate from the teller. In truth, I don't think that I myself can dispense with this presumption but only keep pointing to it. Such an equivocal or shuttling-back-and-forth manoeuvre of course flies in the face of so much that goes down as truthtelling and, for this reason, it will be a constant effort to let the critic have his say.

– Despite various feints to bring in other voices, you always resume the monologue of knowing the truth.

I certainly want to do more than feint other voices. I want to properly register them. But nothing can be done outside the so-called monologue of knowing the truth about my subject insofar as it is *my* monologue and *my* moment to hold court. All I can do is make it as open as possible on the basis of believing that it has never been quite open before. It has never been the case before that one could see clear through the thinker to his subject and then back again. In such an elevated state of transparency, whatever systemacity there may be must flow from – must in fact be one with – the multiplicity that is the subject as truthteller in relation to the other, the subject as truthtelling.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

18. Harking Back to the Heroic

Getting back to my university studies, I'm ready to enter into the fray of what others think and do. Already I can foresee many diverse soundings in a vast area but not nearly so vast as it could be.[12] And already I can foresee the inconclusive results of these soundings as they result from, while trying to tell the truth about truthtelling, trying to tell the truth about myself. I can foresee the *heterogeneity* of all this as it comes more in the artistic mastery of the scholarly than the scholarly mastery of my subject.[13]

Blessed be the professor of the course I took called *Ancient Epic and Drama*. He was a middle-aged man with a humped back, a turtle-like neck and head, and an enthusiasm for ancient Greece and Rome that made one quickly forget his deformity. Always in high spirits and with boundless energy and enthusiasm, he romped through Homer, Virgil, and Ovid as well as the tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. He did so while bringing up a range of architectural, historical, biographical, geographic, touristic, and other points of interest. And he also did so in a range of tones that could go from the quite gay to the quite serious. Sometimes his voice would fall to a hush that signalled his awe and reverence for some aspect of high culture either in antiquity in general or in ancient Greece in particular. Indeed, if I had known only professors who approached their subjects with the fervour and intensity he did, it is not likely I would have been able to make a career out of getting my back up at Academia.[14]

Failing this purity of intention, the university was forever less a potential home for me than a path to negotiate. An arduous climb in which its inherent and even monumental superiority in the way of erudition intimidated me less than any thought I might abandon it as *my* way. Failing this purity of intention, the university couldn't have been a home to me without me no longer being at home with myself. The idealistic and egoistic were bound up in this space of wanting to be different that was forever a hair's breath away from, on the one hand, a smug sense of superiority and, on the other, a feeling of ineptitude and deficiency.

Dr. Gold was in a class by himself and yet I never had the slightest wish to be like him. For purity of intention, insofar as there is such a thing or, more properly, insofar as I'm constrained to use this expression, was what I myself enjoyed as a student as well as an additional something that pertains to specialization or rather the lack of it or rather the lack I perceived as springing from it.

If so early I could mark the distance between my own interests and the interests of what I considered to be the ideal university professor, it was most certainly with the awareness that no one scholarly area, however full and rich in itself, could be my permanent home. The idea of filling up the foreground with an increasingly more detailed study of one subject while consigning to the background so much else was abhorrent to me. To be sure, it was a fine thing to be able to read Greek and Latin as well as to teach them as Dr Gold did, but I certainly didn't

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12 What a sea of scholarship there is! So much to be seen and yet can never be seen! So much to plumb and yet can never be plumbed! So much to ride upon and yet, no matter how great the waves stirred up, can never be troubled and trafficked with except in some small part.

13 And here is the whole matter of not being able to speak to the point about it. Or, rather, only being able to speak to *one* point, namely, that truthtelling is complication and even over-complication. What is left then but a poverty of definition, explanation, and argumentation that can only be justified by pointing to the innumerable definitions, explanations, and arguments that constitute it?

14 For then the university and its professors would have been the embodiment of a certain purity of intention that I myself was striving for and that largely had, as its own impurity, a will to be in some sense superior.

think it more important than, for example, reading the works of a renowned literary theorist by the name of Northrop Frye. Such was what I was doing at the time and it comes to mind now for two reasons. First because it allowed me to take in a highly sophisticated survey of all Western literature that not only embraced the Greco-Roman but the Judeo-Christian tradition. Secondly because, having mentioned Northrop Frye to Dr. Gold on one occasion, I was surprised to find out he knew virtually nothing about him.

But if I were to hold that specialization was anathema to me, I would risk overlooking a persistent motif that kept cropping up in my work and harks back to my preoccupation with the heroic. It would be quite a task to go through all the essays I wrote and pick out this motif. Whatever significance there is in this, and it seems that it is still a thing to be worked out, strikes me as occurring on two levels. First, that I was willing to look at the heroic from many different angles. Secondly, that this value, virtue, or way of living normally doesn't get much play in Academia.

Suppose that I felt that, in light of the seeming devaluation of the heroic in the bourgeois world that the university itself represents, my self-image was to some extent compromised or called into question. Suppose that this state of affairs was operating on a level I was barely conscious of and involved trying to negotiate my way in or through this world. If such were the case, it must certainly have brought to my studies a personal stake or investment that, given my lack of the usual long-term objectives, would have been in some sense beneficial. Not only didn't I have any job, vocation, or profession in sight, but I wasn't even concerned about obtaining a degree. Such high-performance sticking power as I had then must have come from some other source.

Truly I cannot think of any other way to give some precision to the spiritual side of my studies other than by putting forth this hypothesis. What others dreamed and imagined was not there for me, not pulling me along, not making me tailor my expectations and ambitions to what had the look of being most practical and success-oriented. The strongest image I had was of cutting my own path and examining all those matters that lay closest to my heart. But I didn't stop at any time to identify these matters precisely. I simply fell upon them as they came along.

But I must ask myself now how such an identifying task might play itself out? Must it involve swelling myself up as a hero and to such a degree that little has significance apart from it? Is this playing of the hero even now symptomatic of a built-in bias to my subject? But, then again, is truthtelling ever without heroes and hero-worshipping of one kind or another? Could there have ever been a philosopher worth his salt, as Paul Ricoeur says in *La Métaphore vive*, who didn't imagine himself getting closer to the truth than all previous philosophers?

– It seems you're lacking a definition of the heroic? Is it grandstanding and calling attention to yourself? Is it crediting to yourself some truthtelling virtue that others don't have? Or is it, on the basis of a mere assumption, identifying it with some drive to fame and glory?

With respect to this matter, I have sensed a certain queasiness in myself right from the beginning. Being directly involved, I'm aware that I'm potentially subject to letting self-inflating and self-aggrandizing impulses get the upper hand. As much as I don't want this to happen, I keep reminding myself that the heroic is multiple, complex, and morally wide-ranging. Moreover, such a view of the heroic pretty well sums up my investigation of it as a long-term project more explicit and less all-encompassing than the one that, before it got signed up as *On*

Truthtelling, could hardly identify itself. A project that nonetheless only got underway informally during my earliest university years and kept up a certain awareness or presence largely on the basis of topics I chose to write about.[15]

"*Rocky*: A Review"

"It's a movie that was made to appeal to anybody who has ever dreamed of becoming a somebody. The hero is introduced to us as a second or third-rate boxer who has his best fighting years behind him. Moreover, his career is adversely affected by his lifestyle that, to put it mildly, is one of less than Spartan training and discipline. He is free about drinking wine and beer with the local boys, he allows himself a cigarette from time to time, and he trains only when he's not at his bread-and-butter job of collecting loans for a loan shark. By sheer luck and due to no special merit of his own, he gets a crack at fighting with the world heavyweight champion in a specially arranged bout. It is characteristic of Hollywood fantasy that not only does he put up a good fight against the champion, but nearly succeeds in scoring an upset victory. As it stands, he enjoys a tremendous personal triumph by lasting the full fifteen rounds, something no previous challenger has done. He thereby proves to be the fighter that no one, including himself, had ever believed possible.

"The story appears to be a rehashing of the American dream. Rocky comes to fight the world heavyweight champion not because he has the best record of all the local Philadelphia fighters from whose ranks he's chosen. Rather, it's because his ring-title, *the Italian Stallion*, sounds good for promotional purposes. Thus his rising to new heights is first and foremost a fluke, bearing little resemblance to the slow hard climb from the bottom to the top that is more characteristic of true-to-life success stories.

"What the film seeks to provide us with is the picture of a man transcending himself, reaching new and loftier heights through sheer effort, will, courage, and determination. Once Rocky decides that he will go against the heavyweight champion, he sets up a strict regimen. He gets up every morning at four o'clock, gulps down five raw eggs, and then runs through the still-dark city. At some point he stops off at a meatpacking plant and pummels a side of beef until his hands are raw and bloody. Later on during the day he works out at the gym, doing difficult one-armed pushups, punching the speed bag, and sharpening his footwork. As the days and weeks of his training go by, we witness, to the accompaniment of rock music, that he is becoming markedly stronger and fitter. A startling transformation occurs during the two or three minutes of the film which are all that are needed to depict the five full weeks of Rocky's intensive training. From the bumfighter that he formerly credited himself with being (an opinion that most of his entourage shared), he turns into a serious contender for the heavyweight championship of the world.

"Rocky is not the only one to undergo an astonishingly rapid and dramatic growth. His girlfriend from the pet shop, after one night spent in his apartment, changes from an extremely shy insecure nervous woman to an affectionate sensual creature who has also gained a good

15 Here is where I begin integrating essays of the past into the present one. By bringing in even more thematically related but heterogeneous elements, I risk a diffusion that borders on confusion and a self-exploration that borders on self-indulgence. By the same token, my ongoing task is one of admitting them not so confusedly or self-indulgently as would be the case if my subject were not the one it is.

measure of self-confidence. She is finally able to assert herself against her abusive foul-mouthed brother. Whatever the degree or depth of the personality problem she had before she met Rocky, it is effectively rooted out by the simple expedient of sleeping with him. She in effect becomes a new and stronger woman just as he becomes a vastly improved fighter. Since he is responsible for the change in both cases, he wins the admiration of the audience by two masterful if unlikely strokes.

"The pleasing, paradoxical, and sympathetic personality of Rocky is the essential ingredient of the film. Without it, the simplistic way in which he achieves his successes as a fighter and lover, as well as the achievements themselves, would be of little interest or attraction. He is shown to be a kind and gentle man who just happens, as it seems, to be a participant in a brutal sport and a leg-breaker on the side. He is merciful in his professions: he spares a man the breaking of his thumb when he comes to collect from him; he forgives an old trainer the ten years of disinterest in his career. He is also a friend of the neighbourhood: he accepts a slug of wine from a group of hippies on a street corner; he picks up a drunk collapsed outside a bar; he plays the role of a guidance counsellor for a teenage girl who hangs out with a bad crowd. He is also a lover of animals: he talks to his pet turtles and to the budgies in the pet shop; he does some of his roadwork with a dog on a leash. When he courts the girl from the pet shop, he is tactful, charming, amusing, and considerate in a crude but charming way. The first gentle kiss he wins from her lips is in sharp contrast to the fight scenes with their body blows and bloody jabs to the head.

"Rocky is the kind of hero the average person can easily identify with. He starts off as a fairly common type, a normal joe who, along with his situation, has built-in limitations. He's an ignorant, uneducated, and aging fighter who seemingly has only the prospect of going even further downhill before him. Despite all this, his casual self-acceptance, his sense of humour, his frank and unassuming manner prevent him from looking like a sad case. His faults endear him to us as much as his good points. When he finally takes on heroic stature, we are behind him and thrill to his success. The vicarious enjoyment we receive from watching Rocky unexpectedly knock down his superior opponent and thereby come close to winning the world heavyweight championship is the voice of the underdog in all of us crying out for recognition."

With respect to the hero of such a movie, why do people accept the unlikely and even preposterous if not to let admiration flow without reserve? If not to let a striking image or event take on the aspect of greatest significance? What was there in me that didn't object to falsehood, that could at least give it a reprieve from critical censure while I was being swept up by various emotions? Is there any way to answer these questions apart from admitting that truth is rivalled by other values and that, furthermore, its own particular value is relative to circumstances that neither do away with it nor send it aloft entirely free and independent?

Yet truth can't be what it is other than by at least *seeming* to be free and independent. Even though, strictly speaking, it never is nor ever will be this pure independence, it must be the movement that sustains this image as idea. Hence even its identification with the divine sphere eventually had to be challenged. Set up as it was like a cross on a mountain (with all attendant forms, fetishes, and fakery), its loftiness as divine revelation was eventually taken to be, generally considered, less than the sure flight of reason. The corresponding exaltation of the latter was one with identifying it with truth while at the same time allowing it to be of such a nature as to overfly it as an always further exercise and inquiry while leaving behind its own true

markings as an ever-enlarged text and better-known world. But then the identification of truth with this text and this world clapped on a restraint that, if reason were to keep flying high, meant that it had to circle back and feed and defecate even in its most hallowed precincts.

Surely truthtelling was carrying around the seeds of its own destruction when telling the truth about truth itself had to become a task. At the same time the very fact that other values have always been secretly at work in truthtelling has preserved and continues to preserve it in much the way that numerous interests preserve an immense industry. Its self-destructive role as such has always been and continues to be played out on the margins.

Being myself what might be called a self-destructive moment of truthtelling and, at the same time, one inexorably caught up in its industry, I represent, as it seems, something sacrificial, something tragic, something that exalts truthtelling by virtue of its seeming willingness not simply to be part of its industry but also an ideal so thoroughly elevated as to risk itself. Herein would be an explanation as to why the heroic has always exerted such a hold on me or at least why I haven't been able to approach truthtelling without having it as a frame of reference.

Of course it is far from the case that the heroic always keeps company with the tragic and this is no less true in truthtelling than in other spheres. In order to speak fairly about the matter, it should be admitted that the heroic can be found wherever there is singular courage, devotion to duty, accomplishment, endurance, and so on. Therefore any analysis of it shouldn't rob others of what is their due but neither should it fall short in crediting to the heroic as *tragically* heroic its specifically excessive, overreaching, risk-taking, and therefore super-charged valorization of value and meaning. Herein lies an area where moral judgement can range from commendation of the most exalted sort to condemnation of greatest sorrow, anguish, and upset.

When I took up *The Iliad* in Dr. Gold's class, the preposterous as I name it now and as it no doubt pertains to a knowledge of contemporary things and a twentieth century perspective – the preposterous had such a look of grandeur about it that my attitude towards it was less critical than curious. In a longish essay entitled "Homer's Treatment of War in *The Iliad*," I noted that the Trojan War was depicted as being, apart from the participation of a handful of Olympian gods such as Zeus, Hera, Athene, Ares, and Apollo, mainly a series of battles between a handful of warrior leaders with superhuman strength and prowess such as Achilles, Hector, Agamemnon, Odysseus, Menelaus, Aeneus, Sarpedon, Patroclus, and Diomedes. Of course what was submerged in such a depiction of war, in such a depiction no less aesthetic than ethical, was the vast number of common soldiers who lost all individuality and personal value and, as a sort of headless and faceless mass, formed nothing more than a majestic backdrop for the heroes.

"When the common soldiers are mentioned, it is to describe the spectacle of warfare. The forces unleashed by war are compared, for example, to those in nature: the two armies meet like mountain streams in a ravine, the Greeks sweep into battle like great waves on a beach, and the Myrmidons pour from their ships like cold flakes before a northerly gale. This imagery conveys nature's beauty and grandeur onto the battlefield."

Why was I not critical of this lack of veracity in the depiction of war, in this patent omission of its immense confusion and messiness, of its wide-scale horror and ugliness, if it were not that I thought that it was the only way to get at truth from another angle? That is, truth more revelatory than propositional or empirical, more caught up at the heart of human desire and imagination. More caught up then where these two most display their great motivating range and power and so before they encounter other factors that decidedly complicate them?

But then again the question is: Why are the heroes of *The Iliad* mainly tragic and what is it that proceeds from them that didn't proceed from the sort of superheroes that captured my imagination as a child? If it doesn't have something to do with mortality, with the fact that we are all conscious of it, with the fact that this consciousness is, generally speaking, a painful thing, then the interest in and concern for the heroes of *The Iliad* – an interest and concern that I daresay exceeds what we give to the gods – remains inexplicable. To identify with Zeus or some other god only goes so far: it carries us out of this world towards the possibility of another. To identify with a Greek or Trojan hero, on the other hand, however implausible his stature and circumstances, is to rest within a world similar enough to our own to give to a glorified life or career a sort of practical grounding.

A sort of practical grounding, indeed, and yet this is far from saying that it has all rationality and good sense on its side. It is only to say that a certain portion of rationality and good sense is necessary to credit a course or career with meaning. I think I stumbled across this point in my essay without quite recognizing it. Certainly I noted that, on the one hand, the heroes were very mindful of their personal reasons for being on the battlefield. That is, their reasons not with reference to anything complicated but simply to values that they had inculcated and that pertained to their specific role in society.

> Why do the Lycians at home distinguish you and me with marks of honour, the best seats at the banquet, the first cut off the joint, and never-empty cups? . . . Does not all this oblige us now to take our places in the Lycian van and fling ourselves into the flames of battle?

On the other hand, I noted that the reasons for the war itself and, more particularly, for prolonging it and not getting it resolved by peaceful means were so weak as to slide the whole venture into absurdity.

"Why the Trojans go on with the war and risk eventual defeat and destruction by not giving into the demand that Helen be returned to her lawful husband is hard to understand. It certainly could not be out of any deep love or respect for her or, for that matter, the man who stole her away from her husband. Although Priam and Hector have always treated Helen properly, the rest of her family have abused her and, as for the townspeople, well, it is clear they would like to see the last of her. Most Trojans even have a lower opinion of Paris than they do of Helen. The soldiers who are fighting largely on behalf of his interests 'loathe him, all of them, like the death.' Hector chides him for being a vain, self-centred coward. Even Helen scorns him. On top of all this, the Trojans certainly are not fighting the Greeks because Helen prefers to stay with them. Time and again she wishes that she had never left her native city and come to Troy with Paris. Given all these considerations, the wisest policy would be to relinquish her. Yet when an assembly is held at Priam's palace and a proposal is made to this effect, a single objection by Paris is enough to quash it."

It is this both having and not having good reasons for great effort, for in fact upholding a cause for which one is willing to die, that now strikes me as not being merely accidental but central to the tragically heroic. In essence it involves a special commitment of sorts that ties the heroic to the human and, indeed, the all too human while allowing it to be in some sense *super*human.

"*The Iliad* is rife with illustrations of the difference between how the Olympian gods and

how their human counterparts look upon war. For the first it is largely a piece of theatre, a monumental sport or spectacle in which they can intervene at will. Being indestructible, they are just as much magnificent dilettantes – meddlers, idlers, boasters, and gamesters in their war-fevered antics – as participants. By turns they take on the aspect of amused onlookers and quarrelsome backers, of frivolous actors and headstrong players while moving about on a stage that, stretching between heaven and earth, surpasses the one that the heroes rush about on. Built-in limitations and, more particularly, ever-present danger and death are then what gives seriousness to the game."

– Is there any reason why one shouldn't assume that a person could make a great, indeed, a heroic effort on the basis of good reasons rather than bad ones? And, furthermore, doesn't such a person represent the human condition better than the other sort?

Whoever purports to have or seems to have no bad reason for doing what he is doing is not so much a person who presents himself fully as one who presents himself as the *image* of a full person. An idealized image, to be sure, and one that can accommodate the heroic as much as dispense with it. Keeping up this idealized image is virtually indistinguishable from keeping up the ideal. Specifically, the one of being able to reach right down to the foundations of being and draw the line between good and evil even at these lowest depths.

The tragically heroic is what makes so much else in human affairs look like dilettantism. Unlike the spirit that moves and resides amongst the usual round of platitudinous proclamations exalting this or that, it is not something that gives way the moment danger and death move towards it. It is precisely at this moment of willing to risk all and pay the highest price that some principle, practise, or program, be it new-born or age-old, gets the fullest spiritual endorsement. From this point of view, the tragically heroic is entirely open to a multitude of possibilities that take it from the best to the worst. At the same time it is hard to imagine anything in human affairs that, having value attached to it, doesn't have this sort of commitment lurking behind it somewhere.

– Your point is not well-taken. Such things as love, friendship, wisdom, and so on have intrinsic value and require nothing in the way of sacrifice or suffering to keep them intact and essentially what they are.

I suppose what I'm getting at is that great valuing is mixed up with great seriousness and that, just as the first takes in the act of valuing itself, so the second takes in suffering and death. Any standardized valuing or lesser seriousness must at least be potentially in touch with these and potentially able to manifest itself as tragically heroic. Otherwise it won't be able to resist a slide towards dilettantism or, more properly, stop this slide that is always underway and always threatening to swallow up the spiritually neglected and atrophied.

This business of the tragically heroic as highest spiritual endorsement was a preoccupation of mine in a second essay I wrote for Dr. Gold. At the time I had no clear thought of the tragically heroic as a specifically valorizing or vitalizing principle and so my study of it, although ambitious, was limited and self-contained. As usual, I sought to convey the full measure of what I was up to in my title. For this reason it shouldn't hurt to blazon it forth now even though this essay remains to this day unpublished and simply part of my private papers.

The Nature of Noble Suffering and the Noble Nature Suffering:
A Comparative Study of Shakespeare's
Lear and Sophocles' Oedipus

When the intellectual, emotional, and imaginative meet with a kind of high-level intensity that throws none of them in the shade, something is sounded that cries out meaning and value for this world and being human in it. Perhaps it is only now I can measure this against what is always in some sense threatening our estate and what I would be less inclined to call nothingness than infinite change. To the latter would belong what surpasses the human even in terms of all human value and meaning: the unimaginable state of what is not for us but for the always-coming-to-be. But for us of course this is equivalent to nothingness or has always been interpreted as such and, as a consequence, we have lodged in its place a god or gods as ultimate security. The plan or picture is almost perfect save for the fact that the divine sphere never quite loses its illusory, deceptive, or arbitrary look. A compensatory movement is then in some sense called for from the human sphere. Here there is only one currency that can be used to purchase value and meaning if these two are to be reckoned priceless.

But what I might note now is that there is something inhuman in all this that ironically works on behalf of the human. That puts art and life on a par when suffering and death are not so close as to cause us more pain than pleasure, more horror than fascination, and more misery than exhilaration. Both the historical account and dramatic portrayal of suffering and death don't normally overwhelm our sensibilities: fear and pity, though they may very well be raised, are also anaesthetized. It could even be said that a certain celebration and joyousness attach themselves to suffering and death insofar as these make possible the highest affirmation.

But when I wrote the essay on Lear and Oedipus, I was still enough of an Aristotelian to think the world a timeless and ineffaceable script and the law of contradiction one of its fundamental traits. I consequently spoke about spiritual nobility as if I knew what it was in itself and so without realizing to what degree I spoke about it *for* myself. No doubt this explains why I was so discomfitted and at a loss for words when Dr. Gold, after lauding my essay, asked: "Yes, but after all, what is spiritual nobility?" A few brief comments he put down on my paper suggest that, for him, it lay on the side of resignation and obedience.

> *"A very good essay. You have thought the subject through. . . . Perhaps what [Oedipus] accepts is the complete control of the gods. He has learned submission just as Lear has been forced to adopt humility. Each has been forced to submit – Lear to the realities of his position and folly (without responsibility there is no power) and Oedipus to divine omnipotence."*

Everything that was important to me about Lear and Oedipus – still is important to me – was obviously not taken to heart by Dr. Gold. Not any more than I took to heart what was studied in a later course and, along with being a certain put down of the tragically heroic, close to the heart of a thinker I would nonetheless call a kindred spirit. Just as I was sympathetic to but not swept up by Kierkegaard's account of faith (which goes hand in hand with his vaunting the knight of faith over the tragic hero), so no doubt was Dr. Gold to what I had to say.

But this *for* myself, as I realize now, is only highly limited in one sense, in the most

private or personal sense, whereas in a much more extended sense, in the sense of its being indefinitely repeatable, it is highest affirmation. But as this highest affirmation, as this spiritual endorsement with virtually no intellectual, emotional, and imaginative remainder, it is not the pedantic or pedestrian that is being repeated but the exceptional or extraordinary moment. Not the thing itself, be it a virtue, duty, or principle, but its exceptional proximity to or equation with suffering and death.

I examined both Lear and Oedipus with particular attention to their various attributes and how, both in their striving and suffering of greatest moment, certain of these attributes seemed to come to the fore as being preeminently important to them, preeminently in need of being held to and not abandoned. Therefore it was not a renouncing but a maintaining of something in them that, as an act of will, spoke loudest to me. That declared that Oedipus would not be Oedipus if he had followed the usual advice to avoid danger. Or that Lear would not be Lear if he had followed the usual counsel to be patient and show forbearance. More sensible perhaps would they have been but also smaller. Men who carried around a number of half-prized virtues but not one that was fully prized. Or men who paid lip service to finding out the truth of a matter but backed down when it threatened them. Or, then again, men who, suffering both public and private humiliation, threw away the last shreds of their dignity in order to cling to the comfort of hearth and home.

Seeing the tragically heroic in Lear and Oedipus as an *in itself* blinded me to the fact that the tragically heroic can change, can in fact be many things, and that, with respect to either one of the above characters or their corresponding tragedies, there is always the possibility, indeed likelihood, that they will be staked out and supervised by other forms of the tragically heroic. Certainly one of the most central of these is the god-man who lays down his life for values that, on the ethical if not eschatological plane, have gained a kind of universal acceptance. But of course it doesn't end there and anyone who takes up the torch and is willing to go to the wall for what they believe in both demonstrates and delivers something that no possible argument can.

Looking back over this essay, I can't help but observe that I myself was anxious to play on at least one Christian motif. That is, a certain selflessness that both Lear and Oedipus show at the height of their agony and that, as captured in my imagination at the time, can perhaps be illustrated by saying that just as Christ looked past his own suffering to concern himself with the fate of others when he uttered his famous plea from the cross and begged forgiveness for his persecutors, so both Lear and Oedipus look past their suffering to concern themselves with others.

"Where Lear and Oedipus most come together is at that point they transcend their suffering most marvellously – at the moment when thoughts full of love and sympathy for others arise out of spirits as vexed and as sorrowed and as weighed down as nature can inflict on man."

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

19. The Critical Voices

– Are you planning to lead us through all your essays in such a way that, instead of getting scholarship, we get nothing more than ruminations?

It seems to me I'm long past the point I need to justify letting my thoughts range outside this thing called scholarship. This strict but not so strict as it thinks itself practise.

– Good Lord, what does he mean?

– What does *he mean?*

Still with the tragically heroic, I will bring up the matter of *Othello* and try to give some idea of not only my resistance to scholarly consensus but to something that might be called the combined weight of it and an exalted presence.

In the classroom circumstances that were mine some twenty-seven years ago, the latter was no less than Shakespeare. It was in a course that I took the same year as Dr. Gold's "Ancient Epic and Drama." *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Coriolanus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Measure for Measure*, *Twelfth Night*, *Henry IV*, *Part I*, *Henry V*, *The Merchant of Venice* – not one of these did I think was shorn of this exalted presence. But Shakespeare, the greatest dramatist of all time, had also written *Othello*, a play normally grouped with *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth* as the greatest of his tragedies. Having never read *Othello* before this course, I had no reason not to think I would be swept up by it as much as by the other plays.

"**The Reductional Factor on the Status of Othello as Tragic Hero**"

"This factor is quite simply the lessening of the reader's ability as he moves through the play to sustain the belief that the hero's downfall proceeds naturally from forces therein. The high degree of contrivance shown by the frequent and prolonged misunderstandings between the characters, the acts and omissions not thoroughly characteristic of them, and especially the wholly one-sided workings of chance – all these have a cumulative effect and impinge upon one's mind to the extent that the playwright's manipulation of character, plot, and circumstance becomes in and of itself a felt presence. It is in this sense that Othello becomes the victim of the playwright. The weakening of the dramatic illusion surrounding Othello's victimization by Iago as well as his transformation into a jealous monster, his consequent suffering, and his final redemption – this weakening impairs the reader's emotional involvement with him. A loss of belief in Othello's suffering and tragedy resulting from a loss of belief in the reasons for them must entail a corresponding loss of sympathy for the hero."

From my present standpoint, what is most important to me are not my views on *Othello* but a kind of unspoken law that always abided in me and prevented me from bypassing anything in my studies that caused me discomfort. In the case of this play, it was the feeling that the tragedy of the hero was being foisted on me, that his high-mindedness was being brought down to an unusual low-mindedness and then brought back to the former state only by artful ruses that surpassed even what an Iago was capable of. Of course I knew *Othello* was a highly successful

stage play and, although I hadn't seen a performance of it, I even ventured to think it might have been successful with me. But I was also willing to think that, had this occurred, it would have been due to some dramatic sleight of hand, some suspension of disbelief brought on by an over-fascination with the arch-villain, Iago, and his boundless verve and craftiness in playing the spider to Othello's fly.

Perhaps my protest in its most elementary form was that the scholarly agents and mouthpieces of Shakespeare were making *Othello* out to be a better tragedy than *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Richard III, and Coriolanus*. Perhaps I was encouraged in this view by the fact that I found few scholars who protested its improbable elements and the large role that chance played in shaping it into a tragedy rather than, had Iago finally been tripped up and hoisted with his own petard (had he not been blessed with phenomenal luck, in other words), the melodrama it would have been. In any event, I put myself in the role of the boy who cries the emperor has no clothes and systematically attacked it.

"Besides being an ingenious schemer and dissembler, Iago has, paradoxically enough, a widespread reputation for honesty. Since everyone accepts his observations and suggestions without questioning their truth or validity, he can freely go about manipulating all whom he catches up in his web. In addition, the human material he has to work with is excellently designed for this purpose. Everyone responds exactly as he determines they should and, when he is not around to be on top of the situation, exactly as he would *desire* they should. Roderigo is the easiest led or misled of Iago's dupes and this quality, along with the interest which he shares with Iago in the downfall of Cassio and Othello, makes him Iago's ideal stooge. Even so, it is very fortunate for Iago that Roderigo's ability to reason and think independently are so limited that he gives way to his mentor even when he has good reason not to. (This happens on at least three occasions.) Othello's free and open nature, his passionate temperament, his blackness, and his uneasiness with Venetian customs are precisely the traits Iago counts on to help him foster in his victim the belief that his wife is unfaithful. Cassio's quickness of temper, low tolerance for alcohol, and violent reaction to any affront are tailor-made to involve him in a brawl that is crucial for what follows later. Furthermore, his charming way with women is the very thing to make Othello suspect him on the basis of minimal evidence. Emilia's fearful obedience to her husband Iago is a prerequisite for her show of silence over the missing handkerchief that is, along with so much else in the play, crucial to the success of Iago's plot. Desdemona becomes the sacrificial pawn in Iago's game to destroy her husband by virtue of being the loving, obedient, faithful, and unassuming wife.

"The plot to cashier Cassio, although Iago has no way of knowing where exactly it will lead to at the time he conceives it, is vital to his larger plot to poison Othello with jealousy. The discrediting of Cassio as a trustworthy officer paves the way for Othello's suspecting him of having an affair with his wife. It also leads Cassio, the dismissed lieutenant, to become a solicitor for his reinstatement by seeking an audience with Desdemona. By arranging it so that Othello can witness the scene of them conferring together, Iago supplies Othello with the 'hard evidence' that has the effect of supporting all his later inferences and innuendoes.

"Iago takes on a considerable number of risks when he executes his plot. So many in fact that if he failed in any one of them, he would surely be considered a fool for having cooked up this scheme. There are uncontrollable factors – unknown variables at play in all human affairs – that he does not seem to acknowledge before he sets out to destroy Othello. If the plot against the

latter is to succeed, all events must tightly follow one another and simulate the systematic tumbling of a set of dominoes. Cassio must react to Roderigo's taunts and insults in a very precise way, that is, by immediately attacking him. Similarly Montano must intervene in this quarrel and antagonize Cassio even further. Cassio in turn must react to Montano's intervention by drawing his sword and turning the brawl into a very serious affair. When Othello appears on the scene, Cassio must become silent as the tomb and avoid giving Othello the explanation he demands. Othello must then act with a fair degree of rashness by cashiering Cassio on the spot. Finally, Roderigo must succeed in fleeing the scene rather than be called upon to testify and give an account that quite likely would have undone Iago.

"As in the case of the plot against Cassio, Iago succeeds in making everybody do exactly as he would like them to do. After he has convinced Cassio that he should have Desdemona plead to Othello for his reinstatement, the cashiered lieutenant learns from Iago's wife, Emilia, that Othello has already told Desdemona that he will be reinstated. This news does not content Cassio, however, and so he proceeds to an audience with Desdemona in the hope that she will do all she can for him. Iago's plot thus escapes a mortal blow to it that would have resulted had no meeting between these two characters taken place. The success of it now depends on what comes out of this meeting. If Iago is to make it look like a lovers' rendez-vous, he must of course be provided with the means to fuel Othello's jealousy. And just as luck would have it, Cassio beats a hasty retreat when Othello appears on the scene. Iago is then able to capitalize on this and begin a series of innuendoes meant to arouse Othello's suspicions. The next thing that happens is that Desdemona begins to plea on Cassio's behalf. Of course the timing is perfect as well as the degree of ardour with which she goes about it. Finally, by referring to Cassio's intimate role as go-between in their courtship days, Desdemona unwittingly provides Iago with further ammunition to raise doubts and suspicions in Othello's mind.

"Then there is the whole handkerchief episode. Othello believes that there is magic in the web of it and, indeed, a reader might very well concur in this (albeit not for superstitious reasons). Desdemona first drops the handkerchief and, instead of retrieving it, follows Othello's instruction, even though it is a prized love token from him, to let it lie where it is. Thereupon Emilia finds it and, instead of returning it to Desdemona, gives it to her husband. Iago then deposits it in Cassio's bedchamber and Cassio, instead of looking for its owner, gives it to his whore, Bianca. The latter ends up flinging it in his face at the very moment Othello is hiding and watching a scene where he believes Cassio is talking about his love for Desdemona. Then Othello confronts his wife over the missing and much-travelled handkerchief and, as it happens, receives a careless lie from her that confirms her guilt in his eyes. And neither one of them at any time remembers the circumstances under which the handkerchief first went astray.

"The question as to whether Othello is the sort of man who would end up killing his wife out of jealousy is central to his status as a tragic hero. After all, he is spoken of as the noble Moor whom passion could not shake and 'whose solid virtue the shot of accident nor dart of chance could pierce.' Predisposition to jealousy not being in Othello's nature, his conversion into that state on the basis of circumstantial evidence, an incessant flood of innuendoes, and as a passion that goes all the way to being murderous can only come across as being somewhat forced.

"Other of Othello's actions do not mark him as the man whom reputation calls brave and noble, or whose self-control, restrained defiance, and cool and clear-headed reasoning dwell deep within him. To be sure, there is a fine example of these reputed qualities in the beginning when he is able to pacify an outraged mob led by Desdemona's father and bearing down on him with

weapons drawn. But in contrast to this we have later scenes where he seems neither self-restrained nor noble. One of these is when he cashiers his trusted lieutenant, Cassio, without giving him the benefit of a fair hearing. The other is when he enlists Iago's help to avenge himself on Cassio.

"At times the behaviour of some of the other characters shifts radically or else does not conform to how they are presented in the main. Cassio is given to be basically noble in nature but he is also one who cannot hold his liquor, who flies out of control whenever someone insults him, who uses a proxy (i.e., Desdemona) in order to return to the world's favour, and who speaks disparagingly about the woman who loves him (i.e., Bianca). Emilia is one who, in one instance, remains silent when she has important information that could be divulged to good purpose and who, in another, refuses to hold her tongue even when a sword is drawn against her.

"There are a number of interactions in the play which contribute to Desdemona's untimely death and which all involve one person misunderstanding or misinterpreting another. The most blatant of these is that staged by Iago wherein he and Cassio discuss Bianca's love for the lieutenant. It is here that Cassio cooperates most obligingly in Iago's ruse by speaking disparagingly of Bianca while Othello overhears all this and assumes that Cassio is speaking about Desdemona. A second example is the conversation between Othello and Desdemona leading up to her death. In this instance Othello interprets all that Desdemona says as evidence of her guilt. On the other hand, Desdemona interprets everything Othello says as evidence that his changed attitude towards her is simply a result of his being overwrought with cares of state. During this episode, the attempt by Desdemona to have Cassio immediately reinstated as lieutenant becomes for Othello a clear sign that she is in love with him. When she rejoices at the news that they are to return to Venice and Cassio is to take Othello's place in Cyprus, he interprets this as being her happiness over Cassio's promotion rather than the prospect of living happily with him in her home country. And then finally, at the end of the play, when Desdemona utters the heartfelt words 'Alas, he is betray'd, and I undone,' Othello takes Desdemona to be referring to Cassio and so finds a final reason to condemn her.

"While Othello misunderstands or misinterprets Desdemona virtually every time she opens her mouth, Desdemona remains ignorant of his growing jealousy straight up to the time of her death. In spite of his behaviour bearing all the earmarks of an enormous change of attitude with respect to their relationship, she decides that it must be weighty affairs of state which have 'puddled his clear spirit.' Even after he has told her that she is as 'false as hell,' she doe not suspect that anything more serious is at stake than his displeasure over being called back to Venice or, more exactly, his wild hunch that her father is behind this official summons. And then even after he has repeatedly called her such vile names as whore and strumpet, she does not take it so amiss that she cannot be consoled by Iago when the latter confirms her view that only great cares of state would cause her husband to act as he does. In their final conversation, Othello tells her to 'bethink [her]self of any crime / Unreconciled as yet to heaven and grace.' Desdemona responds, 'Alas, my lord, what do you mean by that?' Surely there is someone here – although the same could be said of Othello – who has never learned to read the language of the heart in the eyes of another."

– What do you think?

– I have no opinion. Leave him to his own devices. Or, rather, let's refrain from being one

of his devices.

– Quite. But did you notice the lack of references? The lack of any attempt to engage other scholars?

– Yes. It's a deficiency that he of course plumes himself with.

– It's a form of solipsism, don't you think? Cut yourself off from others. From dialogue. From debate. From disagreement.

– And from agreement. The consensus that keeps us all on course.

– Of course.

– The very centre of discourse and knowledge is consensus. It's the target that we should all aim at. Otherwise there would be chaos. People running off in all directions. Everyone with their own opinion and nothing to keep a debate or controversy on course.

Honest Iago! It is almost as if one were to go around saying good old Uncle Adolph. Well, even if many did at the time, did all? On what basis does this general consensus arise? Why isn't there one person who holds a contrary view? Surely he didn't become an arch-villain overnight? And those two reasons he gives – that Othello wronged him by preferring Cassio for the lieutenancy and *possibly* wronged him (for he is not sure about this) by having an affair with Emilia – are we to think that these two reasons are sufficient to turn an essentially good man (for how else could he end up being called honest by everyone?) into a monster?

– May I put my two cents in?

– Who's she?

– Someone no doubt meant to help him with his disjointed discourse on literature since we're not impressed by it.

– I'm a humble person who may be looked upon in two ways. First as the graduate student who corrected the essay entitled "The Reductional Factor on the Status of Othello as Tragic Hero." Secondly as the representation of the writer's inability to —

– What writer?

– The present writer. He is conscious of his inability to reproduce here a literary scholar of the first rank.

– Yes, that fits exactly.

– Of course I'm sensitive to his overall concern for truth or truth-telling but I don't think

literature should be judged according to the same criteria that a real-life situation calls for. After all, Shakespeare wrote Othello *first and foremost as a play. As a piece of entertainment. As an illusion. This illusion is successful because people at a theatre neither have the time nor inclination to look into every corner. Certainly such elements as character, plot, and antecedent action must have a fair degree of probability if they are supposed to represent our world. On the other hand, the literary or theatrical world, whatever its similarity to ours – and of course I mean real-life – is still never the same as it.*

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20. The Lure of the Non-Professional

Putting ever more balls into the air doesn't go without some risk. I would like to think I'm a skilful enough juggler to be forgiven letting a ball or two get away. The subject of truthtelling is complicated and even over-complicated beyond my mere telling. Therefore it would be strange if the latter didn't show some signs of drifting. Digging into these old university papers, I realize I have to keep my eye on the eight ball. I have to keep digging into an intellectual development heterogeneous enough but guided by a small number of identifiable elements. It is not for me to say they always produced top-flight work but I can say they always produced a top-flight effort. Never in all my university days did I write an essay simply because it was an assignment. Every one of them was an intellectual challenge I was glad to take on.

But before going on with my university studies, what is there to be said about that side of me seemingly so devoted to a non-professional mode? What ethic or aesthetic was operating, what erotic element, what sometimes fearful or fluid combination of these made me want to sidle up to the academic world in my own way? Made me want to come into the proximity of the professional in my own stealthy roundabout way: the good, the solid, the secure, the well-run, the efficient, the knowledgeable, and so on. For it is precisely this ambivalence, this attraction-repulsion that comprised my state and, to the degree that I fixated upon it and carried it along as a sort of calling or career, set me apart from virtually all others.

But it was never so clear or clarion as to leave me with no moments of doubt. Moments in which I was discomforted and suspected that I was deceiving myself and aiming low rather than high. It is difficult to ignore the fact that most people with a will and a way move towards positions of authority and responsibility. As just one more person in the crowd, as just one more member of struggling humanity, I couldn't help but sometimes feel I was shirking my duty and not living up to my potential. Perhaps instances of these doubts and suspicions came to me when I erred from my customary path and imagined myself as one of the well-thinking majority. That goodly number of people who lead decent enough lives and who, if it weren't for that small grain of insincerity I always detected in them, would have surely been able to claim me as one of their own.

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!

With respect to this insincerity that troubled me, I was as sensitive to it as the fairy tale princess who couldn't sleep on account of the pea under her twenty mattresses. It seemed to me that, throughout my life, I had never met anyone who, having identified his personal interests with the interests of some institution or organization, didn't start to equivocate or speak in a hollow way or at best remain silent the moment he felt these interests threatened. There was a systematicity about it that I instinctively felt was a threat to my own particular interests. It kept me at a distance from the professional world as if I thought it might catch hold of me. Towards it I put up all the resistance of a dissident living in an oppressive regime or a martyr to the faith amongst those who turn apostate. All this I can attest to while still admitting I had moments of doubt and uncertainty. Never was it simply a case of telling myself that I couldn't be coopted by

the system but only that it hadn't occurred up to the moment of thinking about it.

The worry of being trapped in some false position was essentially the belief that the professional world was full of such traps. From politicians down (or, as some would say, from politicians up) there seemed to be this way of defending one's position or course of action that was necessarily closed off to self-criticism. Clearly there was this virtually universal preoccupation with projecting an image of confidence and authority that superceded any desire to go on record with one's faults and hesitations. Virtually every person in a public position was testimony to this. Criticism as mode of address was preponderantly – indeed, with few exceptions – outwardly directed. What passed for honesty under such conditions was how accurate one was in the criticism of the other and not the degree to which the intentional or motivational roots of it were exposed to the light of day.

Though I identified insincerity and lack of openness with the professional world, I still didn't have a clear conception of how necessary and indispensable they are to it. It was as if I thought that everyone who was a part of this world had made a decision more in accordance with their own natures than, as I believe now, in accordance with the both apparent and not-so-apparent forces that rule it. Of course it is not infrequently the case that what starts off as second-nature eventually enjoys all the appearance of the natural and is even worn with honour and distinction. Such no doubt was the illusion I had of the matter for a long time. I couldn't envisage all the various shades of struggle and resistance in people who, finally casting their vote for the ways of the world (which, to be thoroughly honest, also means taking on a different set of values that have their own ethical import), relegate all this turmoil to a past self too naive and idealistic for genuine work and accomplishment.

How much of a life may be settled on the basis of what is most comfortable on a day-to-day basis! Whereas I didn't take fright at the prospect of, even at the age of twenty-five, continuing on for several years as a manual labourer, another quite possibly would have thought it a terrible fate. Such a person would have wielded his shovel as if he were condemned to forced labour. Every moment doing such work would have seemed to him a wasted moment. Any news he happened to receive about his friends' progress in their careers would have tormented him. Unhappy would his days have been as he saw himself losing various opportunities to improve his lot in life.

Had I been one who had had in his sights the more or less familiar and conventional ways of success, I no doubt would have been that sufferer. I would have been one who was prepared to forego vague hopes and dreams that seemed unrealizable in order to grasp the more substantial. Or else I would have been one who, for whatever reason, had already forgotten the imaginings and impulses of childhood. Had I been one who suffered from tormenting doubts in this area and wanted to rid myself of them, I would have taken stock of all the possible ways of developing myself along a more or less well laid out and secure path. Accordingly, I would have been one of the many who were prepared to have anaesthetized certain parts of their youthful conscience. If the latter has nothing to do with openness and an unwillingness to separate head from heart, then I miss my guess that this not only has a natural home in youth but a natural danger in growing older and getting on.

Is it not safe to think that, given what I could endure and what I could not, I had no choice but to stay away from work in an office, a bank, a school, an insurance company, and other places where professional comportment often means being a three-quarter self? A three-quarter expression of one's thinking, viewing, opining, feeling, and acting self? Could I ever have had it

as one of my many skills and habits to leave a part of myself at home in the morning and return to it in the evening? Could it have been possible for me to have been a kind of self-explorer, self-experimenter, and, indeed, self-inventor while essentially putting on an act every day? Is there any reason not to think I wouldn't have been able to tolerate such circumstances for very long? Or any reason not to think I would have been in danger of growing violent if for some reason I were constrained to remain where I no longer wished to be?

Question all I may about the possibility of doing things differently, it is still a fact I never felt myself in revolt against my situation. And God only knows I had enough time to think about it: to measure the compass of my airy thoughts and inclinations against the solid acreage that others staked out. Two desirables, to be sure, but to the first, already bequeathed to me, I felt myself a privileged heir: the very lord of a boundless and magnificent domain, a land of never-ending surprises, adventures, and discoveries. To be unimpeded in thought and imagination, to go wherever one had the strength and daring to go, always seemed to me the greatest blessing and highest honour that could be conferred on a life. All else about it, be it as rough and unpleasant as might be, came with the territory that, as an elevated self, as a sort of prince in disguise wandering about his kingdom and taking it all in at close hand, I traversed with an inquisitive and almost voluptuous eye.

– What's he saying?

– I don't know. But I wish he'd do it on his own time.

I'm struggling with the idea that I couldn't have done it all differently. That I'm not just deluding myself with this rationalistic reconstruction of the past. I wanted to feel the extraordinary near to me. If I couldn't have gone to the Himalayas without forfeiting my university studies or if I couldn't have changed my approach to these studies without forfeiting the sense of a spiritual Himalayas, what other choice did I have? University lay open to me but only as a relatively narrow path that had to be navigated with care and precision. Everything that I drew from these studies had to be complementary to my other thoughts or else I would have surely lost my way. With the tragically heroic being such a predominant theme in these studies, how could I have pulled this off without having a commensurate self-image? And if I were not to be truly preposterous in this admittedly ill-defined and often barely known venture, how could I have managed it without taking on those activities and projects that at least didn't grossly contradict it?

– When an author of note speaks on such matters, it may be of interest. But when one is not such an author but is nonetheless trying to convince oneself and others that one should be recognized as such, then it's almost painfully embarrassing because, quite frankly, the author in question simply hasn't earned the right to his sense of self-importance.

I realize that part of my effort is to make the claim that no one has ever held to the subject of truthtelling with greater persistence than I have. It may grate upon the nerves to hear it so proclaimed but it certainly can't be faulted for being coy and indirect. I move towards an elaboration of this claim with the belief that it is no less than an indispensable part of my subject. There is then in some sense a constantly self-justifying effort that, paradoxically enough,

endangers it. But whatever redemptive or corrective element there is in all this (and I of course take it that there is) lies in the fact that even this endangering aspect is part of my subject, part of what I endeavour to take up and tell the truth about.

– He stands on guard for truthtelling and even against himself. In the meantime the subject finds no centre except his own self-centeredness.

I forego the conventions that make it appear that it is otherwise for most human beings. As much as we draw the world into ourselves, it is our stage and set that is similar to but never exactly the same as those of others. One meets certain people, one reads certain books, one sees certain sights and, no matter how multiple and varied these are, the result is a unique configuration of ideas, emotions, and images. If I spend so much time on my thinking, feeling, and imagining self, it is not to shut out the rest of humanity (what an absurdity this would be?), but rather to tell the truth about the relation of the one to the other.

– He's reduced us to mere shadows of ourselves and this is what he wants to hold up as representative of what he's taking on.

Let me be clear about one thing. I see a great gap between the manual labourer I was for so many years and an Einstein, a Galileo, or a Newton. Never did my mind focus with laser-like intensity on a few particular problems that arose as question marks in a more or less well-defined field. Never did I study to become the grandmaster of this or that game but rather moved from one to the other with the dilettantish interest and passion of a collector. Consequently whatever I had to deliver still remained embryonic at an age when others have already brought forth a fully formed scientific or artistic work (or even a body of works). Let me be called an intellectual mountebank for laying things out as I do and trying to work myself into this illustrious company *if* it so happens that all the paths to genius have been numbered and catalogued. Since no one before had thought to take the hyphen away and make truthtelling one word, I have at least this as grounds to think that a new subject has been opened up and must be treated like no other.

– Here's the question I put to my first-year students, Andrew. The answer I was looking for was when a machine can answer all the questions put to it in such a way that the questioner cannot distinguish it from a human being, then, for all intensive purposes, it has a mind. We don't say someone doesn't have one simply because he or she can't come up with original ideas. We only expect the person to formulate clear questions and answers to what's already known.

Let me put it this way. He or she who can grasp a field of study but not reconceptualize it is short of imagination but not mind. A machine can likewise deal with all sorts of problems but, if it doesn't do that rare thing of rendering them null and void with some new vision or theory, we wouldn't say it doesn't think else we'd all be caught short.

I think it is in the nature of truthtelling for people to talk past each other in much the same way that characters in a Chekhov play do. Anyone who has attended a scholarly conference must have had the feeling at some point that only politeness and form prevent interlocutors from saying things like: "Excuse me. I've only been half-listening to you. Since I've already got my own point of view and since I'm here to defend it, I'm really only interested in yours insofar as I

think it's coinciding or conflicting with my own."

But I know very well that such a half-listening self has been the nature of my own polemical being and, from everything I have been able to observe, the nature of polemics *tout court*. Even when it is a case of taking one's time and responding to this or that in a written debate, chances are that certain subtleties and nuances of the opponent's arguments aren't going to find their way into the counterarguments. But it is not the place here to go into this: to take up at length what should be taken up when I recount my graduate studies. All I need to say is that, even with respect to what I'm doing now, the polemical can't be dispensed with. Different points of view link a whole constellation of elements that leave virtually nothing untouched. Nothing that isn't resonating and reverberating and having the same effect on something else. As much as one sometimes wishes for consensus and agreement, it would assuredly mean, if taken to the extreme, the computerization of human intelligence. Yet short of a decimation of the human race that would only leave machines behind, this intelligence rests forever implicated and even over-implicated in all else. It is my task to give testimony to this for reasons that, as I have already demonstrated, lose themselves in the heterogeneity of a lived life.

*– Am I to be frightened? Am I to be cowed? Am I to turn my back on the tradition of thought that has been the very backbone of all human achievement? Am I not to think that Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel and so many others are giants to this puny rebel? Has the tradition not shown itself sufficiently strong and flexible to take in – and I would almost say pass by if not take in – a thousand such sideshow philosophers? You know the old saying: the dogs bark while the caravan goes by. So it is with his present puffing himself up that, like his poor sister's ego, only needs the pinprick of saying "*Passons!" *to deflate it to nought.*

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21. The Lure of the Unprofessional

The system-builders should be credited for much. Bridge-builders are they that allow a whole mass of humanity to cross from one way of thinking to another.

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

There is something about crudity that has always attracted me. That swam about as freely and uninhibitedly in my character as insincerity does in many an honest person's. How is it that this often ignoble habit and trait couldn't break the glass of my self-image? How is it that I could be so hyper-hygienic in one area while fouling myself in another? What would a good bourgeois say about a man who can't tell a white lie but can do a black deed? Is it likely that, if he heard me argue that there is an irreducible contradictoriness in all of us, he would look upon me with a more favourable eye? If I myself have used this argument for justifying low and unseemly behaviour, would I be in a position to deny that my reasoning on the matter is highly suspect? On the other hand, I feel quite right to argue that, inasmuch as these meanderings have been a part of my past no less than my present, I have always been partial to the self-justification of my immoral behaviour *and* to the suspicion against it. Which is as much to say that, although my behaviour may be immoral, it has never been so immoral as to make me unwilling to tell the truth about it.

My job as a cab driver (initially this was either seasonal or part-time work) allowed me to see how by slow degrees the libido can be given ever greater licence. Along with providing the field for a highly extended if casual study of diverse humanity, this job functioned as a sort of moving laboratory for self-experiment and self-observation. How inept I felt at times while doing something that is not supposed to require a great deal of intelligence. Keenly aware when I thrilled at some little adventure and violently self-critical when it went astray and sometimes even turned it into a hellish mess (no doubt because my reactions were often excessive), I egoistically ran through it all the thought that never would someone enter my cab with an intelligence equal to mine. Such egoism was in fact my psychological mainstay as I went from being a kind of stumblebum driver to a rather lecherous one.

– Is this his way of providing character references?

– It's better to ignore him.

In order to be on the track of something, I must check out the hypothesis that my life has been on the track of something. Truthtelling, cab driving, and a kind of tightrope walking are all things I have done that didn't fly off in all directions because the first was the strong pinions upon which, condor-like, I followed my course. What an arbitrary thing it is to think that this subject should only exist, if it should exist at all, in the university! To let it move out into the world and to see the world as its proper setting is what strikes me as the intellectually honest move. Let anyone who wishes to tell me differently also tell me they have answered all questions

about the nature of truth and what it is to tell it.

– It's dreadful! This spitting on the hard work of so many people!

What a headless fool I could be at times when, not knowing the city well, I had difficulty finding some street, address, building, or pickup spot. Then, like a tormented, raging beast, I would drive around, cursing and swearing like a maniac, exhibiting the excessive speed and rude reckless behaviour for which taxi drivers are known. I would often fight my way through traffic, streetlights, stop signs, and all manner of human or inhuman obstacles as if I were fighting my way through enemy lines. Sheer aggression in the line of duty, in the thought that the customer was either getting terribly impatient or that, after all the struggle to get where he was, he would be long gone. In all honesty, I was sometimes on the verge of being as reckless as when, in my younger years, I drove while my faculties were impaired. From the point of view of pure civility and civilized behaviour, I was no more my regular self than a soldier who is trained to kill people. Insofar as I felt myself assigned to a task, mission, or duty, and insofar as the field proved to be obstacle, lure, resistance, deception, and sometimes danger, it took on the dimensions of a battlefield drained of all blood but what pulsed in my fevered brain.

– I'm going to lie down in my office.

It has been said that character is destiny. It could just as easily be said that character is circumstance. Had my life flowed out as one long European trip, had I always had enough resources simply to move about and meet people on a casual and friendly basis, I doubt there would have been many occasions when the less civil side of me would have risen up. But since I was forced to enter into a system of external demands and expectations that either I couldn't always live up to or else were always susceptible to taking arbitrary and abrupt turns, I was subject to all the attendant emotions and impulses of a harassed and beleaguered human being.

– I've never felt such violence in myself and never felt the need to be uncivil towards others.

Of course had I been a different sort, I would have searched for work where incivility, my own or others, wouldn't have likely arisen as an issue. Incivility brought me close to something raw, something unpleasant, something demeaning and degrading and yet and yet – something entirely itself, non-veiled, non-duplicitous, non-alloyed to base metal because it *is* this metal. How often is the latter counterfeited in comparison with gold or silver, the valued ideal and its various forms and embodiments? If all human acts were divided between politeness and incivility, I would say that nowhere is there a more thoroughly consistent agreement between thought and word, between intention and act than where the first is absent. When a Shakespearean character vituperates another, it is as if a beautiful mask suddenly drops and reveals an ugly but all too human face. If one is more repelled by beautiful masks that feign to be non-masks than by the coarse features of a non-feigning face, then the best way to spend the better part of one's time, apart from being alone and in the company of the ideal that one either presumes to be or has the presumption to think unfeigned, is in the company of the latter.

– Am I dreaming? Is this the evil genius? Everything seems normal except this voice that comes from nowhere.

To think of all the people I met: the brief exchanges, the brief events, sometimes banal, sometimes dramatic that have their greatest reality now in a fading memory. In this rather limited and personal zone shared perhaps by a few limited, scattered, and fading others. How vulnerable then the so-called true report to the so-called false one! The what-took-place that is in principle verifiable to the account of it that can escape this principle either wholly or in part. All that guides me as I grope back over the past are various impressions about a particular city's day and nightlife. Things that span work and pleasure, health and sickness, riches and poverty, sobriety and drunkenness, wisdom and stupidity, happiness and sadness, seriousness and mischief, good will and ill will, order and disorder. Can the truth-status of any individual detail at this point in time be more important than simply the wealth and diversity of details? Can what I report as having happened during many private and obscure moments be determined on an ontological basis more firm than the report itself? Thus it must be that, speaking of such things, I tell the truth in the more general and objective sense (that is, not just to myself) only insofar as my report manages to carry the same weight and conviction that others feel when they examine themselves with rigour. It is the character of this report then that ultimately proves or disproves it: the various signs it shows of not wishing to hide or hold back or, for that matter, to forge additional experiences about the past beyond what seems to be unavoidable.

– I feel now I'm supposed to say something. But all I can think of is you've got to have a minimum of belief.

Well, I have said that I was attracted to the wide world as a classroom and it now seems appropriate to bring in another image: the restricted or confined space of a taxicab as a private booth, closed office, or confessional. So many suffering heads trying to patch together a dignity of sorts. So many lives growing up as ragged weeds from earliest years. So many successful or moderately successful people living their compact and modular lives. So many earnest lives being lived all over. So many revealing snatches and brief conversations that made it seem as if intellectualism was very rare and common sense and pragmatism universal. So much in fact as to make me feel I was in a human machine as part of it and not only the driver of a merely manmade one.

– Silence. Whatever we can't speak of should be passed over in silence.

It was this sort of thing: the machine couldn't be dispensed with and yet everything that was low-grade, that seemed to be rough, coarse, and neglected because it wasn't part of the machine, struck me as being desirable and necessary (at least in the large), as being somehow more than it was by virtue of being *what it was*. In all this I couldn't think of giving credit to people for making conscious moves along ethical lines (though this could certainly work its way in somewhere down the line) but simply the indifferent, mysterious, beyond-good-and-evil constitution of the whole. A kind of order/disorder as much identifiable with the human machine and its dehumanizing effects as it was with the rough and barbarous elements that strangely humanized it.

– He thinks he finds bottom by seeing none.

In this outer zone where prejudices are amply viewed, where conventional coverups simply don't have much reason to thrive, I moved as one with an antenna-like grasp of the limited reflection that formed these prejudices. That was largely what it was as limited thought and thought-production because of its inability to return to these prejudices in a doubling back movement. In fact nothing seemed more universal to me than this lack of reflective dexterity. From the highest to the lowest it was hard to find anyone who questioned and reflected with an effort to get behind himself. On the other hand, given that so much is universally hidden away, I should have been cognizant of a largely unreflected prejudice in myself. Which is to say that people are always more of a world in their cognizant being than they give themselves out to be. Limiting themselves to being relatively consistent in their utterances and outlooks, they seem stupider, simpler, and more fixed and one-dimensional than they actually are. Were this not the case, there would be more than a few people who wouldn't be able to spend barely a moment thinking about a point of view different from their own. Even the most thickheaded and unwavering dolt can be made to waver in his arguments – so long as he is willing to argue – by being reminded of other arguments and points of view. It is this repertoire of arguments and viewpoints that is always alive in some sense and to some degree in the most varied range of people. Like a great stack of cards in a tremendous game, it must always be drawn from in those countless situations where to communicate with someone quickly and effectively counts for far more than being innovative and original.

– Let him go on. He's not the only one who can see through a glass darkly.

Prejudice is a sensitive issue. Few people go out of their way to make their own a topic of discussion. It is usually a case of expressing a prejudice or else denouncing others for expressing theirs. Sometimes the most intelligent, well-meaning, and cultivated people seem little different from others in this respect. Reaching back into my memory, I can see once again that young couple I picked up very early in the morning. The more assertive and talkative of the two was a black woman. Although showing signs of a limited education, she spoke to her companion as one who was well versed on the subject of racism and not simply well-schooled by the experience of it. But little did I dwell upon this minor incongruity. It was rather the later event that struck me. Continuing her discourse right up to the time I reached her door, she then told me she had to run into the house to get some money. Being the rather naive driver I was at the time (meaning in effect I still hadn't developed a systematic or working prejudice against poor people, natives, and inhabitants of the demimonde), I waited for about ten minutes before I finally abandoned all hope that she would return. Later I told this incident to a woman I had recently become friendly with. We were seated on a park bench on a beautiful day. The woman I was with was not only black but a journalist from South Africa seeking work in Canada. She was not only a fellow tenant in a modest downtown apartment block but one who had been gracious enough to look over and comment on one of those terrible attempts at a play I was forever working on. A second surprise came out of this whole affair when, in telling my story about the black woman who, along with her white companion, had cheated me, I spoke about the incongruity of the woman's complaining about racism and then promptly committing an act that could hardly be construed as working in favour of its elimination. No sooner had I delivered this critique when my well-

spoken neighbour, looking stricken, jumped to her feet and walked away.

– It was rather tactless.

With people I have no reason to think unintelligent and close-minded, I have always preferred to speak my mind and risk giving offence than to hold like glue to the seemingly correct, proper, prejudice-free, and I might as well add, superficial. My thought was always that, if someone judged me to be in the wrong, he or she should stand their ground and make their case against me. Arguably my greatest prejudice has always been against those who lack courage.

– His sister said — yes, I remember: "It's so easy for the strong to be strong and assign it all to themselves and not to luck."

A large percentage of my customers were native people. For a number of years, I was very much on edge with them. Several reasons could be cited for this. However, if I were to sum up the matter most perspicuously, I would have to go beyond my relations simply with them. I would have to say that being on edge with natives and other disadvantaged people (perhaps ninety-five percent of the natives I encountered were disadvantaged) was tied up with the fact that it took me several years of driving around the city before I got to know it well. Before I got to know it like the back of my hand so I could be confident in dealing with the most troublesome situations.

Not knowing the city well as a system of roads, routes, residential, industrial, commercial, educational, governmental, cultural, recreational, transport, and health facilities was definitely a drawback and an inhibiting and even intimidating factor. Getting lost, making mistakes, wasting time, upsetting people, etc. were elements so common in the first few years that I can only compare it to struggling to learn a new language. Stepping back from it all, I can't help but reflect on the large number of taxidrivers who were immigrants and who were not only confronted with learning the language of the city but English itself. It is difficult for me now not to appreciate what they had to contend with. In any event, the business of learning a new language was complicated by the fact that not all segments of the city used the same one. The poor areas where unemployment, alcohol, drugs, prostitution, crime, violence, and the like prevailed produced a dialect of behaviour that was class isolation and ghettoisation personified.

When I first started driving, I felt much less the master of my situation than I did later. Much less in control of my cab once I had a fare and was somewhere between A and B. Besides the problem I was having with the language of the city, there was also this problem with the dialect: this often quick to anger or show your fangs way of speaking that was not habitual with me. Given that I was quite conscious of being in a service industry, I acted with customary deference to people irrespective of where I picked them up. I accorded all the same level of civility in such a way that I often felt myself at a disadvantage with those whom I have been calling the disadvantaged. For it was with them and not with better-off types that occasions would arise wherein I would be abused, threatened, cheated, intimidated, and so on. No lack of aggression and violence was there amongst some of them and, given that they had been disadvantaged all their lives, I suppose it was natural for them to take advantage of some situations.

At this point I could deliver numerous anecdotes to justify my slow but steady drift towards a working prejudice and on-the-job racial policy. It would have its sensational and self-indulgent side and, like the *fait divers* of a newspaper, exhibit or engender feelings of moral superiority. But because my task is to tell the truth about myself, I must forego this route and focus on the twinned curiosity and moral superiority that kept me alive and enthusiastic as I toured the human zoo and studied up close some of its specimens. Not leaving aside the matter of prejudice, I would say that learning to operate with the presumption that a certain segment of society had it in its power to make my life miserable ultimately saved me from a great deal of misery.

I'm tempted to state my working prejudice and on-the-job racial policy formulaically to avoid soft-pedalling them (or maybe *to* soft-pedal them). Although I have never considered these practises to be unjustified, I have always been sensitive to the fact that, under different circumstances, they either would have been or could have become so. For inasmuch as they contained the seeds of cruelty and calculated indifference, they were in effect what exists everywhere. Practises then that often seem justified or justifiable but have the potential to nourish these seeds either without reference to an altered situation or else in accordance with external conditions radically favourable to their monstrous growth and proliferation.

So this was my working prejudice and on-the-job racial policy: 1) white person + suburban residence = 1% probability of my being verbally harassed, cheated out of my fare, having the taxicab damaged or dirtied, etc.; 2) native person + inner city residence = 10% probability of the same occurring. Accordingly, I systematically discriminated against the second group by not granting it the automatic right to be trusted in the general middle-class way and to be treated with what might be called middle-class courtesy and respect. Although nine out of ten customers from the second group were not much different from those of the first (apart from minor considerations such as non-tipping, coarse language, poor dress, and the like), the one out of ten who made all the difference and who sometimes caused me serious trouble was sufficient to put me on the defensive. Or, more accurately, on the track of becoming *less* defensive insofar as I could find ways to avoid being victimized by, when necessary, going on the offensive.

– I get into a taxi. Go some place. Sometimes they're dirty. What more do I think about?

– Chalmers? Oh, good Lord! What're you doing?

– Did you hear the latest, Theo? A course on prejudice. Mainly how to justify it.

– It woke me up like a bad dream. I'm afraid we're never going to get rid of him.

– There's a glass. Help yourself, Theo. I'm taking the day off.

– You know I don't drink, Chalmers. What's got into you?

– Isn't the question rather what's got into us?

– No, it isn't because we're only in this situation on account of him.

– But are we still ourselves, Theo, you and me?

– I'm not going to answer that question. I'm just going to say that we're struggling to be *ourselves – maintain our sanity – in a hellish situation.*

– As philosophers, shouldn't we examine it?

– No, I'm not about to play Descartes and I suggest you curb this tendency of yours to play Thoreau. You know what I mean. Bringing up big philosophical questions at the most inopportune times. Luncheons, committee meetings, and once, you remember, when I invited you to the house and my wife had over the Greek ambassador. Really, Chalmers, I — I'm sorry, old man, but it's something I've been meaning to bring up for a long time.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words and, though a verbal picture can easily take up as many, it may still capture dozens of interfused elements that would require a matching exposition ten times as long. With this in mind, I'm prompted to bring up one incident that, with no less reference to the kind of animal I could become than to the human zoo just mentioned, captures the good, the bad, and the ugly of my life as a cab driver.

It started off as a busy Saturday night in the middle of summer. I was thirty-five at the time and, although I had been driving on and off for several years, I still wasn't as adept as I would be when, three or four years later, I was forced to work full-time. Around midnight I got a call that sent me out to the very limits of the city. There I found a young native boy, about nine years old, patiently waiting at a phone booth. In his possession was a small rundown bicycle. After I had put it in the trunk, got behind the wheel, and had him seated in the back, he explained to me that he had left the inner city with an older friend and, both on bicycles, they had cycled around for several hours, always moving away from the downtown until, for some reason, they had become separated. Finding himself so far out, worn-out by his adventure, and not sure of his way home, he had called his family to arrange to have him picked up. The first unsettling moment of this soon-to-be very rough night was when, upon finding out that he had been away from home for six or seven hours and then remarking that his parents must have been worried about him, I heard him answer: "No, they're drinking."

It was with some trepidation that I finally arrived in the darkened centre of the low-rental housing complex. Presumably the planners of it thought it was necessary to grant the tenants a good deal of unlighted parking space. After I had unloaded the bicycle and had my young customer lead me towards his unit, I noticed some adolescents loitering about. Then my attention was drawn to the brightly-lit windows and open door where a lively party was underway. I entered the unit, the usual dingy living quarters that one finds in this part of the city, with the boy who promptly disappeared while I, waiting uneasily by the door, listened to blaring country music and loud voices that issued from the back. After a time the boy returned with an old woman, probably his grandmother, who was clutching a twenty-dollar bill. It seemed that all was going to end well when, all of a sudden, another woman entered the scene. By the way she shook and scolded the boy, I could only suspect that she was his mother (although the degree of violence she used might have suggested otherwise). Turning upon me then, she fiercely told me that I hadn't picked up the boy where I said I did and therefore wasn't going to get paid. Instead of walking out of a bad situation, I began to argue with her. In the meantime the poor

grandmother, still clutching the twenty-dollar bill, stood in the background. Beside her the boy with tears in his eyes. Then it came. The younger woman pushed me towards the door and, before I knew it, I had hit her.

And before I got back to the taxi, I realized I had made a mistake. A veritable lynch mob came after me and hauled me out of it. Screaming their lust for revenge, they scratched and tore and punched away at me with a certain degree of ineffectuality that I can only put down to their years. Nevertheless I did receive a few solid punches. But all in all I managed to stay on my feet and find the opening to take to my heels. Running to a nearby busy street, I flagged down a cab and was promptly taken to the police station. There I waited for a couple of hours before being taken back to the scene of the crime. My crime, their crime: the police officers weren't sure. For it never entered my head to give them an account any different from the one I'm giving now.

– What do you make of that, Chalmers?

– Thoreau?

– Chalmers, I know your hero is Wittgenstein. Let's not pursue the matter. You've always been a credit to the Department.

– I've been teaching Gadamer for the past twenty years.

– I know, I know. I only meant you have a soft spot for those philosophers who think it should be lived and breathed. Tell me – just to divert matters – have you noticed how filthy the cabs are in this city? I took one from the airport last Sunday and it was full of rubbish. All over the floor. When I tried to say something about it to the driver, he could barely understand me. Really, I think it's high time they imposed an English course on people who take up that line of work.

What does it matter to me that other people are better behaved when I know that, chances are, they're less honest? That they cover up so much and feign a control of their inner and outer lives that every good writer knows is the crooked backbone of a frail humanity? Which is as much as to say that what is called order and control is inextricably bound up with what is the *image* of it. And that honesty and openness about this are only valued in minor doses and in relatively isolated areas. Such an area is where I am now and where the strict philosopher never is. He who tells the truth while exhibiting great control over his subject, who exhibits no doubts about this control, and who doubts, dismisses, or in some way neutralizes anyone who has such doubts.

– What impudence! Jumping from cab driving to philosophical turf! Are we to recommend him for a special chair in our Department? Letting savagery and buffoonery take over? Hitting women?

– I don't think he's arguing he should take control, Theo. Just that there isn't the control in a philosophy department or book or whatever that you and I give out.

– You and I?

– Well, our crowd. People who often have to give the appearance of being on top of things when they're not and — well, I'm sure you've felt that.

– I've never played the guru.

– I'll be retiring in six months, Theo. So I'm taking the opportunity to speak my mind.

– Chalmers, I didn't suspect you had this problem.

– Yes, it's been gnawing at me for a good long time. I once had a teacher, believe it or not, who actually thought his thoughts in class. How I wish I could've followed his example.

– Chalmers, I wasn't referring to that.

My honesty had its limits. I lied and cheated on occasion. Although I can't remember telling any serious lies, I certainly told small ones. And as for cheating, well, it usually happened over change and when I didn't like the customer.

– Do you hear this, Chalmers? Do you hear this? There's the proof! A working dishonesty harnessed to a working prejudice! A taxi-driving Thoreau who hasn't even got the decency to go out into nature and be pure.

I also picked up prostitutes and got into the habit of using them. Some were even minors.

– Chalmers, if there were a way to turn off this pornographic site, this strip show, this indecent way of exposing an allegedly philosophic mind, I'd do it. As it stands, we must simply bear it with as much dignity as we can.

The whirligig of time is the whirligig of every day and every week. Week after week. Some things step into view for the first time. Others disappear. It was only after I had lost my youth that the very young took on an allure they never had before.

– Chalmers, I'm going to do something I've never done before. Hand me that glass.

– Theo!

– Fill it up. I'm going to try to get it down.

A long way away from a Marquis de Sade but not so far away from a faltering and transgressing priest. That about sums it up. Sexuality is that turbulent subject so out in the open as a vast public property and so secret and furtive as innumerable private transactions.

– I rather wish he'd move on to something else. What's that line in Hamlet? Treat every

man after his dessert and who should 'scape whipping?

Well, there's definitely a satirical element that comes from having to make them talkative. Many an academic, were he confronted with a similar situation, would simply clam up. I have never yet encountered one who impressed me as being more than intelligent, competent, civil, hard-working, fair-minded, and sometimes witty and humorous. It was only in books I met those others who could be all this and something else that I'm tempted to call errant. The capacity to depart from the tried and true that, good or bad, is the way of genius.

– Very charitable, isn't he, Chalmers? Crooked paths. The way of genius, Blake, isn't it? And we're just simple underlabourers.

I have been masturbating all my life and what I'm doing now is only the most elegant, protracted, and heroic form of it. The genealogy of myself as a truthteller requires stating what is unpleasant and impure in order to be pure. Pure in one way and in one movement that can only distinguish itself by drawing itself towards and squaring itself off with the mixed company it habitually keeps. That I got into fights, cheated, lied, whored and did so always with some measure of restraint or reason were the weeds that never overran the spiritual garden I may claim to have cultivated.

– We're off to see the Wizard, the wonderful wizard of Oz!

– Chalmers, what's got into you?

– Shoes and ships and sealing wax and cabbages and kings.

– You're drunk.

– I'm just testing the limits of language. Everything from an early Wittgensteinian point of view should draw us a picture of the world. Otherwise it's nonsense.

– An independent part of the world, you mean. A set of objects and the relations between them that correspond to the logic of propositional language.

– The glass is on the table or the glass is not on the table. But not there is a pink elephant under my desk.

– I suppose we must pass the time somehow.

– There is more between heaven and earth than in your philosophy, Horatio.

– You should've stayed with your dream of the theatre, Andrew.

– All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances. It's a damn frightful thing.

War! War against professionals and professionalism. A private war conducted from the back of a classroom. Certainly not merciless, rowdy, vainglorious or cruel. At least not the vast bulk of the time. War against what I didn't hate but couldn't always like. War against what I didn't disrespect but couldn't always respect. What was less a bonafide threat from without than from within. As if it were a vast doctrine preached largely in the practise or in countless indirect ways to discourage wide-openness, radical self-critique, and the shaking of the foundations. As if the search for truth so earnestly pursued should have its scheduled flight paths from which nothing should divert save all in the past that had already done so. The continual demand not so much articulated as institutionalized that stressed a recognizable and agreed-upon starting point. That was not lacking in sense from the perspective of what is social and needs to be learned as such but rather all too full of this sense and no other. The feeling then almost of an adolescent perpetually rebelling against a necessary but constraining parent. What others shook off for the sake of becoming responsible and successful adults struck me as treason, a betrayal of their youth, its knightly quality that was as hard to find in the professional world as a fair maid to rescue from a dragon. Yes, no doubt I had already personified truth as a woman without knowing it and before I had ever read Nietzsche's account of her as a coy, veiled, secretive, and discountenancing beauty.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

22. The Phantasmagorical Element

At bottom there is this phantasmagorical element that cannot be dismissed. At bottom I have perhaps always wanted to capture this element so pulsating in the mind when thoughts aren't being marshaled for argument or opinion. It seemed to me that such a living force couldn't be subtracted from so-called higher reasoning without exaggerating the social compact and all rights and privileges due it. At least this was my thought if truth, the almost universally acclaimed value, ideal, or principle, the esteemed centrepiece of generations of hard thought by the best and most knowledgeable minds, the sine qua non of the university's integrity and its mission to the young and the community at large – if truth were all this and so transported to the skies that it should be worth dying for.

The heroic, the tragically heroic, the dramatic, the Socratic, and the erotic all did a dance in my head while I pursued my studies. Every other element that did so can, I think, be subsumed under these headings. Still, so much lost to memory that once blew about in the fan of my mind. It is easy enough to dismiss it now as the non-essential, the ephemeral, and in point of fact, I have little choice but to dismiss it. I'm not where I was in the past except by an act of will to pick out the most discernible elements. I can't follow the mini-events and mute changes in me that went on from day-to-day, week-to-week, and month-to-month. So much fiction would be required to write all this and, given that I'm not a gifted fiction writer, it is a good thing my subject is truthtelling and myself only in relation to it. But at least it is worth going on record with this lack or flaw that, paradoxically enough, fiction might make up. Essentially what I'm missing are the finer brushstrokes that can only come when one goes right to the living moment.

– What're we in all this? Fossilized errors? Living monuments to the past we betrayed? Oh, Theo, I'm never going to play Hamlet.

Over and over again I'm confronted with the difficulty of relating telling the truth about myself to telling the truth about truthtelling. If I don't pay enough attention to the first, I risk concealment and, if I pay too much, eccentricity. Not that the latter should be occulted (then I would be paying too little attention to myself), but only that it should go hand in hand with a constant engagement with and elaboration of the other. In addition, there must always be, as a third element, the question what does this other – this or that particular other – reveal about my subject? If truthtelling is what I claim it is, namely, complication and even over-complication, then the danger shouldn't lie in there being a lack of pertinent things to say but rather an overabundance. But this very overabundance can lead towards *im*pertinence – towards at least its *seeming* so – and what is there to check this drift but the highest level of interest and attention? In other words, I must always be entertaining the doubt that I'm not on course so that no sooner is this doubt dead and buried than it springs up again.

– Comments? He's waiting for comments. You're getting pretty stewed, aren't you, Andrew?

– "The cabin boy, the cabin boy, the dirty little nipper." No, that's not right! Vulgarity has always repelled me. Theo, I've a confession to make to you.

– What is it, Andrew?

– I'm gay.

– So was Wittgenstein, Andrew.

– I know. Damned better man than me though, wasn't he?

Never taking notes, I nonetheless always listened very attentively. By and large the university professors I encountered didn't fall below the general expectations I had of them. To say that I was at war with them is a sort of necessary hyperbole that, in the economy of things, assures at least a clearly recognizable disposition. For despite the surface civility and good will that characterized virtually every moment of my university life save one period, there was a certain level of aggressiveness in my attitude and approach that, first, not only showed up in class but in my very writing assignments. Second, never slackened over twenty-five years of being a part-time and then full-time student. And, third, issued from the feeling that I not only had to prove myself different from but superior to those whom I listened to so attentively.

– Oh, damned! Now he's going to give us "Anatomy of a Genius." Is there anything more insufferable than somebody telling you you should take him to be one rather than letting his work do it?

– But this is *his work, Theo.*

– Work? You call this ragout a work? Take me to Quine. Take me to Wittgenstein. Take me to any of those books you have on your shelves. Those are works, Andrew. Hard well-reasoned attempts to find out the truth.

– And what if it's not wrong to say it's all a ragout if taken together, as Montaigne points out?

– Montaigne?

– I read him quite seriously once, Theo. You see, his influence on Shakespeare. The fact is the Bard himself didn't seem to uphold any position or doctrine.

– Where are we? In the English department? Chalmers, go see if the fumes are out of the stairwell. Maybe we can get out of here.

In truth, the other I carry about in me and that gets a partial representation here with the voices of Andrew Chalmers and Theo Baumgarten – this other helps me to carry along a self-doubt or suspicion about me that I feel obliged to address. One thing I can take credit for, I think, is pushing through this process as conscientiously as possible. The upshot is, while giving the appearance of being more egoistic than others by simply not hiding my egoism, I put it on trial in a way that very few do or think pertinent to their various displays of knowledge.

If I had spent my time simply trying to trip up professors in class, I would have likely been less interested in learning than in trying to compensate for feelings of inferiority. Certainly the latter weren't entirely absent and, if I had to characterize them in a word or two, I would say they corresponded to my idea at the time of what it was to achieve a doctoral degree. When I first started my studies, it wasn't even with the aim of getting a BA and, what is more, I was proceeding so slowly – sometimes only a course per year – that an MA or a PhD seemed out of sight. It was in this context that, while not coveting these signs of recognition and achievement more than success as a writer, I was far from being dismissive of them.

– I'm burdened that my daughter didn't get that post at Dalhousie. She had her heart set on living in Nova Scotia.

– She didn't follow you in philosophy, Theo. Instead she joined the ranks of the woolly-headed deconstructionists.

– I'm not talking about that, you woolly-headed — I'm talking about her happiness. Do you know where the poor girl ended up?

How am I to give an account of my various confrontations with authority that, as it seemed to me, were a true and proper reflection of keeping everything open to Socratic questioning? How am I to strike the difference between what I did in the way of challenging authority as tradition and challenging it as current practise? To be sure, the first was usually conducted on that normally humble field called written assignment and the other on that one called classroom participation. Aggressive and audacious in both, I nonetheless adhered to a principle of reasoned argument. Certainly I allowed that I might be wrong in this or that but never simply because some authority claimed as much. I tried to be as open and undogmatic as I could and, although I won't say I was entirely successful, I will say I never ran away from a counter-argument.

– I've got the feeling, Andrew, that we're here for colour commentary. To relieve his discourse of its odious — what the devil is that?

– Writing on the wall. As if it were coming from an overhead projector.

– What do you make of it?

– Comments. Like a professor would write on a student's paper.

– Not very flattering ones, are they?

– Well, the professor's presumably of the opinion that, taken one way, his argument is right but taken another it's wrong.

– Only could you get that kind of waffling in an English course. Andrew, one day she's going to regret it.

– You mean accepting that post in Arkansas?

– No, no, I'm talking about choosing to explore the richness of the text, as she calls it, over good clean argumentative rigour.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

23. Northrop Frye

No way or position is absolutely secure and there are pitfalls and drawbacks everywhere. Although I could live with a certain amount of disorder in my thoughts, I still felt compelled to clear away as much of it as I could. The discovery of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* came at a time when I had virtually all my attention focussed on literature and in particular drama. Initially I balked at Frye's attempt to put order into a field that most engage in before thinking that a critical point may already have been reached. A critical point that the vast majority never recognize as being critical because, first of all, it is the point of entry to this field and, secondly, the tacit agreement that makes it so. A virtual point of entry then where all who are already on the field have implicitly decided that the studying, investigating, commenting on, criticising, interpreting, evaluating, and theorizing about literature should be called literary criticism. More, a point of *forced* entry insofar as it is not strictly determined by reason but has its roots in tradition, practise, or whatever name one cares to give it. To the *de facto* determination, in other words, that is forever exceeding the *de jure* one. Thus what I initially balked at was not this presumption on the part of all critics but what many others have resisted, namely, a project that, by laying down a schema for all literary works, seemed to place a constraint on the reader's freedom. But before going on about this, before taking it up not in the way of examining these initial doubts that dissipated early, before taking it up then as one who effectively succumbed to Frye's theory, who found it to be a highly imaginative account that took the study of literature from the mythical to every species of epic, dramatic, and poetic art, who, moreover, quickly found a way to use some of Frye's ideas in his own work, before going on about this, I must take note of what is perhaps the most retrospective or retarded reason why I didn't balk at his thought more than I did.

It pertains to what I am now, to what I was then and to what I had to traverse to get from one to the other. To the use of the term literary criticism itself and to the fact that I saw no need to scrutinize it at the time. To the fact then that, at the age of twenty-seven or twenty-eight, I knew nothing about Jacques Derrida and, more importantly, that not-quite theoretical not-quite polemical but wholly questioning and analytical way of his. That way of thinking that, as I picked it up much later and took it to heart just as I did Frye's architectonic way of thinking, is questioning and analytical to no end. Both in the sense of implying that *all* is infinitely questionable and analysable and *all* falls short of giving precise and definite answers. Had I been initiated into this way of thinking at the time of studying Frye, had it not come to me only as a later development and so removed some remnants of a dogmatic slumber in what was my thinking at the time or, to speak generally, what is in *all* thought and tends to activate it as much as any awakening does because it allows it to get on a certain path without being held up by infinite questioning and analysis, I quite likely would have balked much more than I did and, finding the main terms themselves problematic, even ventured to analyse his theory rather than to make use of it.

– Andrew, this journal is very similar to one that was the victim of a hoax. The whole thing started when a paper was submitted that seemed to do a good job of attacking scientific objectivity. However, what the editors didn't realize until it was too late, until after they'd put it in a special edition of their journal, was that it was written by someone determined to make a point about postmodernist critique and analysis.

But my heart at the time was in literature . . .

– I'm saying it was a parody and not one of them recognized it as such.

. . . as opposed to the formal questions arising out of it and so such problematic areas as the relationship between literary criticism and literary theory were far from my agenda. The fact of the matter is that, once I came to realize the vast and indeed unlimited universe Frye had in his sights, I lost all my fears about its rendering the study of literature dry and taxonomic. Indeed, I was soon using some of his ideas to analyse such plays as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Ibsen's *Ghosts* and *The Master Builder.*

– Don't you think it's about time we found a way to get out of this?

"***Oedipus Rex*: Ironic Tragedy**"

– Don't you think it's about time we screwed our courage to the sticking place?

"All tragedies have, as an integral part of their structure, an element called irony."

– Don't you think it's about time we adopted a more war-like stance?

"It's the human condition or situation which is essentially ironic."

– Don't you think it's about time we ruined his whole bid to be doing something that's supposed to count by counting against us?

"Since tragedy is primarily concerned with what happens to the hero, it is his fate that reflects this irony most tellingly."

– Or do you think it's right we should just keep acting like meek professors?

"The tragic hero is a great man who sets out to accomplish something rather extraordinary."

– Why shouldn't we demand the most from ourselves?

"What actually befalls him is very much in contrast to his original goal or vision."

– And by that I mean stepping out of ourselves and stopping cold his damned use of us as backdrop and decoration.

"His fate has two distinguishable aspects which are the ironic components of the human condition: the inevitable and the incongruous."

– Don't you think it's about time we put on an antic disposition and hoisted him with his

own petard?

"The inevitable aspect is simply the hero's meeting death or disaster despite all noble and courageous attempts to ward it off."

– I'm sorry, Theo, I'm not up to it. Besides, there's something that interests me here.

"The incongruity of the tragic hero's fate is anything which suggests his suffering goes beyond and even to the contrary of what his character and actions deserve. The inevitable aspect of the ironic human condition in tragedy finds its main expression in the external order or balance of nature which the tragic hero upsets and which may be called 'God, gods, fate, accident, fortune, necessity, circumstance or any combination of these.'"

– I'm going out. I'll see you later.

"By some extraordinary action or other, the hero places himself at odds with this external order and, as an inevitable consequence, suffers personal disaster."

– The main points of Frye's theory are what interest me.

"In Greek tragedy the righting of this order or balance is called nemesis. In *Oedipus Rex* the hero has already upset this external order in the antecedent action when he killed his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta."

– I told him some tragic heroes do deserve their fates.

"Since nemesis first visits him in the disguised form of the affliction of Thebes (which is a plague or famine or pestilence of some sort), the entire action of the play is in effect the hero's efforts to save the city.

– Strange how he wouldn't accept that.

"However, this action is transformed by Oedipus into a personal quest that, along with these efforts, is the very means by which the gods strike him down."

– He couldn't fathom any kind of monster — except a homosexual one.

"When the inevitable element increases in tragedy, the hero's direct responsibility for what happens falls off, and he shifts to a position which is closer to that of the innocent victim."

– Strange how these thoughts still come back to me.

"The ironic tone of the play correspondingly deepens, since the incongruity of the hero's fate becomes more evident the less responsible he is."

– It took a long time to get him — get all that shit out of my system.

"In most tragedies there is a clear causal relationship, which is morally intelligible, between the hero's character and his catastrophe. *Oedipus Rex* is atypical in this respect . . ."

– Atypical?

". . . since the incidents which are primarily responsible for Oedipus's downfall, namely, the killing of his father Laius and the marrying of his mother Jocasta . . ."

– How can it be the model for all tragedies then?

". . . were committed by him without his knowing their true nature. Moreover, these incidents were first revealed to him as the prophecies of a divine oracle, and it was his earnest attempt to prevent their coming about that drove him into the very situations allowing for their realization."

– I'd say that Oedipus Rex *differs as much as it resembles other tragedies.*

"The structure of *Oedipus Rex* is such that the incongruous and inevitable aspects of the hero's fate are inextricably tied together to form the exceedingly ironic tone of the tragedy. Since Oedipus's crimes are part of the antecedent action, and nemesis first appears in the form of the affliction of Thebes, the entire play is an inexorable movement to restore the balance which Oedipus's mere presence in society now upsets. So all-inclusive is the nature of the nemesis which overtakes the hero that he himself becomes instrumental in bringing it about."

– What other tragedy has a king saving his city from a terrible affliction of which he is unknowingly the cause and who is brought to this predicament by earlier events even more shocking and unsettling that are the result of his — not only his but others' — trying to avoid the fulfilment of divine prophecies so indirect and uncanny it takes one's breath away?

"When the play opens, Oedipus is on top of the wheel of fortune: he is the king of Thebes dedicated to saving his city from its strange affliction. The suppliants who come to him have complete faith in his ability to do so. (Before marrying Jocasta and becoming the king of Thebes, Oedipus solved the riddle of the man-eating sphinx who threatened all visitors to Thebes as well as all who attempted to leave the city.) In his efforts to find the killer of Laius who, as he has been informed, is in the city and whose presence is responsible for its affliction, Oedipus has Tereisius, the blind soothsayer, brought before him. From this point on, his quest or mission undergoes a definite change. He no longer is totally preoccupied with saving the city but with finding out the truth about himself. Ironically, he achieves both at the same time. One of the discoveries he makes is that he himself is the killer of Laius and so the polluter of the city who, by virtue of his own proclamation, is banished forever. All other prophecies are likewise borne out. For example, Tereisius, by warning Oedipus that he will leave the city as sightless as he himself is, cryptically prophecies his later act of blinding himself. The cumulative effect of these prophecies, their sacred aspect, their moral import, their duration (the first were made even

before Oedipus was born), and their paradoxical realization – all these factors make the fate of Oedipus seem an inexorable working out of a largely inscrutable plan.

– Yes, but how am I to better understand Macbeth from all this?

"Pity and fear are the feelings raised in us by tragedy. Contrary to what Northrop Frye tells us, however, they are not so much favourable and adverse moral judgements as primal responses to our witnessing the hero's downfall and, indeed, identifying and suffering with him. The inevitable aspect of his fate engenders fear in us while the incongruous aspect – the punishment or suffering so great as to seem unwarranted and even unnatural – solicits our pity."

– I'd say that Macbeth gets his just desserts and whatever we feel for him is not pity.

"In most tragedies the hero's character plays a large part in upsetting the external order, and this usually means that his actions have an adverse effect upon society. Hence the feelings of fear and pity come to a sort of uneasy balance between the hero and his victims. Fear for the hero's fate has as its opposite fear for society. Pity is likewise divided and shared. Since Oedipus only has indirect responsibility for the affliction of Thebes, its people cannot be thought his victims in a clear-cut way. Indeed, his whole effort is to save the city and this, in conjunction with his terrible fate, concentrates fear and pity almost exclusively on him.

– Fine to say this about Oedipus but what about Macbeth?

"At the centre of the Aristotelian concept of tragedy is the idea that fear and pity are purged. Northrop Frye says that, although they are raised in tragedy and then cast out, they are not central to it. His own idea as to what constitutes the tragic effect focuses on the admixture of the heroic to the ironic. More specifically, he states that there is a moment of epiphany for the audience which corresponds to the recognition that the hero has of the determined shape his life has taken. With this recognition comes an implicit comparison with the life he has forsaken. Frye elaborates this point as follows:

> The tragic hero has normally had an extraordinary, often a nearly divine, destiny almost within his grasp, and the glory of that original vision never quite fades out of tragedy. . . .While catastrophe is the normal end of tragedy, this is balanced by an equally significant greatness, a paradise lost (*Anatomy of Criticism*, 210).

– Macbeth surely was never close to paradise.

"My own view of tragedy is a variant of Frye's, but one which does not discard the idea of fear and pity as an essential part of the tragic effect. The powerful heroic movement, whether it be daring, courageous, outrageous, or reckless, raises feelings of awe and admiration in us which act to obscure, subordinate, or dislodge fear and pity from the uppermost level of our sensibility. Rather than being purged or cast out, fear and pity are submerged in something else which, at the very end of tragedy, is the predominating mood or effect."

– The predominating mood or effect might not be the same for all people.

"In *Oedipus Rex* the heroic action dominates the play as much as the operation of nemesis. The starting action of saving the city quickly becomes an equally heroic quest for the past. Oedipus shows an inordinate amount of courage and determination when he persists in finding out the whole truth about himself in spite of a growing awareness that a horrible discovery lies in store for him. Even his actions in suffering are the culminating factors in this heroic movement: the mad rush to Jocasta's bedchamber, the breaking down of the stout doors, the blinding of himself when he discovers her dead, and the final acceptance of his fate as a social outcast."

– Some arguments certainly can be given for Oedipus's being sympathetic and even pitiful. But in the case of Macbeth, whatever sympathy he happens to arouse should be weighed against his crimes and the sympathy that should rightly go to his victims.

"In order to better understand what the tragic effect is all about, it will help to remember that all high mimetic tragedy follows a ritual outline. No play better illustrates this than *Oedipus Rex*. The tragic hero has associations with a god-king who is sacrificed in order to ensure renewal in nature and the rebirth of life. Thus the death of the ritual scapegoat serves a purpose which transcends his own existence. The tragic hero's death has a similar function, since it returns society and the cosmos to a state of health and harmony."

– "No, I haven't read The Golden Bough*, my boy, but I'll certainly look into it."*

"Towards the end of tragedy, the ritual and heroic elements become more prominent than the irony attached to the hero's fate. Consequently, at his death, fear for his inevitable fate is replaced by a sense of the greater purpose his death fulfils. In the same way pity becomes lost in awe and admiration which finally results in a sense of the unique and irretrievable loss his death is. This highly ambiguous state at the end of tragedy sets the hero's death apart from all other events, making it something unique and almost separate from the rest of the human condition."

– You were my golden boy, weren't you? I made the mistake of calling you that too many times. Oh, believe me, I never lost faith in your essential goodness. Not even when you became very cruel and unkind to me. I kept reminding myself of what you told me those first beautiful weeks. We used to meet in the park and then later you were willing to come to my place and discuss many things. I learned so much about you that moved me deeply and then later when you became treacherous (funny to think how members of your own family had become treacherous to you and then you became treacherous to me), I thought of all you went through so that, instead of completely losing my head, I found a way to bear it.

"***Ghosts:*** **Tragic Irony**"

"At the point where ironic tragedy becomes tragic irony, the heroic and ritual elements are eliminated from it. Consequently there is no tragic death which is at once a great loss serving a great purpose. The victims in tragic irony are random non-heroic characters, and their deaths

are not part of any discernible design in nature. Admittedly there are in *Ghosts* certain coincidences or chance events which almost have a supernatural aura about them. Besides being an artifice to override whatever implausibility adheres to these events, it helps to draw attention to the peculiar role the past plays in the present. Beyond this, however, it adds nothing to the significance of the dire fate that befalls the central characters."

– The worst was to lose you. I'm sorry to say that. Certainly not for you but for me it was. And then to be struck down at such a young age. Two years plus thirteen days after you first walked into my class. All my tears had already been shed. But the news still came to me like a dull thud on my heart.

"Tragic irony focuses on the human condition or situation stripped of the heroic encounter with the forces of nature. Hence it moves to a lower plane of human endeavour which resembles the life and character of the average man. Since the victims in tragic irony are random victims and since they are more caught up in ill circumstance than having a direct hand in their catastrophe, their ironic fate is only part of a greater irony which exists in the form society takes. The incongruous aspect is the way society shapes itself in relation to the ideal or idealized image it has. The inevitable aspect is this shaping as a movement from the creative and rational to the destructive and absurd. While ironic tragedy presents us with a powerful agent unsettling the social order, tragic irony presents us with a social order undoing some member or members of it."

– Pull yourself together, old man. Don't want him seeing you like this. He lost his own son, remember? And then wore an expression around here as if his face – but certainly not his heart – had been turned to stone.

"The difference between the human condition in tragedy and irony can best be observed by comparing an example of each. *Oedipus Rex* and *Ghosts* are similar to each other in that there is an inexorable movement of the past into the present. In both plays, this continues right up to the time of the catastrophe. However, what puts them in opposition are two aspects of society and human affairs that may be called the will to orthodoxy and the will to truth."

– They certainly had their differences, those two. Mostly over politics. Anyway, they stopped talking to each other and that couldn't have helped matters.

"In *Oedipus Rex* the two come together and are proven to be one."

– For he was really in need of help from the old man. After all, a manic-depressive was what they finally diagnosed. Always thinking he was on top of the world. Always one or two steps away from his Eldorado. Always overplaying himself and going from one abandoned project to another. Always thinking the big dream that was ultimately a bust.

"Oedipus's quest for the past is also a quest for truth . . ."

– Always out of touch with himself.

". . . and what he finds is a vindication of the divine prophecies which he and his parents had tried to circumvent and whose veracity his wife derides."

– But at least he tried.

"In *Ghosts*, on the other hand, truth and orthodoxy have little in common; they are in fact mutually antagonistic. The action of the play begins as an attempt to avoid truth and perpetuate a falsehood. Mrs. Alving wants to bury the memory of the past life she shared with her husband and resurrect a false one by way of establishing an orphanage as a memorial to him. To this end she has also kept secret from everyone, including her son, Osvald, and her husband's illegitimate daughter, Regine, the true state of her shocking marriage. In these efforts of coverup, she has the blessing of one of the pillars of society, Pastor Manders.[16] The action barely begins, however, before it is foiled. Truth, in the form of the past, impinges upon the present, outrages the well-laid plans of Mrs. Alving and the Pastor, and imposes a reality which, although emerging from past errors and misdeeds, is incommensurately harsh."

– I played that role! I, Professor Andrew Chalmers, was an actor who, at age twenty-two, played Pastor Manders. Well-meaning and not unsympathetic character who happens to be a slave to what sometimes passes for the best in society.

"In *Oedipus Rex* orthodoxy has anagogic significance. It specifically relates to an inscrutable order in nature that, encompassing both the divine and human worlds, has laws that man can only transgress at his peril. In *Ghosts*, on the other hand, orthodoxy relates only to the order that man has established for himself. Rather than obedience to divine oracles and prophecies and acceptance of such manifestations of the external order as fate and nemesis, man is enjoined to adhere to societal laws and conventions as well as the prevalent ways of thinking about morality.

"Every instance in *Ghosts* where orthodoxy is upheld or adhered to proves false, misleading, and, in some cases, disastrous. Pastor Manders, its spokesman and representative, epitomizes its short-sightedness, departure from truth and reality, and superficial judgements. His views on familial and social relationships provide prime examples of this. Throughout the play he repeatedly insists that the proper place for Regine, Mr. Alving's illegitimate daughter, is with Engstrand, her stepfather. He believes that she would thereby be able to help him overcome his erring ways. So taken in is he by Engstrand's lies and false shows of humility that he never entertains the possibility that the latter's influence on his stepdaughter would outweigh any good she might do him. The Pastor puts himself in the paradoxical position of aiding and abetting Engstrand's efforts to enlist his daughter's services for a dubious enterprise that Engstrand calls a house of retreat for old sailors. (At the very beginning of the play, Engstrand tells his stepdaughter about his plans and lewdly suggests to her that her presence in the establishment would make it more profitable.) When Regine leaves the Alving household at the end of the play, she shows every indication of ignoring Mrs. Alving's plea not to destroy herself by going to live with her stepfather.

16 Pastor Manders may be viewed as a sort of ironic counterpart to Teresias. Both give advice based on a claim to possessing knowledge and true insight. But whereas Teresias proves trustworthy as a seer, Pastor Manders proves untrustworthy as an advisor.

"Pastor Manders chides Mrs. Alving on numerous issues but particularly on what he considers to be her failings as a wife and mother. Once before, when she had deserted her husband early in the marriage and come to him for help, he had driven her back into it with remonstrances over her rebelliousness and departure from wifely duty. Consequently, she ended up spending the next nineteen years with a husband who was an incorrigible drunkard and adulterer. Osvald's birth was the result of this unhappy union and, as the play eventually discloses, he has inherited a fatal disease from his father directly related to the latter's debauchery.

"Pastor Manders admonishes Mrs. Alving for having deprived her son of a proper home by sending him away at a very young age. When he hears Osvald speak of the homes he used to visit abroad,[17] he is entirely convinced that the latter has been leading a morally depraved life. Osvald, however, defends these homes from the Pastor's charges. He even compares them favourably to those respectable citizens who go abroad to engage in the debaucheries the Pastor only associates with an unconventional lifestyle. Even after Manders has learned the shocking truth about Mrs. Alving's marriage, he continues to believe that Osvald has been corrupted by having been removed from the home at a young age. However, at the end of the play when Osvald speaks about the kind of relationship he wants with Regine,[18] he shows an honesty and openness (even if his ideas are frantic and wild) which is in direct contrast to the world Pastor Manders represents.

"In all things, whether they be of a personal, practical, philosophical, or moral nature, Pastor Manders' first devotion is to public opinion. Consequently, his purposes are often mistaken, his counsel usually unwise, and his actions sometimes immoral. In his own words, he says to Mrs. Alving:

> . . . [I]n some things it is wiser to depend on the opinion of others. That is the way our world functions – and it is best that it should be so. Otherwise, what would become of society?

"It was precisely this kind of teaching which prevented Mrs. Alving from heeding the prompting of her heart when the young Lieutenant Alving first proposed to her. Instead of rejecting him, she listened to what her two aunts and mother had to say about the utter folly of passing up such a magnificent catch. The Pastor sees no reason to attach blame in this business since 'the marriage in every way conformed to the strictest rules of law and order.'

"Pastor Manders sacrificed both his love and friendship for Mrs. Alving on the alter of public opinion when she came to him, still a young woman, in a desperate flight from her marriage. So fearful was he of arousing suspicions in the community that not only did he offer Mrs. Alving no solace or help, but cut her out of his life. It is only his interest in the establishment of the Orphanage which finally brings him to Mrs. Alving for the purpose of transacting her affairs. Although nearly thirty years have gone by since the time Mrs. Alving

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17 Osvald describes these homes as places where children grow up having parents not legally married.

18 Oswald has learned that he is stricken with a grave illness that will eventually destroy his mind. Shortly before this happens, he tells his mother that he was hoping to find a woman whose character would be such that, when he became a vegetable, she would have no qualms about doing away with him. He believes that Regine is this type of woman until she, learning about his illness, shows quite plainly she wants no part of such an arrangement.

attempted to flee from her marriage, he still puts up with such minor inconveniences as staying at an inn rather than be a guest of hers and risk public opinion.

"Incidents related to the burning of the Orphanage best reveal the slavish and cowardly nature of Manders. It is he who dissuades Mrs. Alving from insuring it by telling her that it would be interpreted by certain influential people as a lack of faith in divine providence. However, he personally admits to her that, were it not for public opinion, he would not take such a risk. When the Orphanage does in fact catch fire before the opening ceremony and dedication of it to the memory of Captain Alving, one of his first thoughts is of its being uninsured. In the aftermath of the fire, Engstrand insists that the Pastor himself accidentally started it and, in order to escape the consequences, Manders allows himself to fall victim to Engstrand's blackmail. In exchange for the latter's taking the blame on himself, he promises to find sufficient funds for his Seamen's Home.

"Other orthodox views which the Pastor espouses reveal the injustices of the double standard between the sexes. He tells Mrs. Alving that her first duty as a wife was to have submitted herself to the will of her husband. It is evident, however, that she was in every way superior to him. It was she who ran the estate very successfully for many years while her husband spent most of his time in a drunken stupor. In addition, the Pastor speaks out against the marriage that took place many years before between Engstrand and Regine's mother. His principal objection is that the latter was a loose woman. At the same time, he vehemently protests when Mrs. Alving points out that her case was similar in that she married a loose man. It seems that the Pastor is of the opinion that a single woman who is guilty of having an illicit affair should forever bear the stigma while a married man who commits the same should suffer no moral reproof.

"Orthodoxy has an insidious effect on the lives of all the characters. Mrs. Alving speaks of the joy of life that her husband once was so full of and which the constricted life in a small provincial town slowly turned into dissipation. She even blames herself for making him unnecessarily miserable by always stressing duty to him. On the other hand, when she departed from the orthodox line, her efforts met with success. Her assuming the mastery of the household and taking over the affairs of the estate no doubt saved them from wrack and ruin. It also put her in a position by which she could send her son abroad and so remove him from the bad influence of his father. In one respect, however, Mrs. Alving has always remained entirely conventional. For thirty years she has kept up an image of respectability surrounding her husband and marriage. The memorial that she plans for him is an attempt to falsify the past and preserve in the public mind the idea that her marriage was whole and sound. In a like manner but for different reasons, she fosters what she considers to be a happy illusion in her son while at the same time keeping Regine in the dark about her true origins. When Mrs. Alving admits to Manders that all this has been cowardice on her part, she is still far from having any inkling of what the dire consequences will be. She soon finds out that the happy illusion she fostered in her son has turned into a nightmare for him. From the time he first discovered that he had a fatal illness, he blamed himself for it. Not knowing that he had inherited it from his father, he had no choice but to think that his lifestyle was to blame. A further irony is that Mrs. Alving kept the truth from her son because she thought that it would be too hard for him to bear. After his initial shock, however, Osvald is not unduly upset by it. As he points out to his mother, he could hardly have tender feelings about his father since he only has one memory of him and a bad one at that. In the matter of Regine, the long delay in telling the truth to her results in the maid servant's seeing her

years of service in Mrs. Alving's home as an injustice. Her anger over the deception causes her to quit the home with no promise she will return.

"In high tragedy it is the hero who makes things happen or, in other words, forms the action of the play. In tragic irony, on the other hand, the principal characters often act only in a limited way before they are forced into even more isolated or static positions. The inevitable and incongruous aspects of their fate arise out of their relationship to a false and imperfect society which, because they are simply a vulnerable part of it, makes them candidates for catastrophe."

– It looks too much like our own good society.

"Fear and pity for the victims of tragic irony are usually not raised to a high pitch, since their fates are only part of the ironic human condition. *Ghosts* is rather atypical in this respect . . ."

– Atypical again?

". . . since the fates of Mrs. Alving and Osvald become a more and more centralized issue."

– What we really have here is, following Wittgenstein, family resemblances.

"The structure of the play is formed by the past intruding upon the present, not only in terms of actual incidents but also in terms of truths revealed in various conversations. The supernatural element invested in this dual makeup of what is in effect the foiling action of the play . . ."

– The foiling action? What's the foiling action?

". . . makes it a plausible, integrated movement towards catastrophe."

– Is it the supernatural? Does it make what's implausible in the play plausible? In Ghosts *there are too many disastrous events happening one after the other. First the burning down of the Orphanage. Then Regine's running off to her father's or rather stepfather's. Finally Osvald's mental breakdown and becoming a vegetable. How are we to understand this litany of unbearable misfortunes if we don't accept (and the play strongly suggests this with all its talk about ghosts) some power at work seeking retribution?*

"Consequently . . ."

– Oh, dear!

" . . . the inevitable gains in intensity and the essential innocence of the victims . . ."

– Let me start over. Ibsen develops this play as a worst-case scenario.

". . . comes to a prominence in our sensible perception of the play . . ."

– So naturally, if extrapolated to the very limits, it will deliver us to nihilism and despair.

". . . which it would not otherwise have."

– But any piece of theatre can do this.

"Finally . . ."

– There's a complexity of thought and feeling in our daily lives that goes beyond any such viewing.

". . . the nature of the catastrophe which ends the play introduces shock for its sensational value . . ."

– Which translates into a healthy scepticism for any reduction of the whole into hellishness.

". . . but the dilemma Mrs. Alving faces at the very end . . ."

– Is heartbreaking.

". . . keeps the emotions of fear and pity alive as opposed to being submerged in some lofty and grandiose vision."

– The poor woman! I remember — yes, we discussed this as actors. Whether she was going to go through with it and kill her son. One said: "It wasn't quite accepted in those days." He meant euthanasia of course. And then George who was playing Osvald said: "What do you mean 'those days'? If somebody killed her son today, you think she wouldn't be charged and dragged through the whole court system?"

"***The Master Builder*: A Tragedy of Vision"**

"In most high mimetic tragedy the hero's action constitutes the main action of the play. The lofty vision he has of himself in relation to his society and the cosmos is what he attempts to fulfil. His vision and the means he goes about to realize it are therefore inextricably tied together. In low mimetic tragedy, the ironic element increases and the heroic element correspondingly decreases. If the main character of such a tragedy has a lofty vision, it is likely to be in some way or other removed from his actual situation. In *The Master Builder* Harvard Solness is involved with his vision[19] only insofar as it tends to assert itself more and more in his thoughts and assume a kind of mastery. And only when it finally does win out over all other considerations do we see him embark on a heroic attempt to achieve the impossible.

19 What first seems mere fancy and then moves towards the utterly fantastic is substantial enough to lead to Solness's downfall.

"The essence of the vision in Solness's mind, however, is not something which originates in the action of the play. Hilda, who to a great extent embodies this vision by means of her character, youth, charm, and the strange way she pops up on the scene and presents herself (not to mention her uncanny influence on Solness), comes to him out of a mysterious and almost forgotten past. Shortly after she arrives at his home and place of business, Solness remarks that he has been torturing himself for years trying to recapture some experience. It is not difficult to understand why he has lost track of it for it is something almost like a childhood longing and bears the appearance of a sort of being in timelessness or living in a purely mythic or fairytale world. It is this which Hilda reawakens in him with her enigmatic talk about a kingdom, castles in the air, and herself as his ethereal princess.

"The real struggle in the play then is not at the surface level of events or, to be more precise, at the level of his protecting himself from what he perceives to be a threat to his status as the master builder. Nor is it simply a question of the dubious fears, irrational guilt, and profound dissatisfaction he experiences. Rather it takes in and in fact has at its heart the mythic vision which, however much he has forgotten it or, for that matter, however little he knew it, has operated for a long time at a subconscious level. When he climbed the church tower in Lysanger[20] and spoke to the God he believed had an influence in his life, it was not just an attempt to reaffirm this vision. It was also an attempt to bring it down to earth and make it tangible. Insofar as he became the master builder and built numerous homes for mothers, fathers, and troops of children, he succeeded in making his vision an operative force. But the essence of it – being in timelessness – he left behind him when he climbed down the tower. It is exactly this, however, which he yearns for above all else and which he attempts to capture in his second ascent towards it.

"The mythic vision, however much it may secretly direct a life, can never be a truly guiding principle. Being in timelessness means being in a world distinct from the world human beings inhabit. As a shaping principle then, the mythic vision operates to establish a romantic outlook and to move an individual along a path whereby he always strives to be above the ordinary. If, as in the case of Solness, such a plan fails, the romantic outlook suffers a severe blow. The one who is unfortunate enough to continue to yearn for something great despite an equally great setback has no recourse but to find a way to escape his intolerable situation.

"Solness started out in his career with the belief that building churches was the noblest task for man. He perceived God as a rational being who would be pleased with his work and perhaps reward him for it. When the fire which burned down Aline's old family home indirectly claimed the lives of their two baby boys,[21] he eventually renounced this romantic vision in favour of another. From the top of the church tower in Lysanger, he brought down to earth the vision of himself as a creator in his own sphere. But this vision too has largely deteriorated over the years, and we see him in the play no longer assured that his work has value or even that he should continue it.

"With the coming of Hilda, a new day dawns in his life. It is a warm and pleasant prelude to the eternal night she will deliver him to. Although she functions as a character in her own right, there is something which attaches her to Solness at the symbolic level. There is a strong sense in which she is both a part of him and a necessary completion. Shortly after her mysterious arrival, she reawakens in him the memory of his climb up the church tower in Lysanger. She

20 Ten years before, Solness built a church in Hilda's hometown.

21 The babies were in fact the victims of Aline's breast milk which, unknown to her, had become tainted.

mentions a number of details he cannot remember and which are so fantastic that he is inclined to believe she is either hoaxing him or relating a dream. At the same time, he is inexorably drawn to her, and he comes to participate with increasing relish in the vision of the past she conjures up. The main focus is on the episode shortly after Solness's descent from the tower. Essentially what she tells him is that, acting like a conquering hero, he kissed her many times and, along with promising to come back in ten years and make her his princess, provide her with a kingdom. Now whether or not things actually took place as she describes them is not, in my opinion, the important thing. What is important is the nature of the tale she relates: the fact that it unites them in a vison which is above the realm of ordinary experience.

"The past vision then is the romantic vision or the placing of desire in a more or less human world. The first kingdom Hilda mentions is one which Solness promised to buy her in some far-off land like Spain. According to this account then, he intended it to be in time and space. The kisses she tells Solness he bestowed on her were not received by an ethereal princess but by a young girl who happened to like the idea of the master builder standing at the top of his church tower. From this we can see that the romantic vision which Solness carried down with him from the tower shaped desire towards the improbable but possible as opposed to the mythic vision which places desire at the level of the impossible.[22]

"While I have been making a distinction between the romantic and mythic visions, it should be borne in mind that, in the case of Solness, the one springs out of the other. Hence the nature of the desire which underlies both visions remains essentially unchanged. Hilda quickly forsakes the idea of an earthly kingdom called Orangia for one which will have Solness building castles in the air. This improvement in choice of kingdoms, if I may put it this way, is Hilda's way of asserting the mythic vision over the romantic one which, at any rate, has diminished and is barely alive in Solness. In other words, the purification of the past one leads to the purification of the present one. As readily as he participates in the former does he come to embrace the latter. While Solness cannot be certain he promised Hilda a kingdom, called her a princess, and kissed her many times, he has no doubt about his desire to do so. Similarly, when he climbs up the tower of the new house,[23] he holds these same images in his mind, only now they belong to a mythic world he hopes to attain.

"However, Hilda's function is not simply the raising of his conscious level of desire to the order of myth. She also introduces into his character the heroic element which, coupled with his odd case of insanity,[24] permits him not only to desire the impossible but to attempt it as well. Before elaborating on this heroic motif, I should note that, throughout most of the play, his disturbed state of mind seems to spring from his guilt over such tragic events as the death of his two children and the burning down of Aline's old family home. Towards the end, however, as the mythic vison takes precedence over everything else, his derangement, if one can call it that, takes the form of an impossible escape into another world. The illusion Hilda presents to him of a castle in the air quickly becomes for him a belief in undertaking a fantastic yet doable project or, as he himself puts it, building a castle in the air with a firm foundation.

"When Hilda first enters Solness's life, he is a man with apparently no future outlook beyond the one which makes him fearful of three things: the younger generation, retribution, and

22 Solness's earlier vision of building churches to win favour from God seems to fall between a purely mythic vision and a more-down-to-earth one.

23 Solness is building a new house for both Aline and himself.

24 Both Solness and Aline refer more than once to some mental disorder that might be afflicting him.

a turn of fortune. In Hilda he gains a rather dubious ally who nonetheless talks him out of these fears. The robust conscience she deems necessary 'so that one dare[s] to do what one would' precludes both having the usual scruples as well as the usual fears. With respect to the latter, Hilda convinces Solness that he should finally grant Ragnar permission to go out and build for himself.[25] In this way, she helps him change from a man who both fears and exploits weaklings to one ready to challenge God in God's own sphere.

"With the robust conscience comes another area of unconcern which is implied by what Solness calls the Viking spirit. As the attempt to attain a mythic level of existence is a withdrawing from the real world, so the shaping of a robust conscience and a Viking spirit is a certain withdrawing from society. More specifically, it means that the vision shaped by pure desire takes precedence over all social and familial ties. The Viking spirit is ruthless unconcern. In Hilda it is represented by her talk about fleeing home to range freely like a bird of prey. Such images as she conjures up and unabashedly presents to Solness's imagination strongly suggest the depth and power of her hold on him. Ultimately this hold does away with whatever lingering scruples Solness has about taking Aline's concerns into account.

"So far I haven't gone into the irony of Solness's situation and the way in which it ties in to his mythic vision. I have mentioned how this vision, played out as a romantic one, informs the actual outlook of a person operating in society and how that outlook has, in Solness's case, fallen on hard times. Although the master builder has achieved a fair amount in his professional life, he does not take much satisfaction in this, and is even rendered unhappy by certain things that resulted from his striving for success. Or so he claims for, as his growing infatuation with Hilda and all she seems to hold out to him reveal, there is a vast self-deception in this area. One of the more explicit connections between her and Solness, a connection both characters refer to a number of times, is the troll which they believe operates in them and is responsible for their deepest desires. First mention of it is made shortly after Hilda's arrival when she tells Solness how he promised to come back for her in ten years and carry her off like a troll. Solness in turn describes the power which drew her to him as the work of a troll that inhabits him. He also blames this troll for what he thinks is a direct link between the secret desire he had to see Aline's old family home burn down (so that he might get ahead in life) and the fact that it eventually did.[26] Given that the fire had both good and bad consequences, he attributes the way things fell out to this troll acting in league with the good and bad devils in the world. On the literal level, this fanciful talk seems to be the product of a diseased mind unable to bear the responsibility for the desires which afflict him and which operate with minimal concern for others. The significance of the crack in the chimney he did nothing about is not so much that the anticipated fire occurred (for it broke out elsewhere), but that he clearly jeopardized the safety of his family by ignoring this crack. However, Solness can no longer distinguish between what he *didn't* do – something that borders on criminal negligence – and the fact that his children died, and not even directly, from a fire that he didn't cause. Or, to put it another way, his guilt has attached itself to a broad base of events and circumstances which, along with his belief in the supernatural, obscure from his conscience the true nature and extent of his wrongdoing.

"When Solness tells Hilda of the happiness he has robbed from other people, he seems to be referring to, first, his suppression of Ragnar, second, the crushing blow he dealt Knut Brovik's

25 Solness has been holding Ragnar down for years.

26 Solness thinks he has the power of making things happen by willing them.

business,[27] and, third, his unscrupulous exploitation of Kaia.[28] But as he admits to Hilda, his greatest sense of guilt rests with the fact that his worldly success has come at the expense of Aline. On two different occasions when speaking to Aline and Dr. Herdal,[29] he vaguely refers to an immeasurable debt he owes his wife. Like the doctor, Aline does not understand what he means by this but, *unlike* the doctor, she promptly thinks that her husband must be ill. Indeed, there is much to suggest that this is the case given that Solness's way of compensating his wife for the loss of her children and her inability to bring others into the world is to build her a new house with nurseries in it. Of course these nurseries will never be used and so they can only be a reminder of an irremediable loss. This pathological way of hurting his wife in the name of doing her good is also evident when Dr. Herdal asks him why he does not tell Aline the truth about his relationship with Kaia. Solness's strange reasoning on the matter is that he cannot do so because he finds a kind of salutary self-punishment in allowing Aline to do him an injustice. He seems to think then that, in order to punish himself for whatever wrongs he has done her in the past, he must do her a further one.

"It is imperative at this point to examine certain other injustices he perpetrates by following a level of desire that eliminates concern for others. In order to keep Ragnar in his employ, he refuses what is virtually Knut Brovik's dying request, that is, to allow Ragnar to undertake a project that will help set him up in business. When the old man finally passes away, Solness seems not to be particularly troubled by this fact and also that, having refused his request, he likely hastened Brovik's death. In much the same way, when Dr. Herdal warns him of the deleterious effect retaining Kaia in his employ might have on his wife, he claims that he is helpless to change the situation. Along similar lines, he makes little effort to communicate in a meaningful way with his wife. Even though she may be partly to blame for this, there is still much to suggest that Solness has sacrificed his marriage on the alter of success. For example, there is little to indicate that he ever sounded Aline out on her feelings about having the family garden divided up into villa lots. On the contrary, it seems that, after the fateful fire that set him up in business but took everything away from her, he was content to put a new roof over her head and then leave her to her own devices. But more than all this, she never received from him the consolation for the deaths of her children that was her due. Speaking about the new house he is building for her and has convinced himself will make her happy, he discovers for the first time that his wife carries her own burden of guilt. Just as with him, there is something irrational about her accepting responsibility for the children's deaths. This comes out when she tells him that she was too weak in misfortune, that she should have hardened herself in order to have done her duties towards him and the little ones. As Solness well knows, however, it was precisely her sense of duty which led to the deaths of the children.[30] Instead of providing her with some comforting word, he simply tells her not to think about them.

"More than once he remarks to Hilda that the reason for Aline's unhappiness is her never having got over the children's deaths. However, Aline herself tells Hilda that it is not the loss of her children, but her old family home that has afflicted her the most. The reason for this discrepancy seems to be that, as Aline herself remarks, Solness has always put the thought of the

27 Brovik was once Solness's employer.
28 Kaia is Brovik's niece and Ragnar's fiancee.
29 Dr. Herdal is a family friend and Aline's main contact with the outside world.
30 For reasons which remain unclear, Aline felt it necessary to continue breastfeeding her children even after she became sick.

true cause of her unhappiness away from him. The new house which, as she tells him, will never make her happy, is a manifestation of his substituting a material for a spiritual solace and improvement in their lives. Although it was a combination of unfortunate incidents which deprived her of motherhood, it was Solness who stripped her of wifehood. Having no other recourse, Aline has retreated into her own world just as he has cut himself off from her. Moreover, all the precious things of the past have disappeared for her and the little that is left, like the remaining piece of garden, no longer seems to be hers. She expresses her grief over this when she tells Hilda about the nine lovely dolls she used to own. They were destroyed in the fire and, as a consequence, she refers to them as her unborn children. The memory of them seems to be the only link she has with the home and family she once knew.

"Gaining an overall view of the structure of the play can be done by seeing it as a parody of the high mimetic form. To begin with, Solness is presented as a man who has succeeded in reaching the top of his profession by a combination of luck and ruthless ambition. Two of his employees, Ragnar and Knut Brovik, fall victim to his surge to the top when the latter's business was simultaneously ruined. To the extent that he has risen in the world and gained control over the professional lives of his former employer and business rivals, Solness is a defacto ruler or order-figure. As such, he is in the same position as all tragic heroes who start off on top of the wheel of fortune. But rather than having to guard himself from some external threat that truly requires a marshalling of forces, Solness faces an internal danger. Or, to put it another way, Ragnar's bid to become an independent builder is certainly not something that should be construed as particularly threatening. As Dr. Herdal points out, it is simply the normal thing for a young man who wishes to marry. Solness, however, treats it otherwise. The pains he takes to keep Ragnar in his employ and so in his power are clearly out of all proportion to the threat. Since neither Ragnar nor any other character with the exception of Hilda is an equal match for him, there is only pettiness in his actions until he renounces this largely imaginary struggle and takes on a new one.[31]

"Before Hilda enters the picture, there are two women in his life: his wife Aline and his mistress Kaia. The former he avoids most of the time (or she avoids him) while the latter serves him not only as an overworked employee but as a sort of earthly princess. Sweet-talking her even while exploiting her, he adopts a self-assured if not boastful attitude when he tells Dr. Herdal that his hold on her verges on the supernatural. The first scenes between Solness and Kaia, however, show that he manipulates her and capitalizes on her love for him. When Hilda comes along and provides a more pleasing likeness of a princess (but one who will manipulate *him*), Kaia, whom he had earlier claimed was quite indispensable to him, finds herself both out of his life and out of a job.

"Solness, as a petty tyrant, commits an act which, in ancient Greek tragedy, virtually guarantees retribution. The fact that Brovik is dying seems to make this act (i.e., the refusal of the suppliant) quite despicable. It is ironic that, while continually sensing that a day of reckoning is in store for him, Solness pays virtually no attention to such acts as these. Rather he worries that the younger generation, simply by wanting what it normally wants, will one day topple him. It is when he is discussing this point with Dr. Herdal that Hilda makes her timely entrance. Not only is she a member of the younger generation, but also what will lead him to his downfall.

31 His intention is to climb the tower of the new house and struggle with God.

Allying herself so closely to his erotic and idealistic flights of fancy, she represents the part of him which strangely merges a sense of guilt and the need to be punished with his deepest desires and highest aspirations.

"While functioning as a character in her own right, we may also discern in Hilda the outline of the lovely female figure who, be she divine or human or something in between, tempts the hero to his doom. In high mimetic tragedy this archetypal figure usually brings about the hero's death by diminishing his chances of succeeding at some ordeal. By contrast, Hilda strengthens and emboldens Solness to the point where he undertakes to do what he otherwise would not.

"The climbing of the tower is itself a parody of the conventional heroic action in four respects. First, it is reduced to a kind of sequel insofar as the main action is Hilda's increasing her hold on Solness. Secondly, the climbing of the tower does not seem to be a particularly noteworthy feat apart from what the characters in the play make of it. Thirdly, Solness goes up the tower with the idea of challenging God by building a kingdom in God's own sphere. This could be termed an act of hubris if it were not for so few indications of God's being present in the world of Halvard Solness.

"Finally, there is one other important point which clearly distinguishes Solness's tragic fate from the one a high mimetic hero suffers. The latter normally has 'an original greatness [and] a nearly divine destiny almost within his grasp' (Frye, 232). In *The Master Builder*, there is no original greatness and no extraordinary potential apart from the mythic vision that, becoming romantic and having some possibility of realization, has never succeeded in raising Solness to a very high place or engaged him in a very great struggle. Given the outstanding claim that the first nonetheless has on him, his life can only take one of two courses. Either he must continue to suffer endless torment and self-dissatisfaction or else break with the situation by deluding himself that the impossible can be achieved. He ends up choosing the second (or having it chosen for him by Hilda) and, as a consequence, there is something heroic but also something more pathetic than glorious about his end. Unlike Oedipus, his downfall cannot be associated with wanting to know the truth about himself and even less with wanting to know it at the cost of everything else."

– You're back, Theo.

In retrospect, the overriding feature of this period comes to me as this: that I felt myself to be in full conformity with the Aristotelian tradition insofar as the *Poetics* formed the basis of Frye's tremendous elaboration of tragedy, comedy, satire, and romance. Without further investigation of a philosophic sort, I was happy to think of the world as separate from literature and the latter as a variously refracted representation of the former. As far as I could determine it then, nothing prevented me from enjoying a perfect freedom in this conceptual scheme that allowed me to go from heaven to earth and earth to hell and back again. Thought in this domain was only Aristotelian for the purpose of taking up literature and studying it. But inasmuch as it escaped these bounds by being the experience of those *other* experiences, everything was entirely free and open and ruled no less by contradiction than its opposite.

– Well, that's the yellow brick road to truth, isn't it?

– Theo, I don't think you're giving him a chance.

– I don't like this! It's tripe! It's like stirring the stew and pulling out the ladle and saying: "Here. Taste it."

– But if it's a nice stew, Theo?

– Andrew, have you ever heard of Stockholm Syndrome?

How am I to understand where the other stands in relation to me if I don't see him looking over a vast field, be it philosophic or scientific, in much the same way that I looked over Frye's? Just as I came to be enthralled by his mapped-out literary universe and take its presuppositions as necessary supports that have no need to be shaken, so the other comes to the shared world and reality of today and, seeing so much to be cultivated by reason, refuses any reason to put reason into doubt. The nub of my problem, as I seem to have to reiterate it, is contradicting this founding ellipsis at the deepest level where contradiction disturbs nothing. But since this level is simply or rather not simply but strategically and even *extra*-strategically not recognized by the other, he takes the contradiction not only to be destructive (the epistemological objection) and self-destructive (the logical objection), but also a sign of bad faith (the ethical objection). What man or woman after all wants to spend time with a niggling doubt that he has no right to a vast inheritance that he is already enjoying? Surely not the man or woman that we all are and some only more than others because they represent the *legitimacy* of this inheritance.

– I like that. Rather nice.

Is there an anomaly in the fact that, under Frye's influence, I ended up embracing a level of systematisation that goes well beyond what most literary scholars are willing to accept? In the fact that I was in some sense at odds with the freedom they individually and collectively enjoy? In the fact that, to boil it right down, I was in some sense at odds with complete and open-ended freedom? I cannot escape the conclusion that I was and no doubt still am, that my relation to the other as errancy, as a less than systematic control in or by the other, is not the same as it is to the errancy in myself. What is this open-ended freedom I have been talking about then if not, at worst, something partisan or prejudicial and, at best, a never-ending struggle and conquest? It seems both wrong and right that it should have to be thus: wrong from the perspective of what it is to be truthful and right in the sense that everything should at least be allowed to stand up and count. What is all this then if not the warring elements that run deep down in every individual who, with both his prejudices and ideals, is never entirely the champion of rule nor the champion of freedom? How I stood in relation to literature was certainly more theoretical and structured than how I later stood or perhaps have always stood in relation to philosophy. That I didn't stay with the former and that I eventually deepened or strengthened my ties with the latter can only suggest a tendency of one of two opposing tendencies to predominate.

– Comments, Andrew? Comments? Given that we can't get the radio to work, the elevator and stairwell are still choked up with smoke, and our diabolical captor has effectively sealed off the place so we don't hear any voice but his own – given all this, what other choice do we have?

– The Viking spirit.

– What?

– Oh, nothing.

– You don't say "the Viking spirit" for nothing

– I played him my first year as a student at Whitehead U.

– You played who, Andrew?

– Halvard Solness. The master builder.

– And?

– Memorable performance, they said.

– So why didn't you keep it up?

– Didn't have the Viking spirit, Theo.

Pushed towards theory where others often abstain from it, I was unquestionably one who wanted to control the literary material. So much so in fact that, once I had analysed a work, I had little patience for interpretations of it that differed from mine. It can't be denied that I viewed myself as the ideal reader of whatever I took up (but mostly this was tragedy) and, following Frye's precept to see more of rather than more in a work, examined it along a scale of major to minor notes so that each was given its due weight and measure. But given that most literary critics reflect bourgeois values and resemble more the chorus than the hero of a Greek tragedy, I was continually confronted with those for whom whatever signs or sentiments of moderation there are bulked larger than what I considered to be the integrity of the hero in his action. In fact, I remember this common way of downsizing the hero coming up in class. The instructor, a good woman from whom I took two courses, insisted upon the culpability of Oedipus in much the same way that Dr. Gold had a year earlier. For her and most of the students in the class, Oedipus's abominable deeds, even though committed before the drama opens and even though done without the hero's knowing their true nature, were a more central feature of it than his unrelenting bid to find out the truth about himself.

– The master builder climbs up a tower at the end of the play. Falls. That's the end of him.

– Did you have to fall onto the stage?

– No, no. It's all offstage. People report it. Hilda screams: "Hurrah for the Master Builder!"

– Hurrah? Who's this Hilda?

– She's the girl who's driven him on to it. Risk the impossible.

– What sort of tower is this?

– Nothing special. It's only a symbol.

– Hmm. Well, I see a moral in all this.

– You do?

– Most certainly. Try to do the impossible and you end up breaking your neck.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

24. A Woolly-Headed Professor

I started this project with the objective of keeping an eye on why I am what I am as a truthteller and why others are what they are. Errancy seemed to be the appropriate word to describe my course whereas order, system, control, and so on seemed to describe the other way. But now it has become apparent that there was this *other* route I took where I acted more like an Apollonian than a Dionysian. Never did this irony strike me at the time because, after having discovered a new direction in studying literature, it was all I could do to take advantage of it. The Fryean principle of various myths and archetypes structuring literature by placing and displacing themselves in it struck me as being a union between the widest possible order and greatest possible freedom. Certainly it wasn't with a Derridean eye I examined these two ideals and so, even though I no doubt blurred them in practise, I theoretically kept them apart. Refraining then from a critical view that extended itself to a *both-and* and *neither-nor* way of thinking, I had only a limited sense of freedom's being implicated in order and vice-versa. By the same token, I took up Frye's theory with less a sensitivity to how I was adapting it to my own particular bent than the conviction that, following its tenets, I could examine a work objectively.

– It's quite true what you're saying, Theo. Only fact is, as far as I can remember, Halvard Solness cuts a better figure when he goes up the tower than he does before it.

When I look back, what a strange thing it seems to have been in a class that, taught by the least lucid and most obfuscating professor I have ever encountered, put me in the position of being an ardent defender of clarity. Here was a man well-beloved in the community for his humane practises, social activism, and left-wing outspokenness. Who was as amiable and helpful a professor as one could imagine. Who taught a course called *Religious Quest in the Modern Age* that I found intriguing. And who absolutely flabbergasted me with his intellectual dribbling around the court and seldom putting the ball through the hoop.

– I never noticed this statuette before, Andrew.

– A student gave it to me a long time ago.

– Headless as it is right now?

– No, no, of course not.

I can't help but think that my reaction to Carl Ridd, a man whose recent death was the occasion for many tributes, was not much different from the way many philosophers react to those who seem to override all order in thought. Just as I have the urge even now to make the case that he often pretended clarity and understanding where there was little of either, so do others throw up never-ending arguments to repudiate those who challenge the degree and extent of – and who thereby seem to be endangering – these same values. And just as they are likely to temper their discourse even when criticizing the work and thought of those whom they morally frown upon and sometimes even despise, so do I feel the need to be tactful even while, as a retrieval of a situation long past, I take umbrage at Carl Ridd's lack of intellectual rigour. On the

other hand, the case against him such as I make it is counterbalanced, mitigated, and perhaps even undone by the fact that, when all is said and done, his intentions were beyond reproach.

– I'll put it away. I just happened to come across it.

– What do you do with it?

– I leave it in my drawer.

– You keep a headless statue in your drawer?

– I don't know what to tell you except it has sentimental value.

With this sort of yes-and-no way of assessing his character (which I don't think he would take issue with except by blunting my sharpest criticism or equivocating more than I could ever tolerate), I will go on to say that Carl Ridd gave me much praise and did his best to win me over. At no time was this more apparent than when he commented on my essay on Franz Kafka's *The Castle.* I described the hero of this rather off-beat novel as a parody of Kierkegaard's knight of faith. By this I meant that, with his continually failing to reach the Castle and its highest official Klamm, the hero K. is a more patently human figure than the one Kierkegaard envisioned as being ordinary in all respects save in the matter of faith. A person, that is, who could pass for a tax collector (Kierkegaard seems to have wanted to emphasize the ordinariness of his outer aspect so as to contrast it with his inner) and yet who, for all that, believes so wholly and intensely in God that he is carried into a one-to-one relationship with Him. Presumably then one who, like the Abraham Kierkegaard took pains to celebrate as the prototype of this knight of faith, is thoroughly rational and normal even while making himself incomprehensible to others by placing this relationship above every earthly consideration.

– I don't understand you, Andrew.

"Franz Kafka's *The Castle*"

"In the novel there are two worlds or levels of being: the upper one of the Castle and the lower one of the village. Together they make up an absurd and incomprehensible order, an indistinct union of a presumably knowable and familiar realm and one that is ultimately unknowable. K. first enters the village or lower world and then undertakes the impossible task of establishing personal and direct contact with the Castle. Neither numerous setbacks nor the advice given to him by the villagers dissuades him from this self-imposed mission. It is made doubly mysterious by the fact that K., while displaying a mind of unusual lucidity, accepts without further ado the absurdity that haunts these twinned worlds as well as his idiosyncratic struggle to attain the upper one. It is the overriding paradox of the novel that he never loses faith in this quest (though it does seem to slacken at the end) or gives up the attempt of achieving the impossible."

– I'm going out. I've had enough.

"I hope to make it clear that the protagonist, K., is a parody of Kierkegaard's knight of faith and that, furthermore, his quest is an ironic or even satiric treatment of what Kierkegaard calls the second paradoxical movement of faith. Essentially this is the belief in the attainment of the impossible even while keeping it fully in mind that this belief is absurd. Rather than going into this paradox of belief in detail, I will rely on whatever familiarity the reader has with it in accordance with the treatment it receives throughout this essay.

"It might help to start at the beginning. K. introduces himself into the lower world of the village freely and voluntarily. Although he appears to have received an invitation from the Castle authorities, its authenticity is by no means certain. Furthermore, his major preoccupation quickly becomes entering into contact with the Castle for its own sake. With respect to the villagers, there is a great deal less hostility to his claim of being a land surveyor (i.e., the role he initially assumes as a job posting that, oddly enough, carries with it no specific duties) than there is to his various efforts to reach Klamm (i.e., the Castle official who is supposed to have appointed him to this position). This discrepancy, I think, should be understood as the collective experience of the villagers which is a recognition of certain boundaries and a sort of general knowledge or wisdom pertaining to the undesirability and perhaps even danger of overstepping them.

"Kafka's ironic treatment of the knight of faith extends to what Kierkegaard calls the first movement of faith or the movement of infinite resignation. In simplest terms, it is a conscious renouncement of earthly happiness for the sake of leading a spiritual life. Kierkegaard holds that it is only by a paradoxical movement of thought that defies reason even while holding to it that one can return to a joyful hope of winning back precisely what one has given up. Now with the protagonist, K., it appears that, throughout his quest to reach the Castle, he is caught on the horns of an existential dilemma. Like the author of *Fear and Trembling* (but not the knight of faith), he finds placing the spiritual side of his life above other concerns (and, in this regard, K. gives up his fiancee just as Kierkegaard did his) much easier to accomplish than having a transcendent experience that, while forever being harnessed to a calculating and deliberative mind, delivers the latter over to an absolute and unwavering faith.[32]

"There are several indications in the novel that K. has forsaken a better world so that he might take up his assignment in the village. To begin with, there are two poignant memories he has of his hometown. Both of them are suggestive of a certain naivety and innocence that underlie his generally romantic outlook. On the arm of Barnabas on the way to the Castle, K. recalls a boyhood adventure not extraordinary in itself but significant in its relation to his present undertaking.

> Memories of his home kept recurring and filled his mind. There, too, a church stood in the marketplace, partly surrounded by an old graveyard, which was again surrounded by a high wall. Very few boys had managed to climb that wall, and for some time K., too, had failed. It was not curiosity that had urged them on; the graveyard had been no mystery to them. They had often entered it through a small wicket-gate, it was only the smooth high wall that they had wanted to conquer. But one morning –

32 Although it could be argued that being absolutely related to God need not imply the elimination of all doubt and uncertainty, it could hardly be without *moments* of such elimination.

> the empty, quiet marketplace had been flooded with sunshine – when had K. ever seen it like that either before or since? – he had succeeded in climbing it with astonishing ease; at a place where he had already slipped down many a time, he had clambered with a small flag between his teeth right to the top at the first attempt. Stones were still rattling down under his feet, but he was at the top. He stuck the flag in, it flew in the wind, he looked down and round about him, over his shoulder, too, at the crosses mouldering in the ground; nobody was greater than he at that place and that moment. By chance the teacher had come past and with a stern face had made K. descend. In jumping down he had hurt his knee and he had found some difficulty in getting home, but still he had been on the top of the wall. The sense of that triumph had seemed to him then a victory for life, which was not altogether foolish, for now so many years later on the arm of Barnabas in the snowy night the memory of it came to succour him.

"Apart from the sharp contrast between this childhood victory and his ill-fated attempt to reach the Castle, the illusory quality of the former, of which K. seems to be partially aware, touches upon a certain underlying egoism which has a great deal to do with his extraordinary ability to concentrate on his objective. I will return to this point later. The other memory of the past occurs earlier that day when he first views the distant prospect of the Castle. In his mind's eye he compares its shabby appearance to his hometown, thinking the latter to be 'hardly inferior to this so-called Castle.' Again we hear him through the narrator saying:

> If it was merely a question of enjoying the view, it was a pity to have come so far; K. would have done better to revisit his native town, which he had not seen for such a long time.

"Coming as early as it does in the novel, this passage seems to foreshadow the frustration and disappointment he will encounter. When he compares the tower of the Castle to the church tower of his hometown, it is the latter which he views most favourably.

> The church tower, firm in line, soaring unfalteringly to its tapering point, topped with red tiles and broad in the roof, an earthly building – what else can men build? – but with a loftier goal than the humble dwelling-houses, and a clearer meaning than the muddle of everyday life.

"The qualifying factor in the above with respect to earthly limitations does not detract from the image of the church as an ennobling confirmation of a certain striving and a certain beyond. Indeed, it is by virtue of its being rooted in the community and symbolically pointing to the higher world that it receives this grace and meaning. Juxtaposed to it we have the description of the unattractive Castle and, as it seems, a representation of the same striving for the beyond bereft of its ideality.

"Archetypally speaking, K. descends into an underworld when he crosses the bridge and enters the village. The surface world is not only the world of his past but whatever there is which

is outside the wintry domain of the Castle, and which he could return to if he so desired. This surface world is closely linked to the normal pursuit of happiness. It is this attainable world which Frieda, his fiancee, wants to escape to when, lamenting over K.'s obsession with the Castle, she tells him that he must take her away to some far-off place. I will quote the relevant passage since it illustrates the difference in their relationship both to Klamm (that out-of-reach Castle official who nonetheless seems to be everywhere) and to each other.

> Frieda said: "I shan't be able to stand this life here. If you want to keep me with you, we'll have to go away somewhere or other, to the south of France, or to Spain." "I can't go away," replied K. "I came here to stay. I'll stay here." And giving utterance to a self-contradiction, which he made no effort to explain, he added as if to himself: "What could have enticed me to this desolate country except the wish to stay here?" Then he went on: " But you want to stay here too; after all, it's your own country. Only you miss Klamm and that gives you desperate ideas." "I miss Klamm?" said Frieda. "I've all I want of Klamm here, too much Klamm; it's to escape from him that I want to go away. It's not Klamm that I miss, it's you. I want to go away for your sake, because I can't get enough of you, here where everything distracts you, here where everything distracts me. I would gladly lose my pretty looks, I would gladly be sick and ailing, if I could be left in peace with you." K. had paid attention only to one thing: "Then Klamm is still in communication with you?" he asked eagerly; "he sends for you?"

"In the above passage one can discern two potential sacrifices, both of which are already partially realized. Frieda has forsaken her privileged relationship with Klamm to become K.'s fiancee. She shows that she is willing to go further by removing herself entirely from Klamm's sphere of influence. K., on the other hand, has already begun renouncing their engagement by continually affirming the priority of his wanting to reach this mysterious official. Allowing for the quasi-mystical or quasi-religious aspect of their relationship to Klamm, we can translate the two opposite movements into these terms: Frieda moves away from a spiritual state in which Klamm is at the centre to make her love for K. the most important thing in her life. K., on the other hand, moves away from love and happiness to 'concentrate the content of life and the whole significance of reality in one single wish' (*Fear and Trembling*). In this line Kierkegaard is referring to the first movement of faith, using the example of the young swain who falls in love with a princess and must, by virtue of this love's impossibility, allow it to be 'transfigured into a love for the Eternal Being.' Now with respect to K. understood as a parody of the knight of faith, it is not the unattainable, the princess beloved by the swain, that is given up. It is rather the woman who loves him and is willing to go away with him. Moreover, what proceeds from the sacrifice of her bears little resemblance to what Abraham receives as a divine blessing and benediction.

"Kierkegaard devotes a good part of *Fear and Trembling* to the elucidation of what he calls the teleological suspension of the ethical. Here is one paragraph which sums it up rather well:

> The paradox of faith is this, that the individual is higher than the universal, that the individual (to recall a dogmatic distinction now rather seldom heard) determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute, not his relation to the absolute by his relation to the universal. The paradox can also be expressed by saying that there is an absolute duty toward God; for in this relationship of duty the individual as individual stands related absolutely to the absolute. So when in this connection it is said that it is a duty to love God, something different is said from that in the foregoing; for if this duty is absolute, the ethical is reduced to a position of relativity. From this, however, it does not follow that the ethical is to be abolished, but it acquires an entirely different expression, the paradoxical expression – that, for example, love to God may cause the knight of faith to give his love to his neighbour the opposite expression to that which, ethically speaking, is required by duty.

"Ethically speaking, the highest expression for K. would be to treat Frieda not as a means to Klamm (it is the discovery that she is his mistress that proves to be the main reason behind his hooking up with her) but as one who, given his commitment to her as her fiancé, should have her happiness wholly at heart. However, his *other* commitment is such that, when it becomes clear to him that she cannot further him along his way, he goes on to seek other means of making contact with the Castle. Frieda herself recognizes that K. transgresses the ethical when she observes him in conversation with the young schoolboy, Hans.

> But in reality everything has changed since I've listened to you talking with that boy. How innocently you began asking about the family, about this and that! To me you looked just as you did that night when you came into the taproom, impetuous and frank, trying to catch my attention with such a child-like eagerness. You were just the same as then, and all I wished was that the landlady had been there and could have listened to you, and then we should have seen whether she could stick to her opinion. But then quite suddenly – I don't know how it happened – I noticed that you were talking to him with a hidden intention. You won his trust – and it wasn't easy to win – by sympathetic words, simply so that you might with greater ease reach your end, which I began to recognize more and more clearly. Your end was that woman. In your apparently solicitous inquiries about her I could see quite nakedly your simple preoccupation with your own affairs. You were betraying that woman even before you had won her. In your words I recognized not only my past, but my future as well.

"When the landlady calls K. 'the most ignorant person in the village,' she does so with the certainty of recognizing that Klamm's relationship with the denizens of the lower world is ambiguous, arbitrary, and unilateral. K. acknowledges this and thereby implies that he has no rational way of accounting for his efforts to reach him. But unlike the knight of faith whose situation he approximates, unlike the individual who resides in the security of a one-to-one

relationship with the absolute, K., precisely because he cannot establish this relationship, is incomprehensible not only to others but to himself.

> Klamm was far away. Once the landlady had compared Klamm to an eagle, and that had seemed absurd in K.'s eyes, but it did not seem absurd now; he thought of Klamm's remoteness, of his impregnable dwelling, of his silence, broken perhaps only by cries such as K. had never yet heard, of his downward-pressing gaze, which could never be proved or disproved, of his wheelings, which could never be disturbed by anything that K. did down below, which far above he followed at the behest of incomprehensible laws and which only for instants were visible – all these things Klamm and the eagle had in common.

"Despite the absurdity of trying to communicate with this eagle that seems to have as much in common with the *abysmal* as with the absolute, with the end of possibility as with divine omnipotence, K. never stops affirming the latter. It is precisely the first, however, that escapes the analysis of the absurd (as Kierkegaard gives it to us).

> The absurd is not one of the factors which can be discriminated within the proper compass of the understanding: it is not identical with the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen. At the moment when the knight made the act of resignation, he was convinced, humanly speaking, of the impossibility. This was the result reached by the understanding, and he had sufficient energy to think it. On the other hand, in an infinite sense it was possible, namely, by renouncing it; but this sort of possessing is at the same time a relinquishing, and yet there is no absurdity in this for the understanding, for the understanding continued to be in the right in affirming that in the world of the finite where it holds sway this was and remained an impossibility. This is quite as clear to the knight of faith, so the only thing that can save him is the absurd, and this he grasps by faith. So he recognizes the impossibility, and that very instant he believes the absurd.

"Now in order to deal with this matter of the abysmal being glossed or eliminated (and at the same time draw the ironic distinction between Kafka's hero and Kierkegaard's knight of faith), it must first be noted that the young swain who is in love with a princess and whose movements of faith Kierkegaard likens to Abraham's – this young swain believes the absurd only with reference to what is really an *improbability*. In other words, the situation is such that only highly unfavourable circumstances bar him from his heart's desire. As a consequence then, his renouncement of the princess and his paradoxical belief that he will yet have her are bound up in a conception of the impossible that is not absolute. The same may be said of Abraham's situation as Kierkegaard portrays it. Here the belief that it is impossible to do other than carry out God's command has as its backdrop a supreme being who can alter or annul his own command. Since God does in fact intervene to prevent the catastrophe (i.e., the sacrifice of Isaac) and since Kierkegaard's knight of faith only becomes justified or glorified on the basis of this intervention,

the movement of faith that he describes is not so much paradoxical as teleological. This notion of a perfect faith that has God both at the beginning and end seems to be what David F. Swanson is addressing below.

> Hence there exists no paradox for faith in its perfection, but for the human individual who is in the process of becoming, the paradoxical cannot be avoided without arbitrarily limiting the spiritual process. Kierkegaard's insistence upon the paradoxical is a consequence of a deep-seated predilection for apprehending the spiritual life in process, and hence ethically, rather than aesthetically, in a foreshortened perspective, or altogether in static terms.

"In the case of K., however, we do not have a 'faith in its perfection.' The absolute as represented by the Castle gives little indication that it will ever satisfy the desire for a personal relationship. It can only be then that K.'s ever-failing attempts to establish this relationship constitute a genuine paradox that leaves the issue of faith a question mark.

"With respect to this ironic treatment of a perfect faith that is no doubt easier to imagine, simulate, and expound upon than to experience as a rationally framed phenomenon, *The Castle* is a penetrating examination of the individual who can never quite get clear of exigencies which interfere with as much as promote his higher endeavour. In other words, the latter is not unadulterated, not completely separate from the baser elements of the human condition. The further one gets into the novel, the more it seems that K.'s striving to reach the Castle has greater significance for him than the goal itself. An intimation of this comes after he has made one of his failed attempts.

> The Castle above them, which K. had hoped to reach that very day, was already beginning to grow dark and retreated again into the distance. But as if to give him a parting sign till their next encounter, a bell began to ring merrily up there, a bell that for at least a second made his heart palpitate, for its tone was menacing, too, as if it threatened him with the fulfilment of his desire.

"His upward striving, in other words, is both the content and meaning of his life, and if it were to come to an end, his identity – the recognition of himself as the one who strives for the highest – would likewise come to an end. Since K. examines everything except, with a few notable exceptions, his own thoughts, one only catches glimpses of this.

> Of course I'm ignorant, that's an unshakeable truth and a sad truth for me, but it gives me all the advantage of ignorance, which is greater daring, and so I'm prepared to put up with my ignorance, evil consequences and all, for some time to come, so long as my strength holds out.

"Another passage revealing an underlying pride, egoism, or self-glorification comes during the interview with the Castle official, Momus.

> It was not Klamm's environment in itself that seemed to him worth striving for, but rather that he, K., he only and no one else, should attain to Klamm, and should attain to him not to rest with him, but to go on beyond him, farther yet, into the Castle.

"It is left to Hans, a young boy who wishes to be like K., to express what are probably K.'s own thoughts.

> [Hans had] the belief that though for the moment K. was wretched and looked down on, yet in an almost unimaginable and a distant future he would excel everybody. And yet it was just this absurdly distant future and the glorious developments that were to lead up to it that attracted Hans; that was why he was willing to accept K. even in his present state. The peculiar childish-grownup acuteness of this wish consisted in the fact that Hans looked on K. as on a younger brother whose future would reach farther than his own, the future of a very little boy.

"It is the child in K. which makes him want to succeed with the Castle in the way that he did with the wall in his youth. This much is understood by such people as the landlady and Frieda who draw attention to it on more than one occasion.[33]

"Opposed to crossing over from a lower to a higher world as self-elevation or self-exaltation is the dissolution of the self in the former. Psychologically speaking, however, the hero yearns for the one as much as the other. Both are movements away from temporal being: one relates to the ideal while the other relates to the buffets and blows of life that wear one down. Death of course is the ultimate loss of self but oblivion may also be sought in passion, drunkenness, and sleep. Elements of all three emerge in the novel and, with respect to K.'s quest, distract and hinder him. His first sexual encounter with Frieda graphically illustrates this.

> Three hours went past, hours in which they breathed as one, hours in which K. was haunted by the feeling that he was losing himself or wandering in a strange country, farther than ever man had wandered before, a country so strange that not even the air had anything in common with his native air, where one might die of strangeness, and yet whose enchantment was such that one could only go on and lose oneself further. So it came to him not as a shock but faint glimmer of comfort when from Klamm's room a deep, authoritative voice called for Frieda.

"The most obvious recurring pattern in the novel is the weakening effect his body has upon his will the closer he seems to get to his objective. The first instance of this comes when he tries to reach the Castle on foot. Weariness and sleepiness overcome him as they do when, for example, he waits for Klamm in the Herrenhof courtyard. The warmth of Klamm's coach and the

33 These occasions, along with other references to .K.'s child-like behaviour, are to be found on pages 66, 198, 202, 314, 397, and 403 of *The Castle* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1974).

sweet-smelling brandy act upon him as a drug, dulling the urgency of his mission.

> His arms spread out, his head supported on pillows, which always seemed to be there, K. gazed out of the sleigh into the dark house. Why was Klamm such a long time in coming? As if stupefied by the warmth after his long wait in the snow, K. began to wish that Klamm would come soon. The thought that he would much rather not be seen by Klamm in his present position touched him only vaguely as a faint disturbance of his comfort.

"But the greatest example of the body gaining the upper hand over the mind comes when K., upon being called to the Herrenhof for an interview with the Castle secretary, Erlanger, stumbles into the office-bedroom of another official, Bürgel, who is desirous of promoting K.'s case.

> K. was asleep, it was not real sleep, he heard Bürgel's words perhaps better than during the former dead-tired state of waking, word after word struck his ear, but the tiresome consciousness had gone, he felt free, it was no longer Bürgel who held him, only he sometimes groped toward Bürgel, he was not yet in the depths of sleep, but immersed in it he certainly was. No one could deprive him of that now.

"From this point on until the end of the uncompleted novel, K. never regains the intensity which characterizes his earlier efforts. It is as if he comes to accept the drift towards dissolution, the death by exhaustion which Kafka's literary executer, Max Brod, tells us would have ended this work. Before the novel breaks off, K. appears to be gravitating towards an acceptance of Pepi's humble invitation to join her and her two friends in a dark and sensual place. And before I conclude this essay, I would like to cite the passage, coming as it does in K.'s conversation with Pepi, which shows a belated recognition.

> And self-seeking? One might rather say that by sacrificing what she had and what she was entitled to expect, she has given us both the opportunity to prove our worth in higher positions, but that we have disappointed her and are positively forcing her to return here. I don't know whether it is like this, and my own guilt is by no means clear to me; only, when I compare myself with you something of this kind dawns on me: it is as if we have both striven too intensely, too noisily, too childishly, with too little experience, to get something that for instance with Frieda's calm and Frieda's matter-of-factness can be got easily and without much ado. We have tried to get it by crying, by scratching, by tugging – just as a child tugs at the tablecloth, gaining nothing, but only bringing all the splendid things down on the floor and putting them out of its reach forever.

"An Apologetic Conclusion"

"I am forced against my will to break off at this point, not having achieved what I initially set out to do. It was my hope that this essay might be a fairly comprehensive study of the novel. But, like K. (and perhaps even Kafka), I am guilty of overreaching. Time and circumstance do not permit me to explore other important features. What I have given at least provides an overview based on my conception of the novel as an esoteric work which demands from the reader a knowledge and understanding of Kierkegaard's knight of faith."

– Now what're we getting?

– You can't say he isn't getting flattered here, Theo. He starts off: "Well, I'm in awe and gratitude for this piece of work."

– Who's in awe and gratitude of what?

– Professor Ridd that's marking this paper on Kafka.

– Are you talking about this student's assignment that's been thrust upon us and dinning in our ears for half an hour?

– Oh my goodness, the comments are rather woolly.

– Andrew, about that Golden Boy statue in your drawer. Does it have anything to do with —

– I'm going to read them out loud. I think they might be interesting despite their woolliness. "While throughout it I have been (occasionally) unclear about what <u>you</u> meant, and occasionally clear (as I thought) but finding you not to be quite clear in what you 'clearly' meant...

– What're you reading me?

– " ...<u>nevertheless I find this to be an exceptionally rich, accurate, proven work</u>. It's very much the kind of conclusion to which I also have come after some years of reading (and teaching) the novel. I came to it more from within the novel itself as illuminated by my understanding of Western intellectual history; you came to it from the novel as illuminated by your study of SK – who is, after all, an important moment in Western intellectual history. No wonder we came to the same conclusion; though I do not mean at all to imply by this identity that there was nothing new here to me. In a sense, 'everything' was new to me. Therefore I hope it doesn't simply trigger again a hopeless (barren) feud that has erupted between us from time to time all year, if I go on to say – as a result of this quite marvellous, subtle, paradoxically <u>clear</u> paper...

– Is he marking it or setting him up for the Nobel prize?

– ...that when I or W. H. Auden or some member of the class say in class a rich, difficult, subtle thing that everyone sees or should, it is frustrating to have a hard voice saying from the back of the room in a rejecting tone, 'I don't see that at all; would you please tell me precisely what you mean by ...' And I get mad, then, for the class's sake, for truth's sake, for my and your sake. It would be like me saying of this quite amazing essay, 'I don't see it that way at all; you're being very inconsistent, not to say mystical; kindly speak it plainly.' But I don't say that. Can't. I say, '<u>Well done, thou good and faithful servant</u>.' Not a servant of me, or even of the class; but of Kafka, of 'truth,' of 'reality.' Or something like that. And I say, 'Thank you.' C. R."

– Turn it off! Turn it off! Where's the switch?

– There is no switch, Theo.

– What is this? Why is this happening? Andrew, we have to keep our wits about us. We have to find other things to talk about. Now that statue in your drawer. It reminds me of that young fellow who —

– The man just died.

– Yes, yes, of course. He died in a car accident. I remember that quite well.

– I'm not talking about him. I'm talking about Carl Ridd.

– Carl Ridd? What do I care about Carl Ridd? It's not Carl Ridd I want to talk about. Andrew, you had a thing going with him.

– With great fanfare he was buried with many honours and tributes.

– I don't mean to meddle but, now that you've come out of the closet, I must tell you there was talk about that young man and a certain amount of favouritism going on.

Perhaps it is time for me to recognize that, despite my antipathy to his effusive, fawning way with me, his excessive good will that betrayed a fear of being rigorously challenged and tested, and his habitual use of the word truth as if it were butter that could be spread everywhere, Carl Ridd's way of thinking was closer to mine than I perhaps ever realized. To be sure, I had no liking for the quasi-Berkeleian metaphysics he introduced at the beginning of the course and that informed his view of literature no less than life. The role it gave to the mind as a kind of super projector throwing up a world like a feature film on an immense and nebulous screen was no more to my liking than the contrary one that treated the mind as a blank slate upon which the world wrote down the ABC of itself.

– Is this his way of slamming both traditions?

– It's a shame we can't get a movie on this computer.

– Running down our profession, Andrew? Is this what it's all about?

– I can't get anything to work. Even the phone is out of order.

– Would you like to have someone like this in your class?

– It might be possible to catch someone's attention from the window.

– Andrew, I don't see anything wrong with causality. It's a principle that's always given us the best results.

– It's not working, Theo. People just ignore me.

So what am I to make of this proximity to him? Can I deny that I'm in some sense saying that truth is all over the place? And what is this "*in some sense*"? Is it just a rhetorical move or does it possess great significance? How does my present outlook compare to the theoretical one I had of literature in the past? Doesn't it seem that, as soon as one has in one's sights the truth about something, one is forced to mark it off from so much else? And isn't this often the case even when one is trying to appropriate the one by the other? That is, the "so much else" by the "truth about something"? Which can only mean that truthtelling is always going back to the human all too human even while extending itself so heroically. Granting itself the freedom to range wider and further than it has ever done before, it nonetheless adopts a protectionist policy when, as a more or less settled thing, it resonates as a field of vested interests.

– Heavens, he's treading on —

– What?

I said at the beginning of this essay that I must resist as much as I must allow for such presumably negative traits as uncertainty, hesitation, contradiction, and equivocation. This goes hand in hand with the fact that truthtelling includes these elements as much as the attempt to expel them. That the latter arises in accordance with the degree to which truth is separated from the telling of it strikes me as being inadvertently admitted by Aristotle's principle in the *Nichomachean Ethics*. When it is allowed that a subject cannot be gone into with the greatest precision, when it is said that it has such a nature as to call for a less schematic and more tentative approach than is the case with other subjects, then much that goes by the name of opinion and interpretation is ineluctably taken up as part of knowledge-seeking. As part of truthtelling then and, as much as this may be admitted or not admitted, as much as it may be underplayed or overplayed, it forever inhabits it as its other. In the case of literary criticism and in the case of Carl Ridd as literary critic, I was sensitive to a tendency to minimize or reduce the literary work in its objectivity by overplaying the subjective side of things.

– Oh, rot! Heavens! Let me hear no more!

– The conflict of interpretations, Theo. You can't just sweep aside everything that doesn't

fall into the natural sciences.

– I don't sweep it aside. I simply refuse to recognize it as consolidating knowledge.

– But there's that knowledge that every generation has and while it may not be consolidated, it's what grasps and gives meaning to your kind of knowledge.

– It's not knowledge, Andrew. It's opinion. What Plato called opinion and we shouldn't mix the two so we can't distinguish one from the other.

– I don't know, Theo. Words can be prejudices.

– Oh, really? How neat! How convenient! How simplifying! Every word is a prejudice. Isn't that what the great immoralist said?

– I take it those were his words.

– Well, why should I pay attention to his words? Aren't they – each and every one of them – a prejudice?

– But if prejudice is irreducible and present at least to some degree in discussion, then there must be some tolerance of it.

– The type of discussion you're talking about is not in the realm of knowledge.

– Well, with respect to what we're doing right now —

– Quite right. It's claptrap. One should get on with the work of doing science and let the results speak for themselves.

No, Carl Ridd wasn't a great scholar but he was a good man whose occasional intellectual dishonesty, I'm sure, only sprang up as his way of trying to keep afloat in an intractable sea of scholarship. Every class he flooded us with handouts that were supposed to enlighten us on the novels we were reading. Strangely enough, this practise didn't extend to his treatment of *The Castle*. Nor did he talk about this novel at any length. I can only assume then that he had never found a satisfactory way of doing so and that, for professional or personal reasons, he was prevented from admitting it.

– Andrew, way back in high school I remember reading a play by Sartre. There were three characters in it who had died and were in a sort of hell they effectively created for themselves.

– It's called No Exit.

– That's our situation.

– Theo, you know I've always been one who's faded into the background.

– Yes, except now it seems you're voicing your opinion with uncharacteristic zeal.

– Well, I —

– And the fact is it's not in keeping with the cordial relationship we've always enjoyed in the past.

– Theo!

– In the meantime this voice – wherever it's coming from – is assaulting our ears with all sorts of rude noise.

– But I'm not —

– And to make the situation worse, I've got work to do.

– I'm not responsible for this.

– You seem to be encouraging it. If we both just clammed up and ignored him — Klamm! I like that name! — he wouldn't be able to get away with so much.

Should I be stricken because my path is windy? Should I be rushed along because I have a multitude of opinions to deliver and no consolidating body of knowledge? Should I in effect be tempted to throw it all over as not worth doing because already laid up as a secret in every human heart? It is the recesses and shadows of the intellectual soul I'm trying to bring to light as if transparency – immediate access to all parts of this soul – were not as impossible to attain as Kafka's castle. Enormous communities and vested interests proceed precisely by shunning what I'm after and, from their range and perspective, scorn as insignificant. In some sense this means I'm left with only the attempt as the important thing: the statement that here, even here, aspiring to truthhood means not running away, not turning one's back, not invoking a taboo, not measuring consequences and calculating results to determine whether the game is worth the candle.

– Oh, brave new world!

– What did you say, Andrew?

– Uh, Shakespeare. The Tempest. *I played — you wouldn't believe!*

– Who did you sympathize for? Prospero or Caliban?

– Well, my goodness!

– I tend to think the latter got the worse deal.

– Caliban was a monster.

– A native indian.

– I certainly didn't play him that way.

– Well, then you didn't go for the subtext. He's on an island. His land's taken away from him. He's reduced to slavery. And he becomes the white man's burden.

– He betrayed Prospero. He was going to violate Miranda.

– Yes, and people the island with little Calibans. But, after all, the island was his. It was taken from him. And perhaps this was his heathenish way of striking back.

– Oh, very well but the fact is the text is Eurocentric. After all, Shakespeare wasn't writing for a twentieth century audience.

– Didn't Ben Jonson say that Shakespeare was for all time?

– Yes.

– And Montaigne? Isn't there something there too?

– By God, you're right.

– You're probably wondering how I got to know Shakespeare so well.

– Well, I've never heard you speak about him before.

– It's been a long time and I remember taking a very business-like approach. I read him from top to bottom and even some commentary starting with A. C. Bradley, Coleridge, and going right up to — oh, what the devil is his name?

Carl Ridd was a good man and no doubt hundreds of people attended his funeral. It is enough to make me dwell on the fact that values collide or at least some take precedence over others and that telling the truth usually comes in varying degrees and doses. When I was young, I was less tolerant of this state of affairs and tended to look down on those who esteemed the good in some way or other while falsifying this or that about it. Since then I have learned not to be so unilateral in my judgements and, with the recognition of such hard truths as that hundreds of people won't turn up at my funeral, be more tolerant of the other in his ethical otherness. When one is like Carl Ridd and fights on many fronts and when one assumes roles, tasks, and responsibilities that require more in the way of practical reason than scrupulous reflection, one sacrifices a bit of one's spiritual freedom. Carl Ridd's battle was not the lone struggle of

someone like Soren Kierkegaard and so, as much as he admired and respected this thinker and paid unusual and, as I think now, heartfelt tribute both to him and me, he was less the poet or thinker of the knight of faith than an acting knight of faith himself.

– O. J. Simpson or something like that. Anyway, what the devil was I talking about?

– You were claiming that Caliban was a victim who deserved pity.

– In moderation. I don't mean to overstate the matter. It's like, well, take The Merchant of Venice*. It's the same thing there. Shylock's a monster, if you will. He wants his pound of flesh from Antonio right to the very end. On the other hand, Shakespeare shows how much he's been brutalized and knocked down by society.*

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25. A Certain Amount of Clarity

No more than one can read all things would it do for me to drag into this account everything I have read. Even all I have thought and written over many years has a limited application to this always tentative advancement of my admittedly heterogeneous subject. By the same token, repetition is necessary but not to the point that it is less a constant reminder of key elements than a sort of puffery or pride that, giving up the ship, lets the egoism that drives this ship drop off the radar screen of this very same ship that . . .

– I'm drinking, Andrew. Did you notice?

. . . that, as the ship of truthtelling, has the impossible but perhaps becoming more possible than ever before task of tracking it.

– I'm feeling the effects. I would almost say I'm feeling no pain.

This over-extended and barely tolerable metaphor . . .

– Fine weather we're having.

. . . has the advantage of being itself an illustration of the egoism that is both being tracked and slipping out of sight.

– I hope it holds up till next week.

And yet if it weren't for this last remark . . .

– Then we'll have on this campus one of the greatest philosophers of our time.

. . . it would be, despite its pretensions, letting this egoism slip too easily out of sight.

– A man who's published twenty-five books, written countless articles, and has finally deigned, after much pleading and fund-raising, to honour us with his presence.

For although it may be construed as a mere preciosity, it prevents my claim – or really what is more a wish than a claim – from perverting itself.

– You've written a few stinging articles on him, Andrew. Damned if I didn't think — but the point is he's coming and it's up to all of us, critics as much as admirers, to give him the royal treatment.

It is an egoism that has managed to distinguish itself from countless others by hitting the ovum of a new conception. Therefore luck, luck, luck but also pain, pain, pain. And, oh, the pain is enough to make one forget the luck or else view it as being less the nourishing and sustaining soil of innumerable factors than a large number of years of stubbornly stumbling along.

– Anyway, getting back to Shakespeare, he had a heart as big as all outdoors. And a way of peering — Andrew, I don't go into this sort of thing much but it was uncanny!

From Professor Ridd's *Religious Quest in the Modern Age* to Professor Burns' *Philosophy of Mind* and *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. A noteworthy change in that it was like going from a cornucopia-cum-crowded nest to a modest workshop-cum-war room. Unquestionably clarity and order, epitomized by rigorous arguments setting out to disqualify all contradiction and inaccuracy, held sway in the second more than in the first and, as the combination of philosophical thought and scholarly work and as, moreover, what set itself up in my mind as the playing field of the top players in the game, implied a challenge of some kind or other. To think of a whole community of recognized and renowned experts missing the boat precisely for the reason that the winning and, if I daresay so, the warring element figured so prominently in their bid for the truth was to imagine that the artist had already won the game. That is, by having the advantage, the sublime and most trustworthy advantage, of admitting defeat. Safeguarding the mystery even while elaborating all and everything about it was something I believed in as much as I suffered from having so much paltry and piecemeal knowledge. Stricken then as I am now and forever will be by this shortage or shortcoming or short-sightedness, I felt the need to take advantage of whatever opportunity arose to corner and spy out the myriad-mindedness of man in his pursuit of some lasting and unchallengeable position.

– Did you ever hear that Shakespeare was gay, Theo?

– Let's change the subject.

Due to factors that go beyond my simply having been a relative newcomer to philosophy (and particularly to that part of it called ordinary language philosophy), I wrote some unexceptional essays that don't interest me much now apart from the opportunity they provide to enrich this one. If, first of all, these essays are rather flat and uninspired and if, secondly, they do a rather good job of reporting the arguments of philosophers but argue against them in a holus-bolus, sketchy, and appendage-like way (this weakness is not so uncommon in undergraduate papers and particularly those written for a philosophy course that, while laying stress on rigorous argument, may nonetheless provoke a both personal and wide-ranging response), then the matter seems to shape itself along the following lines. That a general competence in arguing to which I feel I can lay claim was outmatched by a greater one that may be called linguistic philosophy's. Furthermore, that mine overshot itself by trying to overshoot the second and that this overshooting or overreaching was the result of my resisting any temptation or pressure or even appeals of a goodly, positive, or practical nature to submit to it. In short, I did little more than trace it out as best I could and then, as a sort of conclusion, make a few statements, rather traditional and conservative ones, about what I believed philosophy is or should be. Viewed from the angle of, first, always having esteemed literature over philosophy and, secondly, encountering in the ordinary language school a renegade movement (Gilbert Ryle, in *The Concept of Mind*, calls Cartesian dualism the *official* doctrine and holds it to be radically mistaken), there was an anomaly in my reaction to it based on some conceptual confusion not with respect to what this school was targeting and professed to be able to get rid of, but with

respect to my inability to deal with this claim and everything implied by it. Insofar as I didn't know how to clear up my confusion or insofar as I didn't know how much conception is *already* confusion and, furthermore, insofar as I was on the philosophical chessboard and made a maladroit move to get out of check, I ended up, and without much reason for self-congratulation, on the square that more or less represents the position of the majority.

"The Will in Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*" (with a Short, Personal Appraisal*)*

"In dealing with the concept of volition, Gilbert Ryle purposely sets out to demonstrate its lack of coherence and that its existence is owed entirely to 'the myth of Cartesian dualism.' He states in the Foreword of his third chapter (i.e., 'The Will') that, unlike such concepts as thought, memory, and imagination, volition has no use in layman's language. People do not ordinarily refer to it or think of it as a distinct state of consciousness. Finding it then to be solely a technical or artificial concept arising out of a theory grounded in the aforesaid dualism, he believes that its ongoing use is unnecessary. Although he admits that the use of this concept is comprehensible as a reaction to the success of the natural sciences or, more properly, to what is perceived by many to be the threat of a thoroughly deterministic or mechanical view of human nature, he argues that this *too* is a mistake.

"Before citing his objections to the concept of volition, Ryle describes it as part of 'the language of the para-mechanical theory of the mind.' According to this theory, there are mental processes or 'volitions' which cause all acts of the human body in the physical world. So it is that, when a man intentionally pulls the trigger of a gun (Ryle's example), what is presumed to be a correct explanation requires taking into consideration two levels of operation: the physical one of pulling the trigger and the mental one of *willing* to pull it.

"Ryle's first objection is relatively simple. He denies that there is any experience, be it of the empirical or introspective sort, to warrant the idea that voluntary actions are preceded and caused by mental operations. Despite what theorists have to say about it, no one goes about their daily tasks taking account of such operations or relying upon them in order to have these tasks successfully completed.

"For his second objection, Ryle argues that, if it were the case that a person's acts of volition were purely mental and therefore could never be witnessed by another person, it would be impossible for anyone to ascertain whether anyone else's actions were truly voluntary. He further argues that, with respect to the individual himself, it would be impossible for him to be certain that such and such a volition caused such and such an action because, as the theory allows (and perhaps even safeguards), the link between them remains mysterious.

"Ryle's third objection is the claim that the dualistic theory is paradoxical. According to him, this theory holds that there is a causal relationship between mind and body while also holding that the mind is 'outside the causal system to which bodies belong.'

"With his fourth objection, he argues that volition as a mental operation that causes both physical *and* mental acts runs into difficulty when moral significance is ascribed to it. The problem is that, if an action is to be voluntary, the volition which corresponds to it must itself be voluntary which in turn entails that it results from an earlier volition which in turn must be the result of an earlier one *ad infinitum*. As Ryle points out, if it is objected that volition cannot be described by using the predicates 'voluntary' and 'involuntary,' then the question immediately

arises as to why *moral* predicates should be assigned to it.

"Ryle states that such mental processes as selection and resolution are authentic ones inappropriately identified with volition. In other words, both are members of the class of what dualists call inner operations of will and yet, as Ryle points out, either one of these processes or both together (i.e., selection and resolution) fall short of offering a full characterization of voluntary acts. This is as much as to say that these processes do not necessarily result in successfully completed actions. They may in fact be ascribed to tasks that for, one reason or other, fail or are abandoned. Yet the definition of volition is, according to the theory, a mental act which causes a physical performance or event. As Ryle points out, 'the dualistic theory could not allow that volitions ever fail to result in action, else further executive operations would have to be postulated to account for the fact that sometimes voluntary actions are performed.'

"Ryle claims that philosophers use the words 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' in a different sense than do people in everyday life. The latter apply these adjectives to 'actions which ought not to be done' whereas philosophers apply them to meritorious or fortuitous actions as well as reprehensible or unwelcome ones. Ryle shows that, if one were to extend the philosophical use into ordinary language, then the matter of getting a thing right would not be a question of competence or capability, but a question of *willing* to get it right. But if this willing as mental operation were taken to explain the meritorious or fortuitous action, then it would be, given the already adequate ways of explaining it, at best redundant and at worst nonsensical.

"Ryle states that, just as such terms as voluntary and involuntary are meaningful in light of questions that arise with respect to someone's competence or capability, so such expressions as 'strength of will,' 'effort of will,' and 'irresolute' can be defined in terms of a propensity or character trait. An adequate explanation of these matters then does not require the hypothesis of occult activities preceding and bringing about a person's actions.

"The reason philosophers accepted so readily the mind as a realm of causation is that, as Ryle contends, they felt that, with the success of the natural sciences, there was a threat that mechanical causation (as opposed to causation of a more mysterious sort) would undo the much cherished notion of free will. Much of the impetus for this rearguard action comes from the fact that any new scientific breakthrough tends to engender a cosmogony seeking to embrace everything in its conceptual grasp. Ryle argues that, although mechanical laws explain physical events which unquestionably include human affairs and actions, this does not rule out or replace explanations of a decidedly different sort. In other words, there are other criteria by which to assess these affairs and actions and, although partially coincident with and obedient to mechanical laws, they are not reducible to them. Ryle likens the situation to a chess game where one is free to make all sorts of tactical or strategic moves even while these moves must conform to the rules of the game.

"Having now completed my summary of Ryle's chapter on the Will . . ."

– Oh devil, I can't just keep sitting here and listening to this!

". . . I would like to supplement it with a sort of personal commentary."

– We have no choice but to sit here and listen to it.

– I'll throw myself out the window first.

– You mean break the window and jump out?

– Why not? Gilles Deleuze did it.

– But he wanted to commit suicide.

– Isn't that preferable to staying here?

– It's not really so bad, Theo.

– Oh, not so bad, is it?

– The subject matter isn't so bad.

– It's not so bad if it comes from a scholar. Dammit, I get enough of this from my own students!

"To begin with, I cannot fault his arguments given that the epistemological difficulties which he scrutinizes are, to my mind, all too evident. I do find them to be, however, rather repetitious and wearisome. He makes a great deal of hay out of what all distinguished upholders of dualism must surely recognize as essential problems. I say 'essential' because, if they were only pseudo-problems that should disappear from the intellectual scene, as Ryle claims, philosophy would have little to occupy itself."

– To reduce the mind-body problem to a misuse of words would simply be an excuse for not doing anything.

"I'm reminded of the old saw about its being easier to destroy than to create. Surely it could never be more applicable than when it comes to a wholesale dismissal of mind-body dualism. Philosophy, to my way of thinking, is the attempt to determine rationally what religion merely asserts, namely, primary causes. As a corollary to this, it desires to show us a way of viewing reality apart from the normal and everyday."

– We don't need primary causes as explanation but only a notion of causality as the best and most adequate explanation.

"Thus I do not agree with Ryle when he says that certain questions which each age asks anew are simply the wrong questions and so should be discarded. He might just as well say let us dispense with philosophy. When he puts forth the idea that the mind is nothing more than logical behaviour, he is really saying we should not look for transcendent factors in either man or nature."

– First, let's not assume Ryle is a logical behaviourist. Second, the notion of

transcendence offers nothing but an excuse for throwing up all sorts of occult faculties and entities. Finally, hypotheses as explanatory principles do away with the age-old practise of trying to assert absolute and incontestable ones.

"He seems to be saying that we should just get about the business of living from day-to-day. However, one thing that cannot be dismissed so easily is that man has looked upon the world with the feeling that, as well as being part of it, he is also estranged from it. As long as this feeling endures, logical solutions such as Ryle's will never be the final word."

– When it comes to treating the mind as a field of investigation, we don't need theories to be compatible with ordinary language any more than talk about subatomic particles has to be with talk about tables, desks, and chairs.

To confine truth and knowledge to an austere framework of logic and ordinary language. Is this not to use philosophy as a kind of shredding machine into which it itself is fed until there is nothing left but the shredder? If so, such high-minded destructiveness must be one with the drive for a discourse so pure and sure of itself that it will gladly be the most minimal and modest and reckon silence preferable to the ordinary talk of philosophy. At least this is what the ordinary language philosophy inspired by Wittgenstein impressed me as: a radical reduction of truthtelling to the point where no lie or fiction is supposed to gain entrance.

– I'd say this about the great man: he put the kibosh on all those big-sounding words that philosophers have traditionally used with a good conscience from time immemorial. He was a pioneer and a pathbreaker. The forerunner of Quine who himself brought a new work ethic into philosophy more modest and diligent than ever before while at the same time giving to human inquiry – and this is the chief difference between them – a wide range of tasks, responsibilities, and areas of investigation. The field was left entirely open for responsible work, knowledge gathering, and exchanges of ideas that advance the theoretical and practical as a vast, interdependent, and ongoing project.

I feel a compulsion now to take up a later study of Wittgenstein that, as I know, is a plant with its own roots. To some extent I have already done this and outlined with more present than past understanding my reaction to the Wittgensteinian-inspired courses I took with Professor Burns. At the most basic level, what I was doing then was fighting for an interiority that, as it seemed to me, every thought and every work of literature testified to and that I didn't think should be dismissed simply because it defied logic. The difference between then and now was that then I was more inclined to take thought to be wholly separate and distinct from everything else. The constitution of thought or mind as a taking in of the world as much as a creating of one, as an operation so deep in history and prehistory that it takes all considerations to the vanishing point, didn't come to me itself as a thought until many years later.

– He's hitting on Heidegger now.

– He's all over. Let's discuss something else.

– What?

– Professor Watt! What do you think of that young man? Isn't he a crackerjack?

– Well, he's certainly efficient and, from everything I've heard, a very ambitious young man.

– Damn right. He won't let any flies settle on him. Oh, by the way, Andrew, that reminds me. Two students were in my office the other day. They were complaining about — I'm sorry to say this, old man. It appears you tell too many anecdotes in class.

Let me have this thought now for it seems to be timely. True I jumped about in my university studies. True I wasn't bothered by it because I took it to be in the spirit of a liberal arts education. And also true that I did the rather rare thing of transforming this jumping about into a series of dives that, as far as I could manage it, were deep. Hitting bottom without staying down very long was most often the way. But when I took yet another philosophy course and, in conjunction with it, began to read the works of Paul Tillich, an exception arose in that I adopted a more systematic approach. Perhaps it sprang out of my wanting to know as much about theism and Christianity as I could in an economic way. And so, finding Tillich to be an excellent teacher with his Heidegger-inspired theology, I spent quite some time with him. His statement that the philosophical question must always remain a question and that theology and religion invariably form an answer to it rang true to me. I suppose that the emotional and imaginative side of this question, written off by analytic philosophers who only see a mistake in the very posing of it, who only see a conceptual confusion that should be cleared up, was something I took seriously and wanted to explore from different angles.

– I can see they're not happy in my course but the fact is they're very rude and insolent.

In thinking about my study of Tillich, I must also think about my study of Kierkegaard who, though I felt a strong affinity to him as a person and thinker, repelled me as an overvaluation of his type. As far as I was concerned, the knight of faith *was* Kierkegaard despite his disclaimers to the contrary. Or to express it better, Kierkegaard was in his deepest self the spiritual approximation of this knight who has never existed and who he managed to articulate as an ideal or paradigm. What a world away from Wittgenstein one is when one holds that truth is subjectivity and a passionate relationship with the Absolute. And on the other hand, from Tillich when one holds that faith is something very difficult and dreadful rather than a fundamental support. How can such accounts be so articulate and attractive in their own right and so abominably at odds? How could they all have appealed to me as truthtelling if I wasn't even then, albeit unknowingly, committed to the subject as I am now?

– You see, I try to give the class a few examples from my own life.

I feel that I'm drawing to the end of what can be said about my undergraduate studies. It was a strung out affair that lasted eight or nine years and was only speeded up at the time I was getting close to having enough credits for my degree. Introductory French, Introductory German,

History of Science, Basic Mathematics, Critical Thinking and Learning, Law and Justice in Literature, Ancient Greek History, History of Educational Ideas, Playwrighting, Introduction to the Theatre: this heterogeneity of my final assault speaks to me now of a never-failing appetite to learn as well as a growing sense of having exhausted this fount of knowledge and wisdom.

– What now? How much more of this unwisdom do we have to take?

What is truth? If Christians were truly Christians, wouldn't they subscribe to this truth with their last drop of blood? Here is where Kierkegaard seems so true and revealing. Or if truth were simply a matter of logic and reasoning, wouldn't all intelligent people have it in the main and be cleared of all difficulties by now? What word is used more to authenticate so many different things and so many variations of the same thing? What functions more as a principle of order in a limited space while ultimately breeding so much disorder? Or is one to think that a community of vested interests is innocent when it gives out to understand that the truth is with it and nowhere else? Is it simply objectivity and good reasoning that allows its members to call themselves responsible? When one sees time and time again how such external factors as fear can influence a discourse, should it be overlooked that fear and other factors are with us?

I don't know if these questions exactly capture my state of mind as I continued to slum it as a student. Certainly there was a time of indecision, a sense of being blocked and not knowing how best to proceed. With so little encouragement coming from the artistic side of my endeavours, so little in the way of good and satisfying results, I felt stymied in my attempt to climb high or, to say it more truthfully, climb over other people's heads. Although I had good reason to think that I excelled in my literary studies, I couldn't stand the thought of extending them simply as a way to make a living. Even in the less than glorious position of a part-time student struggling on the margins of the theatre world, I sensed that committing myself to literary studies in this way would be a stopping short, a not going all the way, a being satisfied with something less. Nothing could rid me of the feeling that I was destined to persist or perish, to follow through on my dream of being a writer in some bold and novel way. And of course that is not to say I didn't stumble at times, didn't lose heart and even make a few tentative efforts to go off in another direction. But all this was of relatively short duration and paled in comparison with my desire to write myself large.

– Oh, please, write yourself large somewhere where we don't have to put up with it!

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

26. "Remnants"

I have been conscious for quite some time that there are many personal developments and incidents in my life and, in particular, my later life that, not adding anything important to what I have already looked at in myself, and not dealing expressly with myself as a truthteller or as one in contact with other truthtellers, are best passed over in silence. Or if a word is needed even in this area, it should only be that I continued to live rough, independent, alone, and sometimes too much alone. Just as it had been in my earliest teenage years, there was a great thorn in my side. It was not being able to find that spiritual mate who, as implacable desire and imagination would have it, bore all manner of female charms. With a few exceptions, whoever attracted me physically had nothing of the spiritual that excited me and often was one I didn't know how to approach or else had but a brief relationship with before being rejected. Nothing inflicted upon me a stronger sense of insecurity and inadequacy than being rejected by a woman. Yet that part of my heart that was more sexual organ than I realized was so large and so much a part of my head (as studious observer of this situation) that, along with my absolute inability to feign a contrary attitude or disposition, I was doomed to discourage all who first fancied and favoured me. And it is with no doubt a greater discouragement that, time and time again, I recoiled back into myself, licking my spiritual wounds and dreaming of some vague conquest or victory whereby none could refuse me.

– Why're you looking so glum?

– I just hate the thought that such beautiful boys could be so malicious.

– What on earth are you talking about?

– Whispering back and forth in class. Smirks on their faces. As if I were just a doddering old fool who couldn't contribute the slightest to their knowledge.

But what about the secret or half-submerged enmity I bore towards the professional world? Apart from making poor Carl Ridd squirm in class and accuse me of disrupting it by asking too many pointed questions, and apart from a few skirmishes with other professors, there was only one incident during that first period of my studies where I came close to showing an overt lack of respect. In truth, it was at the tail end of this period: I was thirty-three and going through a period of general discouragement. What followed was my first genuine attempt to go off in a professional direction. Of course I eliminate cab driving and construction work from consideration because, apart from the usual criteria by which to distinguish professional from non-professional, and apart from never having made any special moves in these areas, no great show of getting along with other people is required (that famous collegiality or team spirit so much in demand). On the other hand, some kind of show *is* required to get in view as a bonafide playwright.

With the conjuncture of having received my BA and being thoroughly discouraged by my writing efforts, I took it into my head that I should become a teacher. I went so far as to apply to the education department of the university to take the required one-year training program. Before my scheduled interviews with a couple of representatives from the department, I heard some talk

about this program from other students and it gave me the distinct impression it was intellectually stultifying. The details are no longer with me but they disturbed me enough that I couldn't help but bring them up during the interview process. Both of the officials I spoke to took note of what I had to say not as a misguided conception of the department, but as an objection to my character and to my suitability for the program. With one it took the form of bringing up the matter of my having dropped out of high school. "How do we know you won't do it again?" he said. The other took umbrage when things became a bit heated and argumentative. "Well, I certainly wouldn't want you to teach *my* child!" she said.

– Nor mine were she still of that age. It's not by continually challenging and arguing with people that one is going to make progress. We all live in this world and all have to respect the rights and feelings of others if we want ours respected.

– You're perfectly right, Theo. Still, there's some principle he's hit on, don't you think? I mean, if the truth about the department was being ignored by these two representatives, then surely there's a reason to be critical.

– He wasn't being critical. He was being disrespectful. Surely you wouldn't want someone coming here – a teacher, student, or whatever – who started off by listing the Department's shortcomings.

– But wouldn't you agree it's usually how people proceed in these matters? For example, if the two boys that complained about me — by the way, the anecdotes I tell in class are experiences by which I try to illustrate the concept of Lebenswelt.

– I'm fascinated but get to the point.

– Well, if they'd come to me with their complaint instead of rushing to you, it would've been so much better.

Perhaps being judged disrespectful while thinking oneself merely critical turns on different valuations that grade off on one side towards falsehood and on the other towards constituting an individual freedom that takes itself to be its own rule and measure.

– Ah, there it is! There's the danger! I couldn't have said it better.

– He's saying it in the name of truthtelling.

– And I'm saying it in the name of all the terrors and tyrannies that have afflicted this world.

– Perhaps then...

– What perhaps?

– ...the two sort of merge.

– What're you saying?

– There may be a complicity between the two.

– What two?

– Fear of the truth and taking it as one's right and privilege to say it.

– Andrew, you're suffering from Stockholm Syndrome.

– That isn't a very good way to meet my argument.

– It's not your argument, that's the trouble.

Is there something like the Stockholm Syndrome that afflicts people who belong to a system? It would be a mild form of course but still potent enough to make its often highly privileged captives sympathetic to a standardized unwritten policy of not rocking the boat. Even in the systems where truth itself is featured as a paramount value, the not-rocking-the-boat policy tends to win out when there is a question of choosing between certain truths and it.

– I'm sorry, Andrew. Please, forgive me.

Throughout my life, I have never met anyone who admitted that the good living they made and the honoured position they held had any bearing upon their capacity to be objective about the system that provided them with these. I don't think I would be far wrong in seeing in this strange absence of commentary a willed professional blindness that is one with a subtle and ever-present element of fear. An element that springs up from something irreducibly inhuman and even inhumane about the system that bears upon collective interests and their ultimately overruling private ones.

– Andrew, one of the things that's always ticked me off is to hear people who, not having done much, criticize those who have for making a few necessary and minor – if this is the right word – compromises.

Blocked from going on as a university student. Blocked from undertaking a career as a teacher. Blocked from making any progress as a playwright. What a lucky thing for me there was the bosom of my family. First of all, my mother. What a spirit so upraised to her son, so encouraging, so supportive, so unflagging in her love and devotion over fifty years. To think of how I undervalued her friendship in spite of my best intentions. Such is the way when someone or something is easy, accessible, always around, all too familiar, and inordinately tolerant of one's whims and ugly moods. How much more difficult it would have been if not for that one person who took an exceptional interest in my life and who believed in me as someone driven towards the heights. And this she took on faith from me because there was little in her

background, interests, or inclinations that was congenial to the high altitude flight that, during her lifetime, was always more envisioned by me than visible to anyone else.

– I'm looking for it, Andrew. I can't see it. I can't detect this high altitude flight. Oh, wait! There's something up there! I think it's his mother! Yes, she's looking down from heaven and wondering why he hasn't left the ground yet.

My very clever and level-headed oldest sister. Always the welcome mat put out for me. Always an attentive and patient ear despite her numerous activities. And the same could be said of Sharon, my second-oldest sister, when she was healthy and well or at least appeared to be so. And the same of my brother more or less until we became estranged. But is this estrangement a matter to go into when all it gives evidence of is, apart from my brother's troubled state of mind, my volatile temper and capacity for violence? Have I not laid this out well enough already and indicated that it was a trait even in my later years? Perhaps the only observation worth anything at this point is that I was far from suffering a bad conscience about it.

– Oh, listen to this, Andrew! Truthtelling is fine when it's a matter of generalities but when it comes to a matter of conscience, when it comes to a matter of not having one, when it comes to a matter of squaring that with violence, then it's a different story.

– Well —

– Think of what it is to be continuously assaulted with a point of view that comes from someone who has effectively cut you off from the rest of the world.

– Yes, and —

– That offers you no respite whatever while setting itself up as the true measure of things.

– Perhaps —

– That comes with a load of — I was going to say shit but I'll say self-criticism that effectively stops short precisely where outside criticism would come in.

– It seems to me —

– I don't know what more I can say to you, Andrew, to convince you you have to immunize yourself against this fellow's anti-truth, anti-professional, anti-law-and-order propaganda.

Despite numerous setbacks, I kept on with my playwrighting, becoming even more marginal and isolated than I had hitherto been. Amidst the most discouraging signs and lack of outside interest, I was still bent on writing the one great masterpiece that would redeem all. But nothing of the sort materialized and every single script I wrote eventually ended up in the garbage. The best I can say is that I read a great number of masterpieces over the next few years: plays, novels, short stories, and some philosophical works.

– Even if you have nothing to say on the matter, at least keep up your spirits. Don't resign yourself to being bullied.

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27. Nietzsche

Why it took so long I don't know but I finally came to him. The one thinker who consistently inspired me, heartened me, supplied me with numerous insights into myself and others. The one thinker who, as Emerson puts it in a more general way, had already expressed many thoughts that I myself had had but only skirted or played around the edges of. Expressed them is too weak a way of putting it. He expounded on them at length and with an audacity sans pareil. And what was his principal target? Philosophy itself. The whole Western tradition of philosophical thought. Was it possible to imagine anyone taking on singlehandedly a greater foe? Or at least taking it on in such a confrontational, provocative, menacing, wide-sweeping, and absolutely uncompromising way? To make of the great truthtellers inveterate liars in their will to stand truth naked and unveiled before all – was this itself a truth too rude to go unpunished?

It is difficult to overestimate the impact of a mind that appears to be one's own but more powerful, magnifying, penetrating, and wide-ranging. The best way to put it is that, even at the time of my greatest disillusionment and uncertainty, coming into full contact with Nietzsche's thought made any abandonment of my highest hope virtually impossible.

> Indeed, I know your danger. But by my love and hope I beseech you: do not throw away your love and hope.
>
> You still feel noble, and the others too feel your nobility, though they bear you a grudge and send you evil glances. Know that the noble man stands in everybody's way. The noble man stands in the way of the good too: and even if they call him one of the good, they thus want to do away with him. The noble man wants to create something new and a new virtue. The good want the old, and that the old be preserved. But this is not the danger of the noble man, that he might become one of the good, but a churl, a mocker, a destroyer.
>
> Alas, I knew noble men who lost their highest hope. Then they slandered all high hopes. Then they lived impudently in brief pleasures and barely cast their goals beyond the day. Spirit too is lust, so they said. Then the wings of their spirit broke: and now their spirit crawls about and soils what it gnaws. Once they thought of becoming heroes: now they are voluptuaries. The hero is for them an offense and a fright.
>
> But by my love and hope I beseech you: do not throw away the hero in your soul! Hold holy your highest hope!
>
> *Thus spoke Zarathustra*.

– Thus spoke a madman. Andrew, try to play a bit more quickly than the last time we played.

– What do you mean?

– The conference in Bangkok fifteen years ago.

– You remember that?

– I remember it took you so long to make one move I finally lost patience and forfeited the game.

What mattered to me most was not whether Nietzsche was right or fair or wise in everything he said, but that he took everything he said from the bottom of himself and did the best he could with it. Did his best, in other words, with all that is in fact *not* right and fair and wise and yet is so much a part of the human condition. Of course I was aware that numerous other philosophers also examined this allegedly negative all too negative side of things. But the difference between them and Nietzsche struck me forcibly in that the former immediately marked it off and exempted themselves from it.

– I was thinking. Why hasn't anyone ever written a play about him?

– I saw a play about him, Andrew. It was a short piece in the university theatre when I was an undergraduate. My sister's fiancé, believe it or not, played Nietzsche.

– Is that right?

– Yes, and did a wonderful job. In fact, he received a standing ovation.

– Can you tell me something about this play?

– It was a one-man show portraying him after his breakdown and reflecting on his dubious intellectual heritage.

Nietzsche's one-man polemical show largely concerned with pulling down the britches of traditional philosophy and giving it a good caning reinterpreted as inflammatory talk that had historical consequences for which he should be held responsible. Perhaps this was the sort of thought that eventually came to me and allowed me to take him up without reserve and with a growing admiration of his searching for the truth without the customary philosophical reservation.

The good-evil opposition was the thing already falling in me that Nietzsche gave the final push to. It simply no longer made sense to take seriously other philosophers and the vast majority of people when they treated this opposition as if it were grounded right into the very heart of being. At least it no longer made sense unless one considered what made practical sense for most human beings to be the measure of what all life should be in its uttermost reach. But the thought of all life taking on the form of the thinking and acting philosopher with his perfecting of practical wisdom disguised most often as objective knowledge and theory was an absurdity that, as it seemed to me, everyone knew in their heart of hearts but kneeled down to as the social good. To simplify to this point, to turn all life into one pattern, order, way of thinking, being, acting, feeling, imagining, and so on: what did Nietzsche show but that this was death and that life was this massive and manifold doctrine called the good only as a part of everything that was *also* life and that played into, around, beyond, and even against it?

– You see this chessboard, Andrew? What would happen if we just ignored the rules?

I took Nietzsche to be one who was cruel to that *compact* majority whose cruelty largely consists of shunning or persecuting or condemning those who don't go along with it by taking too seriously – that is, too radically, too noisily, or too performatively – some of its most cherished principles. The hyperbolical element in Nietzsche was more than matched by the hypocritical element of the compact majority: its firm declarations on the side of the good and the true coming as its various members found ways to dilute or circumvent these ideals precisely when they became menacing *as* ideals. Suppose the truth was terrible and suppose evil wrought good: was the compact majority even interested in looking into this? Was not their whole attitude to pretend that it didn't even exist as a question? And when someone finally came along who took the true and the good to be one in the most personal and heart-searching (one might even say, heart-wrenching) way, who at the same time cast his glance over what everyone else had been saying and was still saying about these matters, was he not one who was condemning himself in advance to be thrown out of the company of true believers? Was he not one who was forced to turn himself into a kind of pariah or apostate angel: malignant, rebellious, resentful, and scornful of those who dared to look only so far as they smelled no danger in it?

– It's your move, Theo.

– Nazi propaganda! Made us out to be like vermin! Millions slaughtered! Amongst them my grandfather and two aunts!

As a reader of Nietzsche searching out and impressed by his extraordinary integrity, I no doubt became his apologist in the face of that post-holocaust consciousness both in and around me. So it was that I saw Nietzsche being forced to write, as everyone must do, both for and out of his time (despite the fact that he also wrote against it) and, as a consequence, with the advantages and disadvantages that come from being both somewhat blind and oblivious to the future. Advantages such as being able to speak more freely and openly and uninhibitedly (not to mention insightfully) about evil than anyone before him. Such as being able to look to the future with an almost exclusively eschatological (but definitely anti-Christian) concern. And such as being able to do both these things with a good conscience and so do what otherwise he never would have done. Disadvantages: that he ultimately underrated and undervalued what he himself waged war against: the systematizing, ordering, and machine-like character of society. Its capacity for exorbitant growth and its power to assimilate the most heterogeneous elements. Instead of a chair devoted to the study of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, there was Rosenberg's use of him. In short, Nietzsche's exposé suffered from having little or no internal check on its most dangerous and demonic aspect that would have been in keeping with the humanistic values to which it itself was inevitably indebted.

– I suppose the way he treats us – profs stuck on sticks here to play Punch and Judy for him – represents humanistic values.

Stefan Zweig describes Nietzsche's thought as starting old and growing younger. Wasn't there something like this in me when, after seven years away from university studies, I came back to them? The self-flattering aspect that is inherent in affirming this discomforts me enough that I have to admit it alongside my dread of aging. Stiffness. Love of law, order, safety,

protection, comfort. Loss of the adventurer's spirit. A growing cowardliness and lack of candour that seemed to be inherent to fulfilling one's professional duties and responsibilities. Unctuousness. Lack of zest, spontaneity, and good feeling. All these elements I have always associated with getting older and only an imaginative view of myself as some prodigious exception has prevented me from being overwhelmed with nausea.

– I don't believe this! You've got me checkmated!

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28. The Return

When I made the decision to abandon my playwrighting efforts and return to university, it was with the feeling that I was being true to Nietzsche's spirit even while, ironically enough, taking a direction roughly the reverse of his. Between the critical point in his life where, at age thirty-four, he quit his post as a professor of philology at Basel University to go off into the scholarly wilderness and the critical point in mine where, at age forty, I signed up as a full-time Honours student in English literature and philosophy, there was no difference that I could detect in the one area that mattered most to me. How was I to push my free spiritedness as far as it would go if I didn't take on Academia? How was I to turn my serpents into dragons, to use Nietzsche's recipe for becoming a hero, if I didn't take my disquietude and disagreement to a higher level?

– One thing I'm thankful for in this life is that I've been able to get around and see a fair bit of the world. Different customs, different peoples. Makes one appreciate what one has here.

– You've always been a globetrotter. I remember in particular that time you went to South Africa.

– Yes, apartheid was starting to fall apart and my wife's relatives were caught in the thick of it.

– I remember you told me some of their fields were burned.

– As well as their barn, Andrew. All that happened only five days after we'd left them and gone to Israel.

– How lucky you were to get out of there before all that happened.

– We wanted them to leave but they refused. They insisted they had to see it through.

– It's terrible what hatred and prejudice can do.

– These kind of people, Andrew, are not to be found anywhere. They were willing to die — oh, Andrew, can you believe it? Some of their children go into the homes of the very families that, with white hoods and brandishing torches, came to their home in the middle of the night and, with the most abject cowardliness and ruthless display of force, denounced them as traitors for doing what was right.

Besides the fact that my return to the university corresponded with the end of my being able to call myself a playwright and, more properly, an aspiring one (a static position over thirteen years but at least it offered *some* status), there was also the fact that it came at a time when I could no longer call myself a construction worker. Shortly following the deaths of my sister and my father was the death of the company I had worked for for sixteen years. I wasn't tempted to go to work for any of the rival companies because I had already heard enough about

their shoddy practises. After a few meagre attempts to find comparable or altogether different work, I ended up being satisfied with driving taxi full-time. But of course were it not for the fact that I viewed it as a transitional affair, a means to an end, an ongoing expression of my errancy, I would have been hard put to bear the stigma of lowliness and lack of ambition attached to it.

– Leroux brings up the oddest things.

– What now, Andrew?

– Well, the other day, he mentioned that university profs are far down on the list of professionals respected by the public.

So now my whole bent was to go up the academic ladder as a student and only as a student as far as I could. To go up it without losing myself in the process and so without having any concrete or definite plan to capitalize on. Looking ahead, I saw a doctoral degree coming to me in about ten years if all went well. I saw a long voyage and adventure that, though I might end up shipwrecked, would at least fill my sails with the highest level of interest and satisfaction. And, finally, I saw myself vaguely bringing all to maturity in one massive creative effort.

– It's time for the new game, Andrew.

Perhaps it is at this point I should make first mention of a matter that I will no doubt have to expound upon more fully later. It pertains to what could be called a performative contradiction, an ironic instability and weakness right at the heart of one's greatest show of strength and courage. It also pertains to what a good citizen could bring against a free spirit in the way of charging him with his own form of hypocrisy. In this I'm reminded of a university professor who, speaking some years ago at a conference in commemoration of Nietzsche, took umbrage at the fact that he quit the university so early and, no longer earning a living for himself like most capable and responsible people, was satisfied to live off the small pension he received. At the time I thought her comment was petty and lowbrow but, with the considerations that now come to me, I can see that what she perceived as an element of freeloading and abuse, as an economic dependence on the system sharply at odds with a destructive critique of it, is a bind that leaves the door open to someone like her accusing someone like Nietzsche of living in a glass house. And so must I qualify my own situation for, living in a society that provided for me when, on a couple of occasions, I was unemployed or injured, that allowed me to seek out a higher education at a university, that loaned me significant sums of money when I decided to prolong it, I was subject to bringing into my condition an element of freeloading and abuse even though, for the longest time, I prided myself on not doing so.

– You and I, Andrew, have been strapped to our responsibilities many a time when we would've liked to have chucked them. We've had to accept the gruelling and unpleasant parts of the job so that everyone could get what they came here for.

Once I had decided to pursue graduate studies, it was pretty clear to me that I was going to be shifting my attention from the literary to the philosophical. At least so I viewed the matter

as a formal or systematic undertaking that would provide me with the greatest challenge and the most comprehensive grasp of the Western tradition. For this reason as well as for a couple of others, the thought of pursuing graduate studies in English literature as an ever-deeper involvement with literary theory and criticism left me cold. On the one hand, I had a limited interest in this field apart from what I myself did in it. On the other, it brought me too close to where I had failed and, as a consequence, it inevitably registered with me as a kind of yielding or surrender. A being satisfied with second-best, with no longer trying to attain the heights.

– I'm sure I would've got nowhere. Then where would I have been? Where would I be now? As an actor, I mean. After all, it's only a very few that get to the top. And so for the rest, well, it's precarious. Good for perhaps one's early and middle years but then, with old age, what does one end up doing? Working as a dispatcher for a cab company?

– What're you bringing this up for?

– I don't know. It just popped into my head.

– You've been a professor for thirty years. You've done a wonderful job. I've been thinking, Andrew. I'm going to tell those two know-it-alls when I see them again that your teaching methods, though they of course differ from mine, are impeccable.

I could have speeded things up for myself. I could have got my Honours degree in one year instead of two. But then I would have had to choose between specializing either in English literature or in philosophy. With my graduate studies still ahead of me, I decided to specialize in both subjects. My only reason for doing so was that, just as had been the case in the past, I was committed to making my university studies as pleasurable and as interesting as possible.

– Was für ein Zug ist das?

It was with no shortage of confidence and enthusiasm then that I rode into the university just about the time that a relatively new current of thought had ensconced itself there. Feminism of course had been in the air for quite some time. But between 1984 and 1991, the period I was away from the university, it had definitely intensified and infiltrated the institution in a much more noticeable and even obtrusive way. I disliked it for a number of reasons that issued as much from prejudice as perspicacity. In order to sum up the matter as best as I can, I feel obliged to say that just as I felt somewhat vulnerable to it, so I felt its own vulnerability. The human all too human in me was simply the human all too human in it from a different angle. And what was this human all too human if not idealism mixed with the will to power? On the one side the will to equity or equality in an already ascending and largely privileged group. On the other a will to truthfulness in a person already ensconced in a traditionally masculine and even hyper-masculine identity. What was my view of myself if not one that was instinctively a separation from and elevation above the other? And what in effect was my vulnerability if, as was the case, I had included in that other the mass of men and their middle-class values?

– Andrew, we all have egos just as we all have bodies. And just as out of modesty and

respect for others we — dammit, you did it again! How is that possible?

– You're only in check, Theo.

– Only in check, he says!

– Theo, calm down. As far as I can see, you can still move your —

– My queen. And then what? Your bishop will take her.

– Well, then try protecting your king with your —

– Don't tell me how to play the game. I'll figure it out. Let's see, if I — no, that won't work. I'll lose my bishop to yours. Then if I move my rook to the corner, I'll get eaten by your queen. God Almighty, Andrew, do you think it's fair to play like this?

– What do you mean?

– Letting me think you haven't got a chance of winning and then playing like fucking Kasparov.

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29. Morality Revisited

Who was there who could defeat me argumentatively? Who was there who, playing the moralist in one way or another and yet overlooking or denying the will to power of moralists themselves, wasn't living in a glass house easy enough for me to detect?

Letter to the Editor
Winnipeg Free Press
July 13, 1991

Dear Editor:

On the occasions when some perfidious act engenders a good deal of moral outrage and indignation, I'm always struck by the number of high-minded people who reveal their lack of humanity. Who in their hurry to place themselves squarely on the side of the victim, let the spirit of revenge peep through their spirited demand for justice.

A case in point is that of women's groups who, all too frequently adding narrow-mindedness to their high-mindedness, denounce the judiciary and the law courts for going too easy on such offenders as receive the odium of all respectable citizenry. I'm referring to such criminal types as child molesters and, in order to make my point as quickly as possible, allow me to take up the case of the recently convicted Brandon psychologist.

Now the gist of this report is that the offender received a three-year suspended sentence for putting his hands down a child's pants. Furthermore, that this sentence, along with his being ordered to do community work and speak publicly about his act, displeases those both professionally and politically involved with such matters. The position of these caregivers and advocates seems to be that, in order to underline the gravity of such offences and to deter others from committing them, a period of incarceration is necessary. Leaving aside for brevity's sake the questions of gravity and deterrence, I should like to raise the one of overall social purpose and direction. With respect to the case at hand, is it to stigmatize the offender to the point of making him a virtual outcast or is it to rehabilitate him and reintegrate him into the community?

If the caregivers and advocates answer that it is the second, then I'm hard-pressed to understand their objections to a process by which the offender publicly announces his guilt, expresses remorse over his crime, exposes himself to the anger and opprobrium of others, and, by these means, attempts to win back a modicum of dignity and respect. Can one honestly say that the above is non-progressive but that putting him in jail is? Can one deny that the more forceful and punitive course says more about where we haven't gone than where we have?

– If I hadn't become a professor of philosophy, I would've been a medical doctor.

– Really, Theo.

– That's what my mother wanted. For me to follow in the footsteps of my Dad. He was a heart specialist just beginning to get a name for himself when he started having health problems. Basically, it was a loss of appetite and some pains in his abdomen. We thought his condition would get better but it didn't. Then we received the diagnosis. I was only twenty-one when we got the terrible news.

To be fundamentally right in a way that is fundamentally wrong for philosophy, the Nietzschean way, is to carry one's own bit of folly about. Principally the idea that one is out to conquer something beyond oneself. To win hearts and minds, to draw even a handful of truthtellers (call them philosophers) to one's side by virtue of an unshakeable argument. Perhaps I was stricken more by this folly then than now. Certainly it was the case that, coming fresh off my reading of Nietzsche and going straight into the academic world, I had a sense of my own moral superiority as a truthteller that, compared to what it is today, was unilateral and unambiguous.

"A Critique of Geoffrey Sayre-McCord's 'Moral Theory and Explanatory Impotence'"

"The purpose of this essay is to show in detail and without feigned good will how I view such an article as Geoffrey Sayre-McCord's. How I view it, that is, as so much intellectual straw-thrashing. So much circular reasoning and piling up of questionable assumptions. So much, in short, of a duplicitous nature passing itself off as painstaking scholarship and cumulative insight."

So much hostility and lack of restraint in this first essay of mine in a course called *Moral Theory*. It makes me wince now to read it but at the time of focussing on a scholarly debate about whether or not moral theory was feasible, about whether in fact something called moral properties could be said to exist, I was in another frame of mind. Perhaps I saw in my hostility and lack of restraint the virtue of bravely flying my colours as a non-conformist, an unscholarly type, a higher form of truthteller simply by not being a scholarly type. And yet there I was dealing with scholars or rather one particular scholar and playing the scholarly game. Or rather *not* playing it while playing it and so in a sense in violation of it. In bringing forth the personal element as I did, I was making a pact with waywardness and trouble-making and so bringing forth what in professional circles is generally ignored or expelled.

– Why didn't you follow in his footsteps?

– My hands shook.

– But surely you could've been some other type of specialist.

– I've become that.

– Yes, and you've accomplished great things. Seven books is nothing to sneeze at.

– Andrew, you're wondering why I didn't go into the medical profession. When I was a second-year student at the University of Toronto, I took it into my head to go see the great Max Gottlieb. I had done some work on Tarski's truth definitions and I asked him if he would do me the favour of looking it over and then telling me whether I should become a doctor or a logician. Two days later I got a call from him. I was at home and I'll never forget his words. He said to me: "Baumgarten, you are *a logician!"*

It was this comedy of sophisticated self-assurance amongst scholars that, as I found it in Sayre-McCord and others, induced in me what I would call the signs of moral outrage.

"Why such anger and vexation in a formal essay? Because I dislike with a passion the specious, the pretentious, the hypocritically humble, the deceptive and misleading. I dislike them most particularly in the intellectual sphere – in the (can one imagine it?) *morally concerned* sphere! And due to the fact that formal requirements have obliged me to meet with more than one scholarly work exhibiting the above more-than-mote-in-the-eye, I now take the opportunity to discharge my pent-up wrath, realizing as I do that, given my inability under the present circumstances to deal adequately with more than one essay, I risk the unfairness of making Geoffrey Sayre-McCord my whipping boy."

Oh, much more confident then than now to think that I could deal adequately with that one essay! For however good or bad it was, it inevitably belonged to a much larger and more complicated field. Namely, all the thoughts, ideas, arguments, theories, and so forth that formed the matrix from which it sprang and took its own particular shape. A history of problems, in other words, that, had I been better informed about them, would have made me more humble and sympathetic to Sayre-McCord. But not to the point that such a path as he followed, so full of easy acceptance and so devoid of scrupulous questioning, wouldn't have vexed me.

– There are always those who bite off more than they can chew. But the great corrective in all this – and it far surpasses anything any self-correcting individual can do – is the community of scholars and scientists who monitor each other's work and who arrive at a consensus that is as every bit as much a test and challenge as it is an objective.

Up to the time of my essay critiquing Sayre-McCord, the vast bulk of my written assignments were interpretative. Be they on the works of Homer, Sophocles, Shakespeare, or Ibsen, they were original enough that I didn't feel compelled either to attack or defend the work of literary scholars. At least this was generally the case – only one major exception comes to mind[34] – and so the polemical side of me surfaced more in the classroom than in my writing. But

34 It is at this point that I find myself looking for an excuse to include a short essay that initially I had no thought of including. The drive to put my wares on display always threatens to overburden the present work and egoistically trump up heterogeneity as a virtue in and of itself. Or, more properly, to make it lose its thematic grounding in my subject and so become a sort of intellectual interloper. It is necessary then for me to double back on this area and give it as much consideration as possible.

First of all, I realize that I'm always taking a chance when I dip into my old writings. It is a relatively easy thing to do and, at least in my own eyes, raises them to a venerable status. It is also the case that, as good as many of them are, it would be a sin against my subject to drag anything into it that wasn't already barking at the door. For then I would be merely puffing myself up with pieces I take pride in and without even the mitigating factor of being aware

with the shift towards philosophy, the situation changed and at least some of my writing became quite aggressive. I see three principal factors in all this: Nietzsche's influence on me, the desire to expand the range of my intellectual interests, and philosophy's own tendency towards quarrelsomeness. But the latter had a double resonance. While I was drawn to it in the form of debates and polemics in general, I was also repelled. Both drawn and repelled sufficiently that I had no other wish but to attack the pretensions to theory holding all together.

– If you take away theory, what else is there?

---

of it. It would be like riding on the crest of what I have already said rather than still exploring it.

So here is this essay which I long to put not wrongly into this greater one. Already I have marginalised it and still I'm wondering what hole there would be in my account if I didn't reproduce it. The fact that it is about Ibsen's *Ghosts* but not about Northrop Frye's influence on me (although it no doubt gives signs of this influence and, to this extent, is no different from the others), the fact that it is, roughly speaking, a good whacking I gave to a distinguished critic's interpretation of *Ghosts*, the fact that it has some bearing on moral issues and how delicate things in this area often fall into clumsy hands – all these facts or factors don't seem to add up to a proper justification for dragging it in and sprucing it up.

Am I honoured then in not doing so? In resisting the temptation to play the Carl Ridd that I myself was so critical of? It seems to be so and yet, at the same time, the more I push it towards the margins, the more I say to myself this minor essay is not really essential but only interesting and pertinent up to a point, the more its reduced status becomes its *equivocal* status – the more it seems to be barking at the door.

Objections to Francis Fergusson's View of *Ghosts* as a Truncated Tragedy

In his book, *The Idea of a Theatre*, Francis Fergusson states that "the underlying form of *Ghosts* is that of the tragic rhythm as one finds it in *Oedipus Rex*." Mrs. Alving, according to him, is involved in a quest for her "true human condition." In this quest, according to Fergusson,

> she suffers a series of pathoses and new insights . . . and this rhythm of will, feeling, and insight underneath the machinery of the plot is the form of the life of the play, the soul of the tragedy.

At the centre of Fergusson's thesis is the idea that *Ghosts* has two concurrent actions operating throughout. One is an underlying action with a tragic rhythm and the other is a larger one that imitates the plot. A difficulty arises in that he speaks of the first as giving a tragic form to the play while maintaining that the second also gives a form to it or at least, as he maintains, a superficial one. In other words, we are meant to understand that Ibsen's work is not one but *two* plays operating on different levels. The superficial play he calls a thesis-thriller because it "proves the hollowness of the conventional bourgeois marriage." According to him, it employs theatrical tricks to keep the suspense going until the final curtain. Moreover, he claims that this superficial play interferes with the more important one which is the tragedy of Mrs. Alving.

Fergusson claims that this underlying action is part of a broader action (and this is another point of confusion because he has already characterized the larger action as the superficial thesis-thriller) which he describes as an attempt to control the Alving heritage by most of the characters who "want some material or social advantage from it . . ." He cites two examples: Engstrand's need for money for his Seaman's Home and Paster Manders' desire for "the security of conventional respectability." It is difficult to see, first of all, how the opportunity which comes to Engstrand at the end of the play to extort money from Paster Manders can be viewed as an attempt to control the Alving heritage. Rather than plotting anything along these lines, Engstrand is busy throughout the play simply trying to enlist Regine's and the Pastor's help to get his pet project off the ground (i.e., the Seaman's Home). In the case of Pastor Manders, it may be that he is trying to secure social recognition from his handling of

Looking back, I can see more clearly what I was doing in that moral theory course. It was resistance to the hegemonic aspect of theory. But what a problem unfolds once this is caught sight of. A problem in or for philosophy that is no less than the problem *of* philosophy. And so really *the* problem of philosophy. But a problem so recondite and hidden – and this is the complication and even over-complication – that it is inseparable from the appearance of philosophy's not being concerned about it or even aware of it and so having much time and energy for *other* problems.

– Andrew, I think I'm going to be sick.

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the Orphanage business. However, this does not entail that he is also after what he is already well-endowed with, namely, conventional respectability. As for the two other characters, Osvald and Regine, Fergusson offers no evidence to show how they might be scheming to control the Alving heritage. On the contrary, Regine abandons it and, in a certain sense, so does Osvald. Furthermore, Fergusson never makes it clear how Mrs. Alving's quest for a "true and free human life" belongs to this poorly defined larger action of all members wanting control of the heritage. Her attempt to do away with an *unwanted* heritage, namely, the unpleasant memories of her marriage to Captain Alving by dedicating an orphanage in his memory in conjunction with her plan to start a new life with her son, is derailed precisely by elements that belong to what Fergusson calls the thesis-thriller.

In order to give credence to putting distance between Mrs. Alving's fate as some sort of spiritual quest and the shocking developments of the past that, in their very revelation, devastate the present and create the tragedy, Fergusson resorts to such statements as the following:

> The tragic development is written to be acted; it is to be found, not so much in the actual words of the characters, as in their moral-emotional responses and changing relationships to one another.

This line of argument is tantamount to saying that wherever the written play doesn't provide evidence of a relatively pure and independent spiritual quest by Mrs. Alving, it should be assumed that a correct production of the play will provide that evidence. Instead of analysing it as a literary work (in principle, the author is against this), Fergusson interprets it as if it were a staged production which happily conforms to his thesis. By doing so, he removes himself from a more objective study of it that would not rely on this artifice.

In addition to the above, Fergusson employs a number of vague statements to exaggerate Mrs. Alving's spiritual state as opposed to her practical and even, as one might say, her intellectual concerns. One example is as follows:

> . . . Mrs. Alving is fighting to realize her sense of human life in the blank photograph of her stuffy parlour. She discovers there no means, no terms, and no nourishment . . .

Apart from its obscure language, the above statement, like similar ones, does not show how Mrs. Alving's quest manifests itself as the action of the play. In *Oedipus Rex* the hero is a doer; it is possible to pinpoint events which are brought into being because he acts. Aside from the Orphanage business and Osvald's return to the family home, both of which are largely antecedent events, no such moves or developments are instigated by Mrs. Alving. In response to this paucity of evidence of her cutting a predominantly spiritual path, Fergusson tells us that the tragic quest of Mrs. Alving must be seen at the level of her psyche. In other words, the underlying action of the play must be understood as being predominantly in her head. We are then invited to an imaginative reading of the play that would take it to be properly performed only if it followed this prescript.

According to Fergusson, the tragedy of Mrs. Alving manifests itself most clearly in her changing relation to Osvald. In order to demonstrate this, he plots the play like a Greek tragedy. The opening

Inevitably it must sound like I'm belittling all philosophy and consigning it to the fire. There doesn't seem to be a way of being philosophical without gross pretensions of one sort or another. It touches upon the tree of knowledge myth and the irrepressible combination of curiosity, pride, desire, and belief. We want to see like gods and this happens almost in direct proportion to acquiring the freedom not to have to worry about earthly matters. And yet a large measure of this self-deifying process inevitably becomes a construction of our world and so implicated in everything that may then be called necessary to it.

– *Take it down slowly, Theo. It'll help to relieve the nausea.*

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conversation between Engstrand and Regine is the prologue. The conversation between Pastor Manders and Mrs. Alving in Act I is the *agon.* The scene following their overhearing Regine with Osvald becomes the tragic suffering of Mrs. Alving. And the fit which turns her son into a vegetable is the *peripety*. Again, it is to be noted that Fergusson seems to think that whatever elements of the play don't fit in with his interpretation of it are not essential. For instance, Paster Manders' conversation with Mrs. Alving only has significance for him as a discussion of their opposing views about Osvald. Their first exchange is in fact taken up almost entirely with other topics. These are the reading of works written by free-thinkers, public opinion, the Orphanage, the question of insuring it, the character of Engstrand, and the question of whether or not Regine should live with this man whom she thinks is her father. Fergusson also underplays the significance of the rather heated discussion between Pastor Manders and Oswald over common-law relationships. Characterizing it as "light and conventional, an accurate report of a passage of provincial politeness," he does not see it as one symptom among many of a malignancy at the heart of a restricted and closed-off thinking in society.

According to Fergusson, when Mrs. Alving overhears Oswald and Regine unwittingly reenact an ugly incident of the past which involved Captain Alving and Regine's mother, she "suffers the breakdown of the moral being which she had built upon her now exploded view of Osvald." Here Fergusson suggests in what I daresay is a truncated way that this shocking incident has a traumatic effect on Mrs. Alving that shatters both her belief in her son and her hopes for their future together. Since there is nothing Mrs. Alving or any other character says which either explicitly or implicitly reveals this to be the case, Fergusson is forced to retreat once again into his argument that only a staged version can properly reveal this. He points to the passage where she speaks of the ghosts of the past clinging to the present and states that it is part of the tragic rhythm, the epiphany following the suffering and *agon*. Rather than trying to explain the significance of this passage or relate it in some meaningful way to the shock Mrs. Alving receives upon seeing her husband come to life in her son for an instant, he contents himself with describing it as "a poetry not of words but of the theatre, a poetry of the histrionic sensibility."

At the points where *Ghosts* most obviously doesn't live up to Fergusson's view of it as Mrs. Alving's spiritual tragedy, he faults it not only for what he calls the superficial action or thesis-thriller, but "the limitations of the bourgeois parlour as the scene of human life." For instance, he objects to the ending of Act I since it interrupts Mrs. Alving's suffering and, taking the focus away from her tragic quest, puts it on the more sensational issues concerning Oswald and Regine and the former's presumably having lecherous designs on the latter. According to Fergusson, the lengthy and matter-of-fact discussion that Mrs. Alving and Pastor Manders have at the beginning of Act II is but a deceptive cover for Mrs. Alving's "suffering the blow in courage and faith . . ." When Mrs. Alving deals with such topics then as marriage, law and order, hypocritical conventions, cowardice, artificial and dead teachings, old prejudices and beliefs, duty and obedience, illusions, ideals, and truth, the real significance of her performance as a theatrical event is not supposed to lie in what she says but how well she conveys her hidden suffering to the audience.

It is the end of *Ghosts,* however, which gives Fergusson the greatest displeasure by robbing him of the full tragic experience. Since Mrs. Alving does not come to some sort of resignation to or full acceptance of what fate has inflicted upon her, he sees the tragic action as being broken off prematurely. ("At the end of the play the tragic rhythm of Mrs. Alving's quest is not so much

We miss not taking ourselves too seriously in the scheme of things even by the fact that we try *not* to take ourselves too seriously. The god-like view we want of ourselves and everything else – even the view of ourselves as not being gods – assures this paradox. A scientist who peers into the cosmos and gives us an idea as to when it all started is no less removed from this sublime foolishness. Either in the case of the scientist or the philosopher, good hard work and considerable thought cozy up to extraordinary presumption and make us forget that we're always trying the impossible task of getting clear of ourselves and our world in order to have the absolutely pristine view.

– Take some deep breaths. Think about your wife, your daughter, your colleagues, your students. Oh, dear!

From where I stand, I can see it takes the view that the indeterminable whole is not just the end of everything known but the beginning of the great unknown. Mortality runs deeper than plummets sound and yet so do immortal change and growth. From a strictly imaginative

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completed as brutally truncated, in obedience to the requirements of the thesis and the thriller.") One thing he never makes clear is how Mrs. Alving, who is essentially an innocent victim or, if not that, a person with the best of intentions, should accept a catastrophe totally out of proportion to the responsibility she has for it. Even if the action were to continue to the point where she sadly resigned herself to her fate (i.e., by presumably accepting her son's affliction as a cross she must bear), it would turn her not so much into a tragic heroine as a pathetic figure with all fight and resistance knocked out of her.

The dilemma which Mrs. Alving faces at the end of *Ghosts* is in total conformity with what Fergusson calls the thesis-thriller if one sees Mrs. Alving's fate not so much as a tragic quest but as a series of tragic choices. Her lifelong dilemma has always been whether to break away from or submit to the dictates of a society constantly at odds with honesty, truth, and a sensitive reading of new developments and events. Up to the point of the catastrophe, she has managed to run a middle course by making a number of both conventional and non-conventional moves. When she left her husband but quickly returned to him, usurped his position as head of the household but kept up a pretense that theirs was a normal marriage, and sent her son away from his father but kept alive in him the illusion that his father was a good and respectable man, she followed a pattern of conformity and rebelliousness which is in evidence at the very beginning of the play. There she plans to build a free and liberal-minded future on the false foundations of the past. At the end of the play, Mrs. Alving has finally reached a situation where she can no longer equivocate between what society tells her is the right thing to do and what she likely knows or feels in her heart is required (i.e., executing her son's dying wish). If the play were to end with Mrs. Alving making a final decision whether her son should live or die, it would have to be considered, like Manders' choice between either expressing his love for the young Mrs. Alving or sacrificing it on the alter of public opinion, a choice between either achieving a great personal victory or suffering a great moral defeat. That is, by either following the dictates of her heart in a matter of great seriousness or, with fear more than anything else as the motivating factor, following the dictates of society.

viewpoint, there is no reason not to celebrate what will come any less than to mourn what will pass away. No reason not to think that the first won't be as bounteous and as marvellous as the second.

– I'm alright, Andrew. It was just shortness of breath.

– Theo, I'm starting to believe you. He doesn't give a damn about the violence he does.

It is by virtue of the fact that truthtelling has its work ethic but is not *just* a work ethic that it must move critically into itself. If analytic philosophy is prepared to do this with its empirical tradition, then why not so-called postmodern philosophy with its theoretical? I suppose I was doing the second before I even knew it and certainly before I had ever heard the word postmodern. At the time of taking the moral theory course, I still thought of theory as a more or less neutral thing if it seemed to have understanding as its one and only objective. Sayre-McCord's article – but not only Sayre-McCord's article – exasperated me because, unlike Nietzsche's work, it showed not the slightest recognition of the subtlety and complexity of what it was purportedly explaining. Instead there was the assumption that certain ethical or moral principles broadly accepted today and with a long history of acceptance are fundamental ones and presumably so fundamental that one can dispense with calling them into question. In the case of Sayre-McCord, all his epistemological and ontological concerns, all the points by which he wanted to show that moral theory could be scientific, bore upon such meagre items (meagre because they brought nothing new into the picture) as the cause-effect relation between kindness and happiness (on the one hand) and cruelty and misery (on the other).

– Andrew, take your hand away from my forehead!

Perhaps the hardest thought is that we are condemned to our immorality as much as our morality and, as the key part of this thought, through the latter as much as by it. How much of the heroic inevitably takes on the harsh traits of the inhumane and even inhuman and how much of the humane takes on the soft and pliant ones of the hypocritical, cowardly, and mendacious. It could be said that nearly all public discourse and role-playing are devoted to the task of denying that any such state of affairs exists. That is, to a royal falsehood about morality that everything about it or at least everything essential to it is clear and straightforward. To a good deal of dissembling, cover up, and self-delusion that goes on with a more or less good conscience and makes up everything in society that glitters but is not gold.

– I don't like this collapsing of the distinction between good and evil. The very mixing of the two is, at best, an excuse not *to do good and, at worst — Andrew, there comes a point where the only response to such intellectual devilry is a cold silence.*

There must be a sense in which, morally speaking, one is always vulnerable. A sense in which one's morality is always one's immorality. But who can pass the bulk of their time with such paralysing considerations (unless their subject is truthtelling)? Who is not forced to a yes or a no as soon as they put their hands to something? When I took up John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* in the second part of the moral theory course, I was upset by its phoney manoeuvres to

demonstrate that a certain system of social organization (call it Western, liberal, capitalistic, and democratic) was the perfect convergence of justice and rationality.

"It is clear that the Original Position in *A Theory of Justice* draws just as much upon what could be called *irrational* as rational. True it starts off as a hypothetical contractual situation made up of parties distinct enough that we can more or less identify with them. But as one critic has pointed out, it is 'a very peculiar selection environment where there are no conflicting interests that need to be mediated, where everyone prefers the same two principles, and where the agreement on these two principles is unanimous.'

"The behaviour of these presumably rational beings is strange in another way. The condition of their being partially amnesiac (that is, being forced to submit to the Veil of Ignorance such that they don't know their personal identities and stations in life) seems to sit well with them (nobody presumably complains about it) and they attend to the business at hand with an uncommon preference for theoretical planning and distant projects over practical and immediate concerns. Of course what really underlies all this is that the Original Position involves no contracting process per se but rather the machinations of a covert legislator, namely, John Rawls, who determines the operative values and conditions in advance in order to allow for a *simulation* of free choice and rational deliberation."

It was Rawls' means that I was targeting rather than his end and yet this end, what was it to me? Certainly not what it was to Rawls. Certainly not something to protect and preserve and perhaps, as a secret moral calling, to serve as a political theorist.

– I suppose when we're forced to take up sides, there's always the chance of an injustice creeping in.

– Andrew, there's no injustice in taking up sides against evil. If you give up believing that people fight it for no other reason than to defeat it, then you move into an area of cynicism that is the first step towards not *fighting it.*

This difficult thing of the intellectual in its relation to the practical or worldly, how it feeds into it or plies it own course, how its very merit is plying its own course, is a venture so vast and complicated that it can never quite know itself. Operating with an abundance of risk capital, this indeterminate relationship squanders its time, energy, and resources without knowing what long-term blessings or, for that matter, calamities will follow. And yet at the same time it is always a knowing that they *will* follow for even the most cursory study of history shows that the giving of birth to the present by the past is messy, complicated, and painful. It is almost a reflex action to stay away from the more disagreeable terms that Nietzsche uses to describe this process. His hyperbolic counter to hypocritical complacency in the moral sphere often seems like a diagnosis of the past meant to be a prescription for the future.

– Are we supposed to look towards the future with no hope at all? Are we just supposed to assume it will always be as it is?

– Given our species' track record, it may get worse.

– I don't go in for that sort of pessimism. The world has always been faced with great problems. It's courage and conviction and not black thoughts that have gotten us over the worst and will do so in the future.

Perhaps at no other time than this period of taking honours courses and being both a full-time student and a middle-aged one was I so disposed to exercising a certain mastery or authority in the classroom. The feminist voice versus my Nietzschean one was one of the axes on which classroom discussion turned that tended to be more animated and controversial than usual. This both generational and gender-oriented conflict that was really nothing more than brief displays of passionate intensity on both sides was nonetheless frequent enough that it excited in me a will to argue even more forcibly than I was used to. Being but a student and so, as it were, having no Achilles' heel in the way of professional concerns and commitments, in the way of having to be on guard against upsetting people's sensibilities, in the way of having to fear repercussions from challenging current mores or those who chose to be their spokesmen, I was almost argumentatively unbeatable and perhaps unbearable. No doubt a few walked away from various classroom discussions with a view of me as someone who spoke too loudly and acted too aggressively. Certainly I relished getting the better of these young women (all my principal adversaries were young women and indeed much younger than me except for one middle-aged woman with whom I frequently sparred) and on more than one occasion I was conscious of a certain erotic tinge these skirmishes had. Given that the male professors largely kept silent in the face of feminist commentary, I experienced the difference between their behaviour and mine as if it were an enhancement of my virility and masculine identity. At the same time I felt myself to be morally superior to both parties since the one, the professors, had knowledge but lacked spirit (for the most part, they walked on eggshells whenever there was the chance that some indiscreet remark or all too defensive or confrontational gesture might be construed as sexist) while the other, the young feminists in the class, took advantage of this and had spirit without knowledge or, rather, self-knowledge. While of course they invariably knew something about the material that bore the brunt of their feminist critique, they were very much short in the area of awareness that I admired most and naturally cultivated. Nowhere did I see amongst them the type of spirit that peers deeply into itself and, going beyond theory, captures in one full movement its personal limitations and deficiencies along with its will to overcome them.

– Theo, I think I'll cash out.

What I was fighting in my own egoistic way and with my own degree of ideological commitment was no more simple and pure than my reaction to and reception of it. It was as much the folly of youth as the titillating and sometimes even charming threat it poses to age (this charm itself may be a threat) as it was the usual bugbears I encountered in scholarly work. Principally there was the ever-recurring one that I found not only in feminist writings but in all scholarship. The one that, as I understand it now and try to deal with it even while reacting and railing against it, is indispensable to generating a broad range of arguments and points of view. The one that, though it be an entanglement and obstacle for me, is a fortuitous possibility for many others. In short, the one that is the typical scholarly move of starting off with a few unexamined assumptions that are always-already problematic. Assumptions therefore that cannot be turned over and looked at if one is to deal with relatively clear and straightforward problems

that are to be found downstream and away from the unmanageable, intractable, indeterminable source of all problems.

– I think we're getting variations on a theme that, like Chinese water torture, is supposed to break us down, drive out us our minds and make us shout: "Halleluiah! The Truth has finally come!"

No, I was not so supple in my thinking then as to see that where I hated or where I had contempt was but a zone of passage in that otherwise not inhospitable realm where all discursive possibilities take root. Or to see that, however great this hatred or contempt grew when I found myself challenged, discomforted, afflicted, outraged, and so forth, it was nonetheless bound up with common interest and enthusiasm, with what on a general level is inseparable from extraordinary diversity and development. The all too delicate and almost impossible consciousness of this whole scene, the hardly practicable, manageable, and yet indispensable awareness of where we all are situated as truthtellers – this consciousness seems to me to be something that swirls around like the finest of moral vapours and is what Nietzsche points to when he says that we should be thankful for our enemies.

– Bravo. Summed up well and worth a good long period of reflection.

Yes, there's this matter that has been on my mind for some time now.

– Andrew, wake up. Otherwise I'm truly going to lose it.

It pertains to my subject in a strange, insolent, and even insulting way. It usually has far less to do with not telling the truth than with telling it. Or rather it has mostly to do with overtelling it or undertelling it, with not finding the right measure, means, pace, tone, setting, and occasion for telling it. It continually complicates matters by making an active restless shifting ground of the supposedly fixed and settled realm of intentions, aims, objectives, ideals, and so forth. It presents itself as the threat, and hopefully no more than the threat, of the paralysing nullity that the telling of the truth can be when it no longer connects, no longer discharges energy, no longer reveals itself as startling displays of synthesis, generation, transformation, and so on.

– Is he talking about his own truthtelling? Then I agree wholeheartedly. It's a queue de poisson. It tells us a great deal about nothing that could make any difference to a person seriously and responsibly concerned about the matter.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

30. A New Turn

– Excuse me! I'm looking for Professor Baumgarten.

– I'm he. Who are you?

– A strange mix of things. But principally a new voice assigned to these proceedings.

– You're quite beautiful. Forgive my colleague. He had a bit too much to drink. New voice, you say?

– Well, certainly not one to overrule yours or in any way threaten it. After all, I'm only an undergraduate.

– Please, come in. Sit down. You're certainly a welcome relief. I must tell you, I've almost been stretched to the breaking point of late. This business of endlessly circling around a subject, of not cutting through to something clear – do you know what I mean? – it's a horror!

– I understand. It's not at all what you're used to.

– Oh, you've said so much. Thirty years of teaching students to think clearly and logically about truth and now this.

– There's unfairness and injustice and a certain amount of cruelty you've had to put up with.

– Oh, you're a wonder! You're an angel!

– You've been a captive audience in the worst sense. Under normal conditions, you wouldn't have tolerated it. You would've walked away.

– Especially when it goes on and on, dear girl, and seems to be plugged into your very thoughts. To be maliciously circumventing every possible objection you can make.

– You've suffered a great deal. And if it weren't for the fact this is a kind of thought experiment, it wouldn't be possible to justify it.

With my mind's eye I can see as if seated in darkened rows those who will one day visit this site called *On Truthtelling*. Such a phantom readership is really the common mind in all its range and variability with the one thing that can be relied on as never failing to show up and, at the very least, lurk about in the shadows.

So much by way of saying that truthtelling forever attaches itself to interest, curiosity, wonder, admiration, elevation, worship, and so on and that all of these can just as easily be found where truthtelling *isn't*. To be warding off boredom and to be telling the truth at the same time is only the most unflattering way of depicting this tension and struggle. Not being involved in the

sort of project that creates an argumentative edifice allowing for a step-by-step satisfaction and sense of accomplishment, I continually find myself having to improvise, having to create and discover over and over again.

– You're with him, aren't you?

Not to dabble grossly in fiction but not to pretend I don't dabble in it – this might be just another way to put it. To make my life more interesting than I sometimes lived it is virtually forced on me by the threat of letting this work run down, lose its dramatic impetus, and, with ever-circling reflections, take the form of an interminable soliloquy. I like to think that I have always craved a soul sister in my life and that, if she had ever popped up in it as Hilda in Halvard Solness's, I would have been more than willing to be completely devoted to her. This fantasy of mine as the potential knight waiting to serve his princess has of course its ironic counterpart in my inordinate desire for spiritual freedom and independence.

– I want him to go on, of course. But not with the idea of changing your mind. I just want him to have the chance to fly.

– To fly?

– Yes, to fly. Ever so high. Oh, I know, it sounds silly but I would like to see it and if you decide you don't want to be here, it won't happen.

What essentially is left to cover except many more years of university studies? What essentially is left to say except that this was my spiritual course as I found it and did what I could to make it fly?

– What in God's name are you talking about?

What more can I probe as subject matter except the many essays I wrote over these years?

– He needs me now and yet I'm dependent on you. Without you here, I'm frivolous, disappointing, nothing more than a silly enthusiast.

What more is there to say about my fixation on the heroic and how it kept popping up in my writing assignments?

– I'm not going to help him fly, whatever that means. I'm thoroughly against his crass egoism.

Certainly I didn't shy away from looking at it from all angles. But this is as much as to say that, first, I recognized that it is a stretchable term even to the point of being applied to ordinary people. And that, second, it can be taken positively or negatively and elevated to the very clouds or ranked with destruction and damnation.

– You're of course much more erudite than I am but are you sure you know everything there is to know about egoism?

Does this mean that the heroic is dissolved or just that it is on a sliding scale? What does the average man have to do with Oedipus or Hamlet?

– I could've popped up in another scene and been nothing more than a frivolous fantasy and a piece of erotic fluff. But I came to this one because I wanted to be something more. Professor Baumgarten, I need a bit more substance, that's what it is. I just wish you would think it worthwhile to stick around and help me make something new and possibly even thrilling come about. Oh, Professor, think of it as a possibility for philosophy. A kind of thought experiment. You can be just as you are and speak your mind and tell me when you think I'm being foolish or self-indulgent or just plain stupid. You can even tell me if you think I'd be better off in one of your classes.

Where can I touch down on this matter? There was the Milton course with *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*. And so heroes as different as the Satan of the first poem, the Christ of the second, the Adam and Eve of the first, and the strongman Samson in Milton's drama with the eponymous title.

– If I'm to be as I am, dear girl, I'll tell you what should happen, This spell should be broken, the wand of the experimenter thrown deeper than plummets sound, and I, a wizened-faced and thoroughly fed up Ariel, given my freedom.

There are types and many different types. Almost every different set of circumstances generates a new type.

– Do you really want to leave, Professor Baumgarten?

– What are you proposing?

There are clearly false types. But is the Satan of *Paradise Lost* one of them?

– A game of chess.

Milton the theologian, the author of *The Christian Doctrine,* seems to have thought so.

– I'm sorry, I'm going. I need time to recover from this and then get on with my own work. If you've got any sympathy for what I've just been through, you'll let me out of here without any attempts to — you're as bewitching as hell but I won't fall victim to you. A philosophical castle in the air? Is that what you want? Good heavens, that's more suitable to literature than to philosophy. And to make me part of that ? Me? An analytic philosopher? A logician? *I'm not the sort to dabble in the absurd. My name isn't Lewis Carroll. And by the way I'm late, I'm late. For a very important date. Goodbye.*

But as many commentators have noted, his poem or his poetic instinct had its own say.

– Professor Chalmers?

– Oh, that was an excellent dream! That was — good heavens, where am I?

– In your office of course.

– But where is Theo? Who are you? My God, I feel like I've spent three months touring Ireland in a motorcar and now have been abruptly returned to an earlier dream not nearly as pleasant.

– Really? Was it that good?

– Oh, it was excellent, my dear! Astounding! I was all over Ireland. What a beautiful country! And the people are truly friendly. Even the ones you pick up on the road.

– I'm glad you had such a wonderful dream. I certainly didn't want to bring you back to a nightmare.

– Well, it wasn't a nightmare exactly though it was very strange. It was like being caught in the head of a postmodern — where's Theo?

– Let me explain. I wanted him to stay but he insisted that, if he were to be truly himself, he had to leave and get on with his own work.

– Have I woken up yet?

– Dear Professor Chalmers. In a way I'm glad it didn't work out with Professor Baumgarten. I'm sure you'll be ever so much more help to me.

The phenomenon of Milton the poet being taken in a direction that significantly departed from and undercut the one he took as a systematic thinker (which of course is not totally absent from his poem because he declares at the outset that his purpose is to teach God's ways to men) wasn't something I looked at very deeply then. Nonetheless it weighed enough on me that I saw him as one who, although enmeshed in the doctrinal points of his faith, was forced to return all of this to fiction as the more telling and truthful principle. Principally it was the morality-based and morality-engendering myths of Christianity that he returned to and that, so far as he could make them vibrant and coherent, were also a matter of rendering the corresponding morality no longer pure, unmixed, and entirely independent of contrary and conflicting elements. Here was the truth that dared not speak its name but could only reveal itself stealthily so that all of us might receive the grace of being less than doctrinaires in our heart of hearts.

– Are you a student here?

– Yes, I study philosophy.

– Really? I've never seen you before.

– I just arrived. Tell me, do you think a philosopher should really live his philosophy like Thoreau says?

– Do you mean go off into the woods and criticize society from a distance?

– I mean caring about it so much you think about it every single day.

– I'm sure there are many who do just that.

– I mean eating with it, sleeping with it, practically going to bed with it.

– That might not be for everyone.

– I'm not talking about everyone. I'm talking about philosophers.

– But there are many different types of philosophers.

– Isn't that begging the question?

– I don't see how. Why should anyone be constrained to follow a particular path when there might be others equally important?

That we are inhabited by many voices that often conflict with one another is the still-vague sentiment I would like to bring out more. Usually there is the other way of looking at it, namely, that there are simply lines of argument or points of view that we're free to take from others and make our own. The surface play of our intentions and operations is thus treated as if it were the whole of truthtelling or rather the only meaningful part cancelling all below it without prejudice and remainder. To raise a question or have a doubt about this usually gets targeted as being morally suspect.

– What're you doing?

– We're going to play a friendly game of chess.

– But I've been here long enough.

– Professor Chalmers!...

– No, I've got other things to do.

– I could've popped up in another scene and been nothing more than a frivolous fantasy

and a piece of erotic fluff. But I came to this one because I wanted to be something more. Professor Chalmers, I need a bit more substance, that's what it is. I just wish you would think it worthwhile to stick around and help me make something new and possibly even thrilling come about. Oh, Professor, think of it as a possibility for philosophy. A kind of thought experiment. You can be just as you are and speak your mind and tell me when you think I'm being foolish or self-indulgent or just plain stupid. You can even tell me if you think I'd be better off in one of your classes.

Still I'm confronted with the insurmountable fact that one voice wishes to dominate and lord it over all the others. Be it a voice in the wilderness or one of the many voices of community and consensus, its will is to have its world organized as values or valuations descending from it in rank. What significant difference is there between playing at this as if it were merely make-believe and actually working away at it? It is an uneasy dictatorship of the mind that has to partly democratize itself because it is always labouring to give fully legitimate birth to itself. The so many things that arouse antipathy in us even while being formally recognized and saluted are the traces of this incessant struggle to be benignly and inclusively on top.

– You're an admirer of his, that's pretty clear. But how do you fit in?

– Professor Chalmers, there's a lot of indifference and non-recognition in the world. The gap between what we want most for ourselves and what we end up with is too great to bear.

– For all people?

– At some point I would say yes.

– And your hero?

– I'm here for a good time, Professor. Let's not have any more depressing thoughts.

So I think now that there was this dominant voice in me at the time of taking these courses whose particular bent was to demand that other voices present themselves in fair and open combat. Of course the most imposing strength and greatest power of these other voices came from the outside where they, operating as dominant voices in their own right, challenged me to abandon mine and enter into their far-flung weal. While it is not easy to say how far any of this went or how far it goes at any time, I have little doubt that some of these other voices brought about dissension and discord in me that needed to be quelled. Both those that hoisted the flag of traditional longstanding values and those that sounded the trumpet of new and timely ones were strong enough to brazen their way up to the borders of my post-Nietzschean realm and assault its weakest defences. How like a Roman emperor I then sallied forth to meet them and subdue them just as they, in their parleys and councils, sought to subdue me. No, it can't be said that I ever felt my seat to be truly shaken but no more can it be said that I didn't relish the challenge and risk to it.

– You're as beautiful as can be. Unfortunately, you don't move me as much as those two

boys in my class.

– I'll go in drag, professor – then we'll see.

Wasn't Professor Wyke himself an argument for Christianity? Didn't I feel this highly intelligent, Oxford-educated professor, this competent, efficient, and serious-minded teacher to be such an argument? What was the distance between him and me that he should believe and call himself a Christian and I should not? Had it anything to do with his being any less courageous, sincere, and truthful than me? Or had it anything to do with his being better or less evil? Ultimately I only ended up getting glimpses of someone with interests and preoccupations very much compatible with his Christian faith and so someone separated from me only in this sense and no other.

– This is some professor of his?

– Yes, he was driven to contest my hero's – I shall call him my hero from now on – swipe at Christianity. He wrote this essay, you see, on Samson Agonistes *that cut against the grain of Milton's purported intention for it and so Wyke, being a Christian, naturally resisted it.*

– Are you sure?

– Do you know Milton's Samson Agonistes? *It's about Samson after Delila has cut his hair and just before he destroys the temple and kills all the Philistines.*

– I'm familiar with the Biblical story.

– Wyke took issue with my hero's reading of Milton's dramatic retelling of this story.

– But surely he could've done so for reasons that have nothing to do with his being a Christian.

– No, he made it clear he was against it because he wanted Samson to conform to the model of a hero who learns patience and moderation (I'm talking about Professor Wyke) through suffering and when my hero analysed it and threw it into a different light, he couldn't do much more than say "Look, I'm with Milton on this and your proof doesn't count as much as his doctrinal account of what it is to be a Christian hero."

"**With Inward Eyes Illuminated**"

"It is the contention of this essay that, to paraphrase what Samson's father, Manoa, says at the end of *Samson Agonistes*, Samson acquits himself like Samson, is more like Samson than even he himself knows, at the very beginning and throughout the drama and not just at its conclusion. That is, contrary to what many critics think, I contend that the greatest renewal of Samson's spirit has already occurred *prior to* the poem's action and that the latter merely provides the vehicle – the circumstances and events – for its fullest possible expression. But let

us pause: *merely* here might be a misleading term. What we see in the poem is a full-blown dramatic realization of this spirit reviving and surpassing that which animated the stupendous strongman and people's warrior of former times. It is precisely this strength of mind, however hidden or obscured, however seemingly contradicted by swings of mood and despairing thoughts, which in its final movement confers upon Samson the highest degree of honour and heroic magnificence.

"Of course the terms 'renewing' and 'reviving' are in some sense interchangeable and so, in order to draw a useful distinction between them, I will employ the image of a vital organ and then point to the former term as referring to what is primary and the necessary condition of a body's returning to full health and vigour. The organ, if damaged or wasted, must regenerate; so too that part of the human spirit which, due to injury or illness, draws down both the inner and outer man, turning robust activity of mind and body into lethargy and despair. Yet conceptual clarity would perhaps be best arrived at by, at the same time, thinking of spiritual renewal as a total process, as that, in other words, which includes the highest degree of spiritual vitality and recovery and also includes within itself the potential for even surpassing a former state of spiritual strength and self-sufficiency.

"Like the regeneration of an organ within the body, spiritual renewal in the primary or necessary sense begins and may continue for a long time in silence and with little outward show. Then again, there are all sorts of oddities and what seems a sign of sickness – might even *be* a sign of sickness – might also be a sign of health. The latter would be particularly true in the case of an exceptional person who, in taking the most profound measure of himself (that is, at his lowest point or the most critical time of his life), adopts a standard of behaviour at odds with what normally passes for prudence or moderation. That which counts as excess to others comes to him then as, for example, the affirmation of self even at the cost of losing life. In the case of Samson, it is a kind of outwardly rough but inwardly delicate balancing act – a kind of rough dance along a spiritual tightrope which might see him end with extraordinary success or plummet headlong to destruction or both together.

"There is evidence to support the notion that, prior to taking a break from onerous toil just outside his prison-workhouse, Samson already knows for himself (rough-hewn though it may be) a spiritual course. It can be summed up in three words: faith, knowledge, and passion. It combines that of which he is highly conscious with that of which he is only partially conscious. Its unifying principle is the will to preserve the integrity of his character in suffering. We can look no further at this point because his prospects seem so bleak, because all that retains value for him is the continuity, however weakened or threatened, of his present life with the past one as well as, furthermore, his enduring the trials and tribulations which he believes in greatest part to be warranted. Such is the surface movement of his psyche and only when we look deeper do we see that the series of radical encounters with certain people and events brings to light the unspoken, barely thought, deeply buried intimations of greatest import: the hope, fantastic one though it be, that he might yet fulfil his divine mission and utterly redeem himself.

"Now it may be asked: what is the standing of Samson's faith in God? And how does this faith bear directly on him? He is one whom, due to his breaking of a sacred trust (i.e., his promise not to reveal the source of his strength), God has apparently abandoned. The Philistines have put out his eyes and hold him as their prized captive. They work him to the point of exhaustion every day. They feed, clothe, and house him like an ill-treated slave. They add to his misery by taunting and tormenting him. Moreover, he suffers bouts of black depression and

torments himself with self-recrimination and reminders of past glory. Even after some fellow countrymen and his father have come to comfort and counsel him, the latter even holding out the prospect of delivering him from bondage, Samson still may utter such sentiments as pertain to his 'sense of Heav'ns desertion.' Yet at no point does he impugn God for his dire fall from grace and in fact checks himself when his thoughts grow too bitter and reproachful.

> Yet stay, let me not rashly call in doubt
> Divine Predilection; what if all foretold
> Had been fulfill'd but through my own default,
> Whom have I to complain of but myself?

"There is an element of ambiguity at this early point of the poem in that the above passage immediately follows his citing the divine promise which, taken by itself, gives no hint of having been made conditionally.

> Promise was that I
> Should *Israel* from *Philistian* yoke deliver;

"Though quite understandable given the circumstances, it would nonetheless appear that it is only Samson's *interpretation* of his drastic change of fortune which renders the keeping of the vow about his strength, his sacred trust, a condition of his fulfilling the divine mission. And if such is the case, there is no reason to rule out the possibility that he harbours some hope of a contrary sort.

"The moral significance with which Samson invests the breaking of a sacred vow and the forfeiting of divine trust cannot be understood apart from a sense of his ongoing belief in God's reality, power, and righteousness. Personal misery and other issues or preoccupations might obscure, even disallow the most direct manifestation of faith; nonetheless the reiterated cry against himself only goes to show the extraordinary claim he believes God made upon him and which now resides in his worthiest acceptance of the divine judgement upon him.

> Spare that proposal, Father, spare the trouble
> Of that solicitation; let me here,
> As I deserve, pay on my punishment,
> And expiate, if possible, my crime . . .

"Insofar as there is a claim to human greatness here, it follows only from the knowledge of a divine dispensation and appointment. Nevertheless it still bears the earmarks of excess which, never far from the extraordinary and incomprehensible, raises the suspicions of ordinary men who cannot fathom its spiritual ground.

> Be penitent and for thy fault contrite,
> But act not in thy own affliction, Son;
> Repent the sin, but if the punishment
> Thou canst avoid, self-preservation bids;
> .....

God will relent and quit thee all his debt;
Who evermore approves and more accepts
(Best pleas'd with humble and filial submission)
Him who imploring mercy sues for life,
Than who self-rigorous choose death as due;
Which argues over-just, and self-displeas'd
For self-offence, more than for God offended.

"All that is the rule and conventional good sense in the above misses the point of what sustains Samson in his plight and keeps alive his potential for 'some great act.' It is the difference between a taut bowstring just waiting for the arrow and the weapon which has been unloosed, set aside, and eventually forgotten. Samson knows that, blinded as he is, a return to home, hearth, and family would undo this bowstring forever.

Now, blind, dishearten'd, sham'd, dishonor'd, quell'd,
To what can I be useful, wherein serve
My Nation, and the work from Heav'n impos'd,
But to sit idle on the household hearth,
A burdenous drone; to visitants a gaze,
Or pitied object, these redundant locks
Robustious to no purpose clust'ring down,
Vain monument of strength;

"A state of supreme spiritual preparedness, in sum, is what the most profound suffering helps to sustain in him and, hardly knowing it himself, he awaits the divine arrow which, being the bow himself, he can send hurtling towards his enemies.

"To employ an Aristotelian term, Samson's *anagnorisis,* his recognition of his fall from grace, has already taken place before we encounter him at the beginning of the poem. All indications are that the time he has spent in prison has been sufficient for the most tortuous self-examination.

Ease to the body some, none to the mind
From restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm
Of Hornets arm'd, no sooner found alone,
But rush upon me thronging, and present
Times past, what once I was, and what am now.

"Over and over again he puts before his mind's eye (and, to a lesser extent, before those who now come before him) the bitter truth of what he once was, what he is now, and, more importantly, how the change occurred and its significance. The whole is surveyed from top to bottom; no relevant detail is shunted aside or obfuscating or equivocating one added. Exaggeration, if there is any, only comes in the form of self-recrimination.

Am I not sung and proverb'd for a Fool
In every street; do they not say, "How well
Are come upon him his deserts?"

"Everywhere he looks he catches the measure of a thing (which ironically sets off his blindness): the length and breadth of his affliction ('Yet that which was the worst now least afflicts me / Blindness, for had I sight, confus'd with shame / How could I once look up or heave the head . . .'); the hidden hubris of his past glory ('Like a petty God / I walk'd about . . .'); the sheer folly by which he fell ('This well I knew, nor was at all surpris'd / But warn'd by oft experience.'); its moral significance ('But I God's counsel have not kept, his holy secret / Presumptuous have publish'd . . .'); its wide-ranging consequences ('Father, I do acknowledge and confess / That I . . . have brought scandal to Israel . . .'); the limits of his blameworthiness ('That fault I take not on me, but transfer / On Israel's Governors . . .'); and, finally, the extent of his most cunning and captivating enemy's treachery ('Love-quarrels oft in pleasing concord end / Not wedlock-treachery endangering life'). Over and over again what is put before our eyes is not that these numerous insights and instances of critical awareness are the work of the moment but, rather, the carefully refined product of that millstone in his mind which laboured while he turned the other. Without this hard-earned knowledge, Samson could not acquit himself like Samson in the regeneration of his mind and the renewal of that fighting spirit to which the poem amply attests.

"Appearances can be deceiving. This is the oft-bandied truism but I think it is quite appropriate with respect to how others view Samson in his downcast state and how he views himself at times as one who has been abandoned by God. When certain friends and equals of his tribe, which form the Chorus, first come before him, they immediately compare the blind, soiled, and exhausted captive, the seemingly beaten, dispirited, and inconsolable hero, to the hero of old who committed the most amazing feats and stood high, if not highest, among friend and foe alike. It is a reiteration and elaboration upon the theme which Samson himself introduces when he compares the glory of his past calling to the misery of his present helplessness and captivity. Similarly, Manoa comes before him with sad exclamations concerning the miserable change of his son from a one-man army to a sightless and defenceless mortal. Thus the standard of measure is his past glory and, continuously applied in this way, cannot help but make a bad situation look even worse than it is.

"It goes without saying that these two extremes of fortune and misfortune must, in some sense or other, be defining characteristics of Samson's emotional life. But care must be taken here; there is every reason to think that there is a difference between the way he thinks and feels when his mind or body is not fully employed and when some task is at hand.

Nor am I in the list of them that hope;
Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless;
This one prayer yet remains, might I be heard,
No long petition, speedy death,
The close of all my miseries, and my balm.

"The low point which the above represents comes just after his father has gone off to prosecute the means of his deliverance. Samson, having no interest in this business, lapses into the lethergy

which preceded the Chorus's coming. He laments having to bear the same dull round of pain which seems to lie endlessly before him and so, with no sign of relief on the horizon (that is, relief in the sense of being able to redeem himself), he gives himself up to the despairing view that God has abandoned him.

> I was his nurstling once and choice delight . . .
> .....
> But now hath cast me off as never known . . .

"Shortly thereafter, Dalila arrives upon the scene and we have this from him.

> Out, out Hyena, these are thy wanted arts.
> And arts of every women like thee,
> To break all faith, all vows, deceive, betray,
> Then as repentant to submit, beseech,
> And reconcilement move with feign'd remorse . . .

"The spirited attack goes on at length, never faltering and then, when the giant Harapha shows up, becomes even more ferocious.

> Then put on all thy gorgeous arms, thy Helmet
> And Brigandine of brass, thy broad Habergeon,
> Vaint-brace and Greaves, and Gauntlet, add thy Spear
> A Weaver's beam, and seven times folded shield,
> I only with an Oak'n staff will meet thee,
> And raise such outcries on thy clatter'd Iron,
> Which long shall not withhold me from thy head,
> That in a little time, while breath remains thee,
> Thou oft shall wish thyself at Gath to boast
> Again in safety . . .

"The point to be made here is that Samson, unlike a truly beaten and profoundly despairing person, can change his mood rapidly to suit changing circumstances and, more than this, meet even the greatest challenge.

"After Samson's baiting the blustering giant (and almost coming across himself like a bully), the Chorus, mindful perhaps that a sharp tongue and a fiery disposition are not necessarily an advantage in all situations, points to the saint and his virtue of patience as the most likely and appropriate way for Samson to behave. But patience, heaven knows, has already been his path, that is, the only kind of patience a man like Samson could ever know and exercise. It is the patience he has already shown at the mill, suffering the daily round of exhausting work, deplorable conditions, and unrelenting abuse. It is the patience of the violent man who must unlearn violence or, let us say, learn to redeploy it, internalize it, even use it against himself. It is the patience of the recently caught and caged tiger, the rampaging bull elephant brought to heel, the stallion broken for the first time and with the saddle fresh on his back. It is the patience of the powder keg which, installed in some high place, awaits the secret order, the match, and its

highest purpose. It is, in short, *not* the kind of patience which can endure an idle or helpless situation forever, become enured to it, even perhaps grow to like it. Samson's head swarms with hornets and he could not become a more reconciled, submissive, saint-like person for all the trying in the world.

"The most disturbing aspect of Samson's passionate grief, his death wish, is as much the key to what he can do as what he cannot do. He cannot forget his former glory any more than he can forget his monumental folly (i.e., revealing his secret to Dalila); he cannot forgive himself for the betrayal of divine trust and the ingratitude to the God who raised him to such a wondrous height; and he cannot relinquish in the deepest recesses of his soul the small hope which bulks so large in terms of sustaining him in his deepest misery while at the same time wearing him down with its futility. What he can do, however, is treat everything which gives him reason to despair like fissionable material and hold himself at the most potentially explosive level. He can enlist his blackest thoughts to punish and purge himself of what was formerly slack, weak, and under-used in him. He can devise an alternative hope or ancillary plan, that is, death as a happy deliverance, such that it actually becomes easier to push through every day carrying and keeping alive the more futile hope of still accomplishing his divine mission. He can hold within himself such an unbearable degree of tension through inner agitation necessarily constrained by outward circumstance that, in conjunction with his naturally defiant ways, he must inevitably grow reckless with his life and find relief in some perilous mission or else suicidally bring down the enemy's wrath upon him."

– Good heavens! Samson the suicide bomber! Is this what Milton portrays?

"The question we might put before ourselves at this juncture is whether the incidents within the poem are in any sense the basis of Samson's arduous and highly precarious inner life. Suppose, for example, he was not summoned to the temple by the Philistian officer. What then would be the significance of his encounters with his countrymen (i.e., the Chorus), his father, his Philistian wife, Dalila, and his Philistian foe, Harapha? Would he likely change his mind about returning home with his father? Have these encounters influenced him in some fundamental way or shown a secret predisposition towards some more moderate course? Is it not in fact entirely the opposite? When Harapha runs off presumably to the authorities, Samson considers the likelihood of stirring up trouble against himself and then says:

> But come what will, my deadliest foe will prove
> My speediest friend, by death to rid me hence,
> The worst that he can give me, to me the best.
> Yet so it may fall out, because thir end
> Is hate, not help to me, it may with mine
> Draw thir own ruin who attempt the deed.

"Or, to look at it another way, do these encounters bring to Samson a certain state of mind that enables him to do what he otherwise could not? Is the tongue-lashing of Dalila or the browbeating of Harapha necessary to keeping alive the hope of fulfilling his divine mission? Do these incidents help to make preeminent the thought that his enemy is still about and mocking him, thereby restricting, diminishing, or even cancelling out the ones he has of his guiltiness and

lost glory? And does all this then allow for a refocussing of his violent thoughts and tendencies such that, instead of unceasingly flagellating himself for his past failures and weaknesses, he develops once again the taste for battle.

"Just as it would not be unreasonable to answer yes to the above questions, so would it not be to the following ones: Does Samson finally submit to the most prudent-sounding and conventional advice of Manoa and the Chorus in a way that can only be called ironic? That is, does it prove to be the means by which he finally arrives at the idea not to be more patient or forbearing in his affliction than he already is, but only to *seem* so?

"What we are asking then is this: does it prove to be the necessary element in his spiritual renewal that makes him sufficient to capitalize upon events? That indirectly offers him not what he already has, namely, strength, but what he doesn't have, namely, strategy? The art of deception, the playing of the fox as well as the lion, this is what Samson has never learned (but only been the victim of) before the critical point where he accepts to put on a show in front of the Philistines."

– Well, I'll be damned! Is this supposed to be his heroic magnificence?

– It would hardly be there if he kept being stupid.

– Why don't we have other opinions on the matter?

– Other scholars? That would be an extension of the Chorus's waffling back and forth.

– Dear girl, how can you be so dismissive?

– The Chorus says this between lines 1268 and 1296: "Oh how comely it is and how reviving to the spirits of just men long oppressed, when God into the hands of their deliverer, puts invincible might to quell the mighty of the earth, the oppressor, the brute and boisterous force of violent men hardy and industrious to support tyrannic power, but raging to pursue the righteous and all such as honour Truth; he all their ammunition and feats of war defeats with plain heroic magnitude of mind and celestial vigour armed their armouries and magazines condemns, renders them useless, while with winged expedition swift as the lightning glance he executes his errand on the wicked, who surprised lose their defence distracted and amazed. But patience is more oft the exercise of saints, the trial of their fortitude, making them each his own deliverer, and victor over all that tyranny or fortune can inflict, either of these is in thy lot, Samson, with might endued above the sons of men; but sight bereaved may chance to number thee with those whom patience finally must crown." So, you see, the Chorus thinks he can be both things, a heroic avenger and patient saint without any sense of how these conflict.

– And so are all critics in the same boat?

– More or less. Or else at both ends waging war against each other.

All squabbling and struggle, even the bitterest, has at bottom a difference of accentuation. Hence one often battles with the feeling that, even though one should be absolutely right on such

and such a matter for such and such reasons, one is never fully in the right. For Milton and Wyke and I would venture to say several generations of readers, what counted most in this drama was the movement away from paganism and from the hubris of the hero in ancient Greek tragedy towards Christian submission and obedience in faith. For me, on the other hand, what counted most was how the first clung to the second and could not be left behind. How the ostensibly non-Christian elements of excess and pride infiltrate this quasi-Christian drama and complicate it irremediably.

– To deny excess and pride as operative factors in Samson's continuing to be a people's warrior is like denying these factors have anything to do with being a warrior.

– The anatomy of a warrior then. Is that what's called for?

– Let them find one who's both saint-like and not a Mahatma Gandhi. If they do, then Gandhi was all wrong when he thought it could only be done without slaughtering people.

What I continually find myself having to resist is the temptation to baldly take up sides and argue here and there on behalf of myself as an exceptionally serious and committed writer of essays that were mere university assignments. Certainly the restraint of my present self springs less from modesty than from wanting to avoid the all too egoistic, that is, from wanting to avoid scanting and obscuring the ego's enormous range and diversity. Keeping a critical distance between my present and past selves is what I have always been attempting to do in this essay to prevent the first from narrowing itself down to an all too polemical self. At the same time I'm well aware that I have been continually arguing for my old self by *not* arguing, that is, by omitting many objections and counter-arguments, principally the ones that professors put down on my assignments, that, whether I want it to turn out this way or not, engender the disposition or frame of mind of having *no need* to argue.

– My God! – you're taking notes!

When I look back, I think I had faith enough in my own arguments but never in the assumption that things would finally get resolved by argument. Put down what arguments you would, all it took was one question mark in the margins to unsettle them. Oh, definitely there was always something that could have been written better, more clearly, and so on but, when all is said and done, you would still be essentially where you were and your critic where he was. Would Wyke ever have accepted my interpretation of *Samson Agonistes* without becoming a Nietzschean like me or would I have ever accepted his without becoming a Christian? All that came between us as common ground was nothing more than what results from the limitations of one point of view in isolating and excluding the other. For him, the hero of Milton's one and only tragedy was magnificent in a special way because he had gone beyond the earlier type of tragic hero. For me, on the other hand, he was magnificent only because he wasn't essentially different from it.

– Oh, my hero, you're so profound!

God only knows there was much more in these two years of honours courses that either had me focussing on the heroic in a constative way or acting it out in a performative. It was virtually impossible for me to do otherwise because, however erratic and uncertain my intellectual flight, however low to the ground it seemed at times, it at least provided me with a sense of flying and not simply standing on the ground watching others do it. No, I won't go so far as to think that everything I did was the greatest scholarship but certainly everything I did was invested with passion. Never did I avoid exploring an area out of fear and in fact, if I did experience this, I took that to be a sign that I should explore it.

– What do you think of that, Professor Chalmers? Isn't it wonderful?

– No, it's too puffed up for my taste. Everyone could go around blowing their horn like that. It's unseemly.

– Professor Chalmers, if others were blowing their horn just like that, just like he's doing, then they would also be blowing the whistle on themselves. They would be investigating everything that gets hidden because it's not particularly attractive or self-flattering. And if they were only blowing their horn in the usual way, then they would only sound hollow and as other people get turned off by it, so would they.

At the same time the more essays I wrote, the more it weighed on me that they were mere university assignments. Rough typewritten things compared to all the newly bound, printed, and handsome books on display in the university bookstore. It may very well be true that one shouldn't judge a book by its cover but it is also true that a good cover impresses a good deal. Similarly having one's work printed and published and held aloft for all the world to see. Yet something kept me from making the slightest effort to get any of my essays out to the public as if the demands placed upon me by such a move would have been more worrisome and wearisome than any possible gratification or benefit. Certainly I was aware that as university assignments they had a liberty and licence they never could have had as articles published in a scholarly journal. On the other hand, what other possibilities were there given that, taken together, they constituted a very mixed collection with no apparent unity? Even though I may have realized then to what extent I was fixated on the heroic, I wasn't so perspicacious as to know how it fitted in with truthtelling. It would have therefore struck me as being very self-indulgent and unappealing to make it a subject or theme. No, it took a lot more plodding before I finally discovered the one subject where, being able to take up unabashedly my weaknesses, I was able to do the same with my strengths.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

31. More Essays (and More about My Essays)

Shakespeare was writing his best plays at the age I was writing these honours course essays. All these essays, all these practise-like essays that, along with the ones written before and after this period, I look upon now as preliminary to the one called *On Truthtelling*. To the one great essay that is both cumulative with respect to my best writing (despite what is preliminary or practise-like about it) and redeeming of my worst (which of course can be nothing other than my playwrighting). So much by way of deflating and then inflating my ego in an instant. This is something I can do at the present juncture with a certain amount of confidence in making this comparison between myself and Shakespeare (which I wouldn't make if I didn't think it touched all aspects of my writerly aspirations) whereas something like the opposite was the case when I was still struggling as a playwright. But once this dream was left behind and I had set my sights on a philosophico-literary enterprise both set in the university and drawing from outside it, I was able to think that, even with this essay writing so preliminary and practise-like, I was on the road to something great.

– Something too much of this.

Let me say it straight out and without mincing words. I have an overpowering urge to put these essays on parade. Not every one of them was an effrontery to scholarly-like attitudes but enough were that I had no difficulty keeping at a distance what I would have most abhorred doing. And this was the sort of thing that the good Professor Shimizu, a philosophy professor at the University of Winnipeg, had done as a student and told me about one day. The details aren't important because it was the sort of thing many students have done or at least I have good reason to think have done. Nevertheless one thing does stick out about it that seems relevant to what I feared most as a (however remote) possibility. Pandering one time to a difficult professor so in love with his own point of view that he gave top marks only to written assignments reflecting it back to him was, if I judge correctly, still on Professor Shimizu's conscience some thirty or thirty-five years later.

– I certainly don't think a professor should be in love with his own point of view or a student pandering to it. If ever there was somebody in my class who thought he could gain by it, he was quickly disappointed.

In retrospect, what I can say was that I was banking up a moral authority in writing essays that few people possess. And this was largely due to my allowing no outside authority of whatever kind to intimidate me. It is still the case that, whenever I look back over the many essays I wrote as university assignments, I experience a sense of wonder at the tenacity with which I held to this principle. Here in fact was where I saw my highest good and where I now see this good having more in common with Satan-like rebelliousness than divine order. Certainly I'm not put off by this since, as is the case with Milton's God in *Paradise Lost*, authority can never discharge itself of an arbitrary element that belies and is in indeed caught up in its presumed grounding in reason and right. Certainly I'm not one who wants to think his rebelliousness ever extended to employing treacherous means and yet, as I know from personal experience, arguments put forward as legitimate critique by one party can easily be treated as

unfair play by another.

– The nature of argument can't be summed up so easily as that. It can't be simply reduced to strategy that either side thinks the other has but not itself.

– He didn't say that exactly.

– What did he say exactly?

– He said arguments put forward as legitimate critique by one party can easily be treated as unfair play by another.

– Well, I believe in a fusion of horizons. People can be acutely attentive to what others are saying and if what they're saying is sound and well-reasoned, then it can be integrated into their own way of thinking.

– But how do we distinguish this fusion of horizons from appropriating from others what merely fits in with our position?

– Is this an argument you're giving me?

– How do we distinguish what comes from argument and what comes from other factors?

– Because there are some questions meant to sabotage any possibility of argument.

Pressing forward with my impossible subject, trying to make it possible only in a way that has never been done before, I do the singular violence of setting myself up as a sun from which all else gains visibility. This is at least the close-up view of the matter that is never far away from a reproach to such high-handed presumption and to leaving out so much thought and observation that belong to others. But is it not possible with a more wide-ranging and magnanimous outlook to see this presumption as a sort of monadic-like operation, a view of the whole from one particular corner that may be captured in different ways and to different degrees by others?

– Isn't it incumbent upon us to respect the other party as we ourselves wish to be respected? Then if we consider ourselves serious and truthful thinkers, we should allow as much to others.

– But what a burden that places on all whose goal is truth about something and not truthtelling. (My hero, please grant me the strength to answer Professor Chalmers who is testing you and yet is you and – oh, it's so hard to be truthful!) For what they aim at never has this telling as part of its subject and so is never an examination of what might or might not be truthful about it.

The demands upon me are immeasurable. In truth, I can't cope with all this complicating

and even over-complicating. Inevitably I'm driven towards simplifying. At least such is my situation as soon as I want to give some substance to my observations. And part of this simplifying process is already underway when I'm forced to examine major works, particularly philosophical ones, through my own lens. Through not only this essay but those past ones that examine this and that in various works and so never examine them completely and with greatest precision. Yet what other way, pray tell, would keep me on my subject and in the direction of treating it as thoroughly as possible? To leave myself out (but of course this is never done by anyone except in appearance) might very well be the better way to tell the truth about some other subject but certainly not truthtelling.

– I can see I'm but a pawn here and it would be better — where's that book?

All the factors I must keep an eye on and not let slip out of sight. It seems that the best thing I can to do is to continually gauge the tension between the essays I wrote in the past and the one I'm writing now. Between the act of imagining these essays stretching out and being consummated as one great project and remembering them as little ones (here of course I should exempt the master's and doctoral theses) caught up in immediate anxieties and concerns. At the most technical level they were assignments to be done at certain designated times. Invariably they involved intensive work over a relatively short period. Half the battle in writing them was trying to come up with a suitable topic or theme. Whenever I hit upon a title for an essay that pleased me, I generally thought I had the whole of it roughly in sight. Little did I write in the way of preliminary notes but, then again, never did I write an essay without much reading and reflection. On the other hand, I tended to give a few canonical texts a number of thorough readings rather than carry out a survey of related literature.

– What book are you looking for, Professor Chalmers?

– It's called Human Development and Destiny.

– Perhaps you left it at home.

– No, it's here.

– It's obviously taking on a very big subject.

– Yes, yes.

– It sounds very interesting.

– How could it disappear like that?

– Who's the author?

– Irene Charinsky.

– Is she well-known?

– Yes.

– What's it about, Professor Chalmers?

– She argues – where the devil did it go?

– Please tell me about it.

– She argues in this book that, on the basis of our past patterns of behaviour and what confronts us today in the way of environmental problems, we must choose between civilization without militarism (involving of course some great changes and sacrifices) and a slide towards barbarism.

With all this in mind (but how can it all be kept in mind?), I will try to single out and bear down on some essays that I haven't already touched upon and that belong to these honours courses in both English literature and philosophy. Just as before, my way of looking at them must cut against the grain, must subordinate some common virtues of philosophizing to elevate others, must reveal less by being clear and consistent than by being unflinching in the face of all complicating and over-complicating factors. The latter even includes the simplifying and even over-simplifying that go with any limited operation and perspective.

– Wow!

– It's a very bold bringing together of disciplines that are normally kept apart. You must understand that this is generally frowned upon by specialists who view it as being less strict and scientific than their own work. Also there is the human element. The author doesn't hide herself. She speaks directly about her own development as a thinker.

– You mean she gives an account of herself while dealing with the subject?

– Yes, indeed, she does. Only it's not something, as you might expect, that gets in the way of it. It merely shows how her thinking is grounded in present realities.

– She's taking into account the subjective side of things then.

– But not in a way that prevents her from saying something truthful about these matters.

– For people who share these present realities?

– Of course.

– So the book would be truthful even if these present realities changed and in some sense made it untruthful. But tell me, Professor Chalmers, what is most topical and important about

this book?

– It sounds the alarm for where we are at this juncture in our history and lays out the options before us as rational beings presumably in charge of our destiny.

– Is she optimistic or pessimistic?

– Well, pessimistic insofar as men have long ruled the planet and employed the care principle as a subterfuge for dominating and exploiting whatever presumed enemy lay about.

– Is she saying we should turn our swords into ploughshares?

– There has to be a different mentality worldwide that turns away from the tribalism of nations and is truly fixed upon our interests as a global community.

There is no question that taking Nietzsche to heart had emboldened me to attack all comfort-seeking metaphysics, aesthetics, epistemology, and ethics. All that was a purifying, an idealizing, an upholding of the good (that malleable metal!) and that at the same time was not particularly pure in its ways and means of hammering out the truth. But of course why there should be any attempt to render truthtelling more pure and honourable even as one sabotaged its connection to the good was itself without answer except as a counter-idealization that had long held sway in me and that I knew was alive in the world as much as the other sort.

– Professor Chalmers, I hear you play a mean game of chess.

– From whom did you hear this?

– From Baumgarten.

– Baumgarten isn't in the habit of making comments like that.

– Well, I proposed a game of chess to him and he suddenly grew cool. I assumed it was because you'd beaten him very badly because I read the board in an instant and saw you'd had him in an impossible situation.

– My, how observant you are!

– You gave him a real shellacking.

– Yes, it's true. He did suffer two amazingly quick defeats at my hand. But in fairness to him, he was not playing well.

So with all that I have said and perhaps on occasion repeated, I'm ready to take hold of some of my essays that lend themselves in varying ways to my ever-renewed demonstration of the inseparability of truth from the telling of it. I will start with an essay that clearly cuts against

the grain, that pitted the professor who read it against me (but not so much in the way of this professor's assuming the voice of authority as being the advocate of Aristotle's), and that had deficiencies resulting from my ignorance in areas related to but outside the area I was examining.

– Let's play some chess, Professor Chalmers.

– I'm not in the mood.

It is the essay called "Contradiction and Confusion in Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*." What in essence was I doing here if not, by trying to make the case that Aristotle's work on ethics was maladroitly reasoned, overshooting the mark and thereby inviting a strong defence of it? In retrospect I can say that the source of the problem insofar as it was *my* problem was that I took Aristotle to be less competent than he was. Due to my limited familiarity with his works, I failed to take into consideration the teleological principle that invests the *Ethics* as well as the rest of the Aristotelian corpus but, with respect to the first, seems to be rather unstated or obscured.

– I see you're in the mood for a great game of chess, Professor Chalmers, but I only hope, if I shellac you, you won't take it unkindly.

At the time of writing this essay, I wasn't sensitive to the fact that whatever problem there is in Aristotle's *Ethics* (or, for that matter, his other works) has at its origin this teleological principle. As a consequence I ignored this part of his metaphysics and focussed instead on that part that, in the *Ethics*, is his schematic treatment of the human soul. Aristotle's division of the soul into rational and irrational parts was the nub of the problem for me since I took him to be continually smuggling the rational back into the irrational part in order to account for the formation of a virtuous character by training and upbringing. As the good Professor Miller pointed out, I was operating with the assumption that Aristotle took the rational and irrational parts of the soul to be mutually exclusive.

> *Professor Miller:* "Aristotle doesn't say straight out that the responsiveness of the irrational part of the soul to the rational part is rational in itself. Rather he says that it can participate in the soul's rational nature. You are trying to introduce deeper divisions in the soul than Aristotle countenances."

My essay was thus a continual emphasis upon the divisions and exclusions that I took to be either implicit or explicit in Aristotle's treatment of the human soul and that Professor Miller, in his ample marginal commentary, continually de-emphasized. It is easy for me now to see why he did so and why a certain fluidity is permitted in Aristotle's terminology.

> *Comment 2:* "Aristotle says that philosophical ethics is pointless unless one has some social mode of training and experience under one's belt. He also distinguishes ethics from the theoretical."

Comment 3: "Aristotle is not like Kant. He maintains that there is an empirical side to knowledge in its origins."

Comment 4: "Aristotle doesn't claim that the appetitive part of the soul is rational but only that it can respond to deliberative choice."

Comment 5: "Aristotle, like Kant, distinguishes a non-theoretical, practical form of rationality whose starting point is our rationally clarified wish for the good life that is a product of a) our human nature and b) our upbringing and experience."

Comment 6: "Virtue in the strict sense is the union of rightly ordered appetite and rightly wishing and well-functioning deliberative reason."

Comment 7: "There are outside forces of socialization but there are also the individual's own choices and actions and it is these last two that make one responsible for one's character."

Comment 8: "You raise some good questions about how appetite, action, reason and virtue are connected and whether Aristotle can present a consistent picture of this. You have to be careful, though, that you adequately justify your attributions to Aristotle."

Even though Professor Miller admitted that I had raised some good questions and even while I recognized the generosity and fair-mindedness of his comments, I couldn't help but notice that these comments didn't extend to identifying and addressing these questions. No doubt he took the view that a student should grasp well the philosopher he was studying and that this understanding should have priority over all else. Perhaps he even felt that he only had time to dwell upon a traditional understanding of the *Ethics* and this for two reasons. First, that the radical critique I was attempting complicated matters and, as a consequence, demanded more than could be properly handled by him as a pedagogue (if not as a scholar). Second, that a student's critique of a classical work should proceed on the basis of a traditional understanding lest he establish one on the basis of a *mis*understanding.

But after having said all this, I still find that Professor Miller's commentary itself poses a problem. In perusing it now, what I notice is that, although he responded well to the many points I brought up about the rational-irrational distinction in the *Ethics*, he refrained from mentioning anything about the underlying metaphysics or at least that part of it that gave Aristotle the right to blur this distinction. Like most professors might have done, he admitted the possibility of inconsistency in Aristotle's work and even the possibility that I had provided some evidence of this. Yet while going thus far in recognizing the merits of my critique, it still remains the case that he didn't mention the teleological principle and that this omission could be interpreted as a certain willingness to absolve it of any *blame* for the possibility of inconsistency. That Aristotle can rather convincingly project the rational back into the irrational but only go so far in explaining how the first arises out of the second – what is this but the space of an immeasurable problem and the perennial hope of solving it?

– It's irritating that he doesn't go anywhere, that he doesn't have an objective, that he goes so far as to demand dissatisfaction and disappointment with any possible answer. My word, there's a point at which one would like to get off the merry-go-round, take a stand somewhere and say, "Yes, this suits me perfectly. I don't have any reason to move from here. I don't have to fret and doubt and put things into question anymore."

So far am I from abandoning the teleological principle that I have as my personal and philosophical goal taking the broadest and boldest risk with it. Am I to do otherwise when it is precisely along this line that I see my subject most fully exposed and laid out? Most severely tried and tested and, as it were, put on the rack and stretched? Could irritants and vexation and possibly even boredom (what other tortures might there be?) be a reason to abandon *my* teleology? Well then, abandon all highest hopes and aspirations. Abandon the idea that one should tell the truth fearlessly and without compromise. Abandon the idea that to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth should be carried out by you or anyone else.

– Professor Chalmers, I've got something in my eye.

It is hard to study philosophy for very long without recognizing the almost universal objective of finding some first and final resting place. Indeed, it goes hand in hand with the project of planting and constructing a great technical tree of knowledge between a beginning and an end that are taken to be secure in at least some sense. And yet it is precisely this beginning and end that are not only modifiable but subject to being doubted, shaken, suspected, challenged, and even disbelieved through and through.

– He talks about his own teleology in glowing terms while disavowing or desacralizing – if I can use that word – philosophy's.

In philosophy there might be *two* teleologies conflicting with each other as the higher way, that is, precisely as two ways conflicting. Two ways each of which struggle to be the higher or highest way that is neither one nor the other but both.

– He's always waffling in a way that, if taken seriously, would cut the heart out of the very thing he wants to tell the truth about.

There may be a heart that beats in philosophy or, for that matter, truthtelling forever without a thought being necessary to it. In any event, when it came to writing an essay on Leibniz with the cheeky and even derisive title, "For God's Sake, What's a Monad?," it was not without the feeling that I was already in the presence of some such conflict. And this perhaps for the reason that Leibniz's metaphysics didn't register with me as something to be taken quite literally. That is, as something that was bereft of art or not possessed with a subversive element that allowed for a sort of dual register. Something like a secret avowal of the incomprehensibility of the whole at the heart of an account purporting to make it comprehensible.

"**For God's Sake, What's a Monad?**"

"This essay tries to follow two principles, the first of which it is the present business to unfold and the second of which is an assumption regarding the appropriate means by which to grasp hold of a complex subject. To grasp hold of it, that is, in the face of having to do so with no more than a student's level of scholarship and within the commensurately modest bounds of this writing assignment. The assumption about appropriate means then is that, in order to have the surest grasp of the subject (however much rough handling this entails), a student with limited means and time does best to immerse himself in the subject, reading and thinking carefully not simply with an eye for one particular part of it but for the whole and each part's relation to it. In so doing, there is an inevitable blurring of at least some of the finer points, memory possibly altering them in the attempt to keep strictly before the eye the main outline and grosser features. As bad as this might sound, I do not think that the gain in insight and overall comprehension should go light in the scales. In any event, it is with this in mind that I decided to forego making specific references to the various writings of Leibniz and keep myself within the confines of memory and a general understanding. I place my trust in the diligence with which I read and thought about his philosophy and, as a corollary to this, the consideration that such a reading and reflection is the most important work.

"The first principle mentioned above and long delayed in being spelled out is really the form, style, and content of this paper. Specifically, it is the view that Leibniz's metaphysics is art as well as argument. In saying this, I pay heed to that part of the postmodern discourse that, as I understand it, sees all philosophy as in some sense artful. More specifically, it is the art that suppresses rhetorical elements but ultimately does not eliminate them. All such works, in other words, tell a story or paint a picture, paying a kind of covert but nonetheless painstaking attention to such things as style, probability, diversity, unity, balance, tonality, and so on. In works of highest accomplishment, one finds a content which is not only intellectually appealing but imaginatively so. This being said, Leibniz's metaphysics presents a particularly masterful example (despite the scattered nature of his work and the lack of a *magnum opus*) of a metaphysical epic whose argument is about heaven and hell and everything in between.

"We begin by noting that God is at one end of the spectrum or continuum and the humblest of bare monads at the other. Leibniz tells us that, though the monads be finite entities, they are infinite in number. At the same time they individually participate in this infinitude by not only mirroring God (at least such is the case with human souls or rational minds), but also by mirroring the created order as this infinite number of monads. The idea of such intensely complex entities stretching themselves away from God and of necessity becoming less perfect and simpler (but how is 'simple' to be understood here?) is, to say the least, stunning. Here we note, as we shall have occasion to note elsewhere, what might be called a grand paradox in Leibniz's account of the whole. It is non-reason suddenly becoming acceptable in a work of reason simply by virtue of the latter's breathtaking scope. And here it might also be noted that Leibniz resorts to a rhetorical ploy to cover up this paradox. Denying as he does that the imagination plays any part in grasping and appreciating monadic reality, he conveniently avoids examining even the *possibility* of its role. Which to identity it now and in an admittedly convenient way, is its ability to follow reason to the vanishing point while engendering the conviction that it isn't *really* a vanishing point, that reason has every reason to turn away from this point to spend most of its time with the more visible features and details that prevent the

monadology from being an immaculate conception.

"The Leibnizian god is analogous to the Christian god and the monadic continuum to Christian eschatology. The metaphysical saga and the theologico-biblical one have much in common. In both cases, God is an omnipotent, omniscient, and beneficent being who exists outside but participates to some degree in his own created order. In both cases, the latter is to some extent dependent on his divinity yet independent as mechanically self-operating universe and vitalistic community. Moreover, the created order in both cases involves a ranking or classification. The metaphysical equivalent of the angelic is that part of the monadic continuum stretching between man and God. The metaphysical equivalent of man himself is the monad as rational soul. The metaphysical equivalent of animals and plants is the monad as non-rational soul. And, finally, the metaphysical equivalent of insensate matter is the monad as bare entity.

"Grand schemes of this nature stun the intellect and appeal to the imagination. This might be evidenced in Leibniz's hierarchical ordering that is similar to Aristotle's Great Chain of Being. With respect to the former, however, there is a continuum with infinitesimally varying degrees of change which conflicts with the classificatory scheme. To sum it up quickly, the rational part of the Leibnizian continuum should, according to its characterization, merge imperceptibly with the non-rational part. Since both Leibniz's metaphysics and Christian theology identify all rational souls with human beings, it stands to reason that the former implies that there are creatures extremely close to being human beings without actually being them. However, this point of tension or inconsistency (which of course has doctrinal implications) is covered over by what we may observe as human beings *acting* like animals and vice versa. It is the plausibility factor then that ultimately speaks on the side of Leibniz's conception: the fact that human beings can, given pride on the one hand and shame on the other, think that there is an immense gulf between them and animals and yet, for all that, an intimate bond. (This parallels the traditional view of the relationship between man and God.)

"One important way in which the metaphysical narrative differs from the theologico-biblical one is its depiction of what we might call the pre-Creation scene. Leibniz addresses himself to the big question: Why is there something rather than nothing? Tackling the matter of God's existence, he argues that, in order for him to exist, there must first be the *possibility* of his existence. Since anything is possible that does not include a manifest contradiction, and since the possibility of something is its essence, and since the essence of God is or includes his existence, it follows, according to Leibniz, that God must exist. (We note in passing that, however terrible this argument strikes the modern mind, it and variants of it convinced the best minds of Christendom for centuries.) Neither is it, according to Leibniz, contradictory to state that God is supremely powerful, wise, and beneficent. Such a god does not create possibilities so much as comprehend their infinite range. Moreover, he comprehends whole series of possibilities, that is, possibilities that can connect with others. The series which God allows to spring into being is the best of all these series of *compossibles*. Clearly, Leibniz provides something here which is as aesthetically and morally pleasing as it is intellectually. As in the greatest works of art, complexity combines with a certain unity, a certain meaning or purpose, and the clearest possible expression.

"The Bible tells us that God created heaven and earth and all things in them. Leibniz tells us that heaven and earth and all things in them are really spatio-temporal projections of an infinitely complex arrangement of single substances called monads. These monads themselves exist outside time and space, are indivisible units, and individually contain infinitesimally

different readings of not, strictly speaking, the complete monadic order, but the phenomenal one which represents it.

"As already stated, magnificent schemes confound and leave the much-vaunted intellect a slavish dolt. Leibniz's metaphysics is such a scheme and no doubt one of the greatest ever conceived. Its basis is the long philosophical and theological tradition of employing the verb 'exist' in ways that are questionable without raising too many questions. In the case of Descartes, for example, *exist* applies to entities which occupy time but not space (i.e., minds) and those which occupy both (i.e., bodies). Leibniz takes a further step by asserting the existence of minds over bodies. At this point there are but two positions: to deny the reality of bodies altogether or to accord them a secondary status. It is my contention that Leibniz comes down both ways: the conception of monads as independent entities corresponds with the first position and the conception of them as a vast network of ideal relations corresponds with the second.

"I do not think it is difficult to see that, conceptually speaking, the human mind is, for Leibniz, the paradigm of all monads from the very least up to and including God. Thus all monads have internal activity which manifests itself separately from the internal activity of all other monads. This activity may be described as expressions which are entirely contingent on and determined by previous ones. In the case of the human mind, these are thoughts and desires which, at their origins, would seem to be generated from a site where certain monads break rank with others in order to take on a rational destiny. Not only are there infinitesimally varying degrees of clarity among monads, but also with respect to each expression of a monad as a snapshot mirroring of the universe. The specific nature of each monad corresponds with its rank in relation to God. This in turn involves the overall clarity of its expressions. God is pure activity, pure understanding, and immaculate perception. Rational souls have more limited activity and understanding but are likewise self-conscious. Animal souls possess an even more limited consciousness and memory. Plant souls are even more limited again. The entelechies or substantial forms of inanimate bodies are monads with an entirely unconscious level of activity. However, they are understood by Leibniz to be distinguishable from the monads of unformed matter.

"So far the dimension of the ideal relations between monads has not been taken up. To my mind, this part of Leibniz's metaphysics compromises the whole scheme and yet this compromising is such an elusive affair that, like a thin mist, it wafts almost unnoticeably behind the pyrotechnics of what Leibniz calls *pre-established harmony*. In brief, he arranges it so that God is the great orchestrator of all monadic being and, as such, is one who calibrates each and every monad, has its internal activity varying in accordance with the internal activity of every other monad. And just as Leibniz, the good artist-metaphysician withdraws himself from his work, so God, the supremely good artist-Creator, withdraws himself from his. That is, the monads function independently as a vast array of automata, as an endless army of obedient but fundamentally independent entities. And their activity, need it be said, is of a precision and complexity which goes well beyond any parade square performance. Each monad registers in some fashion or other the shifting activities of all other monads. But the question still remains: how do these infinitesimally ordered proceedings, these infinitesimally varying movements, these delicate, dance-like steps all known and as it were divinely choreographed – how do they translate into the perception, understanding, or experience of one monad which itself is an entity of varying importance?

"Let us allow the mist to waft in more noticeably for a moment, the pyrotechnical display

to be frozen temporarily and let us, in order to be more critical metaphysicians than aestheticians, examine the relationship between Leibnizian phenomena and Leibnizian monads. First of all, we are told that all monads exist outside of time and space. However, it cannot be that they *completely* exist outside of time and space for, if they did, their internal activity would also be atemporal and non-spatial. And if this were the case, nothing would separate monads from God himself. Therefore the unavoidable conclusion is that the monads exist *both inside and outside* time and space.

"Let us grant that their unchanging monadic nature belongs to the one and their changing internal activity belongs to the other. There follows then this difficulty. Unless the latter is understood in terms of monads directly influencing one another (something that Leibniz disallows), time and space are entirely locked up in each and every one. The result is that it would be more appropriate to claim that there are an infinite number of universes as opposed to a monadic unity that constitutes one universe of infinite extent.

"However, Leibniz's presentation of the relations between monads essentially involves two languages and two conceptual levels. The first is the concept of ideal relations and it has as its language that there is no reality other than God and monads. The second is the concept of these ideal relations as phenomenally represented and its language is that the universe is real and thereby made up of physical entities and cause and effect relationships. Out of this arises Leibniz's willingness to recognize the material universe and view it in scientific and mathematical terms.

"However, it is the stated purpose of this paper to examine the overall appeal and attractiveness of Leibniz's metaphysics. I can only submit that, perhaps to a perverse degree, trying to crack the hard kernel of incomprehensibility has its own peculiar charm. It is the common experience with great works that at the heart of them there exists a mysterious, fascinating, and deeply moving question. There is elusiveness and ambiguity in them which generates the feeling of approaching but never quite grasping the answer. But if true art succeeds wonderfully by raising and not answering such a question, true philosophy succeeds by attempting to do so. On the other hand, it always raises new questions resulting from its never quite escaping the limitations of its time.

"Leibniz addresses himself to the perennial question which lies behind all art and science: Why is there something rather than nothing? And why are things the way they are rather than some other way? His answers to these questions involve two great principles which, according to Leibniz, exist apart from God and are the very essence of a reasoning mind's grasp of the contents and operation of the divine one. They are the principles of non-contradiction and sufficient reason. It is by virtue of the latter that, as stated above, God chooses the series of compatible possibilities which becomes the best of all possible worlds. It is indeed a world with a kind of extra-phenomenal perfection which invests even the poorest and most wretched aspects of it with no small degree of worth. At the same time this dimension of God's creation has validity only insofar as the whole is weighed as a whole and only insofar as human endeavour grows more perfect and overcomes wretchedness. Basic Christian values remain intact and shine as the guiding light leading towards a complete fellowship with God. At the same time every part, point, or particle of being belongs to a much larger fellowship whose active end is the merger of the human with the divine. All chaotic or seemingly mindless activity in the phenomenal realm translates back into the highest activity. The pageantry of earthly existence, however magnificent in its own right, is but a whirligig compared to the computer-like precision

of myriads upon myriads of divine sparks which are God and yet independent performers in step with the immaculate choreographer. In sum, God makes the created order a great, pulsating, bejewelled crown with every human soul a gemstone in it.

"With respect to good and evil, I think it may be said that Leibniz paints with broad strokes. Following the traditional line of absolving God from evil, he argues that it is to be equated with the necessary imperfection of all possibilities other than God himself. He further argues that any other world or universe than the one that exists would have more evil in it. With respect to the existing one, he goes so far as to say that the evil in it ultimately works to a good end. But then, with what seems to be little more than faith and tradition as argument, he holds to the view that God rewards good and punishes evil.

"Moral ambiguity, points of tension, and positions which tend to subvert one another are important features of great works. One need only compare what Milton set out to do in *Paradise Lost* (i.e., teach God's ways to men) with what he actually achieved (i.e., make evil look interesting). Philosophy as opposed to art traditionally strives for and indeed claims the opposite. Leibniz's metaphysics is no different in this regard and, insofar as it may be said that it fails to eradicate these elements, it fails as philosophy. However, to look at the matter from the point of view of his being a great and masterful designer, the limitations of human intellect translate into different contending perspectives that, given the strength of his metaphysics relative to others and given that this strength weighs more in the scales than its weaknesses, intensifies interest.

"The best example of such intensified interest is Leibniz's account of the human will as being both determined by past mental processes and having a free expression in the present. Here it is possible to mark off two positions, however overlapping, besides the one Leibniz himself occupies. The resolution of this antinomy (i.e., the conflict between the determined and the non-determined) is what he himself claims. His argument is that, because the will confronts situations that allow it to actualize itself in more than one way, the fact that past mental processes incline it in one direction does not preclude the possibility of its taking another. And even if the assured nature of this inclination is rather overpowering evidence of determinism, Leibniz still argues that, until one possibility is actualized and excludes the others, there is a moment of freedom. A second position that might be taken up, one which might be called the Kantian (but how much of this is already in Leibniz?), maintains that free will, arising in a purely rational way, is a total break from inclinations. Finally, it might be argued, as Nietzsche does, that not only past mental processes but the whole history of a species is caught up in all that might be called one or the other.

"The admission that evil can work to effect an overall gain (no doubt a radical thought in the moral sphere) and the declaration that God's will operates with supreme justice and love provide yet another example of moral tension. The depth of the problem is such that it has now forced a look below the foundations of present-day values and valuations.

"The position which has been argued in this paper is that philosophical works, particularly those of large design and intricate detail, show as much artfulness as argument. It is only perhaps by looking over the distance of time that one can see how every such work is an under-estimation of itself as an imaginative affair and over-estimation of itself as an intellectual one. Stepping back from Leibniz's metaphysics, one can discern the outline of a vast, nebulous globe rising from the religious imagination while being at the dawn of new scientific discoveries. Taking a closer look then, one discerns a multitude of little germ-like entities teaming throughout it and giving a miraculous but all too hidden display of superabundant life. Then, startling as it

may seem, this vast nebulous globe infuses itself with land, sea, and sky and everything that they contain. Now out of this weltering mass of simplest life emerge god-like creatures capable of contemplating this world which is at once beyond, behind, and within the sensible one. But still there is no slaking the thirst to see wholly, deeply, and clearly – up to the highest point and down to the deepest depth. Metaphysics is epic and encyclopaedic: it is the grand work of the human head and heart when these two receive the call (or think they receive the call) to be visitants and beholders in the shrine of greatest mystery."

The good Professor Shimizu marked my essay on Leibniz and a number of his comments were virtually illegible. It was almost as if he were writing to himself or rather in such a way as to allow me to dimly catch sight of what was private and self-addressed but having a bearing on my work and so of interest to me. Certainly enough came through to indicate that he was struggling to understand this or that point in my essay and that these points themselves may have been too dim and obscure. It is quite possible that they sometimes reflected inadequately not only Leibniz's work but how it relates to the work of other major philosophers. Descartes and Spinosa were a couple that Professor Shimizu mentioned. Philosophers that, in ways that could be compared and contrasted not only with respect to themselves but with respect to Leibniz, are connected both to Christianity and to a largely unacknowledged aestheticism.

– Philosophy's mixed up with art but continually in the business of denying it. What do you think of that, Professor Chalmers?

– Perhaps one of its arts is this denying.

– Oh, Professor Chalmers, you surprise me! You can't be as hostile to this art – to what the two of us are caught up in right now – as you've been letting on.

– Well, I'm caught up in it in a way that's partly against my will and partly not. In any event, I'm not going to be around much longer. I'll soon be quitting the academic scene. And then I'll put an end to wrangling over these questions that most people don't care about.

Truthtelling as specialization. As profession. As hypertrophied activity. As the continual risk of sounding pompous and hollow compared to a certain dignified reserve. Perhaps it is this very fracture and contradictory play of sensibilities that makes the opposing pulls of art and science operate as a sort of alleviation and expedient. To get away from a surcharge of reasoning is what I suspect is implicated in both poles of attraction. Thus it would be that communicating the truth emotionally and imaginatively and communicating it narrowly and specifically are simply two different ways of protesting speculative thought's rampant and often ridiculous growth.

– You see? He's always looking for some new twist to his subject. Even my pokey old thoughts are used to start off a new line. Admittedly it would be very hard for him to get all he wants into a systematic treatment because the very ordering or organizing principle of it would forbid such an extreme degree of heterogeneity.

I like to think that I can position myself behind both Plato and Aristotle. Behind that whole range of philosophizing in which dominant voices take a great deal on themselves with the notable exception *of* themselves. What is it to assume a dominant voice and to assume that this voice in its bid to tell the truth need not take itself into account? Surely one thing is certain: its bid is not to know the nature of truthtelling but to keep faith with the ideal of objective or transcendent truth. This faith itself cannot be an issue without breaking faith with this ideal. It cannot even announce itself as faith and in this it has to break faith with another principle of truthtelling, namely, the one of self-examination.

– It's hard to think of Plato downplaying self-examination when it's Socrates himself who personifies it.

But only in a limited sense. For philosophy as tradition is a massive machine of self-examination. And even if it is most often not a *radical* examination of itself, it nonetheless includes the radical.

– That means him, of course.

Perhaps I'm now getting a better idea of where I come down in the tradition and why others are where they are.

– You see what I mean?

When I wrote my essay on Socrates, it no doubt was with the idea that there was some great lack of self-examination on the part of Plato's hero that, as an active principle of truthtelling, hadn't been properly credited to him. As much as this flew in the face of his being the famous upholder of the *know thyself* dictum, and as much as his ironic good nature and welcoming of all questions argued a person thoroughly in touch with himself, the consequence of not crediting to him this principle seemed to me to be having no choice but to view him as a master deceiver.

– It's not as bad as you think, Professor Chalmers. He's only saying there's a choice between viewing him as deceiving or being deceived and that ultimately the second is the better way to see him.

– Deceiving or being deceived? Deceived by whom?

– By himself. By his belief in his ignorance and having only questions and answers as a guide towards knowledge. By thinking the whole process is innocent and doesn't have a coercive aspect. Tell me, if you met someone who was as much in control of a discussion as Socrates, do you think you would say oh, he's a master dialectician and leave it at that?

This essay on Socrates entitled "The Didact behind the Dialectician" itself gave the illusion of crushing opposition because it was one of the few I wrote that wasn't criticized or questioned. Professor Sterns was a genial but highly reserved man who was perhaps too polite to

deface my essay with vulgar pedantries. It would be flattering to think so and to think that he was more sensitive than others to my originality. On the other hand, it is also possible that he was simply too timid and perhaps not even energetic enough to make pointed and searching comments.

– Do you make as many pointed and searching comments on your students' papers as you do here, Professor Chalmers? If you do, I think they're very lucky because it shows you're really engaged with their thoughts and although there are some students – I know, I've talked to them – who don't like that sort of thing, I think you're doing exactly what's best for them.

Like Nietzsche, my attitude towards Socrates was ambivalent. Already there was this parti pris on the side of dialectics that licenced questioning everyone about everything but didn't quite take in the dialectician himself. At the same time it would be difficult to separate what was admirable in Socrates from all that was strategist. From all that was part of his pretending to be ignorant and merely a medium or midwife for other people's thoughts. And why shouldn't this be the case if in fact his goal wasn't simply truth but exalting philosophy? At least my essay took up this theme by focussing on how he operates in the *Gorgias*.

– Do you want me to tell you about how he saw him operating in the Gorgias*? By creating a counter world that calls into question the larger world that could be called Athens or Greece or just plain society. And by creating a fiction like the soul to ground this counter world and make it seem preferable with its emphasis on general order and well-being.*

Striking at Socrates' integrity didn't strike me as being much more than throwing a light on philosophy's. To see ruse and deceit as being elements in virtually all human activity and then to study philosophy as if they didn't exist there – this to me was but one more ruse and deceit. Socrates was close to admitting (while definitely *not* admitting) his wiliness when he insisted on his ignorance and being merely the vehicle of other people's ideas (although it must be admitted that this self-characterization is not in the *Gorgias*). I daresay that a dialogue could be drawn up in which, having his ears pinned back by an even wilier opponent, he would be forced to admit his own use of sophistry. It could also be that, with a grace befitting one who had always leaned more towards principle than profit and who was prepared to die in order to keep faith with himself, he would reaffirm his ignorance in a much more authentic way.

– It's true that Socrates does cast out a lot of lines with a practised arm. If this be ignorance, it makes ignorance already in league with a subtle and crafty art.

– Now you sound like that wilier opponent.

– No, no, no. I don't have that phenomenal memory that records every previous move as if on a mental chessboard. I'm not an effective debater. I'm not even an effective speaker. On the other hand, the one has never struck me as being any more a sure sign of being on the right track than the other.

"The Didact behind the Dialectician: A Study of Socrates in the *Gorgias*"

"Alcibiades mentions in the *Symposium* that the character of Socrates is unique not only amongst the personages of his day but also those of history. No doubt this is true insofar as he pursued with great single-mindedness an intellectual and spiritual quest which, at the ethical level, he exemplified with equal rigour. Nonetheless I believe that we can look upon Socrates as a type which, however rare, impinges upon society from time to time and can be described as the following. He is the type of man who creates a counter world with himself as the centre such that this counter world effectively judges, condemns, and creates changes in the larger world. Needless to say, such a character must rank very high in conviction and fortitude, and be of such an independent spirit that, if need be, he will stand against all. He is the type of person who, despite appearances and claims to the contrary, possesses a massive superiority complex. Although Socrates may often claim ignorance and that he is involved in a pursuit of the truth for its own sake, there are many instances in which his purpose sounds less than pure and objective. In the latter part of his exchange with Callicles, he urges his opponent to adopt the philosophical way of life, citing many reasons as to why it is the best. Then he mentions his habit of beating his opponents.

> These conclusions, at which we arrived earlier in our previous discussions are, I'd say, bound by arguments of iron and adamant, even if it's rather rude to say so. . . . And if you or someone more forceful than you won't undo them, then anyone who says anything other than what I'm now saying cannot be speaking well. And yet for my part, my account is ever the same: I don't know how these things are, but no one I've ever met, as in this case, can say anything else without being ridiculous.

"The ironic pose of not knowing the truth about this or that or of setting out upon a completely open and undetermined course is at best a clever trap for the pretentious and at worst a form of self-deception. The very things he is so bent on condemning such as oratory and sophistry are unavoidable aspects of his own discourse. For example, when Socrates launches into a discussion of the soul in the *Gorgias,* he precludes a truly fair and symmetrical debate with his opponents, Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles because these characters simply don't have it as part of their discursive repertoire. Moreover, what allows its uncontested introduction and thematic domination is the fact that Socrates has already demolished these three characters and so in a sense has left himself free to set up whatever he wishes. The Socrates of the *Gorgias*, I believe, is someone who has many well thought out positions and strategies which he willingly, even eagerly, tests against others. Nonetheless these others more often than not prove immensely unequal to him.

"The first thing to say about the world which Socrates creates for himself and into which others are drawn is that it devalues the commonly esteemed objects of the larger world. That is, it turns its back on privilege, power, position, and material possessions and, on the other hand, embraces an almost ascetic life which emphasizes restraint, control, and moderation. These attributes find their ultimate ground in the soul which, according to Socrates, is that part of the person which, separate from the body, animates the latter and is equivalent to the popular

concept of mind. This then is a fundamental aspect of Socratic ontology which, in aligning the Socratic world with the whole of reality, results in the kind of argumentative power necessary to challenge the larger world as Athenian society.

"I should say perhaps that this ontological aspect makes Socrates' case against the larger world more conclusive than it otherwise would be. He does manage to bring harsh judgements against this world simply by isolating such concepts as the good and the just and then showing how the world falls short of them. At the same time he implicitly commits himself to an even more all-embracing conception, that is, the one of a world that, even though it falls short of being good and just, still has these values as its form, measure, potentiality, and *telos*.

"The above, I think explains the growing prominence of soul talk in the dialogue such that at the end it centres entirely on the soul's experience after death. Earlier arguments in support of such things as the beneficial effects of punishment and the benefits derived from the just and temperate life are now illustrated in terms of not just the temporal and social, but the eternal and universal. The connection of the temporal and social with the eternal and universal comes in the form of these Socratic souls who, having lived the just and temperate life, go off to some paradisaical place whereas the opposite type, the ones who have lived immoderately or unjustly, go off to the place of punishment.

"It is interesting to note that, however severe and exacting Socrates is with respect to finding out the truth, he allows a substantial role for the mythical element which, strictly speaking, bears no relation to the dialectical process. He allows for it because he is engaged in a spiritual quest as much as an intellectual one. The former is distinct from the latter insofar as it involves the whole person and has as its ultimate goal the desire to find a sort of combined intellectual, imaginative, and emotional home. That part of his quest that is intellectual or dialectical can only go so far in this direction and hence the need to complete it with a story that he himself fears might be dismissed.

"I say all this in order to emphasize that Socrates' ethical concerns are part of something very much akin to the religious. This is the larger picture of the man and the smaller one is the one wherein he intellectualizes. A number of times in the *Gorgias* Socrates' comments regarding the unjust man, the deceptive speaker, and the self-serving politician betray nothing less than moral indignation. Since for the most part he comes off like an inoffensive and good-natured type, it is easy to miss the more hidden aspects of his character. The comic, good-natured mask he wears prevents him from sounding pompous and high-toned, precisely the things he attacks or at least shows up in others. Nevertheless were it not for this deeper part of his character (no doubt having at its source much ill will towards those who, leading the unexamined life, make bold to mock him for spending his time philosophizing), it is unlikely he would be motivated to improve the quality of his thinking, to sharpen it as a weapon and employ it as the means by which to strengthen unformulated positions, to acquire as much certainty as possible, and to influence others to follow the same path.

"There is no mystery but some irony in the fact that the real source of Socrates' ethical vision is the larger world which ends up being measured by these same values. Justice, truth, order, goodness, etc. are part of a developing civilization's consciousness long before a philosopher comes along to systematize it. If evidence of this is needed from the *Gorgias*, one need only look at the representatives of this larger world (i.e., the three opponents of Socrates), all of whom betray an adherence to these values even while taking up positions that conflict with them. For example, Gorgias starts off by maintaining that, although the teacher of oratory invests

his students with great power in the way of persuading and influencing people, this selfsame teacher should not be held responsible for those who abuse it. When Socrates gets him to admit that oratory is in some sense tied up with justice, Gorgias, the respectable citizen, is forced to back off from his claim that he has no responsibility for how his students conduct themselves. Similarly, Polus starts off by claiming that the orator, much less the teacher of oratory, should be indifferent to the issue of justice. When Socrates gets him to admit that acting unjustly is shameful, Polus finds that he must agree when Socrates says that punishing the unjust tyrant is appropriate and even beneficial. Callicles in turn starts off by claiming that the unjust orator or tyrant does not do anything shameful according to a higher conception of justice. When Socrates gets him to admit that there is a distinction between the concept of goodness and the concept of pleasure, Callicles shows that he understands the first in terms of the well-being of the many. As a consequence, he affirms social or democratic values that, taking in as they do such concepts as justice, conflict with his view that the strong are entitled to all they can get.

"The distinction between Socrates and his opponents – the distinction between the Socratic world and the larger world of which his opponents are the representatives – is not so much a matter of the degree to which truth is successfully arrived at as the degree to which truthfulness is sought. To state it another way, it is far from evident that everything Socrates says is right or that everything his opponents say is wrong. What is clear, however, is that Socrates wants to examine rigorously what his opponents would leave largely ignored. That part of the dialectical process which is isolating concepts, seeking definitions, and enforcing logical consistency best illustrates the one approach. The other is best illustrated by grandiose claims, smooth talk, violent assertions, and the upholding of what appears to be largely derivative notions. In a similar fashion it could be said that Socrates' hostility to oratory is based not on what the latter is as a technical skill but on the way in which it has come to be understood and practised. This disparity between what might be called the more conscientious view of it (Socrates) and the less conscientious view of it (Gorgias) is part of a larger picture which may be expressed as follows. The opponents of Socrates uphold two conflicting ethics, one of which is an ethic of power and the other an ethic of justice. This accounts not only for their conceptual confusion and inconsistency, but also for the fact that, as the dialogue proceeds and one opponent after another confronts Socrates, the ethic of power becomes more and more the focal point of the discussion.

"Let us examine the above in detail. Gorgias is Socrates' first opponent and there is no question that he is the most restrained, respectable, and conscientious. In other words, he best represents that part of the larger world which is law and order, justice, mature judgement, and responsibility. At the same time, however, he quickly shows that, while praising oratory as 'the greatest of human concerns' and 'the source of freedom for mankind itself,' his real valuation of it concerns its extraordinary power. (He gives the example of being able to have greater influence over a doctor's patient than the doctor himself.) Furthermore, he begins by holding that the teacher of oratory is not responsible for those students who end up abusing this power. Two things need to be said at this point. First, Gorgias is inconsistent in wanting to take credit for the achievements of his students (at least, in the ethical sphere) while disavowing any responsibility for their wrongdoing. Secondly, he indirectly affirms the ethic of power by showing himself to be one who believes that the teacher of oratory or the orator himself can benefit greatly by what he does even while and even by virtue of not troubling himself about possible abuse.

"Socrates next opponent is Polus and, being younger and more reckless than the others,

he represents that part of the larger world which rebels against society to some extent. He begins by expressing admiration for the unjust tyrant, the type of man who is the very embodiment of the ethic of power. That he himself is not such a type is shown by the fact that he permits himself to enter into a discussion which, although it allows for a few incivilities, is itself an expression of values at odds with what he claims to admire. Furthermore, he begins to fall victim to Socrates' arguments and, perhaps feeling the injustice of this, he quickly agrees that doing what is unjust is more shameful than suffering injustice. It would seem then that his shifting ground is, apart from the power of Socrates' arguments, attributable to his, on the one hand, wishing he had great power for himself and, on the other, subscribing to what empowers those who, like himself, *lack* such power.

"The next to confront Socrates is Callicles and he is clearly the least respectable, most devious, and most abusive of the three opponents. Although he sits in the Assembly and presumably believes in government by the majority, he nonetheless holds the most radical view. Not only does he state that it is part of the natural order for the strong to lord it over the weak and to take a greater share, but that this is the higher form of justice. His reasoning thus shows itself to be very bad right from the outset. In order to be consistent, he would have to maintain that law, order, morality, and so on are themselves unjust. As it stands, his assertion that the strong are the better and more naturally fitted to rule runs into difficulty when Socrates points out that it is most often the many who are strong. Thereupon Callicles claims that the bravest and most intelligent men are the ones who should brook no restraint and be a law unto themselves. However, he continually allows Socrates to draw him into a discussion of the human condition in general and with reference to such things as pleasure, pain, sickness, and loss. Like Polus then, Callicles is attached to values at one level of his thinking that he spurns at another. He too participates in a dialogue that, were he the embodiment of what he upholds, would likely end up with his resorting to violence to make his arguments prevail.

"If Socrates is the most radical truth seeker among men, he is also one who *creates* truth. He does so by conjuring up a comprehensive, detailed, and seemingly coherent world picture. First of all is his claim to ignorance or at least only a modest understanding of matters under discussion. In the *Gorgias* one has abundant evidence of his having well thought out views. When Polus and Callicles flag in their ability either to ask or answer questions, Socrates discourses at length on oratory, the nature of politics, the nature of deception, the nature of truthful investigation, the purpose of punishment, the purpose of self-restraint, the harmfulness of pleasure, the shamefulness of injustice, the value of modesty, the constitution of a good society, the caring of the soul, the value of the philosophical life, and the soul after death. The question and answer method or *elenchus* then is not so much a neutral investigation as it is the means by which Socrates seduces his opponents into a step-by-step argument that confirms his views. It may be seen as his way of testing the world picture which he has created and which most certainly is in place long before he steps into the arena of the marketplace.

"One might well ask at this juncture: how does Socrates so successfully control the discussion such that, on the one hand, it has the appearance of an impartial investigation and, on the other, it stays within the compass of a particular point of view? The first thing that needs to be mentioned is that Socrates' insistence on the question-and-answer format is not neutral. Since no one else fashions questions with such skill and dexterity, he controls the situation from beginning to end. For example, the dialogue presumably begins as an investigation of the nature of oratory. We learn virtually nothing about this subject but rather are exposed to some

extravagant claims that his opponents make about it. However, this works to Socrates' advantage because it bears on what he is most interested in, namely, the *ethical* side of this subject. The conversation thus turns on the worth of oratory and how it compares with those practises or skills (e.g., arithmetic) which quite clearly impart knowledge or bestow some other benefit. Herein Socrates seems to blur the distinction between teaching a skill and teaching a subject such that oratory, considered from the viewpoint of its imparting knowledge, is found to be wanting. Having committed himself to an extremely high valuation of oratory, Gorgias is forced by Socrates to agree that it involves justice. That teaching the art of public speaking should carry this extra burden is of course questionable. Nevertheless, being that it is far removed from an ethically neutral or purely technical account of oratory, it falls in nicely with Socrates' wish to expose the sham which is oratory as it is actually viewed and practised.

"At the same time the identification of oratory with justice and, later, politics allows Socrates to set his sights on these larger issues. Polus tries to prevent a connection between oratory and justice but is blocked when Socrates shifts from merely a devaluation of it to a full-scale assault on it. He accuses it of being a kind of counterfeit practise, one which goes under the name of justice but, by appealing exclusively to the baser instincts, harms the soul and the new state as much as certain things harm the body. The body-soul dualism is slipped in at this point without being challenged by Gorgias, Polus, or Callicles. Caring of the soul is said to be the realm of politics and justice. The introduction of this theme and related ones is, as noted before, important in terms of developing ethical principles within a metaphysical framework.

"A good portion of the debate between Socrates and Polus and then Socrates and Callicles centres on the conceptual confusion resulting from both the ethic of power and the ethic of justice being perceived as the good. Polus and Callicles straddle both positions whereas Socrates methodically sets out to destroy one of these positions. Thus the man of great power whom Polus admires becomes the same man Socrates both pities and loathes. The manner in which he carries out this condemnation is one which has him singling out what is most typical or conventional in human affairs and then universalizing it. For example, when he commits Polus to the view that the unjust act is shameful, the assumption is that this is a truth not grounded simply in what is most common in society but in something which transcends it. The same holds when he identifies punishment with what is beneficial. As a result, he comes to the rather strange conclusion that the unjust tyrant who escapes punishment is the most miserable of men.

"After Callicles proves to be much more of a strawman than the formidable opponent he first appeared to be, Socrates continues to apply what would give utmost order and well-being to most men to *all*. For example, to men of extreme wealth, ambition, power, appetite, etc. such that, not surprisingly, he finds them wanting on all counts. The result is that the philosophical life as exemplified by him is judged most worthy. With this conclusion coming after a long debate about other matters, it perhaps doesn't seem so presumptuous and self-promoting as it otherwise would.

"In the *Gorgias* there are many points at which the underlying passion of Socrates' commitment to philosophizing slips through. These are times when his mask of almost unshakeable equanimity slips a bit. It is on those occasions when he reveals his hostility to orators and sophists, his disdain for majority opinion, his contempt for those who pump themselves up and then are quickly deflated, his low opinion of pleasure-seeking (such that he even includes the tragic poets), his barely repressed malice towards those who malign the philosophical life. Socrates' revenge on the non-philosophical world is to ground his opponents

into the dust. At the same time he brings forth a highly intellectualized picture of the world with ethical valuations derived from a society of advanced concerns. To regard the dialogue itself as the womb of Socrates' thought is, in my opinion, a naivety. Much better to understand it as the publication of this thought in the most palatable, free-ranging, and persuasive way.*"*

– Sharp and searching comments, Professor Chalmers?

– Deconstructing Socrates is not a way to win friends and influence people.

– Oh, you're absolutely right. He submitted this essay a couple of times to conferences and nothing came of it.

– There are no references to other scholars. There are hardly any citations. And what's more, much of his interpretation sounds as if he were treating it as a play.

– That's very sharp and searching. A play with characters. Plato's art. Who would deny that he created three-dimensional characters?

– But normally what is paid attention to is the dialogue as argument. And truth to tell, that's more in the spirit of Socrates than prying into personal matters.

– And so he achieved a great victory by not letting his arguments (and for that matter his art) extend that far. For if he did (and I'm talking about Plato here), people wouldn't have come to him for centuries afterwards thinking there was nothing behind them worth looking into.

When I look back at some of these old essays, I'm struck by the excessive rhetoric that sometimes lent them an impudent, disrespectful, and aggressive tone. The Nietzschean influence was no doubt part of the reason for this but there was also this other thing, repeated over and over, of wanting to get to the heart of the matter. Such an overreaching and overriding objective seemed to leave me with no alternative but to make a sort of forced entry.

> "This essay begs permission to dispense with formal niceties. It is not that I regard scholarly procedures as unimportant. It is simply that, rather than proceeding in a routine way, I chose to devote much time to thinking about a matter of central importance. In so doing, I find myself forced at this stage to move along rather quickly and not trouble myself so much with the courtesies and acknowledgements to which I otherwise would attend. I express the hope that my earnest attempt to penetrate to the heart of the current debate will more than make up for this admittedly regrettable shortcoming."

This essay, one of two I wrote for the course called *Postmodern Philosophy*, certainly wasn't the only one where I granted myself some liberties. With its opening paragraph proclaiming the need to dispense with formal niceties in order to get to the heart of the matter, it merely was more upfront about it than most. At the same time it carried with it a presumption

that didn't declare itself fully as if to avoid any unnecessary risk of giving offence. This not-so-straightforward presumption was that, first, politeness and decorum can get in the way of telling the truth and that, secondly, the matter I was dealing with was of such a nature that telling the truth about it required the dismissal of the usual scholarly proprieties.

– I daresay that politeness is the grease for more human understanding than the opposite.

In truth, it was weakness that produced this show of strength: the weakness that everyone has to greater or lesser degree. One that need not transform itself into arrogance but at the same time few flaunt or wear on their finger like a death ring. This weakness was my being unable to research, study, reflect upon, and write about my subject (which was truth, reason, rationality, and selfhood as these intermingled and played themselves out in the essays of three contemporary philosophers) as thoroughly as would have been possible in presumably ideal conditions. So much as I failed in having these conditions and so much as I wanted to get to the heart of the matter, so much did my prejudice dominate my discourse without me trying to hide it. What I was looking for was more in the nature of an insight into this area than how it was investigated by others. To such a degree my critical analysis was one-sided because it lacked a counterbalancing move and insight. Of course it is the one I have been trying to keep going in this essay and could only have had at the time of writing the essay called "Equivocal Anti-Foundationalism in Three Essays" if I had tried to get an idea of not only how but *why* others investigated these complicated matters as they do.

– Do you know who wrote these essays?

– Of course I know. Everything he's done I know as well as I know myself. But does it really matter who wrote them? It's enough to say they're all well-known contemporary philosophers, they all have different points of view, and at the same time they're all trying to save some little space for reason, truth, philosophy, and goodness even while giving up a whole lot of ground to fickle, unconscious, and possibly even irrational forces like Aristotle thinks of them or really didn't think of them only he could've thought of them in that way only, well, Aristotle's passé so they don't really want to talk about things like irrational forces and teleology and make it sound like there's a connection between him and them.

– They want to save something. Is that to be frowned upon?

– Maybe not, Professor Chalmers. But sometimes you can't help but laugh at it because it's always like rearranging the decor and thinking you have a new house.

Driving my philosophical car as hard as I did had the advantage of provoking responses and reactions from my professors that, largely defensive but also, as it needs to be said, tolerant and free of any hostility (I realize now how lucky I was), gave me an idea of how weak I was around the edges. First of all, the comments I received quite often referred to philosophers or philosophical works I hadn't read but were considered by my professors to have a bearing on, if not the work or works I was examining, then at least my way of examining them. Such a move invariably discomforted me for two reasons. The first was that I wanted to believe that I had

almost perfect control of the text, that is, a full understanding of it simply on the basis of a scrupulous reading and study. Thus it was that, when a professor brought into my purview some other text that he thought pertinent to this reading, he was in effect shaking this belief of perfect control and understanding. The second reason for being discomforted was that a corresponding belief was also shaken. The one of assuming that my critical voice in these essays, despite its Nietzschean overtones, was quite distinct from everyone else's. With respect to the essay I wrote that was an attack on three contemporary philosophers and their pretensions to leaving behind the traditional foundations of philosophy, the shaking of my confidence and certitude as far as this matter of control and understanding went was exacerbated when the good Professor Keenan seemed to identify me with a philosopher I neither mentioned in my essay nor particularly liked.

– *What philosopher is he talking about?*

I'm not going to drag in any names or rekindle any skirmishes of the past if the result would be not much more than arguing on the basis of a prejudice rather than trying to demonstrate it. Here is naturally where I see my great step forward and what allows me to distinguish what I do now from what I did in the past. In the past I took everything from the point of view or principle of self-examination without thinking that this point of view or principle was also a prejudice. As much as this principle, point of view, and prejudice can't be dispensed with by me and others (and, indeed, *all* others in the most complete or comprehensive sense), it has no honour or worth apart from being shunned, second-rated, and feigned in both theory and practise. This is as much as to say that the shunning, second-rating, and feigning of it are the very *condition of possibility* of theory and practise.

"**Equivocal Anti-Foundationalism in Three Essays**"

"The three essays which I have looked at very closely are 'Overcoming Epistemology' by Charles Taylor, 'Why Reason Can't Be Naturalized' by Hilary Putnam, and 'Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter' by Jürgen Habermas. The critical position which I have taken up regarding reason (or is it reasoning about reason?) helped to determine the selection of these articles and inform my attack on them that is no doubt equivocal in its own right. This state of affairs cannot be helped nor, in my view, should it be by pretending that this area of philosophical investigation is something other than a peering into vast distances. Indeed, the whole exercise is akin to peering into distances only as they appear in a mirror. This being said, I shall attempt to demonstrate that the three thinkers in question wish to view reason in a way which would entail having to stand outside it.

"Is there not something in this attempt which is itself unreasonable? Perhaps this question signals an appropriate time to indicate the way in which these three thinkers and I are not square together. I do not venture to say what lies in their hearts but in their heads, that is, in their writings, there seems to be a faith in reason which has no concern for the above question. Which sees something enduring, straightforward, matter-of-fact, and inviolable about it. To be sure, these three thinkers diligently attest to another side of the question and admit its intractability. But here, precisely here, in this convenient separating of the non-problematic from the problematic, is where I suffer by their reasoning and do not follow them. All three of these thinkers, though admittedly in varying ways, no longer uphold (or so it seems) that part of the

philosophical tradition which affirms something fundamental. Putnam denies that propositions or observations are valid apart from a socio-linguistic context. Habermas surveys a whole range of anti-foundational critique and, despite all the gunfire and pounding artillery of this latter-day controversy, still holds aloft the glorious flag of critical reason. Taylor boldly immerses the self and its whole cognitive being in the warm waters of intersubjectivity without losing sight of a self that can know itself better. So the point, in brief, is that none of them are endorsing Cartesian self-transparency or the Kantian transcendental ego. Yet, truth to tell, secure land sinks below the waves with these last two and what chances to float up seems very much like what the drowning man clings to when all else fails.

"Already I must impress the reader as being too much of the doom-and-gloom school, too much of a naysayer in this, to use Taylor's expression, deep important area. Surely, as it might be maintained, this noblest faculty of man is being mocked and sullied here, derided simply because it does not give up the chase, the belief in itself, the belief in its transcendence. In other words, it is the *immortality* of reason which is being brought into disrepute in the way that others at one time brought into disrepute the immortal soul. Yet in answer to this anxiety I must pose the question: Is simply the infinite duration of a thing the mark of its respectability, its excellence, its worthiness for human beings, its right to highest honours?

"Rather there might be some wisdom and a lessening of suffering in this coming-to-awareness of the fate of even the most flexible, rebounding, adaptable, enduring, and, last but not least, cunning of institutions. Kant and Hegel, I believe, first brought this complexity of the reasoning self home to us. Nowadays thinkers attach to the backs of our heads an immense background without going so far as to attach what they rightfully should, namely, the whole cosmos as impenetrable mystery. But even limiting this background to society and the immediate world, reason must have its roots in all happenings which go beyond it and which are, no matter how much they are taken up by it, still not in it or of it. A multitude of factors impinge on, hold together, infiltrate, and ultimately change thinking, feeling, willing, and acting. Now this is equivalent to admitting that it is out of our hands what befalls reason. So I ask myself then that, if it should be showing signs today of its mortality, should we conceal this from ourselves? And the answer I give myself is that it is much better to put on knowledge as a kind of armour and to be thus provided with the courage, freedom, and dignity which, as *self*-knowledge, is the mark of a higher reason. The worst affair is what we experience as utter shock, surprise, and with horrifying helplessness. One need only imagine how it would be if people were not prepared for their end but only learned about it at the last moment.

"Just as there is a time in everyone's life for illusions of a sort, so there is a time for something analogous in the course of human development. And just as the thought of a childhood full of cynicism and scepticism is repugnant, so is the thought of an earlier mankind bereft of those beliefs which intrigue, exalt, distract, and so on. The illusions of childhood are eventually replaced by the interests of adulthood; the beliefs of yesteryear give way to the more prolific and pervasive business of today. And yet it is not that anything so deep alters but only the obvious and obtrusive which disappear as the victim of contemporaneous changes and criticism. The institution of reason or, more specifically, the institutional practise which concerns itself with this institution is, it seems to me, caught up in the above process. The public position is one of transition and confusion, of a simultaneous Yes and No to reason, of a willingness to discard this and a refusal to discard that about it. At least so I read the situation as I come to it by Taylor, Putnam, and Habermas. I will not take up the issue of whether they are fully representative of a

situation. I will simply assume it and be pleased to be corrected. I tend to think, however, they could muster legions of the philosophically minded to their ranks whereas the less and therefore more equivocal position regarding reason would attract few who were genuinely committed.

"But what I am most concerned about with here is a fairly prominent mindset which I take to be halfway honest and which I think should be resisted at least by some. After all, if reason compromises itself to play the guardian of both itself and morality (as is the case particularly with Habermas and Taylor), then it tarnishes the name of reason as much as it distinguishes it.

"It is now incumbent on me to deal in some way with these thinkers and to register myself both as a critical antagonist and a fellow equivocator. What spans these two roles is my fundamental insight that there is an eradicable paradox or dilemma at the heart of reason and, a fortiori, reasoning about it. Reason, in order to be reason, must believe and act as if everything potentially lies open to it. Even when it knocks desperately at some door and fails to have it opened, it keeps faith in itself by passing on and saying: 'That was a false door. There is nothing behind it.' And so it arrives at another with the same expectations. Does not Charles Taylor, for example, announce himself at such a door when he commends the critical exploration of what he characterizes as the deeper, more authentic understanding of the self? When he suggests doing away with the disengaged, punctual, atomistic self of the Cartesian tradition? When he declares that this monstrous outcome of modern epistemology and the mechanistic age is not only passé but false, false and, what is more, morally culpable! It is at this point that I would ask: how are we to understand this self that presumably can reach back and behind itself to its primordial origins? How are these origins, this murky and mixed up part of it, to be translated into some present condition of the self which is for its moral betterment? And why should the latter remain a self in any recognizable form?

"Does Charles Taylor understand himself? For, as it seems to me, he does not recognize that the words which he employs to describe the deeper self – words such as *community*, *social identity*, and *commitment* – already form a prejudice about it. As it seems to me, he does not hesitate and grow a bit uncertain when, to speak figuratively, he picks up an armful of the diaphanous train which the queenly self must drag around with her and calls this freedom. Or when he deals so matter-of-factly and objectively with what is always and forever slipping out of sight. With what he calls the situatedness of the self and largely identifies with the civic humanist tradition. Wouldn't he, in knowing himself a bit better by taking into consideration all the murkiness of his own or anyone else's psyche, admit that there are countless denizens of the intersubjective ocean that are hostile to any time-bound conception of the self and the need to overcome it?

"The philosophers of today, unlike the earlier ones with their greater metaphysical self-assuredness, now go about their reasoning, as it seems to me, a bit like circus acrobats. They must deftly keep up in the air the proposition that no propositions are certain while entertaining propositions that must be upheld as such. Publicly it goes out as a hypothesis but privately or personally it is *the* hypothesis. That is, it is what they or anyone takes to be absolutely certain about his philosophy until proven otherwise (and how difficult and rare a thing that is!). If this were not so, it would be impossible to take up a position and maintain it from moment to moment. But at the same time to know that one's belief in the absolutely certain is not itself certain is to know that there is something not entirely reasonable about it. Then again, this knowledge or insight about the uncertainty of certainty weighs far less in the scales at any

particular moment than what is held to be certain *at that moment*. So in this sense the belief in the certainty that is not quite certain is, in the recognition of itself, itself never certain. One therefore effectively discounts what reason tells us about reason (that is, that it is always falling short of itself) as long as believing in it is the higher and, indeed, only way.

"Hilary Putnam, I think, does not find the situation so complicated. He neatly divides reason into an immanent aspect which culture and language determine and a transcendent one which, to make sense of the distinction, I shall say is self-determining. First of all, he states that truth claims have a linguistic character or frame of reference which is in accordance with the particular discourses and practises from which they emerge. He therefore allows that there may be many such discourses with correspondingly conditioned claims. Yet he strongly opposes the position that such a situation as above generates many different truths. Reason he in effect says can criticize the whole background from which it itself emerges. Transcendent reason then is, so to speak, the producer of a super-critical attitude and even a super-truth while immanent reason generates merely criticisable claims and so is a kind of supplier to the first. Since he more or less identifies philosophy with this producer role, one would think that it should evidence this transcendent or self-determining aspect. But then that should lead us to ask: Is not philosophy itself a particular discourse? Does it not generate truth claims which are linguistically and culturally conditioned?

"The modern age with its faith in science and reason have enough of a historical memory to know the fate of many long-held and cherished beliefs. Whether these were tied to tradition or custom or institution or empire, they took their leave no doubt in a troubled way. That is, with the earliest signs of something amiss or unpleasant in the offing being largely ignored by so much that was vested interest, so much that was enslaved spirits and bodies, so much that was disposed to show contrary portents of a favourable and upbeat nature. Jürgen Habermas strikes me as such a modern-day seer. Just like those wise councillors and dream interpreters of old who gave the king only good news, he brings forward much that is meant to charm philosophy and make her take heart. To be sure, there are a number of good sound cautionary signs he gives which, taken together, reveal dangers and the means to overcome them. He paints before philosophy's eyes a strange kind of war that is going on inside her and involves fighting over more and more for less and less. Despite these worrisome symptoms, Habermas makes a shrewd diagnosis when he notes that all these factions, despite their differences, share the one true faith of there being 'claims which transcend all restrictions of time and place.' Even hermeneutics and pragmatism, which he looks upon as rival philosophies to his more community-oriented and truth-by-consensus one, do not, as he maintains, contradict or challenge this. A favourable prognosis is thus established and it only rests with philosophy to assume a more modest and becoming air.

"Is it possible that, for the sake of saving philosophy as a discipline, Jürgen Habermas would have it turn itself into a primping charlatan? A seemingly modest yet truly sycophantic overreacher? A small-time operator going around looking for ever-larger pieces of the action? For what he maintains about philosophy's role-to-come is that, first of all, it should entail a humbling of itself before the sure-footed sciences. It should deal with them with utmost respect, not infringing upon their territory (unless at their bequest) and even deferring to them when it comes to their areas of expertise. Comporting itself in this way and keeping a definitely lower profile than it did in the past is, on the basis of Habermas's account, complementary to carrying out such not-so-modest tasks as, first, supplying the social sciences with their germinal ideas, secondly, mediating all the various elements of the *Lebenswelt* (i.e., the intersubjective world)

such that the whole of humanity moves towards a rational and cultural unity, and, finally, being the guardian of reason itself. In truth, it seems that Habermas would have it doing nothing less than promoting peace on earth and good will towards men. Oh, to be sure, it would all be done modestly enough, beginning with the use of such modest-sounding terms as *stand-in* and *mediator*. Philosophy, duly reformed and humbling itself before the giant, well-planted frames of the sciences, certainly would not be so foolish as to tell them, as it did in the past, where *they* should be standing. Rather it would make itself serviceable to them, offering council and perhaps, if two giants wanted to talk but lacked the manners or vocabulary for it, philosophy would step in and mediate."

– I've read a couple of these papers and, in fairness to their authors, I don't think your hero has understood everything about them. For example, Putnam certainly doesn't deny that philosophy is culturally and linguistically determined. Rather it's on this basis he argues philosophy must hold on to the notion of transcendent truth. Otherwise it simply ceases to be.

– So putting that notion into disrepute is inconsistent?

– This is what he argues against the solipsists and relativists. For with them there's always a claim that wants to be taken seriously.

– But it still remains to be shown that philosophy is anything but inconsistency. For if all philosophers bought into the idea of transcendent truth (and of course I mean in the explicit and dogmatic sense and not just in the implicit and sceptical sense), it would stop searching for itself and so, in a sense, stop searching.

The interminable struggle to deny that the struggle *is* the thing but rather to let on in all ways that it is merely the result of other people's wayward thinking. Can anything be more scandalous than the repeated overlooking of this phenomenon that, from another perspective, prevents truthtelling from *being a scandal*? Can it be that truth is already at odds with something that might be called the good and, inasmuch as this is the case, is pre-determined to be divided into the less-good-than-truthful and the less-truthful-than-good? Is this enormous complication fit for human consumption or is it the absolutely indigestible, the debunking or de-idealizing of both goodness and truth?

– For the life of me, I can't concentrate when he goes on like this.

Something tells me that this complication is complicated even further by our subscribing both ways, by our being not entirely one with recognizing or not recognizing it. Beyond the rational-irrational divide there is still something that can be called thought and it is here we're counselled and committed in ways that every heart is aware of though attached to a head that obdurately claims that all enlightenment comes from it.

– Tell me. Where did you learn to play chess?

– Is the game upsetting you?

– It's not that. It's the lack of a respite from the twists and turns on that chessboard no one can play on but himself.

Perhaps the philosophical heart is what I have always set my sights on. Perhaps this heart is the most hidden thing while its outward parts, its hydra-headed immensity with each head an immensity in itself, enters our consciousness transformed, serviceable, shrunken, and moderately tamed, a gnat compared to its intellectual life outside it.

– There he goes again. Comparing philosophy to a monster in Greek mythology. Scotch one head and another rears up. It's like the devils in Milton's poem who shrink from giants to gnats in an instant to show how mean and worthless they are.

Indeed, whatever is not seen, not understood, not contemplated is left by the wayside. I see it as much in others as myself. It is no doubt a survival tactic that is always in play but hardly gets attention because it is fundamentally disheartening. It speaks of a certain fraudulence in all our attempts that is inseparable from wanting to know as well and widely as possible.

– I give up.

Pushing towards self-examination has been placing a great deal of strain on my thought experiment.

– You shouldn't give up, Professor Chalmers. You still have a lot of men on the board.

The normal thing is to run away when it gets to be too much.

– You're not going to leave me, are you?

With still a good piece of the road to go down and so much effort required to understand why I kept on it and why that should even matter, I realize I'm going to have to tax not only my insightfulness but my inventiveness.

– We just have to find a way to chase away all those grey clouds suddenly hanging over your head. Let's see. You like theatre, don't you? Alright, sit down. Take off your coat. Give me a word. Any word. I'll choose it for you then. How about "Nietzsche"?

– I don't know what word could interest me less.

– But you were interested in the play Baumgarten told you about.

– How could you possibly know about that?

– Everyone knows about that. Okay, Professor, here we go. "It's not possible! When I looked at you just a moment ago, I thought you had changed. I thought you had become someone else."

Certainly self-examination was on my mind when I wrote the essay that started: "After much perturbation regarding how I should go about this assignment, I finally asked myself the question: How might Friedrich Nietzsche have advised me on this matter?*"*

– "Oh-h! There it is again! I can't believe my eyes! You look just like him! With the coal-black eyes and the big bushy moustache and the equally bushy eyebrows. Pinch me! Tell me it isn't true! I'm in the presence of one of the most amazing people who ever lived."

I answered my own question by saying he would have advised me to seek out some small part of his work and draw out as much as I could from it.

– "Why are you staying so quiet, Mr. Nietzsche? Why are you just communicating with your eyes? And now you're shushing me. Do you feel alright? What's wrong with your head? Why are you pointing at your head?"

So I chose Aphorism 335 in *The Gay Science* because we had already discussed it in class.

– "This is worse than anything. If you can't talk, if you're just like the empty shell you were the last eleven years of your life, then I feel like saying with Ophelia:'To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!'"

The essay called "An Exegesis of Aphorism 335" is written in a style that no longer appeals to me. Like many of my old essays, it strikes me now as a strange mix of seriousness and flippancy.

– I could end up like him.

On the other hand, it was doing all that it could at the time to keep alive that one principle that I really couldn't dispense with.

– If there's one thing I can assure you of, you'll never be like him. You'll always be wonderful, wonderful Professor Chalmers!

And despite the fact that I more or less fell short with it by not quite getting to the heart of the matter, I must have been close to getting there. To the place where reason disappears and only reappears as the justification for a faith that surpasses it as much as life does. And this perhaps accounts for the all too Nietzschean style that I adopted as well as the muted critique I made of him.

– Every time you get a bit down from now on, I'm going to cheer you up. I'll make you laugh. I'll make you smile. I'll even tell you stories. If you want, I'll do some more improv. Oh, you're such a good actor! You should've followed it up.

This style that now I find too imitative and this critique too muted. This style and critique

that no longer satisfy me because I have always been pushing the principle of self-examination as far as I can. This same style and critique that were nonetheless the strongest indications of my general direction at the time.

– What is your name, dear girl?

– Alice.

Yes, I suppose I was trying to out-Nietzsche Nietzsche and out-self-examine his own self-examination. But Nietzsche's self-examination was something he did essentially in advance and as preparation for the critique of a whole tradition.

– I really must go.

From this perspective, no one can outdo him because he carried out this task under conditions that were particular to his time and place. Imitating him as I did thus had something naive and all too convenient about it. It is as if I thought that his spirit were alive in me purely as a result of my efforts and apart from the conditions that were particular to *my* time and place. As if I thought that adopting his style didn't betray that I still had unexamined parts of myself.

– You mustn't run out on me, Professor Chalmers. I'm counting on you. Oh, it's so hard to explain. I can't criticize him, you see. I can only worship him. I can only be his princess but I can't be the other thing, the negative thing, or at least, well, it's complicated because I am *this thing in a sort of conflicting or opposite way and that's the trouble. Love makes me blind, Professor Chalmers. That's part of what I'm trying to get at. That's part of it and the other part is that my love is so great that I want to try the impossible. I want to stop being so blind. But I can't do it on my own. Professor Chalmers, I need your help.*

So what was I trying to dig into? My greatly favouring, indeed, my falling down before Nietzsche's analysis of morality wasn't something I tried to hide. Aping him as I did, I must have given Professor Keenan the impression that I fancied myself one of his more radical and provocative spiritual heirs. Indeed, if it were radical self-examination that bound Nietzsche and me together, I was without doubt ready to follow him all the way. I was even ready to go one step further and recognize a certain one-sidedness in his attack on morality that, in the name of self-examination, I thought should be taken into account.

– Oh, please let him come back! For if he doesn't, I'll stop being the princess who's as much an ideal as anything else. I'll stop being substantial and turn into fluff.

This attack on morality, specifically, Kantian morality, that fully convinced me insofar as it was an attack on the doctrine that reasoning, deciding, and acting upon the basis of rules exhausted the subject of morality and gave a full account of the moral self. Nietzsche's call for an intellectual conscience, a conscience behind the moral one, a conscience that would reflect upon and judge the latter (and so be a kind of *second* moral conscience) appealed to me because the moral conscience in and of itself seemed too much attached to a certain conceptual or

constative convenience as well as to a certain practical or performative one. As I saw it then (but also as I see it now), the first as systematisation and simplification was a virtual ruling out of court of another, perhaps the *only* other side of morality, namely, struggling with uncertainty. In this way the first forfeited bringing to bear the most penetrating gaze upon the subject. So far as this was Nietzsche's thought and so far as it was meant for others to grasp and a few to take to heart, I was there for him. So far as it was a call to order that recognized itself as being also a call to a certain *disorder*, I was also there. But so far as it was all this without recognizing that the call to order must also be, despite all proper enmity, the call *for* order, the call for systematicity and simplicity in morality as everywhere else (as well as the corresponding call to honour and idealize it), I was made uneasy and suspicious.

– Did I miss anything?

– Oh, Professor Chalmers, I'm so glad you came back!

It was his lashing out at people who hadn't looked deeply into themselves that struck me as being the sign of some unexamined part of himself. It seemed to me that he wasn't acknowledging the difference of these others or, more properly, their *right* to be different in a both moral and non-moral sense. For what choice did these others have in the matter of what they were if, according to his own analysis, their origins and constituting parts were largely hidden? And if the same applied to his own character, then how could he view his placing himself at some higher or more exalted level as being no less a prejudice than a principle? How could he have prevented himself from reversing perspectives and, not only making the case against the vast majority, making their case against him?

– Well, that might be asking too much of Nietzsche.

But what I didn't see at the time – and this despite reaching the point where I thought I knew Nietzsche better than he knew himself – was how much I was still taken up by his perspective. That is, by a principle that didn't recognize itself as being also a prejudice. That didn't recognize itself as being in the most radical way a prejudice. That didn't recognize itself in the most radical way because it stopped short with the recognition that prejudice is a universal feature. That didn't recognize itself because it didn't go on to *thematise* and *personalize* itself, that is, the very prejudice that allows for such a universalization.

– Whooh! I don't know what to say! Are you hungry?

Without this thematisation and personalization of prejudice, without what in effect I have been doing up to now, the chances are good – both Nietzsche and my past self are evidence of this – of forgetting that one even has a prejudice. And more than this, of forgetting that one is opposed not only to prejudice but to principle. Case in point: my response to Professor Keenan's defence of Kant and his questioning of Nietzsche. Instead of noticing how consistent his comments were with a principle that could have been universalized, that could have been a categorical imperative, that could have taken the form, *Treat all your students fairly even while upholding your own point of view* (for his comments were not in the least dismissive or

disrespectful), I took umbrage at the fact that he wasn't fully on board with me.

– Where did you get all this stuff?

– At various places.

– And you just happened to have it in your packsack?

"Address to Professor Keenan: A Short Response in Light of Some Dissatisfaction and Disagreement with Comments Made upon My Essay"

"Your comments do not pick up on or reflect in any forthright way the exegetical thrust of my essay. If I may say so, they betray an unwillingness either to recognize or to seize this issue with both hands. If you disagree with my analysis, it would have been interesting to have such comments or objections as outline a counter-position. As it is, I'm forced to the conclusion that you do not really believe Nietzsche when he describes his philosophy as dynamite."

– He was upset by Professor Keenan's skirting the basic thrust of his essay but now he realizes he was unjust to him.

– I'm overwhelmed.

– He's trying to go very deep, Professor Chalmers. I think you know that.

– Oh, I know it but I'm just getting a bit tired of it.

When I first started this project, not just telling the truth but telling it to myself seemed like the right way to go. The guiding thought was that it would check all kinds of repression, omission, minimization, and exaggeration. The fact that it would also check coming to any sort of hard-and-fast conclusion didn't strike me as a sin that I, devoted as I was to the most singular of subjects (but how many others have also said that?), needed to bear upon my conscience. This is what essentially fell out from the naive thought that I was doing no more than telling the truth to myself. It was naive not because I wasn't conscious of secretly having in mind a general readership but because I felt myself protected from any sort of wrongdoing. Such was the case at least until I had to bring in other voices in order to register depths that my own couldn't reach. Then it became apparent that, insofar as wrongdoing includes offending, disturbing, and perhaps even deranging others, it is *already* culpable. And this for the reason that, even though I don't intend to do any specific harm, I still go on grinding out *my* truth that will grind down some, that will alienate and unsettle others, and that is always open to being taken up in ways that can't be foreseen and, like Nietzsche's thought (but not only Nietzsche's thought), be put to cruelest and most unusual uses. Of course all of this is not separate from an egoism that, despite this show of moral compunction, wants it to be so. Ultimately this egoism is the faith that its truth will merge and become one with the good.

– Now, tell me. How did you end up bringing all this stuff here?

It is strange how my voice now seems like a lead weight bound to my highest aspirations. As if the little bird that Nietzsche speaks of had flown over my head and cried out to me as it did to him: *What does it matter? What does it matter?* Faith doesn't come without some doubts that perhaps are the necessarily fleeting but also necessarily recurring reminder of the limitations of our faith. Fleeting for most of us at least because spending more than a few moments in this most hostile of regions is death. The alive and the quick are forever those who, in a host of diverse ways, are ready to strap on the strong pinions of faith.

– It's such a boring subject. You wouldn't be interested.

So is my present condition. It belongs to my so far steadfast faith (my health, as Nietzsche would call it) and, with luck, so will some of the future. Surely enough of the future, I daresay, to put the lie to the thought that my voice is a dead weight. If this faith and reassertion of faith must themselves be put into doubt, then such a challenge and shakeup must come from others. No doubt a wide range of others that I'm no more in a position to judge than to bless or to curse.

– Alright, I won't ask any more questions about this unreal scene except where are we headed?

– Are you in good spirits, Professor Chalmers?

– I'm in excellent spirits.

– Do you like everything I brought?

– I like it.

– The plan so far as I know it is to end up where we started.

It's a question now of what to say or what not to say about the other essays I wrote for those ten honours courses I took between 1991 and 1993.

– I may be feeling better but I don't like the idea of listening to all he's ever written.

So much in them is close to my present thought that I don't see how I can bring them into this essay and make them talk afresh.

– You see, Professor Chalmers, it's not so bad as you think. He doesn't want to drag in stuff for any old reason. He doesn't want anything that would just be pure ego without exploring it. On the other hand, this exploring is without limit or, well, of course that's overstating it because at some point he'll have to end it and he'll have to say something like," Look, that's it. I can't go any further. I've more or less said everything I have to."

It is pretty clear that, if I'm to continue on course with my subject, I must also continue with a sense of the moral precariousness and divisiveness of truthtelling. And of course not only with respect to others but with respect to myself.

– That means he can't just talk about his past as if it were like a highway to the present. He must also talk about it and walk it like that scene in Zarathustra *with the tightrope. It's always possible to fall off because there's so many distractions and activities and people wishing you would fall off and, well, if not break your neck, then at least show you've come back down to earth and lost a few feathers for having tried something they're either contemptuous of or don't understand.*

I have swum halfway across the river and there is no turning back. The way I have proceeded so far must be the way I carry through to the end. If my thoughts were to turn dull and stale, then I would know I had run my subject into the ground. But how could this be as long as my account falls short of bringing my past self up to my present one? This present self that itself is a mobile thing but that I decided in advance to freeze and contain (or is it expel?) as a necessary terminus. In a sense then my past self never does catch up to my present one. But to show this to be the case, to choose precisely the right moment where the circle closes without catching it, would serve well as my final statement.

– Oh, bravo!

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

32. Briefly on Feminism

There were those essays I wrote where I grappled with feminism in one way or another. I wanted to squarely confront it and show at the same time that I could wrestle it to the ground. The figure of wrestling is apt because the intellectual or ideological side of me was never far from the fantasy of raping or being raped. Oh, to think that power and sex can be distinguished so easily! Not only was every living fibre of me proof to the contrary but there was every living Helen with her power to draw a thousand looks! Viewed by me as a great propagandistic lie, I detested the feminist line on power. I didn't believe that the latest squabbles between men and women and the re-righting of old wrongs justified it. And when I went about the business of studying feminism and feminist critique, it was less with the desire to identify with people fighting for an equal playing field than to know the enemy.

– Of course I know the essays he's talking about. They're not so sensational as all that. In fact, it's all quite misleading because he never wrote specifically on feminism. It was mostly stuff that came out when he was examining the feminist critiques of works like Paradise Lost*,* Beowulf*, and* The Battle of Maldon*.*

– We're committed to telling the truth here.

– Alright, the one on The Battle of Maldon *got a bit out of hand. The professor reprimanded him for being too harsh and cutting.*

> *(Professor Izydorczyk: Although sympathetic to your main argument, I think the tone of your paper is not entirely appropriate.)*

He was criticizing the critic, Heather Stuart, because she herself was criticizing the heroic ideal in The Battle of Maldon *and making it out to be the cause of wars and suffering.*

– Didn't she have a point?

– Well, maybe a little one but she pumped it up so much she was ready to turn the usual interpretation of the poem upside down.

– But one might say she had courage to do what she did. In fact, one might say she acted heroically.

– That's a point he raised with himself later.

– And probably thinking he was also scoring a point for himself. After all, it's a way to complicate heroism. On the other hand, she was focussing on one end of it. The business of going to war and killing people.

– So maybe she had in mind something else.

– Yes, the warrior ideal. But then it seems to me this ideal would either have to be understood as limited to the battlefield or else the heroic ideal kept out of all human conflict. After all, if it were allowed to assert itself in some part of it, why exclude it from others?

– It would have to be applied only to things like saving people. Then everybody's on board about who's a hero and who's not. But when it comes to killing them, it's always split between those who see a glorious battle and those who see the most horrible crimes.

– It seems to me if the heroic is to be held responsible for wars and suffering, it must be eliminated not only on the battlefield but in the boardroom.

Mixing sexuality with sexual politics even got into my interpretation of *Beowulf*.

> "The *aglaewif*, fighting in her own element, becomes a far greater threat to Beowulf than her son ever was. Greater physical strength no longer is the deciding factor in battle and, as a glorified male attribute, becomes a thing of mockery for the warrior woman who is willing to exploit every advantage. The equalization of the contest between them results in a prolonged see-saw battle fought at close quarters. There is the tussling for a dominant or favourable position, the *aglaewif* finally sitting on the hero and trying to penetrate his armour first with her fingers and then with her knife."

– His thesis was that there's a dialectic in Beowulf *between one type of woman and another. A kind like me, say, for instance, and a monster-type. And the monster-type is outside nature and society which of course means male-dominated society and so is very fearful and even emasculating.*

I must confess I did get a fright when I heard it suggested in class that most anonymous writings of the past were written by women. Or that men had created a patriarchal god in order to put down the threat that the opposite sex posed to them. Or that male authors were guilty of sexism every time they depicted an unflattering female character or let some male character give vent to his misogynist feelings. No doubt my reaction was a typically neurotic one that sprang from largely unexamined assumptions about male superiority. At the same time I was acutely aware that correcting past injustices was not the same as being just. If ever I was one who could have been labelled a misogynist, it was at least partly for the reason that I resented being so labelled and the all too quick use of labels in general.

– It seems to me the phenomenon of feminism in the university cannot be treated so lightly without stifling one of the important voices that should be brought in here.

– That poses a problem for me because I can't be that voice or take on a way of thinking that, though it may suit some, would not suit me.

– Of course you're cut from a different cloth. But I was wondering why he hadn't got

someone to take on the role.

– I suppose I could do it in a pinch.

– No, no, no! What is needed is a genuine voice. Not a caricature.

– How would such a voice sound? Would it chide him for taking up the subject as he does? For letting it be fuelled by an all-too-masculine and even hyper-masculine identity? Would it denounce him for not turning his project into a self-condemnation, an admission of its being grounded in a long tradition of wrongdoing?

– That's the way most of us are made to feel.

– The collective guilt thing?

– Why shouldn't it be admitted as true?

– Who is denying that truth and who is and on what authority demanding it to be the whole truth?

– The masculinists on one side and the feminists on the other.

– And to be neither I think is to find the whole of it a caricature of the struggle between the sexes because it's the mere politics or policy of stigmatising the opposing party while viewing — I'm sorry, I do tend to go on.

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33. On Getting Personal

It was while taking these honours courses that the thought first struck me that I could have been a father to many of my fellow students. Notwithstanding this source of both minor amazement and discomfort, I was still very much at an age (but will I ever be past this age?) that I would have liked to have had sex with a few of them.

– This certainly doesn't sound like someone who's left behind masculinism. On the contrary, he seems to be giving reason to those who've long denounced men for viewing women as sex objects.

As it so happened, one of the young ladies to whom I was attracted was both an ardent feminist and a lesbian. She and the young woman who was her lover often took umbrage at my comments (though our exchanges thankfully fell short of nastiness) in a course on American literature that was focussed on opening up the canon to Hispanic, Afro-American, and women writers. Of course I never made any advances towards her but rather argued with her and her friend in class while secretly admiring her. My sexual love was this show of mastery that from time to time dismayed me because it seemed as sterile as some might have judged the love between these young women.

– And what about the love between men? Why hasn't he dealt with that if his purpose is to confront his subject from all angles?

Of course I now take comfort in the thought that both sterility and fruitfulness can take many forms. Sterility – as much as anything can be called sterile in human affairs – may very well be the seedbed of diverse spiritual children. If I look into my own heart, I see that I was always more interested in being a progenitor of these. No doubt the course of my life and many of my actions have been influenced by this preference. All the heartache notwithstanding, I was at bottom someone who could stand alone and, with a combination of sporadic sexual encounters and erotic fantasies, carve out of my solitude an idealized love and destiny.

– It's still not clear why he treats heterosexuality with less degree of, if I may say so, heterogeneity than other subjects.

Which of course could also be called an unabashed and unrelenting self-love.

– Do you think he could deal with it as you might wish, that is, politically and not be counterfeiting? Especially when you see me here looking as I am which is not exactly dowdy.

– You're voluptuous.

– If you had a man who looked exactly like me, if his voice were like mine and if he acted pretty much like I do, do you know what you'd have? You'd have all my hero's homosexuality coming out of the closet.

My wife-daughter fantasy effectively ruled out any desire for a so-called normal relationship with women. And my preoccupation with my past self did the same for begetting children. Of course all of this must be taken in the light of never having met the right woman when I was young. But, then again, who would have fit the bill except some flesh and blood goddess who, Athena-like, would have been forever behind me?

– Is it part of our task to get personal? To lay bare our souls? Aren't we here simply to flesh out the subjective and objective poles of truthtelling? You on one side, me on the other? You the temptation, make-believe, passion, and high feeling that go with it. Me the nastiness, swordplay, criticism, and so on.

– I'm not jealous or upset by what he said beyond a certain point. I'm not scandalized either by erotic elements that have a lot to do with what I'm all about. Instead I take it as the greatest compliment that I, Alice, a simple undergraduate student, am the flesh and flood realization of what was only fantasy in him before. After all, it's me who can say she's the princess who's finally come into his life and not only declared herself to be passionately in love with him but actively behind him.

I have had to live with the sterility of being an onanist and a narcissist all my life. I have had to bear it as much as any person has to put up with being a soul tethered to an asshole.

– That's a fine line!

It is not so easy to call oneself an asshole when others may very well be tempted to.

– It's from one of Irving Layton's poems.

When I look back on all my passions and rages . . .

– I said it was a fine line.

. . . I know that, as much they issued forth not in private but in public, I always viewed them as well-grounded, as reasonable, as justified, as the mark of my solid, straightforward, and even heroic character. It was always others who, in offensive, treacherous, or thoughtless ways, set a light to the explosive charge that was in me and who received, as a consequence, their due. On the other hand, how many times have I gone in for self-laceration, for calling myself an asshole, for ranting and raving over my foolishness and ineptness in the quiet of a room? What a gap there is between a public and a private persona, between maintaining a good opinion of oneself for others to pick up on and scrapping it entirely in order to be the sternest of judges.

– I must say, I'm warming to his candour. So much in us is divided and hidden away that, if it weren't for efforts of this sort, we'd take it for granted that formality in our lives was the highest achievement.

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34. Formalism

It boils down to this: fighting for the freedom to choose what forms to go with and what forms to reject. To being a bit more passionate about this struggle and this freedom than the vast majority of people. Straight formality was always something I tried to subvert in my essays so that there might be at least some acknowledgement of irreducibly personal factors. Because I was quite conscious of having limited knowledge in many and indeed most areas, any attempt to repress these elements would have struck me as merely taking advantage of a certain licenced deception. Then as now, I took it that there was an implicit understanding amongst truthtellers that, although each and everyone spoke as if he were the voice of reason itself (which I take to be the scholarly style), this was a mere formality that didn't imply that anyone thought he actually was free of all internal or external influences. But along with this was the implication – and this was what struck me as the ongoing deception – that these influences were only accidental. Or, at best, mistakes to be overcome that provided a pathway to some higher and indeed highest understanding.

– Attacking formality is a tricky business. You can hardly dispense with it – I mean the formality and not the attacking – if you're ever to get beyond mere opinion and prejudice. And of course I don't mean in any absolute sense. I mean relative to what is today mere opinion and prejudice. Pathways to a higher if not highest understanding cannot be treated as mere deception because then there would be no reason to climb out of the caves of ourselves and seek the light of truth and knowledge.

It seems the difficulty I have always been wrestling with in this essay is this thinking of truthtelling as the most rarified deception and self-deception. So rarified in fact that it stretches out of sight as truth and knowledge. So rarified again that it converts all eternity into a human habitat with forever a backyard and a field to investigate. And so rarified once more that it can't be argued with, done away with, or distinguished from all that we labour for or labour with. So much is it the character and constitution of truthtelling that sometimes it seems that it is the whole of it. After all, what else might there be but some thought that doubles back on these other thoughts, these monumental ones, and, in the very name of truthtelling itself, doubts their authenticity?

Some one thought out of a hundred perhaps. Some one thought that is erratic, out of order, and not contributing anything to truthtelling except a certain radical idealization of it. Oh, this difficulty that comes from having at least ninety-nine thoughts out of a hundred bent against it! From having ninety-nine thoughts out of a hundred squarely keeping faith with truth, reason, and the idea of one final reckoning! Here of course I'm no different from others or at least no different from them other than by being a bit more constant and persistent in holding onto that one thought out of a hundred that eludes membership. That one thought that speaks of a truth beyond all that can bear this name but that, as much as this thought can touch or include it, speaks more truthfully than the ninety-nine thoughts that range themselves otherwise.

– Alice, you look like a girl who's just joined a religious cult.

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35. Egoism

I decided at the beginning that telling the truth about myself had to be one with telling the truth about truthtelling. I took it to be significant right away that there would be an irreducible element of self-promotion. Of taking the best view of myself. Of letting my egoism be part and parcel of the very attempt to tell the truth about it. Perhaps not fully realized then was that putting all this on display and objectifying it could extend even to creating and falling in love with a Pygmalion-like self-image. Falling in love with what in effect is being born in and borne by this project (I should almost say, as one putting his ego on display, borne *out*) and is both a projection of my past life into the present and my present life into the past. An indissociably aesthetic and ethical project that makes all the weakness and ugliness in this past and present life seem redeemable, necessary, transfigured as the constituents of a growing perfection. Such then is the redoubtable reaction to and overcoming of the self-contempt and self-dissatisfaction that has both spurred and scalded me throughout all my adolescent and adult years. Indeed, it was this negative side of self-examination and self-evaluation that started off this essay and then, due to what I just called or, should I say, *justly* called the redoubtable reaction to and overcoming of it, was immediately subjugated and taken over by the task of redeeming my past life by transforming my present one into its completion and consummation. So much then are these two attitudes bound together (like a wanderer and his shadow) and wherever the one seems to be solely in evidence, it is but the other in a state of total or near-total eclipse. A transitory enough affair that I hardly would wish to do away with if I'm to continue the task of trying to make my egoism one with telling the truth about it. Therefore a tension must be kept between what I want to bring forth as a full manifestation of it and what I must recognize (how else could there be this full manifestation?) as related tricks, games, subterfuge, and the like. So far it has been a see-saw battle with my ego sometimes resembling a balloon about to burst and sometimes a pin that preemptively pricks and deflates it.

– If he continues in this vein, I won't play the curmudgeon. I'll even congratulate him. I'm certainly not against exploring the self and exposing our prejudices. In fact, that's the best way to make our conversation go beyond polemics and become a transfiguring experience.

But perhaps creating and falling in love with a Pygmalion-like self-image should not be thought of as being limited to one essay or the work of one essay or the work of an essay called *On Truthtelling.* The work of this essay that is the attempt to take the whole of my life beyond the ordinary and unexceptional cannot be separated from the life that was often the rough, vague, imprecise, ambiguous effort to do just the same. Nor can it be dissociated from the view that this final wrap-up essay, this most Pygmalion-like one called *On Truthtelling*, is not some mere addition to it but the natural outgrowth of a long period of development, struggle, and the like that might also be called, in a both strict and not-so-strict sense, a long series of *essays*. Nor from the view that, had I not been lucky enough to reach this wrap-up essay, I would have fallen short of reaching the stage of development where I could push my highest branches beyond the surrounding forest of truthtellers. What I think of as my self-love, my creating and falling in love with a Pygmalion-like self-image would have run its course without ever having reached the point of articulating itself as this design and end. Speaking from the depths of this same self-love, I hold that it is no mere narcissism. Rather I'm driven with all that self-love can be as self-

respect and self-engagement to articulate it as the most rarified deception and self-deception. It is indistinguishable from telling the truth as the complication and even over-complication of truthtelling.

– He's walking a tightrope over many things. But if he has good faith and generosity of spirit behind him, I'm sure he'll be able to stay on and get to the other side.

I suppose that from the very moment I imagined myself becoming a great spirit in some definite and yet still vague and uncertain enough way (definite in the sense of aiming high and vague and uncertain in the sense of what this would lead to), I was committed to a self-image that itself was a commitment to hard paths and highest objectives. Winning popularity or having tremendous ability was never the highest goal for me because it didn't involve the deepest or most comprehensive commitment. With such an outlook, I must have had planted in me at an early age the thought that failing greatly was preferable to succeeding without greatness. At least I'm inclined to believe this was so and see evidence of it in the fact that, later on in life, I remained tied to the idea of becoming a great writer when, after having determined I was fit for nothing better, I was given good reason to think I wasn't fit for it at all. To be sure, the university essays were something of an exception. Generally speaking, they gladdened my heart, brought me good tidings, and pointed towards some possibility of entering (or, if I gave my imagination full rein, exploding) onto the literary scene. Even with the shift towards studying philosophy as well as literature, I continued to believe that everything was grist for the writer's mill and that there was always the possibility of being swept up by some future inspiration – or rather wave of inspirations – that would put to use everything I had ever done or thought. Looking back, I find a certain degree of clarity and precision in striving so disjointedly for some major success. For deferring it as a direct course or well-defined route. For finding faith and optimism even while feeling that I was simply plodding along. For when all is said and done, the university essays I wrote never forsook their status as assignments, never transformed themselves except for fleeting moments into wonderfully wrought treatises, and never were more than little scholarly efforts that could easily have lost themselves amongst better attired and more privileged ones. My awareness of this was troubling to the extent that, by not extending myself beyond this limited domain, I sensed some lack of resolve, some inner poverty, some all too scattered and heterogeneous orientation. Indeed, it was this problem of orientation I always felt because at the heart of my erratic flight was less a practical than idealistic bent, less the need to be clear on where I was headed than to be clean on what I was doing. An untroubled intellectual conscience is what I gave highest priority to and, with respect to writing university essays and all that may have troubled it, I was never so troubled as to renounce it as a trustworthy guide.

– I sometimes wish he'd fall off the rope.

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36. Causality

I examined it in one of my essays. The thing that couldn't be dispensed with but stubbornly chose at least when examined closely and with a fastidious eye to be *not* simple and straightforward. That could play itself out as a subjective or objective event or both at the same time. That playing itself out as not just subjective or objective event but something else, also had to *not* play itself out. That is, not play itself out in the sense that the attempt to deal with it theoretically always involved a reliance upon it that was muted, camouflaged, or concealed. That truly was a problem then that had to be ignored or forgotten every time an explanation, great or small, was called for. And this for purely practical reasons that, although they had everything to do with the basis of reasoning itself, were not quite reasons in and of themselves but more like acts of faith. For reasons then that were not dissociable from *non*-reason and, for that reason, had nothing to do with theory apart from allowing it to happen.

– Can you run that by me again?

"**Hume and Kant on Causality**"

"Thinking deeply on the matter of causality is an area in which one important philosopher, David Hume (1711-1776) greatly influenced another, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Indeed, this last point cannot be too much emphasized. In discussing Hume's inquiry into the nature of causality in his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Kant states that the former 'was the very thing which . . . first interrupted [his] dogmatic slumber and gave [his] investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction.' The reason for this abrupt awakening and profound influence lies in Kant's realization of the challenge which Hume's inquiry into this area posed. In other words, he saw that nothing less was at issue than the possibility of doing metaphysics and thus attaining certain and comprehensive knowledge. I think it is best to proceed immediately to a straightforward account of Hume's inquiry into the nature of causality and, once having done this, take stock of Kant's critical reaction.

"Hume's discussion of causality takes place in two separate works: *A Treatise of Human Nature* and *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. The second work deals with the matter of causality in a more concise and general way than the first. In order to be as clear as I can, I shall examine its treatment first in one work and then the other. I shall start with the more concise and general one.

"Before beginning his discussion of causality in the *Inquiry*, Hume states that '[he] . . . shall endeavour . . . to fix if possible the precise meaning of [metaphysical] terms and thereby remove some part of that obscurity which is so much complained of in this species of philosophy.' Specifically, this involves the doctrine which he introduces earlier in the work and which states that all ideas, both simple and complex, originate from impressions, particularly sense-impressions.[35] In order to render an idea clear and unambiguous then, it is necessary to trace it to this source. Now the situation in Hume's day (and the same holds true in our own in many or most respects) had it that causal relationships are unique in that they are invested with an inner force or power. It naturally followed for Hume that, if such were the case, this force or

35 *Professor Shimizu*: "May we ask whether this is a causal relation?"

power as an idea in the mind should have its corresponding impression. However, in the *Inquiry* he is quick to draw the conclusion that this impression is precisely what is missing.

> When we look about us toward external objects and consider the operation of causes, we are never able in a single instance, to discover any power or necessary connection, any quality which binds the effect to the cause and renders the one an infallible consequence of the other.[36]

"If there really were such a power, it should supply the mind with an impression and idea separate from those impressions and ideas that correspond with the two events which form the causal relationship. Further, it should allow for the immediate identification of such a relationship, that is, without numerous experiences of a conjunction of two events being necessary in order to reveal it to the mind. Nor, as Hume goes on to say, is such a power-impression to be found in the mind's willing some bodily motion or mental event.

> We learn the influence of our will from experience alone. And experience teaches us how one event constantly follows another, without instructing us in the secret connection which binds them together and renders them inseparable.

"The familiar feeling of having to exert one's self to effect some task or purpose is popularly thought to represent some inner force or power. Hume points out, however, that this feeling does not identify but merely accompanies the relatively limited range of mind-body operations. Were it really the essence of causality, it should allow for a single instance recognition. Hence what is really going on here is an interpretation by the perceiving self to the effect that certain events are not only connected but *necessarily* so. This notion of necessity, however, only arises out of a repeated witnessing of event B following event A such that the mind comes to the point where, according to Hume, it automatically envisions the effect upon its receiving the impression of the cause. Thus:

> What alteration has happened to give rise to the new idea of *connection*? Nothing but that [the observer] now *feels* these events to be *connected* in his imagination, and can readily foretell the existence of one from the appearance of the other.

It is this feeling which Hume claims is the impression directly leading to the idea of power or necessary connection.[37] Hume goes on to say that '[n]othing further is in the case. Contemplate the subject on all sides, you will never find any other origin of that idea.'

"I shall now take a look at Hume's treatment of causality in the *Treatise*. He begins by distinguishing between those propositions which he terms 'relations of ideas' and those which he calls 'matters of fact' (i.e., what become with Kant the distinction between *analytic a priori* and *synthetic a posteriori* judgements). The first are recognized by virtue of their having, in order to

36 *Professor Shimizu*: "What can the relation of these external objects to Hume be if it not causal?"
37 *Professor Shimizu*: "But not with the impression *causing* the idea of necessary connection or else Hume is begging the question."

be universal and necessary propositions, predicates in agreement with their corresponding subjects. Thus the proposition 'A triangle is a three-sided figure' permits no other predicate which stipulates a different number of sides. Again, the proposition 'Red and orange are more similar than red and yellow' (Hume's example) does not permit the reverse of its predicate. By contrast, matter of fact propositions can predicate contrasting states of affairs, neither of which conflicts with what the subjects can conceptually permit. In the *Treatise* Hume identifies matter of fact propositions in terms of three kinds of relation between objects. They are identity, contiguity, and causality. As Hume points out, these three are dependent on one another for the purposes of reasoning. With respect to propositions involving causality then, there is nothing in the concept of a particular thing or event which indicates that it must be the cause of only one effect and no other. For example, the proposition 'A moving billiard ball striking another will put the second one in motion' has as its subject an event which, conceptually speaking, cannot rule out any number of predicates (that is, any number of effects). In short, such a proposition entirely rests upon a repeated observation and an accompanying or informing belief which cannot itself be based upon reason but helps to form its basis.

"Hume states in the *Treatise* that, in order for a causal relationship to be identified as such, it must involve things or events which are contiguous, successive, and constantly conjoined. However, once the first two aspects imprint themselves upon the mind as impressions, the third aspect of this relationship does not add anything. In other words, the third and most important aspect is not inherent in the sequence but in the mind's grasp of it via familiarity and repetition. Or, to put it another way, the mind brings something strictly of its own to repeated impressions of the same sequence. The mere repetition of the sequence does not generate any new impression that would be proper to the sequence. Rather, the repetition itself forms an entirely new impression which is the source of the causal identification as the idea of a necessary connection between event A and event B. This new impression, specifically speaking, is a development in the mind wherein the imagination customarily unites one particular idea with another.

"Halfway through his inquiry into the nature of causality in the *Treatise*, Hume states the following:

> [T]here is no question which, on account of its importance, has caused more disputes among ancient and modern philosophers, than this concerning the efficacy of causes, or that quality which makes them to be followed by their effects.

"Testimony to the above can be found in the reaction to Hume's inquiry into causality. Immanuel Kant eloquently gives an account of it in his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*.

> . . . Hume suffered the usual misfortune of metaphysicians of not being understood. It is positively painful to see how utterly his opponents . . . missed the point of the problem; for while they were ever taking for granted that which he doubted, and demonstrating with zeal and often with impudence that which he never thought of doubting, they so misconstrued his valuable suggestion that everything remained in its old condition, as if nothing had happened. The question was not whether the

> concept of cause was right, useful, and even indispensable for any knowledge of nature, for this Hume had never doubted; but whether that concept could be thought by reason *a priori*, and consequently whether it possessed an inner truth, independent of all experience, implying a more widely extended usefulness, not limited merely to objects of experience. This was Hume's problem. It was a question concerning the *origin* of the concept, not concerning its indispensability in use. Were the former decided, the conditions of its use and the sphere of its valid application would have been determined as a matter of course.

"It is fair to say that the *Critique of Pure Reason* is the large-scale outgrowth of Kant's attempt to solve the Humean problem: solve it, that is, insofar as it became his problem and the threat which he perceived it to be to the dignity of metaphysics and philosophy in general.

"Now the problem as it faced Kant starts with the traditional conception of the world as being something completely independent of the mind or self. It is the conception to which Hume subscribes and which naturally informs his account of the way the mind acquires knowledge of the world. Following Locke, Hume regards it in the main as a receiver of sense impressions and a retainer of ideas which are mnemonic and conceptual copies of these impressions. In so doing, he propounds a doctrine which denies validity to those ideas which, even though they be compounded of other ideas, ultimately do not have their source in the impressions which, as he admits, form the mind's inexplicable link to physical reality. The immediate and most devastating impact of such a doctrine is to the metaphysical tradition which, with its teachings, disputations, and institutionalized practises, bases itself on such ideas as God, soul, and substance. All causal reasoning in this area becomes suspect and, if this were the only consequence, Kant would have judged Hume's investigation to be a scourge driving out the accumulated falsity which eventually brings the search for highest knowledge into disrepute. However, the ramifications of Hume's reasoning went much further in that, not only did it challenge the metaphysical endeavour as it stood in his day, it also brought into serious question the nature of knowledge and reasoning even as they pertain to the seemingly straightforward and self-evident operations of the world. As Kant reformulated the problem, it became a question as to whether there are universal and necessary truths regarding the accounts given natural events as there are in those which merely relate the various aspects of a concept to the concept per se. The former, as he saw it, necessarily involve the conjoining of distinct concepts and therefore must express themselves in synthetic propositions as opposed to analytic ones. However, these synthetic propositions cannot be derived from some descriptive account of the world's operation since, as Hume so convincingly demonstrated, the causal reasoning which is at the heart of such an account is itself in the form of synthetic propositions and so the very thing in question. It follows that they then must be discovered independent of experience and so, as a first step, Kant asked himself whether synthetic a priori propositions (i.e., assertions which, necessarily and universally true, are also informative about nature) were possible in and of themselves. He thereupon came to the conclusion that both mathematics and geometry include such propositions and that the latter issue from a particular way of viewing time and space. That is, time and space as mental constructs are the medium by which sensible intuition, conceptually ordered or organized, leads to objects of thought. The question then facing Kant was the one which he felt Hume inadequately addressed, namely, the question of how these objects of thought relate to one

another to form the unity which is our conceptual grasp or experience of the world. His answer, at least with respect to the objects of sensible intuition, was the famous transcendental deduction. Herein he posited that certain concepts themselves (i.e., what he called the category of pure concepts) are the organizing principles by which experience is shaped or grasped (e.g., duration, succession, and co-existence). However, the latter are not independent of a larger reality which grounds them objectively or ontologically. This larger reality he calls the noumenal realm or things-in-themselves.[38]

"Thus the concept of causality is an a priori synthetic proposition which operates as a rule or law in the determination of the world as it manifests itself phenomenally in time. It is the Kantian solution to the Humean problem. The latter, by grounding the *necessar*y aspect of causality in pure subjectivity (i.e., with no apparent relation to the external), leaves the matter of its universality unsatisfactorily explained. That is, it is easier to see how the mind, with respect to Hume's account, develops the idea of a necessary connection between two events than how it comes up with the idea of an inner force or power pervading all events. On the other hand, without this aspect of universality, it is difficult to make sense of the mind's identifying certain impressions that are constantly conjoined as causally related but not others. In other words, repeated sequences in and of themselves do not establish such relatedness. And if such is the case, the question then becomes one of how causality in events discloses itself to the mind. Kant himself asks the question when he points out that any happening in time presupposes an earlier time but that no further information is to be derived simply from the concept of *happening.* 'How come I then to predicate,' he inquires, 'of that which happens something quite different, and to apprehend that the concept of cause, though not contained in it, yet belongs, and indeed necessarily belongs to it?' His thoroughgoing answer to this question is an account of those transcendental concepts which correspond with the three relations which Hume specifies as being not of ideas but of matters of fact. They are duration, succession, and co-existence (as opposed to Hume's identity, causality, and contiguity). Kant calls the scheme or operation by which these concepts interpret or order the manifold of sensible intuition *analogies of experience*. That is, they are transcendental judgements which are analogous to the empirical ones made in the realm of experience. These empirical ones operate in and of themselves upon the principle of universally valid and necessary connections between particular phenomena. The transcendental judgements subsume these empirical ones by extending their universality such that all phenomena fall under the law of an implacable causality.

"Causality, it may be said, manifests itself as the subjective identification of that which has been made objective in the phenomenal realm by all the concepts of the understanding (i.e., the category of pure concepts). Specifically, it is that which is objectively or independently undergoing change in the phenomenal realm. It is the characterization of this change as necessary and sequentially ordered such that preceding events determine those which follow them. This objective aspect of the phenomenal realm prevents subjectivity or idealism and points to the ground of the phenomena which is the noumenal realm.[39] Thus the alterations which an enduring substance accommodates are objective from the point of view of their being grounded in this

38 *Professor Shimizu*: "To say this would seem to imply that Kant can't account for objective experience without reference to things-in-themselves after all and that empirical reality is merely appearance in a sense which leaves scepticism intact. and triumphant. Can this be interpreting Kant correctly?"

39 *Professor Shimizu*: "Isn't it enough that the categories and principles provide intersubjective and public requirements (criteria)? To require an untenable noumenal ground would make us hostage to sceptical doubt once again."

substance which is both a concept of the understanding and, as noumenal, an undisclosed thing-in-itself. On the other hand, these alterations are subjective from the point of view of being a mere sequence of representations. As such, they are united merely by the imagination and this 'determines inner sense in respect of the time-relation.' In other words, this faculty unites representations into a sequence which in itself reveals no determination and so indifferently subsumes representations into this sequence. Kant designates the objectively ordered sequences as the *succession of appearances* and the subjectively ordered ones as the *representations of apprehension*. 'Experience,' Kant says, '. . . is thus possible only in so far as we subject the succession of appearances, and therefore all alternation, to the law of causality; and, as likewise follows, the appearances, as objects of experience, are themselves possible only in conformity with the law.' Without the overriding law of causality and with merely the imaginatively united sequence of representations, experience as such would be a phantasmagoria of inexplicable appearances. The main point, however, is that the universal and necessary rule of causality makes possible a distinguishing of the succession of appearances from the manifold of representations which in itself comes to consciousness as subjectively ordered only. A boat moving downstream, for example (Kant's example), is a succession of appearances which the causal law renders as objectively ordered representations and so representations *of a specific kind*. By contrast, all other representations remain subjectively ordered, as is the case when one views a house (also Kant's example) in terms of a sequential observation of its various parts."

– Well, it's clear Kant didn't want the relationship between the noumenal and phenomenal to be understood as causal.

– I get the feeling Professor Shimizu wants to save Kant from the sort of criticism made against Hume.

– Yes, by implying the noumenal realm is nothing more than ideal.

– And yet this ideal represents something real, doesn't it? I mean, a world that's supposed to be there before it's ever experienced.

– There's this ontological confusion Kant probably didn't think so important because what he primarily explained was how we experience this world at the empirical level such that this empirical understanding is what we really know and are most certain about.

– You mean as a theory then that gives the world we normally have no doubts about (except when we philosophize or have a religious experience) a sort of extra certainty?

– Perhaps. It takes as much to curb the scepticism that, if left to its own devices, would declare everything forfeit.

I ended the essay on causality with some general thoughts.

"By traditionally setting itself over and against everything else, reason either sets about investigating this 'everything else' with an underestimation of its inclusiveness (that is, it more or

less turns a blind eye towards this 'everything else' as it impinges on and pervades reason itself) or, what amounts to the same thing, investigating itself with an overestimation of its (i.e., reason's) *exclusiveness*. Thus Plato and Aristotle, as representatives of the first tendency, have the ground of truth conceived as an external order (be it physical or extra-physical) separate from their own thoughts whereas Hume and Kant, as representatives of the second, have this ground of truth conceived as being a mind or ego essentially separate from everything else. It is roughly the difference between wanting to know all about what lies *outside* us and all about what lies *inside* us and, in both cases, without thinking much or even at all about their mutual implication. Descartes is pivotal of course: he looked at the self, essentially the rational self, and came to the conclusion that it was the only thing absolutely certain. Simply the self's sense of itself and its ability to think, doubt, imagine, etc. convinced him that the sense of self and thinking about it must include and presumably exhaust the whole subject. But once the self has been so objectified, it is only a matter of time before various aspects of it present themselves as potential candidates for conceptualization. With Hume, this took the form of his theory of impressions. He postulated these impressions as atomic entities that, in the form of ideas, join together to render thought possible. But these impressions that become ideas arise spontaneously for the most part in a self that is still their primary ground. Or at least so is the implication when these same impressions are presented as being active recipients of the world without a remainder that would be their *indeterminately* being determined.

"The significance of Hume's not being able to find out or determine the necessity of a connection between two events which simply present themselves sequentially and repeatedly is that it shows that the distinguishing of these events in conceptual isolation is already an assumption that they are in fact separate. In other words, it is the presentation of the matter wholly at the level of the mind's ability to distinguish and then unite things without any regard for what quite possibly is united irretrievably. To put it another way, causal explanation is the overcoming of the implicit contradiction that anything is when it is taken to be made up of parts both *necessary* and *not necessary* to it. Insofar as this interconnecting of parts reaches to the very limits of the universe, it implies that the whole is neither object nor event but both.

"By identifying rational being with phenomenal being, Kant largely overcomes the Cartesian dualism still strong in Hume. However, because he makes the noumenal – the things-in-themselves – in some sense accountable for the phenomenal and, furthermore, because he allows a new dualism to emerge as such, he must also bring back into his account a sort of causality precisely where it is not meant to be, that is, in the noumenal realm beyond reason and beyond the area that Kant himself demarcates as the only area of causal explanation. He is caught in a bind that, as much as it is logical or rational, reflects what takes in philosophy as both problem and program. This as much as to say that, while Kant sinks most of the world into the self such that the world's subjectively ordered character is revealed, he does not do the opposite of sinking the self into the world. As a consequence, he maintains the former in its traditional pristine state such that, instead of taking it as the result of a long schooling in community, in history, in pre-history, in animality, in non-sentient matter, instead of taking it as a long hard painful pregnancy and messy delivery, he comes to it with the intellectual imagination that treats the self as issuing full-blown out of God or something like God in much the way that Athena issues fully armed from the forehead of Zeus. Of course it is grossly unfair to present the matter as if Kant could or should have conceived things differently. For the longest time there was nothing behind the rational self except God or gods. With the modern-day dismissal of the latter

and the untenability of the self as a subject apart from others, however, there are good grounds once again for the sort of scepticism that Kant reacted against. With reason always divided into a for and against itself, it is forever a mixture of strategic belief and strategic doubt. Either one of these is no less the servant of the other and so, with respect to causality, it is continually vindicating itself, continually removing itself from doubt in a more or less effective way. Perhaps this is due to the fact that, to take a leaf out of the neo-pragmatists' book, we really do go on what works more than anything else. And the causal principle still shows a liveliness for extending itself all over the place and giving us interesting stories. Perhaps this too is something we want."

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

37. The Analytic/Synthetic Distinction

– There's a danger in not saying anything conclusive about these matters. Your hero, despite all his talk about having the courage to question presuppositions, doesn't set himself up as a veritable challenge to others and, as a consequence, cannot be thought interesting to them.

– Perhaps we should spell out who these others are because I think there would be some interested.

– I'm speaking about those willing to take up a position on the playing field and both challenge and be challenged by others.

– Who are willing to scrimmage a bit then. Rough it up. Make interesting moves and so on.

– Who are willing to engage each other and that's not a bad thing.

– Who are willing to hoist some of their peers in the air while roughing up others.

– Why not something that might be less crude and more consensual?

– Nothing in his discourse denies this.

– But his discourse is *denying it in the sense of trying to stay outside it.*

– So in your opinion a position must be taken up on the field to warrant any serious consideration.

– It certainly doesn't warrant any sympathy if it doesn't.

– You're right, Professor Chalmers. I can't argue there. Except to say that truthtelling should go beyond all such considerations.

I said I wanted to parade out my essays and, as it seems to me now, this doesn't go without a wish to be considered by all and sundry a great philosopher. It is the illusion that comes from working things out on one's own, from not having to confront other works and egos on a regular and hard-hitting basis. From relegating all that one doesn't *quite* understand (and this is often quite a bit) to some solipsistic sinkhole. It has been years since I read Kant and so, when I reproduce the essay on causality I wrote for Professor Shimizu, I'm aware of how much I have forgotten and how much I never read.

– Where's his thesis? Where's it laid out so everyone can understand it? You can't expect others to be interested in a discourse that doesn't want to be right on some point and, if it errs, to be straightened out.

This is where I stand along with the belief – what other can I have? – that I have said what I had to as best as I could. My plan of telling the truth to myself is always pressured to be a telling of the truth to others, an investing of myself with an authority for such a role by laying the basis of what constitutes such an authority. Or, to say it more concretely, here I am virtually proclaiming my modest university essays to be the credentials – *the only credentials* – for what I have undertaken. They trace out a long struggle to get to the bottom of a matter that, even though I have glorified it as *my* struggle, I didn't want to counterfeit or play false with. Perhaps this explains my swinging back and forth from an exalting and condemning of myself that are equally suspect, equally poses to ward off or disguise mediocrity. Always pushing at the door that I thought was the right one and never walking away from it for fear of what might lie behind it – this is, when it comes right down to it, my one and only consolation. Or if there be another, it is my awareness that I have always been riddled by doubts and uncertainties. Even now when I prepare to bring up the matter of another course and another essay, I'm not sure how squarely they suit the situation. How much they dig into my subject as opposed to being a mere incrustation of related thoughts. No doubt there is the connection to causality and to a whole space of thought that, as well as being an abyss, is an arena. One where I saw Quine contending for a certain mastery or authority and Grice and Strawson challenging his presumption and audacity.

– Does this interest you, Professor Chalmers?

– Of course.

– It's about the analytic-synthetic distinction.

– I gathered as much.

– About Quine wanting to do away with it and Grice and Strawson defending it.

– Yes, yes. Stop treating me like I was your student.

"**Summary of Grice and Strawson's 'In Defence of a Dogma'***"*

"The Grice and Strawson essay opens by stating that W. V. O. Quine, in his article entitled 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism,' advances a number of criticisms of the analytic/synthetic distinction. They also state that he rejects this distinction. The purpose of their essay is to 'show that his criticisms of the distinction do not justify his rejection of it.'

"They begin by pointing out that a distinction can be criticized for being framed or drawn up in a loose, ambiguous, or unclear way. But all of this, they contend, would not be sufficient grounds for rejecting it. Rather, it would simply imply a call for clarification.

"Again, a distinction may serve no useful purpose. However, this would not ordinarily involve claiming that the distinction did not exist. Such a state of affairs, thus understood, must fall short of Quine's radical rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction.

"The authors then point out that a distinction may be criticized for the weakness of the explanations which support or justify it. They state that Quine certainly makes a good part of his

case upon this basis. Yet, as they maintain, it is a weak one since it does not justify a fundamental rejection of the distinction or a claim that it is illusory."

– Yes, I suppose there's nothing that couldn't be accused of being illusory if one demanded it be absolutely clear.

"Again, the authors state that the problems involved in explaining a distinction are not sufficient to justify its being rejected as an illusion. Therefore Quine must prove convincing in the second part of his article. This second part briefly outlines a doctrine of knowledge and truth (i.e., his celebrated view of all knowledge and knowledge-seeking as being a thorough, comprehensive, and continuous process of observing, experimenting, and theorizing) which Quine claims is incompatible with the analytic/synthetic distinction.

"The authors note a strong, historical 'presumption in favour of the distinction's existence.' The philosophical tradition, they point out, has maintained this distinction with no small degree of confidence. Moreover, the distinction functions well and has a practical use in the present determination of contrasting statements of a certain kind.

"In other words, the authors stress the *radicality* of Quine's attack. It is not merely a superficial grievance with respect to the use of the particular terms 'analytic' and 'synthetic.' Rather, it challenges both a traditional and present understanding of the distinction which these opposing terms represent.

"The authors then hold up for consideration the possibility that Quine's attack is not as extreme as it appears. Rather than holding the position that the terms 'analytic' and 'synthetic' mark no distinction whatsoever, his meaning might very well be simply that this distinction has been misunderstood (i.e., that its *real* nature has not been recognized).

"The authors then state that the second way of understanding Quine's attack admits a way of responding to it. The point they are most concerned to make is that a distinction consistently made in practise can still be one even if it is in fact misconceived. In other words, a distinction made on the basis of differing appearances renders an account of this differing factor even though the account in question is based on some mistaken assumptions. The authors claim that, if the above way of understanding Quine's attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction is the right one, then he must do more than show 'that certain explanations of a term do not measure up to certain requirements of adequacy in philosophical clarification . . .' He must employ entirely different arguments, in other words, in order to put into serious question the traditional understanding.

"However, the authors nonetheless take time to weigh the adequacy of Quine's case as it itself is a question of adequacy in philosophical clarification. They state that the traditional presumption which favours the use of the analytic/synthetic distinction rests not only on a theoretical or philosophical basis, but also on a primary or popular understanding. This comes through with such expressions as 'means the same as' and 'does not mean the same as.' The criticism they now put forward follows by virtue of the fact that Quine allows that the analytic/synthetic distinction can be formally explained in terms of what he calls *cognitive synonymy*. However, given that he claims that 'the notion of cognitive synonymy is just as unclear as that of analyticity,' it would appear that, as the authors contend, he is equally committed to pronouncing that the former is illusory or nonsensical. The authors then hold that Quine's position runs into difficulty since it ultimately denies meaning to the ordinary

distinctions and explanations surrounding the word ‘meaning’ itself. The authors call this a philosopher’s paradox and claim that it results from declaring a notion illusory merely because it falls short of ‘some perhaps inappropriate standard of . . . clarifiability.’”

– We have to get along with a certain amount of indeterminateness in our thinking because this thinking itself is determined in ways hidden from us. But let’s not forget we always have a chance to shine a light on this.

“The authors reiterate that there is a strong presumption in favour of the analytic/synthetic distinction which rests on both philosophical and ordinary usage. They also state that this presumption ‘is not in the least shaken by the fact, if it is a fact, that the distinction . . . in question [has] not been, in some sense, adequately clarified.’ They then set their sights on trying to determine what Quine precisely means by adequate clarification.

“The authors summarize Quine’s position as follows: he speaks in his article of a ‘certain circle or family of expressions, of which analytic is one,’ whose various members can be explained in terms of one another but in no other way. Quine’s position therefore seems to be that an adequate explanation must exemplify the precision and universality of this circle of expressions while at the same reaching outside it. Since he finds that this condition does not obtain with the analytic/synthetic distinction, he holds that it must therefore be meaningless.

“The authors then take issue with this seemingly straitjacketed notion of adequate explanation. First of all, they maintain that it is patently absurd to assert it as a general principle. Secondly, they maintain that there is no compelling reason to assert it as a *special* principle, that is, one specifically meant for and applicable to the analytic/synthetic distinction. The above holds true even if one claims that the distinction is of a highly philosophical sort and so requires exceptionally well-grounded explanations. Thirdly, there are informal ways of explaining the distinction which, at the same time, are compatible with its philosophical use. The authors cite the example of how one can explain the notion of *logical impossibility*. That is, an explanation of it can be based on a primary or informal distinction between *something not understood* and *something not believed*. Something not understood correlates with the notion of logical impossibility whereas something not believed correlates with the notion of causal or natural impossibility.”

– We can’t understand a triangle with four angles, that’s pretty clear. But how about a triangle giving birth to a fourth angle?

– What kind of triangle, pray tell, would that be?

– Well, not a geometrician’s but maybe a marine biologist’s.

– But then you’re changing the normal reference.

– So it’s only a logical impossibility with a normal reference?

– I would say so.

– And so what happens if the normal reference changes? If it becomes the marine biologist's instead of the geometrician's?

– Then the logical impossibility would apply to the word that takes its place as referring to the geometrician's.

– So the logical impossibility is provisional and depends on how words are used.

– Well —

– So then it's all linguistic.

– Conceptual and *linguistic.*

– Meaning?

– That meaning is out there in some sense.

– But we don't know in what sense or where. If words can change their meanings, then the logically impossible is dependent on the causally or naturally possible such that the logically impossible could become its opposite.

– But that's only wordplay.

– So you think the three-angled triangle remains no matter what?

– I'm happy to have it so.

"The authors point out that, with respect to their example of an informal way of explaining the distinction, it does appear that one of the two conditions which Quine 'seems to require of a satisfactory explanation' is met. That is, such an explanation breaks out of the circle of interdefinable expressions such as 'self-contradictory,' 'synonymous,' 'necessary,' 'semantic rule,' and the like. The distinction between belief and understanding, although itself in need of clarification, is one which they, as they claim, is entirely reasonable and valid.*"*

– I'm happy to have this distinction between belief and understanding.

*"*There follows in the Grice and Strawson article a critique of two points made by Quine, the intent of which (that is, the intent of these points) is undoubtedly to weaken the case for the analytic/synthetic distinction. The first involves Quine's claim that the explanation of synonymy by means of definition is bogus. He makes this claim while at the same time seeming to allow that a definition with a newly created term as *definiendum* provides a unique case of transparent or irreducibly arrived at synonymy. The authors contend that Quine is inconsistent here. They point out that such a definition no less than others must refer to a prior understanding and practise vis-a-vis the notion of synonymy.

"The second point with which they take issue arises from Quine's attempt to illustrate that a statement which is obscure or problematic vis-a-vis the analytic/synthetic distinction is essentially one not suffering from any lack of clarity with respect to the individual terms but only with respect to its characterization by means of the term 'analytic.' (Quine's example is the following: 'Everything green is extended.') The authors note that it would be better to state that it is the relationship between the individual terms which is at the heart of whatever obscurity or problem exists. Presumably a clarification of this relationship would therefore entail a clarification of its analytic character.

"The last part of the Grice and Strawson article deals with what they call Quine's *positive theory*. This theory in brief is concerned with the relationship between the experience of things and statements which assert knowledge and understanding. Specifically, the authors take issue with two important points Quine makes. The first, arguing as it does for a continuity between observation statements and theoretical ones, ends up denying the very basis on which analytic statements have been traditionally distinguished from synthetic ones. That is, it denies that there are statements immune to revision in light of experience (that is, new observational developments). The second rules out the possibility of explaining the distinction in terms of synonymy based on some infallible standard of empirical verification and description. Quine's claim here is essentially that the truth or falsity of one statement is inextricably bound up with the truth or falsity of others. In short, they are part of an immense conceptual web with theory concentrated more at the centre and observation and experiment occupying the outer areas. The authors argue that both claims, while having some merit, do not undermine the analytic/synthetic distinction insofar as expressions may always be conceptually revised.

"In the first case, they argue that, while changing conceptual schemes may upset and reverse the classification of certain analytic and synthetic statements, the act of so classifying them is nonetheless both relevant and meaningful in any one particular conceptual scheme. In the second case, they argue for a simple accommodation by which the explanation of analyticity in terms of a synonymy which is grounded on empirical confirmation or disconformation embraces its essentially relative character by acknowledging its connection with 'certain assumptions about the truth-values of other statements.'"

– They seem here to be more in line with Quine than they might like to be.

"The authors conclude the above argument by stating that cases in which the analytic/synthetic distinction is problematic do not 'entail the nonexistence of statements which are clearly classifiable in one or other of these ways and of statements our hesitation over which has different sources, such as the possibility of alternative interpretation of the linguistic forms in which they are expressed.'"

– The meaning of the distinction is caught up in its practicality but from Quine's standpoint this is not the case. With his extension of the theoretical to everything under the sun, Quine can't see the usefulness of these statements whereas Grice and Strawson, being less sceptical about the ontological status of the world, take the more traditional view that the distinction has already proven itself.

"Finally, the authors conclude their article by characterizing it as a rejection of Quine's

two-part argument. Once again, the first part attacks the analytic/synthetic distinction on the basis of insurmountable problems of explanation or elucidation. The second part makes the same attack on the basis of an epistemological doctrine which stresses change and movement in the matter of truth-valuing and truth-determination.*"*

– One point he didn't mention is that Grice and Strawson think it's incumbent upon Quine to come up with his own theory of meaning. But since Quine is committed to letting experimentation rule right up to the very limits of language, it's not really possible for him. So what I think is behind their demand is really a protest of sorts to the effect that Quine can't make sense or, let's say, can't make complete *sense of his very own talk about it.*

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

38. Time for a Reckoning

Perhaps it is time for a reckoning. Almost three years have gone by since I wrote down the first line of this essay. I have already covered the major part of my life as a truthteller and all that remains is a period of ten or twelve years that needs to be elevated – yes, I have to say elevated – to the rank of crowning and concluding achievement.

But what about these years? Why are they important? What do they have to say about me – about truthtelling – that hasn't already been said?

Perhaps I can venture an answer along these lines. My being a graduate student over nearly ten years with a couple of these spent cab driving (it bothers me to bring this up now, to mention cab driving even in passing because it is stigmatized to some degree and connotes mediocre ambition and limited intellectual means and yet, on the other hand, I feel it is appropriate to what I'm about to say) was split between grooming myself for professional status and subverting this process. The allure of professionalism was very real to me and oftentimes over the course of ten years I had occasion to imagine myself as the singular and striking and, despite my forty odd years, newly minted university prof. In my heart of hearts I felt an enduring youthfulness that couldn't be matched in the one area that seemed most important to me. Just as had been my experience through all my undergraduate studies, I came across no one who, as a truthteller, outdid me in boldness, outspokenness, and even recklessness.

– And who's ever spoken about it so much?

What if telling the truth about truthtelling . . .

– It's his walking the tightrope, Andrew. If he didn't do it this way, he'd be holding onto to a discourse that wasn't pure. It's got to be risked out of fear that fear might get behind it and control it like what happens to so many respectable discourses.

. . . depended entirely upon resisting the pull of professionalism? Wouldn't this then be of utmost significance to my subject?

Of course I realize that raising this question already raises a prejudice *against* professionalism. It already raises it because it is already stealthily or surreptitiously or even straightforwardly present as the answer to this question that is precisely this project. This very personal and particular work that at the same time is trying hard to be one with my career, my path, my trajectory, my errancy, my non-career, my non-professionalism, my valuing all this – at least for myself – more than any straight-line flight to a well-known and well-defined objective.

– It's all very confusing, isn't it? Prejudice, I mean. Who has it, who doesn't? Nietzsche said it was all out in the marketplace. The educated world I think he meant. Only he wasn't very nice about it and so he showed his own prejudice. He called scholars – imagine them writing about him now – scholarly oxen.

So far the great advantage of telling the truth about myself to myself has been being able to tell the truth about prejudice such that telling the truth about truthtelling is told with the least. Had I used a purely public or conventional voice instead of a more personal or, for that matter,

literary voice that is also more than one voice, I would have been forced into serving the ideal of truth that, by virtue of its valuing clarity, coherence, and conclusiveness above comprehensiveness (not that it doesn't value the latter of course), would have prevented me from exhibiting my own prejudice in a way that encouraged it to be not only out in the open but subject to the influence and contrariness of others.

Having said this, I now find myself confronted with a second thought. Though I may be open about my prejudice to all the world and challenge it to no end, there is still nothing in the strictest sense that prevents it from being less a prejudice than whatever opposes it.

– Oh, true heart! You don't back off from telling the truth about the uncertainty *every truthteller carries around in his heart but fails to address.*

So far I have let the element of uncertainty ride high in my discourse. Everything that is most dogmatic in my thinking inclines me thus. Clearly it is the case that, by generalizing about uncertainty and therefore rendering my own discourse uncertain, I both refute it by undercutting it and affirm it by including it. But this is only what one out of a hundred thoughts allows me to do. The other ninety-nine put up a solid front as the belief in a certain consistency throughout my life that qualifies me as someone who can speak with absolute certainty about uncertainty and, with an almost god-like view of it, pass beyond the logical and performative contradictions that afflict all others.

– Oh, true heart! You don't back off from telling the truth about the certainty *every truthteller carries around in his heart but fails to address!*

Most of the time then I'm with my prejudice. But not in the sense that I feel I'm in the wrong or being arbitrary. On the contrary, it is more like living my whole life with the idea that my pre-judgements are continually being confirmed.

– Well, this is interesting. I suspect that anything that can be said about professionalism's being at odds with truthtelling must be viewed under this light of its being a prejudice like all others.

With my thoughts coming to me ninety-nine percent of the time as confirmed pre-judgement and only one percent of the time as unavoidable prejudice, I know in my heart of hearts that characterizing my thought in general as prejudice never seems quite convincing. Never seems entirely right because never entirely removed from a desire to exalt myself as openness and comprehensiveness. How am I to tell the truth about this if I don't incline the other way by telling the truth about where I am as position, as proposition, as polemic, *as case against professionalism in truthtelling*?

– Andrew, don't look so upset.

– I've good reason to look upset. I've spent thirty years being a professor and don't want to go out thinking I've been wasting my time.

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39. Case against Academia (1995)

"Everyone touts the value of a higher education and everyone more or less knows of its advantages. To speak on this side of the matter then would be as banal as recounting the beneficial effects of eating wholesome food or taking exercise. For the most part, it would be best to avoid such tedium no matter what scholarly propriety dictates in the way of showing all sides of an issue. If there is always more than one position to occupy, there is no position secure or definitive. Rather than making a pretence of presenting my position as wholly objective, I therefore would do best to let it honestly reflect my personal involvement. Moreover, the dominant position of the day, precisely by virtue of its being dominant, pays scant attention to the weak challenges to its authority which fall under the rubric of being fair and balanced. To be an effective critic of Christianity or Christendom when all the world proclaims itself Christian requires something more than a moderate tone and taking into account all opposing views. In a similar fashion, the critic of Academia must raise his voice if he is not to be drowned out by the many that sing its praises.

"When Academia speaks of its striving for excellence, it presumably means that it sets out to be more than the mere training ground for various sorts of professions. More than simply a means to accrue wealth and obtain a certain amount of power, prestige, and influence. It presumably means, particularly with respect to the liberal arts, the cultivation and enrichment of the individual. It presumably sets as its task the development of certain talents and capacities in conjunction with personal development as a whole. Even if it only looks upon itself as a kind of finishing school with respect to this task, it certainly does not consider it to be less than important. It is thus the assumption, unspoken or otherwise, that the individual is in all ways *better* for his university education: a stronger, more complete, more centred type of individual. Certainly there is no admission that he might come out weaker, poorer, or anything less than what he was prior to it. Certainly no such admission is forthcoming when the individual does well and excels. And hardly is the notion ever entertained that the highest levels of a university education might increase the likelihood of personal injury, of some deleterious effect. Pronouncements along these lines would no doubt be considered scandalous. Perhaps they would be greeted with the kind of opprobrium at one time reserved for speaking against the Church.

"Yet is it not the case that Academia loudly proclaims itself to be the sanctuary and temple of unrestricted thought? Of thought that is most informed, intelligent, rigorous, and profound? And certainly in most areas and with respect to most matters, it honourably carries out this mission. Certainly the things of the past, no matter how praiseworthy or accomplished they may be, undergo the most rigorous scrutiny. And certainly no less can be said of many things of the present. Indeed, it would be best to admit that the university even takes a good look at itself from time to time. All this must be granted and yet, as much as a few penetrating looks do not constitute a general practise of self-examination, so the university falls short. So the university does not live up to its self-proclaimed mission of promoting human excellence. For what would be required in order for it to live up to what it seems so earnestly and self-consciously to take itself to be surpasses the periodic and punctual, the always tilting at some formal display and end. In short, what would be required is that it speak the truth about itself as an ongoing discourse that is absolutely integral to it.

"What there must be for such a discourse is a consciousness that dares to proclaim itself. No longer simply carried along as a certain theme of informal talk, as a marginalised area of

moral and intellectual dissatisfaction, as sometimes vague but also sometimes painful experiences in the institutional setting, it comes to the point at which it finds the strength and courage to pronounce precisely and at length upon itself. In other words, it becomes a task and a mission.

"One would ask that Academia grow honest. One would ask that it bring to bear the same sort of scrutiny upon itself that it brings to bear upon matters which lie outside it. One would ask that it examine its most minute practises, its most subtle influences, its most hidden sins or insidious vices. One would ask it to ask itself: does it make people more or less honest? And if the answer were that it inculcated subtle forms of dishonesty; if it were, moreover, established that such elements accumulated and grew practised over the years, then Academia, by finally bringing these matters to light, would be more honest and truer to its proclaimed mandate than it has ever been.

"My long practise of comparing and contrasting Academia with the non-academic world has no doubt grown out of my strong attachment to both. At the same time it has produced in me a kind of distance or detachment from both of them, a palpable aversion to being drawn in and wholly claimed by one or the other. If it is always best to be working where one receives the most enjoyment and satisfaction, then the place for me has always been where I experienced the tension and opposition, the free play of thought, imagination, and emotion that springs out of powerfully contending claims and commitments. Fifteen years of continuously failing as a playwright did not rob me of my zest for this manner of living. Security for me has only offered itself along the path of striving to get the best out of myself. When, in the case of playwrighting, my best proved not to be good enough, I did not on that account lower my aim. I simply came to the realization that, after many long years of hard struggle with pitiful results, it was time to search out some other part of the high heavens.

"So whether it be writing an essay or digging out a foundation, I always took it upon myself to put all of myself into it. With respect to Academia, this way of proceeding largely meant finding ways and means to make the system cater to my likes, tastes, interests, and preferences rather than adjusting my natural bent to it. Throughout all my years of taking undergraduate courses, I succeeded very well, perhaps amazingly well, at this endeavour.

"Loving Academia when it worked for me, I at the same time strongly sensed its inbuilt tendency to take charge of the student. To set his agenda not only formally, openly, and voluntarily, but also dimly, surreptitiously, and even oppressively. Likewise the prevailing consciousness of this institution revealed itself to me not only as an official and more or less unquestioning (because welcome and understood) acceptance of its standards, but also as a deeper if less distinct one that amounted to being enjoined to play a difficult game of currying favour. A game that, in order to be played well, involved a certain amount of selling oneself off without ever failing to look like a pillar of integrity that would serve well in any formal setting.

"Such writers as Emerson and Nietzsche sensed this secretly subversive activity of Academia and proclaimed it inimical to human excellence. They saw that, instead of nurturing the individual with a careful eye to all aspects of personal development, it invariably centred upon the accumulation and ever-more skilful handling of established knowledge. Rather than teaching the way of appropriating the latter and going beyond it, they saw that it for the most part rendered this knowledge a de facto final authority, making it the sun around which all other thoughts revolved and stole their light.

"Ultimately Academia holds up to the student the model of the scholar and not the man or

woman of genius. Part of the problem lies in the fact that it blurs the distinction between the two or rather makes it seem as if the second were but the favourable outgrowth of the first. However, the development of highest aims and attributes is not auxiliary to the mastery of some particular subject. Rather it is the coming to be of what must surely be another form of mastery. One that comes from the outside and manages to associate itself with the other and acquire its own authority. Some new vision, theory, etc. that is strong enough to pull into line even the most intransigent of elements.

"Given all this, am I wrong to think that human excellence implies great courage? Am I wrong to think that it implies a discipline that exceeds but certainly doesn't rule out other disciplines? And am I wrong to think that Academia is essentially at odds with this highest of disciplines?

"How can great courage be fostered within its precincts when, after having diluted the wine of the world's wisdom with the water of worldly pursuits, it fails to admit to itself and to others the change of quality? How can it convincingly show itself to be steering a bold course towards truth and knowledge when it fails to take the first, the hardest, and the most exacting look at this, its mixed, adulterated, less-than-excellent character?

"To be highly favoured and, at the same time, to expose some deep flaw willingly and as a matter of conscience is courage. To do the opposite, to cover it up continually and employ clever means to divert attention from it is cowardice. Superficial self-criticism is one of these means. Criticism which only has the common rhetorical ring to it, the common way of focussing upon a problem, and the common way of really leaving everything, particularly one's good conscience about everything, exactly the way it was.

"The deep discourse is lacking. Academia has no deep discourse about itself. And yet here it is presenting itself as the very forum of all deep discourses.

"As a highly influential institution then – one that makes a final, virtually indispensable settlement upon the best and brightest minds of developing youth – the question remains whether these same minds might suffer some impairment, some retardation, some impoverishment due to the long, rigorous attention demanded not only by their studies but by the necessity, in order to insure highest success, of paying heed to the secret workings of the institution. Perhaps some crude labourer, never having been forced to ferret about in this manner or set himself to the odious task of learning to read the entrails of the institution, escapes something demeaning and ultimately disadvantageous.

"Is it possible that the institution is a consummately subtle and richly rewarding tyrant? What it gives or can give are the means to obtain what the whole world wants: power, position, privilege, possessions, and pecuniary reward. What it asks in return, apart from the legitimate demand for hard work, many proofs of ability, and so on, are a great number of seemingly small compromises and little adjustments, slight instances of not standing or falling upon one's own judgement but relying, often despite inner doubt and discomfort, upon the judgement of others. Of course, examined individually, many of these compromises might be the legitimate offspring of good sense, greater experience, and wisdom. On the other hand, the practise of so bending to authority and official opinion, especially when it is undistinguished, arbitrary, questionable, and even coercive, forms a habit of mind which, if we are to follow Aristotle, shapes or, more properly, weakens character. It is the cultivation of the practise of not taking a stand when, despite compunctions or even strong claims and moral commitments to the contrary, such a stand threatens personal interests.

"Such then is the whole of my case against Academia. I do not quarrel with the fact that it brings forth many shining examples of diligent, conscientious, intelligent, capable, and highly agreeable success-seekers. I do not begrudge it its attachment to the material nor deny its contribution to the intellectual wealth of society. I do not even think myself in a position to condemn it for a certain amount of institutional insensitivity, imperfection, and traditional stodginess mixed with fashion-conscious superficiality. What I do take issue with is its gilding this medley of the low, the mediocre, and the high with the name of excellence. What I take issue with even more is its implying that this word excellence also applies to the kind of human being shaped by this institution. Such a travesty in the face of what all the past teaches us, what all great writers, thinkers, and events speak so clearly, is the mediocrity of Academia par excellence. For what it does is make a false connection between the spirit which invests the greatest human accomplishments and the spirit which guides the normal affairs, aims, and so forth of this institution. By effectively claiming that the second is on a near or equal footing with the first, it slights the first, rendering it somewhat unreal, shadowy, and insubstantial. No longer then does it seem to stand as a viable guide or even a possibly divine calling in the actual business of living and learning. Rather it becomes aloof, distant frozen – an archaic feature of certain interesting thoughts or items in books and no more. It robs the present-day consciousness of a genuine sense of connection – of even the need for a connection – with the gods which present themselves in one's kitchen."

– Do we really need all this to tell us that the institution is imperfect? That mere human beings manage its affairs and teach in it? Alice, I frankly don't see any advantage in speaking about the university as if it should be functioning at the level of genius. It deals with a large number of people and so naturally must treat human excellence not at the level of one in a million but at the level of what works best for most people.

I'll admit that my case against Academia doesn't register where most people are most of the time but only where they are some of the time.

– Exactly. It's not the theoretical or practical he's primarily concerned with. Oh, Andrew, if only Academia said what you're saying right now! Loudly and clearly! But of course it doesn't and so naturally it makes truthtelling curtsey to the values of efficiency and payoff.

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40. Statement of Purpose (1993)

"Such a statement as requested by the philosophy departments of various universities to indicate how and why and under what circumstances I have come to make the decision which is the present aim and business of my life – such a statement must needs be, in order to give the true and proper measure of myself, an account both characterized by and taking note of a certain rapturous involvement with candour. With words that test the bounds of formality, propriety, and convention. Therefore let it be put down that I'm no average applicant for graduate studies in neither the necessarily advantageous nor disadvantageous light of being forty-two years old. Neither is it necessarily an advantage for the purpose of picking a prime candidate that he be one who has spent so many years marching to the beat of his own drum, nor is it necessarily a disadvantage that he has acquired a wealth of diverse and not particularly academic or scholarly experiences. Some of the best artistic minds have been sharpened solely on the whetstone of this world and a certain open-eyed way of living in it. Unfortunately, mine resisted this honing operation and remained a blunt instrument insofar as the creation of an artistic work was concerned.

"This admission of failure and taking a drubbing in the early rounds of my life should not be construed as anything like an admission of being a spent force or a seeker, desperate in his decline, of solace and safeguards. On the contrary, I feel myself to be immensely solid, vital, and still-actualizing or being actualized. But I do admit that, on the other hand, it is as a kind of *artiste manqué* that I approach academia in general and philosophy in particular. However, apart from the latter already being an important part of my life, what speaks to me most loudly and singularly is that my aim remains forever high and that, as I have come to believe strongly, the admirable precision and honesty of the greatest artists can be carried over and dwell in the realm where appearances are penetrated rather than painted. Where the main order of business is the conceptualization rather than the imaginative presentation of truth.

"Now I like to think that the above state of affairs holds the potential for some sort of scholarly work and investigation as well as the potential for some sort of *un*scholarly work. At least I hold with Friedrich Nietzsche that the cultivated, self-assured, even, let us say, academic self often stands in need of its own harsh critics and acute observers. I will not elaborate on this here. I will simply say that I wish to bring myself wholly into my work and combine certain proper goals and interests in the university setting with the freest, most open, and most courageous kind of expression.

"What are my specific academic interests? It is hard for me to answer such a question without first stating that my highest interest is personal and creative, without first acknowledging that I find myself still groping, still searching for the various signs of my particular way. To put down that I am attracted to Continental Philosophy and particularly to its manifestation in Postmodernism; to have it out that I have read and reread the works of Friedrich Nietzsche; to say that I treat all great literature as a text by which to grow and prosper; to mention theological, theatrical, linguistic, and even literary interests in the critical sense – what is all this but to admit a lifelong aversion to academic specialization?

"To conclude then: I have no interests of the highly specialized sort except those which grasp and excite me at a specific time. What I like to think I have instead is a new kind of force and momentum, a new kind of revitalizing power within me. But, again, I cannot say too much about this except that, if it not handled carefully, it is likely to prove an unattractive and

unwelcome guest. So I will confine myself to summing up the situation in the following way. I know that it takes tremendous strength to survive putting one's self at odds with an aroused and even slightly antagonized majority. But if one wants to be a hero and, following Nietzsche's example, turn one's serpents into dragons, then one must combat not simply what is mean or petty in the day-to-day but have the strength to will it transfigured."

– Pygmalion-like self-image? Is that what he called it? There's certainly enough evidence to show —

– How else can he undertake a hard and difficult task? It's absolutely necessary to —

– Flaunt it?

– No, but to keep it alive, keep it upright, keep it before him like a bright burning star.

– Oh, that's very moving. Almost Zarathustra-like. But while it may sound like music to your ears, it's intolerable to mine.

First premise of a rule of modesty even in our greatest pride: we always have the potential to be what we criticise and even condemn.

– Oh, there! You see? He's not pretending to be a hard-and-fast rock but only the opportunity to stand like one.

I was always one who could have been tempted into professionalism if the offer had been good enough.

– Well, he doubles back on himself. I suppose that's part of his complicating and over-complicating. Part of his tightrope act or whatever you call it. And I suppose his narcissism is part of it too. He's gambling it won't make his subject unbearable to the many who really don't care for this sort of thing.

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41. Letter of Acknowledgement and Appreciation to Three Professors at the University of Winnipeg (1993)

"Too often, I think, we are so caught up in the day-to-day that we do not take adequate time to ponder what we have just passed through. I strongly suspect this to be an error and a loss, a rushing on or rushing ahead of which age or future events often make a mockery. However, the times and our own ambitions seem to urge us onto the expressway of life. We find it sometimes difficult to see the need for holding up or possibly even jeopardizing our life projects by going on some side trip. I strongly doubt that I am as prone as many to sticking to the shortest and fastest routes of life (perhaps I am even something of an expert at taking side trips); I do know, however, that, with having recently acquired my Honours degree and locked into MA mode, a certain effort is required to stop, turn around, and, instead of giving this past year of study a merely fleeting glance, gaze more steadily over the ground thus covered.

"I took only three courses: American Literature, Modern Philosophy, and Postmodern Philosophy. All three were honours courses and provided me with abundant opportunities for stimulating thinking and serious and sometimes not-so-serious writing. In addition, I was privileged to get a taste of, in the role of teaching assistant, the inner workings of classroom instruction and student evaluation. I feel very fortunate in having made the choice of courses that I did and, moreover, having had such instructors as made allowance for my sometimes abrasive free-spiritedness.

"I look into this world and see that there is much said by many people without the wholehearted attempt to say what is true or at least what is thought to be true most deeply and hiddenly. There is an unwritten law amongst educated, cultivated, goal-oriented people to dispense with candour and honesty when it threatens to alienate and offend others. It is the policy of prudence and promotion; I cannot gainsay it insofar as it both turns and greases the wheels of society. However, without a few individuals who, I might say right now are destined either to be glorious successes or forgotten failures – without these few individuals both partially blessed and partially cursed with the kind of critical eye that never closes, educated society would quickly lose faith in its overall integrity and its aptitude for the most penetrating self-examination.

"I number myself among those both blessed and cursed in having to stand apart. It is in my ability to stand apart that I find my greatest strength. It certainly does not come in the form of extraordinary intellectual or artistic abilities. I also seem to have had a great deal of luck.

"So what I am saying is that my good luck has held steady over this past year and I count all my experiences at the University of Winnipeg very happy and beneficial ones. I know the world well enough to know how large a role chance plays in it and so how the situation could easily have turned out otherwise. Therefore I wish to express my gratitude to those people primarily responsible for making this past year of study so amenable to my particular mode of learning."

– You take his juggling to be a wonderful act more important than saying something substantial.

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42. Address to a Class of Philosophy Students at Concordia University (1994)

"There is a current trend in Academia which I was made more than aware of a few days ago. I am speaking of a trend which is very much shared by the larger world of respectable society. I think I have knocked about enough in this world, respectable as well as non-respectable, to know that, to paraphrase Hamlet, there is more between heaven and earth than in any philosophy. I say this in order to come quickly to the point which is that if such behaviour as typified and exalted by this trend means the stifling of spontaneity to the point of robbing life of much of its richness and zest; if, furthermore, it means no longer bringing to the light of day the ooze-covered wealth of one's deepest self; if, finally, it means going about as a well-rehearsed actor or, even worse, as an inoffensive puppy dog, then I stand before you as one who declares that he must take a different tack.

"As a teacher's assistant I come before you knowing full well that I may at some point transgress the letter of the law. I may very well conduct myself in a way unbefitting the ceremony of the court and, in so doing, perhaps embitter some courtier who has the ear of the king. How much this might happen against my will or how much I might bring it on myself are questions I will leave open for now. I will only say that they reflect upon my status here as a self-styled anomaly or interloper. Even if it chances that I don't survive in Academia despite the support of a few gracious people, I shall nonetheless be content and find my home elsewhere. For the world is large whereas the university has always struck me as being a bit like an overcrowded garden where the weeds of narrow-mindedness not only have a chance to spring up but be shown off like so many prize flowers. And all of this of course while displacing and choking the life out of rare but potentially highest growths. Those very spirits who, in order to survive, must sink their roots deep down below the quickly-exhausted humus of shallow talk and superficial judgements. Fortunately this garden, when one gets right down to it, is so immense and scattered, so much the product of highest things that the weeds and the weed-growers have but their day and no more. At least there rests my faith and so ending this highly improbable address, I thank you."

– He wants to impress all and sundry by showing how far he was willing to stick his neck out.

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43. My Earliest Experience of Concordia University (1994)

"What I bring to the fore here is essentially my experience as a graduate student at Concordia University. It is the experience of one who, having come from another province, based his expectations upon the information offered by the philosophy department of this university and the communication he had with it. In other words, I came to it nearly blind and without the more trustworthy information only to be had by first-hand experience. Only after I had gained this experience and talked with a few students did the scales fall from my eyes.

"Talking to these other students, I quickly came to realize that the Department was for the most part not held in high esteem. On the contrary, it seemed that many bright students had a poor opinion of both its general performance and the performance of certain of its professors. Now while I readily admit that there were dissenting voices with respect to these same professors and the Department as a whole, the overall impression I received was nonetheless negative. At the same time, students tended to view the situation as something simply to be accepted. Their specifically philosophical education was taken to be a trial to be endured, a test to be passed, and a means to an end. Nothing of the inspirational, of the sheer joy in the enrichment and deepening of the mind entered the picture. Or if it did, it was muted, a bare fragment of the whole. It struck me as a case of young people growing old before their time. Their loss of enthusiasm, their implicit or open distrust of that which fails to live up to what it purports to be induced cynicism and the strictly practical outlook.

"Suffice it to say that here is not the place for me to explain why I take it upon myself to address this matter. A full explanation would almost amount to an autobiography. Rather I shall limit myself to saying that I am one constitutionally incapable of being indifferent to whatever passes itself off as the high or the highest and yet betrays itself in many ways as being low and mean. Thus began my problem with one professor who, while taking his thought to be of the highest order, nonetheless grew peevish, impatient, and even insulting when I challenged him to defend it. Thus also began my problem with another professor who, seeming to be the initiator of deep and mysterious rites, proved to be a man with a paucity of energy, motivation, and conviction. Thus also began my problem with yet another professor, the Chair of the Department, who treated me very cordially at first but then later demoted me to the level of a misbehaving child. Moreover, nothing ever came from these professors (save perhaps the second) which indicated they were in the slightest way alive to my concerns and criticisms. What could account for this state of affairs other than the fear that any reciprocity of thought would have undermined their authority or been an intolerable affront to their dignity?

"It is necessary for me at this point to give at least a thumbnail sketch of my approach to Academia. It is simply the one of wanting to have the experience of it on my own terms. Principally this means doing as well as I can in my studies without forfeiting my practised and high-level honesty. Without letting it slip even a few degrees to accommodate the not-so-high-level honesty of institutions and respectable society. This not-so-high-level honesty is not so much a matter of what is said but what is *not* said. Briefly put, it is the barely detectable because almost universal practise of not being true and pure in one's heart, of not having it in the same place as one's head. To all this I hold myself hostile and think that whatever is wrong or excessive about my approach finds its excuse in the wrong that it opposes.

"To conclude, it is not my objective nor could it hardly be my successful mission to demoralize the Department or any member of it. Rather I look upon this confrontation more as a

forcing open of locked doors and windows. For Academia locks doors and windows and draws curtains despite its conscious display of having the multifarious world as its object. It too can grow inward and incestuous, no longer in a favourable position to subject itself to greatest scrutiny. At least so it seems to me and so I strive to make an experiment of myself. An experiment within and alongside the philosophy department in the name of greatest self-scrutiny."

– Perhaps there were a few rotten apples in his department. But that doesn't mean he should tar them all. I remember a couple of professors in my own graduate studies who were not at all to my liking. But you had a choice how to deal with them. You could either run up against them and cause yourself a lot of grief or else choose a topic to write about that would allow you to express your opinions without contradicting theirs.

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44. But Then Someone Asked Me: "Why are You the Only One to Make Such Loud Complaint?" (1994)

"But then someone asked me: 'Why are you the only one to make such loud complaint?' I answered him: 'Are students, particularly graduate students who desire the highest marks in order to go on to even higher studies – are they in the best position to challenge their professors? Are they not rather in the worst position?' I have encountered disgruntled and dissatisfied students who have criticized and in no small way the quality of professorial instruction. But they did so amongst themselves and for the most part saw not the slightest possibility of improving the situation. They therefore chose to bite their tongues when it came to complaining about those who have the power to make life difficult for them. Holding their noses as well as their tongues, they also learned to put up with the slow spiritual death of themselves. That is, the subtle incremental rooting out and slow wasting away of whatever was in them which at one time spoke of enthusiasm, fire, a desire to learn for its own sake. Sensing that the university is in some sense the graveyard of this ideal as much as its patron and promoter, they learned to put all considerations of a non-practical nature aside. In the meantime the university carries on and thinks well of itself for having carried out its mandate. When some intellectual maverick then comes along and points out its defects, he is scorned and considered to be a mere troublemaker. The university in effect says to him: 'We already have our reformers and our reforms. We don't need such would-be destroyers as yourself.' And so in this way as in others it blithely ignores what it best should know, namely, that there is an intimate bond between creation and destruction. If the second strikes fear at the heart of the university, it is because it only has worldly concerns as its preoccupation."

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45. But Here Are Three Satisfied Ones (1994)

"Yes, here are three satisfied ones. And perhaps there are a number of others. But if one were suddenly presented with a barrel of apples and found the top ones to be all good and wholesome, would that be sufficient to think that the whole barrel was good?

"I should say rather that a smart buyer would want to look a bit deeper into the matter. And if he had the least reason to be suspicious, he would check out a good many apples before spending his money.

"So it is in Academia. One shouldn't be so quick to think that, because there are a number of open avowals of satisfaction for a particular professor, there are therefore no hidden undercurrents of dissatisfaction. There are a number of students who, if a professor is kindly and helpful while leading them to the well of his wisdom, will think no further than this show of kindliness and helpfulness. Even if the water of his well is a bit brackish and does not sit well upon the palate; and, moreover, even if the professor makes it quite clear that they should only drink from *his* well, they will imbibe what he offers for fear of quite possibly bringing out another side of his character.

"On the other hand, there are students who, having already tasted more wholesome waters, cannot but go grudgingly to this well. Generally speaking, they keep their sour faces and bitter words out of reach of the eye and ear of the professor. Or else they will learn the art of mockery by which, even while feeling themselves forced to participate in such a demeaning ritual, they may still be able to maintain some dignity and freedom of expression. If they are lucky, they will survive without too much damage. But if they are not, they will think that highest principles, however much they are honoured, are as far away from their immediate concerns as the reveries of childhood."

– Alice, I think you're expecting too much of me. I've been teaching philosophy for thirty years and, although I may not have lived up to everyone's expectations, I've never abused my authority and never expected anyone to drink from the well of my wisdom – to use his words – if they found the waters to be brackish.

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46. Letter to the Chair of the Department (1994)

"Before you have received this letter, you no doubt will have been informed of an incident that occurred in Professor Joós's class on Tuesday, the 25th of October. It consisted of a student approaching Professor Joós in a seemingly threatening way. Being the student in question, I wish nothing more than to tell you the truth of the matter.

"I will begin with the events leading up to this incident. When I first enrolled in Professor Joós's graduate-level courses (i.e., PHIL. 672G Metaphysics and PHIL. 668W Hermeneutics), we got along quite well. I took him to be a very learned man and I think he saw in me a serious and conscientious student. I attended his classes faithfully for a month and, during this time, I became increasingly aware of how traditional and entrenched his views are. At first this didn't bother me because, on the whole, he seemed to be open and receptive. And even my initial reaction to his books, so different from what it was to be later, was positive. Such being the case, you may well ask: what went wrong? How could such a promising start turn out to be so disastrous?

"Perhaps I am one who likes to pick a quarrel. I don't believe that I do so, however, indiscriminately. It was only by degrees that I came to the realization that Professor Joós, both in his books and in his classroom lectures, displays an uncanny ability to evade difficult questions. Principally those that challenge the metaphysical and epistemological assumptions upon which his own theorizing is based. It is this theorizing which underlies one of his books (i.e., the text for PHIL. 668W Hermeneutics) and which dominates in another (i.e., the text for PHIL. 672G Metaphysics). It is this theorizing that, moreover, he promotes as a sort of renewed and revitalized first philosophy to which all other philosophical thinking must incline.

"His interpretation of Heidegger is a case in point. He refuses to acknowledge what many or most scholars do, namely, that Heidegger sets out to surpass Aristotelian metaphysics. Instead he argues that Heidegger is fundamentally in accord with it. Now of course it is certainly not my position that he should neither have this interpretation nor teach it in class. What I object to is his not being willing to suffer any serious questioning of it.

"By the middle of October I had become quite unhappy with, in particular, the metaphysics course. It was in this one that, along with the numerous anecdotes Professor Joós tells in class, there was an ongoing reiteration of Aristotelian metaphysics. It was these sessions that, with respect to the latter, resembled a sort of catechism and glorified rote-learning that increasingly distressed me. I finally went to Professor Joós one afternoon and, since I didn't have any clear idea how to address him on the pedagogical issue, I ended up raising the one of his interpretation of Heidegger. Things got out of hand when, instead of responding directly to questions that I had written down and submitted to him in advance, he began reading and translating out loud passages from *Sein und Zeit*. The upshot was that I lost patience and accused him of being evasive. He in turn accused me of coming to him in bad faith. When I criticized one of his books for being repetitious, he told me it was beyond my understanding. I then accused him of dogmatism. This hostile exchange, although it came to an end before we parted, was sufficient to make our leave-taking less than cordial.

"Shortly after this, I wrote a letter telling him as politely as I could that, while wishing to continue with his courses (I perhaps should remind you that to abandon them at this point would have been a major setback to my studies), I no longer wished to attend his classes. I also told him that, as final assignments for these courses, I was willing to submit essays that would critique his

two books, *Intentionality: Source of Intelligibility* and *Poetic Truth and Transvaluation in Nietzsche's Zarathustra*. Of course this last proposal was unusual and perhaps even provocative. Nevertheless I felt it necessary to back up my claim that his work was repetitious and dogmatic.

"Professor Clarke, Director of Graduate Studies, can attest to Professor Joós's not responding to me directly. Instead he informed the graduate director that I must continue to attend his classes. Indeed, he went on to say – and this struck me as both ridiculous and insulting – that, if I missed these classes, I wouldn't be able to pass his courses. I wrote a second letter asking him to reconsider. It too failed to prompt the sort of response that, even if it weren't the granting of my request, would have shown me a modicum of respect.

"All of the above leads to the incident that occurred on the 25th of October. On that day I approached Professor Joós before class to try to persuade him once again that it wouldn't benefit either one of us to have me there. However, this move didn't fare any better than the others. No, in fact, all it did was engender one more gesture of magisterial contempt and dismissal. Trying not so much to contain my anger as to find an effective way to give vent to it, I then turned towards his students who were all seated and patiently waiting for the class to start. I began informing them about the matter and showing in no uncertain terms how the conflict between us was even then spilling over into the classroom. Some of the students were amused but others were angry. I eventually sat down and Professor Joós took over.

"Although I was still upset, I was sufficiently in control of myself to forego any further theatrics and constrain myself to asking Professor Joós a few questions. These came up as he carried on with the class and bore directly on the subject matter. Nonetheless they proved to be sufficiently provocative that he lost his patience and came out with the comment: *'You can teach intelligent students but you can't teach them to be intelligent.'* At this point I rose to my feet and started towards him. My intention was to produce a certificate for scholarly excellence that I had just received and happened to have with me. (Perhaps you are aware of my receiving the Maria-Teresa Hausmann Award at the recent fall ceremony.) However, one or two of the students, fearing the worst, ran out of the class and informed the security. A great commotion then ensued. The classroom was cleared out and Professor Joós and I were asked to sit down and write reports.

"I must of course be held responsible for my actions. I long ago realized there was something antagonistic in my attitude towards Academia. I want to be entirely my own man and this can easily be at odds with institutional practises. So far I have been lucky and had professors who gave me a certain latitude. Perhaps this luck is now at an end.

"With respect to my disrupting the class and inconveniencing others, I realize I made a mistake. I overstepped my rights and infringed upon those of others. I held to an ideal of allowing full play for informed dissent. Unfortunately, I didn't properly take into consideration other principles. It is only to this charge I plead guilty and reject any other that may be laid against me."

– A veritable menace! How old was the professor?

– Seventy. But he stood his ground. He wasn't afraid. It was only the students who lost their heads.

– Your hero lost his head, Alice.

– Only his temper. He was insulted and he had good reason to stand up and show his indignation.

– I've never witnessed anything like that in my thirty years of teaching.

– Professor Joós said he'd never had in forty.

– What was the upshot of all this?

– Well, a lot of things but when it comes right down to it, stubbornness on both sides.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

47. Second Letter to the Chair of the Department (1994)

"Thank you for your letter of October 27th in which you inform me of my status at Concordia University. I must confess that I was fully prepared to suffer the worst. I realize now that, given that a terrible tragedy took place at this university some two years ago, the confrontation between Professor Joós and me must have shaken up a few people. It is therefore quite right that steps be taken to prevent its recurrence."

– What terrible tragedy?

"Having said the above, I must now, even though I take the risk of being misunderstood, challenge any suggestion that I should be considered a person of poor judgement. (You write: 'Your capacity for self-control and good judgement in respecting the dignity and safety of others will continue under probation by this Department.') I acted the way I did because I was caught in an intolerable situation. If Professor Joós had treated me with respect, the chances of this incident occurring would have been nil."

– What is all this? What's its purpose? I don't see it as a case against Academia. He happened to have a confrontation with a professor who was as difficult and pig-headed as he was. Does that say anything about the university as a whole? I don't think so. You need structured arguments that deal with issues on the general level. Otherwise you're only indulging in the arbitrary and anecdotal.

I had problems with three and perhaps four professors in a philosophy department that operated poorly by certain standards and yet professionally by others. I bear witness then not only to this state of affairs as an institutional possibility but to its being a permanent and universal one. That is, to an ongoing state of affairs where the high-level maintenance of truthtelling as *ideal* and the high-level maintenance of it as *industry* never quite coincide.

– Is it mere self-indulgence to set himself up as the ideal by which he measured the philosophy department? Is it the same thing as being perfect in all ways? Of course not. It's probably even antithetical to super-good behaviour. But to show this, to not pretend there's nothing troubling or troublesome about it is —

– Authentic? Admirable? The pure voice of truthtelling itself? Cancelling out all other faults and failings?

– For me it is if not for you.

– You're too close to him to be anything but his time-honoured vaunting of his pure knightly heroic image.

– That he could've kept this image so long shows there is something pure, knightly, and heroic about it.

– And what if he were to falter? People do. For many reasons. How do you know?

– You're implying he's not a true hero. That he's only playing at being one.

– Fighting with professors isn't such a big deal, is it? You can't compare it to laying down your life for your country.

– Who lays down their life for their country? I don't believe in it. The most that can be said is somebody takes a chance with their life. And that's precisely what he's done.

– His life's not over. What if he abandons ship? Gets soft in his old age?

– I hope he perishes first.

– You're all youth and vigour, Alice. You don't know what it is to get old.

– It doesn't matter. It's what's happened up to now that counts. Is he supposed to make some sort of promise? Prepare the future so it won't betray the past? I think he will if he has to.

However much I look back on my past and wonder at my boldness and, no less, however much it seems pale and paltry in comparison with what others have done, I can't help but view the future as a test or trial no longer so easy to imagine.

– Oh, look upon me and tell me you don't know what it is.

Of course I would like to believe I can still exalt it.

– Oh, look upon me and tell me that's no longer true.

So that all I have thought and said will not end up condemning it or, worse, be condemned by it.

– Oh, look upon me and exalt it as far as death itself. Otherwise it's not a life but a joke. A mere replay of Krapp's Last Tape. *Oh, you remember that, don't you? Let's hear no more of this. It's unbearable. It's old man's talk. It's to make the end – the miserable pathetic old man's end – the whole truth of a life. Andrew, is it such a small thing to take on three professors? Risk alienating a fourth? Write three essays directly challenging Professor Joós's books?*

– I don't feel up to this.

– You don't feel up to it. And then to go toe-to-toe with two other professors who marked his essays and gave him grades inferior to what he normally got?

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

48. Response to the Report on My Essay (1995)

"Dear Professor Clarke,

"This Report poses a problem for me. To put it as succinctly as possible, I find it confusing not to mention badly written. It therefore does not in the least make the assignment question clearer to me.

"I realize that my challenge to the philosophy department of Concordia University is unusual. However, there is the suggestion in the Report that I am somehow acting in bad faith. Let it be said here and now that my increasing resistance and opposition to Professor Joós's books – the ones that were used in the two courses I took with him – antedate the severe rupture and emotional turbulence which led to my carrying on with these two courses alone. I pride myself on my integrity, my independence of spirit, and my unwillingness to be cowed by whatever forces align themselves against me. Only cogent arguments have the power to make me rethink a matter and, as it were, amend the error of my ways.

"I regret having inconvenienced, nay, having created a great deal of extra work for the person who took the time and trouble to assess my essay. It would indeed be a burden on my conscience were I to believe that I had acted in bad faith. Of course I won't deny the element of anger and resentment in all this but neither will I – nor have I reason to – admit it as the predominant factor. On the contrary, I believe that I have legitimate grounds for being critical of and antagonistic towards academic formalism and complacency. At least, I take it upon myself to be such a critic and antagonist, knowing full well there is a price to be paid.

"I am unhappy with the assessment. I am unhappy with the grade I received. I put a tremendous amount of work into this essay. I do not believe that I have been dealt with fairly.

"The following is a detailed response to the evaluator's report that, taking it up point-by-point, reproduces it in its entirety. It is therefore quite long (some fifteen pages). It is also complex and, for various reasons, even confused and confusing. I therefore doubt that anyone will take the time to read it. Nevertheless I submit it to you as both testimony and evidence that the evaluator's report is poorly written, personally insulting, and downright obfuscating. I further claim that it suffers from greater deficiencies than it accuses me of.

"One final thing: in order to deal with the problems I have encountered in responding to this unusually long report, I take the liberty of putting three question marks in brackets (***???***) where the comments most perplex me."

****

date: 9 Dec. 1994
to: Murray Clarke, Graduate Program Director, Philosophy
Report on "A Hermeneutical Questioning of a Question" by Michael Hunter, a paper in PHIL. 668W "Hermeneutics" for Dr. Erno Joos

1. The paper is dictated by the assigned question, "Is it true that the purpose of both Nietzsche and Heidegger was – besides their teachings – to fight conceptualization?", and its specification, "Try to justify this judgment – or argue against it – with the help of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* (and Heidegger's writings if you are familiar with Heidegger's philosophy)."

At my request, the instructor specified the course materials as being "the background of Hermeneutics – then some Ricoeur and Gadamer – my own book on Nietzsche contains a theory of Hermeneutics. This theory was further enlarged. Several sections of *Being and Time* were explained to support my theory. For interpretation Nietzsche's Zarathustra has been used and assigned."

These directions are what 100% of the evaluation for the course is being based upon. There is no oral examination upon this paper being given, as there would have been for 50% if the student had made it possible for himself to continue attending classes until the end of the course.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

I would like to know precisely what is the theory of hermeneutics in the book called *Poetic Truth and Transvaluation in Nietzsche's Zarathustra*. Is it at any point readily outlined and identified? Does it exist as a theory independent of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*?

If it does not exist as a theory independent of this work or an interpretation of it, how are we to understand it? How is it to be recommended as a theory? How is it to be differentiated from simply a particular way of approaching a particular text?

2. This paper is not concerned with giving an exposition of hermeneutics at all, but with exercising it upon a particular text. I take it that this is permissible by the assignment.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

My assignment is to examine and determine whether it is possible to make sense of the assignment question. Insofar as it is a self-imposed assignment and challenges the authority of the assigner, it holds to the view that the search for the truth is the preeminent task.

3. The paper barely even mentions Nietzsche or Zarathustra. I take it that this is not permissible, and is a deficiency, according to directions.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

According to directions, yes, but not according to what I just said. In order to understand or at least try to understand the assignment question which, to render it in its most basic form, is, *Is it true that the purpose of both Nietzsche and Heidegger was to fight conceptualization?*, it is necessary to look into Professor Joós's work and determine, if possible, what 'fighting conceptualization' means.

4. The paper mentions nothing by Ricoeur, mentions and uses as its leitmotif a text by Gadamer as well as using him in the body, and uses three publications by Heidegger throughout. The text upon which the paper is focussed is pp. 129-141 of the Joos volume. This constitutes the section "Metaphysics on Trial," which is only the second of the eight sections making up only the third of the three chapters in the book.

While nothing in the directions dictates what scope of materials must be used, the scope of the Joos materials is a deficiency, for three reasons. Because the student missed most of the course, I would expect more of a demonstration of his having familiarized himself with the whole by himself, instead of possibly having just looked into the table of contents to see where the paper's topic seemed to be located, and then reading only that which, without his familiarity with the

whole course as it transpired, there is no reason not to expect. As well, the absence of Nietzsche from the paper is directly due to this scope of study, since the treatment of Nietzsche is much more prominent in the first two chapters, while not completely absent from the last. Finally, many of the deficiencies in the student's study, as follow, would have been remedied by expanding his awareness of the text which he criticizes beyond only the twelve pages to which he has confined himself in some aping of the artificial naievity [*sic*] in some hermeneutical authors.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

It is obvious that the evaluator does not take me seriously when I set out in my essay to examine the assignment question.

The three reasons that the evaluator gives in order to charge me with an improper use of the Joós material might very well be expressed as one (i.e., that I did not analyse the whole of it but only one small part). However, I will do my best to identify the points he raises.

1) There is the implication that it is more important to show a familiarity with the whole of Professor Joós's book (and because he has written another book closely associated with the one on Nietzsche's Zarathustra and, like the latter, uses it as a course text, perhaps a familiarity with the second as well) than to deal with the question in the most conscientious way. I focussed upon the particular section that I did for a very good reason. My essay states this reason (which I will deal with shortly).

2) There is the suggestion that I did not read the whole book and that I focussed on only one small part for perverse and mean-spirited reasons.

3) There is the follow-up remark that I do not deal with the greater part of Professor Joós's book devoted to an interpretation of Nietzsche's Zarathustra.

4) I am accused of aping the artificial naivety of some hermeneutical authors. In response to this comment (as well as the others), let me begin by stating that I read and studied all of Professor Joós's book on Nietzsche's Zarathustra as well as his other book called *Intentionality: Source of Intelligibility*. It was in fact by doing so that I discovered that there was only one section of the Nietzsche book that spoke directly to the matter of conceptualization. It seemed to me that, if there was a place this notion should become clear and shed light on the assignment question, it was in this section.

I'm not quite sure what the evaluator means when he claims that I am aping some other thinkers. If it means that I'm too much under the influence of someone like Gadamer, then all I can say is I would rather be under his influence than someone who resorts to facile and dogmatic statements.

I examined this unflattering feature of Professor Joós's books in the first essay I wrote critiquing his other book, *Intentionality: Source of Intelligibility*. This essay, due to its harshness, was not accepted by the Graduate Program Director. Nevertheless it has the merit of outlining the major flaws of his intentionality book. Among other things, I list eleven instances where Professor Joós insists – and does little more than insist – that subject-object dualism is an irreducible reality.

5. (p.1) The leitmotif for the study is to look for the motivating question behind the assignment question. This is an excellent route into the study, following the quote from Gadamer which takes up the whole page. There is no conclusion, in any clear, succinct, and summary form, at any

point, however, of what the student's conclusion is as to what the motivating questions for the assignment question are. This is a deficiency.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

Much might be written on what the motivating questions are behind an assignment question like Professor Joós's. Also on the larger issue of a professor's using his own published work in the classes he teaches. However, for the purposes of the assignment, I thought it best to limit myself to finding out whether the assignment question was in fact intelligible.

6. (p. 2) The initial focus upon the terms "fight conceptualization" is via the common dictionary definitions of the terms. The student concludes that this is silly, as it is; and that is good. It is a deficiency, however, that the student shortly hereafter concludes, after having considered the target text's own sense, that it has the same silliness as the dictionary sense, viz. that it says we must be violent towards what is indispensable to human knowing. Even if the sense were the same, the dialectic towards reaching it would disabuse it of such silliness.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

I will ignore the first part of this commentary since the word 'silly' or 'silliness' does not occur in my essay. Instead I will make bold as to say that, in the face of such bad analysis as the above, it is not an impertinence to ask the following questions. What if Professor Joós's book is in fact confused? What if the assignment question is even more confused? And what if the evaluator's report, seeming to be so concerned with defending this book and this question, is even more confused than they are?

7. (p. 3) The student questions whether translating (new) Heidegger into the language of (old) metaphysics is right. It is a deficiency that he does not acknowledge the two steps prior to doing that which the Joos text demands.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

These two "steps" are the following: 1) "to acquire a correct understanding of metaphysics" and 2) "to formulate Heidegger's criticism in his own language . . ." It is then Professor Joós's third step "to translate that language into the language of traditional metaphysics" (129).

Given the above, I take it that Professor Joós assumes that one can carry out the second step without its being immediately countermanded and rendered null and void by the third. Or else he assumes that the second step is already the third in some hidden or potential sense and that, furthermore, Heidegger himself would acknowledge as much. For if it were the case that Heidegger refused to be appropriated by or reintegrated into the tradition, then Professor Joós would be guilty of overlooking an objection of no small importance.

8. (p. 3) The student complains that the expressions are unclarified in the statement that Heidegger attacked classical 'metaphysics' because of its 'conceptualizing'. It is a deficiency that the student does not realize that this had been done in the rest of the book.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

It is a deficiency that the evaluator does not give a better idea of how and where this has been

done. It is a deficiency that the task of clarifying this book or showing that it is in fact a lucid work is appealed to in principle more than in practise.

9. (p. 4) The student is correct that the complaint that some "learned to speak before having lived and experienced" cannot mean that anyone could speak without having any experience(s). It is not clear, then, why he thinks the author means that, either, instead of that it is fully possible for anyone to speak of *some* things when he has not had experience of *those* things.(***???***)

HUNTER'S COMMENT

It is not clear why the evaluator uses the word *some* when he makes the above comments. After all, neither does Professor Joós tell us that *some* people learned to speak before having lived and experienced nor that these people learned to speak before having lived and experienced *some* things but rather that "we learned to speak before we lived and experienced the things around us" (130).

10. (p. 4) Reaching the conclusion above (#6) is due to misinterpreting the relevance of power to conceptualization, in the author's claims within the target pages. This could have been remedied by familiarity with the author's much more extensive treatment of power even within the rest of this chapter, not to mention the book as a whole.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

First of all, the treatment of power by Professor Joós may be extensive but not as an analysis of conceptualization. Secondly, the evaluator is at fault by continuing to assume that I didn't read the whole of his book. As far as I can determine, he has based this assumption on my having decided to limit the analysis to a twelve-page section. Furthermore, he does so despite the fact that I give reasons for so limiting it not only at the beginning of my essay but also at the end.

At the beginning I point out that "in Part III of the book in a section called 'Metaphysics on Trial,' there are a number of scattered references to the specific matter in question (i.e., conceptualization). It must be said that their being so scattered makes the task of interpretation more difficult. Perhaps the best approach is to move slowly through the section, thereby carefully examining these references in their specific textual sites." At the end of the essay I conclude: "Nor can this study move into other parts of the book. Or at least it cannot do so without taking on the enormous task of closely analysing a book that shows little reason to warrant such an effort. It is enough to note that every single page and paragraph raises more questions than it answers. In light of all this, it must be the conclusion of this essay that both the assignment question and the related text are confused and that the former, upon scrutiny, proves unintelligible."

11. (pp. 4-5) The same may be said for his comments on the term 'experience'. Concluding that it must mean pre-predicative experience, since it is opposed to conceptualization, may be ill-founded since the thrust of this section is to heal that separation.(***???***) As well, besides importing a Pontian term, that term makes the student's conclusion here a tautology. Of course *pre-predicative* experience must *pre*-cede *speaking*!

HUNTER'S COMMENT

The evaluator should explain what he means by healing the separation between experience and conceptualization. For it is only by doing so that the term *experience*, so loosely employed by Professor Joós, would gain some measure of precision.

12. (p. 5) To student's claim that the statement that Socrates begins with dialectic and works towards a concept ignores the fact that dialectic must operate with a linguistically ordered world, see my #9. (***???***)

HUNTER'S COMMENT

To evaluator's attempt to clear away problems in Professor Joós's book by dubious means, see my response to No. 9.

Professor Joós wants to distinguish between conceptualization and experience without explaining their relation to language. As a result, it becomes impossible to see how he determines there can be experience without conceptualization or conceptualization without experience.

13. (p. 7) Student's presumption that "surely" "presumably" faith "can not be other" than conceptual, or it would be undirected emotion, would be chastened by the Nietzschean section of the book, wherein that set-off and that prescription are buffered. (***???***) Neither presumptuousness nor every presumption becomes a virtue, just because Gadamer says presumptions are indispensable.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

The first of the above comments might be chastened for being obscure. The second for replacing the rather neutral term that Gadamer uses, namely, *presuppositions*, with one not nearly so neutral.

14. (p. 7) While student's complaint at dismissiveness towards phenomenologists would have been appreciable if he had not had the occasion also to study the *Intentionality* book, which makes the complaint here merely artificial and cranky, he does not give any suggestion of why the author should be taxed as holding the view that every re-interpretation, here of Aquinas, is a mis-interpretation. The author has only said that this one is. (***???***)

HUNTER'S COMMENT

I contend that Professor Joós's treatment of modern-day phenomenologists is rather dismissive. He states that philosophers from Bretano on do not recognize that intentionality is an intermediate entity between subject and object. ("The phenomenologists view intentionality according to their own bias which goes back to Franz Bretano . . ." [132].) He also states that this entity is a causal relation extending from the object to the subject. ("They overlook its true nature as something intermediate between extra-mental reality and the mind" [132].) He claims that this intermediate entity as causal relation is what one finds in Aquinas and is what has been overlooked by later theorists.

15. (p. 8) Student's complaint that author here says knowledge is explained by causality would have to look further than here for support. (***???***)

HUNTER'S COMMENT

Are the following passages in Professor Joós's book to be dismissed as evidence in support of the view that he has a causal-based theory of knowledge?

> What is of interest to us here is a special form of intentionality, an intentionality that I call, following Thomas Aquinas, intentionality of a thing (*intentio rei*). It is a kind of immaterial reality which affects the intellect through the senses, and which is, therefore, an experience in the true sense of *Erleben*. Its product is an *intentio intellecta*, the intention which supplies the full understanding of a thing (132).
>
> In the metaphysical tradition we attribute to meanings an existence which is independent from physical reality; in this way meaning is turned into a suprasensible reality. Now we may wonder how the two realities, the physical and the suprasensible are united. The answer is *causality* (Joós's italics). Entities, which are grasped separately, are also united into a whole or a world by causality. Without causality neither the parts, nor the whole can make any sense (133).

16. (p. 8) The snarky, smarmy aside that surely the author's text is among the meritorious in his eyes is an attitude we've had enough of in the profession, and can do without more of it. This is even if it is true; but as it stands, nothing in the text points to that.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

I do not agree with the evaluator's harsh indictment of my remark. While being ironic and somewhat mischievous, it is not malicious. When I make the comment, "The text under present consideration [i.e., Professor Joós's] no doubt is representative of the latter," namely, the contrary of the "mere intellectual exercise" that he condemns, it is with the thought that the "'harden[ing of] experience into concepts [so that] God, for example, becomes just another entity..." (132) is a sin that Professor Joós, a religious man, would not accuse himself of.

17. (p. 9) In this formulation of "our topic", viz. representation without experience, there is no textual argument for the supposition that this means taking over notions without their having been examined by thought and experience, nor that, in turn, this means conformism. Thought is not the vehicle; and other ways than by conformity are available.(***???***)

HUNTER'S COMMENT

The best I can do, given my difficulties in understanding the above comment, is to reproduce one of the passages in Professor Joós's book that bears upon conceptualization as "a kind of naming which leaps over experience" (130).

> . . . [E]ntities can be turned into concepts, into abstract, lifeless notions whenever the attitude to reality undergoes a change, when our view of the world wheels around and we represent the world before experiencing it?" (133).

Now the evaluator seems to be claiming that thought is not necessary to what Professor Joós is describing in the above passage. If so, he should explain how an "attitude to reality [that] undergoes a change" and a "view of the world [that] wheels around and [represents it] before experiencing it" is separate from thought.

18. (p. 9) It is difficult to see, and no help is given to help see, how it is true that stating "intentionality is a means to make sense" is to lift the notion from the medieval setting and make it modern without reinterpretation.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

It is difficult to see, and no help is given to help see, how Comment No. 18 relates to what I say about Professor Joós's passing look at intentionality. Of course he treats the subject at great length in his other book but this matters little since his main idea rests the same.

Professor Joós states that "if we take the case of intentionality in the middle ages – an example par excellence of the problem we wish to illustrate – then we must say that intentionality is a means to make sense of extra-mental reality" (133). First of all, I note that Professor Joós treats this "example par excellence" more as a solution to the problem than a problem itself. Secondly, that his high regard for "intentionality in the middle ages" leads him to treat it as the standard by which to examine modern-day theory. Thirdly, that he does so with little or no argument.

19. (p. 10) The complaint that it is conceptual freezing to say meaning arises from relating the sensible and suprasensible by causality, and that the modern challenge to causality should have been stated, could have been remedied by student's familiarity with the rest of the book.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

Causality is a matter that Professor Joós only raises as a solution to basic epistemological problems. As the following passage from my essay indicates, I see it as a problem that he should have addressed.

> Now we must pause and wonder why the notion of causality is not seized upon [by Professor Joós] as a classic example of conceptual freezing. After all, for a very long stretch of history, running from the Ancients to such towering figures as Hume and Kant, the idea of causal necessity as a universal law extending from the invisible to visible world went virtually unchallenged.

20. (p. 11) Thus, it is not now "the first time" to consider opposition between conceptual freezing and foundational concepts, as student complains and that more should have been said on it here. (***???***)

HUNTER'S COMMENT

First of all, it is unclear why the evaluator speaks of an opposition between conceptual freezing and foundational concepts since neither I nor Professor Joós does. In fact, the opposite is true to the extent that I suggest that there might be an affinity between them. (Once again, I refer to the example of causality.) Secondly, the evaluator is himself guilty of saying too little

when, without specifying, he claims that the matter of causality has been raised earlier by Professor Joós.

21. (p. 11) The question of how the identity of nature and meaning can be so strongly opposed here when they are identified in traditional metaphysics, [sic] [evaluator's *sic*] while still rehabilitating the latter, would be a good question since it is not handled elsewhere in the book, except for the assumption that definition, which is not set in opposition to entity, is the same as nature. (***???***)

HUNTER'S COMMENT

All I can say here is that Professor Joós distinguishes Heidegger from traditional metaphysics by claiming that Heidegger has a different approach to entities as entities. Professor Joós writes: "The consequence of this new approach is that we will not ask, as is done in traditional metaphysics – What is a thing? – but rather – What does it mean?" (134). Clearly the focus is on entities as entities and not as entities that emerge from Being and whose meaning is caught up in their being recognized and received as entities.

22. (p. 12) This one reliance on a study by Deeley [*sic*], for interpreting Heidegger at this point requires the observation that, for most other papers, this study's removal from the context of any critical discussion among other presumably diligent and able students would be a deficiency. As I understand it, however, this naievity [*sic*] is what the instructor prefers from students, himself relying repeatedly only on Stambough in the book. So no criticism of the paper can be made for this.

HUNTER'S COMMENT:

No comment.

23. (p. 13) I have always thought the distinction here, that meaning is temporally but not historically referenced, is specious; but it seems to accord with the tradition of these texts.

HUNTER' COMMENT

With respect to meaning being extra-historical, there is the following passage from John Deely's book, *The Tradition via Heidegger.*

> Beings-within-the-world generally are projected upon the world – that is, a whole of significance, to whose reference-relations concern, as Being-in-the-world, has been tied up in advance. When beings-within-the-world are discovered along with the Being of Dasein – that is, when they have come to be comprehended – we say that they have meaning [*Sinn*]. According to that analysis, meaning is that wherein the comprehensibility of something maintains itself – even that of something which does not come into view explicitly and thematically (103).

24. (p. 13-14) That meaning was said earlier to be suprasensible, was in the context of "traditional metaphysical systems"; and that now it is to be sensible is not born out by the text.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

Professor Joós states at one point: "In the metaphysical tradition we attribute to *meanings* [my italics] an existence which is independent from physical reality" (133). At another point, while discussing Heidegger whom he claims can be translated into traditional metaphysics (and so presumably into an account that includes the notion of causality as force or power in nature), he states: "Indeed, causality holds the entities together and provides for the unity of their *meanings*" [my italics] (136). Are there one or two notions of meaning here? Are they connected? If so, surely not by causality since the latter would then be caught up in explaining what needs to be explained.

25. (p 14) Student's claim that author's claim that Being is always the being of an entity is contrary to Heidegger's claim that Being is not an entity, while stating that it is in accord, is not correct. The being-of an entity is not the same as being-an entity; classically, these would be property and substance, respectively. Restate it how you wish; but see them different.

HUNTER'S COMMENT: Professor Joós claims that "Being in Heidegger is always the Being of an entity and the Being of an entity is its meaning..." (136). Heidegger claims that "'Being' cannot indeed be conceived as an entity;. . . nor can it acquire such a character as to have the term 'entity' applied to it."

26. (p. 15) True, that to identify meaning with any particular entity is not to follow Heidegger; but not true, that this is to continue the tradition.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

The evaluator seems to be saying that Professor Joós follows neither Heidegger nor the tradition. I would say, on the contrary, that he not only follows the tradition but identifies Heidegger with it.

27. (p. 17) It is correct to recognize that the author identifies meaning with concept on p. 138, although only by apposition rather than argument. Argument from either is lacking.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

That Professor Joós identifies meaning with the concept ("[Traditional metaphysics] speak[s] of immaterial reality . . . as causes of both being and knowledge of being, ie. the concept (or *meaning*)" [my italics, 138]) in addition to causality ("Now we may wonder how the two realities, the physical and the suprasensible are united....Without causality neither the parts, nor the whole can make any *sense*" [my italics, 133]) gives an idea of how he runs a two-tracked discourse on meaning and, what is more, a repeated crossing of these tracks without issue.

28. (p. 18) Correctly identifying nothingness as relative nothingness rather than absolute nothing does nothing to impale the author's argument, which does not depend upon the absence of being.

HUNTER'S COMMENT:

Professor Joós does not recognize the essentially equivocal nature of Being in Heidegger. As a consequence, he does not recognize the always-*beyond*-metaphysical nature of Being which is

also its always-*towards*-metaphysical nature. Nothingness in Being is therefore as integral to beings as it is to Being itself. When Professor Joós identifies Being with nothingness, he ignores the extra-logicality of Being and so makes it seem as if Heidegger ignores logic. ("It may sound paradoxical, but meaning emerges out of Nothingness, because Being itself is Nothingness" [138].)

29. (p. 19) It is correct to recognize that "entities disappear in total indifference" by the author is not consistent with that entities are "indifferent but do not disappear" by Heidegger.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

The evaluator is good enough to note that I pick up on a misreading of Heidegger. (Professor Joós: ". . . Heidegger teaches in his essay – What is Metaphysics? – that meanings arise after all entities disappear (*versinken*) in total indifference (*Gleichgultigkeit*)..." (139). Heidegger: "All things and we ourselves sink into indifference. This, however, not in the sense of mere *disappearance* [my italics]."

30. (p. 20) Also, that the constituting relations of dasein and the constituted relations of meaning are one.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

Without realizing it, the evaluator makes a major concession here. It is essentially the admission that these constituting relations must extend beyond all oppositions such as the sensible/suprasensible one. It is therefore not in keeping with Professor Joós's project, namely, the one of, first, insisting upon subject-object dualism as an irreducible reality and, second, "translat[ing Heidegger's] language into the language of traditional metaphysics" (129).

31. (p. 21) The passage used to show that author suggests that mortality is a datum of knowledge does not do so; nor is it pointed out by student why it is supposed to suggest this. (***???***) So, the . .

32. (p. 22) . . . later statement where author says differently is not inconsistent with anything else said.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

Professor Joós makes a distinction between knowing that we are mortals and understanding what it means to be mortal. He asks in his book:"We all know that we are mortals, but do we understand what it means to be mortal?" (140). It seems to me that he is opposing an intellectual or merely conceptual grasp of human mortality to a more lived, felt, or personally aware one.

33. (p. 23) Regarding making foreconception a way back to lived experience, there is no reason suggested by student why his claim that locating conception in dialectic makes it sensible.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

Professor Joós situates foreconception in dialectic when he asks:"Why not run the risk of calling the initial statement of dialectic a foreconception (*Vorgriff*) which leads to the understanding of the meaning of a thing?" (140). In short, he employs it as a metaphysical notion

– something that can be taken up in discussion and turned into a concept – whereas Heidegger is trying to articulate the coming-to-be or "presencing" of all beings.

34. (p. 23) Student's request for suggestions as to how the concept is later rekindled by return to experience, is answered throughout the whole book, outside of this twelve-page application.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

After suggesting that foreconception "leads to the understanding of the meaning of a thing," Professor Joós adds that this meaning then "turn[s] into a concept . . . severed from the initial experience" (140-41). This way of expressing the matter, in addition to Professor Joós's notion of an initial experience that, according to his basic stance, would keep the subject-object relation intact as an irreducible reality, runs counter to the Heideggerian notion that meaning is always-already implicated in a self and world not separated but constituting each other.

35. (p. 23) The first use of 'generalization' in apposition to 'conceptualization' by no means suggests that N. and H. were only concerned with over-generalization. This is a cranky imposition upon author.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

Let us compare the assignment question with the last line of the twelve-page section I examine and, once again, is called "Metaphysics on Trial." The assignment question reads: "Is it true that the purpose of both Nietzsche and Heidegger was – besides their teachings – to fight conceptualization?" The last line of this section reads: "Those who are too much involved in the fight against conceptualization tend to forget that without *generalization* [my italics], ie. conceptualization, there is no understanding" (141). Does it not seem that Professor Joós takes Nietzsche and Heidegger to be "too much involved in the fight against conceptualization" and, as a consequence, forgetful "that, without generalization, ie. conceptualization, there is no understanding"?

36. (p. 23) That these dozen are the only pages directly relating to the question is false.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

Although the evaluator continues to insist on this, he never cites a single passage from the rest of Professor Joós's book to back up his claim.

37. (p. 24) This is a good summary of the student's claims, including errors.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

I shall take the liberty of reproducing this good summary with errors.

> The investigation of the section called "Metaphysics on Trial" reaches its conclusion here. Our task took the form of examining very closely the only part of the book which directly relates to the question, "Is it true that the purpose of both Nietzsche and Heidegger was – besides their teachings – to fight conceptualization?" The primary concern was to arrive at a full and proper

> understanding of the term *conceptualization*. At one point it was identified with conceptual freezing (i.e., concepts which do not remain open-ended). However, this particular line of thought was not pursued. For the most part, conceptualization remained as something ambiguously opposed to experience. At the same time the term *experience* itself was never clarified. Hence the problem of understanding grew rather than lessened. Also many other lines of thought opened up as fast as they petered out. This only succeeded in bringing further areas of confusion into the inquiry. Since the hermeneutical goal is one of understanding in a particularly conscientious and penetrating way, no value should be assigned to answering a question by reinterpreting it for that purpose. Nor can this study move into other parts of the book. Or at least it cannot do so without taking on the enormous task of analysing a book that shows little reason to warrant such an effort. It is enough to note that every single page and paragraph raises more questions than it answers. In light of all this, it must be the conclusion of this essay that both the assignment question and the related text are confused and that the former, upon scrutiny, proves unintelligible.

38. (p. 24) I hope that it is not to fall into student's crankiness to identify the text without which the author's alleged misinterpretations of Heidegger's text could not have been changed with student's own, as I claim he did himself. (***???***)

HUNTER'S COMMENT
I have no idea what this means.

39. Conclusion. This paper is rife with mistakes. Nonetheless the student satisfactorily handles the application of hermeneutic method within the narrow scope he allowed himself. Several observations were insightful. Several critical argumentations [*sic*] would have been excellent but for seizing upon a focus of complaint which was not there. Use of Heidegger's texts was good.

HUNTER'S COMMENT
How could a paper "satisfactorily handle . . . the application of hermeneutic method," be almost excellent in some of its argumentation, produce several insightful observations, make good use of Heidegger's texts, and yet be "rife with mistakes"?

40. Recommendation. 1) This paper is a pass. It is not a less than well-done piece, as would be a C. Certainly it is not an A. Since graduate grades have no letter "shades", it must then be a B.

HUNTER'S COMMENT
This much at least is, if not right, clear.

41. Recommendation. 2) What got in student's way of an A paper was so manifestly his animosity towards the author and his work. This led student, again on the face of the paper, to make erroneous judgments because of going out of his way to look for deficiencies, and to create them when not found. That is to say, the student's attitude has impeded his learning in this way.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

I will not deny animosity towards Professor Joós. I will not even deny animosity towards the evaluator. But what I will deny is that I had to go out of my way to find deficiencies in Professor Joós's book. Let it be read by a dozen scholars in hermeneutics, phenomenology, and Heideggerian scholarship. What would be the result? Would they praise it? Perhaps. But if they did, it would be more out of politeness than respect.

Whatever clarity and argumentative force Professor Joós's book has depends on the repetition of certain key ideas. Ideas such as the subject-object split and the need to establish an intermediate relation. All in all, these ideas, common enough, are pretentiously decked out and put forward as some sort of epistemological breakthrough.

I also take umbrage at the suggestion that I would have learned more had I stayed in Professor Joós's class. Only one thing would have resulted there for me – severe depression.

The evaluator, I am sure, is doing the honourable thing of defending a colleague. I therefore cannot say he is entirely wrong. On the other hand, it no doubt prevents him from admitting that not only is my treatment of Heidegger good but a challenge to Professor Joós.

41. (continued) In addition, I understand that the student has operated outside of official learning context, not only in this course, nor even only in another course with the same instructor, but even in the third graduate course for which he was registered. There is no reason to think that his lack of exposure to any context for learning in those other two cases would have had any less detrimental effect upon his learning than it had in this.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

Let me tell you, Mister Evaluator, that though I may be troublesome at times, I have never acted fraudulently. Let the same be said of all members of the Department.

41. (continued) In view of that I recommend that, if student ever again finds it impossible for him to benefit from the opportunity for the mentoring of his learning by instructor and colleagues, which he in particular badly needs, then student be immediately deregistered from that course, instead of the entire department being obliged to bend over backwards to service his peculiar needs.

HUNTER'S COMMENT

It is good to know that there are people who know or think they know what you need better than you yourself. Mister Evaluator, I have all the mentors I need when I pick up the work of a truly great mind. Academics are inclined to forget what people like Descartes, Nietzsche, Spinosa, Peirce, Thoreau, and others went through and its relation to the persecution and ostracization they suffered at the hands of the educated class. The very ones who laud them to no end when they're no longer around to make nuisances of themselves.

41. (continued) The same applies to any efforts of his toward arranging singular tutorials. As it stands now, he has completed fully half of his graduate coursework [*sic*] without ever receiving such mentoring, correction, and direction. As it is, he may as well have stayed at home, and continued reading as he had done before.

HUNTER'S COMMENT
No comment.

42. Comment. The arrangements for this case have been a very heavy imposition, involving upwards of ten hours of work on his paper and my commentary, quite apart from the time that was required for reading the author's course text.

HUNTER'S COMMENT
Not only is it an oddity that the evaluator spent so much time on a B paper, but that he took so long getting around to reading Professor Joós's masterpiece.

43. Comment (continued) This involvement is, of course, at the expense of my own students. This is not right; . . .

HUNTER'S COMMENT
Perhaps it's not right to be an evaluator and at the same time a lawyer.

43. Comment (continued) . . . and this serves as a personal reason for recommending against repeating this sort of arrangement for him, in addition to the academic reasons set out above. We have no good reason to assign a premium to incompatibility and bad manners.

HUNTER'S COMMENT
You speak as one who has administrative responsibilities. Along with your bad writing, this concern gives you away. It is almost laughable to think that the Chair of the Department – someone who has shaken my hand and congratulated me for winning an award – would then take up the role of anonymous and objective evaluator and, wearing this ill-fitting and ill-beseeming mask, go about the task of not only criticizing my work but scolding me as if I were an errant schoolboy.

– I give up! I must've been out of my head! Gadamer, Professor Joós, intentionality, fighting — how many professors?

– Three.

– All at the same time? And then writing these monstrous counter-reports to get — God only knows I'm glad I was never faced with anything like this!

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

49. Report on Professor Shamus's Course (1994)[40]

"First Class, September 19, 1994

"A small but crowded classroom. Professor Shamus comes in and sits down. He is casually dressed but with a rather imposing look. He starts to explain why the primary text, Merleau Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, isn't available in the bookstore. I have difficulty following his explanation. He then tells us that, given the heavy workload, he would prefer to have only those students willing to roll up their sleeves. Anyone who is not prepared to do so should think about clearing out.

"He gives us a couple of handouts. One of them is an unidentified excerpt from a philosophy text. The other is an untitled poem beginning with the line, "Think flesh." He gives us ten minutes to read and think about these texts.

"A discussion follows after the ten-minute break. He focuses on one student who is obviously trying hard to understand the unidentified Merleau-Ponty text. Professor Shamus seems particularly concerned with the student's choice of words. They seem inept to him and he badgers her about this. The student doggedly goes from one explanation to another. An amazing amount of time is taken up by this.

"Despite the difficulty of the Merleau-Ponty text, Professor Shamus at no time makes any attempt to identify it. He seems to think that we should be able to grasp it without any preliminaries.

"Then he gives us a reading assignment for the next class. It is an excerpt from the fourth chapter of Merleau-Ponty's posthumous work, *The Visible and the Invisible*. This text is even more difficult than the first. After class I go to Professor Shamus's office. I tell him that I am perplexed by the way he is proceeding. Instead of showing any surprise or concern, he tells me: 'Give it time. There's no closure.'

"**Second Class, September 26, 1994**

"Professor Shamus asks us if we have any questions about *The Visible and the Invisible* text. No one is able to do more than raise a few feeble questions. Showing impatience, he then asks, 'How can we have a class if no one comes to it prepared to ask questions?' At this point I ask him why he decided to give us a difficult text without the benefit of any introduction or

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40 If there is any one factor that militates against truthtelling, it must be doing harm to others. At the same time, no other factor, apart from doing good, is so implicated in it. It is an immense issue too tangled and slippery and even dangerous to be faced or sorted out. Cioran, in his *Précis de décomposition*, blames every sort of doctrine for fanaticism and bloodshed. I agree with this insofar as there is much in history to justify it. (But holding this view could also be considered a doctrine.) At the same time, I do not find myself metaphysically or epistemologically scandalized by it. For the whole that is characterized as meaningless by Cioran is for me both infinite and infinitesimal – the infinite *in the infinitesimal*. Partaking of both, we have equal reason to be full of conceit and wide hopes as we do contempt and despair.

When it comes to practical affairs, our fishbowl world is enough of an ocean for anyone to swim in. The morality of our social being virtually pushes every other consideration aside when it comes to wanting to be *recognized* as a social being. Something of the sort is operating in me now when I choose not to report all facts as I know them but change one so as to prevent possible harm. Of course I like to think that I'm doing this out of a sense of fair play.

commentary. He quickly answers, 'Because it's good.'

"He then begins a discussion about the large oak table that is in our room. A number of times he speaks about the importance of respecting this table. One respects it because of the quality of workmanship that went into it, because of its durability, and because of its long service in the classroom. At some point he asks people to get up and lift the table. All of this of course induces as much mirth as mystification. The affair with the table lasts about forty minutes.

"He then gives us a writing assignment. We are all to tell him what we have learned thus far. By now I'm getting the feeling I'm caught in some scene from *Alice in Wonderland*. This feeling becomes even more pronounced when I look around me and see all the serious faces.

"I speak once again to Professor Shamus after class. When I mention the difficulties I'm encountering and my inability to fathom what he is up to, he only keeps repeating, 'Because it's good!' When I ask him why he isn't lecturing on Merleau-Ponty, he replies that he can only do so if students come to class prepared to ask questions.

"**Third Class, October 3, 1994**

"Professor Shamus asks me to read what I have written in response to his assignment of the previous week. It is essentially the suggestion that each and every student come to class prepared to ask questions. A brief discussion then follows. At some point he decides to have everyone read his or her assignment. Since I have been thinking for some time now I'm the only one having doubts about the class, I'm surprised when a student criticizes the 'Think flesh' poem (written, as I find out later, by Professor Shamus). Two other students complain about this or that. Then one student reads his assignment at breakneck speed. It is full of quotations from, as I find out later, Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*. What this student reads is utterly incomprehensible. Professor Shamus praises it warmly.

"Then he places before us a monstrous candle. While lighting it, he goes into a long story about his father who sold candles. It is never clear to me why the candle is being presented.

"He then gives us another reading assignment. It is the section of the *Phenomenology of Perception* called "The Body as Expression, and Speech."

"**Fourth Class, October 17, 1994**

"The large beeswax candle makes a second appearance. At some point it is lit and passed around. People are invited to smell the candle. Then a cassette player is turned on and the whole class, with lights turned off and the lit candle being passed around, listens to some pop song sung by the Irish singer, Sinead O'Shamus. Professor Shamus gives no indication that the name of this singer has anything to do with his choice of music or the proceedings in general.

"Then there are some more readings from the previous assignment. People discuss how the course is progressing and what they are learning. Neither one of the Merleau-Ponty texts is mentioned or brought up for discussion.

"I once again go to Professor Shamus's office. I tell him that I think his teaching is a sham. Without so much as batting an eye, he takes the pipe out of his mouth only long enough to ask me what is to be done. I tell him that I no longer wish to attend his classes but simply complete the course with a written assignment. He quickly nods and gives his consent.

“**Summary Statement, December 30, 1994**

“I do not believe that Professor Shamus taught this course in a way that even remotely resembles the description of it in the *Philosophy Course Guide*. I therefore believe that, for this reason and others, I was justified in arranging not to attend his classes.”

– Alice, would you get me a glass of water, please?

– It was like something out of Alice in Wonderland.

– Can you vouch for the authenticity of this report?

– Beyond a few literary flourishes, he put down exactly what happened.

– Oh, Ireland, you beckon to me now more than ever!

Return to “The Thematic Sections”

50. Letter to Professor Shamus (January 10, 1995)

"Dear Professor Shamus,

"I want to thank you for your kind words about my essay. Given my criticism of your course, I find them all the more remarkable.

"As is usually the case in such instances, I feel a bit guilty. You see, I was fully prepared to suffer what I have already suffered at the hands of a couple of other professors who, as you probably know, I ran afoul of. In my opinion, they have used indirect as well as direct means to show their disapproval. I challenged their authority and no doubt they believed so much in it and so little in mine that they felt justified in doing so.

"Furthermore, I think that, with respect to the assignment you marked and made some appreciative comments on, I put myself in a vulnerable position. All the more then am I appreciative of your not exhibiting any resentment. Writing the essay as I did, that is, as a series of aphorisms, was certainly not the safest way to go about it. In short, it was less the business of exhibiting my knowledge of the subject than exploring my reaction to the author's thought. The latter is of course a much more personal approach than is normally encouraged.

"So a new perspective has been added. A bit of sorrow too in contemplating how it might have been under different circumstances."

What am I to make of the fact that, a couple of years later, a blind referee made some smarmy comments about this essay and, unkindest cut of all, claimed that it had no literary merit? Should I think that he was upset by my attempt to get it published in a scholarly journal, even one that was relatively modest and put out by graduate students? That he couldn't simply criticize it on a philosophical level? That he felt compelled to attack it where he thought the heart of its presumption lay?

Is my war against professors or, more properly, the all too professional a bit of paranoia? Should I be on guard against the Rousseauian type of persecution complex? I have no proper answer to these questions apart from turning the matter over and over and exposing every doubt that registers in my psyche as subjective truth and every certitude that registers there (whether it be a certitude for anyone else or not) as an objective one.

Surely a sign of literary merit is to keep on track. To bring unity to diversity and vice-versa. Did the blind referee who evaluated my essay say anything that specifically demonstrated a lack of this?

Like many professors, he no doubt was in a hurry and so, resting on the authority that was vested in him, he scanted this and other matters. I suppose that nothing more than a heightened sense of moral obligation would have led him to do otherwise.

A heightened sense of moral obligation! Something like I obviously believe I have. But directed towards telling the truth and not necessarily going much further.

In one way the Merleau-Ponty essay was this attempt. Perhaps its alleged lack of literary merit was simply its being too obviously and obtrusively so.

– Perhaps art tells the truth of the whole simply by telling the truth of the part. In which case trying to tell the truth of the whole artfully and as the whole (that is, mainly as a philosophical attempt) would smack of the immodesty and presumption that art manages to

avoid.

In philosophy everybody is seeking their answer to this or that and nobody wants to be closed off or closed in by the conflicting answer of another.

– Let's not get sidetracked. I want to hear more about his exploits at Concordia.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

51. The One Sweet All-Embracing Encounter

I wasn't exploitative. That's the most that can be said. I longed for the one sweet all-embracing encounter. In the meantime I was, "though in my forty-fifth year, horny as all hell / for every good-looking young thing / that came into my range of vision / but impotent as all hell / to remedy the situation. / I was horny but hardheaded, / that's the way with me. / I was horny but holding back / wanting (what?) great hospitality. / (To be the hero, that always seemed right to me. / To win my love with honour, grace, and style, / that too seemed – oh, but please don't say: / "IMPOSSIBILITY!)"

– I am this impossibility made possible for you. Oh, let me run my fingers into your brain. Let me curve my body into yours. Let me make you think you have no life apart from me.

I have been waiting a good long time for this.

– I will burn you as if I were a goddess. I will be so seductive and searching in finding out all the secret parts of your pleasure that you won't be able to get enough of what will ultimately kill you.

– What strange words! Alice, are you all right?

– I will exalt you to the heavens and at the same time tantalize you, conquer you, destroy you.

– Are you in a trance? Are you auditioning for a part? Heavens, are you reading his mind and now reading it back to him?

– I won't let you go. As helpless as a baby, as a little child you may struggle against me. But you know deep down that nothing is more delicious than to have me in control. Oh, what will it avail you then, Mr. Philosopher, to think yourself independent, free-spirited, and heroic? Once I start to bite, scratch, squeeze, tease, and tear you. your intellectual lights will go out and all you'll think of is how much I give by making you raw, naked, defenceless – subject to my every whim and caprice.

– You're willing to waste your time trying to warm up his old bones. As far as I can judge, it's because you're only an erotic fantasy. The true coeds he lusted after – it seems pretty clear to me – weren't interested in him.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

52. My Montreal Experience (1995)

"How shall I recount thee?
How shall I say the thing that matters?
How shall I be fair to thee,
O fairest of cities, and yet relieve my heart,
speaking of life's rough handling?
(Which of course you didn't begin
and certainly did not end
but I only thought you might).

I remain faithful to some
painful and ambiguous sense of honour.
I hardly know whether this hairshirt suits me.
It seems to contradict so badly wanting to be
one of fortune's favourites. Yet –
there was a time I thought I might
win her love by taking this stonier path.
I dreamt that she might surprise me
on the way and offer herself –
amorously, passionately, admiringly.
And now, it seems, I have but this path
underfoot (sorry fool that I've made of myself)
and no fair greeting, no fairest of greetings
to exalt me.
I have travelled this path so long
that I take it less and less to be
a worthy companion. Yet I know no other."

– After you've stopped crying, I'll get down on my old knees and, like Lear, ask pardon of you. I'm just a might-have-been actor turned professor who's never played a heroic part in his life.

"You have seen
Sunshine and rain at once: her smiles and tears
Were like a better way: those happy smiles,
That played on her ripe lip, seem'd not to know
What guests were in her eyes; which parted thence,
As pearls from diamonds dropp'd. In brief,
Sorrow would be a rarity most beloved,
If all could so become it."

Perhaps it is time to get back on track. I have tried to bring in a more thorough testimony of my bias as a truthteller. Also I might add – and with the idea of not letting a mote of it out of

my sight[41] – of my grandeur as one. After all, a certain self-inflation goes along with what I'm doing and even becomes it as much as the opposite tendency.

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41 But the mote I'm trying to see is also in my eye where it can't help but be a blind spot and, even as such, focus of my attention. It is really what remains *out of focus* (out of sight) such that, with all the care and attention I devote to it, it is where I end up thinking a good deal of myself for thinking *less* of myself. For thinking what is common enough (as both generally admired trait and secret form of self-aggrandizement) even when thinking what is not so common.

53. Some Mad Thoughts about Philosophy (1995)

*"*Generally speaking, one wants to think well of philosophy. However, due to the lack or seeming lack of definitive results, unhappiness and dissatisfaction with it are quite often the order of the day. A good part of our philosophical selves, it seems, would like to find some final resting place for and from deepest problems. Some intellectually hallowed ground for the purpose of burying them once and for all (and then presumably erecting in their place eternal monuments). Less sardonically speaking, perhaps it is that we wish to see imperishable fruit grow from the Tree of Philosophy since it tends to promise or proclaim as much. Perhaps the desire to see such fruit explains the existence of and propensity to the modern sciences. That they abandon deepest problems and seek to pose and solve only ones of their own making, that they ignore all unanswerable questions in favour of ones for which answers are already waiting, is no doubt the necessary compromising and redirected satisfaction of the original impulse which, after centuries of long hard 'empty-handed' struggle, is now very much self-involved, a questioning of its very being or right to be.

"Yet philosophy's questioning of itself, its rigorous soul-searching and self-examination, its often tiresome polemics regarding its own proper role, especially in relation to the other disciplines, is – and here is no doubt both something of the ironic and something of the most straightforward and fitting – the philosophical spirit itself speaking. It is the spirit which forever wants to understand deeply and comprehensively, which will not be satisfied with whatever simply asserts itself appealingly, with that which, in promising certain advantages and fruitful prospects, can buy off to a certain extent the almost pathologically (that is, almost religiously) impassioned and inquiring mind. In short, it is the spirit that won't allow philosophy to rest, to make peace with the most vexing, intractable, and seemingly hopeless of problems.

"Of course the above characterization of philosophy is one which infers numerous inquiring minds interacting with their times as well as their positive and negative reactions to the legacy of earlier ones. Taken in this light, it must be one with these minds while in some sense going beyond them, being forever the movement of radical inquiry, of an unceasing reappearance of what indubitably turns out to be the supremely subversive question and the highly provocative answer. Individually speaking, it often yearns for and places itself at the level of the sure-footed sciences, the disciplines which conveniently adjust their bases for the sake of their development and preservation. While philosophy confounds the one when it confounds the other, it is also the model of the above comportment insofar as it views itself not as a completely finished but a finishable affair. Insofar as it is not an enterprise which lacks practitioners and active defenders of its presuppositions and principles but, quite the contrary, holds it far-flung fields and vast domains successfully and finds, in so doing, the necessary expedients. But philosophy on the whole and as a movement is quite as much the other thing, that is, the scorn and scourge of the territorially-minded, of the singular expansion and hegemonic drive, of those who put up boundaries. It only endures as – and ultimately recognizes itself in – the wholly free, wholly open, and, if need be, wholly destructive adventure. Disciplined and yet untamed, it finds its glory not so much in the arriving but the striving, in the skirting around and peering into – ultimately in defying – the abysses of doubt, uncertainty, and despair which threaten precipitately. What is sedate in it and finds equilibrium is forever confounded. It is, in some respects, a *mad* adventure.

"The proposal I wish to make is that philosophy must push beyond its present malaise by

taking it wholly and willingly upon itself. It must find the bearing up under it and overcoming of it virtually indistinguishable. To escape from such a burden must be so total an undertaking, so unsparing in effort and commitment, so singular in focus, that it places upon philosophy a burden which ultimately cannot be escaped. When, in setting down its burden on occasion, it raises its eyes to the lofty ascent before it with its sheer precipices and craggy heights, when it anguishes deeply over its forbidding allure, its most remote, inaccessible regions, and when it ponders chillingly how many before (great-souled ones) tried in vain, mistaking one or other of its cloud-capped peaks for the highest of summits, the heaven of a hard-earned, all-seeing human brilliance, there are moments philosophy may falter or grow faint of heart but also moments to spur it on to new attempts and to the only true and proper measure of itself.

"Without the feeling of inspiration, of ever-renewed inspiration, a group, a society, a way of life, an individual, an institution, a course of study and learning grows moribund and otiose. Few things appear so inevitable (we may well have reached a point of having too much history) and so singularly sad and oppressive. Confronted with what we know about the mortality of things in general (that is, things formerly taken to be eternal – God, soul, heaven, truth, knowledge, goodness, etc. – and in this way redemptive of specifically human mortality), it is not easy to escape the conclusion that, rather than knowing not enough about such things, we already know too much. What we seem to know only too well is that even the most highly exalted values, ideals, and traditions have their certain life span, their declining course as much as their rising one. Although this may not be the last word on the subject (and, if silence does not follow, it certainly cannot be), it is the only word which we, in our present situation, can utter honestly and directly.

"Yet we live, and in living humanly, must forever be the living contradiction of this dismal and dreary train of thought. We must perforce be its opposite. In philosophy itself the consciousness of this living contradiction, the deepening of this consciousness, is the particular life of radical inquiry as it now presents itself, signalling perhaps its mortality but also its striving and thriving to the uttermost, beyond the always threatening temptation to play itself out meekly, without lucidity, without a struggle, without a resurgence of desperate vitality, without a bang but a whimper.

"My proposal is that we should entertain the notion of the eventual insupportability of philosophy or, as Horatio tells Hamlet in the graveyard scene, the matter of considering things too curiously. Yet, as with Hamlet, such a consideration asks of philosophy further consideration and, insofar as, by following this course, it remains true to itself to the end (that is to say, to the point when powerful strange events should overtake, in unpredictable ways, all such considerations), it remains great and good for us. We need not despise it, in other words, for equivocating or selling out to the largely unphilosophical world.

"Of course, in making this proposal, a certain way of valuing and judging presents itself. We present the way we think philosophy must go and the way in which it should conduct itself upon the basis of what we see as our own 'sure' direction and what is and will always be – as we should like to think – our conduct. Our speaking at all upon the matter is a vesting of ourselves with a certain kind of authority which can never adequately explain itself, which relies merely upon the fact of having something to say at all upon this matter. If some come along speaking or arguing to the contrary and much better than we can manage, then, while we ourselves may bare our teeth to them and continue in our folly, others certainly will not.

"We really speak then of a certain strain of thinking prompted by, and itself prompting, a

growing presentiment, a certain anxiety of the age, itself aging. More than ever, we have difficulty acknowledging anything human or humanly related as that which can still shine upon the soul like an eternal sun and make, by contrast, every crossing shadow and dark place within it insignificant. In point of fact, we see how much our knowledge and understanding, like great heliotropes, have ever searched out this sun and, as much as they have grown high and free-standing but have failed to pierce the shifting racks of sombre, high-flying clouds, so we begin to agonize over the grey bars imprisoning our puny striving and allowing us but longing looks at the dance which, with all our hearts, we should like to (still should like to) join. The dance of our pretty bright-faced hopes on the evening green, exuberantly oblivious to heaven's closing eye.

"Our poetic way of viewing philosophy, of doing philosophy, is the only answer to the mounting oppression which now bears upon us and yet which we may not abandon without abandoning our philosophical selves. What others call philosophy looks more to us like distraction, or business, or livelihood, or reputation. In other words, passing affairs which neither chasten with ice-cold counsel nor move us with a movement at one time considered sacred, marvellous – the witnessing of the divine presence itself. It is the poetic which can deal best with the paradoxical, is the paradoxical, the philosophical enterprise, the voice of reason itself. At least such is the case when the latter grows in the imagination to titanic proportions and, as well as seeming to resound throughout all being, ennobles mankind in its own eyes and impassions it towards seeing itself, settling itself down on an equal footing with the formerly frightening and mysterious. Science no doubt strongly – and weakly – continues this tradition. Strongly insofar as it maintains an aspect, an aura, an illusion of ever-enlarging itself to a complete comprehension. Weakly insofar as it proliferates in the form of a loosely related collection of more or less separate advances and random avenues of development. It is the sense then of a mere semblance of order, of cohesion, of a rational whole developing which sends us back to the source of systematic thinking, to what unquestionably strives to be a total viewing, a total comprehension.

"Yet now we are in the position of admiring this adventurous spirit, this often unaccountable and often 'unacceptable' abundance of confidence and 'scornful wickedness' less for any single achievement than for daring to sail, always to sail upon open seas. Here is youth and vitality, in other words, married to long hard years of experience, risking *Sturm und Drang* to break the bonds (and often the back) of the already established, the already known and respected, the already won and secured. What proof is ultimately more tested, more resistant to being called into question and doubted, than that rational being has plied this course, this really very bold and reckless course, to its credit and, even if now faced with its most perilous voyage, finds its great strength and maturity in both becoming aware of its severe limitations and, despite this, marshalling itself for the great encounter beyond them?

"Let us present a thought rarely attended to: all the fair and perfect things of this world are the product of some singular, limited viewing, some captured perspective which initiates the struggle to prolong it. At the highest reach this struggle is artful, philosophic, and religious; it means to work some given radiance into a durable, often thought to be eternal form. Such captured perspectives, such radiances are no doubt inexhaustible; they figure in the constant flux of our daily lives which itself is not anything particularly artful, philosophic, or religious. Here is rather the mere play of a proceedings which largely mystifies us and whose power and hold upon us are mostly to our chagrin. It is in opposition to this mixture of circus and miasma that work, in effect, becomes a holy relief – an anchor, a sail, a fair breeze, a clear direction.

"Here, in opposition to everywhere else, our cunning and captaincy count, our story takes on a special hue, and the interest and excitement of a particular life's course transcend banality and the various minutiae tangling up our thoughts, so sorely troubling and even tormenting. To be clear of the latter, to rise up finally above it all – this is the motif, the constant, underlying theme of all exceptional, enduring efforts.

"We have no choice but to think philosophy inspirationally and therefore, under present conditions, tragically. Hence the quality of its movement is the preeminent thing, the non-avoidance of all circumstances and conditions which challenge it radically. Without the latter of course it could not be itself (it would be religion or else some flaccid or fanatically inclined ideology) and yet this very being of itself is, despite understandable slips to the contrary, the willing, the even wilful exposure of itself to severe blows, insults, injuries, and internal ruptures. To disallow these last to make a poor thing of it (we decry the current attempt to downsize it) before the final shakeup, the force which cannot be stayed, is its heroic resolve, its true tenor and accomplishment. What matter all its various propositions and principles in comparison with its living liberally, passionately, and intensely? What matter some final arrival or indolent resting place, some paradoxically regained Garden of Eden in comparison with its having its own story, with its being interesting in its own way?

"So the proposal that I am making is that the emphasis must now fall upon the vision of philosophy as an increasingly stricken but noble venture (the tragic beauty) as opposed to its ever finding some eternal treasure (Truth) or founding some eternally happy race of people (Goodness). I speak with regard to its present situation and a certain tendency to preserve itself at all costs. I speak in light of what appears to me to be the studious avoidance of this hardest question concerning itself. Indeed, it appears to me as if the question has been hardly raised. Raising it, it risks itself. Not raising it, it is not itself. Or rather it ceases to be itself but in name only. It grows inwardly cold to what it formerly was and retains only an outward show of lukewarm piety. It dies spiritually before it dies physically. It works by degrees towards such a humble petering out of itself rather than towards its most self-revealing encounter. If the latter is more of a madness than the former, it is nonetheless the madness of reason itself – putting on its best show."

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54. To the Top of the Mountain

– How long are we going to go on with this sort of thing? Till I'm worn out? Till I'm rhapsodizing about it like she is? As far as I can tell, I'm here for no other reason than to provide you with a good conscience. And now that she's out for a bit, let me remind you that, while sympathetic to you in some respects, I'm opposed to this sort of pompous, exuberant, rhetorical...

Self-indulgent —

– ...style calling itself philosophy.

I have some qualms about it myself.

– It's in bad taste. People resent being psychologically pressured into adopting a high opinion of anything but themselves.

I realize that without a measure of sympathy I'm going to be dismissed.

– Alice, where were you?

– He needs no sympathy because his song is a symphony! Long after others have made their seemingly more resplendent runs, his work will draw together so many minds that it's hardly imaginable today.

– Alice, I happen to be living in today and this is all very wearisome.

– You're one of those who can't go up to the top of the mountain. You lose heart halfway and then want to go back to the valley.

– And what is up at the top of the mountain and what's so wrong with the valley? As far as I can recall – and I remember this specifically from Ibsen's Brand *– there's nothing up there but death.*

– There's also death in the valley.

– Delayed, retarded death. Ugly non-romantic unattractive death. Yes, I grant you that. I suppose we need mountain climbers for no other reason than to beautify it. But for the vast majority of us who climb no higher than our beds at the final call, well, who's to say what inner Himalayas we — oh, what's the use? Is youth in any position to do better than secretly admire itself and detest those who've let themselves grow old?

Did Nietzsche die on a mountaintop at age forty-forty or in bed at age fifty-five? Spiritually speaking, I don't think there can be any doubt. I myself am now already at the age he was when he died in bed. Vigorous and vital enough, to be sure. Yet I know full well that desire

and dread stand like twin sentinels on some slope, some abrupt falling off that I can only anticipate.

– Enough of this! Please get back to Concordia!

– Alice, I'm wasted.

– You're committed. You can't leave.

– I feel I've worn out my welcome. It's time for me to return to the soft life of the valley.

– Who's to climb with us all the way up to the top of the mountain?

– Future generations, Alice, I don't know. Look, it's just that you can't change old heads.

– Is your head so old? Is it so much older than his?

– Alice —

– You've done wonderful things so far. You've kept up a running criticism that's been very beneficial.

– It's been simply a backdrop to whatever he has to say.

– You've made your own contribution.

– I'm tired of listening to myself.

– Let me recite these lines to you. "When, in setting down its burden on occasion, philosophy raises its eyes to the lofty ascent before it with its sheer precipices and craggy heights, when it anguishes deeply over its forbidding allure, its most remote, inaccessible regions, and when it ponders chillingly...

– I've heard all this.

– ...how many great-souled ones tried in vain, mistaking one or other of its cloud-capped peaks for the highest of summits, the heaven of a hard-earned, all-seeing human brilliance . . ." You dream of retiring and travelling around Ireland. But you know very well that your home is here. No vision of the blessed isles can be so ultimately rewarding as finding out what you might've been or rather what you could be with us.

I'm reluctant to draw out this phase of fighting toe-to-toe with professors. I know that it took up a tremendous amount of my time and energy and that, had it continued, it would have led to my abandoning graduate studies.

– What're you trying to make of me?

– A hero.

– At age sixty-three, being nothing more than an assistant professor all my life, I'm suddenly to become a hero?

– You will climb the tower, Mr. Solness. I can see you up there already.

– Climb the — how did you know?

– I will see you up the tower. And then I'll shout, "Hurrah for Mr. Solness!"

At the same time I don't want to pass over how, in retrospect, it seems to have gone very deep with me. It is not without imagining someone crying "Hurrah for Mr. Hunter!" that I see myself having driven the nail of my dissidence and discontent deep into the wood of philosophical discourse.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

55. Driving the Nail of Dissidence and Discontent Deep into the Wood of Philosophical Discourse

– Translate.

– I think he means principally his M. A. thesis.

– I suppose he thinks it's brilliant.

– One of the members of his committee seemed to think so.

– What's it about?

– Polemics. The debate surrounding the works of Michel Foucault.

– What's different about it?

– He didn't so much take up sides as examine the nature of the debate itself.

Oh, this business of holding in high esteem before anyone else and apart from anyone else your own work! No matter how long this situation lasts, no matter what the reasons behind it are, you never lose the fear that such self-esteem is based on self-delusion.

– I don't like it when he talks like this.

But how else could one still be flexible, open, and in touch with oneself? Not even if the whole world vaunted one's work could one be absolutely sure of it.

– I suppose he's dreaming of some sort of inverse return. As much as his work is ignored today, it will be revered tomorrow.

Happy thought. To go to your grave and only be recognized later as having stood head and shoulders above those who ignored you.

– I see I'm going to have to take the lead here. I shall make my report to you, Andrew. First of all, he didn't get kicked out of the university. He fought three professors and still remained academically on his feet. What's more, he stuck to his guns every step of the way and never once made a move that, as a matter of conscience, he thought was a wrong one.

– Bravo! I'm not being sarcastic. I just think he should give the university a bit of credit.

– He has. Professor Clarke, amongst others, befriended him. Alright, let's move on. He wrote some interesting stuff even before his thesis.

– Who found it interesting? And how much of it has been published?

– Let's just say some people found it interesting. And as for publishing, that's no criterion for judging anything to be great.

– How did you get to be such an expert?

– Oh, let's not waste time. Who archives journal articles? They're needed as much as anything else but they're satellite things around texts that, like Nietzsche's, might've been scorned at one time. Alright, let's move on. All the courses he took after the ones with Joós and Shamus show that he didn't bend an inch in putting the industry, the truth-industry I mean, into question. Now it would be very tiresome to bring into view each and every sign of the indomitable nature of this man but let me just give as one example the epigraph he used for a paper on Wittgenstein (which by the way was written, like the Merleau-Ponty paper, in a highly unconventional style). It was taken from some commentator but he nonetheless thought it captured the spirit, along with some other quotes he used as epigraphs, of how he was approaching the subject.

> Naturally Wittgenstein had a great horror of "professorial" philosophy by philosophers: people having to turn out lectures when they knew in their own heart that they had nothing of value to say. It is with good reason that he constantly advised his students not to become professional philosophers.

And so on. I mean, I could cite all sorts of instances, show all sorts of signs that he was always pushing ahead with his ideal and never backing off from it. It's the performative rather than the constative thing which of course anyone can take issue with and say "You're wrong here" or "You're wrong there" and have a good conscience about it because, in truth, nothing can be said that doesn't invite something else being said for or against it.

– May I say something against your way of proceeding, Miss Motormouth? I can't help but admire your vigour, your vitality, your exemplary devotion to the Cause, your way of filling in for him so he can rest in the background, modest-like, while studying his nails. Your pugnacious style and your good clean zest for partisanship that doesn't make the adversary feel in the least belittled. But after having said all this, I can't help but feel that, philosophically if not psychologically and spiritually speaking, I've been reduced to a zero. It seems that it's been ruled in advance by the forces that be – I think they come by the name of A - L - I - C - E – that professors of philosophy aren't worth their salt and should humbly thank those that remind them of it.

– Has it come to this, Andrew? Do you think I have such a low opinion of you? Of course not. But in order to show how he drives the nail of his dissidence and discontent deep into the wood of philosophical discourse —

– I must be his whipping boy.

– You must be, in a manner of speaking, both his nail and his wood.

– Putty in your hands, you mean. Wood-filler. I'm deprived of my main strength which is to be part of the institution and turn my back on all this.

– Oh, this massive turning of the back! This collective shrug and "Let's get on with more important things." Tell me, Andrew, if the institution is right in doing this, is it still not right not to do it? And not to do it precisely in the name of truthtelling?

– How did you manage to get to be such a Jesuit? My God, this shows how trumped-up this game is because no normal twenty-three-year-old by the name of Alice or any other name would be so disposed as to think she could give philosophy lessons to her professor.

– Oh, so it's what's normal that should — oh, forget this! You know very well I'm not normal. Normality is at issue because, well, it's not everything and yet it purports to be everything and so...

– I suspect this is just another argument...

– ...in the name of truthtelling...

– ... to get me on your wavelength...

– ...there is a protest that should always be articulated.

– ...and essentially be the opponent of everything I've been up to now.

The day that normality goes over to the other side, wholly and completely, is the day that both sides dissolve.

– Sometimes he's not very helpful.

– But I see your point. I'm not dismissing it. It's just that I'm not constituted to be the rabid defender of it.

– Oh, Andrew, in that "not dismissing" and "not defending" is where all your goodness lies. In any event, I'm starting to have a bad conscience about keeping you here. I'm starting to feel I've been employing all sorts of nasty tricks to make you a partisan like I am.

It's a delicate operation *not* to make a partisan out of anything or anyone we have a good deal of control over.

– Your control over me is more than a little discomforting, Alice. Nonetheless it's not without its charm and piquancy. I've a book-lined room in my house that I keep to most of the time and, like a gay old bachelor not much different from your hero, find some solitary pleasure. This is where I would go now if you hadn't transformed this normally dull university office into the most amazing laboratory a philosopher is ever likely to find.

I have the feeling that some of Nietzsche's truest and most enduring friends were among the group of cultivated people that, with the Zarathustra mask, he disparaged.

– Oh, Andrew, Andrew!

– Enough! You'll soon have me with women's weapons, water-drops, staining my man's cheeks. Oh, there's the role I should've played! "Darkness and devils! Saddle my horses!" Don't you think, if I had a beard and long white hair, I'd look wild and imperious enough to play the role of Lear?

– You'd play it to perfection and nobody would even know you were a university prof.

– That would be something!

– Oh, you could play so many parts. Willie Loman in The Death of a Salesman.

– I suppose I could.

– Ned Bartley's father in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.

– I don't know that one.

– Duncan in Macbeth.

– Alright, you've convinced me.

– A most engaging professor who's near retirement and who's so generous and open-minded that he puts up with all the presumptions and self-confidence of an upstart undergraduate.

– Hmm.

– And who thinks of himself as a bit of a cowardly lion but is in fact full of zest and courage.

– A demanding part. It would require study.

– You are so *good, Andrew. Now let me see. I think I have all the documents here.*

– What documents? What're you doing?

– Okay, here's his M. A. thesis. Here's his doctoral one. Here are numerous essays, notes, letters, poems. And here is even the beginning of his work on On Truthtelling.

– What are we supposed to do with all this?

– Examine it, Andrew. Find out exactly how he drives the nail of his dissidence and discontent deep into the wood of philosophical discourse.

– Are you joking?

– It seems like a Herculean task, I know, but —

– Yes, something like cleaning out the Augean stables.

– Here are his two theses.

– They are the only two texts that have a respectable appearance.

– After thirty years of philosophizing it comes down to judging a book by its cover?

– I see nothing much more than a collection of old essays, notes, correspondence. Alice, put it back in a box and let it sleep for thirty years.

– I know you're just playing hard-to-get. I know you're just dying to dig into this archive.

– Oh, yes! I'm looking at Gadamer's old papers. It's disordered, motley, heterogeneous.

– Stained, coloured, creased.

– Ill-taken care of, to say the least.

– But all intact and still very much a collection of papers. Andrew, it's our job to put some order into it.

– Is this a scene out of Hedda Gabler*? Am I to play the role of George Tesman to your Thea? Are we to treat all this as if they were the notes of Eilert Lovborg?*

– What a lovely way to put it!

– Alice, these two theses are complete philosophical works. If they're worth anything, they should go out to the world as they are.

– But they're incomplete, in a manner of speaking. They're cold, they're uncontextualized, they're philosophical.

– They're what?

– From the point of view of On Truthtelling*, they are. Oh, Andrew, they're different unconventional things but they're still that pose of sitting god-like on some mountaintop while not being so god-like, so truly god-like, as to see all around and through this pose.*

– This god-like above god-like pose sounds like another pose.

– Perhaps it is. Perhaps this going up a mountain is always as much a pretend-achievement as an achievement.

– And for that you're willing to risk life and limb?

– Maybe that's another half-truth because we all die anyway. Andrew, you know I'm not normal. I'm glued to his thought as if I had no other purpose but to flesh it out. To give it a contour it might otherwise not have.

– I don't know what to make of all this. You'll have to take the lead.

– But then we're switching places. Thea is leading Tesman. Alright, our question is: how is the nail of dissidence and discontent driven deep into the wood of philosophical discourse?

– Is this question only applicable to him? Is it not something that should be viewed generally?

– I think you've hit upon this "how" already. How if not for others? How if not for a whole tradition of hitting the nail of dissidence and discontent into the wood of philosophical discourse?

– Now it's so large you could practically throw anyone in.

– I'm with you, Andrew. Does that seem strange? Me, the enthusiast? In any event, I support your cause, I mean, conjecture.

– In my own modest way I've made a few stabs at rattling the cage. However, I know there are others who go much further and make a career out of it.

– Ah, ha! A career! They make a career out of it. So they pitch their tents in a field different from the others.

– There are cranks and crackpots amongst them. Perhaps they don't so much pitch their tents as get pitched out of the main camp.

– A bit of both, I suppose, Andrew. Do you ever suddenly feel that you're faced with too much? That you're pushing on with something only because you started with it and are reluctant to let it go?

– It sounds like life to me.

– I'm dedicated to saying all I can about how he drives the nail into the wood. And yet there's all this other stuff.

– What else can we do but push on?

– Take this essay on Wittgenstein. I've already given some idea as to how he went at it. It's written in a kind of Wittgensteinian way and yet sometimes using Wittgenstein against himself.

– Sounds like deconstruction.

– Something like that. Only it's before he read — oh, I don't want to go into that yet. Or maybe I should. Maybe I should go into it because it shows how things don't always follow a linear path. How you sometimes go down this or that route, give it up for various reasons, decide it's not for you and then later decide it is for you.

– Nothing so special about that, Alice. We all do it on occasion.

– Then what about the urge not to, simply because it's so common, let it slip out of sight? What sort of protest is being made here?

– Are you speaking as one who's making the protest or simply noting it?

– I'm overwhelmed, Andrew. I know it's just an emotional response but I feel it should be registered. Am I protesting or only taking note of it? Am I a partisan? Yes! Am I a pure objective observer? No! Am I nothing more than a partisan? No! Am I trying to be an objective observer? Yes!

– For his sake of course.

– For his sake, Andrew. What I've got to note gives an indication of what he thinks is a general insight into philosophy.

– Let's hear it.

– It's his initial resistance to deconstruction. His being at one time far more of a metaphysician as a philosophical self than he ever was as a poetic or literary one.

– I'm glad to see you're taking the bull by the horns.

– I'm glad to see a sort of symbiotic relationship springing up between us, Andrew, that I can credit as much to your good-heartedness as to my subtle and not-so-subtle ruses.

I have the feeling that I have been relegated to something like the role of Hamlet's ghost who must shout from underneath the stage: "Remember!"

– Oh, I hear you, truepenny. Only the ghost in Hamlet *doesn't shout "Remember!"*

– Andrew, this initial-resistance-to-deconstruction thing is important because it's the counterpart to an initial and perduring resistance to it by the vast majority of people.

– Oh, really?

– This resistance has a head and spinal chord to it that gives itself reasons.

– Gives itself reasons? Head and spinal chord?

– Yes, It's something like the backbone of a community and all its reasons which are this backbone and all its strength and security are here and at the same time almost indistinguishable from it its stupidity.

– Alice, we're talking about the philosophical community.

– Yes, where this stupidity is written over as strategy that effaces itself. Oh, I'm just sputtering out these thoughts that come from him. I know I'm not really thinking for myself. This strategy is not really a strategy in any classical sense but is interfused with a moral and ethical commitment that wards off the disaster of a wholesale commitment to deconstruction.

– Hmm.

– But perhaps I'm going too fast. Let's just talk about this resistance. How does it manifest itself? It manifests itself by scrupulously examining everything except itself.

– That's a good deal and it would be hard to get anything done otherwise.

– Philosophy is incapable of the most powerful self-examination except at the cost of itself.

– Then obviously there's good reason for it not to look too hard at itself.

– But that's not where we are, Andrew. That's not where he is. There's a part of philosophy – call it truthtelling – that's inimical to putting self-preservation before the truth.

– Before the truth?

– Well, before the hardest truth. Before — I'm not sure exactly what to call it but it's always in some sense against the truth.

– Really? I'll tell you, Alice, I can think of a few choice words and without straining my brain to describe this paradox.

– Pejoratives mostly, aren't they? Words used by the tradition to make it sound like the other line of thought is marginal rather than intrinsic.

– Oh, dear! I see what's being asked but I also see the point of staying in the valley where the human community is.

– Andrew, look me in the eyes and tell me you'd rather be in your little room dreaming of Ireland than on some wind-swept height with vine leaves in your hair.

– I'm not particularly attracted to — oh, Alice, I don't have the physique for it. If only I could play Lear on some wind-swept heath.

> "*Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!*
> *You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout*
> *Till you have drenched our steeples, drown'd the cocks!*
> *You sulphurous and thought-cleaving fires,*
> *Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,*
> *Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,*
> *Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world!*
> *Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once,*
> *That make ingrateful man!"*

– There are vine leaves in your hair, Andrew. I can see them.

– Oh, nothing but thorns and briars, my dear. If I didn't know better, I'd think you were my daughter, Cordelia. But I'm afraid I haven't been in my right mind of late.

– And so I am, I am. Oh, Andrew, where have you been with such talent? What great roles awaited you if only you'd taken a chance with your life.

Remember!

– Why has he restricted himself to the role of ghost? Why has he abandoned the main part and left us with the meatier ones?

– A question of taste, I suppose.

– Taste?

– Well, now that he's more or less one with his work and can't scrounge up any critical distance between himself and it, an overly monologic discourse would be too much like pretending some final answer.

– It seems that just as some philosophers are afraid of sounding too indefinite, others are afraid of sounding too dogmatic.

– I think it's safe to say we're a carrying on after his death. Oh, not his real death, of course. But his literary or philosophical death in On Truthtelling.

– What! Are you serious? Alice, how can there be an essay on On Truthtelling *if the author abandons it? How can he speak the truth about his subject if he's no longer speaking?*

– But, Andrew, what is all this if not his speaking? What are we if not his speaking?

– The one may very well be his speaking but we are, as his speaking self, philosophically out of play. We can't be his voice and his thoughts upon pain of being false as fictitious characters.

– Rather let's say upon pain of being characters. People in our own right and yet...

– Either way it's a loss of an authentic voice.

– ...we're bound up with him, you must agree, in a very close and particular way.

– Oh, you much more than I. If it weren't for you, I'd have bailed out long ago. Thea — I mean, Alice, you carry me along with more force than I have strength to resist. You could take me to the bottom of a rabbit hole right now and I think I'd be content to spend all my days soaking up your nonsense about how great an actor I am.

Remember!

– Oh, not quite dead? Well, we swear, I suppose, to carry out this mission.

– Wittgenstein was very special. A logician who kept sounding like he didn't want to be one.

– Read it.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

56. Questions and Problems vis-a- vis the Role of Philosophy in Wittgenstein (1995)

1. It is true that Wittgenstein does philosophy as a therapy to 'cure' philosophical problems. Is there not a very personal dimension to this? Should it be overlooked? I mean, it is evident both in some of his writings and the testimony of those who knew him that he was genuinely afflicted by philosophical problems. But is this not precisely an extraordinary thing? And if he prescribes a means of treatment with respect to this affliction, what justifies universalizing this treatment? (Universalizing it, that is, for all people who delve into philosophical problems?)

– Yes, that's true. Few have followed Wittgenstein in his way of doing philosophy.

2. Rather, I view it this way. By taking and treating himself (and his philosophizing) in a radical way, he treats philosophical problems as inappropriate or inattentive use of language radically. He becomes deeply thoughtful in an area where others have unquestionably been thoughtless. So what he grants to posterity is a method, one way, of doing philosophy. And this is a corrective against the worst excesses of a sophisticated language that forgets itself.

– Well, his own language is not the most sophisticated but certainly very dense and difficult. Something like notes written down that are probing and perspicacious but still with some lack or shortfall in their meaning.

3. Or perhaps all he offers in the way of doing philosophy is an ideal or model. But the ideal or model of anything, as he himself points out, should not be confused with the practise or line of thought which employs it. So should his way of doing philosophy, it seems to me, not be construed as a pattern for all philosophy.

– He said his task was not only to destroy idols but to make sure no new ones were erected. Now what could this possibly mean? And what sort of purity or one true God – after all, he was a believer all his life – is implied by it? Or, for that matter, his affirming and even exalting the integrity of ordinary language? Is there not something here with this emphasis on origins – Rousseauian? And what about his treating philosophy as if it were always sitting at the window, rouged, waiting for Science?

4. When Wittgenstein speaks about the sickness of philosophical problems, is he not using language in an idiosyncratic way? And suppose the whole community of philosophers (barring a few exceptions), continue to regard this way of using the word 'sickness' as idiosyncratic? Does this not mean that this particular move in the language game about language games (perhaps another idiosyncratic term) is meaningful only so far as it is – idiosyncratic*?*

– It's true that when Wittgenstein talks about philosophical problems being a sickness, his own use of language seems to escape scrutiny. I wonder if it's possible to deal with this problem, if I may call it that, from a Wittgensteinian point of view. Ordinarily speaking, a sickness is a problem that one doesn't think one can get rid of by showing it to be a non-problem. And,

ordinarily speaking, it's not something that most people don't even recognize. If a physician publicly announced such a sickness as a widespread health problem, who would understand him?

5. Some spirits react to what they consider to be the bad things of their time by going completely in the opposite direction. This is *their* form of bad behaviour.

– Well, there's no question that Russell, for example, thought that Wittgenstein lacked ethics. And yet Wittgenstein himself characterized his work as being ethical. How is one to understand this? It's true that, from one point of view, Wittgenstein was a bad actor. (He beat on some schoolchildren when he was in Austria and trying to live apart from philosophy.) And yet, on the other hand, he was exceptionally conscientious and courageous. Alice, how many people would give away a vast fortune? How many people have done so throughout all history? And for the purpose of preserving an intellectual conscience of the highest order? Oh, tell me, is this merely a curious biographical fact or a statement of some sort – ethical, philosophical, and perhaps even religious – that goes to the heart of what he was?

6. He does philosophy in order to attack the pretensions of philosophy. Its big questions or at least how these big questions are handled seem bogus to him. But there is ambiguity here. On the one hand, he apparently wishes to bring the whole of philosophy into disrepute. On the other hand, he lauds the endeavours of the past and involves himself in deeply vexing, largely impractical, and sometimes all-too-serious ways of thinking.

– Oh, what an ego must've been necessary to cut away from so much! To reduce it all to a collective shell game! To think that the best game of all was to dismantle it with a few logical or linguistic tools! And then to forget all about it, as he suggested so often to his students, and get into some honest line of work!

7. Should philosophy, unlike other concepts such as 'number,' be a thread with one continuous fibre running throughout it rather than numerous overlapping ones?

– Yes, I remember this aphorism. It's similar to his talk about language-games. A concept identifies itself with sameness while — oh, my God, here I'm talking like a Derridean! — struggling with overriding diversity and difference.

8. Wittgenstein no doubt comes across to some philosophers in a manner which resembles the naive and nagging questions of a child who desires a degree of clarification which cannot possibly be given.

– Well, he says this about himself somewhere. And yet when it comes to questions about his own work – I'm thinking of Frege's and Russell's puzzlement over the Tractatus *– he didn't seem to appreciate demands for clarification. No, as soon as he decided that his spade had hit bedrock, he treated such questions as being bereft of point and purpose. Like wheels on a machine that don't turn anything.*

9. If one simply takes every utterance of his literally or at face-value, then how much has one really learned about being suspicious in the face of the manifold ways (call some incorrect, if you will) that language may be employed?

– He deprecates his own work at the end. He apologizes for not being more controlled and systematic. And yet he claims he has no other way to get out what he has to say except by following his natural bent. So that gives him a certain freedom, I suppose. For what? Well, perhaps just so he doesn't have to hide or dissimulate problems. Internal contradictions, inconsistencies, and perhaps even incoherencies in his own work. Things that, if I don't miss my guess, he would've liked to have surgically removed.

10. Like Nietzsche, he views himself (at least in part) as a destroyer. The one with respect to old values; the other with respect to old ways of doing philosophy. In each case, something smacks of hyperbole. (This too is a way of using language.)

– And one that, in philosophy at least, is generally frowned upon. Imagine if all carried on in such fashion. You know, I'm trying to get into Wittgenstein's head and, all in all, I think I'm doing pretty good. But as a representative of the crass majority, I must finally come down on the side of everybody playing the same game and following the same rules.

11. It is interesting to note, I think, that Wittgenstein saw a way to undo philosophical problems by rendering problematic what most philosophers took to be no problem at all. (Or at least no problem worth investigating on a grand scale.)

– If Wittgenstein is right in thinking that the biggest problem of all is how philosophers use language, then his fate is like Cassandra's in the Greek myth. Few have heeded him. Few have paid attention to him even when explaining him. And so, just as he says, everything remains the same.

12. Does Wittgenstein offer us simply a description of language? Is not 'description' itself a word with a certain degree of fluidity, a meaning related to context? Then, if this is so, could there not be aspects of Wittgenstein's description of language which resemble explanation? For example, when he introduces such neologisms as 'language-game' and 'family-resemblance,' how do these not count as technical terms with explanatory value*?*

– A good point. Even if he limits these terms to a bare minimum, they're still operating. They're still trying to capture the whole of something. Frankly, I don't see how a description can have any sense unless there's an explanation to give it some point and purpose.

13. In Section 109 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, he talks about looking into the workings of language. And this, he says, must be done in the way of description and not explanation. Now imagine someone saying the same thing about a car motor. One fellow says to the other: 'I'm going to describe to you the workings of this motor in such a way that you will be very clear about it.' Now in what way, it may be asked, would such an account not amount to being an explanation? Even if it were to remain wholly practical, its intent would still be more

than simple familiarization. And so it seems to me that, so far as Wittgenstein is involved in wanting to create a new understanding or awareness, he unavoidably involves himself in explanation. (In our normal way of speaking, explanation yields understanding and description yields familiarization or recognition.)

– Description / explanation. Philosophical language / ordinary language. Sense / nonsense. Wittgenstein had a small packet of oppositions that don't find favour with many – or at least some – philosophers. I suppose the explanation is that, just as he wanted to doubt in a thoroughly novel way, so he wanted to end it.

14. I wonder if Wittgenstein's way of proceeding is as wholly unscientific as he seems to think it is. Does he not view language-games as a kind of diverse, wide-ranging phenomena? And does he not find and examine a multitude of examples of language use in much the same way that a scientist collects specimens? (I would hesitate to go so far as to say he proceeds inductively and draws principles.)

– If the question "What's a game?" escapes being answered in an absolutely definitive way, then how should it be any different for the question "What's a science?" And, furthermore, even if, as Wittgenstein allows, strict boundaries can be drawn up for a specific purpose, there are always and forever border disputes.

15. What is the role of philosophy? Webster's Dictionary describes it as 1) the love or pursuit of wisdom, 2) the search for underlying causes or principles of reality, 3) the critical examination of the grounds for fundamental beliefs and an analysis of the concepts employed in the expression of such beliefs, 4) the study of the principles of human nature and conduct, 5) the science that comprises all learning exclusive only of technical precepts and practical arts, 6) the coordinate disciplines of science and liberal arts exclusive only of medicine, law, and theology, 7) the science that comprises logic, ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics, and epistemology, 8) a system of motivating beliefs, concepts, and principles, 9) the sum of an individual's ideas and convictions, and 10) the calmness of temper and judgment befitting a philosopher.

– And 11) the practise of saying that most of the above is nonsense.

16. I would like to try a little experiment. In Section 69 of the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein remarks upon the difficulty of explaining to someone (who is presumably from another planet) what a game is. I would like to quote part of this section but, in place of the word 'game,' I shall substitute the word 'philosophy.' Thus:

> How should we explain what philosophy is? I imagine that we should describe philosophy to him, and we might add, "This and similar things are called 'philosophy'." And do we know any more about it ourselves? Is it only other people whom we cannot tell what philosophy is? – But this is not our ignorance. We do not know the boundaries because none have been drawn. To repeat, we can draw a boundary – for a special purpose. Does it take that to make the concept usable? Not at all! (Except

for that special purpose.)

– Wittgenstein had a very special purpose and, for that reason, drew a strict and narrow boundary around philosophy. And yet drawing this boundary was in some sense at odds with his purpose. Philosophy shouldn't constrain language, he said, and one wonders why that shouldn't include the language of philosophy. In other words, his own philosophizing was perhaps more personal than he realized and didn't check itself out except at odd moments. (For example, I'm thinking of the Introduction to the Philosophical Investigations *where he admits to some failing or shortcoming.) On the other hand, it did do just that – be very consciously or at least conscientiously personal – by presenting itself like the workshop of his mind with none of the inner struggles and questionable moves concealed.*

17. It is fair to say, I think, that there are those scholars who take Wittgenstein to be drawing very definite boundaries around philosophy. But perhaps this view of the matter, if it is not looked into more carefully, comes from a reading of him which is simply too literal. After all, there is certainly enough evidence to show that he wasn't the least bit interested in having disciples or founding a school. So far as that goes then, unless he truly wanted philosophy to end with him, he must have been aware, however bitterly, of the limited application of his method. On the other hand, it would be absurd to think that he desired to have no influence. So the matter might be settled, I think, by considering the more tendencious of his pronouncements, those that sound like universal propositions about what philosophy is or should be, to be an aspect of style. In other words, he wishes his voice not only to sound (or to be simply the voice of sweet reason) but also to ring a bit. And given that this voice was, at least to some degree, a voice in the wilderness, the use of language as an attention-getting device hardly strikes me as an inappropriate move."

– Wittgenstein not wanting disciples? I'm not sure about that. He attracted and was attracted by people largely on the basis of the interest they took in his work. And that work, as much as it was his writings, was also the thing he didn't write about or at least not very much. I'm thinking of the ethic or way of living that, according to him, couldn't be said but only shown.

– I think both can be done. You can live in a certain way. You can also write about it in a certain way. You can tell the truth about it in a certain way and that writing can also be part of that way of living.

– Well, he toyed with the idea of writing an autobiography. Here was a man who seemed to think the best things were consigned to silence. Who couldn't even appreciate Shakespeare! How could he — oh, well there's only one answer. He was a minimalist. A poetic-philosophical minimalist. He wrote the Tractatus *– a brilliant piece of minimalist work – and got away with it in a sort of minimalist way (though I don't decry the work that went into it) by, first, paying little attention to the philosophical tradition, and, second, having this treatise accepted as a doctoral thesis.*

– If one were a bit more of a poet (and didn't just read detective stories), then one wouldn't be so quick, I think, to identify saying with bare-bones talk. Or to identify showing with

silence and so a kind of mute expression of nobility. No, all are bound up together and so, if there's a case for being the kind of truthteller that Wittgenstein was, so there's a case for being another kind.

– Alice —

– Oh, it's so terribly presumptuous, isn't it? To put him on the same level? After all, he's only written a few meagre essays whereas Wittgenstein, well, Wittgenstein wrote the Tractatus. *A very brazen attempt to cut through all the bullshit. At least if you think that, when it comes to truth, it's our ordinary language that counts for everything.*

– Well, statements that hold up a picture of reality. That limit all our genuine knowledge of what's true and what's false.

– Pah! It's so poverty-stricken it makes lying look good.

– "Everything that can be said can be said clearly." Lies? We hardly know what we mean by this.

– I'm thinking about it.

– Well, I suppose you could accuse Wittgenstein of a lie when he says: "Everything that can be said can be said clearly."

– The cat is on the mat. Or else the cat is not on the mat. That's very clear. But if we dragged it out indefinitely, filling up a whole world, it would be a big nothing.

– Oh, he knows that very well. And he also knows that he can't be entirely true to his own position. And that the ethic he can't speak about, along with being the attempt to be as true as possible to it, is precisely not being true to it as a sort of broken confession of its impossibility.

– His writing is boring. It's his life that's interesting.

– Yet he made a singular contribution. He drew our attention to the way we use language. Only what he calls misuse and error and confusion is contestable.

– It's that all-too-typical putting down of philosophers by others.

– He called his own stuff nonsense though. That should give some idea of the non-biassed or objective side of his thought. On the other hand, he took his nonsense to be something like a ladder or escape route.

– That's too convenient. This kicking away the ladder behind him so he could get away from it all.

– Yes, he really thought he could make that great Kierkegaardian leap into another world. I'm not sure what sort of world exactly. I'll only say it seemed to be an active one where, with a clear conscience, he could think everything except philosophy.

– Maybe he was thinking it all the time. Even when he thought he didn't have to think about it any longer.

– Putting it on the back burner is probably what happened. Otherwise it's difficult to explain his coming back to it.

– It was an albatross around his neck.

– It was strikingly like a malediction that, as Nietzsche with his sickness did, was transmuted.

– P and not-P. There's the logic of what he was.

– A man who was torn between being a philosophical guru and a philosophical dropout. I'm afraid I can't contradict you on that point.

– A philosopher who didn't want to be a philosopher. What sort of logic or language-game is that? Doesn't that show that, right from the beginning, the cards are scrambled? That as much as we live and die by the "cat on the mat"stuff, we also live and die by the truth of the human heart.

– Or untruth, Alice.

– Right from the beginning. And since as much certainty as uncertainty is laid up there to make doubting certainty a wise move, it's not surprising we've carried it right to the heart of this fickle world.

– He must've wanted order in one place. Untouchable. And there he's strikingly similar to all the philosophers he's otherwise so different from.

– But he scrambled the cards with the Philosophical Investigations*. Anybody who claims there's an indefinite number of games is on the way to losing faith in calling his game* the *game.*

– And so he died without quite finishing his game. And others have come along to play it for him. There's the whole history of philosophy.

– It's complication and over-complication.

– By and large that seems to have been our agenda so far. What else is on it?

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

57. Hegel in Brief

– Well, let me tell you that he took a Hegel course and had a very hard time with it. Here's the paper.

– Is it worth reading?

– It's very difficult.

– Any paper on Hegel is difficult.

– But it's complicated by the fact that, while trying to look entirely like a paper on Hegel, it wants to be something else.

– We haven't got time to read the whole thing. Just tell me what you mean by this.

– Basically it's the problem of writing on Absolute Knowledge when you don't actually believe in it and at the same time trying to get a good grade.

– Why the good grade? I thought he didn't give a damn about — alright, what else do you have to say about it?

– Well, he tried to work within the notion of Absolute Knowledge while sort of surreptitiously exploding it.

– Why surreptitiously?

– Because you don't attempt to overthrow Hegel in a few pages unless you want a low grade.

– Perhaps in some classes.

– The professor of this course at McGill University (he went there as a visiting student) was a noted Hegelian scholar who was attached to his own particular interpretation.

– Well, read the part you think is important.

– I'll read the last paragraph. It gives a good idea of how he was trying to stay both in and out of Hegel.

> In sum, the experience of Consciousness, its historical trajectory, may be distinguished as three transitional stages. The first stage is the earliest manifestation (but then always abiding condition) of the consciousness which simply unfolds itself. The second stage is the earliest manifestation (but then always abiding condition) of the consciousness which unfolds

> itself to itself. And the third stage is the earliest manifestation (but then always abiding condition) of the consciousness which unfolds itself "beyond" itself.

Notice the quotation marks around the word "beyond." They were simply a concession to the assignment. I think he felt that, if he'd left them out, he'd be making it too apparent that he was treating Absolute Knowledge as necessarily but also essentially (or is it essentially but also necessarily?) an overblown concept. And that the fulfilling of itself by constantly falling short of itself, by constantly being in the process of learning from its errors, is both the rule and ruse of reason and non-reason together.

> The first corresponds to Phenomenal Knowledge, the second to Phenomenological Knowledge, and the third to Absolute Knowledge. The first is aware of its unfolding but not aware of it as its unfolding. The second is aware of its unfolding but not aware of itself as a complete unfolding. And the third is aware of itself as a complete unfolding which it posits for itself, in and as itself, and in this very "explicit" positing implicitly sublates itself in the process of a deconstruction and a fresh positing of Absolute Knowledge. Consciousness thus goes beyond the point at which it first articulates itself as Absolute Knowledge, historically, logically, and dialectically, both by undermining this express articulation of itself and articulating itself further or over again in a movement at once away from and back to itself. Such a consciousness as Absolute Knowledge knows that only in this way (i.e., as the absolute notion or determination of itself) is consciousness in touch with itself as a philosophical consciousness.

And here's a quote from Hegel.

> The goal, Absolute Knowing, or Spirit that knows itself as Spirit, has for its path the recollection of the Spirits as they are in themselves and as they accomplish the organization of their realm. Their preservation, regarded from the side of their free existence appearing in the form of contingency, is History; but regarded from the side of their [philosophically] comprehended organization, it is the Science of Knowing in the sphere of appearance (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, s. 808)

And the rest goes:

> The movement of history, in other words, is a constant regeneration or throwing up of new "organizing spirits." Their recollection is thus the path along which the goal of Consciousness receives ever new forms of, and impetuses for, Absolute Knowing. In such manner, Consciousness, while fulfilling the vital task of keeping itself alive and whole, is no dead march through time, no complaisant coasting or lack of risk-taking, but

an ongoing voyage of quest and discovery.

– It's difficult, as you say.

– I don't think he can read it now without wondering if he knew exactly what he was saying.

– Absolute Knowledge sounds like some sort of regulatory principle that's also a fiction.

– How powerful that fiction is in a course controlled by it!

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

58. End of the Trajectory

– Well, we're all in the same boat. We never know what others will make of what we take to be greatest and highest.

– Andrew, that's just it.

– And still to believe we're doing something worthwhile. That's the hard part.

– That's the risk, isn't it?

– But what about this valuing risk? Why should we be attached to it*?*

– Why should we value our freedom? And why sometimes to the point of risking our lives?

– It —

– Goes right back —

– To origins that are out of sight.

– We're nothing but a blip on the radar screen.

– Of whatever has been or may be.

– Called freedom.

– Call it beyond freedom.

– Freedom and non-freedom together.

– The non-freedom of our freedom perhaps.

– Of being condemned to our freedom.

– Yes, as Sartre memorably put it.

– Andrew, those lines from Hamlet*. Can you do them?*

– What lines?

– That go: "What a piece of work is man!"

– "What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form

and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the paragon of animals! and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?"

– How large you become when you have such lines!

– Alice, we better move along. Words, words, words, When are we to get at these two things?

– Yes, that's the question.

– It takes time to read works of this nature.

– I guess you've sat on a lot of thesis committees over the years.

– Alice, let's not fool ourselves. I'm not here to read them. I'm here to hear what you have to say about them.

– How they drive the nail of dissidence and discontent deep into the wood of philosophical discourse?

– How do they do it? In two words.

– By attacking scholarly arguments. By attacking the whole business of scholarly argumentation. By attacking the whole business of philosophical argumentation.

– I have the master's thesis here. Is it involved in this wholesale attack on philosophical argumentation?

– It's involved without being the thing itself. In fact, there never really is the thing itself. Even the doctoral thesis, which goes much further, is only the semblance of this wholesale attack.

– So the attack is not real.

– The attack's real enough. The attack may be against mere shadows and not hit anything substantial, but, in the realm of truthtelling, that counts for something. You think this is mere word play? But suppose it could be proven all *philosophizing is word play?*

– Has he proven it?

– Oh, what's proof? We shell it out and it's either accepted or not. Of course it's proof. I have no doubt that it's anything but proof. But I also know that many others would find reasons not to think it proof.

– But you'd find reasons to discount their reasons.

– Of course. And what's more I'd be willing to bet I'd outlast them.

– A bet you'd lose if you're mortal like me.

– You might as well say an argument I'd lose if, like all other arguments, it has the fate of either dying as an argument and becoming, at the very best, a cultural artifact. Or, on the other hand, continuing on as an easy target (but not too easy) for a host of interpretative, rhetorical, and argumentative elements driven by the desire to get to the truth of a matter a little or a lot better than it does.

– Can you run that by me again?

– I think what I've just said sums up the whole picture except that, when other arguments take up this picture, it looks slight and ridiculous.

– Infinitely so.

– But then again I suppose my argument makes all arguments look slight and ridiculous.

– Alice, I think I grasp the overall picture you're drawing. Or at least the one he's drawn. But what am I to do now? Play external examiner? Test you on every aspect of it? Make sure you've put forward a good solid argument for it?

– Oh, Andrew — !

– I know, I know. But it can't be ignored. The most powerful argument against you is that you hoist yourself on your own petard.

– The most powerful argument against argumentation is that it can never be quite fair. Never one hundred per cent fair. And that's what he more or less shows.

– So he's written hundreds of pages to show nothing more than that?

– Andrew, when you consider that virtually every philosopher starts and ends as if this weren't a troubling factor. As if his argumentation were somehow absolved from what afflicts – oh, I'm sure he'd be willing to attest to this! – everyone else's, then something leaps into prominence that, if your subject is truthtelling, shouldn't be ignored.

– So this is how he drives the nail of dissidence and discontent deep into the wood of philosophical discourse?

– By coming up with the subject that, in a sense, has been staring everyone in the face. That's written all over literature and poetry and for that matter life itself but has never been put in such a forthright way.

– Hats off! What else is there to say?

– So are you persuaded that, whatever discourse he examines, be it on one side of a debate or the other, he always finds evidence of a lack of transparency?

– I'm convinced, Alice.

– Are we really at the top of the mountain? So easily? Oh, Andrew, if we are, it's only with the feeling that I've somehow cheated. That I've brought you to this point not of your own free will but with a kind of coercion and violence.

– Alice, that may be. But I'm here. I'm ready to take responsibility for it. I'm sure that if I was his thesis examiner, I'd be mightily impressed. I might even call his work brilliant. But at the end of the day it's my pet thoughts and projects I'll go back to. They don't necessarily go with taking his work too much to heart.

– I was hoping to go a bit further into these theses.

– There's a ton of information here that probably won't change one jot what's already been said.

– So much has been said already but not formally. Not in the way of strict argumentation. Strange to think I should want to draw you into this. That I should have to appeal to its authority.

– Tell me how these theses went. Their reception. That might be more enlightening than worrying about the rest.

– Oh, Andrew, are you really interested? Are you willing to give us a second breath? Are you ready to push up the mountain a bit higher?

– Now that I'm breathing mountain air and enjoy the view for the most part, I'm not in a hurry to go back. But let's not pretend I'm won over to anything. It's just that, like other human beings, I have to get away from myself for a while.

– Your goodness shines through. It's more than mine because, unlike you, I'm willing to put people at risk.

– Hmm.

– Andrew, there isn't much to say about how the master's thesis was received. Oh, I could carry on a gossipy this or that but how would that carry us ever higher?

– So that leaves us with the doctoral thesis.

– Yes. Oh, there's these other essays but how could we — no, it would never be more than covering old ground.

– It's difficult to plunge into a new or not-so-familiar area and grasp all its intricacies. In fact, if I were to fault scholars, it would be that they habitually pretend to do just that.

– So we're not going to do what's ridiculously impossible. Andrew, even this thesis by itself is too much. But maybe the story that goes with it – how I shall get it out I don't know yet – is worth something.

– What does it testify to, Alice? How does it bear upon the subject at hand?

– First of all, if I didn't think it was about his pushing higher, I wouldn't want to bring it up. Secondly, if I didn't think it was true to what's already been said, to a sort of orientation that can always be a disorientation and then, whether wanted or not, whether suspected or not, a reorientation, I would close the book on the matter right now.

– Perhaps I will read some of these things. Perhaps others will too. In any event, I've got the feeling that whatever you have to say is more vital for our purpose.

– Andrew, I can't speak now as if the context were one of confrontation like at Concordia. I can't speak now as if he were more a rebel figure than a person grooming himself for a professional career. And I can't speak as if he were one constantly thinking of mountain climbing rather than valley dwelling. At least I can't speak now of all this unless I think of him as a divided self that, after suffering this division in himself, returned to himself.

– Will you never get over exalting him? I'm sorry, but if we're to meet on some common ground, you'll have to stop this.

– Andrew, perhaps you should tell me to stop breathing. Oh, I know very well — Andrew, you can't meet me here. You never will.

– Go on.

– It's mostly to do with what life seems to hold out, may hold out, can hold out if you conform a few degrees more to a certain prevalent standard. If you're just a little more receptive in your heart of hearts to a certain way of being. And if you make the adjustments – jump through the hoops that others jump through – to get to the other side.

– O speak no more!

– It's basically the standard that society exalts without paying too much attention to what it costs in terms of being true and honest. It's basically what we all want apart from truth and what we're willing to sacrifice for it.

– Are there no exceptions?

– None. Oh, look at Socrates! Doesn't he thrive on winning arguments? Isn't he being a bit too ingenuous when he claims that, for the sake of truth, he'd be happy to lose one?

– Your point is that we're all thrust into the position of hiding something about ourselves.

– And maybe from ourselves so that it will always take others to reveal it.

– What sharp eyes you grant to your hero! You seem to think he can peer behind the sharpest eyes.

– In his own manner he can which, because it's his own manner, might be right here and wrong there. Andrew, if your eyes are so sharp, you find out his blind spot.

– I don't know where we're going. My eyes can't follow this highly indeterminate – or is it over-determined? – trajectory.

– Over-determined? Perhaps. By prejudice. By hero-worshipping. By some ethico-aesthetic teleology. Andrew, I'm pushing for him. Your resistance is, well —

– Symbolic.

– But you must confess it's got some substance to it. Andrew, the division: how can I do anything else but symbolize it?

– My head's beginning to ache. It must be this high altitude.

– There was this beautiful young couple who intrigued him and who exemplified everything that could be called not only academic success but much else.

– Married couple?

– Indeed. And married to philosophy as well. Married to doing superbly as doctoral students. The perfect couple. Believe me, the perfect union of correctness, planning, protocol, procedure, high-level commitment and high-level performance.

– Paragons. Paradigms of philosophy students. I've seen a few. And they usually get their careers going very early.

– Well, certainly these did and they took every step to make sure this would happen. Delving into all sorts of activities. The student's association, conferences, the graduate students philosophy journal, publications, even a book by him and her, oh, scholarships and medals and teaching – the both of them did that – and even the organizing of extra-curricular activities. Andrew, don't you think that such people can't be surpassed?

– They sound like a well-oiled machine.

– A very beautiful, sympathetic, friendly, and even generous machine to boot.

– The point being they represented something alluring and attractive to your hero.

– When you see a dream that has so much material substance and when your own dream is looking a bit shabby, well, then it does look enticing.

– You ask yourself, I suppose, whether you're still on the right track.

– Oh, Andrew, your good faith...

– Why do you keep praising me so?

– ...is what keeps this whole thing going. Andrew, they were a genuinely nice couple. There's nothing that could be said against them that wouldn't be an injustice.

– But you're going to say it anyway.

– Do I have a choice, Andrew? Do I have a choice when for truthtelling it's not a matter of being a precision tool such as the university and, let's go further, society wants but an altogether different one?

– Beautiful. Truly amazing what language can accomplish. You've managed to turn that silk purse of a couple into a sow's ear.

– I would rather think that a silk purse is all their reward whereas his is where moths and thieves will never go.

– The threadbare dream seems to have been in not too bad a shape.

– I'm making my way very slowly to the point that might be called the reception or non-reception of his work. I'm trying to be – as I hope you've noticed – fair and diplomatic. Who were his professors? What has to be said about them? Fortunately not much because he got along well with them. There were some incidents resembling what went on at Concordia but of such minor note I won't speak about them. All in all things went rather smoothly. Swimmingly even. Again I won't stop to give details on what might be called his scholarly achievements. It's never been his CV he wanted to write large or at least not in any conventional sense.

Older than the other students, he nonetheless enjoyed a second youth. Indeed, it might be said that he was accepted all-round as some more extended, experienced, heterogeneous form of youth.

He worked hard and was well rewarded. Nobody put any obstacles in his path. Not to say that everything was perfect but mostly he was treated with kindness and respect. Over five and even six years. He felt like an insider many times. And when he received his doctoral degree,

well, it was a conferring of identity.

The doctoral degree. A door-opener if a few things were in place. Perhaps he was a little slow in getting things in place. Perhaps even a little reluctant. But it can't be said that he didn't get or at least try to get some things in place.

The day he asked one professor to sit on his thesis committee, he didn't respond negatively when the latter asked him if he planned to make a career out of teaching philosophy.

Teaching philosophy. Teaching philosophy in the university. This prospect as viable undertaking. Joining the human race. Being like others. Taking advantage of what's near at hand. What can be put to use. Negotiating with the long-held belief that your interests could only be dramatically, triumphantly realized.

The life of the valley. A certain formal or social elevation that could be enjoyed and had heretofore been missing. A certain recognition and those attendant benefits. Compared to what? What exactly? Some great writing event? But where was that? What substance, what shape or form did it have? What a pale insubstantial thing it seemed compared to — well, we won't go into that. We've heard enough about your erotic flights of fancy. All the same – and it's a consideration – you've always been a pig in your imagination as much as you've wanted to be my knight in shining armour.

– Alice, you're drifting off. The temptation thing – the life of the valley and all that – I get it. You've got him, you know, almost where Milton put Christ. Over and over again there's this hero motif that refuses to go away. That glories in its identity, in this recognition of itself, even to the point of pounding nails in itself.

– It always mystified him that he couldn't find me, someone like me in the Department. Andrew, if he had found me, someone like me, what would've happened?

– Alice, you're an obsession. You can't be real. But if you were, if you were truly flesh and blood, you would've burned him up like a goddess.

– So I end up here with you.

– Which seems to be the best thing if you truly want him to be a hero. Alice, I hope you don't burn me up. Although of course I'm not attached to you like he is, I'm pulled along by some force that your youth, beauty, and good will – yes, even your good will – makes a bit frightening.

– Let's hear no more of it. We're just old friends. The spell will be broken shortly. My staff will be thrown deeper than plummets sound and you will be returned to your airy freedom. Andrew, perhaps I'm guilty of making too much of his trials and tribulations when compared to what others have gone through. The intellectual conscience thing, this Nietzschean intellectual conscience thing, is not the battlefield most people understand. Or even think worthy — well, how could they if they don't understand it? Outside the subject of truthtelling nothing is great or extraordinary about resisting the temptation of professionalism even while rubbing up so very close to it. Nothing is great or extraordinary about, while continually being in this environment, continually finding ways to challenge or subvert it. And maybe, when all is said and done,

nothing would be great and extraordinary about it if it weren't for finding a way to write about it. If it weren't for finding the subject that nobody else has ever written about and being as thorough and true in the treatment of it as humanly possible.

You're such an emotional thing! Who would've believed it? We're going to have to wrap up soon or else you'll go to pieces on me.

– Alice, there's this missing something I've always wanted to experience. Perhaps I thought I'd find it in Ireland. In a way I'm experiencing it now. With you. With him even. Oh, if only he were you – as fresh and beautiful as you are! And if only I were he – as he is to you! What mountaintop then wouldn't I be ready to climb!

– Andrew, a hero is nothing if not a sail, a fair breeze, a straight line, a clear direction. In just four days he went from being hard hit in his thesis writing to making his thesis writing the hardest hit.

Am I over-dramatizing? I don't think so. How many people, if they get shipwrecked along one route, end up choosing a more difficult and more dangerous one?

Andrew, do you want specifics? Do you want to be bored by specifics? Andrew, how many theses have you shot down during your career?

– Shot down? You mean raised objections to?

– I mean said they couldn't clear the gate. Weren't doable and all that sort of thing.

– I don't know, Alice. There are many theses that start off on the wrong track and have to be significantly modified.

– Ah-hah! So you know what that's all about. And do the students normally fall into line? Do they normally take their marching orders from the professors?

– Alice, you've already made it abundantly clear what an independent spirit he is. Let's leave it or you'll do him less honour talking about it than not.

– No, it can't be dropped because it's not just a matter of driving this point home. It's also a matter of showing what in a certain sense can never be driven home. I mean to say this sense of independence as ego – as id, ego, and super-ego – can still be rocked, shaken, knocked off its pedestal. And this by forces that others don't feel or at least not to the extent of imminent collapse and ruin.

The very day after his thesis was shot down, he went to see a professor about doing another one.

The professor saw that he was upset and not reasoning well. He wanted to work in an area that, up to that time, he'd shown little interest in.

Actually, that's not going far enough. He wanted to work in an area that, up to that time, he'd been hostile to.

– It sounds like he lost his head.

– He did. For a time. On the other hand, his crossing over, going over to the other side as it were...

– Going over? Crossing over to the other side?

– ...was something he had already observed in others as a...

– I'm afraid I don't understand.

– ...kind of using their heads. Andrew, I'm talking about students who make the jump from where their interests principally lie to where their convenience lies. From where their interests are still tied to their heart to where they're only tied to their head. I'm talking about what's done all the time in the name of convenience and utility and efficiency and practicality and necessity and everything else you want to lump into this area.

So his losing his head and their using their heads haven't much that differentiates them apart from a certain precipitousness, I won't say panickiness, on his part. At least not on the practical level. On the level of the intellectual, imaginative, and emotional life of a person, the distance between them is virtually the distance between life and death.

Am I getting close to some vital point? To some nerve centre? Oh, what does it matter if you end up telling the truth about B instead of A as long as you end up telling the truth about it? What does it matter if telling the truth about B has no relation to telling the truth about oneself? What does it matter? Yes, that's where it all hinges because for a large part of truthtelling it doesn't matter. For a large part of this seemingly straightforward business, the "if" is effaced as if it didn't matter.

As if *it didn't matter. That's important to note too. It's another "if" that's keeps alive the first one in more than a formal or rhetorical way. If things are conducive to wiping out the most fundamental "ifs" then fine. But if they're not, if they're precisely there to engage us in a task from which all higher and indeed highest sentiments spring, then there's also a task, a difficult and sometimes inexpressible task, to call attention to this.*

So he teetered and tottered around the thesis business for a few days until it came to him that, if he were to be true to himself, he couldn't let a setback prevent him from being even more daring and radical.

– What're we talking about?

– Principally language. The use of it in philosophical discourse. Principally how it escapes this use or rather how, in a manner of speaking, it is used and abused even before this use.

You can see how, in order to make it succeed as a thesis, he had to use a certain scholarly or philosophical space already carved out. A certain space that – well, let's face it – is pretty much always an identification of the scholarly with the philosophical. I say pretty much because, if it were ever more than this, ever a pure identification of the one with the other, the thesis would've never been written and the space never carved out.

I think I'm already sketching out the site of the reception non-reception of his thesis. It's not only a matter of dealing with how he came to choose such a difficult and not-so-welcome

subject but also how he had to lay it out like a well-ordered city. Like a place where the main arteries could be identified as big-name philosophers and all other routes as scholars arguing, commenting, interpreting, citing, referring, and so on.

– It's been said that Wittgenstein's Tractatus *wouldn't be accepted today as a thesis project.*

– This was in fact said to him by the professor whom he ran to in desperation. Brilliance and innovation and insight, leave that to the theatre as first marks of approval. The university wants the tried and true to be known and shown to be known before anything else.

How much luck was there in the fact that he found exactly the right site for himself. How much luck indeed in the fact that he managed to find a way to his doctoral degree and yet, at the same time, be a rebel. Be a sort of Nietzschean figure and live dangerously.

You see the title. I think you get a glimpse of what I'm talking about.

It's not just that he dealt with, wrote about, analysed the bête noire of contemporary philosophy. It's that he complicated his thought.

Do you know something, Andrew? Even the external examiner admitted as much. And yet he came close to saying in his report (which went on for ten pages by the way) that he detested it. After eight pages of not being very nice and defending his own work from what he considered to be a thoroughly unjust critique of it, he came to a rather surprising conclusion.

– Perhaps you can sum up this conclusion in your own words.

– I'd rather not. It may be hard to understand and in fact will be hard to understand because it comes from a much larger context but, on the other hand, it's the testimony of a hostile witness who, in affirming the thesis's ultimate success (even though he calls it an anti-thesis) is perhaps the best witness of all.

Let me read it, Andrew. It's only a few lines. He's summing up the thesis after having done nothing but complain about it.

> Par rapport au débat Derrida-Ricoeur, on peut favoriser le premier (D+), le second (R+), ni l'un ni l'autre (D-, R-) ou l'un et l'autre (D+, R+). Ces positions correspondent respectivement aux études allogènes de Clark, Stellardi, Bouchard et Lawlor.

Bouchard's the external examiner. He wrote a book on metaphor or, more precisely, the Derrida-Ricoeur debate on metaphor. So, you see, it's this work he's referring to along with three others.

> Cela, semble-t-il, ne laisse guère de marge d'originalité à M. Hunter. Mais, dans la mesure où Lawlor veut seulement clarifier le débat, sa position laisse place à une autre interprétation, complexifiante celle-là. De plus, M. Hunter avoue non seulement un manque (relative) d'impartialité, mais aussi un penchant pour Derrida (D++. R+-). Mais comme, finalement, Derrida, à toute la fin, se mérite lui aussi quelques

critiques, M. Hunter relève de la formule: D++-, R+-, ce qui, si l'on veut, témoigne de sa (sur-) complexité.

What he's doing here makes it seem as if he (I don't mean Bouchard but Monsieur Hunter) was still trying to get the better of Derrida and Ricoeur even though he credits him (Monsieur Hunter) with boosting both of them (Derrida and Ricoeur) while favouring Derrida a little more than Ricoeur whereas in fact it was the debate itself (as much as what went on between them can be called a debate) that was being analysed and it was this debate as radically different attempts to tell the truth about metaphor and, most particularly, its relation to philosophy that was complicated and over-complicated or rather, shown to be complicated and over-complicated.

Do you sort of get the idea?

– I think this Bouchard allows for an originality that he may misjudge and thoroughly dislike and yet, whether it's one or the other or both together, it's his professionalism that shines through at the end.

– Yes, bravo. But what about this show of originality? And in a department, don't forget, that doesn't encourage originality or at least only a certain version of it?

– The fact that he took on the bête noire of philosophy departments and didn't merely simplify his thought as is commonly done; the fact that he convinced people not wholly congenial to this way of proceeding that his thesis was original and should lead to his being conferred a doctoral degree; the fact that all this came out of an earlier project that was derailed and, instead of making him choose a less risky path, made him choose a riskier one – these three facts speak of something rare and significant.

– Voila! Oh, Andrew, if that struggle and achievement were translated to some physical activity, how much noise it would've made! How much fanfare there would've been! But because it was merely spiritual and intellectual, because it was merely about truthtelling, it raised as much indifference as — oh, he should've got more attention! He should've got much more encouragement! He should've got a better reception! He should've been lifted to the very clouds!

Andrew, I speak as one who sometimes has no self-restraint. But you know where that comes from.

Andrew, there's this whole business of philosophical debates. His examining them. And then his being examined as to how he examined them. And then its being debated as to how he examined or thought he examined them. Andrew, what if there's a part of philosophy where a debate, a real debate, never takes place?

– I think there's the general feeling that, if there is this area you speak about, it's caused by something, rightly or wrongly, called the non-philosophical.

– Oh, that's the very thing!

– It's the movement of it into the domain of philosophy.

– There it is! There it all is! And do you know what, Andrew? Do you know what it really is? The non-philosophical can't debate or at least can only debate with itself and the same goes for the other side.

– But what is this non-philosophical? That's the question.

– Whatever you want it to be. For some it's Derrida and deconstruction. For others it's poetry, literature, and almost life itself. For a whole bunch of people, in other words, it's whatever gets in the way of reason, pure reason which always turns out to be somebody's personal reasoning and wants a voice for itself.

It's what reason resists and what resists reason. It's what reason resists with *reason and, because this is inescapably the prejudice as well as the prudence of reason (that is, to think of reason always having reasons for and never against itself), non-reason.*

So, getting back to the debate-thing, it's really all so much feinting and posturing and shadowboxing. So much expert swordplay that may make a palpable hit or two but without the envenomed points that would be fatal to one side or the other.

– This is a rough indictment. Some would say it's the prejudice of non-reason.

– Of non-philosophy. Of course. That's the circle. And if truthtelling is to demonstrate this circle, it must make all the same gestures of debating and arguing as the other side.

– You mean it must be at once the quackery it condemns and the condemnation of this quackery?

– Well, that's putting it a bit strongly, Andrew. Quackery implies something that can and should be eliminated. But if you think for a second that truthtelling can eliminate all quackery, if you think there's at least one moment of truthtelling that can be absolutely pure and without it, then – well, to put it as strong as you – this is a form of quackery.

And my form of quackery is thinking I should have to trot out all the various arguments of this thesis. I'm already done this or am doing it in a way but imagine if I'd done it the other way. I mean the way of formal argumentation. Then I could be accused of such a sin against his overall argument – I mean what passes for a sort of argument and yet is a heterogeneous mix of non-arguments and anti-arguments – that it would've been better if he'd never borne me.

– All this mountain-climbing is his argumentation. Only made out to be something else. Poetic perhaps. Do you see how far I've come?

– You look weak, Andrew. You're weakening. Pretty soon you'll have to go back down.

– I don't think so. I feel rather good actually.

– It's the altitude. You're starting to think you actually belong here. That you wanted to be here in the first place.

– I don't remember. Did I or didn't I? Alice, I don't know what this game has become. All I can say is I feel as if my insides had been carved out.

– It's time to end it. You've come all the way up and now it's time to go back down.

– You mean go home? You mean leave this office? Alice, I'm already returning to myself. It's this office I've always belonged to.

– Andrew, goodbye.

– You're staying behind? You'll be sure to lock up? Alright then....

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

58.1 (The Master's Thesis with Michel Foucault as My Hero)

– Abstract –

This study is limited insofar as it deals with the texts of three critical attackers of Michel Foucault (Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Isaac Balbus) and four critical defenders of him (Michael Kelly, Dominque Janicaud, William Connelly, and Jana Sawicki). It is strategically limited insofar as these texts provide a worthy yet manageable field of study which, at the very least, represents the more polarized end of the Foucauldian debate.

This study operates along two investigative axes: 1) underlying principles which generate and animate the polemical engagement and 2) strategies and tactics which specifically shape it. The underlying principles are *universalistic insistence* and *particularistic counter-insistence*. The three levels of strategic and tactical activity are *evaluative*, *argumentative,* and *rhetorical*.

This study, in order to economize, takes a dramatic form. There is a progressive disclosure of methodology, matter, character, and conflict. The arguments of Section I, springing from Habermas's critical attack on Foucault, emphasize the realm of the meaningful and truthful. The arguments of Section II, springing from Taylor's critical attack on Foucault, emphasize the realm of the moral. The arguments of Section III, springing from Balbus's critical attack on Foucault, emphasize the realm of the political.

In concert with the theme of scholarly polemics being a sophisticated and sublimated form of verbal warfare, this study demonstrates that the ideal of objectivity functions not only as the standard for removing the crudest aspects of partiality and prejudice, but also as the mask for their more refined but fundamental operation.

– Acknowledgement –

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– Abbreviations –

AF	After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge; Postmodern Challenges
CP	Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate
FCR	Foucault: A Critical Reader
MF	Michel Foucault: Philosopher
PDM	The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity
PT	Political Theory, Vol. 13

– Introduction –

Let us grant that all thinkers have a pre-polemical philosophical disposition. And let us further grant that this disposition manifests itself as either one of two inclinations or two areas of overriding emphasis, interest, and attachment. The first is the prospect, the project, the feeling of the Harmonious Whole. The second is the prospect, the project, the feeling of the Highly Singular and Richly Distinctive. The polemicist most possessed by the first will insist, generally speaking, on the universal. The polemicist most possessed by the second will insist, generally speaking, on the particular. If the above is granted to be the case, then it is likely that such a state of affairs underlies and determines those discourses or debates showing signs of being preoccupied with the philosophical mission itself. With this in mind, we can say that the pre-polemical division between the universalistic and the particularistic will operate as rhetorical reservoirs or capacities for rhetorical assault which, rather than being the derived effects of the strength of specific arguments, will be themselves the *a priori* strength of these arguments. If it is acceptable to abbreviate matters here and, for the sake of moving straight to the polemical scene, avoid discussing in detail the latter's relation to the pre-polemical,[1] we may posit two operative or underlying principles of polemical engagement. They are *universalistic insistence* and *particularistic counter-insistence*. A strategically limited layout and study of the Foucauldian debate in relation to these two principles is the present undertaking.

The critical defenders of Michel Foucault, being in principle and in practise natural hosts of his main ideas and lines of thought, must operate with the particularistic insistence which informs them. For, despite his publicly professed antipathy to polemicists and polemics,[2] Foucault carries on a critical campaign which, to a greater or lesser degree, receives a faithful echo in his supporters and which, however subtle, indirect, and carefully circumscribed it may be, worries and galvanizes various thinkers who incline, straightforwardly or otherwise, towards universalism. Naturally enough, they engage in a counter-campaign which has as its primary objective (to employ one of Foucault's own expressions) the cutting off of the king's head.[3] Less dramatically speaking, the critical strategy of attack is the targeting of the theoretical or quasi-theoretical dimension of Foucault's work. It is, specifically, the dislodgement of this dimension from the precise site of its practical employment and the insistence on independently revealing and critically examining it. It is the insistence, in other words, that it must conform to a

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1 There may be an objection precisely here. Why, philosophically speaking, should we allow this move? Why should not this relation be discussed and the nature of the pre-polemical more carefully outlined? To bring forth the latter would require, in truth, dealing with the question: Why do some people dispose themselves one way and others the opposite way? What makes for these philosophical orientations in the first place? But, again, from another angle we might ask: "Do not these questions already presuppose the legitimacy of insisting on a logical account of the whole? Are they not already committed – at least if there is the expectation of such an account – to one side? And, if such is the case, perhaps this study is already committed to the other. Perhaps it must and can only arise out of insistence on the particular as both the logical and the extra-logical.

2 "The polemicist, on the other hand, proceeds encased in privileges that he possesses in advance and will never agree to question. On principle, he possesses rights authorizing him to wage war and making that struggle a just undertaking, the person he confronts is not a partner in a search for truth, but an adversary, an enemy who is wrong, who is harmful and whose very existence constitutes a threat. . . . Has anyone ever seen a new idea come out of a polemic?" Thus we find Foucault, in one of his interviews, polemicizing against polemicists. (***The Foucault Reader***, ed. Paul Rabinow, London, England: Penguin Books, 1984, 182-183).

3 Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," in ***Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other*** **Writings**, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 121.

universalistic profile and measure, a traditionally established view of philosophical theory and practise. On the other hand, the defenders of Foucault repeatedly point to the uniqueness or particularity of Foucault's "theory" which, qua theory, must in some sense turn away from itself, limit itself, seek its identity in the specific work of the present (or the past in relation to the present), and make no special claims or promises for the future. What finally takes place then is a break in the very concept of theoretical activity qua philosophical activity – a break which effectively puts two powerful capacities for systematizing thought in opposition.

The critical defenders, just as the critical attackers in relation to Foucault, target and take advantage of the main weakness of those who attack him. The critical strategy of defence, in other words, often involves a counter-problematization which is essentially the radical questioning of or placing into doubt the universalistic assumptions of these attackers. One easily gets the picture: a few vessels of bulk with a large number of smaller ones mixing it up in the surrounding waters – firing, returning fire, and cross-firing. Jürgen Habermas, himself no light vessel, calls this pitched battle, in an essay by the same name, "Modernity versus Postmodernity."[4] In his book entitled *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*,[5] he locates Foucault at the latter end of a line of philosophical thought stretching from Nietzsche and characterized by him (Habermas) as the radical critique of modernity. So far as the debate surrounding Foucault goes, the two lectures he devotes to him in this book are rather important.

This study concerns itself with these two lectures. It does not concern itself with later critical attacks on Foucault which, following in its wake and making abundant reference to Habermas's, strategically vary little from it.[6] In order to make this study readable – perhaps even enjoyable – it must be sufficiently diverse yet unified, sufficiently personal yet balanced, and sufficiently select in its choices yet coordinated. So it is that, in addition to Habermas's critical attack and two "anti-Habermasian" defences of Foucault,[7] this study encompasses two lesser but fairly independent attacks,[8] each of which is the catalyst for a not-too-friendly (despite any appearance to the contrary) response from a Foucauldian ally.[9]

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4 Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 22 (Winter, 1981): 3-14.

5 Habermas, ***The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,*** trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).

6 See notes 64-70.

7 Michael Kelly, "Foucault, Habermas, and the Self-Referentiality of Critique," in ***Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate***, ed. Michael Kelly (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), 185-210; and Dominique Janicaud, "Rationality, Force, and Power: Foucault and Habermas's Criticisms," in ***Michel Foucault, Philosopher***, trans. Timothy J. Armstrong (Rutledge: New York, 1992), 283-302.

8 Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," in ***Foucault: A Critical Reader***, ed. David Couzens Hoy (London & New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 69-102; and Isaac Balbus, "Disciplining Women: Michel Foucault and the Power of Feminist Discourse," in ***After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges,*** ed. Jonathan Arac (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rudgers University Press, 1991), 138-160.

9 William E. Connelly, "Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness," *Political Theory*, Vol. 13, N. 3 (August, 1985) 365-376; and Jana Sawicki, "Feminism and the Power of Foucaldian Discourse," in *After Foucault*, 161-178.

Section I: Habermas contra Foucault / Kelly and Janicaud contra Habermas

It should be duly noted that the title of this thesis (i.e., *The Debate between the Allies and Adversaries of Michel Foucault*) is, although (or, rather, on account of being) conveniently pithy and "high concept," a bit misleading. After all, rarely does one side of this debate, i.e., the critical attackers, respond directly to the other side.[10] They prefer (for reasons which would occupy another study) to engage, apart from Foucault himself, each other. They prefer, that is, to enter into a discussion which, although easily admitting second-order differences between them and hence a lateral flow of argumentation, is largely a repetition, renewal, or re-establishing of their earlier objectives and objections vis-a-vis critiquing Foucault.

Notwithstanding this asymmetry and lateral tendency, we may speak of a fairly divided and polarized polemical field. Moreover, this study, presenting specifically the strategically limited field of Foucauldian debate, emphasizes this division and polarization. However, it certainly does not exclude (as opposed to the above-mentioned lateral activity) a "soft-line" strategy of polemical engagement – a kind of attack or defence which signals a desire for a possibility of reconciliation. Such an inclusion, to be sure, also signals that there are strategies in essential opposition to the one of this study. For no doubt it would be wrong to imply that there is no polemical element or inclination precisely here, no underlying principle which, to some degree or other, forms the very presentation of polemical matters. Moreover, it signals in a third way that these matters are not all that simple in their relation to and involvement with these principles and that, for example, Michael Kelly's defence of Foucault, while particularistic in its deproblematizing of Habermas's case against him, is also "universalistic" in its bid "to focus on the appropriate ways to carry out their common project while recognizing their distinct yet correlative strategies" (**Critique and Power**, 391).

Perhaps this emphasis on division and polarization needs itself to be emphasized, this *de-emphasization,* in other words, of the "common project" which, even when this chord is struck by an opponent of those explicitly involved in or voicing such undertakings (i.e. by the Foucauldian whose first movement runs counter to the tradition), still suggests a bona fide spirit of coming together. Certainly this study must position itself elsewhere and, instead of insisting on the *rerum concordia discors*, make its indirect appeal to the *bellum omnium contra omnes*. Thus for us Kelly is, first and foremost, the opponent of Habermas and not the foundation-builder of a new understanding between the latter and Foucault.

On the other hand, it is still within the scope and spirit of this strategically limited study that Kelly present himself not only as a defender of Foucault, but as a recaster of their debate "so that," as he envisions, "philosophically adequate responses to it can be developed and defended" (**CP**, 366). How, he asks, can the universals which justify critique be themselves justified? (366). It is, we should suspect, the problem of the infinite regress that he is posing: every claim or assertion, initially presupposing or "proving" its independence, ultimately "presupposes" or discloses its non-independence. Can Foucault be taken to task for explicitly not providing what Habermas himself, according to Kelly, does not and, indeed, cannot provide? Habermas, of course, "can" do this sort of thing (by the mere fact of *insistence*) and, indeed, having already done it, solicits Kelly's response along with a number of, to say the least, more favourable ones. It consists of, for the most part, fifty-five pages of text (i.e., lectures nine and ten of *The*

10 For an exception to the rule, see note 40.

Philosophical Discourse of Modernity) which, along with their critical intent, seek to give a survey of Foucault's major works (except the last two).[11] As already set out in the Introduction, these two lectures occupy a place within a more or less general account of post-Hegelian thought which, at the same time, is a "genealogical" account of postmodernist thought.[12] Such a thorough contextualization of Foucault is, strategically speaking, the diminution of his distinctiveness by incorporating him in a larger, more populated space – a sub-tradition, that is, having distinction only insofar as it attempts to distance itself from the main one.

According to the Habermasian construal, philosophical thought takes the wrong turn when the young Hegel, forsaking an embryonic theory of reason grounded in intersubjective meaning and purpose, resolves the subject-object dilemma of modern philosophy by subjectivizing being itself (**PDM**, 27-37). Such a move spins out in two ways: the Left Hegelian way which, with a will to reclaiming the concretely historical, returns subjectivity to essentially autonomous individuals confronting an objectified, material world (53-54); and the Right Hegelian way which, maintaining a quasi-religious attitude to the unfolding of events (qua reason writ large), continues the Hegelian stultification of the existential critique of modernity (56, 59-60). Then, "with Nietzsche's entrance into the discourse of modernity, the argument shifts, from the ground up" (85). Reason itself comes under attack as a dispiriting and ultimately destructive form of the will to power. Drawing from his Romantic heritage, Nietzsche invokes the notion of the other of reason, the primal, instinctive, chaotic forces of nature which, as they are subdued and reflected in myth, art, and religion, continuously reconcile the individual with the anonymous processes which throw up, squander, and ultimately efface him (85-88). Habermas sees the Nietzschean move as a splintering off from the counter-discourse which the Enlightenment traditionally understands as its self-critical side (94). In short, it is the would-be dethronement of reason qua philosophical inviolability by a kind of reasoning continually pointing beyond itself and, in its bid to conceal its own paradoxicality, attempting to avoid any self-reference. Later followers of Nietzsche mainly take two paths: the Heidegger-Derrida route and the Bataille-Foucault one (97). While both display no awareness of their own aporias, they seek to clear themselves of the aporias of the philosophy of the subject. The first goes the way of identifying the problem of the subject with the more fundamentally problematic tradition of metaphysics (97-98). The second follows the path of portraying the subject's rise and entanglement in the discourse of modernity (260-265). Between the two outcome ranges, roughly speaking, the spirit of postmodernism. Foucault is perhaps its most able representative with his radically historicizing and de-universalizing project (**PDM**, xiv).

Along with the strategic decentring of Foucault's thought (camouflaged or ambiguated to some degree by occasional honorifics), there are the evaluative claims of the contextualization

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11 Not yet available to Habermas were the posthumously published second and third volumes of ***The History of Sexuality***. These are ***The Use of Pleasure***, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1985), and ***The Care of the Self***, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

12 Dominique Janicaud states that "Habermas himself did after all sketch a genealogy of modern consciousness in *Der Philosophische der Moderne . . .*" *(Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, 299). No doubt we have here, in relation to Foucault's thought, a loose usage of the term *genealogy*. Properly speaking, what Foucault does is quite different from the history of thought which Habermas provides. After all, the latter is very much the conventional business of portraying certain people's ideas influencing other people's. Foucault's genealogy, on the other hand, focuses on social practises and forms of discipline wherein sites of subjectivity play a decidedly subordinate role. However, it is not so much that he is diagnosing or prescribing a *hierarchy* of subjective versus non-subjective (or conscious versus unconscious) elements. Rather, it is one of bringing into the foreground what remains largely hidden by virtue of a dominant role traditionally given to the conscious, willing, decision-making side of things.

which provide reference points for the selecting, emphasizing, and scrutinizing of various elements – for the, in other words, effective reconstruction of his thought. The most obvious move is, as already mentioned in the Introduction, the dislodgement and independent examination of the theoretical dimension. It allows for attaining the principal objective of problematizing Foucault, fashioning the main charges of the critical attack, and providing a focus for the two lectures if not the whole series of twelve. This focus is midway through the second of the two lectures in the form of three objections: i) Foucault's inadvertently *presentist* construal of the genealogically analysed past, ii) his *relativist* construal involving power-knowledge complexes, and iii) his *crypto-normativistic* stance vis-a-vis the implicit critique of genealogy and the political activity which presumably springs from it (276-284). Habermas relates these three objections to three categories of valuation which, as he claims, are necessary to rational consensual activity. They are *meaning*, *validity*, and *value*.

Meaning: Foucault confounds it by explicitly denying the hermeneutic approach to the historical matter under investigation while implicitly framing this investigation according to the cultural, social, and political interests of the present (276-278).

Validity: He forfeits any claim to the true-false distinction "by not thinking genealogically when it comes to his *own* genealogical historiography . . ." (269). That is to say, his theory of power-knowledge, positing the historically contingent, institutionally implicated, and technologically formed substance of theory, clearly implies that his own must lack the force of independent truth (279).

Value: Foucault, emptying his theory of normative standards qua criteria of judgement, runs into confusion when the question of his own critical and political stances is put to him. Habermas, in order to drive this point home, employs the oft-quoted passage from Nancy Fraser's first article on Foucault.[13]

> Why is struggle preferable to submission? Why ought domination to be resisted? Only with the introduction of normative notions of some kind could he begin to tell us what is wrong with the modern power/knowledge regime and why we ought to oppose it (284).

Unlike Michael Kelly's defence of Foucault which ignores Habermas's contextualization and meets his objections with a substantially different reconstruction,[14] Dominique Janicaud's critical defence responds largely to it. However, he does take time to reconstruct carefully the whole of Habermas's problematization. (In so doing, he makes the claim that the three main objections of Habermas are essentially one.)[15] But after having given his impressive display of being able to grasp the intricacies of Habermas's case against Foucault, Janicaud, succeeding, as we might say, to a more authoritative position (by giving this "impressive display"), pronounces his verdict: Habermas "*does not understand* Nietzsche . . ." (Janicaud's italics, **Michel Foucault**, 292). Thus we may describe Janicaud's counter-strategy as the *problematizing* of Habermas's

13 Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions," *Praxis International* 1 (October, 1981), 272-287.

14 The following line from Kelly's essay sums up his whole defensive strategy: "Habermas's critique of Foucault is largely based on a single text, *Discipline and Punish*, and even more specifically on a particular interpretation of that text" (*Critique and Power*, 366).

15 "The other two criticisms [besides the charge of presentism] are largely redundant: it is in fact the same criticism shifted from the point of view of signification to that of truth and then value" (*Michel Foucault*, 291).

contextualization and, as a second or simultaneous movement, the *re-contextualizing* of Foucault's thought. In essence, Janicaud restores to the latter its distinctiveness by strategically destroying the connection to Foucault of a "professing Nietzschean irrationalism"[16] and replacing it with a connection to one "who, as is well known, (and this is one point on which the two interlocutors agree) profoundly shook Western thought, which suddenly had to become aware of its destiny regarding power" (**MF**, 291).

With Kelly, contextualization also carries evaluative force which, being at least in part conciliatory, denies to him a vigorous counter-offensive such as Janicaud's. This conciliatory aspect is, in fact, the formal purpose not only of his essay, but the book to which the essay belongs. This book, edited by Kelly himself and containing contributions by other scholars, is revealingly entitled *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*.[17] As already noted, Kelly sees Habermas and Foucault faced with the same dilemma of self-referentiality. The immediate concern for him then is to counter Habermas's focussing on this problem such that he can give the impression, while making his case against Foucault, of having on his side the force of the better argument.[18] Ignoring, as already stated, Habermas's Nietzschean contextualization of Foucault, Kelly makes the case for a strictly Foucauldian theme – *local critique* (**CP**, 379-382). In order to find the Archimedean leverage point by which to shift aside the bulkier, more wide-ranging arguments of Habermas's critical attack, Kelly simply challenges his reading of one text, *Discipline and Punish*.[19] In other words, Kelly seizes on the quickest way to reverse Habermas's project of dislodging the theoretical dimension of Foucault's thought from his specific historical concerns. Thus the generalizing or universalizing of Foucault's analytic of power is countered by re-examining its use in the analysis of the French penal system from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century (367). The problem of self-referentiality, though certainly not disappearing, no longer assumes the central role it does with Habermas. Instead Kelly (and in this way he resembles Janicaud and virtually all other defenders) spends his time showing how unsympathetically a text of Foucault's is read when one demands of its theoretical dimension the carrying of a weight for which it was simply not designed. With a continual reference then to Habermas's universalizing of Foucault's notion of power, Kelly marshals textual evidence to support the opposite view.

> Of course, the mere mention of a disciplinary regime based on the panopticon which "extends it effects" is precisely what makes Habermas think Foucault is analysing modern society as a whole (**PDM**, 289). This makes it even more imperative that Foucault's comments about the panopticon be understood in the context of his discussion of Bentham's discursive ideal of the prison and other institutions (**CP**, 369).

Before elaborating on the above point by drawing extensively from *Discipline and Punish*, Kelly

16 "Only in the context of his interpretation of Nietzsche does Foucault yield to the familiar melody of a *professing* irrationalism" (*Philosophical Discourse*, 278).

17 See note 7.

18 By giving the impression that he has the force of the better argument on his side, Habermas shows that he does not rely simply on argument. Statements such as the following illustrate the *rhetorical* contribution. "Naturally Foucault does not allow himself to be influenced by the ostensible lack of coercion of the cogent argument by which truth claims, and validity claims in general, prevail" (*Philosophical Discourse*, 247).

19 Foucault, ***Discipline and Punish***, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

provides some comments by Foucault.

> In reference to the reduction of my analysis to that simplistic figure which is the metaphor of the Panopticon, I think that . . . it is easy to show that the analysis of power which I have made cannot at all be reduced to this figure . . . [I]t is true that I have showed that what we are talking about is precisely a utopia which had never functioned in the form in which it existed . . . (369).

But Kelly's whole effort, it should be noted, rests on nullifying or at least partially discounting a generalizing (or even, let us say, universalizing) tendency which, properly speaking, belongs to the text itself.

> Habermas's interpretation of Foucault unquestionably has some basis in *Discipline and Punish*, but it plays off an ambiguity in the text (367).

After citing a troublesome passage which gives the impression of a holistic enterprise (368), Kelly sums up his attitude which is also the strictly defensive side of his soft-line strategy.

> For three reasons I think Foucault's analysis in *Discipline and Punish* is first and foremost a discussion of the French prison and social system and not one of modern society in general: (1) the bulk of the text supports only the narrow or "local" project; (2) Foucault's own interpretation of the notion of power in *Discipline and Punish* does not focus on the carceral society; (3) his notion of "local critique" is limited to narrowly circumscribed genealogical analyses rather than to global theories about modern society (369).

Thus we see how it is that, as exemplified here and elsewhere, the particular, merely by *insisting* on itself, privileges itself discursively and forms the evaluative basis of a counter-discourse and counter-critique.[20]

It is one of Kelly's first moves to call into question Habermas's claim that Foucault's thought involves different methodological approaches to the *same* subject matter (367). (Let us note once again that this problematizing of Habermas's reconstruction differs as strategy from Janicaud's problematizing of Habermas's contextualization.) This subject matter is, almost interchangeably in Habermas's analysis, reason in modernity, modernity itself, the modern

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20 Naturally Kelly must account for the tendency of the text, at least on occasion, to work at cross-purposes. The common tactic here is simply to imply that the writer was careless.

> . . . [W]hile Habermas may misunderstand [Foucault's notions of disciplinary power and local critique], some of the misunderstandings undoubtedly arise from Foucault's own unclarity (*Critique and Power*, 366).

On the other hand, one can always claim the necessity of an informed or interpretative reading.

> . . . [A]s Jana Sawicki emphasizes, the inflammatory rhetoric in *Discipline and Punish* about the carceral society has to be understood in relation to Foucault's challenge to the equally inflammatory humanist rhetoric of progress . . . (370).

society, the philosophy of the subject, anthropologism, the "death" of the subject, the problem of subject-centred reason, and the rise of the human sciences in their complicity with power. Beginning with *Madness and Civilization*, he operates with the theme of Foucault's radical critique of modernity in its misguided opposition to the "affliction" of subject-centred or instrumental reason (**PDM**. 239). He tells us, to refer again to the above-mentioned text (i.e., *Madness and Civilization*) that is about a "history of the rise of the discourse in which psychiatrists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries talk about madness" (239). But, even more important, it is about a "reason that has become monological [and] holds madness at arm's length from itself so as to safely gain mastery of it as an object cleansed of rational subjectivity" (239). Therefore what we finally end up with is a history of science "enlarged into a history of reason" (239).

Foucault, as Habermas notes, later abandons the hermeneutic dimension which makes him suggest that madness has an originating source, a primordial existence apart from the discourses and practises which surround it (240). It is almost as if that Foucault wishes to pursue here "the rise of instrumental reason back to the point of primordial usurpation and of the split of a monadically hardening reason from mimesis . . ." (241). But "one who desires to unmask nothing but the naked image of subject-centred reason cannot abandon himself to the dream that befalls this reason in its 'anthropological slumber'" (241). Thus Foucault next pursues, according to Habermas, a structural analysis of discourse which, treating statements as constitutive and constituent events, leaves no epistemic remainder (241). In addition, he advances the kind of historical writing which, as "a kind of antiscience," integrates the human sciences with the history of reason and hence degrades them (241-242).

However, the earliest works, according to Habermas, still contain the same subject matter which occupy Foucault when he submits the human sciences to, first, archeological analysis and, second, genealogical investigations. Thus Habermas tells us that Foucault "retained to the end the epochal divisions that articulate the history of madness" (243). So it is too that, in agreement with the latter, "the end of the eighteenth century marks the peripeteia in the drama of the history of reason" (243). It is the point at which the earlier large-scale confinement of the insane in Europe reproduces itself in the form of "closed institutions with supervision by doctors for mentally diagnosed illness . . ." (244). Both of these events "serve to delimit heterogeneous elements out of that gradually stabilized monologue that the subject, raised in the end to the status of universal human reason, holds with itself through making everything around it into an object" (244). But, specific to the birth of the psychiatric institution and of the clinic in general, we must note that "it is exemplary for a form of disciplining that Foucault will describe later on purely and simply as the modern technology of domination" (245). It is by this route that Foucault will come to perceive "the monuments to victory of a regulatory reason that no longer subjugates only madness, but also the needs and desires of the individual organism, as well as the social body of an entire population" (245).

Habermas's universalistic reconstruction of Foucault, as already indicated when discussing the former's contextualization of the latter, becomes not only the evaluative basis by which to judge the particular aspects of his thought, but also the conceptually framed selection, arrangement, and profiling of these aspects. Those that, we may say, strike the critical defender as being quintessentially Foucauldian are thereby excluded, marginalised, degraded, or simply reevaluated. Of course, the critical attacker operates from the standpoint that he is merely retrieving or reclaiming what Foucault's analyses themselves exclude, marginalise, degrade, or

reevaluate. Thus Habermas proceeds, for example, by emphasizing and focussing on the structuralist link to Foucault's thought, particularly the archeological side of it, which Foucault himself minimizes and even repudiates.[21] In so doing, Habermas problematizes it.

> Such discourse – totally autonomous, detached from contextual constraints and functional conditions, guiding the underlying practices – clearly suffers from a conceptual difficulty. What then counts as fundamental are the rules (accessible to archeology) that make possible the ongoing discursive practice. However, these rules can make a discourse comprehensible only as regards its condition of possibility; they do not suffice to explain the discourse practice in its actual functioning – for there are no rules that govern their own application. A rule-governed discourse cannot itself govern the context in which it is implicated: "Thus, although nondiscursive influences in the form of social and institutional practices, skills, pedagogical practices and concrete models (e.g., Bentham's Panopticon) constantly intrude into Foucault's analysis . . . he must locate the productive power revealed by discursive practices in the regularity of these same practices. The result is the strange notion of regularities which regulate themselves" (268).

Furthermore, this emphasis on the structuralist link allows Habermas to explain Foucault's changing methodology not in terms of his taking up new problems (as, of course, both Foucault and his defenders insist),[22] but in terms of having *one* problem.

> Foucault escapes [the above] difficulty when he gives up the autonomy of the forms of knowledge in favour of their foundation within power technologies and *subordinates* the archeology of knowledge to the genealogy that explains the emergence of knowledge from practices of power (268).

In other words, what Habermas accomplishes by these manoeuvres is the establishing of a theoretical continuity and completion within Foucault's thought – an attempt by Foucault, perhaps surreptitious or perhaps unconscious (Habermas makes no explicit comment on this matter)[23] to fashion a grand theory of power in modern society.

This grand or total theory now becomes Habermas's express target (prior to the objection of a thrice paradoxical self-referentiality) and, moreover, allows him to grasp tightly the Proteus

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21 Cf. The Foreword to the English Edition in Foucault's ***The Order of Things***, ed. R. D. Laing (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), xiv; the Conclusion in Foucault's ***The Archeology of Knowledge***, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 199-211; and the interview "Critical Theory/Intellectual History" in *Critique and Power*, 109-114.

22 Cf., for example, Gary Gutting's introduction, "Michel Foucault: A User's Manual," in ***The Cambridge Companion to Foucault***, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2-24.

23 We receive only suggestive statements such as the following: "The *concealed* derivation [Habermas's italics] of the concept of power from the concept of the will to knowledge (originally formulated in terms of a critique of metaphysics) also explains the systematically ambiguous use of the category of 'power'" (*Philosophical Discourse*, 270).

of a shifting methodology. According to Habermas, Foucault runs into a different version of the same problem which afflicted his archeological analyses, i.e., a transcendentally constitutive level of explanation which, either implicitly or explicitly operating at the empirical (i.e., historically factual) level, engenders a kind of theoretical sleight of hand (or, as Habermas more politely puts it, systematic ambiguity) (270).

> Foucault's genealogy of the human sciences enters on the scene in an irritating double role. On the one hand, it plays the *empirical role* of an analysis of technologies of power that are meant to explain the functional social context of the science of man. Here power relationships are of interest as conditions for the rise of scientific knowledge and as its social effects. On the other hand, the same genealogy plays the *transcendental role* of an analysis of technologies of power that are meant to explain how scientific discourse about man is possible at all. Here the interest is in power relationships as constitutive conditions for scientific knowledge. These two epistemological roles are no longer divided into two competing approaches that are merely related to the same object, the human subject in its life-expressions. [Note: Habermas is referring here to two main lines of thought in Foucault's *The Order of Things* – the "transcendental" role of epistemic regimes and the "empirical" role of anthropo-philosophical will to knowledge.] Instead, genealogical historiography is supposed to be both at once – functionalist social science and at the same time historical research into constitutive conditions (273-274).

In plain language, Habermas gives the outline and impression of a rather fraudulent move on the part of Foucault – the transformation of his earlier notion of an insatiable will to knowledge (generated by modern philosophy's and the human sciences' objectification of the subject) into the concept of a universal will to power (269-270). In order to clear up a major difficulty in archeological theory, Foucault, according to Habermas, masks the derivation of the concept of a universal will to power from the concept of a will to knowledge and proceeds as if power at the transcendentally constitutive level were explanatorily equivalent to epistemic regimes (*The Order of Things*)[24] and/or discursive formations (*The Archeology of Knowledge*).[25] Thus he positions himself to make the objection that what Foucault originally intended to be the hallmark of the problematic philosophy of the subject, i.e., the will to knowledge or self-knowledge as the will to an impossible self-transparency, becomes the universalistic claim of power's discreet (or not so discreet) operation within all discourses, practices, and realms of knowledge (270).

As already noted, Kelly's primary line of defence is simply to deny Habermas's thesis that Foucault always operates with the same subject matter (**CP**, 367). What Habermas goes to some length to show as being a theoretically distinct, ongoing project meets with Kelly's referring the matter to a misreading of the text which Habermas takes to be its culminating point. For it is clear that it is within the genealogical work of *Discipline and Punish* that Habermas

24 See note 21.
25 *Ibid.*

locates the more or less completed form of an ambitious theoretical undertaking.[26] Now when Kelly gently argues or tries to convince us that this book is mainly about the French penal system and other French institutions (368), his much firmer but less explicit line is to honour the book (i.e., to respect its particular content). Hence the whole notion of a theory of power trying to explain everything is, along with Habermas's valiant attempt to argue this case, rather lightly set aside in favour of expounding on the central concept of disciplinary power and its explanatory relation to the "finer, more detailed phenomena" of institutionalized being (374).

It is entirely another matter with Dominique Janicaud's strategy of critical defence. Neither principally concerned with defending some main work of Foucault's nor even (except indirectly) some specific feature, his aggressive encounter with Habermas's critique is along the front of the Nietzsche-Foucault "philosophical elaboration of the understanding (and the intelligibility) of power in the modern contemporary world" (**MF**, 284). Far from denying a theory of power either to Nietzsche or Foucault (and here he seems closer to Habermas than to Kelly), what he does deny is that this theory should have (or be taken to have) pretensions to totality.

> It is now time to bring to light, with regard to Foucault's work, the fundamental misunderstanding. . . . Habermas imputes to Foucault the desire to construct a theory of power which would arrive at definite and complete "solutions" (295).

At this point Janicaud, as it seems, wanders off a bit, speaking at length about Foucault's "indirect approach" to various topics (295). However, the detour does give the outline of Foucault's highly distinctive style, a manner of proceeding which, always somewhat tentative, circumspect, and even self-effacing, is nonetheless remarkably bold and challenging. But this way of proceeding, as Janicaud notes (while bringing his thoughts back to Habermas's critique) , is such that

> Foucault could not have been unaware of the fact that he would be accused of a 'systematic ambiguity' especially with regard to the problem of power. Yet could not one reply to a censor hungry for coherence that power is precisely the moving locus of unexpected exclusions, mutations, and shifts which make any *grand theory* of power abstract, even utopian? (296)

This rhetorical question as counter-thrust certainly refers itself to Nietzsche's as well as Foucault's thought and, as we have already noted, is the problematizing of Habermas's *contextualization* of Foucault. Instead of a modernity afflicted by rampant instrumental reason qua subject-centred reason (Habermas), Janicaud sees the modern affliction as rampant instrumental reason qua theoretico-technological domination by reason (283). Strategically speaking, we may say that Janicaud's counter-reconstruction of Foucault's thought (minimal though it may be) is a *recontextualization* of it via a counter-reconstruction of the Nietzschean legacy. To this end, Janicaud makes a fierce, scattergun kind of attack on Habermas's submerged

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26 In these two lectures on Foucault, Habermas treats ***The History of Sexuality****, Vol. I*, [trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980)] as a sort of companion piece to *Discipline and Punish.*

thesis of a Nietzschean irrationalism.

> Yet there is a more serious problem. It is necessary to get to the bottom of the misunderstanding (292).
>
> [Habermas's] pseudo-résumé of Nietzsche's thought shows that [he] *does not understand* Nietzsche . . ." (292).
>
> There is no rationality [according to Habermas's construal]; there are only the effects of power; such would be the substance of Nietzsche's teaching faithfully applied by Foucault in his historiography of discursive practices (292).
>
> But what is being refuted? Nietzsche or his shadow? Foucault or his caricature? Is it necessary to go over the demonstration again, this time on Nietzsche's side? (293).
>
> In Nietzsche the questioning of rationality can by no means be reduced to a naive dispute on the surface level between the intrinsic and formal validity of truth judgements. Nietzsche never contested either the coherence or the interest of the logical, mathematical, or scientific corpus (293).
>
> From *The Birth of Tragedy* onwards the question which preoccupied Nietzsche was that of the potentiality of great art as a civilizing force (293).
>
> Nietzsche is proposing nothing less than measuring the scope of Western history against the history of truth (294).
>
> Even the title sets the tone: 'Nietzsche als Drehscheibe': Nietzsche as turntable! Not only is this (false) understanding of Nietzsche worthy of a railway engineer, it is also purely historicist (294).
>
> It is not surprising therefore that we get a distorted view of Foucault from Habermas's criticism (294).

With the critical defenders of Foucault, we may say that a universalistic *counter-tendency*, subordinate to and paradoxically supportive of the main tendency, provides the background, the foil, and perhaps even the pretext for the valuing and evaluating process. In the case of Kelly, the common concern which Foucault and Habermas share, the paradoxical self-referentiality of modern critique, is also the counter-contextualization wherein pride of place is given to the Foucauldian project of genealogy. It is true that Kelly insists on a place for Habermas but, as we should note, he seems to disqualify him until such time as he becomes more of a Foucauldian. For Kelly presents Habermas's insistence on historical/ahistorical

Enlightenment values as being the main obstacle to an improved dialogue between the Habermasian and the Foucauldian camps (**CP**, 390). The suspicion therefore arises that, strategically speaking, disqualification is the covert policy of Kelly and that his soft-line defence is really presenting the case for a hegemonic kind of genealogy. For if the Habermasian project were to dispense with necessary universals and embrace Foucauldian universals qua historical variables (398), how could it preserve itself in a recognizable form?

Perhaps the matter is worth looking into a little more closely. Certainly the first impression one receives is not that of a crypto-universalist. In fact, Kelly takes great pains to show the specificity of genealogical work. Not only, for example, does he discuss the recovery of subjugated, marginalised knowledge by Foucault himself (379-380), but he also illustrates a case related to his own professional experience (380). At the same time, he argues for the affinity between Habermas's critique of modernity and Foucault's (389). In so doing, however, Foucault's critique begins to look less and less like a counter-discourse and more and more like a mainline one. The hegemonic undercurrent of Kelly's conciliatory operation comes through in the following passage.

> . . . [I]t is beginning to seem that the more Foucault's and Habermas's respective positions on the issue of universals are clarified, the less they differ. Foucault says universals are variables that must be criticized constantly, while Habermas calls them stand-ins that are revisable. There is a real difference, however, at least so long as Habermas continues to explore strategies to articulate and justify the "moment of unconditionality" built into actual processes of mutual understanding (PDM, 322) and so long as Foucauldians question the possibility of such unconditionality. Habermas pursues these strategies because he believes that universal norms are necessary for critique in all the modern discursive and concrete practices, whereas Foucauldians practice critique successfully with universals as variables (389).

Much of Kelly's essay devotes itself to showing how "successful" this practise is. At the same time, he gives no indication how the two critiques would draw closer together with reciprocal gains or unique results. Moreover, Kelly goes on very shortly to cast suspicion on the efficacity of Habermasian critique. Admitting that the issue of transhistorical validity and universality is indeterminate (despite Foucault's providing "powerful evidence for the conclusion that [Habermas's] strategies will never succeed") (390), Kelly concludes his essay along these lines:

> Although Habermas may think the indeterminacy buys time for his position by putting the onus of proof on those who deny transhistorical validity and universality, I think it works in Foucault's favor instead; for he works with the correlation between knowledge and power and between critique and power, whereas Habermas insists on their separation without being able to defend it successfully, since what he defends analytically can so far not be found empirically. Foucault can practice critique now, while Habermas must wait (or else operate with

counterfactuals) (390).

With such glowing and dismal reports to make the distinction between Foucault and Habermas, Kelly, as even the most hard-bitten Foucauldian might be prepared to admit, cuts away the ground from Habermas even while presumably establishing the ground which he shares with Foucault.

With respect to Janicaud's critical defence, the universalistic counter-tendency, being overtly hostile to theories such as Habermas's which implicitly claim their innocence or non-involvement with power, engenders conciliatory gestures only at the level of scholarly propriety.

> Is the change in model suggested by Habermas from a philosophy of consciousness to a philosophy of communication sufficient? The edification of a complex, non-functionalist theory of communication is a worthy enterprise; but does it not run the risk of remaining abstract and even edifying in a purely useless sort of way, so long as its recourse to a *normativity* interior to rationality sees this rationality in terms of a comfortable and artificial autonomy, turning away from the most disturbing power effects of scientific rationality itself? (**MF**, 298).

Referring everything to the importance of Nietzsche's first raising the issue of modern power (and doing so in a way which, as we should note again, reverses Habermas's critical evaluation), Janicaud fashions it so that Foucault ends up in the light of the Nietzschean sun while Habermas stands in the darkness of his own critical attack on Foucault and misunderstanding of Nietzsche. Instead of a body of thought, in other words, which loses its lustre by virtue of its derivation from an earlier and highly suspect one, Janicaud presents Foucault's brilliance as being the eminent reflection of the "terrifying flashes of genius" of the nineteenth century thinker. Hence this essay, although subtitled "Foucault and Habermas's Criticisms,"[27] counter-reconstructs Nietzsche's thought much more than it does Foucault's.

The universalistic insistence of Habermas and the universalistic counter-tendencies of Kelly and Janicaud are ultimately the difference between the view (covert or otherwise) of an imperious logicality inherent to both knowledge and being and the view (covert or otherwise) of an illogical, primary otherness. With the first, the problem is always the one of *displacing the seemingly irrational* in favour of the "rational" and, with the other, the problem is always the one of d*isplacing the seemingly rational* while underlining and preserving the "rational" in this very act of displacement. Thus, for Habermas, Foucault's thought poses itself as a mixture of uncertainty, ambiguity, and paradoxicality which must be exposed and, by so exposing it, cleansing the epistemic space it occupies of the irrational elements which contaminate it. On the other hand, the critical defenders of Foucault, holding this epistemic space to be, at least for the time being, the very site of the rational, regard Habermas's thought as being representative of only the seemingly rational which must be challenged and dethroned. It is, as we may very well suspect, an irreconcilable opposition with both sides nevertheless feeding off each other, gaining from time to time the upper hand over one another, and forming countless mergers and quasi-reconciliations which only attend the moment of their breakup.

Strategically speaking then, Habermas always operates with his sights set on the

27 See note 7.

impudent, wayward fact of Foucault and, instead of relating this "fact" to its own universalistic counter-tendency (and by so doing nuancing, sharpening, and in effect rearticulating it), he critically attacks it by *logicalizing* it. It would be safe to say, in other words, that, with respect to the problem of the relationship between discourse and practise, there is, for Foucault, no one answer but rather different converging approaches, explanations, or "answers." Their point of convergence must be, so to speak, in the imagination (i.e., beyond logic). Obviously such a procedure works with thinkers who delight in the highly distinctive and workable nature of this kind of operation. For Habermas, on the other hand, what truly matters, especially in his role as a critical attacker, is the fact that, at the end of the day, Foucault fluctuates between making discourse the basis of practise and practise the basis of discourse.

> There is some unclarity, to begin with, regarding the problem of how discourse – scientific and non-scientific – are related to practices; whether one governs the other, whether their relationship is to be conceived as that of base to superstructure, or on the model of a circular causality, or as an interplay of structure and event (**PDM**, 243).

Furthermore, when Foucault seemingly aims at making discourse the basis of practise (or, for that matter, practise the basis of discourse), he cannot account for how the former affects and alters the latter.

> Both [the Heidegger-Derrida and the Foucault side of the Nietzschean program] neutralize the straightforwardly raised validity claims of the types of philosophical and scientific discourses they study by referring either to an epochal understanding of Being or to the formation rules for a given discourse. It is these that are supposed to first make possible the meaning of entities and the validity of statements within the horizon of a given world or of an established discourse. Both also agree that world horizons or discourse formations undergo change; but in these changes they maintain their transcendental power over whatever unfolds *within* the totalities shaped by them. This excludes a dialectical or circular feedback effect of either the ontic occurrence or the referents upon the history of the conditions of their possibility – whether these conditions are construed ontologically or in terms of discourse formation (254).

In a similar way, the problem of the relationship between knowledge and power which, for Foucault, emphasizing knowledge over power in early studies of a particular focus and power over knowledge in later ones, becomes, for Habermas (because Foucault never picks up again and reasserts the former), a theoretical shift in emphasis which finally asserts power over knowledge. Thereupon Habermas draws a hard line around the later resettlement and articulates it in the form of a reductionistic dilemma.

> Such a strong thesis [i.e., the indissoluble unity between the formation of power and the formation of knowledge] cannot, of course, be grounded just with functionalist arguments. Foucault only shows how disciplinary

> effects , similar to the effects of technologies of power, can be obtained through the application of knowledge from the human sciences in therapies and social technologies. In order to prove what he wants, he would have to demonstrate (for example, in the framework of a transcendental-pragmatic epistemology) that specific strategies of power are transposed into corresponding strategies for the objectification of ordinary language experiences, and consequently that they prejudice the meaning of the use of theoretical propositions about object domains constituted in this way (272).

Habermas, being a relentless attacker, goes on to highlight the incoherence of those power-knowledge regimes which, enfolding validity-claims within themselves, can offer no ground or justification for the genealogical enterprise itself.

> . . . [N]ot only are truth claims confined to the discourses within which they arise; they exhaust their entire significance in the functional contribution they make to the self-maintenance of a given totality of discourse. That is to say, the meaning of validity claims consists in the power effects they have. On the other hand, this basic assumption of the theory of power is self-referential; if it is correct, it must destroy the foundations of the research inspired by it as well. But if the truth claims that Foucault himself raises for his genealogy of knowledge were in fact illusory and amounted to no more than the effects that this theory is capable of releasing within the circle of its adherents, then the entire undertaking of a critical unmasking of the human sciences would lose its point (279).

Now at this point we may well ask, is Foucault still up to any more tricks? Habermas thinks so. He notes that, although seeming to justify his work on the basis of its exposing and rebelling against the tyranny of traditional thought (280), Foucault cannot really claim that this basis itself is free from coercion.

> Foucault's concept of power does not permit such a concept of counterpower that grants cognitive privilege . . . Every counterpower already moves within the horizon of the power that it fights; and it is transformed, as soon as it is victorious, into a power-complex that provokes a new counterpower (281).

Fiercely bent on chasing his quarry straight to his lair, Habermas discovers this lair to be, according to Foucault, *biopower* and, according to Habermas's own reckoning, *Lebensphilosophie.* (285). That is, Foucault ultimately ends up employing as a basis of value and meaning "that nonverbalizable language of the body on which pain has been afflicted [and] which refuses to be sublated into discourse."

> [But] Foucault cannot, of course, make this interpretation his own though it surely finds a basis in some of his more revealing gestures. Otherwise . . . he would have to confer upon the other of reason the status that he has denied it, with good reason, ever since *Madness and Civilization* (286).

The game is over. By virtue of his being flushed out of his hiding place, the would-be exposer is himself exposed, his fraudulent circling back to a seemingly discarded starting point unmasked.

Now it must surely come as no surprise that the critical defenders repudiate this highly sophisticated form of what, at the ontological level, is the crude and no doubt erroneous game of "P v -P." Either Foucault, according to it, holds position X and this position, being ascertained by a critical opponent to be at least trying to give the impression of a strictly logical account of all social being, is in fact strictly logical, or Foucault's thought is, in the main, invalid. Kelly, for example, asks himself whether it makes sense for Habermas to charge Foucault with relativism "unless something like the opposite – absolutism? – were firmly established" (**CP**, 387). He goes on to show how little of a case Habermas seems to make for himself qua absolutist.[28] Janicaud, taking up Habermas's objection that truth can have no genuine existence inside *or* outside power-complexes, simply lets Foucault address the matter "to show how much more subtle it is than the way Habermas presents it" (**MF**, 296).

> Of course, if one places oneself on the level of a proposition, on the inside of a discourse, the divide between the true and the false is neither arbitrary nor modifiable, nor institutional, nor violent. But if one situates oneself on a different level, if one seeks to know what the nature was and still is, through our discourse, of this will to truth which has gone through so many centuries of our history, or what is, in a very general form, the type of division which orders our will to know, then what one sees taking shape is perhaps something like a system of exclusion (a historical, modifiable, institutionally constraining system) (296).

Janicaud then adds the following comments:

> The *if* is the most important thing. In this there is a working hypothesis. One can choose a *different scale* from the traditional perspective, which can act as the *revealer* of something non-said lodged in the relations of submission, exclusion, and violence which are not manifested by the self-envelopment of discourse, nor by the self-reference of philosophy as a sovereign *logos*. Is Foucault here giving way to an anti-rationalist *pathos* and to a will to invalidate rational discourse? The point is rather to broaden the horizon, to make archeologically apparent the 'will to truth' which underlies the self-constitution of the true according to relations

28 "For Habermas himself acknowledges that the 'idealizing presuppositions' of communicative action which are constitutive of modernity – the conditions of symmetry and reciprocity inherent in the mutual recognition of validity claims – emerged at a specific time in history and are thus not a priori. In addition, he argues that our rational reconstructions of these presuppositions, which are themselves unavoidable, are fallible" (*Critique and Power*, 387-388).

> which are perhaps not simple and which need precisely to be deciphered. Also, it cannot be denied that the universal *Geltungansprüche*, the claims of universal validity dear to Habermas, are not those which have regulated the course of history (297).

It now remains to examine purely *rhetorical* tactics. These are, in scholarly polemical engagement, submerged motifs or thematic lines which, usually in a fairly indirect way, honour or disparage. In other words, they surreptitiously serve the strategic objective of decentring or invalidating the opponent's thought. By operating very closely to the main lines of argument and, at the same time, employing with cumulative effect such relatively minor manoeuvres as repetition, selection, citation, exemplification, magnification, minimization, suggestion, and juxtaposition, the evaluative basis of these arguments achieves a continuous discursive presence. It would be a very large undertaking to analyse systematically this dimension of the polemical scene. Rather let us simplify matters here by synoptically presenting these submerged motifs or thematic lines and, by way of linked citations, allowing them to speak for themselves.

With respect to Habermas's critical attack, we may distinguish four such thematic lines. They are in effect rhetorical assaults on Foucault's *originality*, *positive contribution*, *integrity*, and *coherency*. In order to avoid repetition and to shorten even further this specific investigation, let us ignore the rhetorical assault on Foucault's coherency.

The rhetorical assault on Foucault's ***originality****:* Foucault "calls Bataille one of his mentors. He is fascinated by [him] . . . as someone who enriches the language with gestures of waste and excess and transgression of limits . . ." (**PDM**, 238). Foucault himself admits that he "was dominated by a badly resolved conflict between a passion for Blanchot and Bataille on the one hand, and an interest in certain positive studies like those of Dumézil and Levi-Strauss on the other" (238). "Like many of his contemporaries, Foucault was also taken with the structuralist revolution" (239). "These three lines of tradition indicated by the names of Levi-Strauss, Bataille, and Bachelard are joined together . . ." in his first book, *Madness and Civilization* (239). Here he examines "those processes of exclusion, proscription, and outlawing in whose traces Bataille had read the history of Western rationality" (239). And it is in this book "that a Romantic motif comes through that Foucault will later give up. Just as Bataille . . . [did in his way], so Foucault suspects that behind the psychiatrically engendered phenomena of mental illness . . . there is something authentic whose sealed mouth need only be opened up" (240). But with his turn away from this Romantic motif and towards archeology, there comes the "suggestion . . . of a conception of historical writing that Foucault, under the influence of Nietzsche, from the late 1960s set over against the human sciences . . . as a kind of anti-science" (241-242).

"Foucault owes the concept of an erudite-positivistic historiography in the appearance of an anti-science to his reception of Nietzsche . . ." (249). Here the critique of modernity establishes itself upon the concept of power. "Nietzsche's authority, from which this utterly unsociological concept is borrowed, is not enough to justify its systematic usage. [But] the political context of Foucault's reception of Nietzsche – disappointment with the failure of the 1968 revolt – makes the concept of a historiography of the human sciences as a critique of reason biographically intelligible" (249). It is Foucault's desire to escape the "hollow humanism" of earlier historians which "explains why Nietzsche's 'Second Untimely Meditation' is a mine for

Foucault" (249).

In order to put an end to global historiography, "Foucault borrows from the *Annales* school the programmatically deployed notions of a structuralist procedure . . ." (251). There then "emerges the outline of a transcendental historicism at once inherited from and going beyond Nietzsche's critique of historicism" (252). "Foucault's radical historiography remains 'transcendental' in a weak sense inasmuch as . . . [it relies on] structuralist methods" (252). Insofar as he speaks of discursive exclusion, "Foucault takes up the heritage of Bataille's heterology in his archeology of knowledge" (252). But his later reliance on the concept of power "is by no means trivial, and certainly not to be grounded on Nietzsche's authority alone" (254). This concept of power definitely generates problems for him. "Like Heidegger, Foucault also undertakes a fusion of opposed meanings; but here an amalgam results that allows him to follow in the footsteps of Bataille and connect up with Nietzsche's critique of ideology" (256).

"The *Order of Things* raises problems to which Foucault responds some years later . . ." (266). "First of all, [he] must have been irritated by the affinity that obviously existed between his archeology of the human sciences and Heidegger's critique of the metaphysics of the modern age" (266). And "just as problematic as his proximity to Heidegger is his nearness to structuralism. In *The Order of Things* Foucault wants to respond with a liberatory philosophical laugh . . . reminiscent of the laughter of Zarathustra" (267). "Evidently Foucault then regarded contemporary structuralism . . . as alone capable of thinking 'the void left by man's disappearance.' The originally planned subtitle for the book, 'Archeology of Structuralism,' was by no means intended critically. But this perspective had to dissolve as soon as it became clear that structuralism had already covertly supplied the model for the description of the classical form of knowledge" (267).

Later, when Foucault recognizes the relativistic dilemma of his genealogy, he, instead of responding to it, "professes allegiance to an embattled perspectivism only in the context of his reception of Nietzsche" (281).

The rhetorical assault on Foucault's ***positive contribution****:* "Genealogical historiography [is] . . . the critique of reason qua antiscience . . ." (249). "The new history has to negate all those presuppositions that have been constitutive for the historical consciousness of modernity and for the philosophy of history and the historical Enlightenment since the end of the eighteenth century" (249). " . . . [W]ith a similar purpose in mind, Nietzsche had subjected the historicism of his time to a relentless attack" (249). It is therefore a principal part of Foucault's task "to dissolve the illusion of identity, especially the putative identity of the history-writing subject himself and his contemporaries" (250). "The new history makes use not of *verstehen* but of the destruction and dismantling of that context of effective history which putatively links the historian with his object . . ." (250). It also "change[s] talkative documents into mute *monuments* . . ." (Habermas's italics, 250). It puts "an end to global historiography . . ." (251). "History in the singular has to be dissolved, not indeed into a manifold of narrative histories, but into a plurality of irregularly emerging and disappearing islands of discourse" (251). "Thus also excluded is the idea of reconciliation, a legacy of the philosophy of history on which the critique of modernity stemming from Hegel still uninhibitedly nourished itself" (251). It "receives a harsh denunciation" (252). But it is only "from this destruction of a historiography that remains captive to anthropological thinking and basic humanistic convictions" that a new transcendental historiography can emerge (252).

"No place is left for any *overarching* meaning in this chaotic multitude of past totalities of discourse" (Habermas's italics, 253). "Under the *stoic* gaze of the archeologist, history hardens into an iceberg covered with the crystalline forms of arbitrary formations of discourses. . . . Under the *cynical gaze* of the genealogist, the iceberg begins to move" (Habermas's italics, 253). "The only thing that lasts is power, which appears with ever new masks in the change of anonymous processes of overpowering" (253). And thus "the danger of anthropocentrism is banished only when, under the incorrigible gaze of genealogy, discourses emerge and pop like glittering bubbles from a swamp of anonymous processes of subjugation" (268).

Foucault leaves behind structuralism because it "would not have meant a surpassing of modernity" (267). Part of this project is genealogy qua antiscience. "The name 'antiscience' is to be understood not only by opposition to the reigning human sciences; at the same time it signals an ambitious attempt to overcome these pseudo-sciences. Genealogical research takes their place" (275). As Paul Veyne says: "Everything is historical . . . and all 'isms' should be evacuated" (275). So genealogy "follows the movement of a radically historicist extinction of the subject . . ." (276).

"So he will [also] trace back the prohibition of gladiatorial fights in late Rome, for example, not to the humanizing influence of Christianity, but to the dissolution of one power formation by its successor. . . . The speeches that justify establishing or dismantling gladiatorial fights are regarded only as objectifications of an unconscious, underlying practice of domination. As the source of all meaning, such practices are themselves meaningless" (277).

"It is not Foucault's intention to continue that counter-discourse which modernity has carried on with itself from its very beginnings; he does not want to refine the language game of modern political theory (with its basic concepts of autonomy and heteronomy, morality and legality, emancipation and repression) and turn it against the pathologies of modernity – he wants to undermine modernity and its language games" (283).

"Genealogical historiography deals with an object domain from which the theory of power has erased all traces of communicative actions entangled in lifeworld contexts" (286). "If one admits only the model of empowerment, the socializing of succeeding generations can also be presented only in the image of wily confrontations" (287).

The rhetorical assault on Foucault's ***integrity****:* When discussing boundary-transgressing experiences in *Madness and Civilization*, "Foucault omits Romanticism from [his] list, aside from one mention of Hölderin" (270). And, later, when he recognizes "the methodological problem of how a history of the constellations of reason and madness can be written at all . . . he poses himself this question without answering it" (247). Moreover, "Foucault does not allow himself to be influenced by the ostensible lack of coercion of the cogent argument by which truth claims, and validity claims in general, prevail" (247). But what must really be held against him is "the *concealed* derivation of the concept of the will to knowledge (originally formulated in terms of a critique of metaphysics . . ." (Habermas's italics, 270). And "of course, Foucault's dramatic influence and his iconoclastic reputation could hardly be explained if the cool facade of radical historicism did not simply hide the passions of aesthetic modernism" (275).

When Foucault becomes "aware of the aporias raised by a procedure that wants to be objectivistic but must remain diagnostic of its time . . . he does not provide any answer to them" (278). "Foucault sees this dilemma, but once again he evades any response" (281). "Once, in a lecture, Foucault addressed the question [of genealogy's own normative standards] in passing

and gave a vague suggestion of postmodern criteria of justification" (284). In this lecture, he speaks about an antidisciplinarian type of right. "Now it is a fact that, in the wake of Kant, conceptions of morality and right have been developed which have long since ceased to serve the role of justifying the sovereignty of a state with a monopoly on violence; but Foucault remains silent on this theme" (284). It is evident that "if Foucault's concept of power preserves for itself some remnant of aesthetic content [derived from the aesthetic avant-garde from Baudelaire to the Surrealists], then it owes this to his vitalistic *Lebensphilosophie* way of reading the body's experience of itself" (285). Foucault tells us that "we have to dream . . . [about] another economy of bodies and pleasures . . ." (285). "This *other* economy of the body and of the pleasures, about which in the meantime – with Bataille – we can only dream, would . . . [presumably be] a postmodern theory that would also give an account of the standards of critique already laid claim to implicitly" (285). "But Foucault cannot, of course, make this interpretation [i.e., the vitalistic *Lebensphilosophie* one] his own . . ." (286). And "because Foucault cannot accept this notion from *Lebensphilosophie*, he has likewise to refrain from responding to the question about the normative foundations of his critique" (286).

When confronted with the complex phenomenon of the modern individual, Foucault deals with the related socializing processes in such a way that they "have to be artificially reinterpreted to make up for the categorial poverty of the empowerment model" (287). "Just like Gehlen, Foucault compensates for [the] bottleneck in his basic concepts by purifying the concept of individuation of all connotations of self-determination and self-realization . . ." (287).

"Foucault could, of course, turn back objections of this kind as *petitio principii*. . . . We could only answer [to the contrary] if what looks to us like a basic conceptual deficiency were also to affect the design and execution of empirical investigations and thus could be pinned down to specific readings and blindspots" (288). For example, "Foucault can illustrate this thesis [i.e., the rise of modern disciplinary power] with impressive cases; nevertheless, the thesis is false in its generality" (288). It involves a "reduction [which] is enacted in several steps" (289). With respect to the rise of disciplinary power, "Foucault *begins* by analysing . . . [the early classical construal of law, but] *then* describes the advances . . . [culminating], on the one hand, in the Kantian theory of morality and, on the other hand, in utilitarianism. Interestingly enough, Foucault does not go into the fact that these in turn serve [the formation of the modern legal and political order]" (289). And "because Foucault filters out the internal aspects of the development of law, he can inconspicuously take a *third* and decisive step" (289). Disciplinary power, that is, is shown to be incompatible with and even impinging on the contractual form of law. "However, this circumstance [i.e., that Foucault's construal is, to some extent, borne out] cannot justify the strategic decision (so full of consequences for Foucault's theory) to neglect the development of normative structures in connection with the modern formation of power. As soon as Foucault takes up the threads [of one matter], he [conveniently] lets drop the threads [of another]" (290). "Because of this, [an] ungrounded impression arises . . ." (290).

"This uncircumspect levelling of culture and politics to immediate substrates of the applications of violence explains the ostensible gaps in his presentation" (290). His "theoretical levelling down to the system of *carrying out* punishment is [even] more questionable" than his detaching penal justice from the development of the constitutional state. "As soon as he passes from the classical to the modern age, Foucault pays no attention whatsoever to penal *law* and to the *law* governing penal process. Otherwise, he would have had to admit the unmistakable gains [in these areas]" (Habermas's italics, 290). Thus " his presentation is utterly distorted by the fact

that he also filters out of the history of penal practices itself all aspects of legal regulation" (290).

"This same tendency towards a levelling of ambiguous phenomena can be seen in Foucault's history of modern sexuality" (291). Indeed, "one could show in detail how Foucault simplifies the highly complex process of a progressive problematization of internal nature into a linear history. In our context, however, what is primarily of interest is the peculiar filtering out [of humanistic aspects]" (292). "C. Honnegar warns against . . . suppressing once again the repressions of the past" (292).

With respect to Kelly's defence of Foucault, there is, as we should expect, a minimal effort to derail Habermas's critical attack by a counter-critical disparaging of it. What slighting of it there is comes in the form of a questioning, sometimes ironic attack on Habermas's specific (or not so specific) standard on universals.[29] More important than this fact, however, is that it operates as a tactical complement to the implicit honouring of Foucault's thought. Proof of the latter lies largely in the fact that, over the course of twenty-seven pages, Kelly's essay relies on over forty quotations from Foucault's writings and interviews.[30] Since it would be a tedious affair to look at even a portion of these quotations wherein, as Kelly puts it on one occasion, "Foucault's position is best expressed . . ." (**CP**, 378), let us limit ourselves to a few observations.

Kelly's essay properly begins with an epigraph wherein Habermas tells us that "we must not limit our critique of relationships of power to those institutions in which power is overtly declared . . . We must extend it to the areas of life in which power is hidden behind the amiable countenance of cultural familiarity" (365). Tactically speaking, this epigraph can do the following. It can suggest 1) that Habermas is closer to Foucault than he realizes; 2) that, after coming into contact with Foucault's thought, Habermas has covertly appropriated it; and/or 3) that Habermas is confused or uncertain about his own position on power. A few paragraphs later, Kelly introduces a second Habermasian epigraph: "I met Foucault only in 1983, and perhaps I did not understand him well" (366). It is immediately followed by Kelly's informing us that "Habermas's critique of Foucault is largely based on a single text. . . ." (366). A single text and, moreover, "a particular interpretation of that text" (366). In other words, before Kelly has even presented a single argument to us, he manages to arouse the suspicion that Habermas's substantial critique is an essentially soft, blurry, and over-determined one. From this point on, Kelly need only continuously relate Habermas on *Discipline and Punish* to Foucault on *Discipline and Punish* (and related matters).[31] The former certainly does not get the same number of opportunities to speak for himself that the latter does. He must – most of the time, at any rate – allow Kelly to present his case. Moreover, whereas Foucault on *Discipline and Punish* is

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29 "The presuppositions of modernity are historical in origin, our reconstructions of them are fallible, yet their validity is transcendent. This is also true of modernity as a whole; although it arose only a few hundred years ago, it is not merely one of many historical traditions which we can voluntarily adopt or discard; modernity, too, is universal and thus irreversible, intractable, unavoidable.

"How could we modernists ever know whether there are principles whose significance is universal, especially since 'universal significance' here seems to mean 'significance beyond modernity' even when it is applied to modernity itself? How could we possibly justify such universality?" (*Critique and Power*, 388).

30 Kelly's extensive notes at the end of his essay cite all the material to which he avails himself (*Critique and Power*, 391-400).

31 Kelly concerns himself not only with the concept of disciplinary power (central to *Discipline and Punish*), but also with the nature and purpose of genealogical analysis and critique. He draws on, for example, the lectures and interviews in Foucault's *Power/Knowledge.*

supplemented by (in addition to the contributions by other Foucauldians)[32] Jana Sawicki on Foucault (370, 374), Habermas must be content with his critical opponent as his only proxy. However, the latter, not only deferring in large measure to Foucault's textual authority, even goes so far as to detail a personal and professional project directly indebted to it.[33] Therefore we can see that, as in the case of Habermas, much more is at work here than mere argumentation. *First*: A large number of strategic decisions guaranteeing arguments either of one kind or another. Logical force does not lead to these decisions but follows them. *Second*: A large number of tactical decisions right down to the choice of words which form a prejudice always running in favour of these arguments. Whatever is contrary is most often, at least in the case of polemical engagement, another tactic, that is, the one of honouring the opponent so that there is the appearance of being thoroughly just and objective.[34]

Does Dominque Janicaud, by going "straight to the heart of the matter" (**MF**, 292) or to the "bottom of the misunderstanding" (293), avoid rhetorical tactics? One thing is certain: he repeats these two idioms (or something nearly the same) six times over the course of ten pages. Furthermore, he discusses within these ten pages the following: i) Habermas's charge of systematic ambiguity (286), ii) the appropriateness of Habermas's use of the term 'empirical' to describe the historical matter of Foucault's studies (286), iii) Habermas's three main criticisms of Foucault (which are related to the charge of systematic ambiguity (287-291), iv) a few weaknesses in Habermas's arguments (291), v) the more serious problem of Habermas's not understanding Nietzsche (292), vi) Habermas's virtual caricaturing of Nietzsche (294), and vii) Habermas's imputing to Foucault a complete theory of power (293). The next five pages, the remainder of his essay, cover the following: i) Foucault's indirect approach to various subjects (295), ii) power's way of eluding the grasp of theory (296), iii) the different and broadening perspective of archeology/genealogy (297), iv) the problem for modernity of constructing a suitable theory of power (297), v) Nietzsche's singular contribution (297), vi) the question of the efficacity of Habermas's theory of communicative action (298), vii) imperfections in Foucault's theory of power (298), viii) Habermas's charge of "vitalism" against Foucault (299), ix) modernity's need for a mixture of rationality and genealogy (299), x) the question of Habermas's genealogy of modern consciousness in its relation to the theory of communicative action (299), xi) Foucault's treatment of sexuality (299), and xii) the importance of reason's being always its own best critic (299). Two main motifs run through all the above: the importance of the issue of modern power in which Nietzsche and Foucault eminently involve themselves, and Habermas's wholly inadequate response to Nietzsche and Foucault and, hence, to this issue. Since the first motif already finds some expression in this study, let us concentrate only on the second.

*The rhetorical assault on the **adequacy** of Habermas' s response to Nietzsche and Foucault:* Habermas's "critique [of Foucault] proceeds with a mixture of sympathy and irritation (in which the second finally wins out . . ." (286). Let us note that he "is *redoubling* the critical effort which Foucault has already directed at his own work . . . He wants to enforce this criticism even more radically – so radically that a *different* theory seems finally to impose itself" (Janicaud's italics, 286). Once again, "Habermas does not confess that the source of [his]

32 Other contributions include remarks by Arnold Davidson (372) and Ian Hacking (382).
33 "Let us take the case of the birth in 1979 of the speciality of emergency medicine in the United States, which Dr. Richard Sanchez and I have analyzed elsewhere" (380). Kelly then discusses its genealogical orientation and relates it to Foucault's ***The Birth of the Clinic***, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1973).
34 See the end of this section which deals with tactical reverses within rhetorical assaults.

criticisms is often Foucault himself. . . . Is it not up to Habermas to explain and make clear the extent to which he appropriates Foucault's methodological lucidity (even for his self-criticism) and what it is that gives him the right to turn this against Foucault himself?" (292).

"From Habermas's point of view, it is fair game (and here he uses the most classical form of refutation) to show that Foucault does not succeed in his own enterprise, that he is caught up in his own trap" (290). So it is that "historicism . . . [according to this construal] has to confess its origin; and argumentation – in the philosophical crisis – rediscovers all its rights, thus profiting a new theory: that of the intersubjective communication professed by Habermas" (291).

But there are "a few weak points in Habermas's own criticisms" (291). He "seems to confuse two processes" (291). And "the two other criticisms [i.e., relativism and crypto-normativism] are largely redundant" (291). Moreover, "the *ad hominem* arguments interfere with the methodological criticisms" (291). "Yet there is a more serious problem" (292). "[The] pseudo-resume of Nietzsche's thought shows that Habermas *does not understand* Nietzsche . . ." (Janicaud's italics, 292). But [we may well ask] what is being refuted? Nietzsche or his shadow? Foucault or his caricature?" (293). "In Habermas there is nothing (or almost nothing) about [the] hermeneutic contribution of Nietzschean genealogy, at least in the book I am dealing with. The chapter on Nietzsche in *Der Philosophische Discurs der Moderne* is to say the least schematic, if not caricaturing" (294). So " it is not surprising . . . that we get a distorted view of Foucault from Habermas's criticism" (294).

Let us end this section by briefly examining the rhetorical tactics which aim at taking the worst sting out of what otherwise might be put down as mere mean-spiritedness, professional jealousy, or even philosophical "protectionism." The interesting thing here is how a few choice remarks paying respect to an opponent manage to carry weight against the vast number showing disrespect.

Habermas's tactical reverses vis-a-vis his rhetorical assault on Foucault: "Were one to believe it possible to reduce his central ideas to the [biographical] context, one would surely be underestimating Foucault's originality" (**PDM**, 257). And as far as the impressive book, *The Order of Things* goes, we can say that "the internal motivations behind the transition to a theory of power can be understood in connection with the difficulties that emerged from this ingenious study itself" (258). Finally, although much can be said against Foucault's selectivity vis-a-vis historical matters, "this selectivity does not take anything away from the importance of his fascinating unmasking of the capillary effects of power" (291).

Janicaud's tactical reverses vis-a-vis his rhetorical assault on Habermas: "Habermas is the one contemporary philosopher who in the recent past has taken up the question [i.e., the rationality of power] in an extremely methodological way . . ." (**MF**, 285). And as far as his "crypto-normativistic" critique of Foucault goes, it "seems to be quite a classical move[. B]ut the originality of Habermas's criticism lies in the way he traces this choice process (and the negation of this choice) back to Foucault's process of genealogical history" (289). Moreover, it must be credited to Habermas that "the edification of a complex, non-functionalist theory of communication is a worthy enterprise . . ." (298). It is true, therefore, that "Foucault and Habermas bear witness, each in his own way, to the difficulty of dealing with the double demands of genealogy and rationality" (299). So "rather than continuing this criticism [of

Habermas], I should like to end this contribution in a more measured way. Even if he did not recognize the full scope of Nietzsche's, Foucault's and Heidegger's hermeneutics, Habermas himself did after all sketch a genealogy of modern consciousness in *Der Philosophische Discurs der Moderne* . . ." (299).

Section II: Taylor contra Foucault / Connelly contra Taylor

Few critical attackers contextualize their opponent's thought beyond the depth and degree to which Habermas does. If they do, they are polemicists of such an order that, like Foucault, they no longer resemble, at least in the ordinary way, polemicists. Habermas, like Charles Taylor in a less open fashion, considers Foucault's opponent to be nothing less than the whole of modernity. Foucault responds that he is neither for nor against the latter (or, as he refers to it, the Enlightenment), but rather with it insofar as it is the self-critical attitude of the last two hundred years.[35] Foucault no doubt is right but, with a slight shift of emphasis, so are Habermas and Taylor. For to be radically self-critical – to push this kind of criticism to its absolute limit – is to go down a path which, with a Bunyanesque turn of phrase, we might describe as The Path of Philosophical Despondency. Taylor himself uses the term *disconcerting* to describe the effect on him – perhaps the general effect – of Foucault's thought. The first sentence of his essay entitled "Foucault on Freedom and Truth" is: "Foucault disconcerts" (**Foucault: A Critical Reader**, 69). Perhaps if he were more candid, he would say that Foucault frightens or threatens. After all, if we were to give up existentially what Foucault only gives up formally (i.e., the universal as absolute necessity), then the last bit of divinity left to us would surely flee (or be the fleeing itself of) the presence of rational being.

As we observed in Section I, strategy in polemical engagement is essentially the contextualizing and counter-contextualizing – really, the *recontextualizing* – of the opponent's thought. In this fashion, it falls under the jurisdiction of principles and values against which it must appear to range itself as a hostile, alien, and even mortally threatening force. What Taylor finds directly at hand to set up this jurisdiction is the traditional way of critiquing the past.

> Certain of Foucault's most interesting analyses, while they are highly original, seem to lie along already familiar lines of thought. That is, they seem to offer an insight into what has happened and into what we have become, which at the same time offers a critique and hence some notion of a good unrealized or repressed in history, which we therefore understand better now how to rescue (**FCR**, 69).

Within these few lines is the clearly traditional notion of modern critique. It is the moderate critique of modernity itself as well as the "rational" critique of everything showing itself to be anti-Enlightenment, anti-progressive, anti-humanitarian – in a word, anti-modern. With a few deft strokes, Taylor brings before us the whole basis of his essay, the honoured homeland, in other words, that must be protected at all costs.

Strategy, being strategy, becomes methodology.

> For the sake of my discussion, I want to isolate three lines of analysis, each of which suggests, or is historically connected with, a certain line of critique . . . (70).

Ostensibly these lines of analysis with their related lines of critique are present in "Foucault's

35 Foucault, *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, 42.

recent historical works, *Surveiller et Punir* and *Histoire de la sexualité*" (70).[36] In other words, the connections between these particular lines of analysis and lines of critique, even though they be merely "suggestive" or "historical," presumably belong to the work of Foucault himself. Strategically speaking, what Taylor does is move from the impression he originally receives from Foucault's analyses, i.e., that they "seem to lie along already familiar lines of thought" and offer a critique related to some notion of the good, to presenting this impression as the actual form of these analyses. Now the latter, being implicated in "the already familiar lines of thought," must answer to them.

> . . . I have ordered these analyses so that the argument arising from them moves towards more radical repudiations. That is, at first sight, the second analysis will seem to offer a reason for repudiating the good suggested by the first; and the third analysis will seem to offer a reason for rejecting the good implicit in the second; only to be in turn rejected (70).

Though Taylor specifies that he orders the analyses, the analyses themselves, as well as "the argument arising from them," all become attributed to Foucault. The seeming repudiation of the good suggested by the second and third analyses, being related to Taylor's ordering of them, dwells somewhere in the middle.

It is in this manner that Taylor, rather than, as Habermas does, portraying Foucault as the virtually self-professed enemy of modernity,[37] shows him to be the more or less unselfconscious one. Referring everything to a notion of the good, to a notion, moreover, which universalizes the good qua humanitarian and progressive values of modern society, Taylor's critical analysis of Foucault's analyses becomes the study of the successive repudiation of these humanitarian and progressive values. By never expressly stating the universalizing factor, Taylor can deposit it surreptitiously in Foucault's thought as the operative principle which both confounds and is confounded by the particular analyses and their related critiques. Instead of a logical basis, in other words, for historicizing or relativizing universals within the framework of his analyses, Foucault ends up with the illogicality of historicizing or relativizing the very universal which directs and provides meaning for these analyses.

As we observed right from the outset of this study, insistence on the universal by the critical attackers of Foucault immediately incites insistence on the particular by the critical defenders.

> But I also contend, first, that the translation of Foucauldian rhetoric into Tayloresque formulations obscures distinctive features of Foucault's thought . . . (**Political Theory**, 365).

Such are the first words of protest by William Connelly against Taylor's contextualizing and

36 See notes 19 and 26.

37 Nancy Fraser states the following: "In a recent discussion of postmodernism, Jürgen Habermas referred to Michel Foucault as a 'young conservative.' The epithet was an allusion to the 'conservative reactionaries' of interwar Weimar Germany . . . To call Foucault a 'young conservative,' then, was to accuse him of elaborating what Habermas calls 'a total critique of modernity.' Such a critique, according to Habermas, is both theoretically paradoxical and politically suspect" ("Michel Foucault: A Young Conservative?," in *Critique and Power*, 185).

infiltrating operation. Naturally enough, elaboration upon the above-mentioned "distinctive features" forms the reverse strategy. Instead of the progressive, humanitarian tradition being the poorly treated (even betrayed) secret heart of the Foucault corpus, Connelly returns this corpus to its place "outside" this tradition.

> Foucault adopts two interlocking strategies to support this claim [i.e., that there is more to being than knowing]. First, there is, as in the chapter in *The Order of Things* entitled "Man and his Doubles," an archeological account of how modern understandings of finitude – of life, labour, and language – eventually call transcendental and teleological perspectives into question from within" (**PT**, 366). [Secondly], he proceeds . . . as a genealogist, deploying rhetorical devices to incite the experience of discord or discrepancy between the social construction of self, truth, and rationality and that which does not fit neatly within their folds. And the recurrent experience of discord eventually shakes the self loose from a quest for a world of harmonization . . . (368).

Foucault's thought, as we have said, returns to its place outside the tradition. And yet not quite outside it. For though it formally leaves the universal behind in its genealogical investigation of history, it practically returns to it in the form of genealogically-based critique.

> [What is this world of harmonization? It is] a world in which the institutional possibilities for personal identity harmonize with a unified set of potentialities in the self, and the realization of unity in the self harmonizes with the social good realized by the social order. This quest for identity through institutional identification becomes redefined as the dangerous extension of "disciplinary society" into new corners of modern life (360).

Does not the word *dangerous* here simply replace, to no great effect, the word *bad* or *evil*? If such is the case, then there must be an implicit appeal to some social good, to some universal. Perhaps we may call it the already mentioned *rerum concordia discors.* In other words, we end up coming back to a world of harmonization, although the latter now includes, in a very positive way, discord, perhaps even danger (i.e., evil). The danger of having no danger, of being totally harmonized or homogenized, requires particular endangerments. Genealogy, perhaps, is one of these.

But the paradoxical, anti-philosophical, and anarchistic drift of this discourse requires that Connelly, following Foucault here, particularize the evaluative content of genealogical critique. It cannot involve an explicit appeal to some absolute or universal way of being (though it likely harbours an implicit or ironic one), but must rather be the operative values of modernity concretely (i.e., practically) engaged in perpetual acts of self-scrutiny. Hence "genealogy is not a claim to truth (although it functions in an episteme in which established theories of truth are called into question); it exercises a claim upon the self that unsettles the urge to give hegemony to the will to truth" (368).

Perhaps it desires to be no more (and no less) than an understated scepticism writ large. It

can no longer believe in modernity or the past's connection to it in the way Habermas and Taylor do, nor can it quite stop believing in them. So far as it is not a turning away and remains critical, it is, in fact, the refinement of modernity's defining intellectual sensibility. Critique, that is, not just as an industrious, systematic, sharp-toothed way of thinking through everything, but as a way of living – a way of learning to live – with the consequences of such rapacity and the scarce resources that, philosophically speaking, threaten to confront it.

Connelly certainly moves along this path (we might even say this warpath) when he problematizes Taylor's critical or sceptical (hence *reverential*) halt before the progressive, humanitarian values of the modern age. The tactic Connelly employs here is to bring into agreement virtually all the main points of Taylor's and Foucault's thought except one[38] – Taylor's view of an essentially benevolent world to which individuals may better attune themselves.

> [Taylor] seeks to transcend the illusion of the sovereign self . . . by striving to articulate for us those elements in the self and its circumstances that come closest to expressing what we are at our best. The most expressive articulations are not simply the creation of subjects, nor do they represent what is true in itself independently of human articulation: "They rather have the power to move us because they manifest our expressive power itself and its relation to our world. In this kind of experience we are responding to the way things are, rather just exteriorizing our feelings" (367).

Strategically speaking, what we have here is the beginning of Connelly's problematizing of the contextualization of Foucault's thought by Taylor which is only implicit in the latter's key statement (i.e., that Foucault's thought seems to lie along already familiar lines of thought). Connelly's critical defence, in other words, involves unmasking the seeming straightforwardness and simplicity of Taylor's starting point. Moreover, it is also a counterattack which, although it employs more decorous language that does Janicaud's against Habermas, exceeds the latter by going straight to the heart of his opponent's philosophical homeland.

This counterattack actually takes up a significant portion of Connelly's eleven-page essay. It begins with the statement that "once this obscurity is lifted [i.e., the Tayloresque formulations of Foucault's thought], the success of Taylor's critique will depend less on the claim that the theory is 'ultimately incoherent' and more on Taylor's ability to defend his own affirmations from Foucauldian decomposition" (365). Thereupon, Connelly wastes little time insisting on this lack of ability.

> Taylor, finding himself unable to prove his most fundamental assumptions to be true, seeks to draw us closer to the experience of attunement . . . (362).

The third phase of his attack is to demonstrate "Foucauldian decomposition."

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38 Connelly lists seven points of commonality: i) the epistemic limitations on discourse and thought, ii) the inadequacy of the correspondence theory of truth, iii) the eclipse of the pre-modern metaphysical and religious beliefs, iv) the priority of being over knowing, v) the pre-discursive depth of language, vi) the denial of the Cartesian subject, and vii) the threat to foundations by the "death of God" (*Political Theory*, 367).

> The Foucauldian rhetorical strategy works, for instance, through the displacement of the unifying or mellow metaphors governing Taylor's texts by more disturbing ones . . . These strategies are designed, I believe, simultaneously to *express* a view of the relation between social form and the material from which it is constructed at odds with that accepted by Taylor [and] to *express* the subterranean role played by rhetorical configurations in texts by writers such as Taylor in gaining assent to their most fundamental convictions . . . (368).

The fourth phase is to call into question the very heart of Taylor's thought.

> Foucault's theory of power and subjectification is part of his assault on the teleological philosophies that continue to find disguised expression in the modern age. The theory of the essentially embodied subject, for instance, is a theory of self-realization that treats the self as if it were designed to fulfill its potentiality through perfecting its subjectivity; and to reject the residual teleological premise inside that hope is to see the subject as an artificial reality imposed on material not designed to receive it (371).

The fifth phase is to present Taylor with a set of questions "to encourage [him] to articulate more affirmatively what shifts, if any, seem to him to be required in his theories of truth, freedom, order, and personal identity after engaging [Foucault's] texts" (367).[39]

No doubt a good anti-Foucauldian strategist would ignore questions which, as in the case of Connelly's, presuppose the full legitimacy and power of Foucault's counter-discourse.[40] If he were Taylor, no doubt he would continue to insist that, when all is said and done, Foucault "dashes the hope that . . . there is some good that we can *affirm*" (Taylor's italics) (**FCR**, 69) and, in so doing, shows that his "position is ultimately incoherent . . ." (83). The means by which Taylor demonstrates this incoherence is, first, to examine the seeming affirmation of a good (i.e., the rise of modern humanitarianism) which comes out of one line of Foucault's analysis (71-73) and the subsequent critique (i.e., modernity as a new system of domination) which seems to

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39 These questions amount to the following: i) How can Taylor, given what he holds in common with Foucault, presume to shuffle him aside?; ii) Would Taylor be willing to make changes, in the face of Foucault's challenge, to his own theory of identity?; and iii) To what extent is his theory committed "to the sort of teleological philosophy Foucault's genealogies are designed to hunt down and destroy?" (*Political Theory*, 375).

40 Taylor formally responds to Connelly's questions in his rebuttal essay, "Connelly Foucault, and Truth" (*Political Theory*, August, 1985, 377-385). The first thing he does is to sidestep the issue of genealogy as a counter-discourse which must renounce grounding itself in universal principles. He asks: Are they (i.e., Foucault's works) not put forward as true?" (378). Beyond posing this question, he offers little except a reworking of the arguments (i.e., a redeploying of the strategy) of his earlier essay. Instead of responding directly to Connelly's questions, that is, he simply renews his attack on Foucault. To give some idea of this attack, let us point out that, at least a dozen times, he makes passing reference to Foucault's (while ignoring his own) use of rhetoric. Such comments as "[r]hetorical hijinks come just where we should be deploying the most responsible arguments" (381) do not do seem to be fair nor judicious.

Towards the end of his essay, he returns to Connelly's questions but with mainly the objective of clearing himself from the possible charge of holding "a full-scale Hegelian theory or . . . a Platonic vision of the universe . . ." (385).

repudiate this good (73-74). Thereupon, there follows the examination of a second line of analysis which, in turn, seems to affirm a good (i.e., the critique of modernity's reliance on instrumental reason) which a subsequent critique (i.e., the indivisibility of this reason from all aspects of modernity) again seems to repudiate (77). Finally, the examination of a third line of analysis reveals that a seeming good, "the ideology of expressive liberation, particularly in connection with sexual life, is itself just a strategy of power" (80). "And so," as Taylor notes, "we come to the bottom line" (80).

> What about the evaluation which seems to flow from the third analysis? This would offer us some idea of a liberation but not via the correct or authentic expression of our natures. It would be a liberation from the whole ideology of such expression, and hence from the mechanisms of control which use this ideology. It would be a liberation which was helped by our unmasking falsehood; a liberation aided by the truth (80).

The strategic but, as it now seems to become, purely argumentative line is one of insisting on a clear explanation as to how the concept of liberation can still be of service when the ideology of liberation itself no longer serves. The patent incoherency, in other words, is such that Taylor becomes "less interested in hammering this line of critique than in seeing what can be coherently said in this area" (83).

> I think Foucault's position is ultimately incoherent, but that this escapes detection because the points where it falls into contradiction are misidentified as new and deeper formulations of what many would recognize as valuable insights (83).

It is on the above note that Taylor begins his problematizing of Foucault's thought qua theory of power which, though similar to Habermas's in many respects,[41] places special emphasis on the presumed loss of subjectivity.[42]

As noted in the Introduction, the critical attackers of Foucault, sensing that his weakness lies somewhere in the theoretical realm, undertake to examine his theory apart from the specific historiographical work it does. Thus, instead of finding no more that working hypotheses which aim to explain in greater and better detail some area of past social life, they discover the outlines and intentions of a global, systematic, philosophical enterprise. Accordingly, they demand (and here they inevitably seize on Foucault's analytic of power) that it, first, exhibit a rigorously logical design and, second, provide a total account of social and institutional phenomena. It is not surprising, therefore, that this universalizing or "de-circumscribing" of Foucault's thought provides ample critical opportunities.

In keeping with his key statement (i.e., that Foucault's analyses seem to lie along already familiar lines of thought) as well as deploying that part of strategy, already evidenced by

41 For example, Taylor's discussion of the problematic relation between strategies of large-scale social operations and power effects at the micro-level (*Foucault: A Critical Reader*, 86-88) finds its counterpart in Habermas's problematizing the relationship between the "transcendental" and the "empirical" in Foucault's thought (*Philosophical Discourse*, 256, 270-274).

42 While Habermas responds to what he views as Foucault's threat to rationality, Taylor concerns himself with his seeming negation of the individual will (*Critical Reader*, 92).

Habermas, which amounts to integrating the opponent's line of thought with already familiar ones,[43] Taylor more or less shows his agreement with two Foucauldian theses: i) power is not essentially centralized but rather universally exercised (84); and ii) power relations at the micro-level concatenate to form large-scale social operations or strategies (85). But there is a "third thesis which [according to Taylor] makes no sense . . ." (86). It is the one of large-scale strategies both incommensurate with and disconnected from the purposes and desires of individual agents. After giving examples of incommensurate but logically or empirically connected levels of strategy and levels of purposeful agents (86-87), Taylor states the following:

> I am citing these types and examples to illustrate my main point, which is that purposefulness without purpose requires a certain kind of explanation to be intelligible. The undesigned systematicity has to be related to the purposeful action of agents in a way that we can understand (87).

After discussing the logical difficulties of Foucault's second thesis in relation to supplying a connection between strategies and agents (88), Taylor concludes that "in order to stick by the second thesis . . . we would need some account . . . where micro-reactions concatenate in [a] systematic way" (88). In other words, what Foucault needs is a systematic account of power relations in their constitution of all social and institutional phenomena (i.e., a global theory).

After demonstrating how Foucault's theory of power falls short as a logical, systematic effort, Taylor goes on to show how it semantically truncates the concept of power in order to give power the semblance of a universal principle. Here he resembles Habermas in insisting that this concept must have a subjective reference.[44] "'Power', [in other words, can only belong to] a semantic field from which 'truth' and 'freedom' cannot be excluded" (91). "But that is not Foucault's point," Taylor insists. "He wants to discredit as somehow based on a misunderstanding the very idea of liberation from power" (92).

Just as Kelly and Janicaud respond to Habermas's universalizing reconstruction and problematization with a particularizing *counter*-reconstruction and *de*problematization,[45] so Connelly responds to Taylor's when he states that the latter "attributes an intention to Foucault that is not his" (**PT**, 370).

> Foucault does not seek to offer complete explanations because he knows that such an objective will draw him back into the discourse he seeks to unsettle; because he knows that in the modern episteme a coherent explanation will presuppose the very conceptions of truth and subjectivity he wishes to question (370).

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43 See pages 490 to 491 for the profiling of this integration at the rhetorical level.

44 "In his basic concept of power, Foucault has forced together the idealist idea of transcendental synthesis with the presuppositions of an empirical ontology. This approach cannot lead to a way out of the philosophy of the subject, because the concept of power that is supposed to provide a common denominator for the contrary semantic components has been taken from the repertoire of the philosophy of the subject itself" (*Philosophical Discourse*, 274).

45 Here the reference, of course, is to the main tendency (as opposed to the universalistic counter-tendencies) of Kelly's and Janicaud's critical defences. The main tendency is the formal and practical commitment to the meta- or para-theoretical role of genealogy.

The implicit appeal here to special consideration is similar to Nietzsche's cry in *Ecce Homo*: "I am myself. Do not mistake me for another." The particularist, in other words, identifies primarily with the good in the particular. The universalist, by contrast, identifies with the good in the universal. The latter cannot simply extend his full appreciation, polemically speaking, to the former. Thus Connelly (a particularist) bewails the fact that Taylor (a universalist) "has not really tried, first of all, to ascertain what stand Foucault adopts . . . and, then, to ask whether such a stance can be sustained as a viable counterpoint . . . He merely assumes," Connelly continues, "that Foucault intends to offer explanations contesting those that now have hegemony, and then he shows that if Foucault's texts do embody such intentions, they do not live up to the standards of good or coherent explanations" (370).

In simplest terms, the Foucauldian fact that a complex of power relations produces the subject which in turn produces the subject's freedom is hostile not just to a fully coherent explanation in a more or less demarcated area, but to the claim that there is or can be any such thing as a fully coherent explanation.

> In modern discourse we witness "the interminable to and fro of a double system of reference: if man's knowledge is finite, it is because he is trapped, without possibility of liberation, within the positive content of language, labor, and life, and conversely, if life, labor, and language may be posited in their positivity, it is because knowledge has finite forms." In this setting every articulation of thought presupposes the unthought from which it draws nourishment and, conversely, that which nourishes thought must always escape full articulation (366).

However, the testimony here for an essentially ambiguous, paradoxical state of affairs cannot translate itself into a new state of affairs at the practical level, disqualifying the very values by which we now live and, without which, we cannot live. In other words, though Foucault's thought is hostile, it is not hegemonic. It can only exist as the countercurrent to the larger sweep of rational undertakings. And if it is efficacious on a large scale, it is so only as a kind of antitoxin for those poisons which too much certainty allow to accumulate in the body politic – those heady notions of a historico-cultural moral supremacy.

However, in Connelly's counter-strategy there is an elision of the question of incoherence and no doubt it is due to Taylor's employing the "incoherent" charge as the central part of his critical attack. This elision comes about in three ways: i) a vigorous counterattack which is virtually a return of the charge;[46] ii) an emphasis on archeological studies and genealogical critiques as counter-discourse;[47] and iii) the reification or localization of the other of thought as "recalcitrant material in an embodied self resistant" to the form power imposes on it (371). With respect to the last, Connelly effects a break between the power which constitutes the subject qua institutionally determined being and the hidden passions, instincts, or whatever which incline the self towards an opposite expression.[48] Freedom then gains a place outside of, yet connected to, power in a way which contradicts a crucial point of Taylor's critique, i.e., that Foucault's concept

46 "Taylor, I have charged, seeks to evade the pressure Foucault exerts on his own theory of the subject by convicting Foucauldian theory of incoherence" (*Political Theory*, 373).

47 "Foucault's thought at [the] archeological level does not seek to defeat an orientation such as Taylor's. Rather, it identifies the terrain upon which modern critics of epistemological foundationalism . . . compete with one another for hegemony" (*Political Theory*, 366-367).

of power envelops and negates freedom. In effect then, what Connelly does is to counter-reconstruct the paradox of power in order to defuse Taylor's charge which, of course, relies on a particular critical reconstruction of the same.[49]

As already noted, Taylor establishes a link between two main impressions: the one of Foucault's being disconcerting and the one of his seeming to involve himself in traditional discourses. There is much evidence to show that Taylor dislikes being disconcerted. For the time being, however, let us examine the matter of his strategic appropriation of Foucault's thought which takes in the wholesome part of it, so to speak, and expels the rest. For Taylor, the former is principally the first two lines of analysis which portray a growing humanitarian spirit and then, insofar as modernity involves itself in new forms of domination, contest it. The unwholesome part of Foucault's thought is the third line of analysis wherein "the very notion of ourselves as having a true identity to express . . . [is] part of the *dispositif* of control, rather than . . . what defines our liberation" **(FCR**, 80). At this point, moral evaluations of the past, even seeming ones, cease. Taylor explains the situation as follows:

> I have been trying . . . to get to the point [by examining these three lines of analysis] where we can see the break in Foucault's thought, the point which disconcerts, where he adopts a Nietzschean-derived stance of neutrality between the different historical systems of power and thus seems to neutralize the evaluations which arise out of his analyses (79-80).

It is this desire for a "Nietzschean neutrality" which Taylor pinpoints as the source of Foucault's incoherence, i.e., his refusal to accept the possibility of a liberation from the power-produced truth which controls us by constituting our identity, purposes, desires, etc. (80). To articulate a return to coherence involving essential notions of truth, freedom, and personal identity therefore becomes an important part of Taylor's task. Since there is no way, as Connelly points out, that he can logically ground these notions, he must rely on, apart from attacking the opposing position, an implicit appeal to the authority of tradition and widespread consensus.

Submerged motifs or thematic lines, let us recall, can be either disparaging or honorific. They rely on a vast number of rhetorical tactics, often quite subtle, to produce a cumulative persuasive effect. For example, the fact that Taylor begins by strongly suggesting that Foucault follows the already beaten path of historical investigations simultaneously suggests the inevitability of the latter and the illusory or wayward aspect of, let us say, Foucault's beating his own path. In addition, he immediately ties Foucault both positively and negatively to what these "beaten paths," often quite explicitly, honour – the rise of modern society. Thus, an important part of Taylor's strategy, while examining and critiquing Foucault, is to remind us of this traditional homage. Let us, following the synoptical and citational approach of Section I, take a

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48 "Power produces the subject that becomes not a mere fiction of theory and law, but a real artifact. The subject, on Foucault's reading is not 'dead': it is very much alive and very much the effect of modern disciplinary institutions. But if power produces the subject, in what ways does power constrain or limit the self? Subjectification, an effect of power, subjugates recalcitrant material in an embodied self resistant to this form. Power produces and constrains, then, but the target of constraint is not the self as agent, but that in selves which resists agentification" (*Political Theory*, 371).

49 The insuperable problem of the relationship between power and knowledge is the subject of Tom Keenan's essay. See note 80.

look at the above.

Taylor's rhetorical championing of the rise of modern (Western) society: Upon reading the opening scene of Foucault's book (i.e., *Discipline and Punish*) depicting a horrible eighteenth century execution, "the modern is appalled, horrified . . . Obviously something very big has changed in our whole understanding of ourselves, of crime and punishment" (71). "It is . . . that a new notion of the good has arisen. This is defined by what has often been called modern 'humanitarianism.' We have acquired . . . a concern for the preservation of life, for the fulfilling of human need, and above all the relief of human suffering . . ." (72). "What lies behind this . . . is a big and deep story. No one can claim to understand it fully. But I have to go into it a little . . ." (72). "I think one of the important factors . . . [is] what I want to call 'ordinary life'" (72). Since earliest times, highest ethics have increasingly formed it. "Think, for instance, of the growth of . . . companionate marriage . . . the growing sense of the importance of the *emotional* fulfilment in marriage – indeed, the whole modern sense that one's *feelings* are a key to the good life" (Taylor's italics) (73). Thus "with the ethics of ordinary life arises the notion that serving life . . . is a paradigm goal in itself, while at the same time the supposed higher ends which previously trumped life . . . are progressively discredited" (73).

Biographical changes of outlook require personal identity. "Is there nothing comparable in politics/history? There is. . . . We have become certain things in Western civilization. Our humanitarianism, our notions of freedom . . . have helped to define a political identity we share . . ." (96). Moreover, "one of the reasons why we can no longer believe in [the old] kind of order is the advance in our civilization of a scientific understanding . . . which we have every reason to believe represents a significant gain of truth" (97). So it may be asked: "Can we really step outside the identity we have developed in Western civilization . . ?" (99).

Now it must be pointed out that, while Taylor provides critical commentary which is a counterweight to the above and which, at the same time, often involves paying lavish tribute to Foucault, this counterweight and tribute only amount to a fraction of the main perlocutionary effect. Moreover, praise of Foucault is often only that of the "wholesome" part of his thought, the first and second lines of analysis which, according to Taylor, he undertakes and which involve a seemingly more modest critique of modern forms of domination.

Taylor's rhetorical crediting of Foucault for his first two lines of analysis: "Obviously something very big has changed in our whole understanding of ourselves, of crime and punishment. Bringing us up against this evidence of radical historical discontinuity is what Foucault does superlatively well" (71). For example, he shows us how "the [old] punishments have a meaning [in their historical context.] I find Foucault convincing on this" (71). But the modern age is not without blemish. "In an immensely rich series of analyses, Foucault draws the portrait of a new power coming to be" (74). Out of all this, it may be said that "Foucault offers the Frankfurt school an account of the inner connection between the domination of nature and the domination of man which is rather more detailed and more convincing . . . It is the measure of the great richness of his work that this 'gift' is not at all part of his intentions" (77).

Other complimentary remarks surface periodically. But when measured against the amount of disparaging material, even the use of superlatives cannot make the former come close

to being an absolution of the "rhetorically noted" sins of negativity, evasiveness, incoherency, and over-simplification. Since we have already gone through the exercise of portraying Habermas's rhetorical assaults on Foucault's originality, positive contribution, and integrity, let us be content to examine Taylor's assault on Foucault's *subtlety*, *complexity*, and *coherency*.

Taylor's rhetorical assault on Foucault's subtlety and complexity: "Foucault's analyses are terribly one-sided" (81). "[His] attraction is partly that of a *terrible simplificateur*. His espousal of the reversal of Clausewitz's aphorism . . . leaves out everything in Western history which has been animated by civic humanism or analogous movements. Without this in one's conceptual armoury, Western histories and societies become incomprehensible . . ." (82-83).

"[And] then to understand [the modern preoccupation with sexuality] simply in terms of control leaves out its roots . . . in the Christian concern for the quality of the will . . . And to reduce the whole Western, post-Romantic business of trying to save oneself to an artifact of such a technology of control approaches absurdity" (83).

"Strategies without projects; this would be a good formula to describe Foucault's historiography" (86). "He leaves us with a strange kind of Schopenhauerian will, ungrounded in human action" (88). In other words, he needs to explain "the rise and fall of [discursive and practise-related] contexts in history . . . And that is the issue we are talking about with Foucault's system of modern technologies of control. How does it arise? Of *course* , you don't explain it by some big bad man/class designing it (who ever suggested anything so absurd?), but you do need to explain it . . ." (Taylor's italics) (89). For example, take the business of the reciprocal relation, overlooked by Foucault, between "structures of action or language" and "action/speech." "This is a crashing truism, but the fog emanating from Paris in recent decades makes it necessary to clutch it as a beacon in the darkness" (90).

Foucault implicitly discounts the possibility of liberation from power complexes "because of the fundamentally Nietzschean thesis which is basic to his work" (92). And he discounts the possibility of freedom within these complexes "because of his over-simple and global notion of modern systems of control and domination . . ." (92). In other words, "Foucault's Nietzschean theory can only be the basis for utterly monolithic analyses; which is what we [can see] in his failure to recognize the ambivalence of moral disciplines . . ." (94-95).

"The reality of history is mixed and messy. The problem is that Foucault tidies it up too much, makes it into a series of hermetically sealed, monolithic truth-regimes, a picture which is as far from reality as the blandest whig perspective of smoothly broadening freedom" (98).

"Foucault's monolithic relativism only seems plausible if one takes the outsider's perspective, the view from Sirius . . ." (98).

Taylor's rhetorical assault on Foucault's coherency: Foucault repudiates the view that there is "some good we can affirm . . . This is rather paradoxical . . ." (69). "But can he do it? Does he really do it? What does it mean to do it? These are central questions which arise . . . And this is the right place to pose these questions . . . Does he really do it? Even this is not so clear. There are moments when some notion of liberation seems to peek through. Is it true(?) that he repudiates the notion of liberation through truth. But later there is the hint of a possible *point d'appui* for a relative freeing. . . . But the question I would like to explore here is: can he do it? By that I mean: what can be coherently said in this domain? Just how much sense does a Nietzschean position make?" (80-81).

"Is there confusion/contradiction here, or a genuinely original position?" (70). "I think Foucault's position is utterly incoherent . . ." (83). "It is this third thesis which makes no sense, in Foucault's version" (86). "One of the most important reasons why Foucault doesn't feel a need to offer an account here is the confusion which has afflicted the republic of letters during these last decades about the supposed "death of subjectivity" (89). "The Nietzschean programme on this level [where there is no place for freedom or truth] *does not make sense*" (Taylor's italics) (90). "To speak of power, and to want to deny a place to 'liberation' and 'truth,' as well as the link between them, is to speak incoherently" (93). "The position is easy enough to state baldly, but difficult – or impossible – actually to integrate into the logic of one's analytical discourse . . ." (94). "Just because some claims to truth are unacceptable, we do not need to blow the whole conception to pieces" (95). And although "the affinity with Nietzsche in the stress on self-making is very understandable . . . this in no way lessens the paradox . . ." (99).

"Perhaps Foucault was moving, before his sudden and premature death, to free his position from this paradox . . ." (99).

Of course, we make no attempt to deny that these quotational synopses are, in and of themselves, one-sided in their rhetorical effect. Nevertheless, the only difference between the rhetorical effect here (apart from the context of this study) and the actual one is the masking and legitimating tendency of certain assumptions, lines of argument, and other elements (including rhetorical ones).

Given that his essay is much shorter than Taylor's (eleven pages to the latter's thirty-one), Connelly repeatedly hits on the broad theme of Foucault's challenge to traditional discourses. In a manner similar to Janicaud's underlining the importance of raising the issue of modern power, it encloses a moral evaluation simultaneously favourable to Foucault and hostile to his opponent. But to admit to this evaluation openly or to elaborate it philosophically would mean making explicit reference to a teleological or transcendent *point d'appui*, the very thing being formally repudiated. Consequently, the defence of Foucault's thought, as this thought itself, must endlessly circle about, evaluatively speaking, its pure *efficacity* in critiquing. But this kind of efficacity, formally recognized and licenced by the modern age (and, therefore, modern philosophy), cannot refrain from, in fulfilling its mandate, scrutinizing and shaking up the licensing body itself. There is nothing of logic here except the "teleological" instinct, drive, or imperative which brings, under propitious conditions, some acorns of activity to a higher, more intricate show of themselves.

Rhetorically then, the strategy of Connelly's defence is to imply (but not insist on) a certain moral ascendancy which comes with "Foucault's assault on these teleological philosophies that continue to find disguised expression in the modern age" (**PT**, 371). These seemingly less than straightforward philosophies involve "a quest for identity through institutional identification [which] becomes redefined [by genealogical critique] as the dangerous extension of 'disciplinary society' into new corners of modern life" (368). Since Taylor spends a fair portion of his essay valorizing the union between personal and social identity,[50] Connelly's

50 "Central to the Romantic notion of liberation is the notion that the nature within us must come to expression. The wrong stance of reason is that of objectification, and the application of instrumental reason; the right stance is that which brings to authentic expression what we have within us. In accordance with the whole modern rehabilitation of ordinary life, of which the Romantic movement is heir, one of the crucial aspects of this inner nature which must be articulated is our nature as sexual beings. There is a truth of this: an authentic way for each of us to love" *(Critical Reader*, 77).

counter-critique becomes a series of barbed references to the latter. We have, for example, the Tayloresque formulations of Foucault's thought (365), the inability to prove fundamental assumptions (367), the use of unifying or mellow metaphors (368), the rhetorical configurations in texts to gain assent to fundamental convictions (368), and the attempt to draw us "into endorsement and perfection of the identity now given us" (368). Furthermore, the "ontological thesis with political implications" which Connelly attributes to Foucault (365) and which he reiterates several times throughout his short essay (usually as resistance of the "is" to the "ought," content to form, or self to subjectification) finally spells out something which looks suspiciously humane and progressive (i.e., humanitarian).[51]

> When we give up the residue of *telos* clinging to modern conceptions of the subject, we can adopt a different political stance to that which is other to subjectivity. We will see otherness to be less what mental instability, criminality, and perversity are in themselves and more what must be produced and contained if subjectivity is to be. If we understand the subject in this way, if we acknowledge that the subject is formed from material and predesigned to fit perfectly into this form, we are in a position to reconsider the politics of containment that now governs institutional orientations to otherness. We will not be able to conceive an order in which otherness is eliminated, but we may be able to appraise more adequately the debt subjectivity owes to it (374).

A prescription to be even more deeply just and receptive to otherness, perhaps even to – evil? It is a strange suspicion and a strange kind of "humanitarianism." Nevertheless, it does point to the fact that radical critique is not itself the overturning of present values, but the displacement (or shaking up, if you will) of the view that those social ones of highest acclaim really come close to – or perhaps ever can come close to – fulfilment.

51 Certainly Taylor wastes no time construing it this way. In his rebuttal essay (see note 40) he states the following: "Connelly's second question concerns the theory of personal identification that follows from [his Foucauldian] critique. I could embrace as my own the one he offers to me, 'in which the goal is to integrate otherness into more perfect forms of identification with the will of a rational community.' This would seem to me the highest ideal" (*Political Theory*, 384).

Section III: Balbus contra Foucault / Sawicki contra Balbus

With this section the Foucauldian debate moves from a rather weak political reference to a "strong"[52] political contextualization. Isaac Balbus's opening paragraph prepares the ground for it and for what, at first glance, seems to be another hard-line strategy of critical attack.

> . . . I stage a confrontation between the genealogy of Michel Foucault and the feminist psychoanalytic theory of Dorothy Dinnerstein, Nancy Chodorow, Jane Flax, and myself. I am obliged to resort to this artifice because – as far as I am aware – none of the parties to this confrontation has ever before addressed the position of the other: feminist psychoanalytic theorists have yet to make the discourse of Foucault the object of their critique of masculine discourse as a simultaneous reaction to and denial of the power of the mother, and neither Foucault nor his followers have extended their deconstruction of the disingenuous discourse of the true to the theorists of mothering. This confrontation is by no means arbitrary, however, because we shall see that the discourse of the mother looks like a paradigm case of what Foucault would call a "disciplinary true discourse," while from a feminist psychoanalytic standpoint the Foucaldian deconstruction of the true discourse betrays assumptions that can only be characterized as a classically male flight from maternal foundations. If feminism necessarily embraces these foundations, then a Foucaldian feminism is a contradiction in terms (**After Foucault**, 138).

Despite his sabre-rattling, Balbus quickly reveals his intention of reconciling Foucault to feminism. With his obvious desire to cut Foucault down to size, however, this will to reconcile the first to the second appears more like a will to have the first thoroughly reformed. As such, it may be viewed as the offensive counterpart to Michael Kelly's defensive strategy. In the case of the latter, the will to reconcile Habermas to Foucault appears more like a will to have the second take charge of the first. (See pages 484-486.)

> I shall argue that this opposition between feminism and Foucault can be resolved in favour of feminism and – in part – against Foucault. This argument will entail a demonstration that there are aporias or internal inconsistencies in the Foucaldian position that can only be overcome through a reformulation of this position that would require us (a) to distinguish between libertarian and authoritarian true discourses and (b) to assign the feminist mothering discourse to the former rather than the latter category. Thus Foucault's discourse points – against itself – to the power of the very feminist discourse it would undermine (**AF**, 138-139).

In spite of the desire for a presumably amicable resolution, there is, within these passages, at least a trace of a martial tone which, as it seems, means to disconcert. It announces in a concise

52 As this section goes on to illustrate, Balbus is something of a paper tiger while presuming that Foucault is such.

and forceful way that there is a powerful discourse on one side and an internally weak one on the other. But the former, renouncing the role of juggernaut, will submit itself to bringing the latter around to a more favourable disposition. Moreover, part of the strategy is to assume that feminist psychoanalytic theory is the worthy representative of feminist discourse in general and, as also seems to be assumed, best suited for eradicating the growing tensions or potential for strife between it and Foucault.

It is not surprising that Jana Sawicki, in her critical defence of Foucault, offers a counter-critique which, along with immediately suggesting and then making the case for much common ground between Foucault and feminism, attacks the pretensions of feminist psychoanalytic theory. Her first sentence takes aim at the most aggressive point of Balbus's opening by asking: "Is Foucaldian feminism a contradiction in terms?" (**After Foucault**, 161). She then goes on to list what, in her estimation, are a number of areas of common concern and activity.[53] An authoritative pose which, despite itself, claims to be non-authoritarian and, moreover, to have the best interests at heart of both Foucault and feminism, thus encounters the resistance of – whatever uncertainty there may be with respect to some aspects of Foucault[54] – the feminist reception and use of him.

It must be admitted that, by not examining this reception and use and by centring his attack on purely logical problems, Balbus does not operate with the best of strategies. If logic were the only reason things were believed in, fought for, acted on, and brought to completion, we well know how much would be left idle. Logic is rather the backbone *within* any particular belief or activity. These beliefs or activities contend, backbones are broken, and embryonic ones form continually. In order be effective, Balbus's strategy would have to be less rigid but more industrious. It would have to show that the feminist use of Foucault is not just a contradiction in terms, but harmful, perhaps fatal, to feminism.

Given that the appropriation of certain types of discourse is usually quite a flexible, selective matter, the above is no easy task. In order to make his case that Foucauldian feminism is the equivalent of mixing oil and water (or nitrogen and glycerin), not only must Balbus be convincing on Foucault, he must also be convincing on feminism. Further complicating matters is that he is an open partisan of, and contributor to, one of but many theories competing for hegemony. Thus within the space of twenty pages, Balbus takes on three gigantic tasks: i) to refute Foucault, ii) to give a more or less definitive account of feminism, and iii) to assert with authority (but without being authoritarian) feminist psychoanalytic theory. In other words, he invites a counterattack on three fronts.

As far as putting forth arguments to allow an identification between feminism and feminist psychoanalytic theory, Balbus abstains entirely. Rather he assumes this identification when he declares that his task is one of resolving the opposition between Foucault and feminism

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53 ". . . Foucault and feminists both focus on sexuality as a key arena of political struggle. Both expand the domain of the political to include forms of social domination associated with the personal sphere. And both launch critiques against forms of biological determinism, and humanism. Finally, both are sceptical of the human sciences insofar as they have participated in modern forms of domination. Indeed, rather than link the growth of knowledge with progress, both describe how the growth of specific forms of knowledge – for example, in medicine, psychiatry, sociology, psychology – has been linked to the emergence of subtle mechanisms of social control, and the elision of other forms of knowledge and experience" (*After Foucault*, 161).

54 This uncertainty or ambivalence is little more than hinted at in this particular essay (see note 55). It amounts to commenting on the fact that Foucault "never spoke of male domination per se" and that "he usually spoke of power as if it subjugated everyone equally" (*After Foucault*, 161).

by, in part, demonstrating that "mothering theory," as Sawicki refers to it, is a non-authoritarian discourse. In point of fact, his real objective is to defend this theory from Foucault by attacking the latter with the additional authority of the larger discourse and with the additional weight of Foucault's ostensibly being a threat to the whole of it. While such strategists may very well win favour with a limited number of partisan theorists and commentators, their presumption and lack of subtlety are a virtual recipe for alienating others. Moreover, rather than driving a wedge between Foucault and Foucauldian feminism, they are likely to make the latter, at least while they are on the defensive, less critical of him than they otherwise would be.[55]

In order to cover so much ground, Balbus relies on short summaries of Foucault and feminist psychoanalytic theory. He divides these summaries under the headings of "History," "Totality," and "Subjectivity." According to these summaries, Foucault is an opponent of, because of their implicit authoritarianism, such items as i) continuous history, ii) totalizing discourses, and iii) subjectivity. Feminist psychoanalytic theory, on the other hand, supports all three. The next step, of course, is to problematize Foucault's opposition.

> The task begins with a demonstration that Foucaldians are implicitly committed to the very true discourses that they explicitly reject. Although Foucault's manifest discourse repudiates continuous history, totality, and founding subject, it is not difficult to detect in his writings a latent discourse in which each of these interrelated themes assumes a prominent place (150-151).

Requiring only three paragraphs, Balbus demonstrates that, first, Foucault's explicit commitment to power/knowledge complexes throughout history implicitly commits him to a continuous series of such complexes (151). Second, his explicit commitment to a disciplinary power running throughout all society implicitly commits him to "the very concept of totality which the genealogist would unambiguously condemn" (152). And, finally, the explicit commitment to a project of his own implicitly commits him to the notion of originating subject (153).

We might be excused if, behind these inconsistencies, we were to discern the outline of Habermas's three criticisms: presentism, relativism, and crypto-normativism. However, instead of elaborating these inconsistencies as fundamental problems (i.e., as a triple paradox of self-referentiality), Balbus treats them as simply the confusion resulting from three erroneous universals operating as Foucauldian premises. These three erroneous universals are i) that all *historically continuist* discourses are authoritarian, ii) that all *totalizing* discourses are authoritarian, and iii) that all *subjective* discourses are authoritarian.

> I assume . . . that the thesis of inevitably authoritarian effects of all true discourses [i.e., the discourses mentioned above] will have to be abandoned in favour of the authoritarian effects of some true discourses and the libertarian effects of others (153).

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55 In a later essay analysing the feminist response to Foucault both friendly and hostile, Sawicki herself periodically takes aim at him for such things as i) ignoring gender-specific technologies, ii) having only vague, undeveloped themes of political agency and resistance, and iii) being not sufficiently forceful in his political stances ("Foucault, Feminism, and Questions of Identity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, 286- 313).

Balbus thereupon proceeds to show that *some* historically continuist discourses (i.e., developmental or evolutionary ones) are authoritarian and some are not (153); that *some* totalizing discourses (i.e., non-harmonious and anti-humanistic ones) are authoritarian and some are not (154); and that *some* subjectivistic discourses (i.e., Cartesian ones) are authoritarian and some are not (155). By changing the above universal propositions to particular ones, and by specifying that feminist psychoanalytic theory, although historically continuist, totalizing, and subjectivistic, is i) non-developmental, ii) heterogeneously or humanistically harmonious, and iii) non-Cartesian, Balbus allows for a new syllogistic result: feminist psychoanalytic theory is non-authoritarian (156).

Thus the problematizing of Foucault becomes the deproblematization of the three categories of discourse which Foucault presumably opposes. This deproblematization, resulting from Balbus's universalistic portrayal of Foucauldian critique as being self-contradictory, then becomes, as a sort of second movement, the deproblematization of Foucault. More precisely, the latter's discourse is deproblematized when it is (or eventually will be) in keeping with the three categories of discourse that have been, thanks to Balbus's analysis, partially redeemed. All three categories are now deemed unproblematic, that is, when they are recognized as being not necessarily authoritarian. In short, it is possible for them to be i) historically continuist but non-developmental, ii) totalizing but harmonious, and iii) subjectivistic but non-Cartesian. Insofar as de-universalized Foucauldian critique can accommodate itself to these discourses, and insofar as these same discourses cannot be covert accomplices of male domination, it then follows that Foucauldian critique may join feminist psychoanalytic theory and, hence, feminism as a non-authoritarian true discourse.[56]

Sawicki's defensive strategy, the basis of which we have already laid down in relation to Balbus's strategic weakness, is three-pronged: i) the counter-reconstruction of Foucault as the re-particularizing of his discourse in terms of its theoretical independence, ii) the counter-problematizing of feminist psychoanalytic theory or, as Sawicki refers to it, mothering theory, and iii) the deproblematizing of the feminist use of Foucault which, broadly speaking, is the counter-problematizing of Balbus's reconstruction of feminism.

Sawicki's counter-reconstruction of Foucault resembles Kelly's in that she takes up Foucault's account of power as a multitude of complex, subtle, insidious, and highly ambiguous relations constituting society and the subject in society (**AF**, 164). So all-pervasive, in fact, are these power relations that they inevitably have a determinant and operative role in the most sophisticated and seemingly objective theories.

> Foucault adopted a skeptical stance toward the emancipating claims of liberal and Marxist theories insofar as they were based on essentially total theories of humanity, its history, economy, and libidinal economy. His genealogy is not a theory of power or history in any traditional sense, but an antitheory (164).

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56 This conclusion is not the one Balbus expressly gives at the end of his essay. Here he is content to claim no more for his arguments than that they demonstrate that "feminist psychoanalytic theory . . . satisfies all three criteria [of non-authoritarianism] and thus that the Foucaldian should take it seriously" (*After Foucault*, 156). However, in his discussion of feminism under the headings of "History," "Totality," and "Subjectivity," there is a theoretical presentation of matters to the effect that, outside feminism, all discourse is under the sway of male domination. ("Feminist psychoanalytic theory – along with other feminists – understands the history of all hitherto existing societies as a history of subordination by and to men.") (140).

Here we have the particularistic counter-insistence which can only fall back on the refrain: "I am myself (i.e., Antitheory). Do not mistake me for another." No more can it prove this claim and sanctify this injunction than the other insistence can prove and sanctify that, insofar as universal principles implicitly present themselves in the analytic of power qua antitheory, it too is theory and should be treated as such. Behind these two irreconcilables are simply two different perspectives, their relative strength dependent on personal proximity, inclination, interest, capacity, upbringing, and ultimately the infinitely fine-grained extension of these things into extra-personal concerns and consensus.

But when we are involved in a struggle (and polemics is a struggle), we forego subtleties which weaken our position. Insofar as this struggle maintains itself at a certain level, this drive towards simplification, being usually the mere repetition or slight variation of both well-worn and well-received ideas, constitutes, we might say, the intellectual chess game of the unabashedly polemical. With respect to the two camps of the Foucauldian debate, the drive to simplification is most noticeable in the critically attacking one. Here the rule almost seems to be to accord to Foucault's thought a suspiciously overloaded look or "Wizard of Oz" effect. By contrast, the critical defenders deny this aspect entirely. But Foucault himself knew his position (or positions) to be not this "either/or" of faithful friend or remorseless foe.[57]

Jana Sawicki's critical defence, being a hard-line one, certainly does not have as its priority outlining the prickly aspects (such as Foucault's silence on certain issue)[58] of a feminist embrace of Foucault. She touches lightly on the matter in the second paragraph of her essay and dismisses it in Foucault's favour by the end of the third.

> Perhaps as an advocate of what he called the "specific intellectual" he would have thought it best to leave specifically feminist research to those engaged in feminist struggle (162).

In fact, so ardent a defender is she in the face of Balbus's critique that the issue of Foucault's providing a ringing endorsement of feminism (or something less) should not even arise.

> . . . [G]enealogy does not tell us what is to be done or offer us a vision of a better society. Instead, genealogy offers advice on how to look at established theories and a method for analysing them in terms of their power effects (164).

Now it should be noted that the terms *feminist* and *theory* never come together in Sawicki's essay. Such a move, no doubt, would turn the critical knife inwards and invite genealogical self-analysis. Strategically then, the important thing is to keep distance between the two. Sawicki thus deflects attention towards those older theories such as psychoanalysis, Marxism, and liberal humanism which, already having flown and fluttered about for so long, have become something

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57 No one can doubt that Foucault takes pains when he renders the complex thought of his books into the more accessible form of interviews, lectures, and seminars. Insofar as this discursive movement, not only sociable and helpful, is a "de-paradoxicalizing" of the earlier presentation, it is philosophical as well as virtuous. But, on the other hand, insofar as all simplification about life is falsification, the truer, really more philosophically oriented encounter is with the dense, abstruse texts which often resist and confound. And yet, in one interview, Foucault refers almost disparagingly to these texts as fictions.

58 See notes 54 and 55.

of historical specimens.

> . . . [D]etermining the liberating status of any theoretical discourse is a matter of historical inquiry, not theoretical pronouncements. From a Foucaldian perspective, no discourse is inherently liberating or oppressive (166).

Being, historically speaking, a theoretical infant, feminism is primarily its present-day practise. Its link with genealogy is one of wielding the latter vivisectionally against the dominant complexes.[59]

In making her case that genealogy is antitheory, Sawicki systematically dismantles Balbus's tottering syllogistic edifice. First of all, she undercuts the three universal principles Balbus constructs and ascribes to Foucault (i.e., that all historically continuist, all totalizing, and all subjectivistic discourses are authoritarian). The immediate step is to attack the main predicate term by denying the unproblematic distinction between authoritarian and liberatory discourses.

> [Foucault] described the historical conditions that made it possible for certain representations, objectifications, and classifications of reality to dictate which kinds of statements came up as candidates for truth or falsity, which sort of questions and answers were taken seriously. These conditions are not only constraining but also enabling. Presumably they contain possibilities for liberation as well as domination (166-167).

Next she attacks two of the three key assumptions which underlie the universalizing constructs. Instead of Foucault's being opposed to continuous history, she presents him as one who "was not rejecting the concept of continuity altogether").

> Balbus incorrectly assumes that the purpose of genealogy is to *demonstrate* discontinuity. To the contrary, the isolation of discontinuity is the starting point of genealogy, not its aim (168).

Instead of Foucault's being opposed to subjectivity, she responds with the following:

> He believed the humanist discourses that place the subject at the center of reality or history had failed to grasp the extent to which the subject is fragmented and decentered in the social field. But to describe the way in which individuals have been dominated through a rigid attachment to

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59 "Inspired by Foucault's description of the ways in which modern individuals are produced, Sandra Bartky provides her own compelling descriptions of the disciplinary technologies that produce specifically feminine forms of embodiment, for example, dietary and fitness regimes, expert advice on how to walk, talk, dress, style one's hair, and wear one's make-up. Bartky uses Foucault's model of power to show how these technologies subjugate by developing competencies, not simply taking power away. She explains that one reason such technologies are so effective is that they involve the acquisition of skills and are associated with a central component of female identity, namely, sexuality. The disciplines enhance the power of the subject while simultaneously subjugating her. Hence, women become attached to them and regard feminist critiques of the feminist aesthetic as a threat" (*After Foucault*, 174-175).

> particular modern identities is not equivalent to rejecting identity *tout court* (174).

When Balbus, in order to construct his valid argument, replaces the universalizing constructs with particular premises, Sawicki attacks the assumption that Foucault himself has a totalizing discourse and, as a consequence, justifies disqualifying his opposition to such discourses.

> . . . Foucault's comments about the book [i.e., *Discipline and Punish*] indicate that it was intended not as a portrait of the whole of society, but, rather, as a genealogy of the emergence of the ideal of a perfectly administered social system (169).

In this manner, she leaves intact only one of the three critiques – the repudiation of totalizing theories – which Balbus attributes to Foucault. It now becomes the basis of her own counter-critique.

As we already noted, along with providing a short summary of Foucault, Balbus provides a tandem account of, under the same headings of "History," "Totality," and "Subjectivity," feminist psychoanalytic theory. The principal claims of the latter are: i) that there is universal male domination (140), ii) that this domination is the direct result of women's traditional role as primary nurturers of infants and young children (141), and iii) that male domination, once men fully accede to the same nurturing role, will disappear (142). Showing no reticence when it comes to specifying large-scale objectives, Balbus goes on:

> So it is that coparenting is essential not only for the overcoming of male domination but also for the supersession of political and technological domination. It is in this sense that the struggle against patriarchy must be understood as a struggle for an entirely new civilization without domination (144).

Apparently Balbus never took the time to consider that struggle in and of itself may very well carry the seeds of future forms of domination. Certainly history indicates something along these lines. However, Sawicki forgoes this pessimistic or empirical challenge[60] in favour of weighing, vis-a-vis the empirical fact of widespread male domination, the explanatory power of mothering theory against that of genealogy.

> When Balbus argues that a Foucaldian could and should accept mothering theory . . he misses the point of Foucault's genealogy. It is not the empirical claim that male domination has appeared . . . which a Foucaldian would resist, but the attempt to deduce it from a general theory and to privilege a single locus of resistance. For a Foucaldian, patriarchy is the name of a global effect of domination made possible by a myriad of power relations at the micro level of society. By eschewing

60 This challenge only arises with her insofar as she cites Marxism and liberal humanism as examples of attempts "to formulate a global or systematic discourse of the historical or social totality in order to legitimate programs and practices as progressive or emancipatory" (*After Foucault*, 163).

> reductionism, the Foucaldian can bring to light the heterogeneous forms that gender embodiment, the practice of mothering, and power relations producing gendered individuals take. Without rejecting mothering theory, the genealogist adopts a critical attitude towards it, specifically towards the totalistic reductionism that obscures historical contents (171).

Mothering theory, in other words, must be "stripped of its global dimensions," "not be accorded the theoretical privilege that Balbus demands," and discredited insofar as it "claim[s] to be universal and to represent the Archimedean leverage point from which society must be moved" (174-175).

Although Sawicki does not deal specifically with the matter of Balbus's conception of feminism, her attack on mothering theory is, if we may ignore the very few signs of tolerance for it, the attempt to sink it as the presumed flagship of feminism. After all, what does it really mean not to reject a theory (as Sawicki claims when outlining her position above) when the interlocutor, expounding on it, has nary a good word to say about it? Certainly it must mean that, at the very least, she banishes it from main consideration and highest regard. Since Balbus holds mothering theory to be the answer to all the world's ills, to say that no rejection is involved is mere etiquette. Furthermore (and perhaps this is the unkindest cut of all), she points to his theory's *own* potential for doing ill.

> . . . [S]ome feminists have already observed [that] mothering theory may unwittingly reinforce heterosexist norms. . . . It is clear that Balbus has only two genders in mind (172).
>
> Postmodern feminists Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson have criticized mothering theory for adopting the Freudian premise "that there is a basic sense of self constituted at an early age through the child's interactions with its parents," and for assuming that this gendered deep self continues through all adult life and cuts across divisions of race, class, ethnicity, and so forth (113).

In other words, we catch a glimpse here of embryonic realms of intolerance, devaluation, and exploitation. She cites, for example, "the case of the hermaphrodite, Herculine Barbin, whose memoirs Foucault unearthed and edited" (167). Also she makes reference to another culture wherein child-bearing practises, although they exhibit their own inner logic, contradict a main feature of mothering theory (171). Is the latter in the moral position, as Sawicki seems to imply, to overrule this culture and remake it in its own image? With these criticisms and questions, she no doubt gives implicit voice to a feminism of far greater range and diversity than what Balbus seems to offer.

If we now regard the critical strategies from a distance, we perceive one which, despite its ostensible objective of resolving matters between Foucault and feminism, really wishes to change the former beyond recognition.[61] We then perceive another which, despite a certain

61 Sawicki charges Balbus with something to the same effect. "In what follows I shall argue that Balbus's effort to reconcile Foucaldian and feminist discourse deradicalizes Foucault's analysis of power and begs some of the most important questions that he raises" (*After Foucault*, 165).

tolerance for the opponent's position, gives little if any indication of having genuine respect for it. It is as much as to say that the nature of polemics, lying somewhere between discussion and diatribe, is a fundamental division which two or more contending parties, either wholly or in part, deny. No doubt this denial allows the exchange to take place and, at least in the first instance, brings the opponents to greater awareness of each other. Slippages and partial transformations likely follow although, within the framework of the debate itself, they are less important than the fundamental division. Moreover, it no doubt operates practically to direct various parties to or confirm various parties on either one side or the other. It functions, in other words, as an expedient or shortcut for those parties that, although they have an interest in taking sides on a particular issue, cannot, for one reason or another, fully devote themselves to it.

Rhetorically speaking, Balbus's assault is on male domination and, since the latter includes virtually everything outside feminism (and, specifically, feminist psychoanalytic theory), it really demands the subtlety, panache, audacity, industry, and immense buffoonery of a feminist version of Nietzsche. How would the latter have fared, we may ask, if his sweeping attack on Western values were no more than a series of pedantic generalizations? The strategic weakness of Balbus's account and critique, in other words, leaves him with no choice but to treat his partisan claims, given under the headings of "Feminism on History," "Feminism on Totality," and "Feminism on Subjectivity," as being more or less self-evident. In addition, he must resort to two artifices – treating feminism as monolithic and treating himself as the legitimate spokesperson for all feminists (except perhaps Foucauldian ones) – in order to assert himself so titanically. Actually, there are two more artifices, one of which is to imply that his courage and integrity, in relation to Foucault's, are true coinage.

> The much more modest but far less dangerous task of the intellectual – the specific rather than the universal intellectual – is simply to struggle against the power that operates in his or her own local disciplinary domain (143).

Elsewhere he lets slip the fact that his effort is "principled and not merely strategic" (150). The other and what we should call the fourth artifice is his juxtaposing his accounts of Foucault and feminist psychoanalytic theory in such a way that (before he formally presents his critique) the second always functions as the refutation of the first. For example, his account of "Foucault on History" ends with the assertion: "History, in short, has no meaning" (140). Four paragraphs later, in his account of "Feminism on History," we receive the line: "History has a meaning, and that meaning is the flight from and repudiation of the mother" (142).

As we might expect, what stands primarily as a syllogistic house of cards does not really require the rhetorical inflation of the opposing position (à la Janicaud) or the rhetorical deflation of the position being opposed (à la Connelly). Since Balbus's position is so poorly constructed, it need only be dismantled and since it is so highly inflated, it need only be punctured. As already mentioned, Sawicki refers to it some twenty times (over sixteen pages) as *mothering theory* – a term hardly meant to bestow on feminist psychoanalytic theory the status to which, in Balbus's hands, it openly aspires. In fact, it could very well be looked upon as a pejorative to the extent that it suggests over-protectiveness and excessive indulgence. *Straw figure*, another term which connotes weakness, finds employment in Sawicki's attack on Balbus's proposition, attributed to Foucault's position, that "all true discourses are inevitably authoritarian . . ." (166). A couple of

times she refers to the theory as *quasi-biological*, (163, 172), once as *quasi-essentialist*, (173), and, on another occasion, she links it to the word *traditional* (as in the term "traditional emancipatory theories") (170). Her most aggressive trope is to call it "theoretical humanism with a vengeance" (172). All in all, however, there is little in her essay which matches the rhetorical excesses of the other polemicists.

– Conclusion –

Let us sum up this study of the debate between the allies and adversaries of Michel Foucault. First of all, it is limited in that it only involves three critical attackers (Habermas, Taylor, and Balbus) and four critical defenders (Kelly, Janicaud, Connelly, and Sawicki). While attempting to be fairly diverse, it nonetheless best represents the more polarized end of the Foucauldian debate. Secondly, while striving for a certain amount of objectivity, balance, and control, it also operates personally and cathartically. To put it another way, it employs the third person plural only to the extent of anticipating that there are others who share this thinker's ambivalence towards and sometimes sharp aversion to polemics and, at least for the space of this study, have a willingness to counter the usual suppression of these feelings.

Thirdly, this study operates along two investigative axes: 1) underlying principles which animate the polemical engagement and 2) strategies and tactics which shape it. The underlying principles are universalistic insistence and particularistic counter-insistence. With Habermas the former is mainly the insistence on Foucault's thought being a continuous attack on subject-centred or instrumental reason which, along with the insistence on the totalizing nature of Foucault's theory of power, becomes the insistence on Foucault's attacking the length and breadth of modernity. With Taylor it is mainly the insistence on a universal good which the rise of modern society manifests, however imperfectly, and which ineluctably but contradictorily reveals itself at the heart of Foucault's own analyses. With Balbus it is mainly the insistence on universal male domination as a historico-cultural fact prior to and only exclusive of those kinds of discourse (e.g., feminist psychoanalytic theory) which seek to undermine it.

The three levels of strategic and tactical activity are evaluative, logical, and rhetorical. The first corresponds to the contextualization of the opponent's thought, the second to the problematization of it, and the third to the prejudicial presentation of it. The reconstruction of the opponent's thought spans the gap between its contextualization and its problematization. The counter-contextualization and counter-reconstruction also involve the deproblematization of the thought being defended. Thus Kelly defends Foucault against Habermas's charge of paradoxical self-referentiality by arguing that self-referentiality is the problem of modern critique in general. Janicaud defends Foucault against Habermas's implicit charge of Nietzschean irrationalism by arguing that power operates within various and even highly sophisticated forms of rationality. Connelly defends Foucault against Taylor's charge of incoherency by arguing that being always outstrips knowledge and, as a consequence, one form of incoherency is really battling it out with another. Sawicki defends Foucault against Balbus's charge of the former's being implicitly in support of holistic enterprises of a certain kind by arguing that genealogy is not political theory but rather its constant watchdog or critic.

The fourth major point about this study is that, in order to economize, it assumes or presumes to have a dramatic form. There is a progressive disclosure of methodology, matter, character, and conflict. The arguments of Section I, springing from Habermas's critical attack on Foucault, emphasize the realm of the meaningful and the truthful. The arguments of Section II, springing from Taylor's critical attack on Foucault, emphasize the realm of the moral. The arguments of Section III, springing from Balbus's critical attack on Foucault, emphasize the realm of the political. In addition (and this is the fifth point), this study demonstrates that, in concert with the theme of scholarly polemics being a sophisticated and sublimated form of verbal warfare, the ideal of objectivity functions not only as the standard for removing the crudest

aspects of partiality and prejudice, but also as the mask for their more refined but fundamental operation.

Of course there are a good many other attacks on and defences of Foucault. No doubt the vast majority could be, if required, analytically inserted into this study and given a place on the polemical field. Except in a few rare cases, boundaries would not have to be significantly adjusted.[62] Many if not most of the critical attackers of Foucault – scholars such as Nancy Fraser,[63] Dieter Freundlieb,[64] Axel Honneth,[65] David Levin,[66] Thomas McCarthy,[67] Stephen White,[68] and Pyong-Yoong Yoon[69] – either follow Habermas fairly closely in their arguments or else employ ones which he himself cites and uses (e.g., those of Axel Honneth and Nancy

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62 Tom Keenan's essay, being in general agreement with the conclusions of Habermas, Taylor, and Fraser but opposed to the reasoning which brings these thinkers to them (8), polemically straddles the divide between the two camps while being largely sympathetic to and supportive of Foucault. As such, it presumes itself, like this study, to be closer to presenting the field than to being on it. (See note 80.)

63 A very common tactic of scholarly polemics is to begin with a short outline testifying to the willingness of the critic to be up front, straightforward, and virtually transparent in the presentation of matters. However, what is outwardly commendatory can also operate as camouflage insofar as these same matters may swiftly and unobtrusively introduce themselves as far simpler and more settled than they actually are. Thus Nancy Fraser begins her essay (see note 13) by characterizing genealogy as a politically engaged discourse on modernity (272). In so doing, she immediately relegates the diagnostically historical to a subordinate position. What now counts – what forms her contextualization of Foucault, in other words – is the prescriptive or political basis on which genealogy seeks to operate. The demand to reveal and substantiate universal principles (i.e., normative standards) follows directly from the assumption that Foucault means to frame a single, utterly coherent response to modernity.

64 There are some scholars who, qua polemicists, avail themselves of another's strategy to the point of spending the greater part of their time reproducing it. That is to say, they go over all the main points and arguments, adding some emphasis here and there while reserving their own contribution for the end. Such is the case with Dieter Freundlieb in his essay, "Rationalism v. Irrationalism?: Habermas's Response to Foucault" (*Inquiry*, 31, June, 1988, 171-191). To drive the Habermasian nail home – to sink the very head of it into the wood – means accusing Habermas of overlooking yet another form of relativism in Foucault's thought (184-185). In effect, he wants to enlarge on Habermas's charge of a thrice paradoxical self-referentiality and make it a quadruple one.

65 To highlight the universalistic counter-tendency in *Discipline and Punish*, to render it primary, conceptually independent, and theoretically "complete"; to present it as surreptitiously serving the genealogical account of the French penal system and related institutions – this strategy is the operative principle in Axel Honneth's article, "Foucault's Theory of Society: A Systems-Theoretic Dissolution of *The Dialectics of the Enlightenment*" (*Critique and Power*, 157-183). Contextualizing Foucault by situating him in a larger discourse or tradition (as Habermas does) is foregone in favour of making the *reconstruction* of him the evaluative basis for problematizing him. As a theory of society then, Foucault's thought can be criticized for surreptitiously shifting from institutional conflict to institutional coordination (176-177).

66 Some critical attacks operate quite openly as part of a larger strategy to put forward or profit a position at some remove from the debate at hand. David Michael Levin, in his essay, "The Body Politic: The Embodiment of Praxis in Foucault and Habermas," (*Praxis International*, 9,1/2, April and July, 1989, 112-132), targets Foucault as a reductionist while lauding Habermas as a grand social theorist. Denouncing the "Foucauldian" body as a mere product of social forces, he then moves on to praising the "Merleau-Ponty" body of inherent sociability and attunement to universal justice (118).

67 Thomas McCarthy, in his essay, "The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School" (*Critique and Power*, 243-282), does the usual thing of treating Foucault as one who constructs a theory which traverses his historical investigations as opposed to one who conducts different investigations with different theoretical approaches. As a result, instead of granting to Foucault an overlapping project offering different perspectives on the social field, McCarthy credits him with – as well as debiting him for the failure of – an attempt to give a standard account of it.

68 The universalistic reconstruction of Foucault by his opponents repeatedly erases the distinction between the *methodological* suspension of subjectivity and moral principles and the readmission of these desiderata in the social

Fraser).[70] Other scholars such as Richard Bernstein[71] and David Ingram,[72] occupying a kind of polemical middle-ground (i.e., they are sympathetic to and critical of both sides), spend most of their time identifying the extremities and perhaps trying to pull them closer together. Then some scholars, notably Richard Rorty, are harsh critics of some non-theoretical but general trait of Foucault. In Rorty's case, it appears to be Foucault's giving the intellectual cold shoulder to bourgeois liberalism.[73] Then there are, of course, the numerous commentators with specific complaints or technical objections. However, the latter, given the fact that Foucault was a painstaking researcher, never seriously challenge the theoretical side of his thought.

As for the other critical defenders,[74] [75] [76] [77] [78] [79] they would simply supply, if deposited on the field of this study, a greater variety of counter-contextualizations, counter-reconstructions,

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or political role genealogy may assume. In other words, the insistence is that, if his diagnoses of the past are to be taken seriously, they should lead to viable prescriptions for the present and future. See Stephen White's essay, "Foucault's Challenge to Critical Theory" (*American Political Science Review*, Vol. 80, No. 2, June, 1986, 419-432).

69 The conflation of genealogy qua means of historical investigation and genealogy qua social theory which must be answerable to its own postulates is very much in evidence in Pyong-Yoong Yoon's essay, "Habermas and Foucault: On Ideology – Critique and Power/Knowledge Nexus" (*Kinesis*, 17, Spring, 1987, 87-103).

70 *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 284 and 287.

71 Even with some of the most sensitive and sympathetic critics of Foucault (e.g., Richard Bernstein with his "Foucault's Critique as Philosophical Ethos," (*Critique and Power*, 211-241), we cannot help but notice that the emphasis falls on seeking to clarify Foucault's ethical stance as teaching or doctrine. The idea that Foucault might have *lived* ethically hardly seems to warrant consideration.

72 David Ingram, in his essay, "Foucault and Habermas on the Subject of Reason" (*The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, 215-261), moves from being a critical attacker to a critical defender of Foucault in accordance with a reconstruction which essentially makes the latter's last two works a refutation of the earlier ones. Very much with Habermas in his condemnation of a theory of power which dissolves the subject into a myriad of power relations, he nonetheless sides with Foucault and against Habermas when, according to him, Foucault shifts to a theory of the subject with power relations as the basis of social interaction (237).

73 Richard Rorty, in his essay, "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy," (*Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, 328-335), accuses Foucault of having anarchist tendencies and bearing an unwarranted hostility towards liberal society. Given such a short address (six pages), he can hardly mount a critique of Foucault's work so much as criticize him for foisting himself on the public as a political role model (329, 331). In this, Rorty seems to perform two universalistic reconstructions. First, by casting Foucault as a would-be role model for everyone and, second, by casting liberal society as a "best of all possible worlds."

74 Nancy Fraser, among other critics, takes Foucault to task for utilizing liberal humanist values in an implicit critique of modernity while otherwise giving what looks to be like a neutral or anarchistic account of it. Alexander Hooke, in his essay, "The Order of Things: Is Foucault's Antihumanism against Human Action?" (*Political Theory*, Vol. 15, No. 1, February, 1987, 38-60), responds by drawing a distinction between basic human values which antedate modernity and these same values comprehensively ordered according to the paradigm of contractual law. In this way, he provides a contrary evaluative basis which crosses out the straightforward contradictoriness or necessary confusion in Foucault's having to employ values to register a critical intent.

75 Defensive strategies, like offensive ones, vary in their degree of intensity and openness. For example, Joanna Hodge, in her essay, "Habermas and Foucault: Contesting Rationality" (*Irish Philosophical Journal*, 7, 1990, 60-78), makes what is an unusually restrained comparison between Foucault and Habermas. But this does not prevent her from proclaiming the issues themselves to be important (75) and showing more approval of the unsettling methods of the former than the good intentions of the latter.

76 Foucault's presumably last-minute embrace of Kant and the Enlightenment, often criticized for being at odds with the major part of his work, is the issue with which James Schmidt and Thomas E. Wartenberg deal in their essay, "Foucault's Enlightenment: Critique, Revolution, and the Fashioning of the Self" (*Critique and Power*, 283-314). Here they reconstruct Foucault's embrace of Kant to show that it was, first, far from being a last-minute affair and, second, intimately related to his view of modernity. The two nodal points are a heightened philosophical interest in the historical present and acceptance of certain limitations on knowledge.

and counter-problematizations. To speak more conventionally, they too would find certain key assumptions to be questionable and, in effect, dispensable. Then new ones would quickly take their place and, with them, new lines of logic, that is, new lines of attack or defence. Sometimes, however, one line noticeably conflicts with that of an ostensible ally. In his defence of Foucault, for example, Michael Kelly treats the paradoxical self-referentiality of modern critique as an epistemological problem (i.e., one that presumably requires ongoing philosophical work). Thomas Keenan, on the other hand, argues that paradox is the very relation itself between power and knowledge.[80] The more traditional philosophical orientation (i.e., Michael Kelly's), roughly pursuing the same strategic objective as the less traditional one (i.e, Thomas Keenan's), thus confronts what is essentially hostile to it.

Now this study operates on the basis that scholarly debate resembles a highly competitive game like chess. The latter allows for an infinite number of moves and yet the pieces, the board, the rules – unlike assumptions, propositions, and subjects of debate – maintain a stable presence. In spite of this, we often play the polemical game as if it were a matter of finding spaces to occupy permanently. It is as if we, playing it earnestly and expending so much energy in making our moves, end up suffering from a kind of critical exhaustion. Not the exhaustion of wanting to

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77 The implacable sense that we are philosophically undone if our values are not in place logically or argumentatively meets with the response that such narrowness of vision is passé – that values themselves are more varied, flexible, and fleeting than the thought that tries to frame them. The insistence, in other words, is that we possess only the *illusion* of their permanence and stability. But this illusion itself is a valuing that is unquestionably widespread, tenacious, and vital. So far as we are able to make out then, it only has the philosophical mood against it. But the latter is part of a high-end contentiousness hardly legible at the day-to-day level of struggle. It is part of a very local if rather busy and elevated one where, straining to free itself from something called error, thought only ends up re-entangling itself. So far as being able to straighten itself out and project itself definitively on the larger stage, it fails. But so far as it does so with a definite look about it, it succeeds.

Such thoughts, at any rate, come to me while looking over Paul Rabinow's and Hubert L. Dreyfus's essay, "What is Maturity? Habermas and Foucault on 'What is Enlightenment?'" (*Foucault: A Critical Reader*, 109-121).

78 In his response to Charles Taylor's attack on Foucault, Paul Patton, in his essay, "Taylor and Foucault on Power and Freedom" (*Political Studies*, XXXVII, 1989, 260-276), falls into the trap of trying to counter the charge of incoherence by introducing new terms, distinctions, and concepts into Foucault's quasi-theory of power. In effect, he joins the opponent's game of treating it as a full-blown account of society rather than the basis of limited, highly specific investigations of it. Interestingly enough, it is usually the precision and detail of the latter which Foucault's harshest critics single out for commendation. A more insightful defence then would be to target the implication that Foucault would have done better without his "theory."

79 René Robert Fillion, in his essay, "Foucault *contra* Taylor: Whose sources? Which self?" (*Dialogue*, vol. XXXIV, No. 4, Fall, 1995), provides exactly the more insightful kind of strategy mentioned in note 78. Instead of expending his whole effort on the issue of incoherency (whether it be Foucault's or Taylor's), he puts forward their different ways of writing and viewing history in relation to the moral concerns of the present. The key idea is that excessive piety or reverence for certain moral dispositions and conceptual frameworks precludes having the highest critical sensitivity to those practises – often the cherished offspring of these same dispositions and frameworks – which belie them.

80 It is the life of the paradox, the paradoxical life of philosophy and politics which Tom Keenan brings to life in his highly distinctive essay, "The Paradox of 'Knowledge' and 'Power': Reading Foucault on a Bias" (*Political Theory*, Vol. 15, No. 1, February, 1987, 5-37). Instead of the usual exercise of trying either to tie or untie a knot in the discourse about the convoluted relations between knowledge and power, he builds the case that the very tying and untying, ceaselessly reenacting and rearticulating themselves, are the matter and range of all theoretical and practical activity. But where *we* are currently situated and *we* are most interested is where right as controlling state or society and right as liberating act or event contend with and assert themselves against each other. To move around and within this aporia; to find our centre precisely by no longer thinking in terms of one centre over another, is the difficult task – but still a task – which demands our highest ethical concern and involvement.

renounce the game openly, but the exhaustion of coming to the belief that, so far as *we* are concerned, it no longer is a game that is ongoing, perhaps changing itself at the very moment it seems most stable.

Thus to deny it as a game becomes, we might say, the first rule. However much it may resemble a game, however much outsiders may scorn it as such, there must be this unquestioned faith in it as a quest for final results. So often then does it strike us as this pose that we – part of ourselves, at any rate – clamber about for a no doubt lonelier, more perilous position. Already we have been taught that there is the risk of ending up speaking only to ourselves, a kind of solipsistic attunement so different from what is traditionally valued and sought. And yet if we at least admit it as part of our nature, we catch a glimpse of the split, the division, the reason why there is no perfect rest but perhaps, now and then, a few "perfect" moves.

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– Appendix I: Some Questions and Answers –

1. How would you sum up what this study accomplishes?

In broadest terms, it sheds a light on the nature of scholarly debate. In narrowest terms, it gives an idea of how exceptional thought can be mishandled in polemical engagement.

2. Would you please elaborate on this last point?

Such mishandling results from its combative and competitive dimension. As the will to win, it can never be completely the will to truth. At the same time this dimension, however obvious it may be from the outside, goes largely unrecognized from within.

3. It is clear that you identify Foucault with exceptional thought and his opponents with something less. Since the debate that you study, however, is not between Foucault and his critics but rather between his allies and his adversaries, what may be said about the former and their thought?

The defenders of Foucault's thought have as their target the thought of Foucault's critics. Whatever violence they do to it is mitigated by its being on the same level as theirs and by its standing in need of correction.

4. But you seem to be suggesting that all those engaging in scholarly debate have ulterior motives and illicit designs. Is this not something that you yourself are involved in?

Any thinker standing outside a strictly polemical engagement is more like one trying to give birth to a new idea than one trying to destroy the idea of another. On the other hand, any new idea, if it is to develop and prosper, is destined to become both the victim of unfair treatment and the scourge of whatever opposes it.

5. Are we correct in thinking that you take scholarly debate to be more deficient than generally acknowledged?

Certainly my study, an admittedly limited one, is the view that scholarly debate cannot be other than the site of unacknowledged interests that compromise its integrity. At the same time, this is not to deny its efficiency or even its integrity in a total accounting. It is merely to offer a counter-discourse that helps to preserve it or at least part of it as never-ending self-critique and self-examination. The Foucauldian debate, being a fairly lively and controversial one, struck me as a worthy site for studying the strategies and tactics of this verbal combat. My main objection is that it so little acknowledges itself as such. No doubt this is an important part of strategy but perhaps it is outdated.

6. Although you don't come out and say it, it is clear that you favour the Foucauldian camp. How might a critic of Foucault, coming to your study, be persuaded by it if he finds this favouritism right from the start?

It was never my intention to hide the fact that my study owes much more to Foucault than to his adversaries. The very fact that I characterize it as a strategically limited study of various strategies and tactics in a particular debate should be enough to point out its main influence. What I am trying to do is to discount the notion that such discourses can come without prejudice and that it is preferable to keep quiet about this rather than to draw attention to it.

7. Perhaps we should focus a little more on your study. The case you're making is that what divides the two camps of the Foucauldian debate is essentially two principles.

Two principles that are opposed ways of viewing life, the world, the whole, etc. which discursively become two modes of decision-making, assertion, emphasis, repetition, appropriation, and closure or non-closure. These two pre-polemical dispositions form the ambiguous, impenetrable backdrop of my discussion. Empirical investigation here – psychological, sociological, biological – always leaves an unexplained remainder. Such accounts as traverse it, in other words, never bring the two sides wholly together.

8. So you're in the position of positing two forms of fundamental outlook and two corresponding ways of arguing without quite taking up residence yourself in one of them.

Insofar as one posits anything, one creates distance between the act of positing and the things posited. The division I am referring to pertains to what comes to the fore and asserts itself in polemical engagement.

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– Appendix II: Further Reflections on Foucault and the Foucauldian Debate –

1. The advantages and limits of Foucault's conception of philosophical activity

I will limit myself to pointing out the particularity of Foucault's work, its singularity as discourse and practise (be these archeological or genealogical), its counter-movement with respect to the more traditional lines of historical analysis, its purposely disruptive or sceptical nature, and its challenge to the all too human tendency to exalt the thinking and practises of one's own particular time and place.

With regard to this last point, it operates as an ongoing corrective and counter-measure which challenges formalized practises and habitual modes of thinking. It shakes and disrupts them with critical exposures of everything intellectually and spiritually disconnected from the vigorous flow of ambiguous, multiple micro-events. The latter, normally captured by the artist, become, through Foucault's lens, the central ground of historical studies which, in a moral or ethical sense, seditiously relate past discourses and practises to present ones.

So far as the modern world, in a number of ways and to varying degrees, suffers from the dystopian effects of utopian schemes, the Foucauldian approach is vital to our understanding of the world. What Nietzsche called the youngest of the virtues, honesty, now comes to the fore – questioning, problematic, uncertain – helpful and hindering at the same time. Its main advantage is that it brings forth a new intellectual and spiritual strategy that, although it compounds difficulties, shuns a certain socio-historical smugness and sense of superiority. In seeking to address itself to a problem in the most rigorous way, the formal status of a social phenomenon – its status as large-scale homogeneous affair – is revealed to be underwritten by a complex configuration of events.

Idealism does not so much die here as, by constraining itself, become the preeminent struggle to close the gap between itself and what presumably is most truthful. Dealing justly with the past in relation to the present and recognizing the extra-human or anonymous forces at play in human affairs, including the highest ones, contributes to embracing philosophy as a way of life. This personal, non-objective side of the coin, less concerned with engaging in argument than engaging what is crucial and singular in one's experience, is a response to the over-valuing or one-sidedness of academia's grip on philosophy.

What Foucault most concretely or practically offers is a toolkit for those who wish to dismantle, rearrange, or widen the views which, all too common or easily offering their services, are generally reassuring and within whose precincts no one scruples to spot the most subtle, insidious dangers. With Foucault, the latter usually takes the form of certain enduring and deeply-rooted aspects of institutionalized practises which conflict with their formal purposes. The insane person who grows sicker and becomes more unmanageable even while undergoing treatment in the hospital, the prisoner who learns to become a better criminal or more embittered, anti-social person even while in corrective detention, the university student who quickly develops an aversion to emulating any of the great knowledge-seekers even while racking up high grades and pursuing academic excellence – such are the problematic areas systematically ignored or only receiving faint attention. By meticulously charting the contingent complexity of institutionalized discourses and practises, Foucault provides the means and motivation for exploring the possibility of thinking and doing otherwise. Like Nietzsche, he hands down an open-ended legacy and inimitable style that others may follow while, at the same time, finding

their own way.

It is the case then that Foucault's mainly historical and historiographical work falls somewhere within the margins of philosophy. The latter, so far as it is the maintenance and smooth progression of existing orders of thought, likely negates or minimises its influence. And yet, so far as Foucault's work ceases to be fully its own movement and disperses itself within and around existing orders of thought, it places itself at the centre. From the point of view then that it remains intensely active and alive, it continues to be an anomaly, an uncertain region, a potentially destructive or creative force. From the point of view of its already losing itself in piecemeal fashion to decentring practises and purposes, it cannot help but fall under the sway of and be conquered by that to which it initially "opposes" itself, that is, fair argument among equals, rational consensus, and the appeal to universal principles.

2. The main lines of Habermas's critique of Foucault and their tenability

While locating Foucault within a Nietzschean strain of thought which purportedly exalts the irrational and sets itself against Enlightenment values, Habermas undertakes a survey of his work essentially in opposition to the estimation and characterization of it by Foucault and his supporters. Instead of looking upon it as a series of studies with different objects of study, he treats it as a single, unified project. Instead of its comprising a study of madness, a study of medicine, a study of the human sciences, a study of the prison, and a study of human sexuality, it becomes, for Habermas, a multi-pronged attack on modernity. Specifically, Habermas construes it as the critique of subject-centred reason from the viewpoint of this critique's being abhorrently radical. Not content to devalue and decentre the subject qua conscious agent, Foucault, according to Habermas, does away with it completely. The result is that Foucault's peculiar historical studies contradict each other when they try to make anonymous rules that forge the constitutive elements of social being.

In books such as *The Order of Things* and *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault deals with the internal, regulative features of discourse. Here it appears that thought and action are derived from the discursive rules which, subject always to alteration and replacement, both bracket and divide the true and the false, the good and the bad, the authoritative and non-authoritative, the sensible and the non-sensible. Habermas points out that, in order to account for what governs the alterations and replacement of discursive rules, Foucault, in books such as *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, reverses direction, now taking the complex interaction of various practises or technologies to be the essential controlling or constituting principle. In Habermas's estimation, Foucault cannot have it both ways: he cannot found the active subject on the basis of the knowing subject while at the same time founding the knowing subject on the basis of the active one.

In addition to the double-bind or circularity which, in his accounts of various institutions, results from eliminating the subject as a term or point of reference, Foucault, according to Habermas, necessarily gets caught up in self-referential dilemmas. Identifying three, he charges Foucault with what he terms *presentism*, *relativism*, and *crypto-normativism*. The first is that, while Foucault, at first blush, offers scrupulously objective analyses of the past, the areas of study he chooses and the implicitly critical cast that he gives these analyses are rooted in present concerns which ineluctably colour and slant them. The second dilemma, relativism, is that, if truth, meaning, and value are located in truth-constituting, meaning-constituting, and value-

constituting settings, then the truth, meaning, and value of Foucault's work, being so constituted, justifies not taking it too seriously. The third dilemma, crypto-normativism, is that, while Foucault removes from his historical analyses any trace of the normally operative ideals or principles (i.e., those referring to the rational subject, modern progress, democracy, freedom, human rights, etc.), the secret employment of them necessarily follows due to the implicitly critical or "exposé" character of them.

Now the main weakness of Habermas's first line of attack upon Foucault is the claim that the latter's work forms a single unified project. As much as Habermas may marshal evidence to support this claim, Foucault's explicit denial of such a state of affairs, the very fact that his work repeatedly challenges the notion of such unities (i.e., by treating the elements of any unity as half-arbitrary events), and the wealth of counter-evidence which the supporters of Foucault can marshal, all go to make this claim problematic. With respect to the problem of self-referentiality, Habermas must, in direct opposition to Foucault, make the traditional distinction between theory and practise. This forces him not to recognize that it is only by strategically employing principles within a strictly limited domain that relevant elements come to light. From the point of view of Foucault's successfully carrying out such strategies, the Habermasian claim that Foucault hoists himself with his own petard is unwarranted. The problem of self-referentiality, in other words, dissolves when it is not a logical account of the whole that is strived for, but rather a theoretically open study trying to be as meticulous as possible in a particular area.

Summarizing, we may say that the core of Habermas's critique of Foucault is the rationalist's traditional attack upon the quasi-metaphysics of non-universalizing works, studies, or projects. The charges of circularity and self-destructive referentiality are the woof upon which Habermas weaves his political, social, and moral critique. This critique achieves its basic design by situating Foucault within a strain of thought harking back to Nietzsche which, according to Habermas, is dangerously hostile to the Enlightenment legacy. Starting with his claim that, in his analyses, Foucault relentlessly eliminates the role of the subject, Habermas argues that he then goes on to systematically distort the view of modern institutions, knowledge, and values by making them out to be less progressive and beneficial than they purport to be. But even more than this, Foucault impresses him as someone offering a critique of society that is politically conservative, reactionary, or even anarchistic. No doubt it is in the way of combatting this threat that his counter-critique – his calling into question the value, coherency, originality, and integrity of the Foucauldian corpus – ends up being almost as rhetorical as it is argumentative.

3. The general characteristics of a philosophical debate

In his book *What is is Philosophy?,* Gilles Deleuze sees the essence of philosophy as being the creation of concepts and, on a much wider front, the mastering of the chaos threatening us from within and without. If this view is to be accepted, it would follow that philosophical debate nourishes itself from these more or less singular events of creation and renders them social and institutional.

We may ask at this point: what is this realm of philosophical debate if not the receiving field that allots life and death to new-born ideas? Here the urgency is not so much to master the chaotic as to welcome, support, and pay homage to the latest contribution to knowledge or to attack and tear down the mere semblance of such. Since the same thing, however, can often be one or the other for different parties, it happens that two opposing sides will engage not only

ideas but positions. And since both sides inevitably hoist and fly high the banner of argumentative procedure, the movement by which the chaotic is mastered coincides with various degrees and manifestations of conflict.

Hence the caricature of it in the popular mind which itself is dependent on philosophical doubt and self-doubt. Whatever there is of elevated thought in philosophy that this popular mind can take in, it owes to the lonely philosopher patiently giving birth to a new concept and to the small circle of scholars informing this act with value and meaning.

If the creation of concepts is the main movement of philosophy with this movement essentially made up of heterogeneous elements or events, philosophical debate itself must be a plethora of relatively limited moves that propel, promote, or proliferate each other not so much ahead of the dazzling new concept as around it. Indeed, we may say that any prolonged movement leaving behind these other ones is not so much a teleological progression as an unforeseen leap that results from the appearance of yet another new concept.

Of course the active role in debate and the view which informs it is, explicitly or otherwise, a counter-viewing, an immersion within some logical movement. If such were not the case, the extra-logical leap or attraction, freeing itself as much from its previous form as its previous content, would move towards the mythical, the mystical, or the irrational. Philosophy, in other words, owes it to debate that today we have something other than a host of Platonic, Hegelian, or Nietzschean epigones.

Summarizing, we may say that philosophical debate, though secondary to the appearance and development of new concepts, sustains and profiles the latter, disseminates them as an essential part of general development, provides a continuum or linkage between these concepts, and safeguards the form of philosophy from the threatening side of them.

Excursus: In my thesis I tailor the conception of philosophical debate to the analysis of certain exchanges between selected representatives of the more polarized end of the Foucaudian debate. I propose that these exchanges are moves in a highly competitive game like chess and that they form three levels of strategic and tactical activity: the evaluative, the argumentative, and the rhetorical. In order to counter what is construed by one party as the troublesome or offending position of the other, some evaluative shift must take place which, being a universalistic versus particularistic stance or a particularistic versus universalistic stance, introduces new lines of argument offsetting and subverting the evaluative basis of the opponent. In theory such shifting and counter-shifting, along with the varying series of argumentative moves they produce, could go on indefinitely. In practise, however, specific debates with their corresponding positions and points of reference simply disappear when a new concept makes its appearance. But, to complicate matters even further, the rhetorical amplification of each and every evaluative basis within philosophical debate provides an endgame optics which allows the playing of the game to be viewed as being more than a game.

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– Appendix III: Nietzsche, Foucault, Selfhood, and "On Being Personal" –

In order to be or at least try to be rather adventurous and exploratory in the present undertaking, and in order to bring forward what I like to think will be my own best thought and not allow it to be either buried in the thought of others or buried by the major figures under consideration, I shall take the liberty as well as the risk of being less analytical, argumentative, and critically evaluative than literary or essayistic.

Now I realize that such an approach, if not wholly unwelcome, may easily be considered a treacherous straying from the straight and narrow path of scholarly precision. On the other hand, when faced with the daunting, elusive, and ambiguous task of investigating selfhood, it may not be entirely inappropriate to venture onto different ground, to tread a less safe and secure path than ordinarily trod, and, by so doing, perhaps to call into question the presumption and adequacy of the usual way. At least, to call these elements into question insofar as it proves possible to suspend this way and, by employing a more personal kind of rigour, find other ways of being precise.[1]

Now I see that I have already employed some equivocal language and I can only hope that, at this early juncture and in light of the above pronouncements, I am not suspected of secretly slipping into my discourse one or more arbitrary or obfuscating elements masked as some personal virtue. No, rather I must insist that this state of affairs is no more than indicative of the unavoidable equivocalness which, let us say, Nietzschean or Foucauldian honesty or cruelty[2] forces nowadays to the forefront of philosophy or at least to that part of it which can do nothing other than admit it, confront it, and even risk perishing from it. For philosophical thought, I should think, only has its life by overcoming or at least trying to overcome the equivocal, the uncertain, the paradoxical. To place these hostile elements at the very centre, to make them a kind of necessary condition of an either implicit or explicit total viewing of things – what can this be other than a sort of anti-philosophical event?[3]

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1 Perhaps this opening is somewhat misleading. After all, I do intend to document this text and offer additional explanation in the form of these footnotes. However, to employ a well-known term of Emerson's, self-reliance is the keynote of this undertaking and I feel the necessity, given the usual scholarly retreat from the all too personal, to sound it fully and in advance.

2 Cf. Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 230. Here he states:

> This will to mere appearance, to simplification, to masks, to cloaks, in short, to the surface – for every surface is a cloak – is *countered* by that sublime inclination of the seeker after knowledge who insists on profundity, multiplicity, and thoroughness, with a *will* which is a kind of cruelty of the intellectual conscience and taste. Every courageous thinker will recognize this in himself, assuming only that, as fit, he has hardened and sharpened his eye for himself long enough and that he is used to severe discipline, as well as to severe words. He will say: 'there is something cruel in the inclination of my spirit'; let the virtuous and kindly try to talk him out of that!

3 Cf. Foucault's essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 162-164. Here he discusses Nietzsche's thought (while citing a number of pertinent passages from *The Dawn*, *The Gay Science,* and *Beyond Good and Evil)* obviously in relation to his own. Among other things, he remarks that the will to knowledge "dissolves the unity of the subject [and] releases those elements of itself that are devoted to its subversion and destruction." If it is the philosophical subject that is really at stake here, then perhaps what is being said is that there is at least *one* will to knowledge that, while haunting this subject, is hostile to it and that, by virtue of this innermost enmity, allows this subject to be itself in the fullest sense.

It seems then that the modern-day dilemma of philosophy is its internal division, its perversely maintained, accentuated, and perhaps even growing disbelief in itself. It may also be its glorious failure which, like a fate not sought but not avoided either, is a measure of the faith in itself. At least, so it may be viewed if one takes seriously the possibility of philosophy's eventual demise, its perishing of its own truth.[4] In any event, what matters most here is that the present-day self or, let us say, the present-day theory of the self cannot be adequately engaged apart from considering philosophy's internal division and its possible fate. In other words, if one can no longer affirm an essential self or an imperishable soul-substance and if one, by contrast, can only affirm the self as being, before all else, a social, cultural, and historical event or artifact, then this same self, this philosophically discovered, modified, and objectified figure, must have, according to the new dispensation, its whole life solely in the retrospective and reflective moments of the philosophical tradition.

But just as, while living contentedly, we inevitably believe in our being more than our non-being, so the modern self, even while entertaining itself with sceptical, pessimistic, or nihilistic insights, is a much stronger witness to its reality than any testimony to the contrary. To rest rather comfortably in this paradoxical position is what I would call the Foucauldian mode of modern selfhood whereas the push beyond it, the violent dismissal and rupture of this paradox, the Nietzschean.

If one were to look for the single item which sums up the above-mentioned distinction, one could do no better, I think, than to look to the prophetic tendency in Nietzsche's and Foucault's thought. It is safe to say that, just as it grows more vigorous in the former, so it grows less pronounced in the latter.[5] Different philosophical projects undoubtedly account for the contrast. Nietzsche wishes to plant and to see growing his most personally admired traits in the

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4 As well as section 45 of *The Dawn* given below, sections 429 and 501 of the same book and section 39 of *Beyond Good and Evil* bear on this not very popular outlook.

> *A tragic ending for knowledge*: Of all the means of producing exaltation, it has been human sacrifice which has at all times most exalted and elevated man. And perhaps every other endeavour could still be thrown down by *one* tremendous idea, so that it would achieve victory over the most victorious – the idea of *self-sacrificing mankind.* But to whom should mankind sacrifice itself? One could already take one's oath that, if ever the constellation of this idea appears above the horizon, the knowledge of truth would remain as the one tremendous goal commensurate with such a sacrifice, because for this goal no sacrifice is too great. In the meantime, the problem of the extent to which mankind can as a whole take steps towards the advancement of knowledge has never been posed; not to speak of what drive to knowledge could drive mankind to the point of dying with the light of an anticipatory wisdom in its eyes. Perhaps if one day an alliance has been established with the inhabitants of other stars for the purpose of knowledge, and knowledge has been communicated from star to star for a few millennia: perhaps enthusiasm for knowledge may then rise to such a high-water mark!

5 The early Foucault's prophetic inclination is, in fact, largely influenced by Nietzsche. We have it, for example, in the Conclusion of *Madness and Civilization*, in the essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," and in chapters nine and ten of *The Order of Things*. It is the rather obscure theme of a threatening dissolution aided and abetted by the will to knowledge but kept at bay by artistic creativity. Later, Foucault explicitly denounces the role of the prophet and the vision of a doomed rationality. (See, for example, the interview entitled "Critical Theory/Intellectual History" in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, 35-36.) Clearly committed to strategic, relatively specific critiques and investigations of the past/present nexus, he does not speculate about the future but only states that "everything is dangerous" and that his "position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism" (*The Foucault Reader*, 343).

humanity of the future whereas Foucault, less nihilistic but more pessimistic, wishes to leave the future of humanity a question mark while hallowing the self's freedom in the present.[6] Furthermore, whereas Nietzsche makes a veritable practise of distinguishing between great souls and mean or average ones, Foucault's historical analyses tend to reverse this process.[7] It would be another way of summing up to say that Nietzschean selfhood is essentially tragic whereas Foucauldian selfhood is essentially ironic.

The difference is, from a positive viewing, philosophical, personal, practical, ethical, and aesthetic. It is the great divide between two otherwise kindred spirits who both exhibit a kind of Socratic intensity with regard to integrating the way of reason with the way of living a life. To be of one piece, to not be divided into a public and private self flatly contradictory of each other, to find one's essence not in the few extraordinary events of one's life but in the whole course of living one's life extraordinarily, these measures and ways of proceeding characterize the Nietzschean and Foucauldian self as much as they do the Socratic one.[8]

The making of a more general distinction now presses upon me. The distinction between a more or less standardized or universal self, theoretically arrived at and anchored, and a more or less exceptional or ideal self. Now it may be that, as in the case of Socrates and his teaching, the standardized or universal self and the exceptional or ideal self achieve a singular union related to the potential of many or all human beings.[9] Historically speaking, however, the Socratic way of living and the Socratic doctrine follow distinct lines of transmission, the first being largely inspirational and the second pedagogical. A certain rigorous and austere devotion to the quality

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6 A good discussion of the limited but "transgressing" freedom of the self may be found in Foucault's "What is Enlightenment?" (*The Foucault Reader*, 45-50). Here he tells us that critique "will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think" (46).

7 Even in his most "Nietzschean" of essays (i.e., "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"), Foucault speaks of genealogy as being that practise wherein, among other things, "the veneration of monuments becomes parody" (*Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 164).

8 Walter Kaufmann, in his *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, devotes a whole chapter to Nietzsche's attitude towards Socrates. He states that this study "shows how Nietzsche, for whom Socrates was allegedly a 'villain', modelled his conception of his own task largely after Socrates' apology" (391).

9 Such a seemingly universalizable ideal as the proposition " knowledge is virtue" is what, not without contradiction or tension, Socrates upholds. It is precisely against this proposition that Nietzsche speaks when he, siding with Plato's "aristocratism" (which, he believes, struggles to refine it) and against Socrates "plebianism," posits its rather drab, uninteresting, and commonplace origin (*Beyond Good and Evil*, section 190).

> There is something in the morality of Plato that does not really belong to Plato but is merely encountered in his philosophy – one might say, in spite of Plato: namely, the Socratism for which he was really too noble. "Nobody wants to do harm to himself, therefore all that is bad is done involuntarily. For the bad do harm to themselves: this they would not do if they knew that the bad is bad. Hence the bad are bad only because of an error; if one removes the error, one necessarily makes them – good."
>
> This type of inference smells of the *rabble* that sees nothing in bad actions but the unpleasant consequences and really judges, "it is stupid to do what is bad," while "good" is taken without further ado to be identical with "useful and agreeable." In the case of every moral utilitarianism, one may immediately infer the same origin and follow one's nose: one will rarely go astray.
>
> Plato did everything he could in order to read something refined and noble into the proposition of his teacher – above all, himself. He was the most audacious of all interpreters and took the whole Socrates only the way one picks up a popular tune and folk song from the streets in order to vary it into the infinite and impossible . . .

and character of one's life, to the independent functioning of one's reason, mark out the Socratic movement of exceptional selfhood as it enters into an Epictetus, an Augustine, a Montaigne, a Nietzsche, or a Foucault. Similarly, the Socratic movement of standardized selfhood spreads itself out as part of the historico-cultural sedimentation of various peoples and places. Of course, it can only be that, involved here, is but one movement of exceptional selfhood and one movement of a presumed commonality. If it is Nietzsche who throws the most light on the complexity pertaining to the modality of exceptional selfhood, it is Foucault who does the same with its counterpart.[10]

But perhaps it is once again necessary to emphasize the paradoxicalness of all these concrete convergences, conveyances, conceptions, and concerns of selfhood, of all these little lives, little faiths, and little events which ultimately dissolve in the dissoluble life of a still-flourishing selfhood. Highest or most refined faith, now as before, problematizes itself, questions its holy of holies, tests its strength by making proof of its weakness, and powerfully affirms itself even while denying itself. But there is clarity in these contradictions by virtue of the self's no longer being a thing but an event, by selfhood's no longer being, via the propagation of the species, an essentially unchanging condition but the intricate path of a large-scale happening.[11]

The reifying process, the reified fact of the self, is part of this happening, part of the present-day ontology even while it slips out of sight of its epistemology. There is no possibility of there being such a degree of discursive consistency that a totalizing theory could successfully accommodate the divergent strains and tendencies of selfhood. Constrained as much by our present constitution as liberated by its self-problematization, we can do no more than shuttle back and forth, pointing out what I should like to call the mythical, moral, and mortal confluences and crosscurrents of selfhood.[12]

By the mythical, I essentially mean the self's expansion. By the moral, I essentially mean the limitation of this expansion. And, by the mortal, I essentially mean the self's non-expansion and/or proximity to non-existence. Both in a most primitive and a most modern way, the first relates to exaltation and mastery, the second to interest and struggle, and the third to habit and servitude. With the first goes, crudely speaking, a name or title. With the second, a face or figure. And, with the third, a body or function. So it is that the illustrious reputation endures for a long time, the memory of a loved one for a shorter period, and the unadorned function or faceless body but an instant. However, the last, in a manner of speaking, becomes first, creating the complexity and ambiguity of the historically developing self and making it more than a name, a reputation, a figure when, first of all, interest and struggle awaken habit and servitude from their sleep and, in a second movement, ascend to exaltation and mastery.[13] Selfhood, in other words,

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10 This thesis shall be developed presently in the essay.

11 Of course both Nietzsche and Foucault tend to "eventalize" (to borrow a Foucauldian term) substances, unitary necessities, anthropological traits, historical constants, etc. See, for example, Nietzsche's short analysis of the cogito (*Beyond Good and Evil*, section 17) and Foucault's explanation of "eventalization" in "Questions of Method: An Interview with Michel Foucault" (*After Philosophy: End or Transformation?*, 104-106).

12 While such thinkers as Charles Taylor and Jürgen Habermas reject the Cartesian-Kantian self and dialectically relate selfhood to a socio-historical background, they nonetheless allow this self a kind of backdoor entry. In a way that bears the impress of the Christian belief in an immortal soul springing from the humble loins of mortality, they annunciate this self as a sort of general project that, despite its problematic origins and, indeed, by taking them into account, works towards some universal good.

13 Cf. the following passage in section two of the first essay of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*: "Rather it was when aristocratic value judgments *declined* that the whole antithesis "egoistic" "unegoistic" obtruded itself more and more on the human conscience – it is, to speak in my own language, the *herd* instinct that through this

increasingly expands its boundaries, overlaps and implicates itself in heterogeneous elements, grows opaque, obscure, and eventually as mysterious as the external world even while becoming familiar and firsthand as a designation, a commonality, a universal faith or certainty. But this revolutionary course of its development, concretely offering selfhood to so many and formally to all, does not destroy but only recodes and rearranges the hierarchical tendencies and strains of selfhood.[14]

The confluence of the primordial springs of selfhood – that part which escapes structuration and becomes a relatively fast-flowing current of flexible configurations – ends up effectively being the neo-mythical self of modernity. That is, it is the universal selfhood of politico-juridical recognition and philosophical reflection. Here the moral tendency or strain is experienced as the ever-vigilant examination, protection, and elaboration of selfhood. On the other hand, the mortal tendency or strain is experienced as the routinely impersonal, mechanical, causal, contradictory, or harshly callous operation of such a large-scale vigilance.[15] In effect then, the neo-mythical self of modernity, under the aspect of a moral vigilance that goes even deeper and behind itself, captures what is culpable in itself and thereby grows doubly self-analytical. With a second movement, it becomes the exaltation and mastery of unmasking, of demythologizing the modern self. Hence the strange struggle between the self-threatening, self-problematizing integrity of this one operation and the self-protecting, self-perpetuating mission of the other.[16] It is the latest and perhaps last development of the politics of the modern self, its radicalization as a philosophical and ultimately very personal problem.

The Nietzschean and Foucauldian projects essentially move out in opposite directions from the same centre of radically problematized selfhood. They explore, with the ardour of a religious quest and with an equanimous mixture of moral concern, scientific curiosity, and divine aloofness, its whole range and compass. In the one case, it is, with respect to the historical life of selfhood, the highest of the high which is the investigative pole of attraction. In the other, it is the lowest of the low. Mythically speaking, the gaze for Nietzsche is primarily on the Dionysian self recovering itself, resplendent, once again ready to go over by going under. For Foucault, the gaze is primarily on the god's humble but active life in the state of dissolution. One preaches the Overman, the other the end of Man. One parades before us conquerors, rulers, and heroes. The other the mad, the sick, the poor, the depraved, the delinquent, the disciplined, and the criminal. One pronounces the bland middle-class spirit to be the degeneration of selfhood.[17] The other

antithesis at last gets its word (and its words) in. And even then it was a long time before that instinct attained such domination that moral evaluation was actually stuck and halted at this antithesis . . ."

14 Cf. the following passage in *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 260: "There are *master morality* and *slave morality* – I add immediately that in all the higher and more mixed cultures there also appear attempts at mediation between these two moralities, and yet more often the interpenetration and mutual misunderstanding of both, and at times they occur directly alongside each other – even in the same human being, within a *single* soul."

15 Perhaps no scholarly work peers so deeply into this negative drift of modern development as Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. It is enough to say that he demonstrates the "disciplinary" side of Enlightenment society as being dramatically at odds with Kant's notion of the self as an absolute end.

16 Here I am essentially thinking of the whole Enlightenment project. Despite Nietzsche's insights, this project cannot and must never go, as the most popular and wide-scale viewing of itself, beyond good and evil. Even Foucault, despite his antipathy towards making any grandiose moral claims or laying out specific programs, places himself in the Enlightenment tradition. See his essay "The Art of Telling the Truth," in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*.

17 Here is part of the passage on the "last man" in section five of the prologue to Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Interpreting it as "the bland middle-class spirit" comes in light of what I take to be Nietzsche's parodic or satiric treatment of it.

displays it as the crafty architect of the modern age.[18] One yearns for the abyss, for the absolute break at the highest point of intoxication, of striving, of accomplishment. The other – even more systematically than his predecessor – seeks to make the self a radical questioner of present acceptations, a master destroyer of sustaining illusions while also the creator of a quieter heroism, a more indefinite, more open kind of horizon.

What is the active inertia and, perhaps, the very life of the modern self is its resistance to these subversive inclinations, its planting its presence – more than it knows or more than it can help – in the past and the future. On the other hand, this omnipresence of the modern self is already what accounts for its sharper look into the historical fluidity and ontological "vaporability" of selfhood.[19]

It is very hard for the modern self, taking itself to be a kind of evolutionary project or achievement, to grant that this more scientifically based faith is but a holdover from a mythically based one. Indeed, it is so very hard that, even in the act of being renounced, this faith clandestinely returns. The teleological principle is formally repudiated by both Nietzsche and Foucault but, as any detractor might be quick to point out, one oft speaks of a future mission for humankind and the other refers, if not so emphatically, to a present one. Simply put, the modern self cannot really repudiate itself even while doing so. Or, at least, it cannot respectably do so, indifferent to its survival or prospects even while dialoguing with itself in a seemingly contradictory fashion. One might say that Nietzsche's flamboyance and analytical ruthlessness force him to personally enact the end of the modern self – the end, that is, he idealizes and heroicizes. Foucault, by contrast, endures and maintains the tension of the paradox, softening it by carving out, as best he can, a formal area for one side of the matter and an informal area for

> And thus spoke Zarathustra to the people: "The time has come for man to set himself a goal. The time has come for man to plant the seed of his highest hope. His soil is still rich enough. But one day this soil will be poor and domesticated, and no tall tree will be able to grow in it. Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer shoot the arrow of his longing beyond man, and the string of his bow will have forgotten how to whirr!
>
> "I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have chaos in yourselves.
>
> "Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you the *last man.*
>
> "What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star? thus asks the last man, and he blinks.
>
> "The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small. His race is as ineradicable as the flea-beetle; the last man lives longest.
>
> "'We have invented happiness,' say the last men, and they blink. They have left the regions where it was hard to live, for one needs warmth. One still loves one's neighbor and rubs against him, for one needs warmth."

18 "It takes the rather naive optimism of the nineteenth century 'dandies' to imagine that the bourgeoisie is stupid. On the contrary, one has to reckon with its strokes of genius, and among these is precisely the fact of its managing to construct machines of power allowing circuits of profit, which in turn re-inforced and modified the power apparatuses in a mobile and circular manner. . . . The power of the bourgeoisie is self-amplifying, in a mode not of conservation but of successive transformations. Hence . . . its supple inventiveness." ("The Eye of Power" in Foucault's *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, 160.

19 The risk is that the problematizing of selfhood, doubling back on itself, will ultimately become another "death of God." A growing socio-political dispersion of disbelief in this entity as entity, in perhaps its *value* as entity, would challenge its sanctified rule.

the other.[20]

Given what has been said thus far, it is difficult to speak – at least, in the ordinary way – of a Nietzschean or Foucauldian theory of the self. Rather one confronts the self's dispersion, a kind of top, middle, and bottom range of selfhood as well as its insensibly merging into or emerging from non-self. In the case of Nietzsche, the style and arrangement of his work – the intertwining, connecting, and disconnecting of various themes – is a Dionysian discourse ranging from the most pathetically human and fragmentary to the most godlike and fully integrated conceptions of modern selfhood. From his question "What do I matter?" to the living of each moment as if it were to recur eternally. From the ego as a necessary fiction to the magnificently heroic spirit tragically but triumphantly affirming itself. From the mad hermit in his cave of darkness to the commanding eagle's eye view of Western civilization.[21]

It is the all too stationary spirit of the modern self, principally hallowed by Kant, which Nietzsche fulminates against. Perhaps much of his work can be viewed as an enormously diverse, wide-ranging assault upon it. If this sounds displeasing to some ears, let it be considered as testimony to the strength of the modern self and its Kantian sanctification that so much force is deployed against it. That this self wants to set boundaries and make laws for itself by way of reason, *its* reason – this is the crypto-presumption and arrogance which draws the fire, the wrath, the countermeasure of a more openly demonstrated and even, let us go so far as to say, greater presumption and arrogance.[22]

Hence the Nietzschean call: *Incipit tragoedia*.[23] It is almost as if that, by way of Socrates but against Socrates, Nietzsche returns to Sophocles. And the great pride and presumption, of course, is that the modern self, by tearing itself away from all real and false modesty, all inducements to comfort, security, and longevity, can be the embodiment of both spirits. Hence Nietzsche's life. Hence Nietzsche's legacy. What matters, what must be insisted upon, is this

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20 There is no question that Foucault draws a halting line between his "theoretical" work and other matters. He tells us that "the 'best' theories do not constitute a very effective protection against disastrous political choices. . . . [One does] not conclude from this that one may say just anything within the order of theory, but, on the contrary, that a demanding, prudent, 'experimental' attitude is necessary; at every moment, step by step, one must confront what one is thinking and saying with what one is doing, with what one is" ("Politics and Ethics: An Interview" in *The Foucault Reader*, 374).

21 Foucault on Nietzsche and madness:

> It is of little importance on exactly which day in the autumn of 1888 Nietzsche went mad for good, and which of his texts no longer afford philosophy but psychology: all of them, including the postcard to Strindberg, belong to Nietzsche, and all are related to *The Birth of Tragedy*. But we must not think of this continuity in terms of a system, of a thematics, or even of an existence: Nietzsche's madness – that is, the dissolution of his thought – is that by which his thought opens out onto the modern world" *(Madness and Civilization*, 288).

22 How could humble living, sickness, and lack of worldly success maintain this presumption for very long? And how could Foucault, a great lover of Nietzsche but also an admirer of Kant and ultimately an upholder of Enlightenment values, not end up denouncing it? For we find him saying: "The solemnity with which everyone who engages in philosophical discourse reflects on his own time strikes me as a flaw. I can say so all the more firmly since it is something I have done myself; and since, in someone like Nietzsche, we find this incessantly – or, at least, insistently enough. I think we should have the modesty to say to ourselves that . . . the time we live in is *not* the unique or fundament or irruptive point in history where everything is completed and begun again" (Critical Theory/Intellectual History" in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, 35-36).

23 *The Gay Science*, sections 81, 340, and 370.

atavism of selfhood continually renewed. That the modern self can only flourish (though, perhaps, not survive) in the greatest stretch and measure of itself. That, to paraphrase Hamlet, it has much music, an excellent voice, but only if it can be played from the lowest note to the top of its compass.[24]

This artistry of selfhood finds its greatest theme, its most triumphant testimony and challenging inspiration, in high tragedy. However, there is also the comic register of Socratic, Nietzschean, and (later) Foucauldian equanimity. Nothing flat or insipid here: it can be either the needling irritation of a studied irony, the mocking buffoonery of an outrageous presumption, or the highly skilful evasiveness of a quick-change artist. In all three we recognize what we should call, dramatically speaking, characterizations. But these characters, in effect, create themselves. At one and the same time they are *eirons* and *alazons* – characters who are both more and less than they appear to be.[25] This is their artistry: that they may act and know that they are acting even (and very much) to the point of commenting upon, critiquing, or in some other way subverting these ploys of feigned ignorance (Socrates), these bombastic, self-dramatising tendencies (Nietzsche), and these feints of hand and subtle games of hide and seek (Foucault).[26] In all three cases, there is a definite breach of the usual proprieties. What allows it to be successful is their making a virtue and a virtuosity of revealing themselves, of involving selfhood not just in a range of work, but as a range within their work.

It is necessary, I believe, to deny that there is anything like a theory of the self in Nietzsche. However, it is another matter to interpret his work in such a way. It is, moreover, permissible to grant that it readily lends itself to such an interpretation. If, for example, what I am putting down here can be taken to be a Nietzschean theory of the self, it is by virtue of my perceiving not only an interesting but also an intimate and inspirational connection between his life and thought. To this extent, the theme of tragic heroism looms large as well as the complementary one of a kind of divine comedy which effaces it.[27] The title of Alexander Nehamus's book, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, best sums up this overriding affirmation of the grand spectacle of selfhood on the vast stage which both precedes and outlasts it.[28]

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24 *Hamlet*, III. Ii. 371-380.

25 For a discussion of these types, see Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, 39-40.

26 I will limit myself to but one example of these public scenes or professional displays of "self-recognition." It is the close of the Introduction to Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge*. Pretending that a hostile critic is grilling him, he writes: "Aren't you sure of what you're saying? Are you going to change yet again, shift your position according to the questions that are put to you, and say that the objections are not really directed at the place from which you were speaking? Are you going to declare yet again that you have never been what you have been reproached with being? Are you already preparing the way out that will enable you in your next book to spring up somewhere else and declare as you're doing now: "no, no, I'm not where you are lying in wait for me, but over here, laughing at you?" (17).

27 "But to me, on the contrary, there seems to be nothing *more* worth taking seriously, among the rewards for it being that some day one will perhaps be allowed to take [the problems of morality] *cheerfully*. For cheerfulness – or in my own language *gay science* – is a reward: the reward of a long, brave, industrious, and subterranean seriousness, of which, to be sure, not everyone is capable. But on the day we can say with all our hearts, "Onwards! our old morality too is part *of the comedy!*" we shall have discovered a new complication and possibility for the Dionysian drama of "The Destiny of the Soul" – and one can wager that the grand old eternal comic poet of our existence will be quick to make use of it (Section 7 of the Preface to *The Genealogy of Morals*).

28 There are many examples in great literature of this strange affirmation. Recently rereading some of Chekhov's short stories, I came across the one called "Gusev." It is about the last few days in the life of a terminally ill soldier. Far from his native Russia in the sick bay of a tramp steamer, he converses dispiritedly with a few souls in a similar condition as himself. At the same time, he intermittently reminisces about his past. Then he dies; his body is placed

With Foucault, the scientific, systematic, or theoretical dimension does make a solid appearance[29] and, if not eliminating, greatly reduces the chances of his work being given a wide range of interpretations. Its tendency, unlike Nietzsche's, is to view the self downward to its zero point. I shall attempt to discuss this tendency and also indicate how Foucault manages to make room for a kind of restrained Nietzschean upswing of selfhood.

Let us begin by remarking that Foucault provides a good study for this theme of theorizing about the self. For it is also a "theory" of such theorizing which his thought thematises – a theory pertaining to the function and limits of theory.[30]

To put it another way, he presents no grand or totalizing picture of the self. Such a picture always presupposes the possibility of non-problematicity, of, indeed, having finally found and put together all the pieces of the puzzle. But to regard the self so stintingly, to think that it should likely be this rather *simple* kind of puzzle, and not to consider that it may very well be an ever-changing and even ephemeral one – this is but a presumption and a prejudice. It is the presumption of traditional philosophy and the prejudice of the self-valorizing self which traditionally philosophizes.

The problem for Foucault may be stated thus: how does one theorize about the self and yet not set one's self up as the paradigm? How does one avoid extrapolating, idealizing, or mythologising the historically situated self? How if not by different, overlapping approaches or areas of investigation which, although they may conflict according to a foreground estimation, nevertheless engender, along sightlines stretching to infinity, the prospect of an eventual coherence and stability? Of course, the latter is nothing at all like a strictly logical order. It is rather an aesthetic sighting, an appreciative survey of the different analyses, separately so sharply detailed and revealing, and the sense of their sloping off into the distance to form a single

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in a gunnysack and thrown into the ocean. As it sinks, a number of fish inquisitively play around it before a shark looms upon the scene and, after some hesitation, tears open the sack.

> [O]ne of the gridirons falls out, frightens the pilot fish and striking the shark on the flank, sinks rapidly to the bottom. "Meanwhile, up above, in that part of the sky where the sun is about to set, clouds are massing, one resembling a triumphal arch, another a lion, a third a pair of scissors. A broad shaft of green light issues from the clouds and reaches to the middle of the sky; a while later, a violet beam appears along side of it and then a golden one and a pink one . . . The heavens turn a soft lilac tint. Looking at this magnificent enchanting sky, the ocean frowns at first, but soon it, too, takes on the tender, joyous passionate colors for which it is hard to find a name in the language of man."

29 The whole business of whether or not Foucault is engaged in legitimate theoretical work is, I suspect, controversial. To my way of thinking, there are three ways of looking at it: 1) the way he deals with theory methodologically; 2) the way in which his position on theory exhibits itself negatively (by being paradoxical); and 3) the way in which his position on theory exhibits itself positively (by being, once again, paradoxical but according to a different logic). Methodologically speaking, Foucault quite convincingly displays theories as being historical configurations of discursive practise which appear and disappear. Philosophically speaking, however, he undercuts his own theoretical position (i.e., his theory too is a historical configuration and must disappear). Extra-philosophically speaking, however, his implicitly global view of theories both affirms and negates itself. For how could he put forward a theoretical and practical operation historicizing theories which does not validate itself by implicitly invalidating itself – which, in other words, does not heavily suggest its own eventual demise or its being sublated?

30 For an excellent discussion of his general attitude to theory, see the first part of his "Two Lectures" in *Power/Knowledge*, 78-87.

horizon. In other words, instead of the forced structuring and standardization of the self, instead of its being tightly bound into a strictly logical or argumentative whole, there is the more supple theoretical accommodation which is really three approaches – three kinds of practises or domains to which the self relates. Allow me to call them the *epistemic* or *intellectual*, the *institutional* or *social*, and the *aesthetic* or *ethical*.[31]

The first then concerns the formation of the knowledgeable or intellectual self, the second the socially conditioned or disciplined self, and the third the privileged or self-creating self. It is better, no doubt, to think of these three selves as three modes of selfhood or subjectivity.[32] Moreover, they not only run parallel to one another but overlap, intertwine, disconnect, interfere, etc. To make them analytically distinguishable is to conduct, in different historical areas, different forms of historical investigation which necessarily entail or highlight one of these modes. The two modes, however, which on each occasion are thrown into the background, still trace varyingly distinct or diffuse courses. It is true that, for the most part, they fall outside the range of the analysis with its mode of the self under study. Nevertheless, this analysis does not so much close itself off to the subtending ones as to turn the lights down on them. The reason for this methodological optics is to allow one of the three modes, alternately speaking, to register itself fully and without interference.[33]

Thus the epistemic mode of selfhood corresponds to, in the case of Foucault's work, a historical investigation of the birth of the human sciences. It is essentially the relation of the knowledge of the self to the larger domains of epistemic discourse or formal interpretation of the world (*The Order of Things*). This mode of selfhood is therefore inseparable from and transformable in accordance with the slow movement and periodically rapid displacement of such domains. The late eighteenth century, for example, witnesses a shift from the view of all being as a transcendent order to the view of the natural world as a transcendental ordering. By the same token, intellectual selfhood no longer is simply a matter of reasoning about what the self matter-of-factly represents to itself, but also about this now mysterious, sophisticated process of representation. As such, intellectual selfhood becomes a process of objectifying itself, of making the self both a subject and object of study. Here Foucault locates the modern dilemma of a knowledge which, though extending or rearranging itself indefinitely, can never escape the conflicting aspects of its operation and, contrary to its fundamental intention, be rid of its fundamental confusion.[34]

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31 "What I have studied are three traditional problems: 1) What are the relations we have to truth through scientific knowledge, to those 'truth games' which are so important in civilization and in which we are both subject and object? (2) What are the relationships we have to others through those strange strategies and power relationships? And (3) what are the relationships between truth, power, and self?"

"I would like to finish all this with a question: What could be more classic than these questions and more systematic than the evolution through questions one, two, and three and back to the first?" (*Technologies of the Self*, 15)

32 These three modes primarily relate to, in the same order: 1) *The Order of Things*, 2) *Discipline and Punish*, and 3) *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2 and 3. Of course, his other major works feature them as well.

33 The Forward to the English edition of *The Order of Things*, for example, spells out quite clearly Foucault's way of proceeding and the general tenor of his philosophico-historical investigation. Here both the privileged mode of selfhood (i.e., what the great scientist and discoverer best exemplify) is thrown into the shade along with the socially conditioned mode of selfhood (i.e., what refers most strongly to specific institutional practises and disciplines). Nonetheless Foucault is at pains to tell us that this work is a comparative study (x) and 'open site' (xii), and that it should not "be taken as a rejection of any other possible approach" (xiv).

34 Foucault gives this theme thorough treatment in chapter nine of *The Order of Things*.

With respect to the mode of socially conditioned selfhood, Foucault undertakes a study of the penal system and its relation to other confining or restrictive institutions. Because of the shift in perspective, intellectual selfhood now functions principally within the bounds of plans, programs, operations, etc. which continually interact and often form larger, more complex networks and operations. This both discursive and non-discursive activity is mainly the managing of bodies in relation to space and minds in relation to functions and fields of operation. Here is a disciplinary form of power which contrasts in breadth and subtlety with the one of the preceding historical period. The latter, in his book, *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault names monarchical or juridical power. The shift from the one to the other results in the inscribing of an individualizing process in the mode of socially conditioned selfhood. Such a process is also objectifying in terms of subjecting selves to examination, surveillance, placement, and correction. It is, lastly, also a learning process of self-monitoring and self-regulation.[35]

The third mode of selfhood is the privileged or self-creating one (*The History of Sexuality*). While the first mode is the life of the self in its epistemic space and the second in its social space, the third is the life of the self in its ethical or "free" space. Here the self problematizes its conduct largely in relation to the freedom, power, and privilege it enjoys. For the purpose of investigating this mode of selfhood, Foucault turns his attention to certain schools, circles, and personages of antiquity.[36] Parallelling the other two approaches or perspectives upon selfhood, the intense lighting up of this area throws the epistemic and socially conditioned modes into the shade. However, the very fact that he undertakes a historical study, historiographically specified, guarantees their at least marginal proximity. For example, Foucault points to there being, in ancient Greece, a general concern for good government and, with respect to the ruling class, effective mastery over others. Such concern translates into, at the aesthetic or ethical level, a theory and practise of self-control.[37] The practise of self-control is the game of freedom and ethical choice. The theory of it is the set of rules governing this game. Later developments modify the whole setup, creating a new importance for the link between the political and the familial. Accordingly, there occurs, for the male holders of power and privilege, a problematization of the marital relationship. The latter, not cancelling but going beyond the condition of the husband's being a master and progenitor, becomes the issue of his being a partner and lover.[38]

Such then are the three overlapping (but not interlocking) approaches to the theoretical analysis of selfhood. The first addresses the epistemic space (the self mainly as a discursive agent or function); the second the social space (the self mainly as a physical agent or object); and the thirst the ethical or "free" space (the self mainly as self-constituting, self-stylizing singularity). These approaches are diffusely connected because the modes of selfhood inhabit one another just as they split off, separate, or migrate from one to another. As Foucault shows, a specific kind of historical research, specifically situated, can make a spectacle of any one of these modes by profoundly limiting the view of the others. (And, for this reason, some find it a distorted and reductive viewing while others a revealing and enlarging one.) By virtue of this

35 Of course such twentieth century writers as Kafka, Orwell, and Huxley precede Foucault in investigating this internalizing or consciousness-altering process.

36 See Foucault's *The Use of Pleasure* (*The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2*) and *The Care of the Self* (*The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3*). Among other texts, he examines those of Hippocrates, Isocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon, Epicurus, Seneca Epictetus, Pliny the Younger, Plutarch, and Galen.

37 See chapters three and four of *The Use of Pleasure.*

38 See parts five and six of *The Care of the Self*.

manner of theorizing, honour is paid to the wealth of evidence testifying to the self's multiple character and protean range. Here, one might say, Foucault assiduously extends the study of the non-heroic scale of selfhood which, in Nietzsche's work, is more or less a lacuna.

***

So much of the self which is personal. So much of the self which is public. So much both separate from and bound up with the world along a continuum which doubles back on itself, cancels itself out, and intensely affirms discontinuity. Each of us feels our singularity and, at the same time, our nothingness in the face of so many other singularities. Like Leibnizian monads, we all have our differences, construed to be great or small, while hovering in a great sea of cosmic anonymity and indifference. For there is no longer, philosophically speaking, the one Supreme Monad to count among us and to make the crucial distinctions. To the extent that the State now fulfils this function, we collectively guard against the loss of optimal selfhood even while knowing its potential for dissolving everything into the opposite state of affairs.[39] But selfhood must go on tragically and ironically, heroically and non-heroically, as long as we suffer from the question. And when we no longer suffer the question, when, for whatever reason, there is no question of the question, we —

39 See part five of *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. It deals with the modern state's effectively investing itself with the power of life and death over whole populations.

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Return to "The Thematic Sections"

58.2 (The Doctoral Thesis with Jacques Derrida as My Hero)

– Abstract –

The first chapter of this thesis (entitled *The Dynamics of a Deep Disagreement: Derrida and Ricoeur on Metaphor and Its Relation to Philosophy*) is an examination of four projects of clarification which are all studies in one way or another of the deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur. The objective is to show how these studies as clarifying projects simplify and even over-simplify the nature of this disagreement or, more broadly, Derrida's and Ricoeur's both convergent and divergent discourses on metaphor.

The following four chapters are the analysis proper of the dynamics of the deep disagreement. These dynamics, being both ethical and epistemological, are as much about the *indirect* as the direct encounters between Derrida and Ricoeur. The second chapter analyses Derrida's essay, "La mythologie blanche," as challenge to the tradition which Ricoeur, its undeclared champion, must take up. Accordingly, the third and fourth chapters are devoted to analysing how Ricoeur meets this challenge in *La métaphore vive*.

While the third chapter is devoted to analysing Ricoeur's indirect encounter with Derrida's project, the fourth is devoted to analysing his *direct* encounter. The latter is essentially his critical analysis of "La mythologie blanche" in the last study of *La métaphore vive*. In turn, Derrida responds to Ricoeur's critique with a polemic and an exposé of sorts in "Le retrait de la métaphore." Analysing how Derrida takes aim at Ricoeur through Heidegger is the task of the fifth and final chapter.

– Dedication –

To my Mother (December 12, 1921 – October 7, 2001)

I have no proper words for it,
no words that can match the fifty long years
of your absolute constancy.

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– Abbreviations –

DC Discours et communication

HD Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor: Imperfect Thought

IC Imagination and Chance: The Difference between the Thought of Ricoeur and Derrida

MB La mythologie blanche

MV La métaphore vive

PC Philosophie et communication

PM Le procès de la métaphore

PR Paul Ricoeur

RM Le retrait de la métaphore

SEC Signature, événement, contexte

– Introduction –

The present study must profess to be complicated. To profess this at all – and particularly as an opening statement – is perhaps to raise some suspicion against it. Or perhaps it is to invite the sharp rejoinder: What study is not complicated? Or, then again, perhaps it is to induce some scholarly unease. Nevertheless, in spite of all this, in spite of the risk of provoking a negative reaction, it must profess and, more than profess, even thematise complication. It must do so in order to be, as it must be in its own way, a striving for whatever light can be shed on a matter which can never be fully in the light. The present study is complicated because it is implicated – because it chooses to be implicated or, more precisely, because it chooses to be aware that it is implicated – in what it sets out to analyse and how it sets out to analyse it. In so doing, what is analysed is not only recognized as being complicated, but as being a complicating of philosophical discourse in general.[1]

The deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur over metaphor and its relation to philosophy ultimately reaches as far and as wide and as deep as the issue of what philosophy is (or is not) and what it should be doing (or should not be doing). To admit that this issue borders on the unwieldy and the unmanageable is perhaps to admit that the professed orientation of the present study should be carefully – quite carefully – reconsidered.

It is almost to admit that it should be reconsidered straight out of sight. Instead of prizing the recognition – the full or fullest recognition – of a complicated and even over-complicated issue, the present study would perhaps be better off to prize, particularly in light of such a complicated (and even over-complicated) issue, the task of *clarification*. The latter is undoubtedly the most popular route for philosophical discourse and it is safe to say (but not entirely safe) that all existing studies of the deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur have taken it. As a side of the matter then which certainly cannot be ignored, Chapter I examines and diagnoses *four* such studies. But before identifying these four studies or explaining the process of examination and diagnosis, it is best to admit that this process is also the case against clarification.

The way of clarification is not necessarily the best route to follow because, as much as does the alternative route, it suffers from a major difficulty and dilemma. Underlying this difficulty and dilemma is the presupposition that clarity (which is also *leukos*, *theoria*, *logos*, *eidos, ousia*, *physis*, etc.) pertains almost exclusively to the matter at hand (i.e., the deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur) and that *lack* of clarity or concealment is a moot point and should itself be occulted. The result is that, even before beginning their examination of this deep (or, according to some, not so deep) disagreement,[2] the authors of the four studies rule

1 Part of this recognition of the complicating of philosophical discourse is that the author of this thesis (which, in some ways, struggles hard not to be a thesis) runs the risk of complicating his own situation. This is as much to say that what he does here has an inescapably performative side to it, that his own discourse, however faulty, must be somehow the measure of what it purportedly extends, expands upon or, better, exposes in this area. What it wishes to expose is philosophical truth-telling as agon, as conflict, as internal division, as heterogeneity, as being both ethical and epistemological in nature. It is therefore not possible to take this path without encountering resistance, without encountering the *other* ethical orientation, without encountering the commitment to truth-telling which is more or less collective and concerned almost exclusively with its constative side.

2 With the exception of but one of the four studies being examined in Chapter I (i.e., S. H. Clark's *Paul Ricoeur*), the responses given to the question of the depth of the disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur tend to be equivocal if not contradictory. For example, towards the end of *Le procès de la métaphore,* Guy Bouchard speculates that Derrida and Ricoeur are much closer than they suspect. "Que Derrida et Ricoeur puissent s'entendre au sujet de

out or rule on what is precisely at issue.

Now before raising the question whether the present study, in ruling on the above presupposition, also a priori rules on what is at issue, it is perhaps best to note that, while the way of what is rightly or wrongly called *obfuscation* is the way of complication and even over-complication, the way of clarification is the way of simplification and even over-simplification. This is to say that, just as the first way threatens with incomprehension by pointing to concealment at the heart of discovery and disclosure, so the second way threatens with a blind and blinding lucidity. As may be observed in both the history of ideas and history itself, much that is initially celebrated as the light of this clarifying and simplifying sun – this sun which shines as it were with all that is good, pleasing, comfortable, caring, commodious, convenient, etc. – may also be this sun's dark centre. At the very least, it must surely be admitted that, no less than the way of complication and even over-complication, the way of simplification and even over-simplification is necessarily troubled from within.

To demonstrate this internal trouble – this major difficulty and dilemma of the way of clarification – is the business of Chapter I. At the same time, it is also, as already mentioned, the process of examination and diagnosis. According to the present study, these outside studies are best representative of the way of clarification and the trouble or difficulty which attends it.[3] They

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la métaphore, cela n'est peut-être pas dénué de toute vraisemblance" (*PM*, 215). However, in his Introduction, he characterizes the relationship between them quite differently. ". . . Ricoeur réaffirm[e] très fortement une compréhension foncièrement traditionnelle de la philosophie, de la littérature et de l'interprétation 'in the face of what would seem to be its most disorienting and uncanny challenge', en l'occurrence la position de Heidegger et, surtout, celle de Derrida" (*PM*, 10). In strikingly similar ways, Leonard Lawlor in *Imagination and Chance: The Difference between the Thought of Ricoeur and Derrida* and Giuseppe Stellardi in *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor: Imperfect Thought* characterize the relationship between Derrida and Ricoeur as one which is both intimately shared subject matter and opposition over the nature of philosophy. But for the present study and, in particular, the analysis which is carried out in Chapters II to V, the question is not whether the disagreement between them is deep or not, but what is the nature of its depth.

3 Of course, the four outside studies examined in Chapter I are considered to be best representative of projects of clarification which are also studies of the deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur. There are not many such studies. And yet, on two occasions in "Le retrait de la métaphore" (i.e., the exposé which contains Derrida's response to Ricoeur's critique of "La mythologie blanche"), Derrida makes passing reference to the possibility of others taking up the discussion where both he and Ricoeur leave it off. On the first occasion, he claims that his response to Ricoeur's critique (all of this takes place at a conference in Geneva at which Ricoeur himself is a participant) is not meant to be what he calls a *pro domo*, a defense of his earlier essay which at the same time would be an opportunistic bid to strike back at Ricoeur. On the contrary, it is meant to "re-situer le lieu d'un débat possible, plutôt que pour l'ouvrir et encore moins pour le fermer. Quiconque voudrait s'y engager dispose maintenant à cet égard d'un corpus ample et précis" (*RM*, 69). The second occasion comes when, before moving on to an analysis of Heidegger, he winds up his defense of "La mythologie blanche" with the following: "Laissant donc de coté, en sa réserve intacte, la possibilité d'une toute autre lecture des deux textes, *La mythologie blanche* et *La métaphore vive*, j'en viens enfin à la note annoncée sur une note [à savoir celle qui porte sur Heidegger dans *La mythologie blanche*]" (*RM*, 74). Both Leonard Lawlor and Guy Bouchard explicitly respond to Derrida's open invitation. Lawlor cites the second reference at the very end of his Introduction. It follows his declaring that "perhaps we can let these texts [i.e., Derrida's and Ricoeur's] be read in unforeseen and diverse ways, in ways that are novel and surprising" (*IC*, 7). After citing not only the second but the first reference in his Introduction, Bouchard states that it is "cette autre lecture que nous proposons ici . . ." (*PM*, 10).

Apart from the four studies examined in Chapter I, there are only a handful of studies which take a look, usually a fleeting and partial one, at Derrida's and Ricoeur's dispute. One of the more substantial of these studies is an early article by Leonard Lawlor called "Dialectic and Iterability" (*Philosophy Today*, 32, Fall, 1988, 181-194). While being the precursor to his book, *Imagination and Chance,* this article adopts a more partisan and radical stance. Lawlor begins by claiming that "White Mythology" reveals a pervasive metaphoricity in philosophical discourse.

are also the means by which to present, albeit in a preliminary and variegated way, the deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur. The overall format of the present study includes then, before the analysis proper of the debate (or, rather, quasi-debate) between Derrida and Ricoeur on metaphor, a rather lengthy detour and delay. There are two reasons for arranging it thus. First, given the demands placed upon the majority of readers of this study – readers who no doubt are more inclined to hold to the way of clarification than to the way of complication and even over-complication – the studies in question deserve to be presented and moreover, presented in a reasonably thorough and objective way. Secondly, the traditional practise of integrating these studies – or at least elements or arguments of these studies – in the analysis proper or recognizing them only in footnotes is, in the first case, wholly out of the question and,

"Philosophy cannot therefore maintain its traditional claim to autonomy and sovereignty" (181). "According to Derrida, Ricoeur simply misunderstands metaphoricity itself. Thus the question of metaphoricity and univocity in philosophical language drives the debate which takes place in these three texts [i.e., Derrida's "La mythologie blanche," Ricoeur's *La métaphore vive*, and Derrida's "Le retrait de la métaphore]" (181). For Lawlor, the deciding factor which "plays an absolutely necessary role in every linguistic utterance" (182) is *itérabilité*, a Derridean notion not expressly thematised in the above-mentioned texts on metaphor. Rather it comes from a paper, "Signature, événement, contexte," which Derrida delivered at a Montreal conference in 1971. Ricoeur himself presented at this conference and, along with Derrida, also participated in a roundtable discussion. Lawlor goes on to connect *itérabilité* to *usure*, a notion which, unlike the former, is to be found in "La mythologie blanche." "*Usure* indicates that any term can essentially deviate from any supposed unity of sense" (183). Here there is a dissemination of meaning which makes univocity impossible and hence undermines philosophical discourse. Lawlor then discusses Ricoeur's analysis of Aristotle's analogy of being. This analysis takes place in the Eighth study of *La métaphore vive* and focuses on Aristotle's attempt to contain and control equivocity or equivocation. Expanding further on Ricoeur's own struggle, Lawlor discusses his notion of *distanciation*, the dialectical movement wherein "meaning achieves universality by cancelling and preserving the [discursive] event's singularity" (188). "The ultimate referent is prelinguistic 'lived experience,' a correlation between act and meaning which is 'effectuated' in discourse" (188). "Like Derrida, Ricoeur's view of language in general intersects Husserl's writings" (188). In the case of Derrida, however, Husserl's ideal objectivities are deconstructed in order to demonstrate their complicity in the empirical and historical dimensions of experience. "For Derrida, the complete determination of a meaning (even such a meaning as triangularity) can never be achieved, because the terms in factual language can be used in unforeseen ways" (188). Finally, Lawlor concludes on the following note: "Without the event, is hermeneutics still possible; without identity, is philosophy still possible? Only a negative answer can be derived from the absolutely necessary condition of iterability. The confrontation therefore resolves itself into a Derridean critique of Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory" (193).

Another study which takes more than a passing glance at the deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur is Morny Joy's "Derrida and Ricoeur: A Case of Mistaken Identity (and Difference)" (*Journal of Religion* 68, No. 4, 1988, 508-526). Unlike Lawlor in his article "Dialectic and Iterability," Joy shows herself to be more receptive to Ricoeur's point of view than to Derrida's. Entertaining the possibility that, due to Heidegger, "philosophizing is passé" (508), Joy announces that she "would like to focus on an exchange between Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida as symptomatic of one of the vital issues at stake. Each thinker presents a possible response to Heidegger's dictum that 'the metaphorical only exists within the metaphysical.' Their debate questions not only the philosophical enterprise as traditionally conceived and pursued (which is hardly a novel procedure) but also the very foundations of philosophy in language" (508). But before directly addressing this debate, Joy examines "briefly Heidegger's delineation of the relation of metaphor and metaphysics" (509). At the heart of this delineation is that, while apparently denouncing metaphor for being implicated in metaphysics, Heidegger "still employs figurative language" (509). "Much of Heidegger's later writing involves attempts to describe, in an increasingly enigmatic fashion, [the] integrative form of language (*Sagen*) that reflects and embodies 'the being of language, the language of Being' (*Das Wesen der Sprache*, *die Sprache des Wesens*)" (509). According to Joy, both Derrida and Ricoeur question whether Heidegger "has actually escaped the logic of identity and dichotomy, and its concomitant metaphysical dislocations, in quite the way he professes" (510). Derrida, questioning Heidegger's formulation of the difference between Being and beings, "adopts a Nietzschean critique of any metaphysical claims to truth and absoluteness" (512). Not himself interested in investigating "a form of language prior to the split wrought by the metaphysical division" (512),

in the second case, a move which would be merely arbitrary or decorative. Another way to state the matter is that, given that the four studies as over-simplification are incommensurate with the analysis proper as over-complication, the demand for at least a certain amount of clarity in this study (for there is such a demand) is also the demand to keep the four outside studies and the analysis proper separate.

To state the matter even more completely, it is on the basis of a quadruple aim that the four outside studies have been selected and arranged. Accordingly, the objectives of Chapter I are, first, to give as fair a representation as possible of the available studies of the deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur, secondly, to expose their fault lines as studies which in different ways are projects of clarification, thirdly, to provide a preliminary but overall view of

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Derrida "introduces the neologism *différance* to demarcate his distance from Heidegger because for Derrida there is no primordial Being-at-one that can ontologically, dialectically, or by perdurance subsume difference" (513). Instead of the Heideggerian nostalgia for Being as some lost native land, Derrida advocates an affirmation of life in the Nietzschean sense. Joy then goes on to glance at Derrida's response to Ricoeur's critique of "La mythologie blanche." "[Derrida] is particularly concerned that Ricoeur's identification of himself with Heidegger on the position of metaphor and metaphysics in *The Rule of Metaphor* [i.e., *La métaphore vive*] is a misreading" (517). But rather than looking closely at this matter of an alleged misreading, Joy continues her argument that Derrida is primarily concerned with undermining Heidegger. Then, in the third and final part of her essay, the author turns her attention to Ricoeur. The latter is commended because he "has charted a course through the maze of contemporary philosophical options in an attempt to formulate an ontology that he feels is appropriate to the present situation" (518). Equally opposed to Heidegger and Derrida, Ricoeur attempts "a reformulation of certain traditional ways of understanding both metaphor and metaphysics" (518). Joy then goes on to discuss Ricoeur's various objections to Derrida's reading of Aristotle and his treatment of the subject of metaphor. In particular, she points out that Ricoeur critiques Derrida's "thesis" of *métaphore usée* or *métaphore morte*. She then goes on to discuss Ricoeur's tensional and referential theory of metaphor. "Ricoeur's provocative thesis is that with the appearance of a 'live metaphor' a new experience comes to language" (521). It is in the context of this new experience which Ricoeur calls the metaphorical redescription of the world that he dares to appropriate both Husserl's *Lebenswelt* and Heidegger's *In-der-Welt-Sein*. At the same time, Ricoeur's theory manages to evade "the Heideggerian alogical manipulation and Derrida's verbal pyrotechnics by grounding itself in the more ambiguous categories of human activity" (522). Although the author concludes that Ricoeur's theory still needs more detailed development, it is given preference over Derrida's "attention to the profound ambiguities of language" which "leaves us in a state of noncommitted polymorphous exploration that is confined basically to retrospective textual analysis. Ricoeur, committed to action, seeks to explore the same ambiguities of language in a creative manner . . ." (526).

Finally, there are a few texts which only briefly touch on or enter into the vicinity of the dispute between Derrida and Ricoeur. As to be expected, some are prone to siding with Derrida and others to siding with Ricoeur. With respect to the supporters of Derrida, the general tendency is to affirm his philosophical objectives and credentials in the face of the fairly widespread suspicion that he is out to weaken or discredit philosophy. For example, Rodolph Gasché in *The Tain of the Mirror*: *Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), states: "Yet because Ricoeur is primarily concerned with warding off any intrusion of poetics into philosophy, he remains blind to the fact that Heidegger's and Derrida's investigations into metaphor and metaphoricity are not simply poetical inquiries but are based on a philosophical concept of metaphor and are thus a debate with that philosophical concept" (301). In *Jacques Derrida: Rhétorique et philosophie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), Marcos Siscar denounces Ricoeur's presumption that he can to do away with metaphysical oppositions (e.g., sensible/non-sensible) simply by moving into the foreground an undeveloped and ambiguous theory of tension. He then gives an account of Derrida's project which, while not shying away from its subversive aspect, is largely apologetic. "Interroger, déplacer chaque mot et chaque concept, les placer ou se laisser placer à travers eux dans cette loi paradoxale de la métaphore jusqu'à ce qu'il ne reste du langage que la trace d'un déplacement. N'est-ce pas celui-là le projet le plus difficile et le plus contradictoire (en tant que projet) de la déconstruction derridienne, celui, en tout cas qui rend les textes à peu près « illisible » ou « inutile » quand on les approche avec l'expectative d'y retrouver très vite une thèse dans les modèles classiques, présentée, soutenue, développée, une thèse qui parie sur son homogénéité?" (105).

the deep disagreement which is also a debate or a quasi-debate between Derrida and Ricoeur, and, finally, to make as accessible as possible the analysis proper which takes up the four remaining chapters – Chapters II to V – of the present study.

It is appropriate at this point to introduce the four outside studies and give some indication as to how they satisfy the above-mentioned objectives. But before proceeding to the first study, it should be noted that all four studies – as studies of Derrida and Ricoeur on metaphor and its relation to philosophy – are significant parts of larger studies. To be more precise, these larger studies are four books, each of which is the work of one author and each of which deals with matters related but not expressly belonging to the subject in question.

The first study to be examined and then, as in the case of the three other studies, subsequently diagnosed is to be found in Leonard Lawlor's *Imagination and Chance: The Difference between the Thought of Ricoeur and Derrida* (1992). What recommends this study as the one to begin with is that, of all the books or articles which examine in some way or other the deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur, no other one treats it more systematically as a disagreement, dispute, or polemic per se.[4] As the title of his book suggests, Lawlor's objective is to go to the heart of the difference between them. His interest in the polemical side of their exchange is to be observed in the fact that not only does his book begin with a more than forty-page study of Derrida's and Ricoeur's disagreement over metaphor, but it also ends with a thirty-page transcript of an earlier and highly relevant debate. Having as its subject the relationship between philosophy and communication, this debate was part of a conference and, more precisely, a roundtable discussion which followed the presentation of papers by, among others, Derrida and Ricoeur.[5] Furthermore, while Lawlor extends his inquiry into the difference between them beyond metaphor and to other subjects such as time, imagination, and chance, he nonetheless uses their principal works on metaphor as the basis from which to launch his more sweeping investigation.

With respect to Derrida's and Ricoeur's deep disagreement over metaphor, Lawlor presents summaries of the *three key texts* or, more precisely, the key parts of these texts. For reasons of economy and efficiency, the present study's report of these summaries will be a

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With respect to the supporters of Ricoeur, the general tendency is to commend his meeting the challenge of Derrida and deconstruction. For example, Pierre Gisel in "Paul Ricoeur: Discourse between Speech and Language" (*Philosophy Today* 21, 1977, 446-456), states: "The metaphorical is first. But because there is discourse, the philosophical enterprise is possible. The metaphorical can be thought. Ricoeur criticizes Jacques Derrida for whom the thesis of an initial metaphoricity entails a metaphoricity without any limits" (452). In "Metaphor in the Modern Critical Arena" (*Christianity and Literature* 33, No. 1, Fall, 1983), Roger Lundin describes Derridean deconstruction "as an assault upon philosophy and its privileged status as a rational discourse" (24). Shortly thereafter, he glances at the work of Paul Ricoeur. "Paul Ricoeur sees in the deconstructionist line a continuation of the dominant Western tendency to view metaphor as a 'guilty' substitution of figurative for proper meaning (*The Rule of Metaphor*, 284-289). . . . Thus behind the deconstructionist attack upon the truthfulness or significance of metaphor we find, curiously enough, a metaphysics of the proper, a view of language which claims that metaphor, in doing its work of bearing, transferring, carrying over, does nothing more than make a transfer from the realm of the proper, the sensible, the real into the realm of illusion" (25).

4 Ricoeur himself calls the second half of his critical analysis of "La mythologie blanche" polemical. See page 686 of the present study.

5 The transcript which Lawlor provides at the end of his book is an English translation. The original one in French is entitled "Philosophie et communication" and is to be found in the second volume of *La Communication: Actes du XVe Congrès de l'Association des sociétés de philosophie de langue française* (Montréal: Montmorency, 1971), 393-431. An analysis of Derrida's internal dilemma in the context of this conference is given in section 2.1. of the present study.

mixture of condensed statement and citation. In addition, in order to avoid an overabundance of material, most of Lawlor's discussion of Derrida and Ricoeur which goes beyond the range of these three key texts will not be reproduced.

The second study to be brought forward is found in Guy Bouchard's *Le procès de la métaphore* (1984). In a way which may be said to be even more complicated than Lawlor's, it is a project of clarification which strongly suggests that it is not a project of simplification. Reproducing and examining in detail throughout the better part of his book Derrida's and Ricoeur's discourses on metaphor, Bouchard is less concerned with the difference between them than with what he considers to be their respective ways of overextending or, as he puts it, *inflating* the conception of metaphor. Unlike Lawlor then, Bouchard is explicitly critical of both Derrida and Ricoeur and, furthermore, offers a corrective in the form of his own scaled-down and presumably more tractable definition of metaphor.

It should be apparent that, because the whole of Bouchard's book focuses, first, on the concept of metaphor and thus on the most formal or technical part of the dispute between Derrida and Ricoeur, and, secondly, because it focuses on what Lawlor, with his ranging outside the three key texts, only takes as the preliminary basis of his "larger" study, it offers a certain change of perspective and way of critically encountering their projects. On the other hand, Bouchard follows a similar path to Lawlor's when he provides a resume of the three key texts which, to identify briefly here and in chronological order, are: Derrida's essay "La mythologie blanche" (1971), Ricoeur's book, *La métaphore vive* (1975) and, finally, Derrida's exposé, "Le retrait de la métaphore" (1978). Pertinent to the matter of the present study's selecting and ordering the outside studies is the fact that Bouchard's coverage of the three key texts differs both in style and substance from Lawlor's. Because of its focus on the subject of metaphor, Bouchard's study is a much more extensive treatment of what seems to be (this "seems" will prove to be important later on) the non-polemical part of these texts. At least, this is certainly the case with respect to Ricoeur's *La métaphore vive* which, while only having the last of its eight chapters or, as Ricoeur calls them, studies examined by Lawlor, is examined in full by Bouchard.

In order to be faithful to the texts he is examining, Bouchard does a great deal of paraphrasing which so closely duplicates Derrida's and Ricoeur's texts that it is often quasi-citational.[6] Less interpretative than Lawlor's, it may be thought that his resume is a better choice for serving as a schematic outline of the deep disagreement. But apart from the fact that Bouchard never really analyses this disagreement such that beginning with his study would leave

6 To give an idea of how close Bouchard comes to paraphrasing Derrida's text in a way which makes it resemble – at least, in certain places – a string of slightly modified and unacknowledged citations (for example, it should be noted below that Bouchard discards Derrida's quotation marks around "metaphor"), a small sampling and comparison is in order. First of all, there is the following passage in "La mythologie blanche": "L'appel aux critères de clarté et d'obscurité suffirait à confirmer ce que nous annoncions plus haut: toute cette délimitation philosophique de la métaphore se laisse déjà construire et travailler par des « métaphores »" (*MB*, 301). In *Le procès de la métaphore* Bouchard traces the above passage as follows: "Les critères de clarté et d'obscurité confirment donc que la délimitation philosophique de la métaphore est travaillée par des métaphores" (*PM*, 19). A little further on, Derrida continues: "Si nous reprenions chaque terme de la définition proposée par la *Poétique*, nous y reconnaîtrons la marque d'une figure (*metaphora* ou *epiphora*, c'est aussi un mouvement de translation spatiale; *eidos*, c'est aussi une figure visible, un contour et une forme, l'espace d'un aspect ou d'une espèce; *genos*, c'est aussi une filiation, la souche d'une naissance, d'une origine, d'une famille, etc.)" (*MB*, 301-302). Bouchard, always condensing, follows his earlier paraphrase with this one: "Travail lisible en chacun des termes de la définition aristotélicienne: *métaphora* [*sic*] ou *ephiphora*, c'est aussi un mouvement spatial; *eidos*, c'est aussi la figure visible, le contour, la forme; *genos*, c'est aussi une filiation, la souche d'une naissance, d'une origine, d'une famille" (*PM*, 19).

out something important right at the outset of the present study, there is another problem. It is that, given the nature of the analysis carried out in Chapters II to V, the reproducing of Bouchard's resume would risk being redundant. Paying as much attention to the textual moves and movements of "La mythologie blanche," *La métaphore vive*, and "Le retrait de la métaphore" as to their arguments, the analysis of Chapters II to V, although not quasi-citational, is amply supplied (or, at least, it is to be hoped) with citations. Moreover, to place undue emphasis on the question of which of the outside studies is more precise and in what way would be to deflect attention from Chapter I's main order of business, namely, to examine these studies from the point of view of their internal distress.

While Bouchard's critique of Ricoeur is much harsher and longer than his critique of Derrida, the third outside study to be brought forward is entirely pro-Ricoeur and anti-Derrida. S. H. Clark's, *Paul Ricoeur* (1990), offers an eleven-page discussion of the dispute between them in a subsection entitled "Deconstruction and Metaphor." With a more assertive style than either Lawlor's or Bouchard's, Clark characterizes the disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur as a confrontation in which Ricoeur, as the more aggressive but nevertheless always respectful and restrained party, comes out the clear winner. In fact, Clark goes so far as to suggest that the presumably non-polemical part of *La métaphore vive* (i.e., the first seven studies which constitute a survey and analysis of many metaphorical theories as well as the development of an all-embracing one) is in some way a preparation for and prelude to Ricoeur's confronting Derrida in the Eighth Study. Challenging the assumption that there is a strictly non-polemical part of Ricoeur's discourse on metaphor is also an important part of the analysis of Chapters II to V.

If the present study should be fully committed to its task and not given to sparing itself and, furthermore, if Clark, in endorsing Ricoeur's position, also endorses and exhibits the virtues of clarity; and, furthermore, if another study, in endorsing Derrida's position, falls short in this area, then surely, as a sort of challenge to the present study and, more precisely, as a challenge to Chapter I, this situation must be looked into. It is thus as a sort of oddity that the fourth outside study comes to be selected and placed at the end of Chapter I's worksheet. Completely devoted to Derrida's discourse on metaphor and to this discourse's even "exalting" metaphor, the study in question nonetheless exhibits – at least to some degree – a will to clarify both metaphor and philosophy. Although Derrida's and Ricoeur's debate on this subject (which is called a fundamental debate on the back of the author's book) takes up only the better part of one of the four chapters of *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor: Imperfect Thought* (2000), there is a sense in which Giuseppe Stellardi's whole project is under its sway. If one takes into consideration the fact that Heidegger himself has very little to say about metaphor and that, despite this lack or seeming lack, both Derrida and Ricoeur refer abundantly to Heidegger, that, furthermore, Stellardi does not strictly follow Derrida's analysis of Heidegger and admits to a certain agreement with Ricoeur on the matter of Heidegger's metaphors, and that, finally, he primarily engages Heidegger's text as a task of exploration or, as he puts it, "the task would be better described as a 'journeying over' it" (*HD*, 128), then one gains some idea of the tension or trouble which traverses the author's undertaking.

But perhaps it is now time to address the question of the tension or trouble which traverses the present undertaking. One problem which confronts it is that it cannot properly say what it is or at least cannot say what it is all at once. It must defer a large part of this task to a self-analysis at the beginning of Chapter II. But, apart from this self-analysis, it must also defer it

to the analysis of the deep disagreement itself. Or, more precisely, it must defer it to the analysis of this deep disagreement as quasi-debate and even highly extended quasi-debate. Or, more precisely still, it must defer it to the analysis of the *dynamics* of this highly extended quasi-debate. Or, even more precisely, it must defer it to the analysis of the dynamics of this highly extended quasi-debate as being epistemological *and* ethical.

To leave aside for the time being the task of introducing the analysis proper then is no less than to keep in view the present issue of complication versus clarification. To the extent that the present study professes to be complicated and even over-complicated, there is the admission that it cannot be thoroughly impartial in its analysis. While it is true that Ricoeur is willing to invite a tremendous amount of complication into his work in order for it to be as comprehensive as possible, it is also true that he aims at ruling out all *excessive* complication. Ricoeur himself admits as much when, for example, he characterizes philosophical discourse as being that which is sometimes infected with an invincible ambiguity, a sort of overly poetic effusion which he thinks is to be found, for example, in the very last works of Heidegger and which results from its succumbing to the lure of the ineffable. *"Le prix de cette prétention [de mettre fin à l'histoire de l'être] est l'invincible ambiguïté des dernières oeuvres . . ."* (*MV,* 397).

Despite Ricoeur's tremendous range then, Derrida goes beyond it or in a sense explodes what, according to Guy Bouchard, is Ricoeur's already inflated conception of metaphor. For Bouchard, Derrida, by tracing metaphor to the very heart of the definition of metaphor, to the very heart of the concept, and, finally, to the very heart of language and being, not only presents an epistemological obstacle to metaphorical theory, but to all philosophy of language. The present study of course will shortly take into account Bouchard's critical stand more fully. For the time being, it is enough to remark that, were Bouchard's interests less linguistic and, like Lawlor's, more epistemological, he no doubt would make much of the fact that Derrida troubles philosophy's own language.

But even to describe the situation in this fashion would still be to oversimplify it. Derrida only troubles philosophy's own language because it is already troubled. Haunted by metaphoricity (but not metaphor *stricto sensu*) which is inherent to language in general, it can never be entirely in control of itself. At the same time, it is fairly evident that the major part of philosophical discourse can go on without scrutinizing or, for that matter, scrupling over the seemingly minute part of it which escapes control. From this point of view then, the status of the second sentence of this paragraph is rendered uncertain: Derrida still seems to be an accomplice in making life difficult for philosophy and philosophers. A heterogeneous element enters the picture as "perverse" motivation, disposition, intention, inclination, etc. or, then again, as "bad" consequence, effect, result, etc. A number of "ethical" values are thus put into play which need not be harmonious with each other, let alone with those in larger circulation in both philosophy and the world in general.

It is in this way that one might return to the objection made earlier by the present study, namely, that the four outside studies all operate with a presupposition which a priori rules out or rules on the matter at issue. The problem is that, while it is true that this objection can be justified on the basis of analysing the four studies in question, it is also true that, in and of itself or rather in all that it can possibly mean or entail, it is not justifiable. Or, more properly, it is just as much unjustifiable as it is justifiable. For example, it is unjustifiable from the point of view that the objection itself is inevitably an epistemological ruling which, according to what the objection is or must be as an anti-epistemological one, rules itself out of court. Or, to put it another way, the

ruling that conceptuality is prone to internal slippage rules out conceptual rule as absolute rule and therefore must rule out the certainty of the ruling that metaphoricity is implicated in conceptuality. On the other hand, it is justifiable or even more than justifiable from the point of view that it is the *responsibility* of philosophy to examine all presuppositions and therefore the responsibility of the present study to examine the presupposition in question (i.e., that lack of clarity is a moot point and should itself be occulted).

What all this ultimately means for the present study is that it cannot entirely free itself from the principle of clarity even while troubling it or because, even while doing so, it is also the clearing of a path towards it. This is both an "affirmation" and a "negation" of the principle of clarity which of course is non-receivable in many circles. But from the point of view of the present study, this double gesture can only be both ethically and epistemologically right. Strictly speaking, this study is not an affirmation or negation of this principle, but merely the challenging of its authority or rather **Authority**. Always being half-respectful and yet half-distrustful of this Authority, it is the recognition of its being not simply the eternal light of a Philosophical Saying, but also the eternal twilight of a Philosophical Doing. It is the recognition not only of the constative side of philosophical discourse, but also the recognition that this *recognition of the constative side* only comes at the expense of not recognizing the performative side. Conversely, it is the recognition not only of the performative side of philosophical discourse, but also the recognition that this *recognition of the performative side* only comes at the expense of not recognizing the constative side. Finally, it is the always precarious attempt to guard philosophy from the lure of the utterly effable and, as such, to guard it from itself.

Chapter I

The Commitment to Tell the Truth about Derrida and Ricoeur on Metaphor as Project of Clarification

As set out in the Introduction, the business of this chapter is to examine and diagnose four studies of the deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur. Traversing this primary task is the secondary one which is to provide a preliminary and variegated look at the deep disagreement itself.

1.1. Leonard Lawlor's Study in *Imagination and Chance: The Difference between the Thought of Ricoeur and Derrida*

A key part of Lawlor's discussion of the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur already takes place in his Introduction. It is not only part of a preliminary outline of his overall project, but also part of a preliminary analysis. Given this early complication, it is better to postpone the examination of it and begin with the examination of his resumes or, as he calls them, his *readings*. This is Part I, "The Polemic between Ricoeur and Derrida." Part II and Part III are where Lawlor carries out his more extended analysis but, for reasons to be given later, these parts will not investigated. In order to be as clear and economic as possible, the report of these readings is itself a reading. More precisely, it is a highly condensed one which takes a few judicious shortcuts[1] and, notwithstanding its bid to be as taut and as spare as possible, also takes the liberty of, along with citing frequently from Lawlor, making a few minor contributions and corrections.[2] It also avoids, as much as possible, repetitious expressions such as "according to Lawlor," "Lawlor claims that," "for Lawlor," and so on. It is to be hoped that this move will not be found unwelcome since its only aim is to facilitate a preliminary encounter with Derrida and Ricoeur. Furthermore, the present study's reading of Lawlor's readings seeks neither to critique nor to slavishly reproduce them but rather to "collaborate" with them. Thus the distinction between Lawlor's voice and the voice of the present study should not be considered, insofar as the three readings are concerned, a relevant issue.[3]

Lawlor's Reading of Derrida's "La mythologie blanche"

Lawlor begins by announcing that he will take up in turn each of the five sections of Derrida's essay: "Exergue," "Plus de métaphore," "L'ellipse du soleil: L'énigme,

1 For example, no attempt is made to reproduce Lawlor's reading of "La mythologie blanche" in its contextualized or cross-referential state. This aspect of his reading is described as follows: "The reading will be guided by earlier Derridean texts, in particular, 'The Pit and the Pyramid' and 'Ousia and Gramme' (both in *Margins* like 'White Mythology'), and *Speech and Phenomena" (IC,* 11). Two things follow. First of all, certain notions of Derrida which Lawlor often refers to (e.g., *supplémentarité*) but which are not expressly thematised in "La mythologie blanche" and "Le retrait de la métaphore" are not given the same amount of attention as Lawlor gives them. Secondly, the motif of "zigzagging" which is central to Lawlor's description of both Derrida's trajectory and the tradition's as the latter views it is likewise avoided.

2 Footnotes 8 and 9 are perhaps the only significant corrections. Footnotes 5, 6, 7, 10, 13, and 14 are citations from Derrida's and Ricoeur's texts which are not found in Lawlor's.

3 The diagnosis to be carried out after these readings turns less on points of interpretation than how Lawlor proceeds in the Introduction.

l'incompréhensible, l'imprenable," "Les fleurs du rhétorique: L'héliotrope," and "La métaphysique - relève de la métaphore." In the first section, "Exergue," Derrida begins his demonstration that metaphor is implicated in the concept. "The Greek word, *eidos*, for instance, means not only a suprasensible idea, but also outward appearance" (12).[4] On the basis of this way of conceiving the relationship between these two familiar terms, metaphor and concept, which of course are quite often considered to be inimical, Derrida claims that no adequate study can be done of philosophical metaphor or, as he expresses it in the sub-title of "La mythologie blanche," metaphor in the philosophical text.

In the second section, "Plus de métaphore," Derrida presents an argument to back up his claim. The first premise of this argument is that philosophical metaphor cannot be defined without appealing to, on the one hand, such basic oppositions as sensible/intelligible, sensory/sense, and sensual/spiritual and, on the other hand, such basic concepts as *theoria*, *eidos*, and *logos*. The second premise is that all such oppositions and concepts have a figurative or tropic aspect – a metaphorical charge – and, as a consequence, what is to be defined is inseparable from the defining operation. "Thus, the definition of philosophical metaphor [is itself] a philosophical metaphor, but one not included in the field" (13).

This paradoxical situation of extracting from the subject which is presumably under definitional control in order to add to or to equip the subject which operates *as* definitional control is what Derrida calls the *law of supplementarity.* Operating both as a negative and positive universal, this law becomes particularly evident in the study of philosophical metaphor. Nor does this situation change, be the study of philosophical metaphor called the rhetoric of philosophy or the philosophy of rhetoric. "'White Mythology's first two sections, therefore, define an irresolvable problem: how can one speak about metaphor nonmetaphorically?" (14).

Perhaps the tradition's most powerful response to this question has been Hegel's. According to Derrida, metaphor in Hegel is taken up into and by the concept as Absolute Concept or Spirit and, as such, is taken up without remainder. With respect to philosophy's use of metaphor then, there is not in Hegel simply the semantic or epistemological work (described by Ricoeur in *La métaphore vive* as Platonic) of transferring meaning and reference from the sensible to the intelligible, but also the ontological work of transferring the sensible in its entirety to the intelligible (or World to Spirit). Accordingly, the sensible or figurative aspect of the concept is not the sign of an impure residue which would result from its base (etymological) origin, but rather the sign of the sensible's – as well as the sensible sign's – being preserved and elevated.[5]

In order to deal with the third and fourth sections of "La mythologie blanche," Lawlor proposes to examine them together by combining their respective analyses of Aristotle on metaphor. These analyses in turn include what for Derrida is the paradigmatic metaphor (of both good and bad metaphor)[6] of the Western tradition. It is the figure of the Sun to which, in both the

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4 All page numbers of cited passages in section 1.1. of the present study refer to Lawlor's *Imagination and Chance* unless otherwise indicated.

5 "Surtout, le mouvement de la métaphorisation (origine puis effacement de la métaphore, passage du sens propre sensible au sens propre spirituel à travers le détour des figures) n'est autre qu'un mouvement d'idéalisation. Et il est compris sous la catégorie maîtresse de l'idéalisme dialectique, à savoir la relève *(Aufhebung*), c'est-à-dire la mémoire qui produit les signes, les intériorise (*Erinnerung*) en élevant, supprimant et conservant l'extériorité sensible" (*MB*, 269).

6 "Ce qui apparaîtra d'abord, dans l'exemple aristotélicien, c'est sans doute que les métaphores héliotropiques peuvent être de mauvaises métaphores" (*MB*, 298).

third and fourth sections, Derrida pays special attention. Correspondingly, Lawlor guides the second part of his reading of these two sections by singling out this figure.

Going back to Aristotle's highly influential definition of metaphor (this is the first part of the above-mentioned reading), Derrida begins his investigation of the traditional association between metaphor and name (*onomos*). Since the name, according to Aristotle, corresponds to the object in a true or false way and, furthermore, since metaphor ultimately is a kind of naming, it is implicated in meaning, reference, truth, and knowledge. Derrida shows that, just as Aristotle's theory of metaphor falls inside his theory of diction (*lexis*), so the latter falls inside his theory of poetic imitation (*mimesis*). The latter in turn falls inside his theory of resemblance (*homoiosis*) which in turn falls inside his theory of nature (*physis*).[7]

Metaphor thus belongs to metaphysics because, underlying Aristotle's theory of nature is his theory of substance (*ousia*) which in turn is at the heart of his theory of being. Although the latter encompasses change, movement, and, of course, difference, the origin and destination of all this is but the One. "Everything, for Aristotle begins and ends in unity. As he says in Book IV, 'it is impossible to think of anything if we do not think of one thing (*me noounta hen*).' Because Aristotle's ontology is based on *ousia* and because his ontology determines his metaphorology, Aristotle must, according to Derrida, privilege the proper over the metaphorical" (18).

Much of Derrida's discussion in the fourth section is concerned with *propriety*. In Aristotle, the property of an object, while distinguishable from its essence, is in a quasi-synonymous relation to it. Thus it may be said, for example, that, while Socrates' essence is that he is human and that, distinguishable from this fact, he has reason (*logos*) as a property, the fact that he has reason is also the fact that he is human. Metaphor imposes itself in this relation by ascribing the property of one thing to another thing (e.g., Socrates is a plant) and in a way which, while initiating a comparative relation between two different things, also initiates an *impropriety* which of course is the transferred property's incompatibility with the essence of the thing to which it is ascribed. "It is improper or metaphorical to say that Socrates is a plant (*phutos*). Metaphor then, in a way, destroys the unity of the subject's essence by not saying the same" (19).

For Aristotle, metaphor by analogy is metaphor par excellence. The example he gives is: *Evening is the old age of day* (or: *Old age is the evening of life*). Since this metaphor originates from four retrievable terms – evening, day, old age, life – it can always be brought back to the univocal and proper. At the same time, it does epistemic work or is operative in a cognitive way by being a perception of resemblance and suggesting or pointing out a new class or category. But "even if metaphors provide knowledge through resemblance, Aristotle always prefers the proper and univocal discourse of philosophy" (19).

Going back to the third section (this is the second part of the above-mentioned reading), Lawlor now gives an account of Derrida's "first solar example." What is primarily at issue here is that Aristotle admits that there are metaphors by analogy which have a missing term. Despite his not looking further into this matter, Aristotle provides an example of metaphor by analogy

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7 "Au début de la *Poétique*, la *mimesis* est posée en quelque sorte comme une possibilité propre à la *physis*. Celle-ci se révèle dans la *mimesis*, ou dans la poésie qui en est une espèce, en raison de cette structure peu apparente qui fait que la *mimesis* n'apporte pas de l'extérieur le pli de son redoublement. Elle appartient à la *physis*, ou, si l'on préfère, celle-ci comprend son extériorité elle-même et son double. La *mimesis* est donc, en ce sens, un mouvement « naturel ». Cette naturalité est réduite et confiée par Aristote à la parole de l'homme. Plutôt qu'une réduction, ce geste constitutif de la métaphysique et de l'humanisme est une détermination téléologique: la naturalité en général se dit, se rassemble, se connaît, s'apparaît, se mire et se « mime » *par excellence* et *en vérité* dans la nature humaine. La *mimesis* est le propre de l'homme" (*MB*, 283).

which, for Derrida, renders problematic the distinction between good or proper and bad or improper metaphor. The example in question, *The sun seeds its light*, is one in which the improper word "seeds" corresponds to no proper term and hence functions improperly even as metaphor. "Because the sun's power lacks a proper name, the sun's essence has never been disclosed without mediation, in complete presence. The disseminating sun metaphor, which Derrida calls 'an ellipsis of an ellipsis,' implies absence. The sun – the 'original, unique, and irreplaceable referent' – seems to have already been elided" (20).

Lawlor then returns to the fourth section with its "second solar example." Once again, Aristotle not only seems to be revealing the weak points of his own theory, but doing so in the way of suggesting a pact between the sun and the enigmatic. In the *Topics* he argues that the property of a sensory object can only be adequately determined on the basis of its full presence. He then goes on to claim that, when a person defines the sun as the brightest star moving about the earth, this person does so incorrectly. Given that the sun is absent half the time, it is always possible that, during that time, it does not move about the earth. Yet, if for this reason, nothing which is proper to the sun can be determined, then not only is it the paradigmatic metaphor – the good or proper one which is the perpetual return from absence to presence and from non-meaning to meaning – but also the paradigmatic *bad* metaphor. As the paradigm then of, in addition to metaphor (good or bad), the sensorial and the full presence of things, the sun is the fissured basis of the proper/improper opposition and, for that matter, all other oppositions. "Philosophical discourse is constituted by terms and oppositions with sensuous referents, terms such as *phainesthai*, *aletheia*, etc., oppositions such as the visible and the invisible, appearing and disappearing, presence and absence. All these basic terms' and oppositions' senses derive from the sun, its light and movement" (22).

> [What can now be seen is that] Derrida has generalized metaphor beyond its traditional limits. [He] states this generalization explicitly at the close of "White Mythology's" last section where he speaks of two self-destructions of metaphor. The first self-destruction is based in the metaphysical determination of metaphor. Exemplified by Aristotle and Hegel, metaphysics defines metaphor as continuity. So defined, metaphor can always be elevated into a concept or into the proper. As the last section's title, "La métaphysique – relève de la métaphore," indicates, the elevation (*relève*) of metaphor is metaphysics.[8] The second self-destruction destroys the metaphysical determination of metaphor. Metaphor, for Derrida, happens everywhere; thus, the "reassuring" opposition between the metaphorical and the proper is "exploded." Not opposed to the proper or the conceptual, metaphor must be understood as supplementarity, thanks to which thought and being themselves are discontinuous from themselves. The discontinuity of the relation implies that Derrida has reinscribed metaphor as catachresis or homonymy (23-24).

Before moving on to his reading of Ricoeur, Lawlor stresses certain points in Derrida's

8 *Relève* has a second meaning which is "derives from." For further commentary on this, see the passage cited from Alan Bass's translation of "La mythologie blanche" on page 733 of the present study.

analysis which Ricoeur critiques in the Eighth Study of *La métaphore vive*. Paramount among them is Derrida's affiliation with Heidegger which, according to Ricoeur, is no less than the theoretical core common to both of them. But, as Lawlor points out, while Heidegger identifies metaphor with the metaphysical transfer of meaning and reference from the sensible to the intelligible, Derrida, although considering this determination to be important, does not consider it to be the only one or the most important. "Heidegger 'distrusts' the concept of metaphor because the sensory/nonsensory opposition determines it. Derrida agrees that this metaphysical opposition is 'important' for understanding the concept of metaphor, but he goes on to say that it is 'neither the only, nor the first, nor the most determining characteristic of the value of metaphor'" (24).

For Derrida, the movement of metaphor in metaphysics is part of the general movement of all meaning away from the same or self-presence and back towards it. Although best represented by Aristotle and the relationship between potency and act and by Hegel and the relationship between world history and spirit, the relationship between the lower and upper worlds in Plato (this will be an important target for Ricoeur) also represents this movement. Infinitely above both these worlds and yet the source of them and all that is in them is the Platonic sun, the Good which attracts its own kind back up to itself. "As Derrida says, all metaphor theory belongs 'to a more general syntax, to a more extended system that equally constrains Platonism; everything is illuminated by this system's sun, the sun of absence and of presence, blinding and luminous, dazzling'" (25).

Another point which Lawlor brings out is that Derrida's style in "La mythologie blanche" is convoluted and differs from the more conventional exposition of his earlier writings. As someone who can no longer regard the tradition as "an irreducible unity of fact and essence" (25), Derrida sets out to trace the subtle interaction between this opposition. Moreover, he does so not only in the way of his "theoretical" account of the tradition, but also in the way of his "practical" approach to it. A case in point is his use of the term *usure* and, more precisely, his homonymic or equivocal deployment of it in the description of metaphor. In other words, Derrida plays upon *usure* in order to signify both figurative loss (in the sense of wearing away, erosion, being used up, etc.) and semantic gain (in the sense of usury, plus-value, profit, etc.). This play upon *usure* is the most demonstrative or "dramatic" way of signifying the tradition's own equivocal (as epochal) conception of metaphor.

"Derrida's discussion of *usure* takes place mainly in the 'Exergue' [first section] but he also recalls this notion in his Hegel discussion in 'Plus de métaphore' [second section]. Within the tradition, *usure* presupposes, according to Derrida, that a continuous kernel of sense underlies the transition from literal to figurative to concept. According to the tradition, then, metaphorisation is simply concept formation. Concepts overcome the difference or eliminate the relationship between the literal and the figurative. Connected to metaphysics, *usure*'s continuist presupposition implies, for Derrida, that concepts elevate and absorb metaphor just as the intelligible elevates and absorbs the sensible" (26).

Another point which Lawlor raises and which figures prominently in the dispute between Derrida and Ricoeur is the opposition between live and dead metaphor. In his examination of Hegel, Derrida notes that live metaphor is traditionally identified with conscious, intended, or poetic metaphor and dead metaphor with the figurative and etymological aspect of a concept. The latter is, for the most part, perceived as that which remains behind and simply records the concept-term's origin (*etymon*). "In order for a term to function metaphorically, to be alive, one

must recognize a relation between the literal and figurative senses. As Hegel stresses, after the literal sense has been erased,[9] it occurs to no one to take *begreifen* as to grasp by the hand. *Begreifen* contains no recognizable tension. Concepts are dead (used up) metaphors and not true (live) metaphors" (26).

Lawlor's Reading of the Eighth Study in Ricoeur's La métaphore vive

Lawlor begins his second reading by characterizing the final (eighth) study of Ricoeur's book as being part of an extended polemic with "La mythologie blanche."

> The "Eighth Study" in *The Rule of Metaphor* (1975) echoes these earlier works; it (and the first) constitute an extended "polemic" with "White Mythology" (cf. MV, 290/368) (*IC*, 29).

This polemic concerns not only metaphor per se, but metaphor in philosophy and metaphor as threat to philosophy. Or, to be more precise, it concerns the threat to philosophy as the "deconstructive" conception of metaphor which, in over-generalizing it, does not constrain it to its dialectical role of poetically relating the equivocal nature of being to the univocal nature of speculative discourse which, according to Ricoeur, has as its essence its semantic aim (*visée sémantique*). "To Derridean generalized metaphoricity Ricoeur opposes a discursive pluralism that implies neither a radical heterogeneity of discursive types nor a radical homogeneity. Throughout the 'Eighth Study' he constantly tries to steer between a discontinuity which would eliminate the intersection of discourses, and especially the intersection between poetical and philosophical discourses, and a continuity which would collapse the difference between discourses. Above all, Ricoeur's discursive pluralism does not imply that philosophy is merely one discourse among many" (29).[10]

For Ricoeur, ordinary discourse (which presumably is analogous to speculative discourse)[11] is the systematic interaction between meaning and reference of which poetic

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9 It would be better to say that it is the *improper*, *figurative,* or *metaphorical* sense which is erased. What Lawlor calls the literal sense is actually the "primitive" or "original" sense of the word (e.g., *foundation* as bottom or physical support) which philosophy metaphorizes before *de*-metaphorizing or lexicalizing. The following is the pertinent passage from Hegel's *Aesthetics* as it is cited by Derrida in "La mythologie blanche." "« *Fassen* », « *begreifen* », (saisir, concevoir), en général de nombreux mots qui se rapportent au savoir, ont dans leur signification propre (*eigentliche Bedeutung*) un contenu absolument sensible mais qui est ensuite abandonné et remplacé par une signification spirituelle; le premier sens est sensible (*der erste Sinn ist sinnlich*), le second spirituel. Mais peu à peu s'efface à l'usage (*im Gebrauche*) le métaphorique d'un tel mot qui, à l'usage (*durch die Gewohnheit*), se transforme pour devenir, d'expression non propre (*uneigentliche*) expression propre (*eigentlichen Ausdruck*) . . ." (*MB*, 268).

10 Generally speaking, Ricoeur certainly does not give the impression that he regards philosophy as simply one discourse among many. But at the beginning of the First Study when he looks at the public sphere and describes the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy as the power and violence of the first which the latter cannot directly control, he states: "Son discours n'est lui-même qu'un discours parmi d'autres et la prétention à la vérité qui habite son discours l'exclut de la sphère du pouvoir" (*MV*, 16).

11 What distinguishes ordinary discourse from speculative or philosophical discourse is never the focus of Ricoeur's attention in *La métaphore vive*. In the First Study he associates it with rhetoric as undisciplined speech. But then in the later parts of *La métaphore vive,* he frequently contrasts ordinary discourse with metaphorical or poetic discourse. For that matter, his use of the term "speculative" is also ambiguous. In many or most places it is interchangeable with "philosophical" (with a weak sense of being metaphysical) and, when he is discussing Aristotle

discourse, an errant wanderer, is the prodigal son. Poetic discourse is the ultimately fortuitous deviation of meaning and reference wherein metaphor, as a form of predication, breaks the rules of language and logic in order to deliver up a new wealth of information about the world. This new information, although it comes in the form of a pre-conceptual or pre-objective grasp of the world, is open to interpretation and, as a consequence, is eventually taken up by speculative discourse. "Interpretation then struggles to respect poetical discourse's multiplicity and to achieve the univocity of a concept. Productive imagination, for Ricoeur, we might say, explicates the implicit conceptual meaning of a metaphor" (32).

But productive imagination's poetico-interpretative operation is only necessary and prior to speculative discourse as its content and not as its form. "In order to 'work free' of all schematising interpretations, the nascent concept must be connected to a 'network of significations of the same order, according to the constitutive laws of logical space itself.' A horizon of 'speculative logos,' a metalanguage, must be prepared in advance, into which the new 'concept' is placed. Not generated by metaphor, speculative discourse 'offers' its already constituted systematizing resources to metaphor" (32).

Concerned with demonstrating the discontinuity between poetic discourse and speculative discourse, Ricoeur does not shrink away from investigating the area where it is most likely to be called into question. "At first, Aristotle's analogical unity of the multiple meanings of being appears as a counterexample to Ricoeur's distance between speculative and poetical discourse. Because Aristotle attempts to introduce analogy into philosophical discourse as an intermediate modality between strict univocity and equivocity, it seems philosophical discourse reproduces the semantic functioning of poetic discourse. The word *analogy* belongs to both discourses; therefore, it looks as though poetic discourse in some way induces or causes philosophical discourse. Concepts would seem to be hidden metaphors. Philosophical discourse would lack the univocal precision that Aristotle claims for it" (33).

In response to this seeming quandary, Ricoeur claims that, given that being is impervious to genus-species classification and therefore essentially equivocal in nature, the only means by which it can be conceptualized – at least by ancient and medieval thought – is by way of analogy. But what is important here is not the equivocal sense of analogy itself, but that, unlike poetic analogy, metaphysical analogy is not a fortuitous eruption of new meaning into language and cognition. It is rather a conceptual operation along with others in a pre-existing system in which poetic meaning is as much transformed as it is incorporated into speculative discourse. Now, for Ricoeur, the fact that this means of operation ultimately proves to be inadequate, that being no less resists analogy than univocity, is of course a problem for philosophy and even *the* problem for philosophy. What it most assuredly is not for him, however, is philosophy *as* problem. "The work of thought crystalized in Aristotle's text aims to form a system or a self-sufficient structure of the meanings of being, a nongeneric unity. This aim is, for Ricoeur, *the* philosophical project" (34).

Lawlor next turns to Ricoeur's critique of Derrida but first by way of the shorter analysis of Heidegger which precedes it. Here Ricoeur claims that, on the basis of the highly limited and peripheral nature of Heidegger's discussion of metaphor, his ample use of it is much more significant than what he says about it. Despite his slighting of the importance of Heidegger's conception of metaphor, Ricoeur never ceases in characterizing Derrida's conception as the radicalization of Heidegger's and, moreover, as a certain threat if not ultimate danger to

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and Aquinas, "theological" (with a strong sense of being metaphysical).

philosophical discourse. “This is because Derrida unearths, as we saw, the unavowed and unstated metaphoricity in philosophical discourse and the unavowed and unstated metaphysics in rhetorical discourse” (36).

What Ricoeur calls the theoretical core of both Heidegger’s and Derrida’s thought is also what he refers to as the Platonic conception of metaphor. According to Ricoeur, both Heidegger and Derrida view metaphor as the metaphysical transfer of meaning and reference from visible to invisible being. The proper is then identified with the sensible signification of some object or event and the improper with its non-sensible signification. In agreement with this Platonic conception is, according to Ricoeur, the view that Western philosophy, despite its accidental variations or even because it is one giant accident, is essentially homogeneous. Ricoeur points out that, for Derrida, the sun is the predominant figure in philosophy and represents its essential continuity from Plato to Hegel.

In addition, Ricoeur views Derrida’s analysis as being preoccupied with used or dead metaphor. Dead metaphor is a theory or thesis which he takes to be very much opposed to his own theory of live metaphor. Instead of conceiving it as predication and as the production of new meaning, Derrida conceives metaphor as word-substitution and as the transfer of old meaning. It is on this basis alone that he can claim that all philosophy is inhabited by metaphor. The thrust of Ricoeur’s critique of Derrida’s project is that dead metaphor is not true metaphor. Rather, it is but the trace of a word’s past history or what was once its nature as catachresis or even live metaphor. It is the polysemous addition to a word which occurs either with a forced transfer of meaning when the word is shifted from one reference to another or when the word outlives its metaphorical life – its diachronic, predicative, and discursive context – and reverts to the static, synchronic, and virtual or potential mode as linguistic unit or lexicalized term. This polysemous addition to the word is what becomes a coded or institutionalized signification which, at least for some period of time (for there can always be an additional signification brought about by a new metaphorical usage), is the ordinary, current, or literal signification. “Dead metaphors, therefore, are no longer metaphors, true metaphors. Polysemy is not metaphoricity, live metaphoricity. Ricoeur stresses that live metaphors exist only in an interpretation that recognizes a deviation in sense. A live metaphor exists only in the awareness” (39). It may be said then that, for Ricoeur, Derrida’s fundamental mistake is the classical one – the one of ancient, modern, and contemporary rhetoric – of taking metaphor to be an act of naming rather than an act of predicating.

Along with dismissing outright the notion that the whole of philosophy can be construed as Platonism, Ricoeur takes issue with Heidegger’s and Derrida’s distinction between proper and improper. “For Ricoeur, literal does not mean proper in the sense of originary, but simply the current or ‘usual’ sense . . .” (39). Insofar as proper signifies the primitive or original sense of a word, it implies or assumes that discourse divides between physical or natural references and metaphysical or transcendental ones. By virtue of such a determination, words referring to the physical or natural world would be absolutely independent units of meaning. “In this view words are like Platonic ideas, possessing meanings apart from their particular, contextual instantiations” (38). In the face of this, Ricoeur points out that his whole effort in *La métaphore vive* has been to show the opposite, namely, that words only have potential meaning by themselves and actual meaning in sentences and discourse. “In effect, Ricoeur accuses Derrida of being metaphysical. Ricoeur argues . . . that a more precise semantics dispels this ‘illusion’ of meanings in themselves and that of dead metaphoricity” (39).

In the matter of Derrida's interpretation of concept-formation and, more precisely, his interpretation of Hegel's account of it as *Aufhebung* or the sublimation of metaphor into concept, Ricoeur claims that Derrida's interpretation is an idealization of dead metaphor which ignores a crucial distinction. Rather than being a continuous movement, Hegel divides the process into two stages. The first is purely a metaphorical operation and the second purely a conceptual one. That philosophy must perform the first operation as well as the second is the result of its suffering from a lexical deficiency and, in order to name new concepts, being compelled to wrest terms in a catachrestic way from other discursive realms. "This, for Ricoeur however, is 'a relatively banal case of an 'extended' use of words'" (40).

It is not then this first catachrestic operation in Hegel's account of *Aufhebung* which counts for Ricoeur, but the second which is the final destination and ratification of new meaning. As philosophy's response to the unique question of being, this new meaning is the actualization of the potential meaning of being inherent to poetic discourse and supplied to the conceptual order. Likewise, the response to the question of metaphor is philosophy's actualization of the meaning of metaphor which goes beyond the transitional signification of philosophical metaphor. "Ricoeur says, 'Speaking metaphorically of metaphor is not at all circular, since the act of positing the concept (*la position du concept*) precedes [*sic*] dialectically from the metaphor itself'" (40).

Lawlor's reading of Derrida's "Le retrait de la métaphore"

"Le retrait de la métaphore" is an exposé which Derrida delivered three years after the publication of *La métaphore vive.* Lawlor notes that it roughly divides into two parts. The first part is Derrida's response to Ricoeur's reading of "La mythologie blanche" and the second part is his "reinterpretation of his relation to Heidegger" (43). The latter is a complicated discussion of metaphoricity which Lawlor chooses not to examine.[12]

The pivotal point of Derrida's response to Ricoeur's reading is a footnote in "La mythologie blanche" which Derrida claims that Ricoeur has overlooked and which runs counter to Ricoeur's interpretation of his essay. The note in question is on Heidegger and, more precisely, Heidegger's explicitly identifying the concept of metaphor with what is considered by Ricoeur to be Platonic, namely, the metaphysical transfer from the visible to the invisible. Important to Derrida here is the fact that, in this note, he only agrees to Heidegger's point of view with a certain reservation. By ignoring this reservation, Ricoeur assimilates Derrida's position to Heidegger's and, on the basis of this assimilation, organizes his reading. "Ricoeur too hastily equates Derrida and Heidegger" (44).

Derrida goes on to claim that not just this note, but the whole of "La mythologie blanche" calls into question the Platonic conception of metaphor. While it is of course true that this conception is dependent on metaphysical oppositions among which is the sensible/non-sensible

12 In the Introduction, Lawlor gives a partial explanation as to why he does not deal with the Heideggerian part of Derrida's exposé. "Because of its extreme complexity, I shall not analyse Derrida's reading of Heidegger in *Le Retrait*. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that Heidegger's shadow casts itself across this entire book" (*IC*, 6). An additional explanation is then offered at the beginning of Part I, Section 3, "Distanciation and *Différance*: Derrida's Response to Ricoeur in 'The *Retrait* of Metaphor.'" "Derrida's reinterpretation of his relation to Heidegger extends into the complicated question of Heidegger's metaphoricity (a question I shall not examine here). By focussing on reading errors, on the one hand, and by steering away from Ricoeur on the other, Derrida, however, never resolves the polemic with Ricoeur" (*IC*, 43).

opposition, it is also true that these oppositions are themselves already implicated in metaphor which is to say that they already have a metaphorical charge or a figurative aspect. In order to demonstrate this implication of metaphor in the most basic concepts of philosophy, Derrida examines in "La mythologie blanche" some of the studies of philosophical metaphor which have been carried out and of which there are a highly limited number. In his response to Ricoeur in "Le retrait de la métaphore," he suggests that Ricoeur does not read his essay with sufficient attention[13] and, as a result, does not distinguish his deconstructive reading from the studies he analyses or, more precisely, the philosophemes which are operative in them. In fact, a repeated complaint which Derrida makes is that he finds himself being criticized for holding views which he himself criticizes. "Thus, Derrida does not subscribe to Heidegger's adage [i.e., *'Das Metaphorische gibt es nur innerhalb der Metaphysik'*] but agrees with Ricoeur's evaluation of it. It is overly restrictive and Derrida submits it to deconstruction" (45).

With respect to Ricoeur's charge that Derrida is in solidarity with Heidegger on the matter of viewing Western philosophy as a homogeneous unity, Derrida argues that this view is precisely the one that philosophy has of itself and that, by contrast, he views it as being traversed by its own boundary or, to put it another way, always being united with what it is not and so, at least to some degree, divided against itself.[14] The attempt then is "to account for the complex differences in the tradition, from Plato to Husserl, from Platonism to phenomenology, from transcendent idealism to transcendental idealism, from objectivism to subjectivism, from structuralism to geneticism" (46).

Besides Ricoeur's claim that there is a theoretical core which is common to both Heidegger's and Derrida's conception of metaphor, there is the other pivotal issue of *usure* and dead metaphor which, in a complicated way, Ricoeur tends to separate from Heidegger and associate only with Derrida. As already noted, Derrida cultivates equivocation in "La mythologie blanche" and, in particular, with the term *usure*. *Usure* is brought into play in order to signify simultaneously two longstanding but opposed conceptions of metaphor. Now the charge that Derrida lays against Ricoeur is that, while Ricoeur identifies *usure* with one of these conceptions (i.e., figurative erosion, wearing away, loss, etc.), he ignores the other (i.e., semantic gain, profit, addition, etc.). It is only in this way that it is possible for Ricoeur to substitute dead metaphor for *usure* and then go on to claim that the former is Derrida's watchword (*mot d'ordre*). "This makes *usure* an easy target for Ricoeur's notions of polysemy and lexicalization. In turn, worn-out metaphor collapses into dead metaphor, which restricts metaphor, that is, living metaphor, to that of which one is aware or conscious. Ricoeur then can assert that philosophical discourse

13 "A montrer en quoi, dans ses deux prémisses les plus générales, la lecture de *La mythologie blanche* par Paul Ricoeur me paraissait, disons, trop vivement métaphorique ou métonymique, je ne voulais, bien entendu, ni polémiquer, ni étendre mes questions à une vaste systématique qui ne se limite plus à cette *Huitième Étude* de *La métaphore vive* . . ." (*RM*, 74).

14 "L'expression « longue séquence métaphysique » le marque bien, il ne s'agissait pas pour moi de tenir « *la* » métaphysique pour l'unité homogène d'un ensemble. Je n'ai jamais cru à l'existence ou à la consistance de quelque chose comme *la* métaphysique. Je le rappelle pour répondre à un autre soupçon de Ricoeur. S'il a pu m'arriver, compte tenu de telle ou telle phase [*sic*] démonstrative ou de telle contrainte contextuelle, de dire « la » métaphysique, ou « la » clôture de « la » métaphysique, (expression qui fait la cible de *La métaphore vive*), j'ai aussi très souvent, ailleurs mais aussi dans *La mythologie blanche*, avancé la proposition selon laquelle il n'y aurait jamais « la » métaphysique, la « clôture » n'étant pas ici la limite circulaire bordant un champ homogène mais une structure plus retorse, je serais tenté de dire aujourd'hui selon une autre figure: « invaginée ». La représentation d'une clôture linéaire et circulaire entourant un espace homogène, c'est justement, tel est le thème de ma plus grande insistance, une auto-représentation de la philosophie dans sa logique onto-encyclopédique" (*RM*, 72).

possesses no metaphoricity because no one notices there a contrast between semantic pertinence and impertinence" (46).

Examination and Diagnosis of Lawlor's Study in Imagination and Chance

Now that the present study's reading or meta-reading of Lawlor's readings has been accomplished, it is time to turn to the matter of his study's being a project of clarification which is also a project of simplification and even over-simplification. First of all, it should be noted that, in the Introduction, Lawlor characterizes his task as being one of *clarifying* the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur. If no attention is paid for the moment to what the following passage suggests about similarities between Derrida and Ricoeur (this point will be returned to later), it provides a good example of this characterization.

> Thus, the similarities demand a clarification, perhaps a deepening and a broadening of the difference. This book responds to that demand; it aims to make the difference as visible as possible (5).

By a "deepening and a broadening of the difference," Lawlor essentially means that Part II and Part III of his book, which deal with closely related matters and texts,[15] explain what goes unexplained in Part I. The latter, to say it again, is his reading of the three key texts and is entitled "The polemic between Ricoeur and Derrida." Part II and Part III therefore supplement and presumably complete the task of Part I which, as a relatively neutral and straightforward report, shows "where the difference can be most easily seen" (5). A little further on in the Introduction, Lawlor seems to equate "most easily seen" with *clearly* seen. He states that, although "it never brings to light the basis of the difference" (6), "the polemic establishes a clear difference between Ricoeur and Derrida . . ." (6). Yet if the basis of the difference is still in the dark, all that is really clear is that Ricoeur and Derrida have a difference in the sense of a difference of opinion or a dispute. Thus, "most easily seen" cannot properly mean clearly seen.

To see clearly the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur must be to clearly see the basis of this difference. In the Introduction, Lawlor begins this task which is the very ground or basis of bringing this basis to light. This first basis is the simple proposition which supports the rest of his clarifying project. Lawlor states it along these lines: while Derrida holds that mediacy precedes immediacy, Ricoeur holds that immediacy precedes mediacy.[16] Under mediacy fall such notions (mostly associated with Derrida) as absence, discontinuity, difference, and chance and under immediac*y* such notions (mostly associated with Ricoeur) as presence, continuity, sameness, and imagination. In turn, mediacy is primarily associated with *différance* and immediacy with *distanciation*.

It is Lawlor's contention that, because neither Derrida nor Ricoeur expressly address each

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15 Lawlor's general approach to the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur is to compare and contrast the former's *différance* and the latter's *distanciation*. Among the other works he examines are Derrida's *Dissemination* (1972 [translation: 1981]) and *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry* (1962 [translation: 1989]) and Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative, Vol. III*. (1985, [translation: 1988]) and *Interpretation Theory* (1976).

16 This proposition is repeated more succinctly in the Conclusion: "Mediation or distanciation, traces or absence, derive for Ricoeur from *immediacy* and should return to it. . . . As we know already from our reading of 'White Mythology,' for Derrida, *mediation*, space, discontinuity, and traces are prior to immediacy, time, continuity, and perception" (Italics added, *IC*, 84).

other's notion of mediation, the basis of their difference is not brought to light. Ricoeur "does not address Derrida's notion of différance; Derrida does not address Ricoeur's notion of distanciation" (6). Part of Lawlor's argument is that Ricoeur, because he misreads "La mythologie blanche," does not recognize différance in this essay or, more precisely, he does not recognize it under the various headings of *usure*, the law of supplementarity, quasi-metaphoricity, etc. The second part of his argument is that, because Derrida responds to Ricoeur only in the way of correcting the latter's misreading, he does not properly acknowledge Ricoeur's point of view and, in particular, does not recognize distanciation as the underlying notion of Ricoeur's discussion of metaphor and metaphor's relation to philosophy. At the same time, Lawlor's identifying différance and distanciation as the basis of the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur and, moreover, recognizing these two broad notions as clarifying supplements or correctives suggests that his project is in some sense more wide-ranging than Derrida's and Ricoeur's projects on metaphor.

Part II and Part III of Lawlor's book deal with Ricoeur's distanciation and Derrida's différance respectively. A number of Derrida's and Ricoeur's works are looked into by Lawlor and, as already mentioned, certain key issues such as time, imagination, absence, and discontinuity are identified with the two forms of mediation – distanciation and différance. But for the purpose of demonstrating that Lawlor's study as project of clarification is also a project of simplification and even over-simplification, it is not necessary to go into the specifics, indeed, the complications of this wide-ranging inquiry. The reason for this is that, both in the Introduction and the Conclusion, Lawlor does not simply describe his task as one of bringing the basis of the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur into the light, but rather as one of bringing a barely visible difference into the light. It must be then that this barely visible difference is Lawlor's study's raison d'etre: the intolerable obscurity surrounding the difference demands a clarification of it which, according to Lawlor, also demands "perhaps a deepening and broadening of the difference" (5). Besides its appearance and elaboration in the Introduction, this claim of a barely visible difference also serves as its sub-title: "Introduction: A Barely Visible Difference." Moreover, there is another key claim which is inseparable from this one and appears in the very first sentence of the Introduction: "It is easy to see overwhelming similarities between the works of Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida" (1). As will be shortly seen, the word "overwhelming," no less than the word "similarities," plays a determinant role in Lawlor's project of clarification.

Lawlor performs in the Introduction and the Conclusion (which is subtitled "The Difference Illuminated") two identical moves. The first move is that he lists all the similarities between Derrida and Ricoeur and the second move is that he defines and describes the barely visible difference. The only way in which the two moves of the Introduction differ from the two moves in the Conclusion is that, given the wide-ranging inquiries into distanciation and différance which take up Parts II and III, the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur is described at the end in somewhat more detail.[17] But since the additional information in the

17 In the Conclusion, Lawlor claims that "the difference can be divided into four. First, we can focus on the origin of mediation in Ricoeur and Derrida" (123). While the analysis of Ricoeur's work demonstrates that he construes the present as immediacy, "our reading of Derrida's *Introduction* [i.e., *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*] disclosed that the living present for Derrida is 'the consciousness of Difference'" (124). "Second, from the origin we can turn to the middle itself. For Ricoeur, the distanciation of meaning from the immediate event is dialectical. . . . This implies, as we saw, that the speaker's (or writer's) singular intention is simultaneously cancelled and preserved in a universal structure" (124). "Meaning for Ricoeur is content-based, continuous, imaginative,

Conclusion is a summary of the "deepening and a broadening of the difference," it does not make a significant contribution to explaining why the difference is barely visible. It follows that the two moves of the Introduction, that is, listing all similarities and defining the barely visible difference, although less detailed in some respects, should be sufficient to do what Lawlor obviously wishes to do early, namely, demonstrate that the overwhelming similarities between Derrida and Ricoeur are responsible for the difference's being barely visible. To refer once again to the short passage given earlier, Lawlor claims that these "similarities demand a clarification, perhaps a deepening and a broadening of the difference" (5).

Lawlor's whole project of clarification thus turns on the premise that not only are there a number of similarities between Derrida and Ricoeur, but that these similarities are overwhelming or, as he says in the Conclusion, that their positions are so close as to be "almost indistinguishable" (123). What is further claimed is that, due to these similarities as well as other factors,[18] the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur is so well concealed that neither of them can see it. Presumably then, these two moves by Lawlor – the listing of similarities and the describing of the difference – should themselves be clear. They should stand up to scrutiny and, even if the order of presentation is changed and, for the purpose of testing them, the similarities are not listed as they are at the very beginning of Lawlor's Introduction, that is, if they are not listed first and in one impressive block, betray no signs of confusion.

As mentioned earlier, Lawlor gives as his basic outline of the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur the idea that two forms of mediation, Derrida's différance and Ricoeur's distanciation, are in conflict with one another. To say it once again, différance is defined as the priority of mediacy in relation to immediacy and distanciation as the priority of immediacy in relation to mediacy. In turn, Lawlor uses a number of terms to describe both mediacy in the first case and immediacy in the second. Primary among these terms are *absence* and *presence*. Différance is a certain absence of which presence is but the effect and distanciation is a certain presence of which absence is but the effect. Furthermore, Lawlor claims that, while différance accounts for chance, it does not, unlike distanciation, account for productive imagination. With its emphasis on discontinuity then, différance is the hazardous dissemination of meaning.

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dialectical negativity; mediation for Derrida is formal, discontinuous, aleatory, disseminational information" (125). "Third, from the middle we can turn to the end. Because Ricoeur's starting point is belonging to, the positive expression of finitude, we saw that he is able to resist the Hegelian temptation of totalization" (126). Nevertheless it can be described as a quasi-Hegelian position which "always points to a horizon of totalization, always in the complete identity of thought and being" (126). On the other hand, Derrida "is quite explicit in 'The Double Session': dissemination does not project a horizon" (127). "Finally, we turn to the opening, the fourth, the Idea. We saw for Ricoeur that an Idea in the Kantian sense is defined by totality and openness. Although being is essentially equivocal, there is what Ricoeur calls a struggle for univocity. "Indeed, we were able to say at different points in our analysis that the Ricoeurian Idea imposes an imperative of univocity, an end is still dictated" (128). With Derrida, matters stand differently. "Because it refers literally to nothing, to no origin, to no end, the Derridean Idea points to nothing, to no end, to no one. Lacking this one (or even 'we'), the Derridean Idea – we should say Derridean Ideas – cannot be conceived as polysemy or analogy. As we saw in the *Introduction*, the imperative of univocity is displaced by one of equivocity; in "The Double Session" we saw this imperative reappear as the law of supplementarity, as the law of *plus de*" (129).

18 These other factors are Ricoeur's "hasty" reading of Derrida and Derrida's "unfair" reading of Ricoeur. "Indeed, Derridean *différance* is what Ricoeur most overlooks in his reading of 'White Mythology.' Ricoeur does not recognize that supplementarity targets the Hegelian *Aufhebung* and the Aristotelian analogical unity of being. Derrida, however, in "The *Retrait* of Metaphor" is not entirely fair to Ricoeur. Although Derrida notes 'the wealth' of *The Rule of Metaphor*, he never takes into account the basis of Ricoeur's criticism of 'White Mythology,' the intersection of poetic and speculative discourse" (*IC*, 47-48).

"Différance accounts for the unforeseeable accident and not the novel production of imagination" (2). On the other hand, distanciation with its emphasis on continuity, becomes the safe return of it to the world. "As Ricoeur points out repeatedly, because discourse originates in the world, all expressions are about or refer back to the world" (3).

If one were to stop at this point and take stock of Lawlor's account of the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur, one might very well conclude that, first, the difference in question is both epistemological and ontological and that, secondly, rather than being simply a difference, it is more like an opposition. In particular, the ranging of Derrida with absence and chance and Ricoeur with presence and productive imagination gives the impression that the former is engaged in a dialectics of the negative and the latter a dialectics of the positive. There are elements of Lawlor's account which support this oppositional characterization and other elements which do not. Taking up the first, one notices that Lawlor extends the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur all the way to philosophy or, more precisely, to how both Derrida and Ricoeur view and do philosophy. He declares repeatedly in the Introduction (4, 5, 6) as well as in the Conclusion (128, 129) that Ricoeur's project is to *revive* philosophy and Derrida's project to *pervert* it. As part of his demonstration of this philosophical agon between them, Lawlor cites a passage, shown below, from Ricoeur's *La métaphore vive*. Directly after citing this passage, Lawlor claims that there is an allusion to Derrida in it and that, furthermore, this allusion shows that "Ricoeur himself recognizes that the hermeneutical project differs from that of deconstruction" (4).

> When the philosopher fights on two fronts, against the seduction of the ineffable and against the power of "ordinary speech" . . ., in order to arrive at a "saying" . . . that would be the triumph neither of the unintelligible nor of manipulatable signs – is he not in a situation comparable to that of the thinker of Antiquity or the Middle Ages, seeking his path between the powerlessness of a discourse given over to the *dissemination* [Lawlor's emphasis] of meanings and the mastery of univocity through the logic of genera? (MV, 310/393-94) (*IC*, 4).

If one keeps in mind that Lawlor's project of clarification turns on the premise that not only is the basis of the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur well concealed, but that the difference per se is barely visible, then surely there must be elements interfering with and obscuring the above passage and other issues which render the difference all too visible. Of course, the problem then is to determine whether the obscuring elements, if there be any, are inherent to Derrida's and Ricoeur's disagreement over metaphor and its relation to philosophy or to Lawlor's account of it.

One of these obscuring elements may be Lawlor's claim that Derrida perverts philosophy. While it is true that he seems to use this word in a non-moral sense, it is also true that he never explains why he uses it. But even if this expression is taken in the relatively neutral sense of diverting philosophy from its traditional path, there is little about it which suggests that, as a feature of the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur, it is barely visible. On the other hand, when Lawlor uses another seemingly incongruous term – when he claims that Ricoeur's hermeneutics "must be seen as the recovery of the most generous instances of metaphysics" and "deconstruction must be conceived as an attempt to be more generous" because it gives "merely

for the sake of the giving" (4), it is equally difficult to see why the word *generous* is used other than to invoke a similarity between Derrida and Ricoeur where there is possibly none. To compound the difficulty, Lawlor "dramatizes" the difference between them by relating their respective projects to "singular powers which ultimately affect how we conceive ethics and politics" (5).

Finally, to focus on the obscuring element which is the most daunting of all is to focus on the overwhelming similarities which Lawlor enumerates at the very beginning of the Introduction. More precisely, it is to examine "the most striking similarity," namely, Derrida's and Ricoeur's "attempt to describe mediation, that is, the relation between two beings or the movement between an origin and an end" (1). Lawlor clearly uses the word *mediation* to signify here the essential nature of both Derrida's différance and Ricoeur's distanciation. Presumably, the difference between them is derivative of this nature in the sense of mediation's being itself a potential dividing and coming into conflict with itself.

Only three paragraphs later, however, Lawlor describes mediation quite differently. No longer the essential nature of what both unites and divides Derrida and Ricoeur and certainly no longer the most striking similarity, it is that which itself is essentially divided by différance and distanciation. More precisely, it is divided by the fact that Derrida's différance is "no longer mediation" (3). Unlike Ricoeur's distanciation, Derrida's différance is not a dialectical concept and does not "attempt to articulate mediation *in terms of its origin and its end*" (Lawlor's emphasis, 3). Rather, différance is integral with unforeseeable accident and "sends us indefinitely back and forth to rethink the origin and transform the end" (2).

If the most striking similarity in the first paragraph turns out to be, by the time of the fourth paragraph, the most striking difference between Derrida and Ricoeur, it is not likely that the other similarities, no matter how numerous, will make the difference between them barely visible. Certainly the first similarity cannot fulfill this role because all it does is point out that both philosophers are indebted to earlier ones such as Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger and share many of the same interests such as time, history, writing, and metaphor. Nor can the similarity coming after the most striking one fulfill this role because all it does is point out that they use many of the same or similar terms (e.g., writing, mimesis, traditionality, trace). Nor can the similarity which Lawlor calls the first of the three insights shared by Derrida and Ricoeur fulfill this role because all it does is point out that they both disclaim what many other philosophers disclaim, namely, that "it is absolutely impossible for thought to achieve complete self-knowledge or self-understanding by means of intuitive self-reflection" (1). The second and third insights fare no better. That both Derrida and Ricoeur claim that thought must externalize itself in signs and that mediation is a never-ending task are hardly traits which exclude all other philosophers. To say then with Lawlor that "both Derrida and Ricoeur oppose the hubris epitomized by Hegelianism: the hubris of the completed circle in which difference and alterity are mastered" (2) is not to say a great deal unless this statement itself is scrutinized by thoroughly analysing both Derrida's and Ricoeur's relation to Hegel.[19]

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19 By claiming that Derrida and Ricoeur are equally opposed to the "hubris epitomized by Hegelianism," Lawlor seems to be putting them more on the same *ethical* footing than the same epistemological one. With respect to the latter, he makes a point of distinguishing in the Conclusion between Derrida's non-teleological notion of the dissemination of meaning and Ricoeur's distanciation as dialectical movement which negates polysemy and analogy and "always points to a horizon of totalization, always in the complete identity of thought and being (*IC*,126). Of course, Ricoeur's dialectical conception of meaning which implies no closure very much appears to be what Hegel refers to as the bad infinite and what Husserl refers to as *Lebenswelt*. According to Lawlor, however, Ricoeur

1.2. Guy Bouchard's Study in *Le procès de la métaphore*

The present task is to examine Bouchard's study which is both limited and extensive. It is limited as a study of the deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur and extensive as a critique of their discourses on metaphor. For the most part, Bouchard is satisfied to provide a resume of the encounter between them which, despite its precision and thoroughness, seems to fall short of offering what is to be expected in this area. On this point, there are two considerations. First, it is Bouchard himself who calls this encounter one of the most profound debates on metaphor. Secondly, although he claims his resume to be part of his argumentation, it is difficult to see how it functions as an analysis of the debate. Perhaps there is reason to think then that, despite his emphasizing its importance in the Introduction, Bouchard overlooks it or, rather, looks through it in order to look at something else.

The number of works which Bouchard analyses and which are related in some way to Derrida's and Ricoeur's works on metaphor far exceeds the number which Lawlor analyses. On the other hand, how Bouchard relates these outside works to theirs is clearly of a different order than what Lawlor does. While Lawlor largely restricts his analysis to works by Derrida and Ricoeur which relate to différance and distanciation, Bouchard analyses a number of theoretical works dealing with metaphor. More precisely, he not only analyses Derrida's and Ricoeur's own works on metaphor, but he also analyses most of the works which Ricoeur himself analyses. Now while Bouchard largely limits this re-analysis to the second chapter of his four-chaptered book, he refers to these same works – and often at great length – throughout the nearly seventy pages of notes at the end of it.

The works which Ricoeur examines and which Bouchard reexamines represent more or less the whole tradition of philosophical, rhetorical, and linguistic study of metaphor. Ranging from Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* to Fontanier's *Les figures du discours* to contemporary works such as Group Mu's *Rhétorique générale*, they make up a large array of theories which often include a theory of metaphor as part of a larger theory of tropes and figures. In Chapter II, Bouchard examines all these theories (but, of course, mainly as theories of metaphor) in order to systematically compare and contrast them. More precisely, he introduces what he calls a metalanguage and what is essentially a number of technical terms which, according to him, can encompass, assimilate, and standardize all the technical terms already in use by the theories in question. *"Pour comparer entre elles diverses conceptions, surtout si elles proviennent d'époques et de contextes hétérogènes, il importe d'utiliser un métalangage constant qui permet leur traduction et leur intégration à une même grille d'analyse"* (75).[20] Then, following Ricoeur, Bouchard analyses these theories by dividing them into two main groups: theories of substitution and theories of interaction. But within this presumably oppositional framework, Bouchard systematically critiques a further move by Ricoeur which enlarges the difference between these

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appropriates Derrida's notion of dissemination in order to characterize the plenitude and "gift-giving" of symbols. What seems to result is that "Ricoeur's discussion of symbolic inexhaustibility does not fit neatly into the Hegelian categories of good and bad infinite" (*IC,*126). Then Lawlor goes on to speculate that both Ricoeur and Derrida share the same quasi-Hegelian position. On the other hand, he blames Ricoeur for not recognizing that Derrida's notion of "supplementarity targets the Hegelian *Aufhebung* . . ." (48). To all these crisscrossed notions must be added another one, namely, that, even on the ethical plane, Lawlor does not have Ricoeur and Derrida in solidarity insofar as Ricoeur's *revival* and Derrida's *perversion* of philosophy are value-laden terms.

20 All page numbers of cited passages in section 1.2. of the present study refer to Bouchard's *Le procès de la métaphore* unless otherwise indicated.

two kinds of theories.[21] The move in question is Ricoeur's identification of theories of substitution with theories of denomination and theories of interaction with theories of predication. Although Bouchard does not take issue with the second identification, he does with the first. He argues over many pages that theories of substitution do not imply that metaphor is, contrary to Ricoeur's position, simply a deviant act of denomination. He insists, on the contrary, that theories of substitution consistently treat metaphor as a linguistic unit or a *syntagma* – a subject and modifier – which can also be part of a deviant sentence or an act of predication. *"Nous nous contenterons d'ajouter que le cadre syntagmatique peut à l'occasion être un syntagme au sens restreint, c'est-à-dire une expression intermédiaire entre le mot isolé et l'énoncé complet"* (78).

In his Chapters III and IV, Bouchard is mainly concerned with demonstrating that, first, Ricoeur's conception of metaphor is problematic and that, secondly, it does not take into account the many roles or functions of metaphor. With respect to the second issue, Bouchard specifically targets the distance which Ricoeur puts between his conception of metaphor – metaphor as production of new meaning – and the ornamental or decorative notion of metaphor. Appealing to such authorities as Aristotle, Cicero, and Tertullian, Bouchard argues that the rhetorical tradition includes this notion of ornament and, as a consequence, is rich in its account of the possible uses or functions of metaphor. *"Suppléer aux déficiences du propre; manifester la créativité, faire interagir les idées, faire voir les choses: n'est-ce vraiment là qu'un art du colifichet? Ici encore, l'opposition tranchée entre métaphore-ornement et métaphore cognitive se révèle trop simple"* (242). As a consequence of this assessment, Bouchard holds that Ricoeur impoverishes his conception of metaphor when he opposes it to this ornamental role. Insisting that metaphor is a linguistic unit before it is a discursive event, the author places more emphasis on metaphor's being a sort of multi-purpose device – a rhetorical, aesthetic, heuristic, lexical, and phatic element – than he does on its being a large-scale semantic or cognitive operation. *"Nous pouvons maintenant répondre . . . que la métaphore est un principe omniprésent du langage"* (251).

Bouchard's critique of Ricoeur's conception of metaphor is not only focussed on what it allegedly lacks, but also on what it allegedly has in excess. In the Introduction, he implicitly finds fault with Ricoeur not only for not having a precise definition of metaphor, but also for, along with other theorists and commentators, wildly extending the conception of metaphor. *"À ce point, la tentation devient quasi irrésistible de « dénoncer » les généralisations abusives qui ont cours aujourd'hui"* (7). Identifying Ricoeur's project with what he calls the inflationary conception of metaphor, Bouchard suggests on at least one occasion that it even comes in close contact with Derrida's deconstruction. More precisely, he targets Ricoeur's *La métaphore vive* for turning all truth and reality into, if not one giant metaphor, then at least the product of a giant metaphorical activity.[22]

Bouchard critiques four important moves by Ricoeur: 1) his opposing discourse or *parole*

21 While one of Ricoeur's moves is to stress the difference between the two kinds of theories, another is to bring them together. When he brings them together, it is with the theory of interaction superior to and even inclusive of the theory of substitution. Although the following passage is only mentioned in passing by Bouchard, it goes some way to giving a better representation of Ricoeur's "tensional" position. "Il n'y a donc pas, à proprement parler, de conflit entre la théorie de la substitution (ou de l'écart) et la théorie de l'interaction; celle-ci décrit la dynamique de l'énoncé métaphorique; seule elle mérite d'être appelée une théorie *sémantique* de la métaphore. La théorie de la substitution décrit l'impact de cette dynamique sur le code lexical où elle lit un écart: ce faisant, elle offre un équivalent *sémiotique* du procès sémantique" (*MV*, 200).

to language or code and favouring the former as the site of the semantic, 2) his extending the meaning of metaphor to include larger figures of speech such as parable, allegory, fable, and myth, 3) his claiming that resemblance does not determine the metaphorical operation but rather results from it in the sense of the latter's being an imaginative or inventive perception of the world, and, finally, 4) his claiming that metaphor comes into referential contact with an extra-linguistic reality and, as a consequence, with truth, knowledge, and being.

Bouchard's critique of the above moves by Ricoeur divides into two parts. The first part – Chapters I and II – bears on Ricoeur's alleged lack of definitional rigour and his devaluation of language as system or code by exclusively identifying semantics with the sentence and discourse. The second part – Chapters III and IV – bears on Ricoeur's inflating what Bouchard calls the cognitive role of metaphor and what, in his estimation, arbitrarily excludes a number of other roles or functions traditionally assigned to metaphor. With respect to the overall layout of his book, five items should be quickly pointed out. First, Bouchard gives a lengthy resume of Derrida's and Ricoeur's texts on metaphor which takes up almost a third of his book. Secondly, the first half of this resume comes in Part I – "La définition de la métaphore" – and constitutes Chapter I. The second half comes in Part II – "Les rôles de la métaphore" – and constitutes Chapter III. Thirdly, Bouchard considers this resume to be, as already mentioned, part of his argumentation. "*Nous suivrons très attentivement les textes de chacun des deux auteurs. Voir dans cette lecture une simple passion pour le résumé en tant que tel serait oublier, de celui-ci, la fonction argumentative*" (10). Fourthly, Bouchard takes this resume to be the means by which to become familiar not only with the basic conceptions of Derrida and Ricoeur, but also with those of the many theoreticians which they themselves take up. Fifthly, Bouchard, as it seems, also considers the resume to be an opportunity to refer Ricoeur's interpretations of these many theoreticians to his extensive notes at the back of the book where they are given a second going over.

In order to give an idea of the extent of Bouchard's corrective operation, the following is a list of the theorists whose works Ricoeur examines and Bouchard only reexamines by way of critiquing Ricoeur's interpretation of them: Aristotle, Fontanier, Saussure, Black, Richards, Beardsley, Frye, Goodman, Jakobson, Ullmann, Henle, Todorov, Cohen, and Group Mu. In general, Bouchard's criticisms of Ricoeur's readings of these theorists largely amounts to demonstrating that these same readings are in some sense predetermined by Ricoeur's overall project and, as a consequence, reductive.[23]

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22 Although Bouchard only takes up this issue briefly in Chapter III, it seems to be the most extreme point of the inflationary conception of metaphor. The first part of his discussion here is in the resume of the fourth section of Ricoeur's Eighth Study. He notes that, according to Ricoeur, metaphor is the primary matter of speculative discourse which develops into the first notions and principles articulating the space of the concept. But Ricoeur's subsequent claim that metaphor does not essentially constitute this space even while being its matrix is greeted by a certain skepticism on Bouchard's part because, in a corresponding footnote to which he relays the second part of this discussion, he solicits another point of view. "La distinction [entre métaphore et concept] s'impose d'autant plus, pour Ricoeur, qu'ici encore la métaphore est traitée sur le mode inflationniste du « procès de nature métaphorique, dont on a pu dire qu'il engendre tous les champs sémantiques » (MV: 380). Ne percevant pas de différence entre la métaphore et ce procès métaphoriquement métaphorique, Gary MADISON en conclut que « one can no longer maintain that language refers to an extra-linguistic reality », puisque, « since the established categories which a new metaphor violates are themselves products of previous metaphorical discourse », « what one normally takes to be the objective referent of language is in fact the correlate of a dead metaphor! » ('Reflections on Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy of Metaphor', *Philosophy Today*, XXI (1977) 4, p. 427) . . ." (*PM*, 319).

> Je dirais plutôt que Ricoeur n'apprend rien de la très grande majorité des auteurs qu'il passe en revue. En un sens, son livre est un *inécrit*, c'est-à-dire un texte implicite qui sert de norme à l'accueil ou au rejet des théories examinées, un texte qui affleure par bribe, mais qui ne s'expose jamais lui-même de façon systématique (69).

In addition, Bouchard, examining Ricoeur's theory of metaphorical reference as it refers to Benveniste, Frege, Wittgenstein, Strawson, Jakobson, Black, Goodman, and Searle, claims that their arguments only support Ricoeur's theory insofar as the latter does not take into account all aspects of how these theorists approach the problem.

It is now time to turn to how Bouchard deals with what he calls an epistemological obstacle and raises not only in the Introduction where, to be precise, it is more described than identified, but also later on in his book. With respect to these later occurrences, it is sufficient to point out that, in the second and fourth chapters, there are short sections which deal with Derrida and which are both entitled "Reconsidération de l'obstacle épistémologique." In the first of these sections, Bouchard argues that Derrida's position is incoherent.

> Pourtant, lorsqu'on s'intéresse à « la métaphore dans le texte philosophique », il faut bien, de ce trope, reconnaître la figure. Comment Derrida peut-il y parvenir sans définir lui-même la métaphore et sans entrer du même coup dans le cercle qu'il dénonce? (73-74).

Bouchard goes on to claim that, although Derrida manipulates certain existing conceptions of metaphor, these conceptions themselves are irreducible to one another and, as a consequence, there is a certain *"absence de rigueur au nom de laquelle on rassemble, sous le nom de métaphore, « toutes les figures dites* symboliques *ou* analogique » *(MB: 255): figure, mythe, fable, allégorie"* (74-75). Furthermore, Derrida's position is, besides being incoherent, guilty of what it accuses metaphorical theory, namely, circularity in that, in order to show that the definitions of metaphor are themselves metaphorical, it is necessary to have a definition of metaphor which permits the recognition of the metaphors in the definition. Then Bouchard offers a warning:

> On notera d'ailleurs que si Derrida avait raison, l'impossibilité d'une philosophie de la métaphore ne serait qu'un fragment d'une impossibilité beaucoup plus radicale: celle de toute philosophie du langage. Car il n'est point de lieu non linguistique d'où le philosophe puisse parler du langage (75).

In the second "Reconsidération de l'obstacle épistémologique," Bouchard claims that Derrida carries over his demonstration of circularity to "Le retrait de la métaphore" in which he demonstrates the metaphysical nature of the concept of metaphor. Citing passages from both

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23 "Le rôle heuristique de la métaphore ne se réduit pas à la dénomination. Mais, dans la mesure où celle-ci en relève, il ne sert à rien de la banaliser pour mieux faire ressortir la restructuration du réel que permettent certaines métaphores. « Étant donné la complexité évidente du problème, pourquoi les philosophes exigeraient-ils qu'il y ait ici des réponses correctes uniques? »" (*PM*, 233).

Derrida's exposé and *De la grammatologie*,[24] Bouchard raises the suspicion that, like Heidegger, Derrida treats being as a *primum signatum*, a hypostatized and even apotheosized source of meaning.

> Mais l'être comme signifié transcendantal n'équivaut-il pas alors à ce « logos absolu » en vertu duquel « la face intelligible du signe reste tournée du côté du verbe et de la face de Dieu »? Onto-théo-tropisme? (217).

Bouchard then cites two examples of metaphor in Heidegger which Derrida himself examines and which, according to Bouchard, suggest that being plays *"le même rôle stratégique que Dieu [joue]"* (218). Then, turning his attention back to "La mythologie blanche" and to the *dieu-soleil* connection, Bouchard criticizes Derrida's analysis of "the sun seeds it light" metaphor.

> Mais où a-t-on jamais *lu* que les quatre termes présents soient le soleil, les rayons, l'acte de semer et la graine? Le premier terme de la proposition n'est pas le soleil, mais cet acte de lancer analogue à l'acte de semer qu'exprime en français le verbe darder. . . . Il faudrait donc en fait déclarer que le premier terme est à la fois présent et absent, présent en tant que métaphore du genre pour l'espèce, absent en tant que nom « propre » (ou plutôt: « nom courant »); et il faudrait surtout constater que même en l'absence d'un « propre », la métaphore par analogie peut fonctionner . . . (219).

Bouchard's further criticisms focus on Derrida's claim that the sun is both the paradigm of metaphor and the paradigm of the sensible. Citing at length from Aristotle, he offers opposing interpretations to Derrida's: *"le soleil « sensible » n'est pas le modèle"* of the sensible and therefore *"il est peut-être aventureux de déclarer qu'il « ne peut pas être connu dans son propre »"* (220). Drawing from Aristotle's *Topics* and *On the Heavens,* he then claims that "en un certain sens, donc, le soleil est immobile" (221).

> Son histoire est ici celle d'une immobilité en mouvement, et toute histoire qui se trame de la sorte ne peut être pensée dans la simplicité d'un mouvement de l'Orient à l'Occident. Si la philosophie ne peut dominer la métaphore, elle ne peut non plus dominer le soleil. Comment pourrait-elle, dès lors, affirmer, du soleil, qu'il « est seulement métaphorique » (MB: 300)? Par quel mouvement passe-t-on d'un « propre » (sensible) mal assigné à l'absence implicite de tout « propre », et de là à l'affirmation que le « soleil n'est jamais présent en propre dans le discours » (MB: 300)? (*PM*, 221-222).

To turn now to Bouchard's Introduction is to focus on an "epistemological obstacle" whose scope and complexity – to judge by the author's own description of it – is perhaps more daunting than what he takes to be Derrida's. *"Nous sommes à l'époque de l'euphorie*

24 Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967).

métaphorique" (4). Here he reports that the contemporary discussion of metaphor ranges in diverse ways and without any sign of abatement from one polar extreme to the other. The two principal categories of judgement in this area – the nature and value of metaphor – lend themselves to attitudes which run from outright aversion and hostility to something which verges on exaltation. Even in the fields of rhetoric, linguistics, and literary studies, interest in metaphor can fluctuate wildly over a relatively short span of time.

> De peu de discussions consacrées à la métaphore, la plupart, déplorait, en 1927, John Middleton Murry, sont superficielles. A peine un demi-siècle plus tard, la situation a considérablement évolué. Prolifération d'articles et de colloques tant nationaux qu'internationaux, note Jacques Derrida. Une production extraordinaire sur un sujet apparemment inépuisable, souligne Max Black. Et Wayne Booth suppute qu'en 2039 le nombre de personnes étudiant la métaphore dépassera la population du globe (3).

In addition to this ability either to shrink or to swell enormously in its own proper field, metaphor can migrate with ease to many other ones.

> Shibles rappelle qu'on voit en elle la méthode centrale de la science, de la poésie, de la littérature, de la philosophie, du langage, de la psychologie, de la psychiatrie, etc. Edge souligne l'accroissement récent de l'intérêt des philosophes des sciences pour les fonctions cognitives de la métaphore. D'un point de vue psychologique, Paivio exprime l'espoir que son étude puisse contribuer à une meilleure conceptualisation du mécanisme général de la compréhension. Petrie insiste sur son rôle fondamental en éducation: c'est elle, soutient-il, qui permet à l'étudiant d'apprendre quelque chose de radicalemement nouveau, quelque chose qui ne s'insère pas dans ses cadres conceptuels mais les modifie. Quant à Tracy, il relève l'importance de la métaphore pour l'étude du phénomène religieux, car chaque religion majeure se fonde sur certaines métaphores radicales (4).

By the facility with which it traverses so many fields and diverse interests, metaphor no longer remains an essentially linguistic phenomenon and ends up with such an extended meaning that it can signify both empirical objects such as models, maps, and diagrams and transcendental ones such as thoughts, dreams, and visions. *"Au-delà, le mot métaphore est employé non seulement en un sens vaporeux, mais, semble-t-il , sans la moindre nécessité théorique"* (7).

Given the above state of affairs, it is small wonder that, even before he is halfway through his description, Bouchard raises a doubt as to whether he himself should address the subject. Almost in the same breath, however, he announces that he has two reasons for wading into this contentious area.

> Deux raisons, pourtant, nous incitent à reprendre l'ensemble de la problématique d'un point de vue philosophique. La première est liée à la persistance de certains problèmes. . . . La deuxième raison qui nous incite

> à reprendre l'ensemble de la problématique, c'est l'intérêt particulier que la métaphore présente pour le discours philosophique. (4-5, 7).

These two reasons are spread out over six pages and split off into other motivations, considerations, etc. With respect to the first reason, it is worthwhile to note that the vast problem which Bouchard has just described and will soon describe even in more detail suddenly becomes reduced to *"la persistance de certains problèmes"* (4). Briefly outlining these problems, Bouchard moves from one which seems to be of a purely technical nature – "*d'où vient le changement d'extension du terme métaphorique?*" (5) – to one which is undoubtedly of much larger scope and which he characterizes as the current inflation of the cognitive role of metaphor. *"Cette inflation, surtout si elle déborde le domaine du langage, s'apparente à l'autophagie."* (5). He then describes this inflation as being, first, the practise of taking the meaning of metaphor beyond the bounds of language and, secondly, the excessive interest in the subject of metaphor which threatens to reduce it to insignificance. *"L'intérêt démesuré que suscite aujourd'hui la métaphore ne peut-il mener qu'à son insignifiance?"* (5). Thus it is that, before he has given his second reason for venturing into this domain, Bouchard makes two important moves. First, he identifies the problem of metaphor with the inflationary conception of metaphor and, in turn, with the cognitive role of metaphor. Secondly, he denounces this problem as one which is not inherent to metaphor itself but of many theorists' or non-theorists' own making.

His second reason for plunging into this widespread problem is, to say it again, the particular interest which metaphor presents for philosophical discourse. In conjunction with this, Bouchard unleashes a second wave of difficulties in the form of ideas and evaluations which roughly divide philosophers between those who take metaphor to be a threat to truth and knowledge (e.g., Locke, Hobbes, Quine) and those who take it to be at the very core of language-creation, concept-formation, and philosophy itself. Notwithstanding this vast problem of metaphor, Bouchard's first philosophically-oriented response to it repeats the tactical move of his first reason or set of reasons which may be characterized as a considerable narrowing down of matters:

> Le travail de chaque philosophe, commente Wayne Booth, consiste ainsi en l'élaboration critique, implicite ou explicite, de l'inadéquation des métaphores de tous ces collègues. Dans le quatrième chapitre, il nous faudra situer ce rôle philosophique de la métaphore dans un contexte qui le préserve sans pour autant occulter les autres fonctions de celle-ci (9).

His second reason for taking up the problem of metaphor then is that, viewed as being a problem which is attributable to the inflationary conception of metaphor which in turn is the result of recognizing only the philosophical role of metaphor, it can be resolved by giving this role its due in Chapter IV. His next philosophically-oriented response to the problem of metaphor is to announce that, by looking at, as was mentioned earlier, an area or issue which he seems to think important by calling it *"l'un des débats les plus profonds"* (9), he will be dealing with two major problems which he claims are also Derrida's and Ricoeur's problems: "*celui de la définition de la métaphore et celui de son rôle dans le discours (philosophique)"* (10).

But even before he has finished explaining why he chooses to look at this debate, it very much appears that the plan or procedure in question rests on three presuppositions. The first

presupposition is that the problem of defining metaphor and the problem of the role of metaphor are ones which can be treated separately. The second presupposition is that Derrida and Ricoeur either treat them separately or else make no claims which are contrary to this separation. Finally, the third presupposition is that the two separated problems equal the vast problem of metaphor which Bouchard has sketched out in the Introduction.

Bouchard's third philosophically-oriented response to the problem of metaphor (which is also part of his second reason for taking up this highly dispersed subject) is to underline the importance and utility of Ricoeur's *La métaphore vive*. Not only does this book survey the tradition as a whole and not only does it bring together the Anglo-American and Continental schools, but it also takes in the most important contemporary theories. According to Bouchard, *"*La métaphore vive *nous fournira donc l'occasion et de repenser l'ensemble (relatif) des théories de la métaphore, et d'approfondir la portée philosophique de celle-ci"* (10). On the other hand, he not only claims that, first, Derrida erects an epistemological obstacle which must be removed and, secondly, that Ricoeur's conception of metaphor is one-sided and must be corrected, but that the latter reaffirms "*une compréhension foncièrement traditionnelle de la philosophie, de la littérature et de l'interprétation . . .*" (10).[25] In other words, Bouchard will deal with the problem of metaphor by looking at a debate which, if his assessment of Ricoeur's end of it is valid, does not appear to be representative of all the ramifications of this problem. After all, it is metaphor as *contemporary* problem which Bouchard describes and lays particular stress on in the Introduction. More precisely, what he describes is the inflationary conception of metaphor in the way of this trope's wandering all about and becoming something of an inter-disciplinary virus or interloper.

At the very end of his Introduction, Bouchard turns once again to the problem of definition. But instead of relating this problem to the Derrida-Ricoeur debate which, for better or worse, represents for him the contemporary problem of metaphor, he cites a passage from an article by Wayne Booth. In this passage Booth declares that "we seem to have a kind of common-sense agreement about a fairly narrow definition, one that survives even while our theory expands the original concept beyond recognition" (11). Bouchard then announces that his project is precisely the one of coming up with this narrow definition. But with the Derrida-Ricoeur debate now on hold and with his impromptu glance at the opinions of two other theorists (i.e., Booth and Khatchadourian), Bouchard never fully explains the relationship between his "narrow" project of defining metaphor and his "wide" project of looking at the Derrida-Ricoeur debate. The result is that, at the very end of the Introduction, he must make an extended plea for the first project rather than demonstrating its necessity.

> C'est cette définition minimale que nous espérons reconstruire même si la possibilité d'une telle entreprise a été contestée. Khatchadourian, par exemple, déclare que la plupart des théories présupposent que toutes les métaphores ont une nature commune exprimable par une description unique, alors que cela serait faux. Booth lui-même affirme qu'il n'y a pas

25 In order to show that Bouchard's assessment of Ricoeur as a dyed-in-the-wool traditionalist might itself be one-sided, the present study takes the liberty of delving back to a much earlier Ricoeurian writing, "Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales" (*Histoire et vérité* [Paris: Seuil, 1964,] 286-300). "Une culture meurt dès qu'elle n'est plus renouvelée, recréé; il faut que se lève un écrivain, un penseur, un sage, un spirituel pour relancer la culture et la risquer à nouveau, dans une aventure et un risque total. La création échappe à toute prévision, à toute planification, à toute décision d'un parti ou d'un état" (297).

> de réponse unique à la question de savoir ce qu'est la métaphore . . . (11).

Once again, Bouchard points to an epistemological obstacle but, instead of demonstrating how it should be taken up into an examination of the debate, he attempts to dismiss it with three short questions.

> Mais l'hypothèse d'une définition unique n'est-elle pas valable jusqu'à preuve du contraire, et s'en priver d'emblée n'équivaudrait-il pas à s'empêcher de la trouver ou de la construire? (11-12).

The presupposition of this question is that hypotheses, whether they are good or bad, widely accepted or not, count as some sort of evidence. But if in fact hypotheses of the above kind already exist and constitute the vast problem of metaphor, then it can just as easily be claimed that they count as evidence in favour of Booth's and Khatchadourian's position.

> Que l'ensemble des choses baptisées métaphores ne soient pas compatibles entres elles, cela ne résulte-t-il pas de l'inflation du terme et ne doit-il pas inciter le théoricien à produire une théorie cohérente qui éliminerait les emplois abusifs? (12).

The presupposition of Bouchard's second question is that the problem of defining metaphor is separate from the problem of determining its nature. But if a narrow definition of metaphor is sought for its own sake, then the definition itself will be determining the nature of metaphor and whatever coherence is gained will be at the expense of the resulting theory's missing its object.

> La définition proposée serait alors normative, mais depuis quand le travail théorique doit-il obtenir l'assentiment de tous? (12).

Bouchard's third question presupposes that the vast problem of metaphor is not already made up of countless normative definitions. Furthermore, it would seem that, if the definition were to be truly up to the task of solving the problem of metaphor, it must obtain a consensus or near consensus.

With these three questions now out of the way, Bouchard is ready to begin his resume and what turns out to be his largely separate treatment of Derrida and Ricoeur. But he does so without having removed the epistemological obstacle represented by Booth and Khatchadourian and which, to say it again, is not properly assimilated to what is supposed to be one of the pivotal areas of investigation, the debate between Derrida and Ricoeur. Therefore he only sidesteps this obstacle with his three questions.

1.3. S. H. Clark's Study in *Paul Ricoeur*

Unlike Bouchard, S. H. Clark does not call the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur a profound debate but rather he calls it Ricoeur's confrontation with Derrida. His account of it is limited to the sixth section of his book which is divided into seven sections. This sixth section is entitled "The Rule of Metaphor" and contains the account in an eleven-page sub-section,

"Deconstruction and Metaphor." Both these sections form part of what Clark calls, in describing his book as a whole, his "compact and accessible summary of the major developments of [Ricoeur's] thought – existentialism, symbolism and mythology, psycho-analysis, text theory, metaphor, and narrative . . ." (10).[26] In his Introduction, he announces that he will "examine how these interact with and clarify the current preoccupations of literary theory" (10).

In contrast to the above statement of purpose which emphasizes Ricoeur's thought for its own sake, more than half of Clark's Introduction is taken up with a description of Ricoeur's long struggle with *other* currents of thought. As representatives of a conception of language to which Ricoeur is opposed, Clark quickly names Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida. Characterizing them as deniers of reference and the speaking, intending agent, he also claims that they are "a subversive response [which] remains conditioned by and to a large degree dependent on a series of restricted and unstated premises derived from structuralism" (5). He calls Ricoeur himself a post-structuralist but with the crucial difference that, although Ricoeur acknowledges structuralism's insights and has even incorporated them into his own hermeneutic philosophy, he strongly censures this discipline for treating language per se as an autonomous field.

Clark then goes on in his Introduction to give a brief but wide-ranging account of deconstruction as both general movement and Derridean project. Examining a passage which comes from the work of an American exponent of deconstruction, Jonathan Culler,[27] Clark notes that there is "a symptomatic progression from the 'interest' in 'accurate discrimination' to a 'discernment' opposed to any kind of ethical or political commitment . . ." (6). Almost immediately after, he gives credit to deconstruction for "validating the application of sophisticated rhetorical exegesis to texts previously consigned to other domains, and conversely exposing literary works to greater conceptual scrutiny" (6). Then, shortly after, he links his own objections and critique to Ricoeur's attitude to deconstruction and states that it is necessary to "stress the disproportionate influence in Derrida's work of what Ricoeur calls 'vengefulness'" (7). But only a couple of sentences later, he returns to a more positive note and makes the following comment: "Yet when reinserted into the context of critical philosophy, Derrida represents not rupture and abolition but vigorous renewal" (7).

Along with numerous remarks of a similar nature, the above comments indicate that Clark views Ricoeur's project as being, on the one hand, the appropriation or at least domestication of deconstruction and, on the other hand, the refutation or even outright repudiation of it. With respect to the former, Clark, paying a lengthy tribute to Ricoeur in the Introduction, observes that Ricoeur investigates a large number of contemporary discourses both in and outside philosophy and, furthermore, in a way which is a "respectful, almost grateful assimilation of criticism: there is nothing in his work remotely comparable to Derrida's altercation with Searle" (4). Secondly, there is also in the Introduction a brief outline of Ricoeur's career where Clark mentions his book *De l'interprétation: Essai sur Freud.*[28] In the fourth section, "Freud and Philosophy," Clark examines this book at length. On the first page of this section, he describes Ricoeur's hermeneutic task in a way which, although referring only to Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, is not without relevance to Ricoeur's relationship to Derrida.

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26 All page numbers of cited passages in section 1.3. of the present study refer to S. H. Clark's *Paul Ricoeur* unless otherwise indicated.

27 Johnathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

28 Paul Ricoeur*, De l'interprétation: Essai sur Freud* (Paris: Seuil, 1965).

> The process of doubt is two-way: philosophy must seek to preserve it own realm of jurisdiction and privilege of situating alternative modes of thought, but in turn it must risk itself, expect to be transformed in the encounter with its challengers. This dialectic is not restricted specifically to psychoanalysis: Freud joins forces with Marx and Nietzsche to found the modern hermeneutics of suspicion, of freedom through disbelief, through demystification. Though the sphere of validity of the psychoanalytic critique may at times appear quite sharply restricted, the ideal of critique itself is accorded an immense and unwavering respect (57).

A similar passage comes at the end of the Introduction and in a way which not only links Derrida to the hermeneutics of suspicion, but links the hermeneutics of suspicion (albeit in a vastly different way) to Ricoeur's project. There is an assimilation of the first to the second which resembles the Hegelian dialectic of conservation and elevation *(Aufhebung*).

> It is worth stressing that Ricoeur's work has relevance not merely where it directly treats such issues as symbol, metaphor, and narrative, but also where its often highly technical discussions illuminate the conceptual heritage that lies behind much post-structuralist thinking. In the course of this book, for example, such major Derridean themes as the status of the trace, the alienation of the text, the centring [*sic*] of structure, and the latent power of concealed metaphor will be discussed in detail. Furthermore, if as de Man is prepared to concede 'however negative it may sound, deconstruction implies the possibility of rebuilding' (1983: 140; compare Derrida, 1973: 159), Ricoeur's persistent engagement with the full force of the hermeneutics of suspicion provides impressive testimony . . . (12)[29]

While it is true that Clark repeatedly commends Ricoeur for being tolerant, respectful, and non-antagonistic towards the discourses which are part of or close to philosophy, it is also true that he is not averse to Ricoeur's having a showdown with certain of these discourses. The first indications of this second line of Clark's attitude or assessment are admittedly faint but come very early in the Introduction.

> Ricoeur never picks a fight. One of the most impressive traits of his work is his respectful, almost grateful assimilation of criticism: there is nothing in his work remotely comparable to Derrida's altercation with Searle. At times we may lament the absence of 'blistering refutations', but these would run counter to the values that Ricoeur's whole intellectual enterprise seeks to promote: humility, mutual respect, the truth of charity.

29 A strikingly similar theme is to be found in Patrick Bourgeois' *Philosophy at the Boundary of Reason: Ethics and Modernity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001). On a few occasions (xiv, xvii, 11, 153), Bourgeois speaks quite disparagingly of Derrida's deconstructive project or deconstruction in general and, at the same time, he allows room for its making a positive contribution if received through the filter of a radical Ricoeurian critique (xvi).

> But the force of his quiet implicit retorts to his more vociferous contemporaries should not be underestimated (4).

After going on to mention the major objections which Ricoeur raises against Saussurian linguistics in particular and structuralism in general, Clark makes some further comments which seem to contradict his statement that Ricoeur never picks a fight.

> [Ricoeur's dense thought] seems to invite the reader into new domains of thought with a kind of weighty transparence; but then at a certain level of familiarity one realizes that this very transparence is combative, a position staked on disputed terrain. There is no backing away from the necessarily conflictual nature of interpretation: and Ricoeur, we should remember, has held his own in uncompromising, at times vitriolic, debate with the major figures of the post-war period: Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, Lacan, Derrida, Habermas. His reading against the grain is as dexterous and as audacious a conceptual enterprise as anything in Derrida (11).

With respect to Ricoeur's confrontation with Derrida over metaphor or, more properly, with respect to all the implications of this confrontation, Clark offers some revealing comments much later on in his book. They come at the very beginning and the very end of the sub-section, "Deconstruction and Metaphor." First, he characterizes this confrontation in rather dramatic terms by stating that "what is at stake is the claim of reflective philosophy to retain its traditional prerogative as governing metadiscourse" (137). In order to assert and reenforce this claim, Ricoeur's project must go beyond being simply a theory of metaphor. "The proper understanding of metaphor involves something like a complete overhaul of philosophy; but one that philosophy itself must carry out" (137).

"It is difficult not to see this as a classic illustration of the policing of boundaries: 'vigilance' inevitably appears a repressive and repressed quality" (138). But Clark does not dwell on this point and, after giving a summary of the first two sections of the Eighth Study of *La métaphore vive* – sections which come before Ricoeur's confrontation with Derrida and deal with Aristotle's and Aquinas's analogical conception of being – he offers a comment, first, on an unusual display of humour by Ricoeur and, secondly, on the latter's overall response to deconstruction.

> A rare joke – 'Ah, the sun! Oh the fire! The heliotrope cannot be far away' (*RM*: 278) – signals an imminent confrontation with deconstruction for which this detour through ancient and medieval philosophy has been mere preparation. It has also been an exemplary reappropriation of a cultural heritage in contrast to 'the convenience, which has become a laziness of thinking, of lumping the whole of Western thought together under a single word, metaphysics' (*RM*: 311) (*PR*,139).

Finally, at the end of this sub-section, Clark not only links Ricoeur's confrontation with Derrida

to philosophy's traditional quarrel with rhetoric, but he also links the end of Ricoeur's book to its very beginning.[30]

> The relatively unproblematic account of rhetoric as 'philosophy's oldest enemy and oldest ally' offered in the opening chapter [i.e., the First Study] has now become overt confrontation. The 'claim to truth' of philosophic discourse excludes it from the 'sphere of power', where eloquence holds sway: 'before becoming futile, rhetoric was dangerous' (*RM*: 10) . . . 'Reflective mastery and clarification are closely related" (*RM*: 84) (*PR*,147).

To turn attention now to Clark's formal or specific account of Ricoeur's confrontation with Derrida (i.e., the subsection, "Deconstruction and Metaphor") is, first of all, to note that it goes beyond a simple summary or report. Clark not only reproduces Ricoeur's critique of Derrida's essay, "La mythologie blanche," but he also endorses it. Although there are numerous indications of his favouring Ricoeur over Derrida throughout his book and particularly in the Introduction and particularly in the form of numerous ethico-rhetorical statements, the most direct backing comes when Clark argues on behalf of Ricoeur in the latter's confrontation with Derrida. This is to say that he both recognizes to some extent Derrida's response to Ricoeur in "Le retrait de la métaphore" and takes on the responsibility of refuting it. But in order to clarify the status of this refutation, there are four points which should be considered. First, Ricoeur himself does not refute or comment on this response in any of his later writings.[31] Secondly, Clark's recognition of it is highly abbreviated and dispersed throughout his account of Ricoeur's confrontation with Derrida. Thirdly, Derrida's exposé, "Le retrait de la métaphore," is nowhere identified by Clark (except by publication year and by indirect reference to the Bibliography) as being the source of the response in question.[32] Fourthly, the passages taken from "Le retrait de la métaphore" are not dealt with separately but rather linked to passages from "White Mythology"

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30 In the First Study of *La métaphore vive*, "Entre rhétorique et poétique: Aristote," Ricoeur supplies a brief description of the often troubled relations between philosophy and rhetoric.

> Avant donc la taxinomie des figures, il y eut la grande rhétorique d'Aristote; mais avant celle-ci, il y eut l'usage sauvage de la parole et l'ambition de capter par le moyen d'une technique spéciale sa puissance dangereuse. La rhétorique d'Aristote est déjà une discipline domestiquée, solidement suturée à la philosophie par la théorie de l'argumentation dont la rhétorique à son déclin s'est amputée (*MV*, 14).

31 The only later critique of Derrida which Ricoeur seems to undertake is in *Temps et récit.* It concerns Derrida's analysis of Husserl's "living present". Clark briefly discusses it in the third part of the second section, "Deferral or Eschatology."

32 These references are further obscured by being in error on occasion. For example, in the following passage Clark, although taking three "sound-bites" from "Le retrait de la métaphore," provides two different references. While the second is correct, the first is not. "Derrida later defends himself by insisting that to talk of metaphor requires a metaphorical idiom: 'elle (la métaphore) continuerait à se passer de moi pour me faire parler, me ventriloquer . . . je ne peux en traiter sans traiter avec elle' (1979: 105) [*sic*]. His argument is not an 'affirmation' but 'un mode...déconstructif' of working out the implication of this tradition; certainly not a 'perversité manipulatrice' (1978b: 109) . . ." (*PR*, 143). Although this obscuring of reference may be a simple error (although it happens twice), the fact that Clark shows little concern about the order in which he presents his highly abbreviated quotations is more suspect.

and "Limited Inc."[33]

The fact that Clark refutes Derrida's response to Ricoeur's critique only by reproducing it in a way which sharply delimits it is contrary to the values of respect and solicitude which the author esteems so highly in Ricoeur. Unlike Ricoeur's treatment of "La mythologie blanche" in *La métaphore vive*, Clark neither offers a resume of "Le retrait de la métaphore" nor does he cite a single passage from it which goes beyond a sentence or two. In fact, on three of the five occasions when he refers to Derrida's exposé,[34] he is content either with citing a mere phrase or sentence from it or simply commenting on it as part of a parenthetical remark. Moreover, each citation or remark only comes after other commentary of a decidedly hostile nature.

> This is the point that de Man made against Derrida on Rousseau [vis-a-vis Derrida's book, *De la grammatologie*], that he presented himself as merely the latest in a 'massive tradition' of corrective commentaries, 'always accompanied by an overtone of intellectual and moral superiority' (1983: 112, 122). There is an implicit self-righteousness, an absence of the requisite 'solicitude' (1983: 101). (Derrida's subsequent vigorous denial that his work presents the metaphysical as 'l'unité homogène d'un ensemble' (1978b: 110) underestimates the specific strengths of his own arguments . . .) (139-140).

Of course, the vigorous denial in the above passage refers to Derrida's response to Ricoeur's critique which takes up about six of the thirty pages of "Le retrait de la métaphore." Clark's second reference, again resorting to parenthesizing a short citation from Derrida, comes in the following passage.

> The charge of collusion [by Ricoeur] results from treating metaphor at the level of word rather than the level of sentence. He attaches to the 'opposition between the figurative and the proper a meaning that is itself metaphysical, one that a more precise semantics dispels' (*RM*: 290). Derrida later denies that he has paid insufficient attention to this distinction ('ni davantage propre, littéral ou usuel, notions que je ne confonds pas' (1978b: 104), but there is no acknowledgement of the semantic level of metaphor anywhere in the essay (146).

Finally, there is the parenthesizing of a disparaging reference to Derrida's exposé in the

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33 Jacques Derrida, "Limited Inc abc," *Glyph 2*, 1977, 162-254.

34 Besides the reference to Derrida's exposé in footnote 32 on the preceding page, there is a fifth one which is the most substantial of all. It deals with Derrida's objection to Ricoeur's assimilating his position on metaphor to Heidegger's.

> Derrida vigorously protests against this "geste d'assimilation ou au moins de dérivation," claiming to have demonstrated "une réserve nette et sans équivoque" towards his predecessor (1979: 109) [*sic*]. The sole evidence offered for this, however, is "la place et la portée" of a single footnote (n. 29: 1982: 226) quoting the key passage on the sensible and invisible from Heidegger's *Der Satz vom Grund*. No serious argument is offered about the overall tradition in which Ricoeur situates his work (*PR*, 144).

following passage.

> Derrida [in "La mythologie blanche] quotes the relevant passages from Hegel's *Philosophy of Fine Arts* in full (1982: 225); deferentially, one might say derivatively. Certainly it appears to be offered in order to ground and justify his more adventurous textual forays: as Ricoeur says, he 'bases his work on' it (*RM*, 286). (Derrida takes particular exception to this term (*appuyer*), to the point of angrily inserting a rebuttal in the middle of a quotation (1978b: 112)) (*PR*, 141-142).

It might be objected that Derrida's "angrily inserting a rebuttal in the middle of a quotation" is, along with Clark's other references to an exposé largely kept out sight, far from being a fair representation of Derrida's response to Ricoeur. But even if this issue of Clark's unfairness to Derrida is ignored and Ricoeur's arguments alone are looked to as proof against Derrida's deconstructive project, there still remains the problem of how to determine that Ricoeur's reading of "La mythologie blanche" – a reading, of course, on which Ricoeur's very own arguments are based – is accurate. It is precisely this reading which Derrida challenges in "Le retrait de la métaphore" and, given that Clark ultimately pays very little attention to it, there is a need for some other way of gauging Ricoeur's reading of "La mythologie blanche." It is to this end, it seems, that Clark cites a long passage from Ricoeur's Eighth Study which he calls "an admirably lucid summary of an extremely elusive text" (142). By referring to "La mythologie blanche" in this way, Clark is obviously not paying Derrida a compliment because a little later on he characterizes Derrida's writing in general as obfuscating, decadent, and obscurantist. "The famous style, far from being some kind of liberating breakthrough, derives from the most decadent and obscurantist aspects of the late Heidegger . . ." (143). At the same time, he claims that Ricoeur paraphrases Derrida's text successfully and, as a consequence, is able to pin down his argument and refute him. "The very act of paraphrase is crucial. Once pinned down and pegged out, Derrida can be argued with, and refuted" (142). But Clark's way of explaining matters, namely, that, on the one hand, there is an extremely elusive, even obfuscating text and, on the other hand, an argument which can be clearly drawn from it and pegged down, still leaves unanswered the question of how this feat is accomplished.[35]

In his account of Ricoeur's confrontation with Derrida, Clark relies overwhelmingly on Ricoeur's reading of "La mythologie blanche" in order to contribute his own critique and assessment. But the only reason for following Ricoeur so closely in this respect is that he recognizes the latter to be trustworthy and Derrida not. Among the many positive assessments of Ricoeur and negative assessments of Derrida in the Introduction, there are the following:

> Ricoeur does not simply announce a commitment to openness. His is a rationality genuinely inclusive, kinetic, in constant internal evolution: the Socratic inheritance in its most positive form. Intellectual positions are never either finally formulated or completely abandoned: they are there

35 The problem seems to be this: if Derrida's text is truly obfuscating, decadent, and obscurantist, then very little, if anything, can or should be said about it. If not, then Ricoeur is in need of clear criteria by which to isolate and identify its argument or thesis. But if such criteria are lacking, then what he extracts from it remains largely a matter of interpretation. Since no criteria are in fact forthcoming, Clark should at least be cautious and not be so quick to treat Ricoeur's paraphrase of "La mythologie blanche"as an irrefutable piece of evidence.

> to be reoccupied, reargued. . . . And in this continuous self-criticism Ricoeur's thought is more genuinely exploratory than many apparently more radical interventions (4-5).
>
> I would stress the disproportionate influence in Derrida's work of what Ricoeur calls 'vengefulness' (*RM*: 295). A theory of intertextual dependence that demands intimate cohabitation with past writings combines with ostentatious gestures of severance, a stylistic scorched-earth policy. If he cannot be the subject of his own discourse, he'll still have the trickiest text in town: a baroque, apocalyptic prose seasoned with a mincing self-righteousness (7).

Of course, by using Ricoeur's trustworthiness and Derrida's untrustworthiness (which, if not absolutely stated, are heavily implied) as the basis of his approach to Ricoeur's confrontation with Derrida, Clark cannot very well claim that his account of this confrontation itself demonstrates, first of all, that a moral imbalance or inequality exists between them, and, secondly, that there is good reason to trust Ricoeur's critique of Derrida and not to trust Derrida's response to this critique. It must be a judgement based on prior impressions and/or received opinion. But whether it is one or the other or both together, it falls short of the espoused standards of scholarship in which Clark no doubt wishes to keep faith.[36]

1.4. Giuseppe Stellardi's Study in *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor: Imperfect Thought*

Giuseppe Stellardi's study strives hard not to be a project of clarification or at least not one in any conventional sense. Taken broadly, it is the study of Heidegger and Derrida on philosophy and metaphor. Taken narrowly, it is the study of the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur. Taken in the widest sense, it is the study of philosophy, metaphor, and the relationship between them. Carrying out this widest study with less than the usual amount of scholarly precision is justified right at the outset.

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36 "Faith" versus "unbelief" seems to be a sort of Hegelian opposition which Clark views as being operative in Ricoeur's work. In the Introduction, he follows his discussion of Ricoeur's battle with Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida (and, on a more general level, with structuralism and deconstruction) with a tentative evaluation of the former's intellectual contribution.

> Thought is a "task" that must acknowledge its own situation of fall, exile, and alienation, and direct itself towards "reconstruction." But the prefix is misleading. The excavation through the "sedimented" levels of the concept does not allow the "re"-discovery of original wisdom. Meaning emerges not through nostalgic regression, but in the space opened by the commitment to the "act" of interpretation. And this is arguably the crucial issue in his work. Is the positive side of the dialectic essentially sacramental, a vindication of hierophany, a warning against "forgetting the signs of the Sacred, losing hold of man himself, as belonging to the Sacred" (*Le conflit des interprétations*, 288); or does Ricoeur succeed in utilizing all the resources of post-modernist scepticism in order to promote a new beginning, a "second naïveté" on the far side of the "hermeneutics of suspicion"? (*PR*, 8).

> This contact, this obscure copulation [i.e., between philosophy and metaphor] which constitutes the primary stake and wager of this study, is not approachable in a direct manner, through a straight determination reflecting itself – if such a determination were possible – in its very title, and directing, by means of a rational method, the journey inaugurated by it. Hence the extreme (conjunctive and suspensive) generality of the title under which this work announces itself, which is meant to signal, more than the inordinate ambition of its author, the amplitude and implications of a question which, such as I attempt to shelter and face here, only preserves its sense at the cost of resisting any reduction and fragmentation, and also of renouncing any too strong preliminary methodic, decision. The price to be paid for this fidelity to the question, however, will include a large measure of incompleteness, approximation, and imprecision: imperfect thoughts, these of mine shall be (15-16).[37]

Due to the vastness and complexity of the field, Stellardi adopts a free, open, and mobile type of analysis. His method is to continually oscillate between the two poles of philosophy and metaphor and, as a sort of parallel movement, take up provisional positions which are mainly his definitions of metaphor and philosophy. Claiming that this mobility, this "rigour that is not rigidity" (18) is necessary in order to free his analysis from pre-existing conceptions of philosophy and metaphor, he sets out not so much to find answers to large-scale questions as to keep open a radical line of questioning.

From the beginning to the end of his book, Stellardi follows a path which takes – or at least seems to take – metaphor beyond a metaphysical conception of it. At its most basic level, this conception is the philosophical, speculative, theoretical, rhetorical mastery of metaphor. For example, he states that "the recognition of a fundamental complicity between metaphor and philosophy translates directly into the undecidability of priorities and hierarchies, and perhaps even into the impossibility of *founding* philosophy as an autonomous discourse" (Stellardi's emphasis, 46). On the other hand, a close examination of Stellardi's book will reveal that neither Chapter One nor his final chapter, Chapter Four, primarily adopt an extra-metaphysical stance. While the first, "Of Metaphor,"is largely devoted to providing a definition which is also a description and theory of metaphor, the second, "Of Philosophy," is largely devoted to providing a definition, description, and theory of philosophy. Now, insofar as defining metaphor is out of keeping with an extra-metaphysical conception of it and, insofar as Stellardi's qualifying his definition as provisional does not prevent him from using it in the later part of his book (i.e., Chapter Three), Chapter One is devoted to a metaphysical conception of metaphor. And insofar as defining philosophy is out of keeping with an extra-metaphysical conception of it, Chapter Four is devoted to a metaphysical conception of philosophy.

Chapter Three, "Metaphors that Hurt," is Stellardi's analysis of not only Heidegger on metaphor, but metaphor *in* Heidegger. Largely critical in its orientation, it belies the title of Stellardi's book which suggests that Heidegger's views on philosophy and metaphor and the relationship between them are at least as important as Derrida's. In fact, Heidegger is far from being treated by Stellardi as an authority and what really counts for him is that Heidegger's

37 All page numbers of cited passages in section 1.4. of the present study refer to Stellardi's *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor: Imperfect Thought* unless otherwise indicated.

writings, considered to be philosophical by him only in the broadest sense, prove to be a sort of textual field which can be explored "to see if and how a discursive machine functions . . ., perhaps even (partially) in a way that is unknown to its author" (128).[38] Stellardi's Chapter Two, "Derrida: The Catastrophe of Metaphor," is the analysis of "the debate between Derrida and Ricoeur on metaphor and philosophy" which "still best represents and synthesizes a cluster of problems that contemporary theory has definitely not been able to dispose of" (67). Similar to Lawlor's and Bouchard's way of proceeding, Stellardi begins with "La mythologie blanche," follows with the Eighth Study of *La métaphore vive*, and ends with "Le retrait de la métaphore." But before embarking on these readings, he makes it clear that Derrida counts for him much more than Ricoeur.

> . . . Derrida's contribution still represents the unsurpassed edge of what our epoch has been able to produce as truly radical reflection on the enormously intricate problem that goes under the working title "metaphor

38 Chapter Three takes Stellardi from the Ricoeur-Derrida debate (Chapter Two) to philosophy as ongoing but "self-destructive" supertheory (Chapter Four). He begins his analysis of Heidegger on metaphor and, more particularly, metaphor *in* Heidegger "with the intention of developing it in a more open and personal way" (127). He then follows by listing the obstacles and difficulties which confront him. "To say that we are more *in* than *before* this text means therefore that we are partly lost, partly impotent, in this relationship" (129). Notwithstanding what seems to be an untenable position for an analyst, Stellardi sets out to question the internal coherence of Heidegger's text. Agreeing with Ricoeur's assessment of Heidegger's condemnation of metaphor, Stellardi sees the latter equating it with metaphysics, with representational thought, and with language "as an instrument for the establishment of the total interdependence that permits the exploitation of Being"(131). But despite his hostility to metaphor, "Heidegger's text is overrun by metaphor. It does not control it: expelled, metaphor comes back . . ." (133). Declaring that textual facts here are obviously at odds with authorial intention, Stellardi goes on to supply an operative notion of metaphor by which to analyse Heidegger's *Unterwegs zur Sprache*. Then, distinguishing between an "ordinary" context which is philosophical language and an "extraordinary" context which is language per se, Stellardi equates Heidegger's metaphors with a leap towards the "unspeakable" of the extraordinary context which is, once again, the essence of language. Of course the risk is that Heidegger's text "begins to wander, to lose itself more and more – in vagueness, poetry, mysticism, analogy, tautology, contradiction, the unspeakable" (140). In addition, it is caught in a dilemma because it is neither able to transform itself into poetry nor shake off metaphor as the lingering sign of metaphysics and representational thought. "The philosopher (Heidegger's reader, in the first instance) suffers thus from the *presence* of metaphor! . . . It's not metaphor's suffering, its indefinite waiting, that bothers the philosopher, but the faux pas or the bad faith of a text that, mixing genres and losing control (or pretending to lose control, perhaps not without premeditation and gain, somewhere, one suspects) allows itself to be invaded by dangerous plants and inebriating flowers, and cannot manage to destroy them, in spite of its stated (but unconvincing) desire to do so" (143). Further on in his analysis, Stellardi goes on a different tack when he describes "the structure and function of Heidegger's metaphor" (148). Now it is no longer an unwanted and out of control element but a specially designed tool which Heidegger employs. "Heidegger rejects metaphor as the instrument of representation. He uses it, nevertheless, but only as 'open' metaphor . . ." (149). This use, highly complex and ambiguous, coincides with a certain kind of thought which "wants to find again the marvel of its origins, which was generated by the happening of being" (152). Stellardi then gives a detailed account of the rhetorical structure of "Die Sprache" in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*. The last few sections of Chapter Three are devoted to the following: metaphor and suffering ("But true thought must suffer the threshold [between poetry and technique]") (160), the hypothesis that true poetry is without metaphor and "presents a world" (162), language as difference, analogic trait, and the relationship between them ("From another point of view, since it cannot be founded, [the trait] is 'co-originary' with difference and comes before any possibility of 'seeing' any difference, any analogy within language and in the world") (166), the relationship between poetry (nomination) and philosophy (metaphor), Heidegger's use of poetry as sacred text, and, finally, Heidegger's "work of thought which is not, cannot, and does not want to be poetry, [and] can only suffer, to an extent, not from its renunciation, but also from its incapacity to enunciate itself in a more luminous and accomplished manner") (182).

> and philosophy," or "metaphor and concept." His contribution thus remains not only "interesting," but also strictly speaking, unavoidable, at least until a complete remodeling of the philosophical field in which it was generated becomes possible (67).

In addition to the analysis of "La mythologie blanche" and "Le retrait de la métaphore," Chapter Two is devoted to a further discussion of Derrida and, in particular, his notions of undecidability, différance, and dissemination.

Besides the exorbitant sway which Derrida's point of view has over it, Stellardi's analysis is noteworthy for the reason that it undergoes a stylistic shift when he moves from Derrida's "La mythologie blanche" to Ricoeur's Eighth Study. While the former is examined in a very general way and with the text kept virtually out of sight, the latter is given a standard resume which reproduces Ricoeur's arguments and explicit point of view. Holding that Ricoeur argues for philosophy's essential separation from and control over metaphor, Stellardi stresses that Ricoeur confronts Derrida as one who poses a threat to philosophy. But while he points this out and seems to consider it important, he is far from making it an integral part of his analysis. Although he agrees with Derrida's purportedly generalizing metaphor to the point that it permeates all language and, a fortiori, all philosophy, ("[i]nstigating the generalization of metaphorical power, allowing its proliferation, accepting the effects thereof" [76]), his ultimate conclusion is that Ricoeur's fears are unfounded. "For both, the thin line separating poetry from philosophy is to be preserved" (101). But this conclusion is not arrived at on the basis of an examination of Ricoeur's arguments per se, but on the basis of Derrida's response to them in "Le retrait de la métaphore."

But Stellardi goes beyond Lawlor, Bouchard, and of course Clark in his look at the exposé, "Le retrait de la métaphore." If one discounts the fact that this exposé is only thirty pages long while both "La mythologie blanche" and the Eighth Study are well over twice as long, it weighs in as the most challenging piece of writing. Along with giving a response to Ricoeur's critique of "La mythologie blanche," Derrida undertakes a lengthy analysis of both Heidegger on metaphor and – what is most significant here – *quasi-metaphor* in Heidegger. Neither literal or proper nor figurative or metaphorical, quasi-metaphor is, insofar as it can be determined or located in a text such as Heidegger's, the always provisional signifier of neither the transcendental nor the empirical, but the condition of the possibility of both. To speak of quasi-metaphor then is not to speak of metaphor per se and it is certainly not to speak of the generalization of metaphor except in a qualified sense. Contrary to the rest of his book where Stellardi repeatedly refers to this generalization without any qualification whatsoever and affirms it both in his own name and Derrida's, his analysis or, more properly, his resume of "Le retrait de la métaphore"is, for the most part, precise. It is also happens to be the part of his book where he most clearly relies on paraphrase and citation.[39]

Before moving on to what he calls a deeper study of Derrida in the second part of Chapter

39 To the degree that Stellardi shows later on that he either chooses to ignore or has not grasped the thrust of Derrida's analysis of Heidegger, it must be presumed that his resume of "Le retrait de la métaphore" is not much more than a technical success. Nothing could be less doubtful than that Derrida is providing an explanation for the apparent discrepancy between Heidegger's denunciation of the concept of metaphor and his abundant use of what *seem* to be metaphors. By contrast, Stellardi, with a few rare exceptions, continually refers (and of course in a critical way) to Heidegger's metaphors as metaphors in the traditional sense and does not bother to explain why he departs from Derrida.

Two, ("I will pursue and deepen the examination of Derrida's 'machine'. . ." [105]), Stellardi devotes a half-dozen pages to analysing the difference between Derrida and Ricoeur. Entitled "Some Questions," this short subsection is a mixture of suppositions and relatively strong claims. It begins with the declaration that "the difference between Ricoeur and Derrida is not clear-cut: It sometimes seems insignificant and sometimes enormous" (99). Concentrating first on the "insignificant" end of the difference between them, he speculates that their thought is deeply united in "a questioning, a radical self-interrogation of philosophy in the quest for its own statute, for its own place (to be found or maintained), with one final step: the confirmation of its own privilege" (99). He then goes on to suggest that Derrida, no less than Ricoeur and despite the fact that the former poses a threat to philosophy, still wants it to be a view of the totality, a metadiscourse, a "master discourse in the theoretical space" (100). He then points out that Derrida's response to Ricoeur in "Le retrait de la métaphore" is relatively mild and that "most of Ricoeur's criticisms against him are not due to a real disagreement, but to a defective and therefore unsustainable reading of his texts . . ." (101). Stellardi also finds Derrida and Ricoeur to be in essential agreement on the nature and operation of philosophical metaphor. "For Ricoeur the so-called philosophical metaphors are no longer metaphors. . . . For Derrida, too, philosophical metaphors are not common metaphors" (101). And "for both, the thin line separating poetry from philosophy is to be preserved" (101). Then, suddenly reversing his direction, Stellardi adds: "But the apparent proximity becomes an insuperable distance when Derrida explains that the step beyond metaphor can only be a total generalization of metaphor . . ." (101). As might be expected, Ricoeur "rejects the idea that metaphysics is in a metaphoric relation vis-a-vis Being . . ." (102). Furthermore, Ricoeur "rejects all hermeticisms and despair of language and denies the possibility, the necessity, and the opportunity of a rupture with the tradition of speculative philosophy" (102). It is only Derrida who "puts thought (even if only by supposition) in danger of losing itself . . ." (103). On the other hand, Ricoeur's philosophy "never risks its own point of foundation, because 'speculative discourse has its necessity in itself, in putting the resources of conceptual articulation to work'"(103). Stellardi then asks a series of questions about "the sense and extent of the 'risk' that deconstruction is prepared to accept" (103). But he cuts short this line of inquiry by declaring that "these questions will not find a definitive answer here" (103).[40]

Given all the above and much else in Stellardi's book which is complicated and even over-complicated, it could very well be asked: how is it to be considered a project of clarification? Before dealing with the point – significant but not of first importance – that Stellardi himself identifies it as a project of clarification, there is another point which should be considered. Without denying that his book is difficult and complex, it is possible to think that, if it is also obscure, its obscurity results less from its complicating matters than from its conflating them. The most outstanding example of Stellardi's conflating and thereby obscuring matters is his free-wheeling use of the term metaphor. Not only does metaphor signify the definition or description of metaphor which he himself provides in Chapter One,[41] but it also signifies much which falls in the neighbourhood of Derrida's, Heidegger's, and Ricoeur's discussions of

40 This move of suggesting or raising a question or even a number of questions in order to shortly dismiss them (or else to defer answering them) is made several times throughout Stellardi's book. Examples can be found on pages 22, 46, 70, 73, 78, 89, 103, 106, 116, 214, 239, 247.

41 The short version of his definition is: "*Metaphor* is a meaning-effect generated by way of interaction between two contexts with reference to a text. A *meaning-effec*t is a commotion of the order of discourse, produced by a successful effort of reabsorption of an irregularity, measured on the basis of previous expectations" (*HD*, 51).

metaphor. In the case of Derrida, Stellardi's unregulated use of this term obscures the fact that there is less a concept of metaphor in Derrida than a disruption of this concept. A crucial point of which Stellardi must be aware but nonetheless overlooks is that Derrida does not begin "La mythologie blanche" by asking a question of quiddity, but rather by asking a question which can never be properly answered, namely, *"[Y] a t-il de la métaphore dans le texte philosophique?"* (*MB*, 249).

In the case of Heidegger, Stellardi bases his Chapter Three analysis of *Unterwegs zur Sprache* on the above-mentioned definition and description of metaphor in Chapter One. "Towards a Description of Metaphor" is a subsection of Chapter One which is also part of a larger section called "Beyond the Traditional Model." By offering a presumably non-traditional definition and description of metaphor, Stellardi suggests that he is also offering a theory of metaphor which, in spite of or even on account of its provisional nature, is adequate in dealing with both Derrida and Heidegger on metaphor.[42] The difficulty is that, in his apparent haste to provide this theory (it is the work of about a dozen pages), Stellardi never explains why it should be entrusted to take on the task of explaining a mode of thought which itself calls into question all metaphorical theory. Moreover, to label his own theory provisional does not render its explanatory function more legible or understandable unless it and all else, including Derrida and Heidegger, were destined to be taken up into another theory, a super-theory which itself would be irreproachable.

But, as to be expected, no *Aufhebung* of the provisional theory is forthcoming. On the contrary, when the author puts his theory of metaphor to work at the beginning of Chapter Three (which is also where he begins his analysis of Heidegger), it is with the proviso that "this sort of analysis remains inevitably insufficient and secondary in the elaboration of a question that does not tolerate too strong a framing for its initial position, even less a definitive limitation of its scope" (134). Now while it is no doubt true that Stellardi's analysis bases itself on "the elaboration of a question" or even on simply raising or posing a number of questions, it is also true that most of these questions result from his particular way of looking for provisional answers. But if he uses his theory of metaphor which he admits to be inadequate in order to raise questions about philosophy and metaphor and, furthermore, if he also uses it to supply provisional answers on the basis of which these further questions are raised, then surely these questions will not be any more adequate or reliable – any more philosophically worthy or valuable – than the answers from which they spring.

Despite his evident concern for questioning in philosophy, and despite his raising many questions throughout his book, Stellardi never asks himself what would be *for him* the most radical question, namely, what is the value of all these questions which his own theory, proclaimed inadequate, is largely responsible for? To put it another way, the difficulty which Stellardi circumvents only by keeping it a blind spot in his text is that there is little reason to think that the above-mentioned questions are reliable or adequate in dealing with the subject of Heidegger and Derrida on philosophy and metaphor. There is little reason to think so because there is little reason to think that they are *better* questions than the ones which Heidegger and Derrida ask themselves and pose to philosophy and philosophers in general.

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42 "Ideally, the task would be . . . to compare current theories of metaphor and, finally, to select, extrapolate, or build an operational one for the purposes of this study" (38). Immediately before his "ideal" prospectus, the author states that he will "have to disavow [it] consistently, together with its guarantees and promises, in order not to repudiate the most pressing reasons for the inquiry itself" (37).

In order to illustrate the unreliability and imprecision of these questions, it will be sufficient to look at, along with Stellardi's resume of "Le retrait de la métaphore" in Chapter Two, the beginning of Chapter Three. This chapter's first section, "Position of the Problem and Initial Questions," runs only to a few pages and yet it is the forum for laying down a general approach to analysing Heidegger's text. What is most striking about this section is that, although Stellardi begins with some preliminary propositions which strongly affirm the intractability of Heidegger's text, he nonetheless proceeds to other propositions which, despite their being somewhat equivocal, broadly announce Heidegger's rejection of metaphor. "In Heidegger's text there is metaphor. This trivial statement . . . does not go without saying. It is, for instance, explicitly belied with much force by Heidegger himself, when he insistently sets out to discredit metaphor, and precisely in circumstances where the presence of metaphor . . . seems to be indubitable" (130). What makes this second affirmation particularly troublesome in light of the first one, namely, the one stressing the intractability of Heidegger's text is that it falls short of the level of precision which Derrida's own analysis brings to this area and which should provide a standard for Stellardi, or, more precisely, it falls short with respect to the question of the ostensible contradiction between Heidegger's negative remarks about metaphor and his use of language which is not literal, proper, or univocal. Stellardi's analysis of Heidegger is not only out of keeping then with his allegiance to Derrida, but also it does not agree with Derrida's analysis of Heidegger's text as Stellardi himself reproduces it. In Chapter Two, instead of any mention of Heidegger's "repression," "rejection," "condemnation," "abandonment," and so on of metaphor, there is only mention of his reserve in talking about metaphor and his "apparently univocal, simplifying, and reductive denunciation of the 'metaphysical' *concept* of metaphor . . ." (Italics added, 93). As Derrida's analysis goes on to attest, Heidegger's battle is not with metaphor per se, but with a possible construal of his text as being metaphorical in the metaphysical or Platonic sense, that is, in the sense of its being a transfer of meaning and reference from the sensible or empirical realm to the intelligible or transcendental realm.[43]

As already mentioned, Derrida's analysis is reproduced in Chapter Two without a critique by Stellardi. Whereas this analysis demonstrates that Heidegger's text is neither metaphorical nor literal, Stellardi's own analysis in Chapter Three begins with the claim that Heidegger's text is full of metaphors. The precise status of this claim is not easy to determine right away because, after posing "two separate sets of questions"[44] – questions which are set

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43 The care which should be taken in looking into the apparent discrepancy between what Heidegger says about metaphor and how he uses it is evidenced by Derrida in the following passage:

> La métaphoricité du texte de Heidegger déborderait ce qu'il dit thématiquement, sur le mode de la dénonciation simplificatrice, du concept dit « métaphysique » de la métaphore (Greisch, p. 441 et suiv., Ricoeur, p. 359). Je souscrirais assez volontiers à cette affirmation. Reste pourtant à déterminer le sens et la nécessité qui lient entre elles cette dénonciation apparemment univoque, simplifiante et réductrice du concept « métaphysique » de métaphore et d'autre part la puissance apparemment métaphorique d'un texte dont l'auteur ne veut plus qu'on comprenne comme « métaphorique », justement, ni même sous aucun concept de la métalinguistique ou de la rhétorique, ce qui s'y passe et prétend s'y passer de la métaphore (*RM*, 78).

44 "We ought then to distinguish between declarations of intent and textual facts, and ask two separate sets of questions: (1) How does Heidegger see metaphor, how does he see his own 'usage' of language, and why does he reject metaphor? (2) How does metaphor function in Heidegger's text, and how does language work there, irrespective of all the author's explicit statements and of his inferable positions?" (*HD*, 133).

down to guide his analysis and which assume that Heidegger's text is full of metaphors – he asks a further question which does not assume this and which in fact requires his theory of metaphor to set everything on course.

> Is it possible to prove that Heidegger's text is filled with metaphors? In order to do so, would it suffice to define metaphor and check whether an object corresponding to such a definition is present in the text, in which form, in which proportion, and with which effects on the text itself? An attempt of this kind (which I shall undertake) could yield some interesting results. However, this sort of analysis remains inevitably insufficient and secondary in the elaboration of a question that does not tolerate too strong a framing for its initial position, even less a definitive limitation of its scope (133-134).

Immediately following the above passage is an extremely brief section (two pages) which is Chapter Two's second section, "Delimiting the Field." It begins with the following announcement: "Once again, I shall draw the essential traits of the provisional definition of metaphor, which I gave in Chapter 1" (134). The definition which Stellardi thereupon provides and which, like his "two separate sets of questions," is meant to guide his analysis, is partly semantic and partly psychological. Metaphor is described as a linguistic occurrence which brings about an interaction or exchange between two different contexts or sets of associations, significations, references, etc. Some new coherence or coordination is thereby generated which is also the production of a new comprehension on the part of the reader. Taking this definition straight to Heidegger's text, Stellardi of course has no problem demonstrating that it is full of metaphors and answering – with of course always additional questions – the "two separate sets of questions" which already presuppose that Heidegger's text is metaphorical. But, just as in the case of Bouchard's efforts in *Le procès de la métaphore*, Stellardi cannot avoid having a definition which determines the nature of metaphor in Heidegger rather than a definition which is determined on the basis of isolating and identifying metaphor. Moreover, his calling this definition provisional and thereby implying that his whole analysis is subject to revision is of no help if, while always mistrusting his answers in order to sanctify his questioning, his own questions go without the sanction of the very thought which would call them into question.

Before moving on to the final stage of diagnosing Stellardi's study as a project of clarification which is also a project of simplification and even over-simplification, the equivocal status which it bequeaths to Ricoeur's work needs to be examined. Despite acknowledging a debt to Ricoeur which he does not precisely identify and despite the possibility (soon to be commented on) that his own theory of metaphor is derived from Ricoeur's, there are some points which are quite clear. First among them is the fact that, apart from Derrida's "La mythologie blanche" and "Le retrait de la métaphore" and Heidegger's *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, no work has anywhere near the amount of attention lavished on it as does the Eighth Study. Setting his resume of it between his resumes of Derrida's "La mythologie blanche" and "Le retrait de la métaphore," Stellardi devotes almost as many pages (thirteen) to the Eighth Study as to Derrida's "La mythologie blanche" and "Le retrait de la métaphore" (sixteen). Calling *La métaphore vive* an "excellent work" (78), Stellardi nonetheless sets aside only four paragraphs in order to review Ricoeur's book from the First Study to the Seventh Study. Now these seven studies amount to

more than three hundred pages of critical and corrective analysis of ancient, modern, and contemporary theories of metaphor. Furthermore, Ricoeur takes metaphorical theory over these pages from the level of the noun or word to the level of the sentence and then finally to the level of poetic discourse and its dialectical relation to speculative discourse. At the end of his review of both Ricoeur's and Derrida's writings on metaphor, Stellardi, despite condemning Ricoeur for holding the traditional notion that philosophy is not metaphorical but only conceptual, still finds his theory of metaphor to be a contribution.

> Simplifying once again, I should say that from Ricoeur's side almost nothing has changed with reference to the traditional philosophical point of view on this matter [i.e., on the matter of philosophy's preserving itself rather than "risking" itself]. It is certainly true that the strict metaphysical theory of metaphor is refuted and a very interesting and rich reworking is carried through in order to produce a more adequate and comprehensive theory of metaphor (103-104).

The fact that Stellardi finds Ricoeur's theory to be better than most or perhaps all other theories of metaphor and, at the same time, does not take it into account or at least does not refer to it when he provides his own theory is one of those questions which the author should perhaps raise about his own work. Just as he, by focussing on the Eighth Study, ignores how Ricoeur develops his theory of metaphor from the First to the Seventh Study, so does he provide his provisional theory in Chapter One without explaining why it should be considered more reliable than Ricoeur's or, for that matter, other contemporary theories. On the other hand, Stellardi's theory bears a striking resemblance to Ricoeur's in that the latter also describes metaphor as an interaction or exchange between two contexts. First of all, there is interaction between what is called, not only by Ricoeur but by other interactive theorists and, in particular, Max Black, the metaphorical sentence or frame and the metaphorical word or focus. Secondly, there is interaction between what Ricoeur, vastly extending the theory of metaphor, calls the first order level of reference to the world (*descriptive*) and the second order level of reference to it (*redescriptive*). While Stellardi touches on these points (but without mentioning the interactive theory) in his resume of the Eighth Study, he does not bring them up as references when he sketches out his own theory of metaphor.

By theorizing about philosophy and, as he does in Chapter Four, philosophy's relation to other discourses such as scientific, poetic, ordinary, etc., Stellardi occupies himself with the largest of subjects. On some occasions, he claims that this undertaking is unjustifiable and that truth is not at issue because it is impossible to attain. On at least one other occasion, however, he claims that he has a moral duty to tell the truth about philosophy and metaphor.[45] Similarly, just as he occupies himself with raising questions throughout his book, so he also summarily dismisses these questions or defers answering them. That he esteems Ricoeur as a theoretician and an eminent representative of philosophy's traditional view of itself goes hand in hand with the fact that he under-represents Ricoeur's theory of metaphor and overrules the latter's position

45 "On the contrary, what imperatively moves the investigation at every stage, and even beyond the horizon and the interest of philosophy as discourse and as institution, is a moral duty to search for 'the truth.' The duty is itself unjustifiable and, I believe, purely philosophical, though free from any disciplinary affiliation (including to philosophy)" (*HD*, 33).

with a parti pris,[46] namely, Derrida's metaphorization of philosophy. Highly sympathetic to and supportive of deconstruction, his own work is not a project of deconstruction, but rather a project of theorization. More precisely, it is a project in which deconstruction is theorized to the point that, in a move reminiscent of both Hegel's *Aufhebung* and Husserl's *Lebenswelt*, Stellardi speculates on the "death" of deconstruction and its ongoing movement in an endless super-theory.

> I shall once again abandon this question [i.e., the question of whether philosophy controls theory] and instead suggest another, less terroristic one: Would it be possible to put together a supertheory capable of unifying and explaining the different metaphorical operations produced by the different theoretical movements and systematisations . . . ? A supertheory of theory? A model capable of encompassing all theoretic possibilities? The question is less idle than it may seem. Deconstruction, more than a specific theory, in is my opinion a dynamic element in the path leading toward (but not nearly approaching, and for essential reasons) such a supertheory of all the possible theoretical effects. The path is not simply long: It is in fact endless. The old (and almost empty) name for such a supertheory would be, once again, as it has always been, philosophy (247-248).

Unlike Derrida who, in analysing a philosophical discourse, be it Hegel's, Husserl's, or Heidegger's, monitors its virtually perfect control to the point that it inevitably, and in spite of itself, loses control, Stellardi makes innumerable gestures of loss of control while focussing on the point of gaining control. If such were not the case, it would be impossible for him to undertake (or even to think of undertaking) what he announces in his Introduction, namely, a project of clarifying philosophy.

> The ultimate (and certainly remote) aim of this study is therefore, without doubt, the clarification of the status, structure, and legitimacy of philosophical discourse, and its delimitation in relation to neighbouring ones. From this point of view, at least in a preliminary phase, metaphor will function as a point of departure and a touchstone: Its presence – and possibly its specific difference from other types of metaphor – within the philosophical text, and more specifically in some texts of Heidegger and Derrida, might tell us something relevant concerning philosophy itself (32).

From a provisional definition, description, and theory of metaphor in Chapter One, Stellardi follows a winding path of analysis – his "series of oscillations" (17) – to a provisional definition, description, and theory of philosophy in Chapter Four. Philosophy is described as the discourse which, unlike science, is concerned only with non-verifiable truth, with what,

46 "I should actually add that although there is here a 'philosophical *parti pris*' in the way I question the link between metaphor and philosophy, no decision has been made in advance that philosophy 'must be saved'" (*HD*, 17).

according to Stellardi, is the "strong" meaning of truth. "'Strong' meaning: affirmation and creation of truth. Proposition of that which is de jure or de facto, temporarily or permanently, undemonstrably true, auto-proclamation of what must be true" (211). The author speculates that this "strong" truth is "strictly linked to the ethical impulse" (213) and "corresponds, probably, to what Aristotle understood under the heading of rhetoric . . ." (214). As the bearer of this "strong" truth, philosophy interacts with other discourses and mainly occupies itself with finding its unique and indispensable place among them. It fills, via metaphor, "the spaces of movement and articulation of sense that more traditional procedures of control, having been in part expelled or dismantled, are no longer able to manage" (234). But by this account it may be seen that, just as Stellardi views metaphor at the heart of philosophy and yet presumably outside its control, so he views it, while still at the heart of philosophy, presumably in the latter's control or else exerting a control which is indistinguishable from philosophy's self-control. While the first certainly is a non-traditional philosophical but not necessarily rhetorical view of the relationship between philosophy and metaphor, the second view – the one which is Stellardi's own theory – is not far away from Aristotle.[47] Furthermore, while the first is the theme which runs rather wildly throughout Stellardi's book, the second is the thesis which structures and orders it.

No doubt the first thematic of Stellardi's book is meant to complicate or even outflank the second, but the second is also meant to control and contain the first. At the same time, by conflating Derrida on metaphor with metaphor in general, deconstruction in general, and even philosophy in general, Stellardi handles roughly – indeed, caricatures at times[48] – what must, in

47 Discussing Aristotle on metaphor in "La mythologie blanche," Derrida notes:

> La métaphore, effet de *mimesis* et d'*homoiosis*, manifestation de l'analogie, sera donc un moyen de connaissance. Subordonné mais certain. On peut dire d'elle ce qu'on dit de la poésie: elle est plus philosophique et plus sérieuse (*philosophôteron kai spoudaioteron*) que l'histoire (*Poétique*, 1451 b), puisqu'elle ne raconte pas seulement le particulier mais dit le général, le vraisemblable et le nécessaire. Elle n'est pourtant pas aussi sérieuse que la philosophie elle-même et elle conservera ce statut intermédiaire, semble-t-il, à travers toute l'histoire de la philosophie. Statut ancillaire plutôt: bien ordonnée, la métaphore doit travailler au service de la vérité, mais le maître ne peut s'en contenter et doit lui préférer le discours de la vérité pleine (*MB*, 283-284).

48 Despite placing great emphasis on the fact that his definitions of metaphor and philosophy are only provisional, Stellardi consistently makes sweeping statements which belie his commitment to proceed with a certain amount of "epistemological" reserve and caution. For example, in Chapter Four he states: "In the functioning of the philosophical mode of discourse, the role of metaphor is not secondary. In a sense, we can say that metaphor is the essential instrument of philosophy, which confirms Heidegger's ideas" (*HD*, 232). Of course, Heidegger's ideas are, along with philosophy and metaphor, one of those areas which the author continually declares to be ambiguous and uncertain. Nevertheless, it would be unfair not to take this opportunity to mention that, even when pressed around from all sides by what is confusing, repetitive, and oftentimes banal, exploratory and insightful elements do present themselves. For example, in his analysis in Chapter Four of the different "dispositions of philosophy," Stellardi compares structuralism and deconstruction in a way which does not occult the mutual implication of the ethical and the epistemological in philosophical discourse.

> In this respect (and, by the way, all this has to do with *respect*; that is, the relation with a given order of priorities, the acceptance or rejection of a state of things) structuralism belongs to the tradition that (through both idealism and empiricism) strives to regulate the relation between subject and object that is called *theory*, and links it inextricably to the metaphorical field of *vision.* For example, (and, once again, simplifying in the extreme), we could say that from the structuralist point of view the literary object (like any other object) may initially be positioned outside the field of

order to be meaningful as the articulation of the extremely elusive and systematically elided slippage of meaning in philosophy, have the most delicate treatment of all. Falling short here, falling away from Derrida's text and leaving it behind too quickly, it is inevitable that Stellardi also falls away from the traditional efficiency and mastery of philosophy.

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vision of the reader/subject, but can in principle always be included in the theoretical field through operations of the mind aimed at the discovery and production of structures. This setup or disposition is never really questioned; nevertheless, it constitutes the foundation not only of structuralism, but also of that necessary part of structuralism that is at work everywhere in criticism and in theory, even beyond the recognizable legal borders of structuralism itself.

Deconstruction questions any given opposition, it even questions the very position from which only theory is possible (for instance, the position of the subject as external to the object): the "old name" of this position is philosophy. It can therefore be argued that deconstruction sees the theoretic relationship (that is, philosophy) as a problem in itself, as the first and most important problem of theory (*HD*, 240-241).

Chapter II

Derrida's Commitment to Tell the Truth about Metaphor as *Indirect* Encounter with Ricoeur's Project[1]

The present study must take a short detour through itself with all the risk this entails before it can properly take up the analysis of the deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur. Although it was stated in the Introduction that it cannot say what it is all at once, it was also stated or at least suggested that it is committed to saying something *differently* about itself. Concerned as it is with truth-telling and its complication and even over-complication, it cannot avoid examining its own truth-telling. Setting itself apart from the four studies examined in Chapter I as projects of clarification which are also projects of simplification and even-oversimplification, it must itself be a project of *obfuscation* (if this term can be somewhat reformed or refined) which is also a project of complication and even over-complication. But to say that it sets itself apart is already misleading because there is not an opposition between projects of obfuscation and projects of clarification but rather a profoundly ramifying difference. Just as the latter are dedicated to being comprehensive and therefore complex or complicated in their striving for ultimate clarity (even though this striving for clarity is itself founded upon some simplification), so the former are dedicated to being clear in their obscurity or, to put it less paradoxically, in their striving for greater comprehensiveness.

The first question may very well be then: what is the nature of the present study insofar as it is possible for it to catch sight of itself and insofar as it is distinguishable from the object of its study or at least one of these objects, namely, the deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur? Perhaps what should first be mentioned is that, even though it is a common enough practise, the present study does not wish to identify itself with an authorial "I." Because this "I" can easily become an additional question or problem in the context of complication and even over-complication, such a move would place an insufferable burden on the present study which, for the sake of convenience, shall from now on call itself PS. To keep this "I" out of sight then is a simplifying move but one which cannot reduce the object of study insofar as the latter, as complication and over-complication, is irreducible. On the other hand, insofar as the object of study is the deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur, this simplifying move keeps it from being driven offstage by the problematic of the "I."

The second important consideration is that, as already suggested in the Introduction, PS is closer to Derrida's project than Ricoeur's. A number of additional considerations follow from this which, if the worst sort of confusion is to be avoided, are equally important to bring out and register. Given the context of over-complication, to say "worst sort of confusion" may be suspect. In truth, this notion cannot be entirely registered at the epistemological or theoretical level, but also must be registered at the ethical or practical level. This is to say that what is to be avoided as the worst sort of confusion refers to PS's own commitment to truth-telling and, more particularly, to the fact that truth-telling always runs the risk of inducing a miscarriage of itself, of delivering a fatal blow to what it anticipates in the way of conveying itself to others and in the

1 Throughout the present study, the word "project," insofar as it refers to Derrida's and Ricoeur's works, refers only to the former's "La mythologie blanche" and "Le retrait de la métaphore" and the latter's *La métaphore vive*. Although its signification could be extended to encompass their works as a whole, a matching ethico-epistemological analysis would not only be over-complicated *in extremis*, but unbearably long and repetitive. (Perhaps this is how some view Derrida's lifework.)

way of garnering a certain amount of interest and attention. It is therefore incumbent upon PS to make such points as the following as clear as possible: that, although it is more indebted to Derrida's project than to Ricoeur's, this indebtedness is not meant to operate as the basis on which to repudiate Ricoeur's project or to assimilate it to Derrida's except in a qualified sense. A certain amount of assimilation of one to the other is unavoidable (and, for that matter, a certain amount of repudiation) because PS's commitment to truth-telling is, like Derrida's, a project of complication and even over-complication, a project of "ultimate" comprehensiveness and obfuscation.

A further consideration which comes from taking seriously the fact that PS lines up with Derrida's project is that it is inevitably a parti pris. While in most contexts of philosophical truth-telling such a situation would be intolerable or equivalent to bad faith, it is not possible in the present context to think that a commitment to truth-telling could be other than a parti pris. Philosophy itself as project of clarification which is also, as it is been often called, metaphysics has its presuppositions not simply in place as reasons or arguments but also has them *kept* in place – guarded and protected – as tradition, institution, ideal, order, control, and so on. At the same time, the commitment to philosophical truth-telling which admits that it is a parti pris can never be – or, at least, *should* never be – simply a licencing of itself, a dismissal of any attempt to find justification for itself, or, on the other side of the ledger, a non-resistance to itself, an unwillingness to call itself into question.

Out of this last point springs another one, namely, that PS suffers from its own internal dilemma which is the justifying of itself while calling itself into question. Part of its justification as the complication and even over-complication of truth-telling can only come precisely from this calling itself into question but, on the other hand, the latter cannot escape being, in any final accounting, something of an empty gesture or else a highly circumscribed move. For example, if it is stated that PS's meta-reading of Lawlor's reading in Chapter I likely inflects these readings such that the threat which Derrida's project poses to Ricoeur's is highlighted, there is perhaps here the raising of a doubt about the case PS is making for a deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur but, on the other hand, not one which can do away with the conviction that no interpretation is possible without some sort of inflection.

The same sort of limited move or gesture is at work if PS takes another example such as its reading of Stellardi's study. Describing it as a project of clarification is somewhat risky since it bears signs of being a complication and even over-complication of truth-telling. For one thing, this study makes a fairly consistent effort to catch sight of itself as project which must necessarily fall short, which is more concerned with raising questions and providing provisional answers than arriving at some definite conclusion. In addition, it reveals a certain ethical side to itself, a certain performative side to its truth-telling, a certain setting of itself apart from philosophy's customary self-assuredness and systematisation. Consideration of these matters is no doubt threatening to PS's distinction between clarification and obfuscation and it seems that, at least in this context, the former is being collapsed into the latter. Indeed, there is much in Stellardi's project which is confusing or conflated and, if the word *obfuscate* is taken in the usual sense of obscuring matters unnecessarily, then perhaps, despite whatever merits it may have, this project is more deserving of being called obfuscating than Derrida's.

Without reproducing the arguments in favour of viewing Stellardi's project as an attempt to clarify the whole of philosophy even while obscuring it, it must be admitted that, for the very reason that it is invested with these contrary aims or intentions, it is not so far removed from PS.

On the other hand, Stellardi does not catch sight of this internal conflict or division or at least does not thematise it. In this way, it is still very much in line with the norms of philosophical truth-telling. Ricoeur, as will be seen in Chapters III and IV, is particularly concerned about intention (and, more precisely, the *form* of intention) in philosophical or speculative discourse and, although he allows for background intentions, gives no indication that he thinks that they should be thematised or at least thematised as the performative side of truth-telling inseparable from the constative side. The simplifying or reducing of philosophical intention is a major concern of PS, not only with respect to analysing Ricoeur's project, but also Derrida's.

PS's dilemma of being committed both to justifying and not justifying itself may also be expressed as the imperative of analysis which, in the present context, is to resist as much as possible being polemical and tilting at Ricoeur. The fact that this polemic is irreducibly built into the analysis should not be held against it or at least should not be separated from another fact, namely, that, from the point of view of the analysis itself, the polemical stretches all the way down to presuppositions. Given this state of affairs, the only way to offset the deeply polemical nature of PS is to make Ricoeur appear more favourable and Derrida less favourable that might otherwise be the case. But with respect to Derrida, there is the problem that, while PS must begin its analysis with "La mythologie blanche," it is "Le retrait de la métaphore" which lends itself most easily to an examination of the play or conflict of philosophical intentions. Although in all instances the examination of this play or conflict is largely a matter of interpretation and guesswork, of accumulating a lot of circumstantial evidence which is never entirely certain, "La mythologie blanche" still resists this procedure or, more precisely, it betrays few signs of what is really needed to be rung in right now, that is, few signs of having an internal dilemma or at least one which is not already incorporated into its own analysis.

In order to deal with this problem of finding a more observable dilemma in Derrida's project, it is not necessary to go outside the deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur, but only to examine it briefly in another setting and with Derrida the point at issue and Ricoeur in the background. Given the inbuilt prejudice of PS, the latter would inevitably come under fire if his project were exposed and examined at this early stage. Of course, when Ricoeur's commitment to truth-telling is analysed in Chapter III and Chapter IV (and even at the end of Chapter V) as the indirect and direct encounters with Derrida's project, it will not be spared coming under fire, but it is to be hoped that, by that time, such an expression will have a new meaning. The best that can be said for the time being is that, on the basis of viewing philosophical discourse as ethico-epistemological dynamic, PS is in no position to claim that Ricoeur should be arguing or doing philosophy differently.

2.1. Derrida "versus" Ricoeur at the Montreal Conference on Communication (1971)

A few months before "La mythologie blanche" was published in 1971, Derrida and Ricoeur presented exposés at the same conference and participated in a roundtable discussion which followed and which was called "Philosophie et communication."[2] Since the illocutionary and perlocutionary effects of Derrida's exposé can be considered part of the complication and even over-complication of truth-telling, this roundtable discussion is particularly helpful at this

2 "Philosophie et communication," *La Communication: Actes du XVe congrès de l'association des sociétés de philosophie de langue française: Tome I* (Montréal: Montmorency, 1971), 393-431. Ricoeur's exposé at this conference, "Discours et communication," is to be found on pages 23-48 of *La Communication*.

juncture. But first it is necessary to take a brief look at Derrida's exposé, "Signature, événement, contexte."[3] In the opening paragraph, Derrida examines the various significations of the word "communication" in such a way that the *concept* of communication is destabilized and rendered uncertain.

> Est-il assuré qu'au mot de *communication* corresponde un concept unique, univoque, rigoureusement maîtrisable et transmissible: communicable? Selon une étrange figure du discours, on doit donc se demander d'abord si le mot ou le signifiant « communication » communique un contenu déterminé, un sens identifiable, une valeur descriptible. Mais pour articuler et proposer cette question, il a déjà fallu que j'anticipe surs le sens du mot *communication*: j'ai dû prédéterminer la communication comme le véhicule, le transport ou le lieu de passage d'un *sens* et d'un sens *un*. Si *communication* avait plusieurs sens et si telle pluralité ne se lassait pas réduire, il ne serait pas d'emblée justifié de définir *la* communication comme la transmission d'un *sens,* à supposer même que nous soyons en état de nous entendre sur chacun de ses mots (transmission, sens, etc.). Or le mot *communication*, que rien ne nous autorise initialement à négliger en tant que mot et à appauvrir en tant que mot polysémique, ouvre un champ sémantique qui précisément ne se limite pas à la sémantique, à la sémiotique, encore moins à la linguistique (*SEC*, 49).

Although Derrida is deeply concerned with communication and the many subtle aspects of this subject, his focus on a particular task, the analysis of the concept-term, makes it impossible for him not use words or expressions which themselves go unquestioned and yet which may communicate a great deal. The best examples of such words or expressions are the following: "*il ne serait pas d'emblée justifié de*" and "*rien ne nous autorise initialement à négliger.*" Presumably the "*nous*" here refers both to Derrida and the philosophical community which then are said to be not initially justified or authorized in reducing the polysemy of communication and attributing to this word a single sense. It seems that what Derrida appeals to as proper justification and authorization is a certain philosophical duty or task of which asking the most searching and penetrating questions is the first order of business. At the same time, it should be noted that, if these questions end up disabling the concept of communication and, what likely would follow, communication in the philosophical community, it is not clear how this first order of business, if it is truly meant to be taken as a universal duty or responsibility, could be other than the *only* order of business.

If asking the most searching and penetrating questions is disruptive of and even dangerous to philosophy, then the justificatory role of this duty or responsibility is rendered uncertain. The "*nous*" which Derrida uses in the above passage cannot then be inclusive of the philosophical community or at least it can only be inclusive of it in a formal, polite, or perfunctory way. Similarly, the demands of protocol and propriety are likely determinant in his description of the destabilizing inquiry into communication insofar as he suggests that this

3 *Jacques Derrida,* "Signature, événement, contexte," *La Communication*, 49-76. Also to be found in *Marges de la Philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), 365-393.

inquiry is a preliminary step on the way to some conception or comprehension more concrete, stable, constructive, and so on. The tension between the opposing aims of engaging the philosophical community and somehow keeping at a distance from it lead to, so it seems, some dissimulation or commitment of a dubious sort, itself not necessarily intended or reflected upon.

What can only be teased out of Derrida's exposé and called the tension between two opposing aims or intentions is, by comparison, legible in the transcript of the roundtable discussion. This is as much to say that, on the basis of noting the various responses to Derrida's exposé and his subsequent explanations, arguments, and commentary, the two poles of keeping at a distance from the philosophical community and engaging it are visible. First of all, there is considerable resistance to certain key notions which, when Derrida goes further into his exposé, are articulated at great length. While Derrida himself carefully pitches these notions (e.g., *écriture* and *itérabilité*)[4] at the level of, to borrow a term from "Le retrait de la métaphore," quasi-metaphoricity, a number of his questioners continually refer them – as well as their understanding of them – either to, on the one hand, the semiotic or semantic, or, on the other hand, the empirical. Since their arguments and objections in this area go in the direction of drawing these notions back into metaphysics, they represent a certain denial of Derrida's project in the sense of the ongoing possibility of its being shunned or condemned. This in turn means that they also represent, given his efforts to counteract this threat, both his disengagement from the philosophical community and his attachment to it.

But there is a way in which the roundtable discussion reflects more dramatically Derrida's divided loyalty to philosophy and non-philosophy. There is, first of all, the fact that one or more participants of the roundtable discussion show signs of being annoyed with him. The clearest sign of annoyance comes early in the discussion when the president, René Schaerer, addresses Roland Paul Bloom who, like Derrida and Ricoeur, earlier delivered a paper on philosophy and communication.[5] Schaerer asks Bloom whether he would to like respond to the first question asked which, due to its sparking a rather lengthy debate between Derrida and Ricoeur, seems to have been forgotten by him. In lieu of responding to this question, Bloom turns to Derrida and complains about the latter's setting himself apart from other philosophers.

> Je ne sais pas si je répondrai à la question, mais je veux discuter un peu avec M. Derrida. Il me semble que vous vous placez un peu contre tous les autres philosophes dont il a été question aujourd'hui, que ce soit Levinas ou Strawson ou Searle. Ils veulent tous, je crois, rester en contact avec le monde du sens commun et il me semble que dans votre théorie sémiotique, ce que vous reproche d'ailleurs, je crois, M. Ricoeur,[6] vous

4 *Itérabilité* is repetition of any mark, trace, or sign which is also its differentiation. *Écriture* is an example of Derrida's use of *paleonomy* which, as he describes it, is an inverting of the traditional hierarchy of concepts – in this case writing and speech – in order to generalize the characteristics of the first such that it encompasses the second.

5 Roland Paul Blum, "La perception d'autrui," *La Communication*, 77-95.

6 In the roundtable discussion, Ricoeur identifies Derrida's *écriture* with what he calls interchangeably in his exposé, semiology and semiotics.

> Effectivement, il y a dans la discursivité tous les traits que vous avez reconnus a l'écriture mais que vous êtes obligé de reporter sur l'écriture parce que, à mon sens, vous êtes resté dans une sémiologie et jamais dans une sémantique, c'est-à-dire, dans une sémiologie où vous vous demandez quelles sont les conditions du signe; alors, comme elles ne sont pas satisfaisantes dans l'ordre phonique, il faut les chercher dans

> réduisez, vous faites disparaître ce monde que nous tous nous acceptons, à partir duquel nous vivons (*PC*, 404).

A couple of other signs of alienation or antipathy are one person's remark that the notion of *itérabilité* induces in him a certain malaise and another's remark that Derrida's manner or conduct seems to indicate that he is irritated about something. Of course, these last two signs mean little by themselves but if read in the context of much more violent attacks on Derrida and deconstruction over the years, then they take on an added significance. In any event, what is more important here is that, although Derrida's work generates a certain amount of dislike, scorn, and indifference, it cannot be separated from what he purposes or intends philosophically and yet, at the same time, neither can it be separated from his ongoing efforts to win respect and be part of the community. But the question then is: if these efforts are one with (besides his scholarly competence) a certain amount of accommodation, civility, and agreeability, how can this agreeability not always be a threat to his maintaining a certain distance? Moreover, how can this threat to his maintaining distance not also be a threat to, for example, his deconstructive analysis of communication?

In order for his agreeability to be a threat to his deconstructive analysis, this threat need not take the form of suggesting that the latter is inherently wrong, but only the form of suggesting that it is inherently wrong *for philosophy*. To this degree or in this way, Derrida moves against his own analysis, but this "moving against" cannot be contradiction in the strictest sense but only temporary abandonment. Speaking from inside his analysis, he necessarily views theories of communication, discourse, meaning, and so on as possibilities for philosophy and, at the same time, what is ultimately *impossible* for philosophy. But when he is forced to step outside his analysis in a debate or, more properly, a polemic and become agreeable (for polemics are not simply a matter of disagreement) to the point of, as he does in the roundtable discussion, throwing his lot in with theory-builders or, more precisely, with Ricoeur as theory-builder,[7] then his simultaneous defence of his analysis becomes fraudulent in the sense of being an obstruction or dead end which refuses to acknowledge itself as such.

On more than one occasion in the roundtable discussion, Ricoeur chides Derrida for, while extending his analysis of communication to writing and speaking, not having in place a theory of discourse. In response to this, Derrida claims that a theory of discourse requires a preliminary theory which he calls a theory of the event[8] and which he considers to be, on the one hand, systematically overlooked by philosophers and, on the other hand, given all that he argues

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> un autre ordre qui est alors la trace, la distanciation, l'espacement, etc. Mais moi je dis ... parce que justement il y a une grande lacune dans toute votre entreprise, qu'il n'y a pas là une théorie du sens (*PC*, 398).

7 Derrida makes an effort to close the gap between Ricoeur and him on more than one occasion in the roundtable discussion. Perhaps the most striking example of his agreeability is the following:

> Un point pour dire que sur la tâche d'une théorie spécifique du discours je suis tout à fait d'accord avec vous, même si l'horizon ou les fondements de cette tâche peuvent être conçus différemment. Je suis tout à fait d'accord qu'il faut élaborer une théorie spécifique du discours. Je suis, d'autre part, tout à fait d'accord, et je l'ai marqué au passage ce matin, sur la nécessité de critiquer dans ce domaine un certain impérialisme de la linguistique et je dis aussi, et là je suis d'accord avec vous, que l'intérêt de la théorie d'Austin me paraissait résider en ce point; donc tout à fait d'accord là aussi (*PC*, 404).

against the singularity of the semiotic or semantic occurrence,[9] perhaps not possible. The status of this "perhaps" is significant insofar as, if it were left out by Derrida, it would make his observation about a theory of the event's being systematically overlooked seem, instead of being a reprimand of sorts, either trite or else a wholesale condemnation of philosophy. Accordingly, it seems that this "perhaps" is a vital concession to philosophy which, even though it dissolves in deconstruction's area of greatest certainty, the condition of the impossibility of theory, is, as soon as Derrida's project encounters the flesh-and-blood commitment to theoretical truth-telling, a sine qua non.[10]

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8 "Simplement, ce qui m'a intéressé, de façon tout à fait préalable, à une théorie du discours qui en effet est nécessaire, ce qui m'a intéressé c'est de repérer tous les présupposés, disons très vite non-critiques, qui me paraissent retenir jusqu'à ici les tentatives de théorie du discours auxquelles on a pu assister aussi bien dans la linguistique que dans la philosophie. Ces présupposés, ce sont ceux que j'ai très schématiquement dessinés ce matin, à savoir, que quelque chose comme l'événement, par exemple, allait de soi, que nous savions, ce que c'était qu'un événement; or une théorie du discours suppose une théorie de l'événement . . ." (*PC*, 399)

9 An idea of how Derrida does away with the singular event or, what amounts to the same thing, self-presence can be obtained from the following remarks on the generalizing of *écriture.*

> Avant de montrer plus précisément quelles conséquences découlent de ces traits nucléaires de toute écriture . . ., avant donc de proposer ces conséquences comme hypothèses de travail et de discussion, je voudrais montrer que les traits qu'on peut reconnaître dans le concept classique et étroitement défini d'écriture sont généralisable. Ils vaudraient non seulement pour tous les ordres de « signes » et pour tous les langages en général mais même, au-delà de la communication sémio-linguistique, pour tout le champ de ce que la philosophie appellerait l'expérience, voire l'expérience de l'être: la dite « présence » (*SEC*, 59).

10 Another dimension of the roundtable discussion which should be mentioned is the customary occultation of the ethical side of philosophical truth-telling. Despite their differences over how the subject of communication should be handled, both Derrida and Ricoeur respond to questions about the relation of the ethical to communication by stressing its importance and at the same time pleading that they cannot deal with it.

> *Derrida*: "La dernière partie de votre question concerne l'éthique. C'est une question importante et difficile. Il est certain que tous ce que j'ai proposé ce matin ou toutes les implications de ce que j'ai proposé ce matin n'ouvrent pas immédiatement sur la possibilité d'une éthique et qu'on peut même considérer que c'est menaçant pour une éthique. Un certain type d'analyse est toujours dangereux pour l'éthique et réciproquement. Par conséquent, je crois qu'une théorie de l'éthique, de la spécificité des actes éthiques, des intentions éthiques, des lois morales, etc., est indispensable, qu'elle est à constituer. Mais on ne pourra pas le faire rigoureusement ou sans que l'éthique ne soit une sorte de violence doctrinaire ou intéressé, si on n'a pas préalablement analysé, élaboré tous les préalables historico-transcendantaux de la forme de la question éthique, de la motivation de l'éthique, etc." (*PC*, 426).
>
> *Ricoeur*: "Et comme tous les actes sont produit dans un milieu de culture, nous ne sommes pas dans un milieu éthique neutre et toutes les façons de se commettre sont marquées par des structures éthiques antérieures. Nous ne connaissons pas un monde éthiquement neutre; par exemple, il y aura peut-être un monde où il sera permis de tuer, mais il y aura autre chose qui ne sera pas permis. Mais ce que je maintiens c'est que, si c'est le point d'appui d'une structure éthique éventuelle, ce n'est pas un phénomène éthique comme tel, c'est un acte par lequel le sujet s'implique, c'est la relation du locuteur dans l'élocution. Cette relation est absolument fondamentale" (*PC*, 412).

2.2. Metaphor – in the Philosophical Text

The commitment to philosophical truth-telling is the commitment to tell the truth *well* which is always the possibility of not telling it well. While clarification is only concerned with the latter insofar as it can be avoided or effaced, obfuscation must in some way register it. Not that this registering is any less the struggle to perform well, but that it is also the struggle to reduce the possibility of effacing this struggle. The first major difficulty which confronts PS in its analysis of "La mythologie blanche" is that it must be necessarily double-focussed. The second major difficulty which confronts it is that it must be necessarily reductive. To bring these two difficulties together is to say that both the form and content of Derrida's essay are over-complicated and that using the terms *form* and *content* is a provisional move which allows the first major difficulty to be quickly identified. It allows PS to say that the second major difficulty, the one of being necessarily reductive, is largely confined to the task of analysing the contents of Derrida's essay. On the other hand, being necessarily reductive or simplifying in this area is inseparable from complicating it in another area which is the task of analysing the form of Derrida's essay.

The third major difficulty confronting PS is that, although committed to analysing both Derrida's and Ricoeur's discourses as ethico-epistemological dynamics, the ethical inevitably slides off into the practical, performative, or rhetorical as well as the non-ethical and the unethical. If philosophical truth-telling is essentially conflictual and full of strategies, ruses, and devices, such a state of affairs is not so surprising. Although the dominant intention of philosophical truth-telling is its very commitment to truth which itself is necessarily ethical, this dominant intention does not rule out other intentions or a play or conflict of intentions or, for that matter, intentions which hardly register as intentions. With respect to this last point, the analysis which fleshes out these subordinate or dominated intentions always runs the risk of fleshing them out too much and even to the point that they loom larger than the dominant intention. A certain sensibility is therefore required which PS is now trying to evoke and which may need to be *re*-evoked periodically.

The fourth major difficulty confronting PS is to make the case that Derrida's project indirectly or apart from any debate or polemic per se encounters Ricoeur's project. Since making this case rests upon an accumulation of evidence stretching to Chapter V such that the best view of Chapter II is likely retrospective, to sift through all this evidence perhaps requires the patience of a jurist at an interminable trial. What is being attempted over a long course and in various ways is to catch sight of the ethical as one side of the philosophical difference between Derrida and Ricoeur which is both part of and not part of the epistemological side.

One way to describe to Derrida's task in "La mythologie blanche" is to say that it calls a whole discursive continuity or, for that matter, community – the notion, idea, concept, definition, theory, conception, use, etc. of metaphor – into question. Such a task likely renders his own discourse both precarious and presumptuous. Precarious in the sense that, while questioning the validity of the definition of metaphor, Derrida cannot himself dispense with at least something like a definition of it. Presumptuous in the sense that, in trying to determine the validity which the philosophical and rhetorical tradition has bestowed on a certain conception of metaphor, he works his way through all the resources of this tradition and exhausts them. Indeed, in his attempt to bring this conception of metaphor so fully into view that it ultimately disappears, Derrida is forced to take a precarious – one might even say a poetic or rhetorical – step beyond

the tradition.

If "La mythologie blanche" may be considered to be both a modest and immodest undertaking, then the modest side of it would be its negative thesis which is that it is impossible to adequately (i.e., fully, conclusively, unequivocally, etc.) define and classify philosophical metaphor.[11] With respect to the immodest side, there is what might be called the essay's anti-thesis. By opposing itself to the proposition: "*le sens visé à travers ces figures est une essence rigoureusement indépendante de ce qui la transporte,"* (273), this anti-thesis is the inverse of *"l'*unique thèse *de la philosophie, celle qui constitue le concept de métaphore, l'opposition du propre et du non-propre, de l'essence et de l'accident, de l'intuition et du discours, de la pensée et du langage, de l'intelligible et du sensible, etc."* (273).[12] While the negative thesis and its limited focus on metaphor leads directly to the anti-thesis and its unlimited focus on philosophy, the former is, at least in a formal way, in control of the essay from beginning to end.[13]

The negative thesis of "La mythologie blanche" is modest in the sense that, practically speaking, philosophical resistance to it is nil. Derrida himself observes that there are few systematic studies of philosophical metaphor. While it is possible that such a paucity of work in the area implies an intentional oversight, it is also possible that it implies a lack of philosophical interest. From a purely formal standpoint then, this essay, first published in a literary journal (i.e., *Poétique* 5, 1971, 1-52) seems to address itself to the margins of philosophy.

The manner in which Derrida boards the subject of metaphor is surely not, in and of itself, right or wrong because philosophy holds open – is supposed to hold open – the possibility of investigating a matter in all ways. Ricoeur himself, in his exposé, "Discours et communication,"[14] declares that *"il n'y a pas de tabous en philosophie . . ."* (*DC*, 26). At first glance, it seems difficult to find anything in this declaration which is modest or which would not render it more appropriate to be spoken, with all due respect to Ricoeur, by Derrida.[15] But, apart from this consideration, philosophy rarely shows itself to be so adventurous as to seriously put itself at risk and, on the contrary, habitually keeps within certain recognized limits. If this keeping within limits is really more the prudence of philosophy than its reckless audacity, then,

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11 In "Le retrait de la métaphore," Derrida, raises an objection to Ricoeur's claim that there is a thesis in "La mythologie blanche" and, moreover, one of dead metaphor.

> Tous ces malentendus font système avec l'attribution à *La mythologie blanche* d'une thèse, et d'une thèse qui se confondrait avec la présupposition contre laquelle précisément je me suis acharné (*RM*, 73).

It is no doubt true that, if a thesis is a proposition wholly theoretical in intent and import, then there is no thesis in this essay. However, what *is* intended by Derrida is a proposition, namely, "reconnaître en son principe la condition d'impossibilité d'un tel projet (*MB*, 261).

12 All page numbers of cited passages in section 2.2. and the following sections of this chapter refer to Derrida's "La mythologie blanche" unless otherwise indicated.

13 This formal control of the essay by the negative thesis is evidenced, for example, at the beginning of the fifth and final section. After having analysed in the two preceding sections the traditional conception of metaphor from Aristotle to Hegel and now coming to a consideration of a contemporary epistemologist, Gaston Bachelard, Derrida explicitly takes up once again – and in a manner similar to the first and second sections (but now looking at scientific metaphor) – the issue of a possible philosophical metaphorics.

14 See footnote 2 on page 580.

15 S. H. Clark thinks differently. After praising Ricoeur as one who carries forward "the Socratic inheritance in its most positive form" and shortly before comparing him to such "structuralist" thinkers as Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida, Clark states: "And in this continuous self-criticism Ricoeur's thought is more genuinely exploratory than many apparently more radical interventions" (*PR*, 5).

insofar as Derrida's project is philosophical and not entirely disposed to endangering itself, there should be something of this prudence in it.

To demonstrate that Derrida's project is adventurous (which may be considered by many to be ethically neutral or even unethical) is less difficult than to demonstrate that its immodesty, imprudence, or presumptuousness is harnessed to the opposite.

> La métaphore *dans* le texte philosophique. Assuré d'entendre chaque mot de cet énoncé, se précipitant à comprendre — à inscrire — une figure dans le volume capable de philosophie, on pourrait s'apprêter à traiter d'une question particulière: y a t-il de la métaphore dans le texte philosophique*?* sous quelle forme? jusqu'à quel point? est-ce essentiel? accidentel? etc. L'assurance est vite emportée (249).

Here there is, as is in his exposé, "Signature, événement, contexte," an indirect recognition and even an implicit admonishment of a common practice in philosophy. This practise is one of treating well-handled terms as if their meanings were already well established and secure. Derrida no doubt finds something imprudent in this practise and perhaps even presumptuous and precipitate. Something also perhaps unbecoming to philosophy insofar as it registers a neglect, calculated or otherwise. In any event, it is clear that he wants to strike out on a different path and, at least on this particular point, be more modest and reserved. *"L'assurance est vite emportée"* (249).

On the other hand, the particular question he raises – *y a t-il de la métaphore dans le texte philosophique?* – is probably one which has never been asked by either philosophy or rhetoric. It therefore imposes itself straight off as something upstart and upsetting. Instead of doing the usual thing which is to ask the question, what is philosophical metaphor?, Derrida asks, is there philosophical metaphor? All previous studies no doubt have assumed it as object insofar as they have assumed the reasonably clear and straightforward concept of metaphor. Derrida's essay, on the other hand, leaves little doubt that investigating this concept – and investigating it scrupulously – is precisely what should be attended to first. By forcing on the philosophical scene such a scrupulous investigation, "La mythologie blanche" implicitly censures philosophy for a certain neglect of its investigative responsibilities.

But the reserve and caution of Derrida in the face of the presumptuousness of the tradition ends up becoming a certain presumption itself, namely, the one of taking on the whole tradition. A double dilemma of sorts is registered here. First of all, there is the dilemma of being committed to a proper investigation of this subject only in order to arrive at, if not its dissolution, then a certain limited or equivocal demand for it. Secondly, there is the dilemma of being committed to a proper way of doing philosophy only in order to call the proper way into question. This irreducible dilemma afflicting Derrida's project is one with its being both philosophical and anti-philosophical.

2.3. "Improper" Argument and Analysis

Derrida's point of entry leads to a question which is simple and yet infinitely complex. Insofar as this question cannot be overlooked or dismissed by philosophy, it forces itself on the scene as an epistemological demand, duty, task, etc. The question, *Y a t-il de la métaphore dans*

le texte philosophique?, is also the question, If there is metaphor in the philosophical text, how does it come to be known and determined? As the commitment to tell the truth about metaphor, Derrida's inquiry must be responsive to these questions and be responsible before them. With such a binding commitment, there can be no stopping short of the difficulties raised by them and it may be said in all fairness that this fundamental part of Derrida's commitment to tell the truth about philosophical metaphor is, first, the inescapably "adventurous" side of it and, secondly, its ethical dimension. There can be neither a simple response nor an avoidance of how others – a few others at least – have answered or not answered the above questions. Or, to put it another way, Derrida cannot avoid examining how the whole tradition has already given, as if by default, an affirmative answer to the question.

As mentioned earlier, Derrida notes (this comes when he discusses the standard way of classifying metaphor in the philosophical text, namely, by its biological, organic, mechanical, historical, economic site of origin) that there are few systematic studies of philosophical metaphor. *"Cette classification, qui suppose un indigénat et une migration, est couramment adoptée par ceux, il ne sont pas nombreux, qui ont étudié la métaphorique d'un philosophe ou d'un corpus singulier"* (262). Though he does not mention it, there must be even fewer studies or none which deal with it as problem or issue. In order to do precisely this, Derrida begins by examining a work which at least resembles such a study. Of course, its only resembling such a study – *perhaps its not even being a study* – is already reason to raise some suspicion against it.[16]

The study in question is a fictitious dialogue in Anatole France's *Le jardin d'Épicure.* Why Derrida would begin his inquiry into metaphor with a work which many would consider to be literary rather than philosophical is, apart from all general considerations about Derrida's objectives or intentions, still a question in the stricter or narrower sense. In this fictitious dialogue, Polyphile addresses another character, Ariste, and argues that all metaphysical concepts are derived directly from metaphors. However, he does not primarily have in mind poetic metaphors but those which metaphysics itself produces and puts to use. His thesis is that all metaphysical concepts are surreptitious transfers of meaning and reference from nature to a fictitious upper realm. According to Polyphile, it is essentially the etymological study of metaphysical concepts which reveals the true physical or natural origins. Metaphysics constitutes itself by conveniently forgetting its figurative aspect and metaphorical history, its connection to the physical world, and its converting its metaphors into literal terms referring to nothing.

Polyphile compares the metaphorical operation of metaphysics to the grinding and polishing of coins. This operation is one of effacing the exergue, the figurehead and inscription of these coins such that they are converted into pure metal. The polished coins, a sort of absolute and universal currency, represent the nature of metaphysical concepts. Derrida observes that the comparison of philosophical metaphors to coins which are polished down by much handling crops up on at least a few occasions throughout the tradition. The second figure which Polyphile employs is that of the palimpsest. According to Polyphile, the writing in dark ink on the palimpsest is like the work of metaphysics. Underneath it and concealed by it is the writing in white ink which is likened to metaphysics' origins. Derrida comments:

16 Generally speaking, there is no reason to consider this study in Anatole France's *Le jardin d'Épicure* so negatively. But what seems necessary to take into consideration as part of an analysis which is not excluding any traits or traces of the ethical is that this study probably has professional opinion against it. Along with its being a dialogue and more or less out of fashion as philosophy, the author is no doubt considered to be, first and foremost, a novelist, satirist, and social commentator.

> La métaphysique – mythologie blanche qui rassemble et réfléchit la culture de l'Occident: l'homme blanc prend sa propre mythologie, l'indo-européenne, son *logos*, c'est-à-dire le *mythos* de son idiome, pour la forme universelle de ce qu'il doit vouloir encore appeler la Raison (254).

Two brief points are now in order: first, the analysis which follows Derrida's examination of the Polyphile-Ariste dialogue takes in works, principally Aristotle's, whose philosophical status is beyond doubt; secondly, the syntactic and semiotic dimension of language soon arises in Derrida's inquiry and, in some respects, operates as a critique of Polyphile's position. "*Dans cette critique [avancée par Polyphile] du langage philosophique, s'intéresser à la métaphore – cette figure particulière – , c'est donc un parti pris symboliste"* (255). Derrida describes Polyphile's "symbolist" position as being, despite his anti-metaphysical stance, in conformity with the traditional conception of metaphor. Just as it has been since Aristotle, metaphor is viewed by Polyphile as being wholly a diachronic and semantic operation. This conception, extremely common and historically stable, equates metaphor with the perception of resemblance. *"La métaphore a toujours été définie comme le trope de la ressemblance . . ."* (255). As such, it conceals the synchronic, syntactic, and semiotic dimension of language.[17]

Despite the justification which he provides for disinterring the example of *usure* in *Le jardin d'Épicure*, Derrida's early focus on it still might be suspect. Polyphile's position, although formally rejected by Derrida, is cited at great length. Furthermore, the majority of Derrida's observations tend to be non-critical. It seems that what is disinterred here, if destined to be re-buried, is first to be carefully looked over.

> Il va de soi que la question de la métaphore, telle que nous la répétons ici, loin d'appartenir à cette problématique et d'en partager les présuppositions, devrait au contraire les délimiter. Il ne s'agit pas, cependant, de consolider par symétrie ce que Polyphile choisi comme cible; plutôt de déconstruire les schèmes métaphysiques et rhétoriques qui sont à l'oeuvre dans sa critique, non pour les rejeter et les mettre au rebut mais pour les réinscrire autrement et surtout pour commencer à identifier le terrain historico-problématique sur lequel on a pu demander systématiquement à la philosophie les titres métaphoriques de ses concepts (256).

To arrive at a different understanding of philosophical metaphor – one which is neither a defence nor a dismissal of Polyphile's position – is what Derrida lays out. But at the same time there is of

17 Derrida's general view of the traditional conception of metaphor identifies the semiotic with the linguistic level below the noun or, more precisely, below the *nominalizable.* This is to identify the semiotic with the linguistic level even below – on those rare occasions when they are converted into nouns – such syntactical units as prepositions, conjunctions, and articles. Since metaphor as a kind of naming is unquestionably at the heart of the traditional conception, Derrida labels this conception semantic. On the other hand, Ricoeur's general view of the traditional or rhetorical conception of metaphor puts the semiotic on the level not only of the preposition, syllable, letter, etc., *but also the word or noun*. Ricoeur therefore views the traditional conception of metaphor as semantic only insofar as it indicates, despite its reliance on semiotic theory which he identifies with the theory of substitution and single-word trope, that metaphor is not primarily denomination but predication (i.e., that the word or noun receives its meaning from the sentence).

course a certain critique of this position in that it grounds itself in metaphysics while being anti-metaphysical. In order to characterize metaphysics as transfer of meaning and reference from one realm to another, Polyphile must rely himself on such oppositions as proper/improper, sensible/intelligible, and natural/artificial.

On the other hand, Polyphile brings into view the philosophical concept as heterogeneity, as impurity, as what goes largely unrecognized by the philosophical community and which translates into, not surprisingly, a longstanding equivocation. Specifically, the latter is that, although philosophical metaphor is presumably effaced by the philosophical concept which replaces it, it still manages to show its face.

> L'exergue effacé, comment déchiffrer la figure, singulièrement la métaphore dans le texte philosophique? On n'a jamais répondu à cette question par un traité systématique et cela n'est sans doute pas insignifiant (261).

This trace or vestige of something essentially foreign to the philosophical concept is neither that to which the concept is reducible nor what is reducible to the concept. To investigate this sensitive area between, on the one hand, the philosophical imperative which speaks and wants to speak transparently through the concept and, on the other hand, the figurative or foreign element which inhabits this concept and ignores this imperative is what leads Derrida to ask such questions as the following.

> Comment rendre *sensible* [la métaphore philosophique], sinon par métaphore? ici le mot *usure*. On ne peut en effet accéder a l'usure d'un phénomène linguistique sans lui donner quelque représentation figurée. Que pourrait être l'usure *proprement dite* d'un mot, d'un énoncé, d'une signification, d'un texte? (249).

In order to tell the truth about philosophical metaphor, both the essentially equivocal nature of it and the essentially equivocal nature of the traditional conception of it must be explored. Being itself a philosophical text, "La mythologie blanche" is not immune from equivocation and separate from what it inquires into. Rather than pass frivolously over these matters (here again, the adventurous and even dangerous side of truth-telling is revealed), Derrida makes them an indispensable part of his inquiry.

In order to deal with the figurative life of the concept as a question for philosophy, Derrida must challenge the traditional way of treating this figurative life of the concept as past life only. He must find signs of the present figurative life of the concept which takes his inquiry beyond being merely an etymological study and makes it a sort of self-study which is also a demonstration of this figurative life. It is to make his inquiry both the work of analysis which uncovers this life and the rhetorical play which strangely subverts and supplements the analysis. Given the complicated and even over-complicated nature of metaphor, what is required is not only the constative but the performative side of language. Derrida must not only make the problem of philosophical metaphor sensible in the way of making sense of the matter, but also in the way of putting the matter before the senses.

In order to demonstrate philosophical metaphor both theoretically and practically or

constatively and performatively, Derrida creates something like a philosophical metaphor which is also something like its impossibility. Insofar as *usure* represents figurative wearing away, erosion, loss, etc., it is not only a metaphor but a metaphor of philosophical metaphor. On the other hand, usure operates not only as philosophical metaphor, but as philosophical concept. As concept it has an additional figurative aspect and signification which is usure as usury or semantic gain and which corresponds to the transition from metaphor to philosophical concept. The reason for this homonymic or equivocal deployment of usure is Derrida's attempting to capture, besides the more or less negative signification of philosophical metaphor, its positive signification. Now insofar as usure becomes this complicated figure-concept and succeeds as a technical term in Derrida's inquiry, it does a strange thing: it tends to escape its own meaning. This is to say that usure itself is not an example or illustration of figurative effacement and conceptual gain, but rather an example of conceptual gain *and* figurative gain. This figurative gain comes with its signification as usury or semantic profit and is the correspondingly sensible or physical aspect of this particular signification.

Usure is at the same time not only a figure of conceptual gain, but an example or illustration of conceptual *loss*. While it is true that usure as both usage (wearing away) and usury (gain) is a more comprehensive and, in this sense, adequate definition of philosophical metaphor as the traditional understanding of it, it is also true that it is at odds with the philosophical ideal of dissipating the equivocal. Usure then is in itself an example or illustration not of figurative erosion, but of conceptual erosion. Of course, by functioning as an illustration of this sort, usure is not only at odds with the philosophical ideal of dissipating the equivocal, but also the ideal of philosophy's being only an intended rejection, removal, or replacement of concepts.

Despite the importance which Derrida assigns to usure as an operative concept for his historico-problematic inquiry and, furthermore, despite its prominence in the first section, it falls to the wayside by the time Derrida begins the second section, "Plus de métaphore." In a way which is similar to the role of the Polyphile-Ariste dialogue, usure serves as a provisional background whose main purpose is to bring into early view what is traditionally ignored or concealed. In providing this background, Derrida of course takes the risk of employing both a dubious work and a dubious concept. But there is certainly even more than this going on or at least more of this going on at a deeper and murkier level which also seems to be a matter of stretching investigative possibilities to the limit. Since exergue signifies both the epigraph at the beginning of a work and the inscription on a coin, the title of the first section likely refers to, on the one hand, the whole of the Polyphile-Ariste dialogue (by metaphorizing it as an extended epigraph) and, on the other hand, this dialogue's theme of polishing coins. In the case of the former, exergue would be signifying then what normally stands outside the work or, more precisely, what is not quite proper to it. At the same time, it signifies, as part of the contents of the first section, the erosion or effacement of philosophical metaphor. Given the overall thrust of Derrida's essay, it likely signifies as well the erosion or effacement of the *concept* of philosophical metaphor. This is to say that, given that the first section deals largely with usure and, furthermore, given that usure drops out of sight as figure and concept after this section, the title likely signifies the wearing away of the first section as extended epigraph and therefore the wearing away of its contents which is also the wearing away of a worn-out conception of metaphor. "Exergue," the title of the first section, likely signifies the usure of usure.[18]

18 In "Le retrait de la métaphore," Derrida is more explicit on the matter of this "worn-out" conception.

2.4. "Proper" Argument and Analysis

Derrida articulates his negative thesis at the beginning of the second section, "Plus de métaphore."

> Au lieu de risquer ici des prolégomènes à quelque métaphorique futur, essayons plutôt de reconnaître en son principe la *condition d'impossibilité* d'un tel projet. Sous sa forme la plus pauvre, la plus abstraite, la limite serait la suivante: la métaphore reste, par tous ses traits essentiels, un philosophème classique, un concept métaphysique. Elle est donc prise dans le champ qu'une métaphorologie générale de la philosophie voudrait dominer. Elle est issue d'un réseau de philosophèmes qui correspondent eux-mêmes à des tropes ou à des figures et qui en sont contemporains ou systématiquement solidaires. Cette strate de tropes « instituteurs », cette couche de « premiers » philosophèmes (à supposer que les guillemets soient ici une précaution suffisante) ne se domine pas. Elle ne se laisse pas dominer par elle-même, par ce qu'elle a elle-même engendré, fait pousser sur son sol, soutenu de son socle. Elle s'emporte donc chaque fois qu'un de ses produits - ici, le concept de métaphore - tente en vain de comprendre sous sa loi la totalité du champ auquel il appartient. Si l'on voulait concevoir et classer toutes les possibilités métaphoriques de la philosophie, une métaphore, au moins, resterait toujours exclue, hors du système: celle, au moins, sans laquelle ne se serait pas construit le concept de métaphore ou, pour syncoper toute une chaîne, la métaphore de métaphore. Cette métaphore en plus, restant hors du champ qu'elle permet de circonscrire, s'extrait ou s'abstrait encore ce champ, s'y soustrait donc comme métaphore en moins. En raison de ce que nous pourrions intituler, par économie, la supplémentarité tropique, le tour de plus devenant le tour de moins, la taxinomie ou l'histoire des métaphores philosophiques n'y retrouverait son compte. A l'interminable *déhiscence* du supplément (s'il est permis de jardiner encore un peu cette métaphore botanique) sera toujours refusé l'état ou le statut du complément. Le champ n'est jamais saturé (261).

L'autre raison qui m'attiré vers l'expression « vieux sujet », cette une valeur d'épuisement apparent qu'il m'a paru nécessaire de reconnaître une fois de plus. Un vieux sujet, c'est un sujet apparemment épuisé, usé jusqu'à l'os ou jusqu'à la corde. Or cette valeur d'usure, et d'abord d'usage, cette valeur de valeur d'usage, d'utilité, de l'usage ou d'utilité comme être *utile* ou comme être *usuel*, bref tout ce système sémantique que j'abrégerai sous le titre de l'*us* aura joué un rôle déterminant dans la problématique traditionnelle de la métaphore. La métaphore n'est peut-être pas seulement un sujet *usé* jusqu'à l'os, c'est un sujet qui se sera entretenu d'un rapport essentiel à l'*us*, ou a l'*usance* (l'usance est un vieux mot français, un mot hors d'usage aujourd'hui dont la polysémie mériterait toute une analyse à elle seule). Or ce qui peut paraître usé aujourd'hui, dans la métaphore, cette justement cette valeur d'*us* qui a déterminé toute sa problématique traditionnelle (*RM*, 66).

It might be asked: if few have undertaken this project, what significance is there in claiming its impossibility? What does Derrida mean when he states: *"On n'a jamais répondu à cette question par un traité systématique et cela n'est sans doute pas insignifiant"* (261)? Perhaps what is implied here is that philosophy has good reason not to conduct such an investigation in order not to run into the deepest sort of difficulties. But perhaps what is also implied is that philosophy has no good reason, as philosophy (and hence there would be the added implication of wrongdoing), not to look into these difficulties. But apart from his choosing to accent the second way of determining what is right or wrong in this area, it might be thought that Derrida is caught in a performative contradiction and puts himself in the awkward position of undertaking what he declares to be impossible. Up to a point this is true, but since Derrida only speaks of the *condition* of the impossibility of such a study, the issue is not one of whether or not such a project can be carried out, but rather one of all such projects falling short.

As already mentioned, S H. Clark holds that Ricoeur's project, one which he praises for its philosophical openness and self-criticism, is "the Socratic inheritance in its most positive form" (*PR*, 4). While it is possible that the same could not be said of Derrida's project (but for reasons other than any lack of openness and self-criticism), it is also possible that it is the Socratic inheritance in its most daring or courageous form. Like Socrates, Derrida does not avoid, in addition to the deepest sort of inquiries, the most formidable of opponents. The plea before the bench of philosophy that a general ignorance of philosophical metaphor (and hence the concept) should be recognized has at least some similarity to the plea before the bench of Athens that a general ignorance of justice, virtue, and piety should be acknowledged. Due to the systematic neglect of inquiring into this area, however, Derrida must begin not with what is most formidable but simply with what is most available. In the second section, he examines Pierre Louis' *Les métaphores de Platon*, a study which, claiming to break with tradition, refrains from the customary task of classifying metaphors according to their ostensible sites of origin.[19] What Louis means by the traditional form of classification is that there are tropes in Plato – for example, form, light, or sun – which, although they refer to the suprasensible world of knowledge, seem to be derived from the world of the senses. For Louis, to classify metaphors in the etymological fashion – that is, in the fashion of their having some primitive origin – is to overlook what is most significant, namely, their connection to philosophical ideas.[20]

Philosophical metaphors are therefore not rhetorical or poetic ornaments. Their role is rather to avoid a lengthy, more complicated discussion or demonstration. But Derrida points out that this notion of metaphor as verbal shortcut, as well as recurring frequently throughout the tradition, implies, despite the author's explicit intentions to the contrary, that the use of metaphor in philosophy is a matter of convenience rather than necessity. What ultimately happens then is that Louis can only maintain his thesis by having it oscillate between an understanding of

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19 Derrida's main objection to Pierre Louis' study in *Les métaphores de Platon* (Rennes, 1945) is that it deals equivocally with philosophical metaphor by conflating it with the philosophical concept.

> Tenir compte de la pensée platonicienne, de son sens et de son articulation interne, c'est là une exigence peu contestable pour qui veut reconstituer le système des métaphores de Platon. Mais on s'aperçoit très vite que l'articulation interne n'est pas celle des métaphores elles-mêmes mais celles des idées « philosophiques » la métaphore jouant exclusivement, quoi qu'en ait l'auteur, le rôle d'ornement pédagogique (*MB,* 263).

20 Derrida will be looking at a similar view of philosophical metaphor when he examines Gaston Bachelard's work in the final section of his essay.

philosophical metaphor which renders it virtually indistinguishable from the philosophical concept and an understanding of metaphor which implies that it is expendable as rhetorical artifice. Or, as Derrida puts it: *"Il s'ensuit, selon une logique imperturbable, que la métaphore sera plus « en trop » que jamais: s'identifiant à son tuteur, à la direction de l'idée signifiée, elle ne pourrait s'en distinguer, se distinguer qu'à la condition de retomber comme une signe excédentaire et aussitôt fané"* (265).

What catches Derrida's attention next is a passing but impressive account of philosophical metaphor in Hegel's *Aesthetics*. *"Nulle part ce système [fait des oppositions métaphysiques] n'est plus explicite que chez Hegel. Or il décrit l'espace de la possibilité de la métaphysique et le concept de métaphore ainsi défini lui appartient"* (269). According to Hegel's account, certain words become metaphorical when, in the natural or historical evolution of a language, their meaning and reference are taken up from the physical world and, in order to comprehend this same world (i.e., to render it pure concept), transported to the theoretical or ideal realm. Then, over the course of time and as a result of frequent use, these words lose their figurative aspect or, more properly, this aspect becomes indissociable from the new meaning and reference. The *Aufhebung* of metaphor is then one of its being taken up into metaphysics and, even though suppressed and transformed, nonetheless conserved inside it.

Now Derrida asks: what would be the precise nature of a study which based itself on the Hegelian account? Presumably it would want to investigate philosophical metaphor's origins as physical or sensible signification and reference. Hence the further question arises: what words connect to the physical world at the most basic level of language? It seems that the answer must be: fire, air, earth, and water. However, a study of philosophical metaphor cannot rest at this level; it must schematize all the linguistic zones, first, which are presumably derived from these elements, secondly, which correspond to a more diverse physical order, and, thirdly, which supply the stock of words eventually taking an upwards flight and becoming the vocabulary of metaphysics. In addition to this task, what is required is some kind of transcendental explanation as to how meaning is transferred from the sensible to the suprasensible realm. Questions of time and space then demand to be taken up. *"Mais à cette esthétique empirique des contenus sensibles devrait correspondre, comme sa condition de possibilité, une esthétique transcendantale et formelle des métaphores. Elle nous reconduirait aux formes a priori de l'espace et du temps"* (270). But, as Derrida points out, these questions – the issues of time and space – are the very ones which traditionally have been the most intractable for philosophy. Moreover, they are discursive areas in which philosophical metaphor is already implicated. Therefore, once again, there is the situation of defining philosophical metaphor by using it.[21]

2.5. The Problem of the Concept of Metaphor: First Investigation

The fact that Derrida begins by inquiring into philosophical metaphor rather than metaphor per se is probably not without significance. It likely allows him to demonstrate that the

21 "La conséquence en est double et contradictoire. D'une part, il est impossible de dominer la métaphorique philosophique, comme tel, *de l'extérieur*, en s'en se servant de concept de métaphore qui reste un produit philosophique. Seule la philosophie semblerait détenir quelque autorité sur ses productions métaphoriques. Mais, d'autre part, pour la même raison, la philosophie se prive de qu'elle se donne. Ses instruments s'appartenant à son champ, elle est impuissante à dominer sa tropologie et sa métaphorique générales. Elle ne la percevrait qu'autour d'une tache aveugle ou d'un foyer de surdité. Le concept de métaphore décrirait ce contour mais il n'est même pas sûr qu'il circonscrive ainsi un centre organisateur; et cette loi formelle vaut pour tout philosophème" (*MB*, 272).

problem of philosophical metaphor is integral with the traditional one of poetic metaphor. Moreover, by treating it as a historico-problematic and dealing at length with the tradition, he is able to display not so much the outsider's destructive intent (as perhaps could be held against Polyphile or, more properly, Anatole France), but rather the scholar's care, forbearance, patience, and diligence. To be sure, he also upsets philosophy along the way and interferes with its noble task of looking for safe harbours and havens for truth.[22] But if this task is not without a certain errancy of its own, then Derrida's project would be extending to it something like a diagnosis if not a remedy. On other hand, insofar as it is a disruption of or interference with philosophy which always risks being excessive or unjust, it equally risks doing a bad turn to itself. Perhaps then what is circumspect about it is also its wariness of becoming self-stricken and self-undone.

Although the negative thesis may very well represent Derrida's circumspect or cautious side and the anti-thesis his presumptuous side, the negative thesis, as already mentioned, leads to the anti-thesis. In the third section, "L'ellipse du soleil: L'énigme, l'incompréhensible, l'imprenable," Derrida begins the main part of his inquiry by looking into the history or genealogy of the concept of metaphor. But, at the same time, he also gives an indication of what his inquiry will not be and which, at the deepest level, resembles a critique of the type of project which Ricoeur carries out.[23]

> Comme il va de soi, nulle pétition ici de quelque continuum homogène qui rapporterait sans cesse à elle-même la tradition, celle de la métaphysique comme celle de la rhétorique. Néanmoins, si l'on ne commençait par prêter attention à telles contraintes plus durables, exercées depuis une très longue chaîne systématique, si l'on ne prenait pas la peine d'en délimiter le fonctionnement général et les limites

22 Derrida employs a similar expression in his analysis of Aristotle. "Toute l'onomatisme qui commande la théorie de la métaphore, toute la doctrine aristotélicienne des noms simples (*Poétique* 1457a) est faite pour assurer des havres de vérité et de propriété" (*MB,* 291)

23 Ricoeur's account of metaphorical theory *as internal development* is ambiguous. On the one hand, it seems to be in agreement with Derrida's critique – which is to say that it seems to be at odds with treating historical or other factors as major theoretical determinants – and, on the other hand, not to be in agreement. At the beginning of the Second Study, Ricoeur briefly brings up the New Rhetoric of France, principally represented by Gérald Genette's "La rhétorique restreinte," (*Communications*, 16, [Paris: Seuil, 1970], 158-171) in order to refute the argument that the decline of rhetoric since Aristotle is due to its separation from a larger field which included argumentation and composition. Although devoting the first section of the First Study precisely to this matter and, moreover, after treating rhetoric's separation from philosophy as highly significant for both rhetoric and poetry, Ricoeur ends up claiming nonetheless that it is still not the most important reason for the decline of rhetoric. Theory of metaphor itself is the most significant reason insofar as, instead of, after Aristotle, enlarging itself into a theory of the sentence and discourse, it becomes a theory of denomination which itself is subsidiary to a theory of tropes and figures. For Ricoeur then, metaphorical theory itself has a particular configuration, a set of coordinates, which has guided it through history both in its long period of decline and its recent (Anglo-American) revival as interactive theory. On the other hand, Ricoeur's explanation of the internal development of metaphorical theory rests on an interpretation of Aristotle which both credits him for providing the proper foundations of metaphorical theory and blames him for its decline. According to Ricoeur, it is Aristotle's own emphasis or seeming emphasis on metaphor as single-word trope which leads astray the later rhetorical tradition and allows the study of metaphor to be submerged in a larger and more general project of tropical taxonomy. Ultimately, then, Ricoeur bases a significant part of the development of metaphorical theory *on an accident or error.* Such an account then sounds very close to what Derrida wishes to avoid when he says that, if one does not take the trouble to delimit the general function and effective limits of metaphorical theory, "on courrait le risque de prendre les effets les plus dérivés pour les traits originaux d'un sous-ensemble historique, d'un configuration hâtivement identifiée, d'une mutation imaginaire ou marginale" (*MB*, 275).

> effectives, on courrait le risque de prendre les effets les plus dérivés pour les traits originaux d'un sous-ensemble historique, d'une configuration hâtivement identifiée, d'une mutation imaginaire ou marginale. (274-275).

To say that the above passage resembles a critique of Ricoeur's project is to say that Ricoeur depicts the development of metaphorical theory as being historically ruptured and dramatically discontinuous. It is also to say that the encounter between Derrida and Ricoeur is already taking place in not just a figurative sense, but in the sense that Ricoeur's project is both firmly attached to the tradition and launched or projected from it.

Derrida begins his lengthy examination of Aristotle in the third section by noting the following: *"Aristote, certes, n'a inventé ni le mot ni le concept de métaphore. Il semble pourtant en avoir proposé la première mise en place systématique, celle qui en tout cas fut retenue comme telle avec les effets les plus puissants"* (275).[24] The cornerstone of Aristotle's theory of metaphor is, of course, the following definition.

> "La métaphore (*metaphora*) est le transport (*epiphora*) à une chose d'un nom (*onomatos*) qui en désigne une autre (*allotriou*), transport du genre à l'espèce (*apo tou genous epi eidos*), ou de l'espèce au genre (*apo tou eidous epi to genos*), ou de l'espèce à l'espèce (*apo tou eidous epi eidos*) ou d'après le rapport à l'analogie (*è kata to analogon*)" (1457b, tr. Budé) (*MB*, 275).

As already mentioned in Chapter I, metaphor, traditionally understood, belongs to the realm of meaning which is also the realm of words, nouns, and naming in general. This is evident in Aristotle at various points and one of the issues which Derrida first takes up is Aristotle's discussion of the units of speech below the word or noun. Here Aristotle claims that the sound which a human being emits as a vowel or consonant is not equivalent to the same sound which an animal produces. Derrida calls this a retrospective and teleological account of the difference between language and animal sounds and notes that, by virtue of it, the syntactic's implication in the semantic is both recognized and not recognized. It is recognized in the form of the non-human or physiological path which meaning must take in order to arise from non-meaning but, at the same time, it is not recognized as being part of meaning's final destination at the level of human speech.

Metaphor stands in solidarity with other Aristotelian notions such as *aletheia* and *logos.* Operating as a sort of hidden syllogism, it deduces sameness from similarity. Aristotle directly comments on the veridical and heuristic role of metaphor when, for example, he declares that a good metaphor gives pleasure by providing knowledge.[25] Good metaphor, for Aristotle, largely means metaphor by analogy. *"L'analogie est la métaphore par excellence. Aristote y insiste*

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24 Ricoeur's comparable remark on Aristotle's significance is in the Preface of *La métaphore vive*. "C'est lui, en effet, qui a défini la métaphore pour toute l'histoire ultérieure de la pensée occidentale, sur la base d'une sémantique qui prend le mot ou le nom pour unité de base" (*MV*, 7).

25 "Le Livre III de la *Rhétorique* le précise, entre une calame et une fleur: « Apprendre sans difficulté est naturellement (*physei*) agréable pour tout le monde; or les mots (*onomata*) ont une signification (*semainei ti*); par conséquent ce sont les mots qui nous apportent quelque connaissance qui sont les plus agréables . . . La métaphore produit tout particulièrement cet effet »." (chap. x,tr.fr., p. 349) (*MB*, 284).

beaucoup dans la Rhétorique*"* (289). It is the trope which, resembling simile or comparison, naturally reveals the role of resemblance. One example Aristotle cites is a figure which compares old age to a dried-up tuft of grass. He remarks that this figure, by bringing together two species or two examples of a biological activity, allows the perception of the genus. The latter he identifies as "loss of flower."[26] On the other hand, metaphor also signifies absence, deviation, and improper use of words. Here metaphor occupies a sort of linguistic twilight zone. While still somehow conveying meaning, it nonetheless introduces the opaque, obscure, and obtrusive. It seems to ply a course between the nonsensical and the full sense of language. It seems to veer between the syntactical which escapes meaning and reference and the direct, explicit use of language which, while virtually effacing itself as medium, is in accord with the true and the real. However, the errancy of metaphor is only temporary. It only absents itself in order to make a fruitful return and provide a supplement to meaning. Yet a certain difficulty arises in that there are bad metaphors which presumably do not carry out this work. In the case of at least some species of these bad metaphors, confusion or deception arises and Aristotle is critical of their use in argument along with other figures of speech such as homonym which cloud definition. Derrida's inquiry at this point becomes the question: what is the difference between good and bad metaphor?

Accordingly, he carefully observes the fact that, when Aristotle discusses good metaphor and, more precisely, metaphor by analogy, he also provides an example – a rather illustrious one – of metaphor by analogy which does not follow the normal pattern of having four retrievable terms. The example in question is the figure of the sun or, more precisely, what is said of the sun in ancient Greek, namely, that it seeds its light. Aristotle himself notes that, while "seeds" is figurative, it is the only word to signify the sun's casting its light. The fourth term is missing and Derrida asks: *"Où a-t-on jamais vu qu'il y a le même rapport entre le soleil et ses rayons qu'entre l'ensemencement et la semence?"* (290).

Although Aristotle brings up the figure of the sun in order to register it as anomaly or exception, it goes unacknowledged even by him that, given that it is supposed to be an example of metaphor by analogy and, furthermore, given that its missing term is supposed to be the original or proper term which "seeds" replaces, this figure, by reason of its obscure origins, ends up being the exception which throws the rule into doubt. Perhaps it is not out of place to speculate here that Aristotle's reticence on this matter is one with philosophy's traditional identification of the act of securing truth with the act of making truth secure. It is not so much to possess it as not to be dispossessed of it. At the deepest level of investigation, what is generally wanted by philosophy is less the positive securing of it than the positive response to the threat to or absence of it. This response is both a recognition and a non-recognition. It is both the recognition and non-recognition of never fully having the truth (there is always room for another investigation or commentary); it is both the recognition and non-recognition of the indiscernible behind truth; and, finally, it is both the recognition and non-recognition of the right to pull up short of – for fear of putting them into jeopardy – the essential, elemental, integral, or ideal bases of truth. So it is that, by implicitly invoking a governing consciousness which is responsible for expressing the sun's activity on earth in the form of seeding its light, philosophy can dismiss another possibility, namely, that there is an unconscious use of language which forces new

26 Derrida continues the above passage from the *Rhetoric* as follows: "« Quand on nous dit que la vieillesse est comme l'éteule (*kalamen*), on nous fournit une connaissance et une notion par le genre: vieillesse et éteule ont toutes deux perdu leur fleur »" (*MB*, 284).

meanings onto old words. Given this dismissal of the unconscious or secret operation of language, the sun can be maintained as being singular, universal, and wholly independent from language. It need not be seen to be bound up itself in a linguistic network which is contemporary with it.[27]

There is another troublesome figure which Aristotle brings up and then passes quickly over.

> Et pourtant, en une phrase, une parenthèse aussitôt refermée, Aristote évoque incidemment le cas d'une *lexis* qui serait de part en part métaphorique. Aucun nom propre n'y est du moins présent, apparent comme tel. Aussitôt après l'ensemencement solaire, voici la « coupe sans vin »: « On peut encore user de ce mode de métaphore d'une autre manière; après avoir désigné une chose par un nom qui appartient à une autre, on nie une des qualités propre à celle-ci; par exemple, au lieu d'appeler le bouclier « coupe d'Arès » on l'appellera « coupe sans vin » »
>
> Mais ce procédé, Aristote ne le dit pas, peut se poursuivre et se compliquer à l'infini. Aucune référence n'étant plus proprement nommée dans une telle métaphore, la figure est emportée dans l'aventure d'une longue phrase implicite, d'un récit secret dont rien ne nous assure qu'il nous reconduira au nom propre (290).

By conscientiously pointing out and then hastily passing over the anomaly of the metaphor whose proper terms can never be assured, Aristotle formally recognizes it but never incorporates it into an explanation. Rather, its being implicitly labelled anomaly or exception almost operates as an explanation in and of itself. Or, to put it another way, it is legitimized as what requires no explanation simply because it is identified as being marginal. Aristotle's recognition of troublesome metaphors or figures, insofar as it is not an investigation of them or a recognition of their falling short as good or proper figures, is also a form of non-recognition.

The difference between, on the one hand, what is the exception to good metaphor and yet not considered bad metaphor and, on the other hand, *enigma* or what Aristotle identifies as confused figure of speech is not clear insofar as the first resembles or is not far from also being a random juxtaposition of words. But there is a sense in which not only bad or dubious metaphors but also good ones are brought under the banner of the exceptional and enigmatic when Aristotle claims that metaphorization comes more naturally to some human beings than to others. Only poets and philosophers make good metaphors. It is a gift and not something which can be learned.

> Puisque l'invention des métaphores est un don inné, naturel, congénital, ce sera aussi un trait de génie. La notion de nature rend cette contradiction tolérable. Dans la nature, chacun a sa nature. Certains ont

27 "Si le soleil peut « semer », c'est que son nom est inscrit dans un système de relations qui le constitue. Ce nom n'est plus le nom propre d'une chose unique auquel la métaphore *surviendrait*; il a déjà commencé à dire l'origine multiple, divisée, de toute semence, l'oeil, l'invisibilité, la mort, le père, le « nom propre », etc. Si Aristote ne s'engage pas dans cette conséquence, c'est sans doute qu'elle contredit à la valeur philosophique d'*aletheia* . . ." (*MB*, 291).

> plus de nature que d'autres, plus de génie, de générosité, de semence. Si « ce qui est important, c'est d'exceller dans les métaphores », certains ont le génie de la métaphore, savent mieux que d'autres apercevoir les ressemblances et dévoiler la vérité de la nature. Ressource imprenable. « Exceller dans les métaphores », « c'est la seule chose qu'on ne peut pas prendre à autrui et c'est un indice de dons naturels (*euphuias te semeion estin*) » (*Poétique* 1459 a cf. aussi *Rhétorique* III, chap. ii) (*MB*, 292).

2.6. The Problem of the Concept of Metaphor: Second Investigation

In the background of Aristotle's theory of metaphor is an ontology which Derrida identifies, first, as Aristotle's theory of *phusis* and, secondly, his theory of the analogy of being. In accordance with this ontology, meaning and reference have as their absolute basis the correspondence between word and object. With respect to later metaphorical theory, this correspondence becomes one between word and idea. Traditionally, the distinction between the metaphorical and the non-metaphorical has been defined then as the distinction between an improper versus proper correspondence to the real or ideal.

As Aristotle notes, a word may have many significations but, in order for it to be meaningful, it must operate with only one of them. An uncontrolled polysemy would be a chaotic dissemination, a complete breakdown of communication and order. Derrida notes how harshly Aristotle censures the sophist for his practise of substituting an equivocal term for a univocal one. In contrast to the philosopher who only concerns himself with truth, the sophist aims to win at argument. He brings to any matter obscurity rather than clarity. Besides the sophist, there is also that sort of person so unreasonable as to insist that X is both Y and not Y. Such a person, according to Aristotle, is little better than a vegetable.

> A la limite de ce « ne-rien-vouloir-dire », on est à peine un animal, plutôt une plante, un roseau et qui ne pense pas: « Il est cependant possible d'établir par réfutation l'impossibilité que la même chose soit et ne soit pas, pourvu que l'adversaire dise seulement quelque chose. S'il ne dit rien, il est ridicule de chercher à discuter avec quelqu'un qui ne peut parler de rien: un tel homme, en tant que tel, est dès lors semblable à un végétal (*homoios gar phutô*) » (*Métaphysique* I 1006 a 10) (*MB*, 296).

When Derrida cites Aristotle's condemnation of the sophist and the irrationalist, he does so at some length and without raising any objection to it. And yet, from a certain standpoint, he cuts the sort of figure whom Aristotle condemns. It seems then that Derrida willingly risks drawing this condemnation on himself and, at the same time, that he is oblivious to it or perhaps even defiant of it. All of this likely turns on – if it is to be accepted as pertinent material here – the fact that, for Derrida, dealing with metaphor properly is to deal with it equivocally rather than univocally.[28] The question he never quite renders explicit might very well be: Can the equivocal in a way similar to the polysemous be controlled and rendered meaningful? If his project is a

28 Perhaps its would be better to say that metaphor is *always* dealt with equivocally and that it is more appropriate to affirm this than to deny it. In "Le retrait de la métaphore," Derrida brings out this point more clearly than he does in "La mythologie blanche."

demonstration of the equivocal as the more appropriate vehicle of understanding metaphor, then his passing encounter with Aristotle the moralist is quasi-confrontational on both the epistemological and ethical fronts.

With respect to the proper/improper distinction, one of the first points Derrida takes up is that there is a significant difference between Aristotle and the later rhetorical tradition in that the former allows for the possibility that, along with ordinary or literal terms, some metaphors themselves have proper significations. This peculiarity is the result of a certain ambiguous play between two levels of analysis in Aristotle: the semantic and the ontological. More precisely, it is the ambiguous play between the proper as it applies strictly to words and the relations between words (which is the proper of the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*) and the proper as it applies to objects (which is the proper of the *Topics)*. In contrast to later rhetorical theory which seals off the semantic from the ontological and thereby strictly equates proper with current, literal, or univocal, Aristotle leaves open the possibility of a metaphor's being proper by being in one-to-one correspondence with the object.

Proper is most commonly denoted in the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric* by the term *kurion* and proper in the *Topics* by the term *idion*. *Kurion* best translates as the current or literal sense of a word and *idion* as the proper in the sense of the property of an object which is to be distinguished from its essence and accidents. Although, as just mentioned, Aristotle most commonly uses *kurion* in the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric* and *idion* in the *Topics*, Derrida suggests that it is the latter which is ultimately more significant. *"Pourtant la valeur de l'*idion *semble soutenir, sans en occuper l'avant scène, toute cette métaphorologie"* (294).[29]

As already mentioned in the Lawlor reading, Aristotle claims in the *Topics* that the property of an object is in a quasi-synonymous relation to the object's essence. According to Derrida's account of Aristotle's theory, it is the slight play or difference between essence and property which allows for metaphor. *"Cet écart permet sans doute le jeu de la métaphore"* (296). This is to say that metaphor is the transfer of the property or properties of one object to another object. Of course, it is a only a semantic transfer and not an ontological one and, as such, neither disturbs the object's essence nor its properties. In this way, when a metaphor becomes a common or current expression which, as has already been noted, is what Aristotle's theory claims and what distinguishes it from later rhetorical theory, then it is proper.[30]

> J'essaie de parler *de* la métaphore, de dire quelque chose de propre ou de littéral à son sujet, de la *traiter* comme mon sujet mais je suis, par elle, si on peut dire, obligé à parler d'elle *more metaphorico*, à sa manière à elle. Je ne peux *en traiter* sans *traiter avec elle*, sans négocier avec elle l'emprunt que je lui fais pour parler d'elle. Je n'arrive pas à produire un *traité* de la métaphore qui ne soit *traité avec* la métaphore qui du coup paraît intraitable (*RM*, 64).

29 Derrida's privileging of *kurion* is an early target for Ricoeur in *La métaphore vive*. His critique of it comes in one of two successive footnotes focussing on Derrida in the First Study.

> La lecture des *Topiques* n'encourage, ni le rapprochement entre *kurion* et *idion*, ni surtout l'interprétation de l'*idion* dans le sens « métaphysique » de primitif, d'originaire, d'indigène. Le traitement de l'*idion* dans les *Topiques* relève d'une considération absolument étrangère à la théorie de la *lexis*, et particulièrement à celles des dénominations ordinaires ou extraordinaires (*MV*, 27).

30 There is no little ambiguity in this area but it seems that what Aristotle means by a species of metaphor which is essentially a proper noun (e.g., *the lion advanced* in which "lion" signifies Achilles) is what Ricoeur would call a dead metaphor. Presumably this dead metaphor adds a new signification to *lion*.

For Derrida, it is not insignificant that, in the *Topics,* Aristotle repeats a certain gesture which he makes in the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*. Indeed, what is remarkable is not only that this gesture – the pointing out and subsequent passing over an exception or anomaly – is repeated, but that it once again involves the Sun. Here it takes the form of Aristotle's claim that the definition of the sun as the brightest star moving over the earth during the day is wrong for two reasons. Aristotle's first reason is that the term being defined, namely, the sun, is already implicated in the defining part of the proposition, namely, the brightest star that moves over the earth during the day. The second reason is that the sun, regularly concealing itself, may not always be moving over the earth. Hence the conclusion is that "moving over the earth" cannot be a property of the sun.[31]

The Aristotelian sun then, according to Derrida, proves to be an essence with unknowable properties. As both literal and figurative source of light, it is also the essence of essences. This essence of essences complicates itself by concealing itself. Not only does it conceal itself by simply being a great imponderable egg in the sky, but also by being a great shining eye which regularly absents itself. Its very regularity in this respect – its movement away from and back to the world and away from and back to the full presence of things – is what makes the Aristotelian sun the paradigmatic metaphor. But, once again, its meaning and signification are shrouded in mystery or, more properly, they are implicated in a virtually unlimited problematic.[32]

2.7. Catachresis

To the extent that bad metaphor, unlike good metaphor, is no addition or even an obstacle to knowledge, it resembles the unknown essence of the sun and its hidden movement. Unlike good metaphor, catachresis which is perhaps the most celebrated species of bad or untrue metaphor (Ricoeur equates it with dead metaphor)[33] is not the movement of proper to improper

31 The following, as cited by Derrida, is the relevant passage from Aristotle: "« Par exemple, quand on a posé que c'est un propre du Soleil d'être l'astre le plus brillant qui se meut au-dessus de la Terre, on se sert dans le propre d'une expression telle que *se mouvoir au-dessus de la Terre*, ce qui est connu par la sensation, et par suite le propre du Soleil ne saurait avoir été donné correctement: car on ne verra pas bien si le Soleil, au moment où il se couche, continue à se mouvoir au-dessus de la Terre, parce que la sensation nous fait alors défaut » (*Topiques*, V, 3. 131 b 20-30, tr. Tricot)" (*MB*, 298).

32 "Quelque chose s'est inversé dans notre discours. Nous disions plus haut: le soleil est ce référent unique, irremplaçable, naturel, autour duquel tout doit tourner, vers lequel tout doit se tourner. Nous devons maintenant, suivant pourtant le même trajet, retourner la proposition: le soleil proprement dit, le soleil sensible, ne fournit pas seulement de mauvaises connaissances parce que de mauvaises métaphores, il est seulement métaphorique. Puisqu'on ne peut plus s'assurer, nous dit Aristote, de ses caractères sensibles comme de ses « propres », le soleil n'est jamais présent en propre dans le discours. Chaque fois qu'il y a une métaphore, il y a sans doute un soleil quelque part; mais chaque fois qu'il y a du soleil, la métaphore a commencé. Si le soleil est métaphorique déjà, toujours, il n'est plus tout à fait naturel. Il est déjà, toujours, un lustre, on dirait une construction *artificielle* si l'on pouvait encore accréditer cette signification quand la nature a disparu. Car, si le soleil n'est tout à fait naturel, que reste-t-il de naturel dans la nature? Le plus naturel de la nature comporte en lui-même de quoi sortir de soi; il compose avec la lumière « artificielle », s'éclipse, s'ellipse, a toujours été autre, lui-même: le père, la semence, le feu, l'oeil, l'oeuf, etc., c'est-à-dire tant d'autres choses encore, donnant de surcroît la mesure des bonnes et des mauvaises métaphores, des claires et des obscures; puis, à la limite, de ce qui est pire ou meilleur que la métaphore" (*MB*, 300).

33 Only once does Ricoeur explicitly identify dead metaphor with catachresis. Nevertheless, since it is in the context of discussing philosophy's frequent need to fill a lexical deficiency and, furthermore, since his definition of dead metaphor is itself restricted to a philosophical or metaphysical context (i.e., the Platonic sensible/intelligible opposition), there seems little reason not to think that this identification is fundamental.

or known to unknown or sameness to difference and back again. It is rather the direct movement from improper to improper or, strangely enough, from proper to proper. With respect to the first, although it is the case that all metaphors by analogy are fashioned out of a rearrangement of fours terms, these terms themselves give no indication of being absolutely primitive or original and hence belong to an infinite chain of contingent associations in which the proper is lost to view and is no longer possible except as what springs out of the "sub-microscopic" workings of this chain as the ideally constituted. Derrida compares this long chain to a secret narrative wherein transfers are both made and forgotten.

> Dès qu'on admet que dans une relation analogique tous les termes sont déjà pris, un à un, dans une relation métaphorique, tout se met à fonctionner non plus en soleil mais en étoile, la source ponctuelle de vérité ou de propriété restant invisible ou nocturne (291).

With respect to the movement from proper to proper, Derrida notes that Fontanier defines catachresis as the extension of one word which signifies one idea to another idea which lacks its own proper word. It is therefore the forced application of a familiar word to an unfamiliar or anonymous idea and, moreover, one which, however rude or violent, is useful.

Catachresis is, for Derrida, fully implicated in the problem of metaphor. Albeit no less a metaphysical concept than the other, it helps to signify what the metaphorical is or is not or, to put it another way, what the tropic or figurative is in the very defining terms of metaphor.[34] At this deep level of investigation, the proper/improper distinction no longer holds and, of course, neither does the distinction between metaphor and non-metaphor.

2.8. The Problem of Philosophical Metaphor as Scientific Metaphor

Even while Derrida complicates and even over-complicates the subject of metaphor, his project runs along a relatively simple and straightforward path. As mentioned earlier, the peculiarity of his initial question is that, contrary to the usual practise, it does not presuppose the quiddity of philosophical metaphor such that the only task would be to properly define it. Rather, it implies that there is something to find which calls itself philosophical metaphor and that it is best to leave open the question of whether it does so rightly. In fact, Derrida very quickly comes to the conclusion that philosophical metaphor can never be properly called to account because

> Il est vrai que le langage philosophique, dans son travail de dénomination, paraît contredire le jugement de sémanticien concernant la rareté des métaphores lexicalisées. La raison en est simple: la création de significations nouvelles, liée au surgissement d'une nouvelle manière de questionner, met le langage en état de carence sémantique; c'est alors que la métaphore lexicalisée intervient dans une fonction de suppléance. Mais, comme Fontanier l'avait parfaitement aperçu, il s'agit d'un trope « par nécessité et par extension pour suppléer aux mots qui manquent à la langue pour certaines idées... » (*Les figures du discours*, 90); brèf, il s'agit d'une *catachrèse*, qui peut être d'ailleurs de métonymie ou de synecdoque aussi bien que de métaphore (*MV*, 369).

34 "Mais peut-on, nous demandions-nous plus haut, nommer encore métaphores ces tropes définissants, antérieurs à toute rhétorique philosophique et producteurs de philosophèmes? Cette question pourrait guider toute une lecture des analyses que Fontanier réserve à la *catachrèse* dans *le Supplément à la théorie des tropes*. Contentons-nous ici d'une indication. Ce *Supplément* concerne d'abord l'inscription – violente, forcée, abusive – d'un signe, l'imposition d'un signe à un sens qui n'avait pas encore de signe propre dans la langue" (*MB*, 304).

any definition of it will necessarily have its definiendum implicated in its definiens. Nonetheless there is sufficient evidence to show that, although it has not been studied very much, philosophical metaphor is widely recognized. Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Lenin, and Bergson are a few of the philosophers or thinkers who, as Derrida notes, have made observations about it. Therefore, if the investigation which issues from Derrida's question is to do justice to this question, it would seem that it must be a consideration of anything which could possibly oppose the recognition of the condition of the impossibility of defining philosophical metaphor.

But Derrida does not analyse more than a few observations from most of the above philosophers or thinkers because their suspicions about the influence of metaphor on thought and their both metaphorical and metaphysical descriptions of philosophical metaphor are not a serious step beyond Aristotle. Observations such as Nietzsche's are, on the other hand, directly supportive of Derrida's negative thesis.[35] It is therefore significant that, when he takes a look at the work of a contemporary epistemologist, Gaston Bachelard, Derrida does not limit his analysis to what a footnote or two might handle. On the contrary, it takes up the better part of the fifth and final section and seems to add a new dimension to his inquiry. But it remains a question whether Derrida undertakes this lengthy examination of Bachelard's limited analysis of metaphor for epistemological reasons only.

This last phase of the inquiry into philosophical metaphor is begun by Derrida's speculating that, although a rhetorical or philosophical study must ultimately prove deficient in defining philosophical metaphor, perhaps there is the possibility (but, one must ask, how strong or meaningful can this possibility be in the context of Derrida's already demonstrating the condition of its impossibility) of a meta-philosophical study capable of mastering it.

> Rêvera-t-on pour autant de quelque méta-philosophie, d'un discours plus général mais de type encore philosophique, sur les métaphores de « premier degré », sur ces non-vraies métaphores qui ont ouvert la philosophie? (308).

It is in this context that Bachelard's work is singled out as possibly furnishing this new kind of

35 Both in the first and last sections of his essay, Derrida cites from Nietzsche's *Truth and Falsehood in the Extra-Moral Sense* or, more properly, the French translation of *Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne* in *Le Livre du philosophe* (trans., A. K. Marietti, [Paris: Seuil, 1969]). On both occasions, the cited passages have as much a figurative as thematic connection to Derrida's discussion of metaphor. In the first section, the passage cited finds Nietzsche making use of, like Polyphile in *Le jardin d'Épicure*, the figure of coins which are polished until they lose their inscription. In the fifth and final section, the cited passage finds Nietzsche making use of the figure of the columbarium. Directly before this second passage, Derrida discusses the use of metaphor in science and, in particular, a certain unwanted influence which metaphor can exhibit in scientific inquiry and investigation. Drawing from Georges Canguilhem's *La connaissance de la vie*, Derrida reproduces a brief account of "« le développement de la théorie cellulaire » sur lequel « des valeurs affectives et sociales de coopération et d'association planent de près ou de loin »" (*MB*, 311). Being, as said before, as much a figurative as thematic connection, the two passages from Nietzsche are in some sense interruptions or interventions which briefly shift the focus from metaphor in the narrower sense to metaphor in the larger sense. What is primarily at issue then is truth as metaphoricity or quasi-metaphoricity. Being a mobile multiplicity of traces which constitute the non-human as much as the human, it leads scientific and philosophical thought away from the "truth" of its nature as such towards propositional and empirical truth only. "Cette opération de Nietzsche (généralisation de la métaphoricité par la mise en abîme d'une métaphore déterminée) n'est possible qu'à prendre le risque de la continuité entre la métaphore et le concept, comme entre l'animal et l'homme, l'instinct et le savoir" (*MB*, 313).

study. At the same time, Derrida does not raise the question of – and surely not because of some lapse or oversight – why it should be assumed that there is a difference between a rhetorical study of philosophical metaphor and a so-called *meta-philosophical* study of it. After all, if it has already been established that all rhetorical studies are philosophical because they operate with the same metaphysical presuppositions, there is no reason to think that, because a study is re-christened meta-philosophical, the same would not hold true for it.[36]

It may be then that Derrida's prolonged inquiry is governed by some other consideration. As an *envoi*, a sending out into the world, this inquiry cannot be the product of a total indifference to its reception. It is possible therefore that there is the need for a certain *délicatesse* at this juncture and for a further proof that it has left behind its initial waywardness. This return to the land of the serious, civil, and straightforward is no doubt of a scholarly bent and corresponds to a certain obligation to give Bachelard, the eminent epistemologist who has published recently on both poetic and scientific metaphor, his due.

In *La formation de l'esprit scientifique* (1967), Bachelard discusses the ever-present possibility of metaphorical control and over-control of the scientific concept. By virtue of certain affective associations – ones, for example, of an anthropomorphic or animistic nature – the metaphorical or figurative dimension of certain concepts can result in even sophisticated research being carried out under the spell of a vivid or agreeable image. Bachelard's response to this problem is one of suggesting that science should consciously employ other metaphors to counter the "pre-scientific" ones. Presumably the countering metaphors are but provisional means or tools which science can later dispense with. Derrida gives reason to think, that, despite Bachelard's optimism, the separation of the figurative from the conceptual is never completed and, in fact, the attempt at this separation goes hand in hand with the opposite movement which is the uniting of the conceptual with the figurative. While it is no doubt true that metaphors can be employed to counter other metaphors in science, it is also true that there is no straight progression from figurative concepts to pure concepts but rather shifts from figurative concepts to other figurative concepts. The example Derrida provides is that of the blood's movement in the body which was first depicted as a system of irrigation and later depicted as a circulatory system. The latter is of course no less a figure than the former. All shifts from one scientific concept to another happen in particular historico-scientific contexts and what is ultimately going on is that these shifts are not governed by criteria monitoring a process of conceptual purification, but rather ones dealing with explanatory efficiency.

The second way in which Derrida examines Bachelard's discussion of metaphor is to take a look at his meta-poetics.[37] As a sophisticated classification of metaphor in the poetic text, its governing hypothesis is that certain metaphors are related to other metaphors and that, taken as a whole, these relations constitute an aesthetic pattern, an ordering of dominant and less dominant metaphors. Furthermore, this pattern or ordering constitutes a diagram of the poetic text which, according to Bachelard, has both syntactic and semantic import. Following the latter's very own suggestion and, of course, in the spirit of entertaining all possibilities, Derrida hypothesizes that Bachelard's scheme could be transferred *mutatis mutandis* to the philosophical text. Taking as an example Descartes' writings, he quickly sketches out the likely shape of such a program.

36 Derrida pays tribute to Bachelard by taking the term *meta-philosophy* from him. At the same time, there is little reason not to think that, despite Bachelard's endorsement of it, it is simply a way of dignifying what has been traditionally assigned to work on the margins of philosophy.

37 The following reference is supplied by Derrida: *Lautréamont*, ed. Corti, 1939, nouv. éd. 1956, p. 54-55.

According to Bachelard's theory, one central metaphor should come into view and, in the case of Descartes, it would be no other than natural light (*lumen naturale*).

> Mais, si on se rend au point le plus critique et le proprement cartésien de la démarche critique, au point du doute hyperbolique et de l'hypothèse du Malin Génie, au point où le doute frappe non seulement les idées d'origine sensible mais les idées « claires et distinctes » et les évidences mathématiques, on sait que ce qui permet au discours de repartir et de se poursuivre, son ultime ressource, est désigné comme *lumen naturale* (318).

This metaphor is precisely the one, however, which breaks out of the circle of Cartesian logic or, to put it another way, is the equivocation which surreptitiously closes this circle. *"La lumière naturelle et tous les axiomes qu'elle donne à voir ne sont jamais soumis au doute le plus radical. Celui-ci se déploie* dans *la lumière."* (318). Descartes states that, according to the natural light, it is manifestly clear that God exists and, at the same time, attributes this natural light to God. The central metaphor of *lumen naturale* is thus employed in order to embrace both philosophical meaning and what stands outside this meaning. Derrida claims that, in varying ways, all philosophical texts, if so schematized, yield the same result. A Bachelardian metaphorics applied to philosophical texts must then run into a major difficulty. Having its primary justification in relating philosophical metaphors to philosophical meaning, it would ultimately run up against a central or dominant metaphor dropping out of this program.

> Qu'y trouver d'autre sinon la métaphore de la *domination*, accrue de son pouvoir de dissimulation qui lui permet d'échapper à la maîtrise: Dieu ou le Soleil? (318).

2.9. From the Deaths of Metaphor to the Deaths of Philosophy

The fifth and final section of Derrida's essay (which includes the Bachelard study) is entitled "La métaphysique – relève de la métaphore." Allan Bass, the English translator of this essay, notes the following:

> This subtitle is untranslatable, at very least because of its double meaning. Derrida simultaneously uses *relève* as both noun and verb here. If *relève* is taken as a noun, the subtitle would read: "Metaphysics – the *relève*, the *Aufhebung* of metaphor." If *relève* is taken as a verb, which would be the usual reading, it can be understood in its usual sense, i.e. not as a translation of *Aufhebung*. Thus, the subtitle would read: "Metaphysics derives from, takes off from metaphor". . . . If one is attentive to the implications of this unstoppable alternation in meaning, along with the interplay of metaphysics, metaphor, and *relève*, one will have begun to grasp what Derrida is about in this essay.[38]

38 Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1982), 258.

What Derrida is about here is worth comparing to Nietzsche's account of the relationship between metaphor and concept.[39] Derrida, along with citing him in "Exergue" on the subject of metaphors that are so well-handled that they lose their figurative value, also cites him in the fifth section at some length and on a matter which PS is thematising.

> A la construction des concepts travaille originellement, comme nous l'avons vu, le langage et plus tard la science. Comme l'abeille travaille en même temps à construire les cellules et à remplir ces cellules de miel, ainsi la science travaille sans cesse à ce grand columbarium des concepts, au sépulcre des intuitions, et construit toujours de nouveaux et de plus hauts étages, elle façonne, nettoie, rénove, les vieilles cellules, elle s'efforce surtout d'emplir ce colombage surélevé jusqu'au monstrueux et d'y ranger le monde empirique tout entier, c'est-à-dire le monde anthropomorphique. Alors que déjà l'homme d'action attache sa vie à la raison et aux concepts pour ne pas être emporté par le courant et ne pas se perdre lui-même, le savant construit sa cabine tout près de la tour de la science pour pouvoir y aider et pour trouver lui-même protection sous le bastion existant. Et il a besoin de cette protection, car il y a des puissances redoutables qui font continuellement pression sur lui et qui opposent à la « vérités » scientifiques des « vérités » d'un tout autre genre aux enseignes les plus hétérogènes (*Le livre du philosophe*, tr. A. K. Marietti, Aubier, p. 193-195) (*MB*, 313).

What needs protection as philosophy or science is likely very close to what protects as philosophy or science. And what announces the threatening as philosophy or science is likely very close to being the threatening as philosophy or science. Surely the philosophical ground reveals itself divided up in ways other than purely formal ones. And surely it is inhabited at least on its boundaries by an uncontrollable part of truth-telling which demands the greater freedom for itself as well as the possible sacrifice of itself.

Derrida's analysis of Bachelard's discussion of metaphor takes up, as already mentioned, most of the fifth section. Now insofar as this approach is epistemological and presumably remains so even when taken up by Derrida, and, furthermore, insofar as it purports to be non-metaphysical, scientific, and psychoanalytic,[40] the inquiry into it seems to have little to do with

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39 Although characterizing his writing as being masked, Nietzsche's style is still very acerbic and direct. It is likely that, given his philosophical canonization and the greater tolerance which it wins for him, the aggressive aspect of this style is largely forgiven. On the other hand, this style, both aggressive and direct and even, on occasion, highly offensive, is the product of a free spirit who spent the better part of his time alone and away from institutions. Derrida's situation, being different, would likely render it impossible for him to be both aggressive and equally direct at the same time.

40 "Mais, d'une part, la psychanalyse de la connaissance objective doit dénoncer surtout les « métaphores immédiates » (« Le danger des métaphores immédiates pour la formation de l'esprit scientifique, c'est qu'elles ne sont pas toujours des images qui passent; elles poussent à une pensée autonome; elles tendent à se compléter, à s'achever dans le règne de l'image », c'est le *système* des métaphores qui, nous le verrons, intéresse d'abord Bachelard); d'autre part, la métaphore non immédiate, construite, est utile quand elle vient « illustrer » un savoir conquis sur la mauvaise métaphore. Sa valeur est alors essentiellement pédagogique: « Une psychanalyse de la connaissance objective doit donc s'appliquer à décolorer, sinon à effacer, ces images naïves. Quand l'abstraction aura passé par là, il sera temps d'*illustrer* [Bachelard souligne] les schémas rationnels. En résumé, l'intuition

the title of the section which, in and of itself, suggests that metaphor is intimately connected to the possibility of metaphysics and therefore far from being a scientific object. On the other hand, it may very well be that devoting so much of the final section to these relatively orthodox matters rescues the last few pages of Derrida's essay from, because of their relative obscurity, being ill-received.

As the final coda of his essay, there is the apt but also antipathetic account of what he calls the two paths of metaphorical self-destruction. The first path is the way of metaphysics and the way of philosophy. It is the arresting, the stopping short, the freezing and congealing of metaphorical play. Here the poetic and the philosophical are already to be found in their kinship and antagonism. The second path of metaphor follows the first path but always as the barely discernible outside or other of philosophy. Here there is the breakdown of the concept, the fraying at its edges, the return not to full meaning or presence but always the escape beyond them.

The first path of metaphorical self-destruction corresponds to the birth of philosophy. The second path corresponds to its death. Or, to be more precise, Derrida recognizes two ways in which philosophy perishes. The first death is what it lays to rest of itself as a sort of completion or accomplishment. The second death is what drops away from it without obvious counsel, consciousness, or consensus. The death of philosophy is a double genitive.

> Homonymie en laquelle Aristote sut reconnaître – alors sous les traits du sophiste – la figure même de ce qui double et menace la philosophie: ces deux morts se répètent et se simulent l'une l'autre dans l'héliotrope. Héliotrope de Platon ou de Hegel d'une part, l'héliotrope de Nietzsche ou de Bataille d'autre part . . . (324).

Here then for Derrida is the philosophical sun, Platonic or Hegelian, which reveals "everything" and here also the anti-philosophical sun, Nietzschean or Bataillean, which "engenders" everything. These two suns can only be one and the same – forever alternating – in the discourse of philosophy which is also the discourse *on* philosophy.

2.10. The Rhetorical Remainder

The response which Derrida gives to the question of the adequacy or inadequacy of his own project seems to be divided. On the one hand, it seems to be the recognition that his inquiry is, insofar as it is the recognition of the inadequacy of all such inquiries, adequate. On the other hand, it seems to be the recognition that his inquiry, insofar as it is implicated in what it recognizes as inadequate, is itself necessarily inadequate. To find an illustration of this divided recognition or self-recognition, it is perhaps not necessary to look further than the opening lines. Here a dual but uncertain control is set up in that, while this earliest exposition exhibits its own effects and influences, it still remains marginal to the inquiry. At the same time, there is something registered in this opening passage which escapes Derrida's own best intentions or which he himself thinks must escape them and which, for lack of a better word, should be called

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première est un obstacle à la pensée scientifique; seule une illustration travaillant au-delà du concept, en rapportant un peu de couleur sur les traits essentiels, peut aider la pensée scientifique » (*La formation de l'esprit scientifique* [Paris: J. Vrin, 1967], 78-81)" (*MB*, 309-310).

metaphor.

> De la philosophie, la rhétorique. D'un volume, à peu près, plus ou moins – faire ici une fleur, l'extraire, la monter, la laisser, plutôt, monter, se faire jour – se détournant comme d'elle-même, révolutée, telle fleur grave – apprenant à cultiver, selon le calcul d'un lapidaire, la patience ... (249).

The metaphor here – the metaphor of metaphor which is the image of a live flower and the image of an engraved flower – is a *mixed* metaphor. After seventy-five pages of analysis and at the close of his essay, Derrida resorts to a similar metaphor which, like the first, paints before the eyes (despite being a "bad" metaphor) metaphor's relation to philosophy.

> Telle fleur porte toujours son double en elle-même, que ce soit la graine ou le type, le hasard de son programme ou la nécessité de son diagramme. L'héliotrope peut toujours se relever. Et il peut toujours devenir une fleur séchée dans un livre. Il y a toujours, absente de tout jardin, une fleur séchée dans un livre; et en raison de la répétition où elle s'abîme sans fin, aucun langage ne peut réduire en soi la structure d'une anthologie. Ce supplément de code qui traverse son champ, en déplace sans cesse la clôture, brouille la ligne, ouvre le cercle, aucune ontologie n'aura pu le réduire.
>
> A moins que l'anthologie ne soit aussi une lithographie. Héliotrope nomme encore une pierre: pierre précieuse, verdâtre et rayée de veines rouges, espèce de jaspe oriental (324).

Now what confronts PS in this most uncertain of all areas of interpretation is to somehow make the case, however slight, that the opening and closing passages of Derrida's essay are examples or demonstrations in a performative sense of what the essay and its contents are in a constative sense. Perhaps this can be achieved by saying that these passages are, in and of themselves, both an integral part of the inquiry *and* a dispensable part. Derrida's resorting to figurative language is, on the one hand, a rhetorical stopgap or complement, a filling in of what otherwise cannot be said, an artistic stratagem in the manner of, for example, the myths of Plato's dialogues. On the other hand, his employing poetry on the margins of his inquiry is not meant to replace argument or analysis, but only to be a subsidiary part of it which, if considered to be philosophically insecure or dubious, can be safely ignored or, if considered to be "evidence" of the inadequacy of Derrida's own inquiry, incorporated into the analysis.

While it is true that there is some difficulty in labelling as inadequate an inquiry which carries itself off so artfully, it is also true that a difficulty persists nonetheless as the epistemological commitment which is the desire to grasp the truth about metaphor and not to have this truth dispersed, rendered uncertain, or occulted at the deepest level. In the face of Derrida's artful way of philosophizing, no critical philosophy can enter too far into its web without becoming irremediably stuck. Nor can it simplify it or reduce it without changing it beyond recognition. It therefore remains impenetrable to critique and stands as a sort of counter to the hegemony of the true/false opposition. At the very deepest level, Derrida affirms neither

the true nor the false but only what them into operation, into opposition, and into question.

But as suggested earlier, truth-telling can only have significance as the socially valued and accepted. What constitutes the socially valued for philosophical truth-telling is the requirement of two conditions: a plurality of discourses in fair exchange with one another and certain discourses' winning or gaining precedence over other discourses in a consensual way. Now whether these conditions are actually grounded in their impossibility, the fact is that they have an indispensable life in the practise of philosophy. This practical life quite likely involves forgetting or not recognizing the possibility that these conditions are grounded in their impossibility. Derrida's project, insofar as it shares in this practical life, must also forget or not recognize this impossibility. But of course this impossibility is also what it proclaims and in a sense is its formal program.

There is a social imperative in Derrida's project which is as much the condition of the possibility of this project as the asocial or egocentric one. Being thus divided between the social and the asocial imperatives, the condition of this project's possibility is also the conflict between its truth maintained in principle – the truth which accords a certain privilege to the impossibility of truth – and its truth maintained in practise and which accords a certain privilege to its possibility. In PS's section 2.1, it was pointed out that, in the round table discussion, Derrida emphatically agreed with Ricoeur when the latter impressed upon him the need for various theories. He thus acknowledged a conventional commitment to tell the truth in philosophy even while, with his exposé and other parts of his discussion, he clearly call this same commitment into question.

Now the above discrepancy cannot simply be explained away by the fact that Derrida's project, even while it affirms the impossibility of theory, is also an account of its possibility. The reason is that his accounting for the possibility of theory is not the same as his agreeing with Ricoeur and *calling for* theory. His calling for it can only be his recognition of a certain kind of commitment – the conventional commitment of philosophical truth-telling – of which he himself is effectively incapable. Thus the conflict between affirming the possibility and impossibility of truth, along with its being the condition of the possibility of Derrida's project, is also what puts it in the awkward position of having to preach what it does not practise.

In a similar way, the traditional opposition between true and false makes its claim on Derrida's project insofar as the latter is the commitment to the tell the truth about metaphor, metaphor's relation to philosophy, metaphor's relation to philosophy as virtually unlimited problematic, and Western philosophy as ongoing process of idealization. As thesis or even anti-thesis, it sets itself up as the true grasp of the tradition which eludes the tradition's own grasp. Insofar then as Derrida's project cannot avoid the opposition between true and false, it is one with the tradition. On the other hand, insofar as it disrupts even itself or calls itself into question, insofar as it introduces uncertainty at its margins, and insofar as it defines itself as being both inside and outside the tradition, it secures itself with a certain insecurity, a certain play which stretches it beyond the epistemological dilemma always threatening it. It does so even while veering towards the univocal as "critique" of the tradition by veering away from it as "self-critique."

But the dilemma which it cannot entirely avoid and which is both ethical and epistemological is that the tradition, by continually asserting itself as the univocal and even as the *right* to the univocal, always makes the equivocal response unsatisfactory and something to be negated. Inasmuch as Derrida's project must then affirm itself, its repeated response to this

attempt to negate it is, by dint of rigorous analysis and further exploration, the re-registering of the equivocal. But this re-registering is not apart from the struggle with some element which is never completely mastered or controlled by it, some element (social) which is of its very self and which is even addressed to itself and yet which runs against itself. This element is some tension, force, or strife which is both beyond this discourse and within it: *some call to order*.[41]

41 There is a sense in which Derrida's "Le retrait de la métaphore," an exposé which certain people agreeing with S. H. Clark's assessment would say "derives from the most decadent and obscurantist aspects of the late Heidegger," is also a project of clarification. This is to say that the more polemical part of this exposé – the part which is Derrida's response to Ricoeur's critique of "La mythologie blanche" and which is distinct from the analysis of Heidegger – is dedicated to correcting Ricoeur's "misreading" of the earlier work. But this correcting is a certain call to order which, apart from how it redounds to Ricoeur (and however much it is effaced by the later analysis of Heidegger), is Derrida's *own* reading or rereading of "La mythologie blanche." Now, inasmuch as Derrida's rereading of his own essay is a simplification and even oversimplification of it (after all, it is done in the context of a conference), it testifies to a social imperative which Derrida himself cannot avoid and which must traverse his over-complicating operation time and time again.

Chapter III

Ricoeur's Commitment to Tell the Truth about Metaphor as *Indirect* Encounter with Derrida's Project

If there were to arise from the tradition a project opposing itself to Derrida's and targeting his anti-thesis by way of taking on the negative thesis, it would have to be a discourse on metaphor and metaphor's relation to philosophy. And if it were to be as fair and as accommodating and as scrupulous as possible even while being this indirect yet wide-ranging assault, then it would have to coincide with it and reach into it as far as possible.

Of course, it is PS's contention that Ricoeur's project opposes itself in such a way and to such an extent to Derrida's. But what was stated earlier about Derrida's indirect encounter with Ricoeur also holds here, namely, that making this case for the long-distance and circuitous targeting of Derrida's project rests upon a large amount of circumstantial evidence. At the same time, for the very reason that it is circumstantial and is opposed to or goes well beyond the testimony of Ricoeur himself, it likely will shake but never dislodge the contrary conviction. What further counts against the case being made here (which may also be thought to be the case against Ricoeur if not in this chapter than in Chapter IV and at the end of Chapter V) is that his critical analysis of "La mythologie blanche" only takes up twelve of the four hundred pages of *La métaphore vive.* Not only does it seem then that Derrida's essay is examined only in passing or as a supplement to a long, exhaustive, diligent, equanimous, and non-fractious investigation of metaphor, but also that Ricoeur's eye is on many other issues besides dead metaphor, issues which, if not burning more brightly for him, burn much longer.

Another important consideration is how close Ricoeur brings his conception of metaphor to Derrida's not only in the First Study but also in the Sixth where he provides an abbreviated version of what he calls in the First Study his most extreme hypothesis.[1] It is the notion that all semantic fields and hence the very network of concepts constituting speculative discourse arise from an original metaphorical play, an original metaphoricity (Ricoeur cites Gadamer here)

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1 What Ricoeur calls "l'audace de notre hypothèse la plus extrême" (*MV*, 33) refers to the following:

> Une troisième hypothèse, plus aventurée, pointe à l'horizon de la précédente. Si la métaphore relève d'une heuristique de la pensée, ne peut-on supposer que le procédé qui dérange et déplace un certain ordre logique, une certaine hiérarchie conceptuelle, un certain classement, est le même que celui d'où procède toute classification? Certes, nous ne connaissons pas d'autre fonctionnement du langage que celui dans lequel un ordre est déjà constitué; la métaphore n'engendre un ordre nouveau qu'en produisant des écarts dans un ordre antérieur; ne pouvons nous néanmoins imaginer que l'ordre lui-même naît de la même manière qu'il change? n'y a-t-il pas, selon l'expression de Gadamer, une « métaphorique » à l'oeuvre à l'origine de la pensée logique, à la racine de toute classification? Cette hypothèse va plus loin que les précédentes, qui présupposent, pour la fonctionnement de la métaphore, un langage déjà constitué. La notion d'écart est liée à cette présupposition: mais aussi l'opposition, introduite par Aristote lui-même, entre un langage « courant » et un langage « étrange » ou « rare »; et, à plus forte raison, l'opposition introduite ultérieurement entre « propre » et « figuré ». L'idée d'une métaphorique initiale ruine l'opposition du propre et du figuré, de l'ordinaire et de l'étranger, de l'ordre et de la transgression. Elle suggère l'idée que l'ordre lui-même procède de la constitution métaphorique des champs sémantiques à partir desquels il y a des genres et des espèces (*MV*, 32).

wherein no difference is possible between proper and improper or literal and figurative. Standing outside his own theory of live metaphor and, indeed, theory in general, Ricoeur's hypothesis is only a hair's breath away from Derrida's deconstruction of the concept of metaphor. But this difference of a hair's breath, if examined more closely, still turns out to be significant and perhaps even abysmal to the extent that, first of all, Ricoeur's version of quasi-metaphoricity involves a genesis of meaning and language, that is, an original chaos replaced by order, and therefore a teleological and dialectical process. Secondly, this difference is likely more a point of contention or division than it seems to be because, even though Ricoeur's hypothesis falls in the vicinity of Derrida's project in more ways than one, Ricoeur himself makes no connection between them. Or, to put it another way, he does not draw himself closer to Derrida at this point even though he has just finished dealing with him (albeit critically) in two lengthy footnotes.[2] Nor does it seem that Ricoeur has simply forgotten him since, when he gives his account of his most audacious hypothesis, he uses Derrida's "watchword" twice.[3]

It may well be asked at this point: if Ricoeur's encounter with Derrida is really an epic and not an incidental struggle, why does he not acknowledge it as such? What purpose is served by making it seem peripheral or something that only needs to be dealt with in passing or even as something which comes to him as an afterthought?

PS can only offer the following as a hypothesis which, of course, is already governing the analysis. Ricoeur proceeds in the best and perhaps the only way he can. He cannot confront Derrida both directly and on a broad front without either relinquishing the resources of the tradition which he marshals against him or else abandoning the act of recognition which is also the most fair and just hearing of Derrida. With respect to the first option which is really no option, a direct and exhaustive recognition of Derrida's project would necessarily entail calling into question the very presuppositions which allow Ricoeur's project to oppose it. For if the recognition of Derrida's project is so direct and exhaustive as to be itself a calling into question of these presuppositions, then there is no possible basis on which to be critical of it in the sense of refuting it.

With respect to the second option (which is, again, no option), matters turn on the fact that the resources of the tradition are not sufficient to meet Derrida's challenge without being updated and replenished. Since the challenge posed here is essentially one of a discourse on metaphor extending to the very heart of philosophy, the tradition falls short by having no

2 Besides the two successive footnotes in the First Study where Ricoeur, among other things, critiques Derrida's interpretation of the key terms, *kurion* and *idion,* there are three other brief references to him. In one of these references, Ricoeur approves of Derrida's interpretation of the difference between *dianoia* and *lexis* in Aristotle's theory of tragedy. In another of these references, he cites a passage from "La mythologie blanche" in which Derrida links Aristotle's metaphorology and metaphysics to onto-theology and humanism. Finally, in another reference, he makes what surely is, given his endorsement of Aristotle's theory of metaphor and his critical account of Derrida's and Heidegger's allegedly Platonic conception of metaphor, a passing swipe at both of them. "On pourrait être tenté, à la suite de Heidegger et de Derrida (cf. ci-dessous, viii Étude, sec. 3), de détecter ici quelque reste honteux de platonisme" (*MV*, 50). Ricoeur is referring here to Aristotle's description of metaphor as animating the inanimate. He then goes on to affirm that this description entirely agrees with Aristotle's metaphysic as things in act which itself is distinguishable from the Platonic metaphysic of visible and invisible worlds.

3 The first occasion comes slightly before the "troisième hypothèse" passage cited above. "La méprise catégoriale serait alors l'intermède de *déconstruction* entre description et redescription" (Italics added, *MV*, 32). The second occasion comes shortly after it. Commenting on Aristotle's remark that to metaphorize well is to perceive resemblances well, Ricoeur asks: "Ne sommes-nous pas ici au plan de la trouvaille, c'est-à-dire de cette heuristique dont nous disions qu'elle ne viole un ordre que pour en créer un autre, qu'elle ne *déconstruit* que pour redécrire?" (Italics added, *MV*, 33).

corresponding discourse. Without this corresponding discourse, the tradition meets Derrida's challenge not by being particularly fair and just to his project, but by attempting to turn it to scorn. To reduce it to a philosophy of rhetoric or a rhetoric of philosophy results in two convenient ways to dismiss it: first, by treating it as a project which, whether being a philosophical study of rhetoric or a rhetorical study of philosophy, is marginal to the principal aims and interests of philosophy and, secondly, by treating it as a project which still operates with a conventional thesis and hence is involved in a performative contradiction.[4]

A critique of Derrida which wishes to do him justice must therefore be more subtle, circumspect, and circuitous. It must be the recognition and non-recognition which comes from being a secret appropriation of him. Such an appropriation must take the risk of coming as close as possible to Derrida without the appropriating discourse's collapsing into the appropriated one. To the extent that such an appropriation is successful, it becomes impossible to announce or acknowledge it. At least, such an acknowledgment cannot be an integral part of the critique which accompanies the appropriation and yet which turns its back on it in order to register itself as the one true measure of doing justice and giving a fair hearing. Were it otherwise – were the appropriation recognized – this recognition as self-recognition would divert attention away from the critique of Derrida and towards the critique of the appropriation itself. For Ricoeur, this self-critique would also be self-destruction in the sense of its being a calling into question of the very presuppositions which Derrida himself calls into question.

It is the case then that, despite secretly appropriating Derrida for the purpose of giving him a fair and just hearing – for the purpose of recognizing him in a way which is also a valorizing of him – Ricoeur cannot avoid giving him a sort of rigged trial and committing an injustice which is itself, strangely enough, inseparable from the immense work of overhauling the tradition in order to better recognize Derrida's challenge and yet, at the same time, to defeat it. Furthermore, Ricoeur cannot engage Derrida very deeply or at least as deeply as philosophical thought can plummet without ultimately being less critical of his adversary and more critical of himself. At the same time, this injustice which he commits towards Derrida is inseparable from doing him – at least in the context of safeguarding the tradition – broad justice.

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4 For the sake of economy and certainly not to settle here the matter of justice and fair play, the following is an example of Derrida's reaction to these hasty and often ill-considered attacks on him. It should go without saying that the rightness of his stand does not rule out the possibility of his committing a return injustice. For example, one might very well ask: Is he right in speaking, as he does below, of his work having theses rather than only negative theses and anti-theses?

> What is going on at this moment, above all, around "deconstruction," to explain this fear and this dogmatism? Exposed to the slightest difficulty, the slightest complication, the slightest transformation of the rules, the self-declared advocates of communication denounce the absence of rules and confusion. And they allow themselves then to confuse everything in the most authoritarian manner. They even dare to accuse the adversary, as Habermas does me, of "performative contradiction." Is there a "performative contradiction" more serious than that which consists in claiming to discuss rationally the theses of the other without having made the slightest effort to take cognizance of them, read them, or listen to them? I invite interested readers – or whoever may still have doubts about what I have just said – to read for themselves this chapter by Habermas [i.e., his "Excursus on Leveling the Genre Distinction between Philosophy and Literature" in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1990), 185-210] which claims to criticize me, naming me for twenty-five pages without the slightest reference and without the slightest citation (*Limited Inc* [Evanston, Il: Northwestern University Press, 1988], 158).

3.1. Metaphor, Subject, Discourse

As large as metaphor looms in *La métaphore vive,* it is relentlessly shadowed by the subject of discourse. Discourse is, indeed, a shadowing subject to the extent that, unlike its status in Ricoeur's "Discours et communication,"[5] it no longer occupies centre stage. And yet, despite this apparent shift to the sidelines, there are not simply one but two important ways that it is present and even casts its shadow beyond metaphor.

Both ways of thematising discourse are of course related to and a relating of it to metaphor. The first way is by analysing and elaborating metaphor's role or operation. The idea of metaphor's having an influence and effect which is much larger than traditionally recognized is explicit throughout *La métaphore vive*. It is most widely represented by Ricoeur's ongoing insistence that metaphor is predicative and, only in this way, semantic. But by the time of the Seventh Study, Ricoeur has extended it even further to include discourse as whole texts and, in particular, literary or poetic ones.

> Or la postulat de la référence exige une élaboration distincte lorsqu'il concerne les entités particulières de discours qu'on appelle des « textes », donc des compositions de plus grande extension que la phrase. La question relève désormais de l'herméneutique plutôt que de la sémantique, pour laquelle la phrase est à la fois la première et la dernière entité (276).[6]

With respect to the second way of thematising discourse, what is at issue is philosophy's exerting a certain control over other discourses and over metaphor. To begin with, the First Study opens not with a discussion of metaphor, but with a discussion of three discourses in the context of discussing Aristotle: philosophy, rhetoric, and poetics. Ricoeur is concerned with historical developments which go back to Aristotle and which affect the relationships between these discourses. He is also concerned with the decline of rhetoric resulting from its break from philosophy's tutelage. Due to its unfortunate abandonment of the theory of argumentation and persuasion which in Aristotle is under the guidance of *"une théorie du vraisemblable, qui armerait la rhétorique contre ses propres abus"* (17), the later rhetorical tradition or, more precisely, its argumentative branch gives up the most rigorous commitment to truth, knowledge, logic, proof, evidence, etc. Deprived then of philosophy's theoretical sustenance and guidance, its field of study inevitably shrinks.

> . . . vidée de son dynamisme et de son drame, la rhétorique est livrée au jeu des distinctions et des rangements. Le génie taxinomique occupe la place désertée par la philosophie de la rhétorique (17).[7]

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5 See footnote 2 on page 580.

6 All cited passages in Chapters III and IV refer to Ricoeur's *La métaphore vive* unless otherwise indicated.

7 "Or la logique offrait une solution de secours, qui rejoignait d'ailleurs une des plus vieilles intuitions de la rhétorique; celle-ci avait dès ses origines, reconnu dans la terme *to eikos* – le vraisemblable – un titre auquel pouvait prétendre l'usage public de la parole. Le genre de preuve qui convient à l'éloquence n'est pas le nécessaire mais le vraisemblable; car les choses humaines, dont tribunaux et assemblées délibèrent et décident, ne sont pas susceptibles de la sorte de nécessité, de contrainte intellectuelle, que la géométrie et la philosophie première exigent. Plutôt donc que de dénoncer la *doxa* – l'opinion – comme inférieure à l*'épistêmê* – à la science, la philosophie peut se proposer

With respect to the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric, Ricoeur notes that the former, while generally helpless against the latter as use and abuse of power, can at least exert a theoretical or normative influence over it and, as such, employ the only kind of control which is not a use of force. *"Son discours n'est lui-même qu'un discours parmi d'autres et la prétention à la vérité qui habite son discours l'exclut de la sphère du pouvoir"* (16). Here it seems that philosophy is, contrary to being valued over rhetoric, put on an equal footing with it and all other discourses. At the same time, it is distinguished as the commitment to truth, non-violence, and non-deception, and, as such, it is fit to tutor rhetoric which, close to ordinary speech, is by nature undisciplined. Not only this, rhetoric has the potential to be reformed and taken up into philosophy on a serious or full-time basis.[8]

Philosophy's non-forceful control over rhetoric seems analogous to rendering the subject of metaphor subject to philosophy. Although this analogy between rhetoric and metaphor in the context of a certain call to allegiance is never thematised by Ricoeur, it is safe to say that his book bears many signs of it. First among the many indications of metaphor's being called to philosophical allegiance is that *La métaphore vive* begins with Aristotle and ends with him. In between, there are numerous metaphorical theories but, however important they are, Ricoeur only recognizes them in the context of Aristotle's theory of metaphor which dominates the First Study and Aristotle's theory of act/potency which dominates the last section of the Eighth Study.

Apart from this last section where Ricoeur explores the ontological presuppositions of his theory of metaphor, the development of this theory is finished before his last study begins. The Eighth Study is about metaphor only in the context of issues which seriously overshadow it and which primarily concern Ricoeur's encounter with Derrida and Heidegger and his analysis of the interaction or interference between discourses in general.[9] Here the notion of philosophy's having final say over metaphor is thematised as the discontinuity between poetic discourse and speculative discourse. Poetic discourse is the wide-ranging eruption of metaphorical truth into the world which is fluid and which ultimately congeals in speculative discourse. Ricoeur explains that works of literature and poetry, in offering a fictional world comparable to the real one, impinge on the latter. Whereas in poetic discourse there is always a tension or play between language and thought and language and world, in speculative discourse there is, if still a gap between language and world, no gap between language and thought.[10] Both discourse and

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d'élaborer une théorie du vraisemblable qui armerait la rhétorique contre ses propres abus, en la dissociant de la sophistique et de l'éristique. Le grand mérite d'Aristote a été d'élaborer ce lien entre le concept rhétorique de persuasion et le concept logique du vraisemblable, et de construire sur ce rapport l'édifice entier d'une rhétorique philosophique" (*MV*, 16-17).

8 "Ce que nous lisons aujourd'hui sous le titre de la *Rhétorique* est donc le traité où s'inscrit l'équilibre entre deux mouvements contraires, celui qui porte la rhétorique à s'affranchir de la philosophie, sinon à se substituer à elle, et celui qui porte la philosophie à réinventer la rhétorique comme un système de preuve de second rang. Au point de rencontre de la puissance dangereuse de l'éloquence et de la logique du vraisemblable se situe une rhétorique que la philosophie tient sous surveillance" (*MV*, 17).

9 Although implicit in other parts of *La métaphore vive*, the relationship between poetic discourse and speculative discourse is explicitly analysed in the Eighth Study's fourth section, "L'intersection des sphères de discours," which follows Ricoeur's critical analysis of "La mythologie blanche."

10 "Que le discours spéculatif trouve dans le dynamisme qu'on vient de décrire quelque chose comme l'esquisse d'une détermination conceptuelle n'empêche pas que le discours spéculatif commence de soi et trouve en lui-même le principe de son articulation. De soi-même il tire la ressource d'un espace conceptuel qu'il offre au déploiement de sens qui s'esquisse métaphoriquement. . . . Elle procède plutôt des structures même de l'esprit que la philosophie transcendantale a pour tâche d'articuler. De l'un à l'autre discours, on ne passe que par une *époché*" (*MV,* 380).

thought at the level of the inquiry into being are the mind's independent work of finding and founding the ordered truth of the world. This conceptual truth, as opposed to fictional or metaphorical truth, is both first-order truth and final truth in the sense of its being a return to the world as the same or the one.

Ricoeur begins the Eighth Study by making a plea for the discontinuity between poetic discourse and speculative discourse. He also makes a second plea which is the plea for a plurality of discourses. These pleas, if taken, not in isolation but in a certain limited context, could easily raise the question of who, besides Ricoeur himself, is contesting this discontinuity and plurality.[11] After all, his notions of metaphorical truth and split reference[12] certainly suggest that the boundaries between poetry, science, and philosophy are far more fluid or porous than they are normally taken to be. Likewise does his criticizing the positivistic or empirical notions of truth.

> Pour autant [que] se ramenait [la distinction entre connotation et dénotation] à l'opposition des valeurs cognitive et émotionnelle du discours, nous ne pouvions y voir que la projection, dans la poétique, d'un préjugé positiviste en vertu duquel seul le discours scientifique dit la réalité (386).

Ricoeur's plea then is perhaps not so much for a discontinuity between poetry and philosophy, but rather for a greater discontinuity than *some* philosophers seem to permit.
On the other hand, it is possible that the issue of discontinuity is a distraction and what is really at issue is, despite Ricoeur's obviously wanting to portray it otherwise, an ordering of discourses. This ordering is not some brute grasp for power but rather is intimately connected to philosophy's control of itself. Since philosophy's self-control is inseparable from its control of metaphor and rhetoric, what is at stake is not simply the truth about them, but the very *ideal* of truth. It is these higher stakes which generate Ricoeur's concern for philosophy's influence and operation in the Eighth Study.

It is not only fair to say that Ricoeur is committed to protecting the most basic presuppositions of philosophy, but that he is also committed to calling other presuppositions into

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11 Even S. H. Clark who is wholly supportive of Ricoeur's project finds a certain oddity here.

> It is a remarkable paradox that a book so committed to demonstrating the fundamental importance of metaphor in human creativity should devote so much of its final chapter to trying to fend off the success of its preceding argument (*PR*, 137).

Another relevant point is that, on more than one occasion while developing his theory of metaphor, Ricoeur raises the spectre – but shortly to dismiss it – of philosophy's being confounded by all the implications of his vastly extended theory. In the last section of the Eighth Study, he raises once again this spectre and, after citing all the metaphysical oppositions which his theory must dispense with, articulates the general fear:

> C'est ici que, comme nous le craignions, l'instance critique semble se convertir en plaidoyer pour l'irrationnel. Avec la suspension de la référence à des objets faisant face à un sujet *jugeant*, n'est-ce pas la structure même de l'énonciation qui vacille? Avec l'effacement de tant de distinctions bien connues, n'est-ce pas la notion même de discours spéculatif qui s'évanouit, et avec cette notion la dialectique du spéculatif et du poétique? (*MV*, 388).

12 Ricoeur's theory of metaphor as theory of split reference takes up the whole of the Seventh Study. In brief, he describes the copula of the metaphorical proposition as being both an *is* and an *is not*.

question. Perhaps the boldest move along these lines is his doing away with, at least in a qualified sense, the fiction/truth opposition. It is Aristotle's theory of mimesis on which Ricoeur first relies in order to rethink the relationship between the virtual world of art and the actual world of day-to-day. The first imitates the second but also returns to it as a redescribing or recreating of it. Much later on in his book, Ricoeur examines the use of models in science which certain theorists compare to metaphor as a way to explain natural phenomena. Here the integration of a certain fiction in the scientific explanation can be so successful as to render the former indistinguishable from the latter.[13]

Ricoeur in a certain sense carries on his own deconstructive project when he calls into question such oppositions as proper/improper, visible/invisible, and "inside"/ "outside." *"D'autres distinctions vacillent en chaîne. Ainsi la distinction entre découvrir et créer, entre trouver et projeter. Ce que le discours poétique porte au langage, c'est un monde pré-objectif . . ."* (387). It is clear then that he shakes up in some sense the traditional areas of epistemology and ontology. His repeated criticism of empiricism and positivism is part of a comprehensive theory of interpretation which permits little data to be called hard or to escape being challenged and subject to revision. Also revealing in terms of his deconstructive bent is the way he characterizes the very last section of his book where he examines the ontological presuppositions of his theory. Here he describes this task in a way which bears an uncanny resemblance to Derrida's modus operandi:

> Dès lors, ce ne peut être que sur le mode exploratoire et non point dogmatique, sur un mode où l'on n'affirme plus qu'en questionnant, que l'on peut tenter une interprétation de la formule: signifier l'acte (391).

Rather than hard knowledge or truth, it is the pure form of meaning and intention which Ricoeur seeks to preserve and which are, of course, inseparable from having at least some metaphysical oppositions in place and ones, moreover, which ground philosophy's independence from poetry. Of these oppositions, the one which is most explicitly laid out and endorsed by Ricoeur is the semiotic/semantic one. He pays a great deal of attention to this opposition because it is inseparable from his project of enlarging metaphorical theory from denomination to predication and from word to sentence. It is on the basis of this opposition that Ricoeur allows no more than virtual meaning to the sign or lexicalized word while claiming that meaning proper is only to be found at the level of the sentence. Meaning then belongs to a referring which is also an intending.[14]

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13 "Cet enjeu épistémologique est bien mis en relief par Mary Hesse: « Il faut, dit-elle, modifier et compléter le modèle déductif de l'explication scientifique et concevoir l'explication théorétique comme la redescription métaphorique du domaine de l'*explanandum* ». Cette thèse porte deux accents. Le premier accent est mis sur le mot explication; si le modèle, comme la métaphore, introduit un nouveau langage, sa description vaut explication; ce qui signifie que le modèle opère sur le terrain même de l'épistémologie déductiviste pour modifier et compléter les critères de déductibilité de l'explication scientifique tels qu'ils sont énoncés par exemple par C. G. Hempel et P. Oppenheim" (*MV*, 304-305).

14 "On peut rattacher à ce premier couple [l'événement et le sens] les distinctions introduites par Paul Grice, dans sa théorie de la signification, entre la signification de l'énoncé, la signification de l'énonciation, et la signification de l'énonciateur. Il est précisément de l'essence du discours de permettre ces distinctions. On en trouve le fondement dans l'analyse de Benveniste, lorsqu'il parle, d'une part, de l'instance de discours, comme on vient de voir, et, d'autre part, de l'intenté du discours, qui est tout autre chose que le signifié d'un signe isolé; le signifié est seulement, comme l'a bien dit Ferdinand de Saussure, la contrepartie du signifiant, une simple différence du système

3.2. Mobilizing the Tradition: Critique, Correction, Protection

PS's hypothesis is that Ricoeur provides a large-scale response to Derrida's project which marshals the whole tradition in a highly complex way. This response is one with his immense concern for the tradition and for comprehending it as well as possible. Given the huge mass of material to be mobilized, the great challenge to Ricoeur is to coordinate it and, at the same time, to develop a theory of metaphor. The most important coordinating principle for Ricoeur's project is the line which runs from Aristotle in the First Study to Aristotle in the Eighth Study.

This first coordinating principle makes Ricoeur's marshalling of the tradition a metadiscourse which is both resourceful and full of resources. It is full of resources in the sense that, like Derrida, Ricoeur takes Aristotle to be fundamental to all later metaphorical theory. Aristotle's philosophy therefore can operate for Ricoeur as the broad basis on which to critique and correct the theories which follow. It is also resourceful in the sense that, as an Aristotelian-based project which takes on another project, it pits itself against one which, because it is also an analysis of Aristotle, is inevitably an *interpretation* of him and, as interpretation, vulnerable.[15]

The second coordinating principle is Ricoeur's deployment of what is already implicit in Aristotle: the semiotic/semantic opposition. In the context of interpreting Aristotle, Derrida and Ricoeur both agree that, in his theory of diction (*lexis*), some linguistic units such as letter, syllable, preposition, etc. fall below the level of meaning and others such as noun, verb, sentence, etc. attain it. They also agree that metaphor in Aristotle belongs to the semantic level of discourse and not to the semiotic or syntactic level of language.

The third coordinating principle is the division between the philosophical and rhetorical study of metaphor. For Ricoeur, the rhetorical study is essentially the theory of metaphor as theory of substitution. According to this theory, metaphor is not propositional, predicative, and discursive, but simply a single-word movement or effect. It is a word which, replacing another word, offers no additional meaning. Rhetoric thus reduces metaphor to ornament and to a linguistic element or event which, in its diversity, simply needs to be classified. Ricoeur argues that this reduction of metaphor to ornament is not simply the case with the Classical Rhetoric of the nineteenth century but with structural semantics and the New Rhetoric (Group Mu).[16]

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de la langue; l'intenté est « ce que le locuteur veut dire ». Le signifié est d'ordre sémiotique, l'intenté d'ordre sémantique: c'est lui que P. Grice vise dans son analyse" (*MV*, 93).

15 Aristotle's ontology, which receives extensive treatment in the Eighth Study, is in the First Study only dealt with, on the one hand, in an implicit way and, on the other hand, in a marginal way. The subject makes its first appearance in the first of two long footnotes in which Ricoeur critiques Derrida's interpretation of Aristotle. In the first footnote, Ricoeur takes issue with Derrida's grounding Aristotle's theory of metaphor in his theory of the analogy of being.

> Quant à l'analogie de l'être, c'est à strictement parler une doctrine médiévale, fondée en outre sur une interprétation du rapport de la série entière des catégories à son terme premier, la substance (*ousia*). Rien n'autorise le court-circuit entre métaphore de proportionnalité et analogie de l'être. 3) La notion de sens « courant » (*kurion*) ne conduit pas, comme on le verra plus loin, à celle de sens « propre », si l'on entend par sens propre un sens primitif, originel, indigène. 4) L'ontologie de la métaphore que paraît suggérer la définition de l'art par la mimesis et sa subordination au concept de *phusis* n'est pas nécessairement « métaphysique », au sens que Heidegger a donné à ce mot. Je proposerai, au terme de cette première Étude, une interprétation de l'ontologie implicite de la *Poétique* d'Aristote qui ne met aucunement en jeu le transfert du visible à l'invisible . . . (*MV*, 26).

16 In the following passage, Ricoeur describes New Rhetoric and how he relates Group Mu to it.

To give an explanation of the metaphorical production of new meaning is the fourth coordinating principle. The call to provide this explanation gives the final boost to Ricoeur's own proper theory and allows it in some sense to escape the gravitational pull of the tradition. Indeed, if one bears in mind the problematic sun-metaphor in Derrida's analysis of Aristotle and also Ricoeur's negative reaction to it, then one is almost inclined to think that Ricoeur sets up his grand theory of metaphor as the philosophical sun which shines so brightly as to obliterate Derrida's problematic one. Certainly there is a sense in which he not only provides a metadiscourse on metaphor but also a meta-theory of sorts. Despite his strongly opposing theory of metaphor-sentence to theory of metaphor-word, theory of predication to theory of denomination, and theory of interaction to theory of substitution, none of the second-named are lost or entirely rejected. On the contrary, Ricoeur in the Fourth Study, "La métaphore et la sémantique du mot," reintegrates them back into a grand theory of metaphor which assigns to them their proper place. In this sense, Ricoeur's theory, operating in what is normally a marginal area, is a gigantic taking in and ordering of all. In order to take a closer look at this immense operation, it will be necessary to examine each coordinating principle in turn.

3.3. The Aristotelian Basis: Act/Potency

Ricoeur gives no single project besides his own more attention than Aristotle's. Setting aside twenty pages for Fontanier's *Les figures du discours* in the Second Study,[17] he devotes more than twice as many to Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. In addition, there are numerous references to Aristotle in the following studies.

Despite Ricoeur's extensive reliance on Aristotle, there are two closely related issues in the *Poetics* which he critiques and considers to have far-reaching consequences. The first is the status which Aristotle seems to accord to the noun in his definition of metaphor and the second the status he accords to the noun in his theory of diction (*lexis*).

> Le terme commun à l'énumération des parties de l'élocution et à la définition de la métaphore est le nom (*onoma*). Ainsi est scellé pour des siècles le sort de la métaphore (20).

While Aristotle's numerous remarks on metaphor suggest that metaphor is predicative and discursive, he defines it as the transfer of a word from one object to another. Ricoeur takes this

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> Les travaux de la nouvelle rhétorique auxquels cette [cinquième] étude est consacrée ont l'ambition commune de rénover l'entreprise essentiellement taxinomique de la rhétorique classique en fondant les *espèces* de la classification sur les *formes* des opérations qui se jouent à tous les niveaux d'articulation du langage. La nouvelle rhétorique est tributaire à cet égard d'une sémantique portée elle-même à son plus haut degré de radicalité structurale.
>
> La période considérée étant trop courte et les travaux trop récents, on s'attachera moins à l'enchaînement historique des thèses qu'à leurs grandes articulations théoriques, en prenant pour repère terminal la *Rhétorique générale*, publiée par le Group ų (*Centre d'études poétiques, Université de Liège*) (*MV*, 173).

17 Ricoeur accords to Fontanier's theory of tropes and figures a certain exemplary status. "Le traité de Pierre Fontanier, *les Figures du discours* (1830), constitue l'effectuation la plus rapprochée du modèle rhétorique que nous avons construit systématiquement" (*MV*, 68).

short definition to be implying that a theory of metaphor is a theory of denomination. On the other hand, he argue that Aristotle's full definition describes metaphor as predication. All four species of metaphor in this definition necessarily involve two terms which form a subject-predicate relation. Moreover, the resulting sentence is in part a transgression of linguistic and logical boundaries. There is a negative or "deconstructive" moment of the metaphorical function which Ricoeur calls, borrowing from Gilbert Ryle, a category-mistake.[18] Opposed to the latter is of course the positive or reconstructive moment which reveals hitherto unperceived relations resulting in the discovery and founding of the categories themselves.

The pivotal role which Aristotle assigns to the word or noun in his theory of diction comes about from his defining it in such a way that it is the dividing line between the semantic and the semiotic or syntactic. The result is that the description of the noun rounds off Aristotle's discussion of the smaller units such as letter, syllable, preposition, conjunction, etc. The noun is then not properly integrated into a theory of the sentence and in turn a theory of discourse. By largely looking on the sentence as the linguistic unit which is meaningful only by being constituted by the smaller semantic units such as noun and verb, Aristotle fails to observe or at least fails to *emphasize* the fact that there is an interaction between sentence and noun which ultimately makes the role of the former the more important one.

Aristotle's misplaced emphasis on the word or noun both in his definition of metaphor and his theory of diction operates as a sort of fault line which extends throughout the later tradition. On one side of this line is the rhetorical tradition and on the other side is the philosophical. Nowhere is this more explicitly recognized by Ricoeur than at the beginning of the Second Study. Here he carries on what is essentially a critique of the rhetorical tradition which has its roots in the opening section of the First Study. It is Ricoeur's contention that the New Rhetoric of France (Genette)[19] is mistaken when, looking back into the tradition, it claims that rhetoric's decline in the nineteenth century is attributable to its having severed itself from philosophy. To be sure, Ricoeur more than acknowledges the historical separation of rhetoric from philosophy and the resulting harm to the former. In his estimation, however, the problem which lies at the heart of the short-lived but major taxonomic efforts of the nineteenth century is the taking of the noun or word as primary unit of meaning.

> Le déclin de la rhétorique résulte d'une erreur initiale qui affecte la théorie même des tropes, indépendamment de la place accordée à la tropologie dans le champs rhétorique. Cette erreur initiale tient à la dictature du mot dans la théorie de la signification (64).

It is on this split Aristotelian basis with its one division resulting in a miscarriage of the tradition and its other division being true and corrective that Ricoeur begins his examination of later theories of metaphor. As one of the most prominent and influential of these later theories, Fontanier's theory of tropes and figures falls on the side of the tradition which miscarries. At the beginning of the Second Study, Ricoeur lists all the key traits assigned to metaphor by the

18 Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1949). "Aristote n'a pas lui-même exploité l'idée d'une transgression catégoriale que quelques modernes rapprocheront du concept *category-mistake* chez Gilbert Ryle. Sans doute parce qu'Aristote est plus intéressé, dans la ligne de sa *Poétique*, au gain sémantique attaché au transfert des noms qu'au coût logique de l'opération" (*MV*, 31).

19 For this view of rhetoric's decline, Ricoeur specifically refers to Gérald Genette's "La rhétorique restreinte" *Communications*, 16 (Paris: Seuil, 1970), 158-171.

rhetorical tradition or, as he calls it, the rhetoric of tropology (*rhétorique de la tropologie*). After providing this list of traits (one of which is that metaphor is merely ornamental or decorative), Ricoeur admits that all of these traits can be found in the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*! Of course, he adds that they are subsidiary to Aristotle's theory of metaphor which emphasizes the predicative, semantic, heuristic, analogous, and so on.[20]

It must be then that there is an ambiguity in the way rhetoric is connected to Aristotle and, more generally, philosophy. On the one hand, rhetoric strays from what is proper to Aristotle's theory of metaphor by, first of all, ignoring what is both implicit and explicit in his theory, namely, metaphor as predication and, secondly, by only attending to what is explicit in a limited or truncated sense, namely, metaphor as denomination. It therefore strays from what is proper only because there must be something not quite right about this theory even if this "not quite right" is limited to its laying a certain momentary or unintentional stress on the word as key linguistic unit. While attributing this originating fault to Aristotle's lack of clarity and precision in this particular area (at least, so it seems), Ricoeur attributes the secondary or derivative fault, which is the tradition's, to a certain lack of interpretative caution or perspicacity. He then goes on to suggest that a better interpretation of Aristotle is required, one which shows the breakaway tradition of rhetoric its proper roots in philosophy and even its innate tendency to rejoin it. This play between a rhetoric which goes astray and yet is already programmed to return to philosophy is analogous to Ricoeur's account of live metaphor.

In Fontanier, Ricoeur finds the traces of this internal distress in a theory of tropes which, basing itself on a theory of thought, also bases itself on a certain tension or play between ideas and judgement. Although Fontanier's theory designates that tropes replace literal or proper words and that there is a one-to-one correspondence between words and ideas, the thought which contains these ideas is essentially propositional or judgmental.[21] Thus the static tropological account of Fontanier's theory which is of course the official, formal, or intended one is implicitly supported by a dynamic account which, as the registering of judgmental thought, is also the registering of the need for a theory of metaphor which is also a theory of predication. A little further on, when commenting on a certain remark by Fontanier to the effect that metaphor, unlike metonymy and synecdoche, can encompass all different types of words such as verb, adjective, and participle,[22] Ricoeur explicitly affirms this internal need in Fontanier's theory:

> Pourquoi la métaphore joue-t-elle ainsi sur toutes les sortes de mots, alors que la métonymie et la synecdoque n'affectent que la désignation par les noms? On peut se demander si cette extension ne préfigure pas un

20 "Ainsi, tout en étant l'initiateur du modèle qui triomphera dans la rhétorique finissante, Aristote fournit aussi quelques-uns des arguments qui mettront en échec ce modèle. Mais ce n'est pas parce que sa rhétorique est plus vaste qu'une théorie de l'élocution, mais parce que la *lexis*, explicitement centrée sur le nom, repose implicitement sur une opération prédicative" (*MV*, 67).

21 "Il est alors possible de retranscrire toutes les distinctions entre espèces de mots en fonction de leur rôle dans la proposition: l'idée substantive, considérée dans le jugement, devient le sujet de la proposition, l'idée concrète est ce qu'on appelle l'attribut et le rapport de coexistence, exprimé par le verbe être, est ce qu'on appelle la copule" (*MV*, 70).

22 These non-nouns remain metaphors in the Aristotelian sense because, as Derrida points out, they still are nominalizable. "Parmi les mots correspondant aux « idées d'objet » – qui se laissent naturellement nominaliser –, on range les *noms*, tous les mots « employés substantivement » (*le beau*, *le vrai*, *le juste*; *le manger*, *le boire*, *le dormir*; *le pour*, *le contre*; *le devant*, *le derrière*; *le pourquoi*, *le comment*; *le dedans*, *le dehors*; *les mais*, *les si*, *les car*, *les quand*) et les participes actifs ou passifs" (*MB*, 280-281).

> déplacement plus important qui ne sera reconnu que dans une théorie proprement prédicative de la métaphore (78).

While the dozen or so references to Aristotle in the Third and Fourth Studies are slight, it is certainly not due to any shifting away from the Aristotelian basis. On the contrary, there are two schools of thought which Ricoeur examines and which he brings closer together and plants more firmly on this basis.[23] One is the Anglo-American school with its theory of interaction and the other is the Continental or structuralist school with its theory of substitution. Ricoeur, rather than rejecting the latter, seeks to bring it, in a manner of speaking, under the rule of the Anglo-American school. Due to the split in the Aristotelian basis between the properly philosophical tradition and the improperly rhetorical tradition, Ricoeur uses the former, largely represented by the Anglo-American school, to rectify the latter, largely represented by the Continental school.[24]

But while it is true that the bulk of Ricoeur's critical and corrective attention goes to the Continental school, the Anglo-American school is not entirely spared. At the beginning of the Third Study, Ricoeur makes a distinction which tends to redeem Aristotle's troubled definition of metaphor and, at the same time, acts as a counter to the Anglo-American school's tendency not only to slight the role of the metaphorical noun or word, but also to reject outright the theory of substitution. Following Leibniz, Ricoeur claims that there are two kinds of definition: *nominal* and *real*. The nominal definition is Aristotle's definition of metaphor as identification of metaphor per se. It belongs to the task of classification. The real definition is Aristotle's description of metaphor which explains how metaphor comes to be or how it operates. It belongs to a theory of discourse and a theory of the production of metaphorical meaning. Ricoeur's concern, of course, is to point the way to a union between the theory of substitution with its emphasis on metaphor-word and its nominal status and the theory of interaction with its emphasis on metaphor-sentence and its real status.

Apart from critiquing its tendency to dismiss the role of the word in the metaphorical

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23 While Ricoeur clearly puts New Rhetoric in line with Classical Rhetoric and the rhetorical tradition per se, he has a much different way of looking at the work of I. A. Richards (*The Philosophy of Rhetoric* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936]), the first of the interactive theorists whom he examines in the Third Study.

> I. A. Richards emprunte sa définition de la rhétorique à un des derniers grands traités du XVIII siècle anglais, celui de l'archevêque Whateley [*sic*]: la rhétorique, déclare celui-ci, est « une discipline philosophique visant à la maîtrise des lois fondamentales de l'usage du langage ». On le voit, l'amplitude de la rhétorique grecque est restituée par chacun des éléments de cette définition. En mettant l'accent sur l'emploi du langage, l'auteur situe la rhétorique au plan proprement verbal de la compréhension et de la communication; la rhétorique est la théorie du discours, de la pensée comme discours.... Enfin, le caractère philosophique de cette discipline est assuré par le souci majeur de remédier à la « perte de communication », plutôt d'assigner à la rhétorique le souci de persuader, d'influencer et, finalement, de plaire, souci, qui, de proche en proche, a coupé dans le passé la rhétorique de la philosophie (*MV*, 100-101).

24 "Cette permanence de la thèse de la métaphore-mot et cette fidélité de la néo-rhétorique à la théorie de la substitution étonnent moins quand on considère la différence des contextes historiques. L'analyse des Anglo-Saxons doit infiniment moins à la linguistique des linguistes, que bien souvent même elle ignore souverainement, qu'à la logique et plus précisément la logique propositionnelle, laquelle impose d'emblée le niveau de considération de la phrase et invite spontanément à traiter la métaphore dans le cadre de la prédication. La néo-rhétorique, au contraire, s'édifie sur les bases d'une linguistique qui, de plusieurs façons, conduisait à renforcer le lien entre métaphore et mot et corollairement, à consolider la thèse de la substitution" (*MV*, 130).

operation, Ricoeur aims at least one other Aristotelian-based criticism at the Anglo-American school. When Monroe Beardsley claims that the metaphorical operation takes in the whole poem or literary work, he relates this extended operation only to a literary or fictional world. Ricoeur identifies this move as a common one by literary theorists who, unlike Aristotle, separate *muthos* from mimesis and, of course, then from *phusis,* By doing do, Ricoeur suggests that the Anglo-American theorists once again miss an opportunity to account for the metaphorical production of new meaning.

> La théorie de la métaphore de Beardsley conduit donc un degré plus loin dans l'investigation de la métaphore neuve; mais à son tour, elle bute sur la question de savoir d'ou viennent les significations secondes dans l'attribution métaphorique (126).

The Sixth Study is Ricoeur's sustained defence of the theory of metaphor as theory of resemblance. It is also the continuation of the complex operation which is the bringing together of the Continental and Anglo-American schools. Mention of Aristotle comes early here and, when it does, Ricoeur is dealing with the issue of the traditional connection between metaphor and simile. While Aristotle defines simile as extended metaphor, the later tradition defines metaphor as abbreviated simile. Despite this difference and the sway of the theory of substitution, the Aristotelian tradition implicitly holds here with Aristotle on the vital point that metaphor is predicative. What preoccupies Ricoeur, here as elsewhere, is the establishment of a theoretical background which brings together the Anglo-American and Continental schools by overcoming the former's opposition to metaphor as simile or analogy and therefore to the theory of resemblance and the latter's opposition to metaphor as predication.

The dilemma which confronts Ricoeur by the time of the Sixth Study then is that while he, following Aristotle, naturally upholds the theory of resemblance, the school which he most strongly supports, namely, the Anglo-American, rejects this theory and the one which he most strongly critiques, namely, the Continental, supports it. In order to do away with this dilemma, Ricoeur not only must demonstrate that the theory of resemblance is integral with the theory of interaction and, as a consequence, not adequately explained by the Continental school, he must also demonstrate that the theory in and of itself is viable. Giving the critics of the theory of resemblance (e.g., Black and Beardsley) their due, Ricoeur admits that Aristotle's discussion of metaphorical resemblance is sometimes vague. For instance, it seems difficult to reconcile Aristotle's comments about the sensible aspect of metaphor as to be found in such remarks as "To metaphorize well is to paint before the eyes" and those about its informative, heuristic, and epistemic role. Also Ricoeur agrees that, if, as the Anglo-American school argues, metaphor is the perception of resemblance only to the extent that this perception is the *effect* of the metaphorical operation, then it is not truly part of this operation. On the other hand, if it is the *cause* of this operation, then this operation as semantic operation becomes problematic. Ricoeur's response to these objections is the systematic examination of numerous Continental theories which support metaphorical resemblance. Taking up better than half of the Sixth Study, it is essentially the argument that, first, there is a moment of imaginative input in the metaphorical operation which is not opposed to the linguistic and semantic dimension of metaphor but rather one with it and that, secondly, the semantic and the perception of resemblance are compatible as the logic of perceiving sameness in difference.

It is at this stage that Ricoeur brings up once again the hypothesis which, in the First Study, he calls his most extreme one. Extrapolating from Aristotle's definition of metaphor as genus-species, species-genus, species-species transfer which is also a definition of metaphor as transgression of logico-linguistic categories, Ricoeur posits an originating metaphorical activity. At the same time, he posits that this metaphorical activity, being at the pre-conceptual level, is discontinuous from the network of concepts derived from it. It follows that, given the meaningful nature of metaphor, its activity after the network of concepts is in place is a transitional zone where there is both a transgression of the old order and a movement to a new one.

In the Seventh Study, Ricoeur makes his own explicit contribution to metaphorical theory with his theory of split reference. Here there are at least three occasions on which Aristotle's support is solicited. In introducing his theory of reference, Ricoeur evokes the latter's theory of analogy.[25]

> L'argument est argument de proportionnalité: l'autre référence, celle que nous cherchons, serait à la nouvelle pertinence sémantique ce que la référence abolie est au sens littéral que l'impertinence sémantique détruit. Au sens métaphorique correspondrait une référence métaphorique, comme au sens littéral impossible correspond une référence littérale impossible (289-290).

Pushing the analogy even further, Ricoeur argues that just as metaphor brings two significations into the proximity of one another, so the corresponding objects in the real world must also share this proximity.

> « Voir le semblable », disions nous avec Aristote, c'est « bien métaphoriser ». Comment cette proximité dans le sens ne serait-elle pas en même temps une proximité dans les choses mêmes? (290).

A second instance of Ricoeur's calling on Aristotle in the Seventh Study is a repetition of his account of the theories of mimesis and *phusis* in the First Study. Here as elsewhere, Ricoeur argues that the theory of mimesis is integral with the theory of *muthos* and the two, taken together, are integral with the theory of metaphor. *Muthos* as plot gives shape and definition to the human world and presents it in a more familiar or knowable way. *Muthos* as metaphorical operation at the level of the literary work is ultimately the ground for the metaphorical proposition. At the same time, Ricoeur holds that Aristotle's theory of mimesis is also a theory of reference. *". . . [P]our parler comme Mary Hesse, la* mimesis *est le nom de la 'référence*

25 In the first and second sections of the Eighth Study, Ricoeur discusses analogy at great length. In the first section, he defends Aristotle's use of it from "le logicien et le philosophe contemporains [qui] peuvent être justifiés à déclarer que la tentative échoue et que la théorie de l'analogie n'est tout entière qu'une pseudo-science" (*MV*, 340). Shortly thereafter, he states:

> Mon propos exprès est de montrer comment, en entrant dans la mouvance de la problématique de l'être, l'analogie à la fois, apporte sa conceptualité propre et reçoit la qualification transcendantale du champ auquel elle est appliquée (*MV*, 340).

Then he goes on to identify the source of the analogy by proportion as developed by medieval theology and, in particular, Aquinas. "L'application la plus proche est fournie par la définition de la justice distributive dans *Éthique à Nicomaque*, V. 6." (*MV*, 341).

métaphorique'" (308). Mimesis is not simply the imitation of the world of human action by the work. It is also the work's inscribing itself into the world or, as Ricoeur puts it, redescribing it.

A point already brought up constitutes a third instance in the Seventh Study of Ricoeur's drawing support from Aristotle. Unlike later rhetoricians, Aristotle did not characterize metaphor as abbreviated simile, but rather simile as extended metaphor. In Ricoeur's estimation, Aristotle's definition is the correct one because, unlike the contrary, it implies that metaphorical meaning is not equivalent to its translation into literal terms but rather exceeds it. *"Ainsi nous resterions fidèles à la tradition d'Aristote, non suivie par la rhétorique ultérieure . . ."* (312). Then, citing as authority Aristotle's *On Interpretation*, Ricoeur argues that the copula of the metaphorical proposition is not simply relational but also existential. At the same time, this copula is in a state of tension in that, being figurative or fictional, the *is* is also an *is not*. At this point, Ricoeur brings into the picture two schools of thought. The first school, represented by Philip Wheelwright, accredits all value to the *figurative* side of the metaphorical operation in the way of its identifying one thing with another.[26] The second school of thought, represented by Colin Murray Turbayne, accredits all value to the *literal* side of the metaphorical operation in the way of its being a shorthand for comparing two things.[27] In a manner which he claims is comparable to Aristotle's approach to First Philosophy, Ricoeur finds the proper middle ground between the two opposing schools.

> Avant toute interprétation proprement ontologique, telle que nous tenterons de l'amorcer dans la huitième étude, nous nous bornerons ici à une discussion dialectique d'opinions, comme Aristote au début de ses analyses de « philosophie première » (313).

In the Eighth Study, "Métaphore et philosophie," there are three areas in which Aristotle's presence either moves into the foreground or rests in the background. In all these areas, there is a shift from critiquing and correcting the tradition to one of "protecting" it. Stated broadly, the first of these areas is Ricoeur's analysis of Aristotle (first section) and his followup analysis of Aquinas (second section).The second area is his analysis of Derrida (third section). The third area is his analysis of Heidegger (third and fifth sections). It is appropriate to take up now the first and third of these areas and to defer the second to Chapter IV.[28]

The first Aristotelian part of the Eighth Study is a highly complex analysis of Aristotle's and Aquinas's closely related theories of being. It takes up the first two sections which are "La métaphore et l'équivocité de l'être: Aristote" and "La métaphore et l*'analogia entis*: l'onto-théologie." One of Ricoeur's first moves here is to reject the critique of metaphysical concepts based on etymology. The fact that all words can be shown to have a figurative aspect is merely an indication of their past history and polysemous nature. This etymological or genealogical datum in no way impinges on the metaphysical concept which, having been taken up into and ordered by a network of concepts, has its signification – a singular and univocal one – determined by this conceptual network. Ricoeur quickly concludes that, if there is a case to be made that poetry secretly underwrites philosophy, then it must base itself on the equivocal nature

26 Philip Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).
27 Colin Murray Turbayne, *The Myth of Metaphor* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1970).
28 With respect to his critical analysis of "La mythologie blanche" in the third section of the Eighth Study, it cannot be insignificant that Ricoeur keeps Aristotle almost out of sight (in contrast with the rest of this study) even though Derrida discusses Aristotle at great length.

of analogy which spans both domains.

For Ricoeur, analogy as it relates to poetic or live metaphor is not itself the production of new meaning. It is only the aftereffect or leftover of this production, the literal or non-dynamic representation of metaphorical meaning. The distinction between metaphor and analogy is the same as the one between metaphor and simile. Simile, being merely a paraphrase of metaphor, falls short of capturing its meaning because metaphor extends this meaning all the way from the sentence to the poetic or literary work and then, from the literary work itself, suffers a *choc en retour*. To put it another way, metaphorical meaning, because it runs all the way to a redescription of the world, is necessarily diffuse. On the other hand, it cannot be overlooked that a parallel situation exists in philosophy, namely, that there is equivocation surrounding the use of analogy in response to the question of being. In Aristotle, the categories of being cannot be brought together as species of a single genus which would be being itself. They can only be roughly ranged in their proximity to substantial being. This means that the strict scientific approach to the question of being is impossible and what in effect happens is that philosophy secretly culls the categories from language itself.

> On peut d'abord objecter que les prétendues catégories de pensée ne sont que des catégories de langue déguisée. C'est l'objection de E. Benveniste (328).

But Benveniste himself notes that the response to the question of being is not itself determined by language.

> "Tout ce qu'on veut montrer ici est que la structure linguistique du grec prédisposait la notion d'« être » à une vocation philosophique" (328).[29]

As follow-up to all this, Ricoeur notes that the response to the question of being is rendered equivocal only to the extent that being itself is equivocal. What is being sought then by philosophy as a response to this question is essentially a way to deal with this equivocalness: to control the polysemy of being and to avoid an uncontrolled dissemination of meaning. Whatever analogical ordering of being goes on in Aristotle then is not the indication of some poetic rapture or surge of meaning, but rather the effort to contain it.

In the second section of the Eighth Study, Ricoeur deals with the same issue but now with the complications which Aquinas brings to it. Ricoeur contends that, despite the introduction of the concept of God into the question of being, it still remains speculative discourse and hence apart from all biblical hermeneutics and dealings with metaphor and poetry. While it is true that theological metaphysics is a *mixed* discourse, it is also true that it brings together different aims and objectives on a common issue. Here there is a cross-fertilisation of discourses which, along with generating new problems, opens up a new conceptual space. With respect to Aquinas, this new space is equivalent to a second axis of investigation. Not only is there the horizontal one of substance and accidents, but also the vertical one of finite and infinite. The ultimate failure of analogy as response to the question of being is therefore not attributable to metaphysics having

29 Ricoeur's reference to Benveniste is the following: "É. Benveniste, « Catégories de pensée et catégories de langue », *Études philosophiques,* décembre 1958, p. 419-429, in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, I, Gallimard, 1966, p. 63-74" (*MV*, 328).

one foot in religion but rather the result of what is innate to the always open-ended question of being. *"Le discours de l'être, dès lors, désigne le lieu d'une investigation interminable. L'ontologie reste la « science recherchée »"* (334).

The last section of the Eighth Study is devoted to Aristotle's theory of act/potency. In a first movement which is critical, Ricoeur declares that this theory is insufficiently developed in Aristotle. Not only are the two terms of act and potency circular in their definitions, but also floating and unstable in their significations. Act, while signifying movement in general, can also signify the originating source of activity (*phusis*) and the natural development of a thing towards completion (*entelechy*). Another problem is Aristotle's description of the metaphorical operation as "seeing things in act." Ricoeur finds this determination of the visual in the deepest processes of being to be an undesirable anthropomorphism. *"En revanche, voir toutes les choses comme des actions, n'est-ce pas aussi les voir comme « humaines, trop humaines »? et, par là, accorder à l'homme lui-même un privilège abusif?"* (391).

In a second movement which is corrective, Ricoeur overcomes the basic problem of Aristotle's account which is the overshadowing or domination of the theory of act/potency by the theory of substance and accidents. In order to bring the first theory properly into the light, Ricoeur emphasizes or even radicalizes it and, at the same time, reforms Aristotle's notion of *phusis* such that it is more dynamic than static or substantial. Accordingly, his crowning move comes when he assimilates Heidegger's *Ereignis* to Aristotle's *energeia* or, more precisely, to an expanded sense of this word.

> Pour nous, modernes, qui venons après la mort de la physique aristotélicienne, ce sens de la *phusis* est peut-être à nouveau vacant, comme ce que le langage poétique demande au discours spéculatif de penser. C'est alors la tâche du discours spéculatif de se mettre en quête du lieu où apparaître signifie « génération de ce qui croit ». Si ce sens n'est plus à chercher dans une région d'objets, celle qu'occupent les corps physiques et les organismes vivants, il semble bien que ce soit au niveau de l'apparaître dans son ensemble et comme tel que le verbe poétique « signifie l'acte ». Par rapport à cette acception illimitée, signifier l'action, signifier l'artifice, signifier le mouvement sont déjà des déterminations, c'est-à-dire des limitations et des restrictions, par quoi quelque chose est perdu de ce qui fait signe dans l'expression: signifier l'éclosion de l'apparaître. S'il est un point de notre expérience où l'expression vive dit l'existence vive, c'est celui où le mouvement par lequel nous remontons la pente entropique du langage rencontre le mouvement par lequel nous régressons en deçà des distinctions entre acte, action, fabrication, mouvement.
>
> C'est ainsi la tâche du discours spéculatif de se mettre en quête du lieu où apparaître signifie « génération de ce qui croît ». Ce projet et ce programme nous font à nouveau croiser l'itinéraire de Heidegger, dont la dernière philosophie tente de mettre la pensée spéculative en résonance avec le dire du poète (392).

3.4. Semantics versus Semiotics

So much for the analysis of the first coordinating principle which is meant to justify the proposition that Ricoeur's investigation of metaphor is an Aristotelian-based metadiscourse. To give further weight to the hypothesis that Ricoeur mobilises the tradition through this investigation and for reasons not expressly stated or immediately apparent, the matter of the semiotic/semantic opposition must now be taken up. Like the first coordinating principle but in a more discontinuous way, this opposition runs throughout the eight studies. As already mentioned, it begins modestly enough with Aristotle's theory of diction. In the Second Study (Fontanier), this opposition is not so evident but, with the beginning of the Third Study and its first section, "Le débat entre sémantique et sémiotique," it arises with a vengeance and remains a point of reference until the end of the Fifth Study (New Rhetoric). Although explicit mention of it after the Fifth Study is scarce, it continues to offer background support by being integral with Ricoeur's claim that the sentence is the only site of meaning and hence with his much larger claim that metaphor is thoroughly discursive and only in this way dutifully proceeds to its encounter with philosophy.[30]

The initial challenge which confronts Ricoeur and which certainly testifies to his intrepid spirit is that, between the quasi-semantic theories of the Continental or structuralist school and Derrida's quasi-semiotic project, there is a sizeable number of theoretical positions. If examining these positions is an important part of the critiquing and correcting operation which is also the safeguarding of the tradition, then Ricoeur is in need of the semiotic/semantic opposition as an organizing principle. In the Preface, Ricoeur calls his Third Study the key one which argues for the predicative nature of metaphor. *"Elle [cette étude] place provisoirement dans un rapport d'opposition irréductible la théorie de la métaphore-énoncé et la théorie de la métaphore-mot"*(8). The "*provisoirement*" of this passage refers to the fact that, in the Fourth Study, Ricoeur's analysis puts itself in reverse in order to affirm the metaphorical word as focal point of the metaphorical sentence. For example, in the proposition, "man is a wolf," the word *man* metaphorizes as "*wolfman*" and is the effect of the metaphorical proposition. The focal word is what identifies the frame or sentence as figure of speech.

The Fifth Study deals with the New Rhetoric of France. Ricoeur claims that this school, particularly as it is represented by Group Mu, takes the semiotic approach most radically into the realm of semantics. *" . . .[E]lle procède d'une révolution dans la révolution, qui confère aux*

30 The following passage gives perhaps the best example of Ricoeur's affirming the hierarchical opposition between semantics and semiotics. It begins with his citing a line from Benveniste's "La forme et le sens dans le langage" (*Le langage, Acte du XIII congrès de l'association des sociétés de philosophie de langue française* [Neuchatel: La Baconniére, 1967], 27-40).

> « À aucun moment, en sémiotique, on ne s'occupe de la relation du signe avec les choses dénotées, ni des rapports entre la langue et le monde ». Mais il faut aller plus loin que la simple opposition entre le point de vue sémiotique et le point de vue sémantique, et subordonner nettement le premier au second; les deux plans du signe et du discours ne sont pas seulement distincts, le premier est une abstraction du second; c'est à son usage dans le discours que le signe doit en dernière analyse son sens même de signe; comment saurions-nous qu'un signe *vaut pour...,* s'il ne recevait pas, de son *emploi* dans le discours, sa visée, qui le rapporte à cela même *pour quoi* il vaut? La sémiotique, en tant qu'elle se tient dans la clôture du monde des signes, est une abstraction sur la *sémantique*, qui met en rapport la constitution interne du sens avec la visée transcendante de la référence (*MV,* 274).

postulats du saussurisme une pureté en quelque sorte cristalline" (174). In Group Mu's seminal work, *La rhétorique générale*, the basic move is one of relating abstract units of meaning or *sèmes* to all the forms and figures of language. These abstract units correspond to and yet can conflict with two principal levels of language: the phonetic units smaller than or equal to the word and the units of speech or writing equal to or greater than the word. In this way, a highly technical account is given of both the literal and figurative uses of language. The level of constituted *sèmes* functions as the basis on which to analyse the figure of speech's semantic deviance from the literal level or level of zero degree rhetoric (*degré rhétorique zéro*).

At the beginning of the Fifth Study, Ricoeur distinguishes between New Rhetoric as it is represented by Group Mu and other theories of metaphor which, taken together, he refers to as structural semantics. He claims that the latter, less radically semiotic, are in keeping with Aristotle to the extent that the word is maintained as primary unit of meaning which divides the semiotic and the semantic. In the case of New Rhetoric or, more properly, the seminal work, *La rhétorique générale*, the semiotic and semantic are run together and, as a consequence, form a homogeneous field of study. As Ricoeur points out, the advantage is that it is able to adopt a more technical and scientific approach to language. It can avoid making the move common to the other structural as well as Anglo-American theories which is the one of resorting to outside fields such as psychology and sociology. It is central to Ricoeur's analysis to show that this outside move is the result of these theories' being not sufficiently developed as theories of meaning and reference.

On the whole, Ricoeur does not seem to view New Rhetoric as having made a substantial contribution to metaphorical theory. His earliest critique of it comes in the Second Study when, discussing its initial plan or earliest aspirations to arise like a phoenix out of the ashes of the old rhetoric, he comments: "*Mais l'entreprise ne serait pas moins fidèle à l'idéal taxinomique de la rhétorique classique; elle serait seulement plus attentive à la multiplicité des figures"* (64). A question may arise at this point: If New Rhetoric does not add significantly to the theory of metaphor, why does Ricoeur give it so much attention? Perhaps what is not stated but nevertheless at work here it is that, since he does not acknowledge that New Rhetoric is essentially different from the old rhetoric, he must also refuse to acknowledge that it is dissociable from the decline of rhetoric and the reason for this decline which, according to him, is principally the result of the emphasis on the word as primary unit of meaning. If it is the case then that he only recognizes it as being the latest stage of this decline despite its pretensions to renovating the field and to scientific precision, he must view it as being a dangerous rival to his own theory even though its status in this regard must be one of dissimulating its heritage.

With respect to his analysis of the various theories of structural semantics in the Fifth Study, Ricoeur's look at New Rhetoric or, more precisely, Group Mu's *La rhétorique générale* is easily the longest. Although in some sense it stretches as far back as the Second Study and as far ahead as the Seventh Study where Ricoeur discusses New Rhetoric in relation to his theory of reference, it is largely confined to the Fifth Study. The first three sections of this study are devoted to calling into question the basic presuppositions of the structuralist school of linguistics. The first section, "Écart et degré rhétorique zéro," deals with the presupposition of an absolutely non-figurative level of language. Ricoeur argues that the level of zero degree rhetoric in language is not attainable and, as a result, structuralism only operates here with abstract approximations. The second section, "L'espace de la figure," deals with spatial representations or characterizations of language. What is central here both to structural semantics and New

Rhetoric is, as two linguistic axes, a linear dimension of speech or writing which is *syntagmatic* and a vertical dimension which is *paradigmatic*. While the linear axis represents syntax, grammar, and logic, the vertical axis represents the interaction between the linguistically actual and virtual or, to put it another way, between speech and writing and language as system or code. While Ricoeur is not expressly opposed to this schema, he raises objections to the structuralist conception of it. The problem for him is that structural semantics inevitably identifies metaphor with the paradigmatic dimension. By disavowing then a theory of metaphor which would throw the emphasis on the syntagmatic dimension, it places the metaphorical operation not along the horizontal axis, but the vertical one. As a consequence, metaphor is inevitably viewed as being one word taken from a pool of possible words which is the code and substituted for another word. The difference between metaphorical and literal meaning then is essentially null. In the third section, "Écart et réduction d'écart," Ricoeur examines a principle which is of central importance for structural semantics and New Rhetoric, namely, *deviance*. Here he gives special attention to Jean Cohen whom he finds to be most in agreement with the Anglo-American school. Unlike the authors of *La rhétorique générale,* Cohen takes deviance not to be simply linguistic but the first phase of metaphorical predication. Ricoeur finds him to be very close to such advocates of the interaction theory as Beardsley who describes metaphor as logical absurdity. At the same time, Cohen, still holding to the syntagmatic/paradigmatic opposition, identifies metaphor with the substitution of one word for another and the meaning of metaphor with a change brought about in the code. Although Ricoeur considers Cohen to be in good company with Aristotle, he criticizes him for relying on a theory of substitution which cannot explain metaphorical meaning without going outside semantics and appealing to some psychological change in the reader or auditor.

The fourth section, "Le fonctionnement des figures: l'analyse sémique," deals strictly with Group Mu's *La rhétorique générale* and is almost equal in length to the first three sections of the Fifth Study. On the opening page of the Fifth Study, Ricoeur declares that all the problems which are dealt with in the first three sections will be gathered together in the final one. The result is that his critique of this work, despite its length and specificity, does not differ in essentials from the critique which precedes it. At the beginning of the Fifth Study, Ricoeur makes a reference back to the Third Study and to its first section, "Le débat entre sémantique et sémiotique." Citing Benveniste once again, Ricoeur opposes the latter's conception of a radical discontinuity between word and sentence to New Rhetoric's conception of a homogeneous linguistic field. The fatal mistake of New Rhetoric is not to recognize properly this discontinuity and, as a consequence, to exaggerate the significance of the word. Ricoeur argues that, because the analyses which New Rhetoric carries out still rely on actual speech, its theory of *sèmes* as theory of abstract units does not free it from what this theory itself implicitly demands, namely, a theory of discourse. The only positive note Ricoeur sounds while analysing *La rhétorique générale* comes at the very end of the Fifth Study. Here he observes that Group Mu examines more extended figures of speech which it calls *métalogismes* and which it distinguishes from *métasémèmes.* The latter includes metaphor and is intralinguistic; the former includes allegory and is extralinguistic. By taking its analysis of tropes and figures to the level of discourse, Group Mu, without knowing it, stumbles onto the proper ground of metaphorical theory. Were it to have placed its own theory of metaphor in the larger landscape of *métalogismes* (i.e., in the area of allegory, parable, and fable), it would not have tried to explain deviance in terms of perceiving

resemblance at the linguistic level only, but also at the level of reality and the world.[31]

3.5. Interaction "versus" Substitution

Just as Ricoeur largely approves of the theory of interaction and associates it with semantics, so he largely disapproves of the theory of substitution and associates it with semiotics. Although this "axiomatic" way of looking at matters is continuous in *La métaphore vive*, it nonetheless takes place only at the most formal or thematised level. At another level, certainly less obtrusive, Ricoeur assimilates the theory of substitution to the theory of interaction. Insofar as this move is successful or the minor theory is not simply obliterated by the major one, the theory of substitution both unites with and is subordinated to the theory of interaction. At the same time, the theory of substitution becomes a part of Ricoeur's semantics even though, at the most formal or thematised level, this semantics is opposed to the theory of substitution.[32]

With the possible exception of the Eighth Study, the interaction versus substitution axiomatic covers the whole of *La métaphore vive.* At the most elementary level, it is the opposition between metaphor-sentence and metaphor-word. It is at this level that one encounters it in the First Study and, more precisely, in Ricoeur's analysis of Aristotle's theory of diction (*lexis*). Even though the interaction and substitution theories are not expressly named here, it would seem that Ricoeur is staking out the ground for them. By contrasting Aristotle's full description of metaphor to his "abbreviated" definition, Ricoeur puts the opposition of metaphor-sentence/metaphor-word in place. It is not until the Second Study that this opposition as dialectical or dynamic operation becomes evident. As theory of single-word trope, Fontanier's theory of metaphor is both criticized by Ricoeur for its limitations and given a vote of confidence in the very act of correcting it or, more precisely, uncovering its inherently predicative nature.

One of the clearest indications of this dialectical ordering of the two theories is that Ricoeur takes the opportunity to refer in the Fontanier study to the Anglo-American school. When discussing the implicitly predicative nature of Fontanier's theory, and more precisely, his definition of metaphor as one idea's being transposed onto another idea, Ricoeur compares this operation to the interaction between vehicle and tenor which are key terms in I. A. Richards' theory.[33] Even further in this direction is his analysis of Fontanier's theory of figures of speech.

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31 Ricoeur's analyses of Fontanier and New Rhetoric both follow the same pattern of ending on a positive note which is the look at their respective theories of extended figures. His shift from the critical to the corrective mode in both cases is equivalent to first negating each one's theory of metaphor and then cancelling this negation in the way of preserving this theory as an incorporated part of each one's theory of extended figures.

32 This opposition between the theory of substitution and semantics is ambiguous in Ricoeur. Insofar as this theory is identified with the sign-system which falls *below* the level of the word, Ricoeur strongly opposes it to semantics. But insofar as this theory is identified with the word itself, then Ricoeur recognizes that the theory of substitution has some legitimacy because the semiotic as word unites with or crosses over into the semantic.

33 Ricoeur also refers back to Fontanier when he discusses Richards' theory in the Third Study. After specifying that this theory describes a semantic transaction between contexts, Ricoeur goes on to state:

> A ce stade de la description, le danger serait plutôt inverse de celui auquel l'excessive minutie de la tropologie exposait. Tout couple de pensées abrégé en une unique expression ne constitue-t-il pas une métaphore? C'est ici que I. A. Richards introduit un facteur distinctif qui joue le rôle de différence spécifique par rapport au concept générique de « transaction entre contextes ». Dans la métaphore, les deux pensées sont en quelque sorte dénivelées, en ce sens que nous décrivons l'une sous les traits de l'autre. Fontanier en avait aperçu quelque chose dans sa définition de la métaphore « présenter

Here the taxonomic project goes beyond the level of simple word-substitution to a more complex level where it is implicated in predication and makes explicit what is already implicit in Fontanier's theory of metaphor.

There is a difference in the way Ricoeur treats the theory of substitution at the beginning of the Third Study and the way he treats it at the beginning of the Second Study. In the case of the latter, he fits substitution into a list of traits which he draws up in order to describe the rhetoric of tropology.[34] Even before he begins his analysis of Fontanier and well before the theory of interaction is introduced, the theory of substitution is thus presented as being in solidarity with rhetorical waywardness. By contrast, the theory of substitution at the beginning of the Third Study seems to move towards respectability when Ricoeur associates it with a nominal definition of metaphor which cannot be dispensed with and which is even to be found in Aristotle.

> Anticipant sur une analyse qui sera faite dans la cinquième étude, disons dès maintenant que la définition réelle de la métaphore en termes d'énoncé ne peut éliminer la définition nominale en termes de mot ou de nom, parce que le mot reste le porteur de l'effet de sens métaphorique; c'est du mot qu'on dit qu'il prend un sens métaphorique; c'est pourquoi la définition d'Aristote n'est pas abolie par une théorie qui ne concerne plus le lieu de la métaphore dans le discours, mais le procès métaphorique lui-même . . . (88).

While Ricoeur is mainly concerned in the Third Study with demonstrating the merits of the theory of interaction, he takes time in its first section, "Le débat entre sémantique et sémiotique," to look ahead and offer a preview of the Fifth Study. Employing the terminology of structural semantics, he then makes a distinction between the theory of metaphor as paradigmatic or semiotic theory and the theory of metaphor as syntagmatic or semantic theory. Claiming that he opposes the dominance of the first and favours the second, Ricoeur then endorses the theory of substitution insofar as it is restricted to a classificatory or nominal role. But it may be suspected that the theory of substitution is effectively undone at this point insofar as, for one thing, Ricoeur offers no precise account of the relationship between it and the other theory and, for another, does not stop referring to the theory of substitution as the rival of the theory of interaction even after he has subordinated the first to the second and dialectically related them.[35]

> une idée sous le signe d'une autre... »; mais il n'avait pu en tirer toutes les conséquences, faute d'une théorie adéquate du discours. I. A. Richards propose d'appeler « teneur » (*tenor*) l'idée sous-jacente, et « véhicule » (*vehicle*) l'idée sous le signe de laquelle la première est appréhendée. Mais il importe de bien noter que la métaphore n'est pas le « véhicule »: elle est le tout constitué par les deux moitiés (*MV*, 105-106).

34 The following sums up the series of postulates which, according to Ricoeur, constitute the implicit model of tropology: postulate of the proper and improper, postulate of the semantic lacuna, postulate of the borrowed term, postulate of deviation, *axiom of substitution*, postulate of the paradigmatic character of the trope, postulate of the exhaustive paraphrase, postulate of nil information. "Le trope, n'enseignant rien, a une simple fonction décorative; il est destiné à plaire en ornant le langage, en donnant de la « couleur » au discours, un « vêtement » à l'expression nue de la pensée" (*MV*, 64-66).

35 This return to old ground is most apparent at the beginning of the Sixth Study. Here the theories of substitution and interaction are opposed to one another while the theory of resemblance, in historical solidarity with the first, is weaned from it and transferred to the second. "Cela veut-il dire que la ressemblance soit solidaire exclusivement

In continuation with the Third Study, the Fourth Study's first section, "Monisme du signe et primat du mot," is devoted to an analysis of semiotics. Here Ricoeur makes explicit reference to the theory of substitution when he analyses the theory of metaphor in contemporary structuralism. He claims that this structural theory of metaphor is the historical outgrowth of Saussurian semiotics which relayed to contemporary linguistics the rhetorical tradition's theory of metaphor.

> La sémantique structurale, au contraire, s'est progressivement édifiée sur le postulat de l'homogénéité de toutes les unités du langage en tant que signes. . . . L'examen de la rhétorique ancienne et classique avait déjà montré le lien entre la théorie de la métaphore-substitution et une conception du langage où le mot était l'unité de base; seulement ce primat du mot n'était pas fondé sur une science explicite des signes, mais sur la corrélation entre le mot et l'idée. La sémantique moderne, à partir de F. de Saussure, est capable de donner un fondement nouveau à la même description des tropes, parce qu'elle dispose d'un concept nouveau de l'entité linguistique de base, le signe (130-131).

The recent turn to studying language as extensive sign-system therefore did not do away with the primacy of the word but rather reinforced it. The key feature of semiotics, the binary opposition of signifier-signified, is conducive to a theory of denomination while effectively blocking the path to a theory of predication.

The rest of the Fourth Study is taken up with the examination of certain theories of metaphor which are precursors of New Rhetoric (Group Mu) and yet which are more amenable to being coordinated with the semantics of the sentence. One of these theories is to be found in Stephen Ullman's *The Principles of Semantics*.[36] Unlike later structural theoreticians who take linguistics to be a completely homogeneous field, Ullman extends his theory of semantics to psychology. It is in this attempt to deal with problems bordering on the realm of the cognitive that Ricoeur finds much of the ground on which to critique and correct Ullman. It is also in this area that he first sees a resemblance between Ullman's theory of metaphor and the theory of interaction insofar as the latter is also a theory of speech and communication.

> Cette médiation psychologique entre sémantique et rhétorique mérite attention. Le bénéfice de l'opération est très positif, quelles que soient les réserves que nous soyons amené ultérieurement à faire. D'abord, un pont est jeté entre l'activité individuelle de parole et le caractère social de la langue; les champs associatifs fournissent cette médiation . . . (152).

But before beginning this particular part of his analysis, Ricoeur finds it necessary to examine the semiotic basis of Ullman's theory and raise some objections against the fundamental tenet of

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d'une théorie de la substitution et incompatible avec une théorie de l'interaction? Telle est la question qui nous occupera dans cette étude. Je dirai par anticipation que je me propose de dissocier le sort de la ressemblance de celui de la théorie de la substitution . . ." (*MV*, 221).

36 Stephen Ullmann, *The Principles of Semantics* (Glasgow: Jackson & Oxford, 1959).

his theory, namely, that the word and not the sentence is the primary unit of meaning. Ricoeur repeats his argument that it is only the sentence which delivers the word from its polysemous state and grants it a proper signification. He also looks at the signifying relation of name and sense in Ullman's theory which is a direct descendent of Saussure's signifier-signified opposition.

The psychological dimension of Ullman's theory is represented by associative fields; one field is attached to the "name" pole and the other to the "sense" pole of the name-sense opposition. These fields in turn operate on two axes: the contiguous or metonymic axis and the similar or metaphorical axis. Covering all language and polysemy of words, these metonymic and metaphorical axes are then taken to be the basis of all substitutions both at the name-level and the sense-level. But because Ullman provides his semantics with neither a theory of predication nor a theory of reference, it must fall short of explaining the metaphorical production of new meaning. This is to say that, in its striving to account for linguistic innovation, it can only tap into the rich ambiguity of both individual expression and social activity by being a cross-disciplinary effort. At the same time, because all signification in Ullman's theory of metaphor turns on acts of denomination, the metaphorical perception of resemblance is entirely constrained to the level of words. The "sense" pole of the name-sense opposition falls short as explanation because, lacking worldly reference, it cannot give an account of this perception as truly innovative or creative act.

Despite these objections, Ricoeur argues in the fifth section, "Le jeu du sens: Entre la phrase et le mot," that the theory of metaphor-sentence is compatible with the theory of metaphor-word. Once again, it is stated that it is the contextualizing role of the sentence which gives to the word its proper or unique sense. At the same time, the word as lexicalized unit brings to the sentence a potential meaning which the latter actualizes. Then, towards the end of the fifth section, Ricoeur evokes the theory of interaction by repeating the argument at the beginning of the Third Study, namely, that the rapport between metaphor-sentence and metaphor-word is equivalent to the interaction between frame and focus in Black's theory and tenor and vehicle in Richards' theory.

In the Fifth Study there is a long analysis of Jean Cohen's theory of metaphor in *Structure du langage poétique*.[37] At the end of it, Ricoeur identifies one and only one of the basic tenets of structural linguistics with the theory of interaction, namely, paradigmatic deviance which, according to him, is equivalent to the effect of the metaphorical sentence on the metaphorical word.

> Ainsi remis à sa place, l'écart paradigmatique retrouve toute sa valeur: il correspond dans la théorie de l'interaction, au phénomène de *focalisation* sur le mot que nous décrivions au terme de la précédente étude. Le sens métaphorique est un effet de l'énoncé entier, mais focalise sur un mot qu'on peut appeler le mot métaphorique. C'est pourquoi il faut dire que la métaphore est une novation sémantique à la fois d'ordre prédicatif (nouvelle pertinence) et d'ordre lexical (écart paradigmatique). Sous son première aspect, elle relève d'une dynamique du sens, sous son deuxième aspect, d'une statique (200).

37 Jean Cohen, *Structure du langage poétique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1966).

In the Sixth Study, "Le travail de la resemblance," there is a return to depicting the relationship between the theories of substitution and interaction as oppositional. In the opening paragraph, Ricoeur claims that the theory of resemblance, rather than being, as has traditionally been the case, in solidarity with the theory of substitution, belongs more properly to the theory of interaction. In the first section, "Substitution et ressemblance," he gives an account of this traditional solidarity and of how it is reinforced by structural linguistics. As on many other occasions, Ricoeur, in order both to explain and critique structural principles, relies on the influential works of Roman Jakobson.[38] Here he notes that, no matter how many adjustments are made to it, the metonymic contiguity/metaphorical resemblance opposition proves incoherent. One of the difficulties is that the notion of metonymy mixes together two qualitatively different phenomena on the syntagmatic axis: the concatenation of phonemes in morphemes and the logico-grammatical ordering of a sentence.

Just as the first section of the Sixth Study is critical of the traditional solidarity between the theories of resemblance and substitution, so the second section, "Le moment « iconique » de la métaphore," brings about a new association between the theories of resemblance and interaction. With his examination of Paul Henle's essay "Metaphor,"[39] Ricoeur begins a long analysis which relies on many diverse sources such as Immanuel Kant, Charles Sanders Peirce, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Northrop Frye, Owen Barfield, and Nelson Goodman and takes up the rest of the Sixth Study with its third section, "Le procès fait à la ressemblance," fourth section, "Plaidoyer pour la ressemblance," fifth section, "Psycho-linguistique de la métaphore," and, finally, sixth section, "Icône et image." Wishing to avoid psychologisms but not the psychical domain per se, Ricoeur demonstrates that there is a moment in the metaphorical operation which is, first, pre-conceptual or pre-objective, second, both verbal and sensible as perception of resemblance, and, third, the work of the productive imagination. It very well seems then that Ricoeur is denying the sensible/sense opposition to poetic discourse.

3.6. The Production of New Meaning

According to the analysis of PS, Ricoeur's reordering of the theory of substitution and the theory of interaction paves the way for the development of his own theory of metaphor. This is to say that it provides the means by which to transfer the work of resemblance from the theory of substitution to the theory of interaction presumably without giving up the technical precision or explanatory value which comes with the theory of substitution. In this way, he puts a necessary check on the indefinite or expansionist nature of his theory by providing it with a "surveying" role or responsibility, an ongoing capacity to critically and correctively refer back to metaphor as simple word-substitution.

For the most part, Ricoeur has identified the rhetorical tradition with a non-informative or non-heuristic concept of metaphor. At the same time, there often appears in this tradition a need

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38 Roman Jakobson also figures prominently at the beginning of Ricoeur's exposé, "Discours et communication." (See footnote 2 on page 613.) In *La métaphore vive*, his works are extensively referred to but never cited at length. These works are: "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasia Disturbances" in *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), "Results of the Conference of Anthropologists and Linguists" in *Supplement to the International Journal of American Linguists* (19/2, 1953), and "Closing Statements: Linguistics and Poetics" in *Style in Language* (Cambridge, Technical Press of MIT, 1960).

39 Paul Henle, "Metaphor," *Language, Thought, and Culture*, ed. Paul Henle (Ann Harbour: University of Michigan Press, 1958), 173-195.

to explain the apparent richness of metaphor as a sensible or affective moment. Most often, this need results in an appeal to some non-linguistic or non-semantic explanation. Ricoeur notes that there are a number of times in metaphorical theory when, for example, the distinction is made between a denotative and a connotative signification. The first represents the literal or non-figurative meaning of metaphor and the second its effect on the reader or auditor. Ricoeur also finds the same distinction being made not only in the rhetorical tradition *stricto sensu* but also in the ranks of the Anglo-American school. While he considers the latter to be on the right path to comprehending metaphor, he also views it as being necessarily restricted by the epistemological and ontological limitations of semantics. In order to carry out a full investigation here, it is necessary to ask the basic philosophical questions about truth and reality.

To say it again, Ricoeur endorses Aristotle's inclusion of his theory of metaphor not only in his theories of diction (*lexis*), imitation (*mimesis*), and plot or structure (*muthos*), but also his theory of nature (*phusis*).[40] As a consequence, even when restricting himself to an analysis of Aristotle's theory of metaphor, Ricoeur finds many indications of an operation stretching beyond language. Very early in the First Study, he describes Aristotle's full definition of metaphor as signifying a "category mistake" ultimately taking thought towards a new logical and conceptual grasp of reality. Metaphorical meaning is illustrated then only in a limited way by simile and analogy which are snapshot views of what is ultimately a diachronic operation. On many occasions, Ricoeur distinguishes between the rhetorical tradition's definition of metaphor as abbreviated simile and Aristotle's definition of simile as extended metaphor. Upholding Aristotle's definition, Ricoeur calls simile a weakened metaphor, a paraphrase of metaphor, a merely static record of the metaphorical perception of resemblance. The simile's simple declaration of likeness between things is not equivalent to disclosing – to sketching out in rough – the sameness of different things. It is precisely metaphorical identification as vehement commitment to reference and reality which precipitates thought in the direction of a conceptual articulation of this sameness.[41]

This sameness for Ricoeur is truth, reality, and the world which is integral with ever-changing but progressive knowledge. Metaphor itself is the medium by which the manifold aspects of the world are taken up by a pre-conceptual or pre-objective grasp of them and delivered over to speculative discourse as updated knowledge gleaned from the myriad subtleties which elude science, logic, and empiricism. Metaphorical theory cannot therefore be restricted to linguistics or even to semantics but must be extended to the things themselves. Here truth as the telos of knowledge becomes complicated by being not just a static target which knowledge aims at, but rather a moving target whose very movement metaphor discloses repeatedly.

The Seventh Study, "Métaphore et référence," is entirely devoted to Ricoeur's theory of metaphorical reference. He begins by drawing a distinction between a semantic and a hermeneutic study of reference. While the former restricts itself to the word and sentence, the latter *"s'adresse à des entités de plus grande dimension que la phrase"* (273). At the same time, Ricoeur holds fast to Frege's distinction between meaning (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*). The

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40 "Mais, dira-t-on, aucun exégèse de la *mimêsis*, fondée sur son lien avec le *muthos*, ne supprimera le fait majeur que le *mimêsis* est *mimêsis phuseôs*. Il n'est donc pas vrai que la *mimêsis* soit le dernier concept atteint par la remontée vers les premiers concepts de la *Poétique*. L'expression « imitation de la nature » semble-t-il, fait sortir du champ de la *Poétique* et renvoie à la *Métaphysique*" (*MV*, 58).

41 PS apologizes for the repetitious aspect of some of this coverage of Ricoeur's project. Nonetheless it is largely unavoidable given that, first, the investigation of the coordinating principles necessarily involves returning to old ground and, secondly, Ricoeur reargues his main points in many different contexts.

truth of a proposition depends upon the reference's being the complement to and completion of its meaning. Yet Ricoeur takes a further step by claiming that, along with scientific discourse's having this structure and relation to the world, poetic discourse has an analogous structure and relation. To make the common assumption that poetic discourse is non-referential is only the error of mistaking a suspended reference for no reference. Making the distinction between a first-order reference and a second-order reference, Ricoeur then argues that the suspension of the first permits the second or, to put it another way, the reader experiences the possible world of the literary work as taking up the foreground while the actual world recedes to the background. The bracketing of the actual world by the possible world is a cognitive operation which is counterbalanced by the ontological operation of the possible world's being bracketed by the actual. This latter operation is mimesis as both imitation of the world and redescription of it.

Much further along, in the Eighth Study's fourth section, "L'intersection des sphères de discours," Ricoeur gives an account of the metaphorical production of new meaning at the ultimate level of its transfer from poetic discourse to speculative discourse. Referring to Jean Ladrière's theory of signification,[42] he associates metaphor with an incessant competition between sense and reference which, in their drive to outdo yet complete one another, form ever-new significations. While the new and unfamiliar reference calls on the understanding for a corresponding concept, the freshly emergent concept in turn seeks anchorage in some new empirical or transcendental reference. With respect to metaphorical reference, there is of course the complication of its *is/is not* status. It is up to interpretation, a discourse which mediates between the poetic and the speculative, to determine the specificity of the metaphorical *is* while not losing sight of the *is not*. At the same time, speculative discourse relays the diffuse aim of poetic discourse as sharpened by interpretation to its own independent domain where metaphorical perception is integrated with the logical space of universal principles.[43]

42 Jean Ladrière, "Discours théologique et symbole," *Revue des sciences religieuses*, nos.1-2, 1975, 120-141.

43 "L'attraction que le discours spéculatif exerce sur le discours métaphorique s'exprime dans le procès même de l'interprétation. L'interprétation est l'oeuvre du concept. Elle ne peut pas ne pas être un travail d'élucidation, au sens husserlien du mot, par conséquent une lutte pour l'univocité. Alors que l'énonciation métaphorique laisse le sens second en suspens, en même temps que son référent reste sans présentation directe, l'interprétation est, par nécessité, une rationalisation qui, à la limite, évacue l'expérience qui, à travers le procès métaphorique, vient au langage. . . . On peut concevoir un style herméneutique dans lequel l'interprétation répond à la fois à la notion du concept et à celle de l'intention constituante de l'expérience qui cherche à se dire sur le mode métaphorique. L'interprétation est alors une modalité de discours qui opère à l'intersection de deux mouvances, celle du métaphorique et celle du spéculatif" (*MV*, 382-383).

Chapter IV

Ricoeur's Commitment to Tell the Truth about Metaphor as *Direct* Encounter with Derrida's Project

Accrediting to Ricoeur a vast mobilisation of the tradition which operates in the guise of being an ambitious and wide-ranging investigation of metaphor and which, as the defensive and offensive movements of philosophy, is the surreptitious bid to subdue a seditious element, cannot help but also be a certain discrediting of him. For this reason alone – for the reason that it implicates him in a certain amount of ruse and deception – the analysis of Chapter III may be rejected and it may be said that, although there is little doubt that Ricoeur guides his project with the Aristotelian tradition of philosophy dialectically opposed to the quasi-Aristotelian tradition of rhetoric, there are few signs that this elaborate working out of a longstanding problem is not what it declares itself to be, namely, the attempt to arrive at a better understanding of metaphor. It would seem then that much of what is being brought forward to demonstrate that Ricoeur wages an undeclared war against anti-philosophy turns on whether the Eighth Study is to be viewed as being accidental or essential to the seven studies which precede it.

It has already been noted that, along with his extensive survey of metaphorical theory, Ricoeur has more or less completed his theory of live metaphor by the beginning of the Eighth Study. This "more or less*"* is significant in the present context because it fills in the gap between Ricoeur's extending his theory to an account of metaphorical truth and reality and his recognizing an obligation to reveal *"la philosophie [qui] est* impliquée *dans le mouvement qui porte la recherche de la rhétorique à la sémantique et du sens vers la référence*" (323). Specifically, what is at issue here is that he refers at the beginning of the Eighth Study to the presuppositions or operative concepts which undergird all philosophical theory and which, according to him, cannot be thematised immediately but which must be investigated in due course and as well as possible.

> Nul discours ne peut se prétendre libre de présuppositions, pour la raison simple que le travail de pensée par lequel on thématise une région de pensable met en jeu des concepts opératoires qui ne peuvent, dans le même temps, être thématisés. Mais, si nul discours ne peut être radicalement dénué de présuppositions, du moins nul penseur n'est-il dispensé d'expliciter les siennes, autant qu'il le peut (323).

In this regard, it is precisely the last study of *La métaphore vive* which Ricoeur chooses as the forum of this deferred but by no means dispensable task.

As far as his investigation of presuppositions or operative concepts goes, it seems that what Ricoeur essentially has in mind is his ontology which, unquestionably Aristotelian, is taken up in the final section of the Eighth Study. Now although Heidegger, whom Ricoeur strongly associates with Derrida, is discussed at length in this section, the latter is not mentioned once. On this basis alone, it may be suspected that Ricoeur's critical analysis of "La mythologie blanche" is not essential to his project as investigation of presuppositions. On the other hand, Ricoeur himself expressly connects this analysis to it even though he does not investigate this connection in and of itself.

> En outre, cette phase proprement polémique de mon argument [qui va à l'encontre de thèse derridienne] est inséparable de la clarification positive de l'ontologie impliquée par la théorie de la métaphore dans le reste de la présente étude (368).

Given this state of affairs, it is possible to think either that his judgement is faulty in this area and that the critical analysis of Derrida's essay is not part of a vital concern or that it is related to it in a way which Ricoeur himself does not articulate.

But even if it is admitted that Derrida's project and, along with it, Heidegger's pose a serious challenge to Ricoeur's project, it may be thought that, on the basis of his long deferral in taking up this challenge, Ricoeur does not find it as worrisome as the semiotic-structural one. After all, the latter receives a tremendous amount of attention in the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Studies and, to a lesser degree, in the Sixth and Seventh Studies. But if Ricoeur's semantic theory is essentially a theory of discourse and, at the same time, supportive of his theory of metaphor, and if, furthermore, both the semiotic-structural and the Derrida-Heidegger connections are threats to it, then the fact that the former is largely confined to a discussion of metaphor and the latter to a discussion of discourse (with metaphor as a secondary consideration) seems to go in the contrary direction. In point of fact, Ricoeur disarms the threat of semiotics almost immediately by placing it in opposition to his theory of semantics. While the former is of course found to be problematic in relation to the latter, the latter itself is never considered to be problematic (which is part of Derrida's project) in relation to the former.

But to return to the matter of presuppositions, perhaps what Ricoeur means by thematising them is something which is inseparable from an affirmation of them. If the issue of examining presuppositions is only this pre-determined securing of them, then it cannot be, from an epistemological standpoint, of much interest. On the other hand, if it is not the epistemological but the *ethical* which prevails here, then this examination is of primary significance for the reason that it "secures" these presuppositions. From such a standpoint then, what ultimately counts is not good argument in the traditional sense, but the tradition itself as "good" argument.

The tradition itself as "good" argument would simply be its re-production or re-presentation. With its presuppositions already in place as the very basis of any self-examination or self-exploration, it of course would receive its tremendous force as self-affirmation or self-confirmation from an immense circularity. But even without this self-examination which would be necessarily self-justifying, its presuppositions would receive indirect justification simply on the basis of proving themselves to be indispensable. The very length and comprehensiveness of Ricoeur's analysis as historical survey and encounter with various theories which, despite their differences, occupy a certain shared ground, implies a large-scale consensus on what is most fundamental. On the other hand, if these presuppositions were secure simply by being in operation or valid simply as support, it would be superfluous to justify them or to take seriously any challenge to them. On this point, there seems to be a profound tension or ambiguity in that while Ricoeur stands firmly behind his theory of metaphor, he only explores his presuppositions or at least some of them *"sur un mode où l'on n'affirme plus qu'en questionnant . . ."* (391).

4.1. From Polyphile to Derrida and Heidegger (*peut-être*)

Ricoeur's critical analysis of "La mythologie blanche" takes up most of the third section, "Méta-phorique et méta-physique." Besides the critical analysis of Derrida's essay, there is of course a number of related discussions. At least some of these discussions are what might be called Ricoeur's quasi-direct encounter with Derrida. On this point, the first observation to make is that he considers Derrida's project to be a radicalized version of Heidegger's. Now, of course, Ricoeur makes no declaration that his encounter with Derrida or, for that matter, Heidegger is the culminating point of his book and, in fact, he restricts it mainly to one section which he describes as being his "second navigation" of the discontinuity issue. This second navigation results from Ricoeur's extending his plea for the discontinuity between poetic discourse and speculative discourse from a discussion of Aristotle and Aquinas to a discussion of Derrida and Heidegger. But the discussion of Heidegger in the third section, coming directly before the critical analysis of Derrida's essay, is minor compared to the latter.

At the beginning of the Eighth Study, Ricoeur announces that the first three sections deal with some erroneous ways, essentially two,[1] of relating poetic discourse to speculative discourse.

> Les trois premières sections sont un plaidoyer pour la discontinuité entre discours spéculatif et discours poétique et une réfutation de quelque-unes des manières erronées, à notre avis, de comprendre le lien d'implication entre discours métaphorique et discours spéculatif (324).

Ricoeur first distinguishes between these two erroneous ways by calling the second the reverse of the first. *"Une modalité toute différente – et même inverse – d'implication de la philosophie dans la théorie de la métaphore doit être considérée"* (324). The first erroneous way is the claim that metaphor and poetic discourse are at the origin of speculative discourse. The second erroneous way is the theory or project which puts *"les présuppositions philosophiques à l'origine même des distinctions qui rendent possible un discours sur la métaphore*." (324). At first glance, this second erroneous way is puzzling because it seems to be entirely in agreement with Ricoeur's own conception of philosophy as metadiscourse. Yet, in the next passage, he indicates that, according to the second erroneous way, these philosophical presuppositions are already infiltrated by *"le jeu inaperçu de la métaphore"* (325). But if this follow-up description of the second erroneous way is the correct one, then it becomes difficult to see why it should be called the reverse of the first.

At this point, it is worthwhile to observe that there is an ideal candidate for representing the first erroneous way whom Ricoeur must have encountered in "La mythologie blanche" but never mentions. It is Polyphile who argues in *Le jardin d'Épicure* that metaphysics is itself a kind of mythology by making and effacing metaphors in order to span the visible and invisible

1 With respect to what Ricoeur calls the erroneous ways of conceiving the relationship between the poetic and the speculative, he presents three which correspond to the first three sections of the Eighth Study. The first section deals with Aristotle and the possibility of deception by way of thinking that poetic intention is simply transferred to the level of speculative discourse on the basis that the latter uses analogy and is equivocal as the inquiry into being. The second section deals with Aquinas and the possibility of deception on the basis of the same problematic but with the complication that speculative discourse is now yoked to theology. This section then is not essentially different from the first section since both concern the issue of thinking that philosophical intention with respect to knowing, encountering, or describing the transcendent is essentially the same as poetic intention.

worlds. Further to this is the fact that, rather than implicating metaphor in the very presuppositions of philosophy which is the second erroneous way, Polyphile himself relies on these presuppositions. What is surely not insignificant here is that Ricoeur, by never mentioning Polyphile, never need mention Derrida's critique of him. And by never having to mention this critique, he avoids the difficulties which would result from having to explain its relation to the two erroneous ways.

Another point to consider here is that there is yet another way in which Ricoeur defines the opposition between these erroneous ways. While he takes the second to be describing the operation of philosophical metaphor at the level of the unintentional which is *"le jeu inaperçu de la métaphore,"* he takes the first to be describing it at the level of the intentional which is to *"reproduire au plan spéculatif le fonctionnement sémantique du discours poétique"* (324). Now this opposition between an "unintentional" theory of philosophical metaphor and an "intentional" theory of philosophical metaphor happens to be analogous to the difference which Derrida makes between his own position and Polyphile's. Polyphile's claim that metaphysics takes up into itself a mythology corresponds to the intentional dimension which Ricoeur attributes to the first erroneous way and which, to say it again, he describes as the semantic function of poetic discourse's being reproduced at the level of speculative discourse. This semantic function is described, if not at the beginning of the Eighth Study than elsewhere, as the Platonic transfer of meaning and reference from the sensible to the suprasensible realm. At the same time, Ricoeur identifies this transfer with both Derrida and Heidegger as *"le noyau théorique commun à Heidegger et à Derrida, à savoir la prétendue connivence entre le couple métaphorique du propre et du figuré et le couple métaphysique du visible et de l'invisible"* (373). What Ricoeur seems to do then is, by implicitly equating Derrida's and Heidegger's positions with Polyphile's position or at least what has every reason to be identified as Polyphile's, unite the two erroneous ways which he explicitly opposes. Thus Ricoeur implicitly makes Derrida and Heidegger representatives not only of the second erroneous way, but also the first. In short, it would seem that Ricoeur identifies both Derrida's and Heidegger's position with the very one which Derrida himself critiques and which, instead of calling metaphysical presuppositions into question, naively relies on them.[2]

4.2. Aristotle and Equivocation

According to the above analysis, there is a certain amount of confusion in Ricoeur's account of the two erroneous ways which perhaps is not entirely inadvertent or even wholly

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2 Ricoeur's "secret" identification of Derrida's and Heidegger's position with Polyphile's position is what has led some commentators to think that Ricoeur has exposed these deconstructors in much the same way that Derrida does Polyphile, that is, as closet metaphysicians. In "Metaphor in the Modern Critical Arena" (*Christianity and Literature* 33, No. 1, Fall, 1983), Roger Lundin describes Derridean deconstruction "as an assault upon philosophy and its privileged status as a rational discourse" (24). Shortly thereafter, he states:

> Paul Ricoeur sees in the deconstructionist line a continuation of the dominant Western tendency to view metaphor as a "guilty" substitution of figurative for proper meaning (*The Rule of Metaphor*, 284-289). . . . Thus behind the deconstructionist attack upon the truthfulness or significance of metaphor we find, curiously enough, a metaphysics of the proper, a view of language which claims that metaphor, in doing its work of bearing, transferring, carrying over, does nothing more than make a transfer from the realm of the proper, the sensible, the real into the realm of illusion (25).

distinguishable from good argument. And yet, were this confusion to be recognized by Ricoeur himself, there is no question that he would attempt either to correct it or to clear the whole of it away. On this point, there seems to be a blind spot not only in Ricoeur's but in philosophy's way of proceeding which has to do with multiple and even competing objectives. Because of ongoing delays in achieving the ideal of fully realized intention, philosophy is never under the control of a single aim except in a protracted, prescribed, or programmed sense. One of the most striking features of the Eighth Study is the contrast between, on the one hand, the rather banal and even unnecessary plea for a discontinuity between poetry and philosophy (Ricoeur ends up admitting that Heidegger keeps them apart) and, on the other hand, all the various signs of its being a high-stakes affair. Because the reasons for Ricoeur's plea for a discontinuity between poetry and philosophy are not fully evident and because his two erroneous ways themselves are not clear, the constant reiteration of this plea in the Eighth Study suggests that its most important role is to bring otherwise intractable material onto the field.

Equivocation is not only the essence of the metaphorical "power" which Ricoeur unleashes in his theories of resemblance and reference; it is also the essence of the metaphorical "explosive" which Derrida unleashes as the catachrestic movement at the heart of philosophy. The difference between Ricoeur's and Derrida's approach to equivocation is the difference between, on the one hand, finding it outside of and yet still at work for philosophy and, on the other hand, finding it at work *in* philosophy. Finding it in philosophy is a threat to philosophy because it is the implicit admission that equivocation is the work of philosophy which philosophy itself does not control.

With respect to this difficult area of investigation, the challenge to Ricoeur is threefold. First, there is the matter of giving sufficient recognition to equivocation which is not only at work outside philosophy, but also inside it. Secondly, there is the matter of demonstrating that, despite this work of equivocation in philosophy, it does not involve metaphor. And, thirdly, there is the matter of, on the basis of distinguishing philosophical from metaphorical equivocation, countering the claim or the suspicion that the former is out of control.

Contrary to finding a certain amount of equivocation in Aristotle as Derrida does in "La mythologie blanche," Ricoeur demonstrates how Aristotle controls equivocation. According to Ricoeur's analysis in the first section, "La métaphore et l'équivocité de l'être: Aristote," equivocation is only what originates with the subject matter of philosophy. More precisely, it originates with philosophy's primary task which is the question of being. This question, along with philosophy's own response to it in the form of the theory of substance and accidents, both delimits the philosophically equivocal and is the basis of predication and the univocal.

Despite this philosophical response, a threat still persists in the fact that, while metaphor is not, strictly speaking, out of control, it contains a moment of errancy. Now, should this moment be admitted as a veritable part of philosophical discourse, it would no longer be possible to hold that equivocation in philosophy is simply the result of its own subject matter. To bar the admission then of such a moment is not to condemn entirely the use of metaphor in philosophy, but rather to condemn its abuse. On this point, Ricoeur gives the example of Aristotle's condemnation of Plato. According to Aristotle, the latter constructs his world of eternal forms by way of empty words and poetic metaphors.

> L'équivocité réglée doit se substituer à la participation platonicienne, laquelle n'est que métaphorique: « Quant à dire que les idées sont des

> paradigmes et que les autres choses participent d'elles, c'est se payer de mots vides et faire des métaphores poétiques » (*Métaphysique*, A 9, 991 a 19-22; trad. Tricot, I, 87-88). Donc, la philosophie ne doit ni métaphoriser ni poétiser, même quand elle traite des significations équivoques de l'être (327).

It must be said at this point that Ricoeur's extremely long and detailed demonstration of philosophical control over equivocation seems to be preemptive of engaging Derrida in this area. It appears to be a strategy of fundamental avoidance, an advance sidelining of his project in the sense that the prolonging of this issue beyond the analyses of Aristotle and Aquinas could easily be judged tiresome. By the time Ricoeur turns his attention to Derrida in the third section, philosophical equivocation is no longer an issue and what replaces it is dead metaphor.

Perhaps at bottom no serious or deep encounter with Derrida is aimed at by Ricoeur. If his overriding preoccupation is the task of affirming the unmediated foundation of philosophy as self-presence, as dominant discourse, as unique response to the question of being, then the difference between going as far as possible in the direction of confrontation and refutation and the *semblance* of going as far as possible becomes virtually nil.

Of course, the thrust of Ricoeur's analysis is to demonstrate that, while Aristotle does not provide the most satisfactory or fully developed answer to the question of being, it is one which nonetheless is systematic, anti-metaphorical, logical, and logically analogical. He notes that in the *Categories* – which agrees with the *Metaphysics* on this point – Aristotle is intent on controlling the semantic spread between the absolute univocity of the synonym and the full-fledged equivocity of the homonym. Ricoeur locates this will to master philosophical equivocation in Aristotle's discussion of *paronym*. Here the orderly spread of significations is conceived on the basis of a single root term: *"« [A]insi de grammaire vient grammairien, et de courage, homme courageux » (*Categories*, 1 a 12-15)"* (329). According to Ricoeur, Aristotle's ordering of the multiple significations of being is itself an example of paronym which at the same time is unique: the root term is *being* and the conjugates are the various modes of being. Yet Ricoeur also describes this primary schema as being analogical in the sense that the criteria by which the multiple significations of being are ordered are progressively weakened in order to accommodate the largest possible number of significations.

> L'analogie désigne virtuellement cet affaiblissement progressif de la précision de la fonction prédicative, à mesure qu'on passe de la prédication primordiale à la prédication dérivée, et de la prédication essentielle à la prédication accidentelle (qui est paronymique) (332).

4.3. Aquinas, Analogy, and Onto-theology

Although Ricoeur gives greatest attention to equivocation in the first section, he nonetheless extends it to the second section, "La métaphore et l*'analogia entis*: L'onto-théologie." Conversely, the issue of analogy, while analysed at length in this section, is already launched and well underway in the first. Of course, what formally links and orders these sections is his demonstration that the discontinuity between poetry and philosophy disqualifies the thesis that the semantic aim of the first is transferred to the second.

Given that the first section on Aristotle, besides being a critique of the first erroneous way, is inevitably a critique of *"le noyau théorique commun à Heidegger et à Derrida"* (373), the following section on Aquinas must be a continuation of the same. Here Ricoeur's demonstration is essentially that philosophical equivocation, even if transferred to theology, is still a matter inherent to and controlled by speculative discourse. It therefore is non-metaphorical and, being purely the result of raising and answering the question of being, is unique and not influenced from the outside.

Medieval metaphysics is a fundamental complication of the issue of philosophical equivocation because, although based on Aristotle, it does not operate solely along the horizontal axis of substance and accidents, but also along the vertical axis of Creator and creation. Moreover, this second operation is as at least in part a return to the Platonic metaphysic of a suprasensible world grounding the imperfect, sensible world. Taking into consideration Aristotle's critique of this Platonic metaphysic (which theology appropriates), Ricoeur admits that there is a need to counter the suspicion that theology smuggles metaphor back into metaphysics.

According to Aquinas's version of the Platonic metaphysic, the imperfect creatures of this world participate in a perfect being, a divine Creator, from whom they receive their essence. Viewed in isolation and apart from his own modifications, this metaphysic is, along with being quasi-poetic or quasi-mythical, problematic on two counts. First of all, it effectively separates itself from the metaphysic of substance and accidents and, secondly, it denies the incommensurable distance between infinite and finite being. In order to address these difficulties, Aquinas, following Aristotle's lead, conceives God as the supreme substance and first cause. But given that this first cause is now taken to be act rather than agent, the way is open to a non-anthropomorphic conception of divine being. Countering the Platonic and poetic dimension while seemingly doing away with the accompanying difficulties, Aquinas hierarchically relates the infinite and finite dimensions of being by using the analogy of proportionate relations.

> On voit l'avantage pour le discours théologique. Entre le créé et Dieu, en effet, la distance est infinie: *finiti ad infinitum nulla est proportio*. Or la ressemblance proportionnelle n'institue aucun rapport déterminé entre le fini et l'infini, puisqu'elle est indépendante de la distance. Elle n'est pas pourtant pas absence de rapport. Il est encore possible de dire: ce que le fini est au fini, l'infini l'est à l'infini. Transcrivons: la science divine est à Dieu ce que la science humaine est au créé (349).

Following the pattern of his earlier analysis of Aristotle, Ricoeur observes that Aquinas is also concerned with philosophical equivocation when he sets up a polar opposition between univocity and equivocity. Instead of univocity's being, as in Aristotle, defined as synonymy and the word's one-to-one correspondence with the object, it is now defined as divine being in its relation to itself. The univocity of this divine being is then contrasted with the equivocity of being in its general dispersion. Ricoeur's observation of this similarity between Aristotle's and Aquinas's conception of the equivocal nature of being is part and parcel of what is a primary consideration for him in the Eighth Study, namely, to illustrate that different discourses, even while successfully maintaining their integrity, conduct fruitful exchanges with one another. This, in turn, is tied to the basic argument of his analysis of Aquinas, namely, that, although medieval

metaphysics is *"un mode de discours qui est déjà lui-même un* mixte *d'ontologie et de théologie"* (344), its speculative dimension is nonetheless independent. Although this speculative dimension is influenced by the general discourse on God, it is still essentially the response to the question of being. Here as elsewhere, Ricoeur insists that semantic intention is the basis of discursive discontinuity. The following passage provides a striking example of this insistence:

> Du moins la bataille pour un concept toujours plus adéquat d'analogie reste exemplaire sur un point: son refus de tout compromis avec le discours poétique. Ce refus s'exprime par le souci de toujours marquer la différence entre l'analogie et la métaphore. Pour ma part, je vois dans ce souci le trait distinctif de la visée sémantique du discours spéculatif (353).

If it is the case that philosophy cannot be dissociated from even a theological use of its own basic tenets, then Ricoeur's demonstration of the discontinuity between metaphor and metaphysics runs the risk of being both excessively wide-ranging and excessively limited: excessively wide-ranging in that philosophy and theology are brought together by him in order make common cause against unlicenced metaphorical play in philosophy; excessively limited in that he correspondingly rules that whatever metaphorical play there is in philosophy must be a holdover from Platonism.[3]

Along the same lines, Ricoeur makes a brief but telling reference to Heidegger at the beginning of the second section and an equally brief but telling reference to Derrida at the end of it. When giving his description of medieval metaphysics as the combination of a vertical or transcendental axis and a horizontal or empirical one, Ricoeur identifies Heidegger as the philosopher who, following Kant, labels this discourse onto-theology. *"Depuis Heidegger, qui suit lui-même Kant, on l'appelle par abréviation* onto-théologie*"* (344). Since, first of all, Ricoeur himself acknowledges that the rudiments of onto-theology are to be found in Aristotle[4] and, secondly, since he also links Plato to this onto-theology and, finally, since he associates

3 There is a discontinuity between how Ricoeur refers to Plato in the first seven studies of *La métaphore vive* and how he refers to him in the Eighth Study. In the case of the first set of references to Plato which is half the size of the second, Ricoeur mainly draws support from him on the semantic front, namely, on the issue of the sentence's being the primary unit of meaning rather than the word. In the Eighth Study, the references are to Plato's metaphysics or ontology (called "theological") which is treated by Ricoeur as something like a false start by philosophy. "S'il est vrai, comme le soutient Aubenque, que c'est du dehors que ce discours reçoit sa « perspective », son « idéal », son « programme », à savoir de *la théologie héritée du platonisme*, l'urgence devient plus grande, pour l'ontologie, de répondre à cette sollicitation externe avec ces ressources propres" (Italics added*, MV*, 335). On the following page, Ricoeur continues this treatment of Plato as initial problem to be overcome. "Du même coup, la rencontre, chez Aristote, entre un problème ontologique de l'unité – issue du dialogue avec la sophistique – et *un problème théologique de la séparation – issue du dialogue avec le platonisme* – fournit un exemple en quelque sorte paradigmatique de l'attraction entre sphères différentes de discours" (Italics added, *MV*, 336). Further on in the Eighth Study, Ricoeur associates Heidegger and, by implication, Derrida with Platonism. "J'ai évoqué, dès l'introduction, l'adage fameux de Heidegger: . . . Plusieurs choses sont ainsi affirmées: d'une part, que l'ontologie implicite à toute la tradition rhétorique est celle de *la « métaphysique » occidentale de type platonicien et néo-platonicien*, où l'âme se transporte du lieu visible dans le lieu invisible . . ." (Italics added, 357). Other references of a similar sort follow. But Ricoeur reverses direction at the end of his analysis of "La mythologie blanche." Plato is now no longer one who is misled by metaphor, but one who consciously uses it. "Ce n'est donc pas la métaphore qui porte l'édifice de la métaphysique platonisante: c'est plutôt celle-ci qui s'empare du procès métaphorique pour le faire travailler à son bénéfice" (*MV*, 374).

Heidegger's critique of metaphor with his Platonic conception of metaphor, there is reason to suspect that, in referring to Heidegger at this juncture, Ricoeur is signalling that the whole theological tradition has been wrongly associated with a metaphysical misunderstanding or misuse of metaphor which rightly belongs not to Aristotelianism, but to Platonism.

Ricoeur's reference to Derrida at the end of the second section is a rather out-of-character and obscure remark[5] which is only accompanied by a short, identifying footnote: "*Ah, le soleil!, oh, le feu! l'héliotrope n'est pas loin, où se dénonce tout trope par ressemblance*!" (353). Immediately before this remark, Ricoeur raises once again the spectre of Platonism or, more precisely, onto-theology's having recourse to Platonic participation and thereby smuggling in metaphor. Following Aquinas, Ricoeur then, raising this spectre only in order to dismiss it, compares the sun's relation to the earth as single and unique progenitor to God's relation to all earthly creatures as source of their "perfections." After briefly signalling that the analysis of Derrida is near at hand, Ricoeur, still following Aquinas, then examines metaphor and analogy in their greatest proximity, namely, the relationship between metaphor by analogy (poetic) and *analogia proportionalitas* (philosophical). Here the task is to describe the attributes of God along two parallel lines. One of these lines is the metaphorical line of signification which, as the perception of the lesser known by the better known, refers to the attributes of God by referring to some earthly thing (e.g., "lion" as in *God is a lion*). By contrast, the analogical line of signification is a direct reference to God which is also the attributing to Him of what is infinite (e.g., His wisdom) and what is only to be found in finite form at the human level. Unlike metaphor by analogy, *analogia proportionalitas* is signification produced by and incorporated into a pre-existing system of concepts. Given that the latter includes the concept of God as infinite being, what is attributed to God analogically by theology is also what logically supercedes its finite form and content.

Like Ricoeur's reference to Heidegger at the beginning of the second section, his reference to Derrida at the end of it suggests that the latter's conception of metaphor is Platonic. Of course, Ricoeur rejects the Platonic conception of metaphor and, by doing so, he also rejects whatever critique of Aristotelian metaphysics is based on it. At the same time, his repudiation of this conception is itself based on demonstrating that Aristotelian metaphysics is, among other things, in control of itself. It would seem then that, if Derrida were claiming or even implying the contrary, Ricoeur has found a way in the first and second sections to counter this charge and even to deliver perhaps a preliminary counter-critique. The latter would be that Derrida only comes to his anti-philosophical stance because he has improperly grasped the nature of metaphor and philosophy's primary question.

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4 Ricoeur agrees with Pierre Aubenque (*Le Problème de l'être chez Aristote. Essai sur la problématique aristotélicienne,* [Paris: PUF, 1962]) that Aristotle's ontology is inflected by a theology inherited from Plato.

> J'entre d'autant plus volontiers dans cette problématique de la rencontre entre discours théologique et discours ontologique, qu'Aubenque oppose à l'hypothèse d'une simple succession chronologique entre deux états du système d'Aristote (hypothèse introduite, comme on sait, par Werner Jaeger), que j'y trouve l'illustration saisissante de ma propre thèse de la pluralité des sphères de discours et de la fécondité de l'intersection entre leurs visées sémantiques (*MV*, 336).

5 S. H. Clark calls it "a rare joke" (*PR*, 139).

4.4. The Heidegger Connection[6]

In the Eighth Study, Ricoeur's analysis of Heidegger comes in the third section, "Méta-phorique et méta-physique," and in the fifth section, "Explicitation ontologique du postulat de la référence." In the third section, Ricoeur associates Heidegger with Derrida explicitly and in the fifth section, does not mention the latter at all. But not mentioning Derrida does not necessarily mean that he is not present in this section and, because Ricoeur does in fact associate these two at the most fundamental level, PS will assume that he is present in the final section. Besides this complication then, there are two others. The first additional complication is that, while the explicit association of Derrida with Heidegger is made on the basis of Ricoeur's critique of the Platonic conception of metaphor, the implicit or covert one is made on the basis of his defence of the Aristotelian conception of being. The second additional complication is that, in both the third and fifth sections, Ricoeur also implicitly *dissociates* Heidegger from Derrida. This simultaneous countermove is largely the result of, while taking Heidegger to be more in line with the tradition than he realizes, considering Derrida to be essentially committed to its disruption or even destruction.

> Cette tactique déroutante, on l'a compris, n'est qu'un épisode dans une stratégie plus vaste de la déconstruction qui consiste, en tous temps et en tous cas, à ruiner par l'aporie le discours métaphysique (365).[7]

While Ricoeur brings together Derrida and Heidegger very briefly in the First Study, it is only in the Eighth Study's third section that he finally analyses their discourses on metaphor. Coming directly before his analysis of "La mythologie blanche," Ricoeur's analysis of Heidegger is less than half as long and, apart from its own merits, effectively ushers in the analysis of Derrida's essay. At the beginning of the Eighth Study, Ricoeur describes the third section as follows:

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6 In the First Study, Ricoeur brings Derrida and Heidegger together only once and in passing. Nevertheless, this single instance is highly charged given that its basis is the claim made explicit in the Eighth Study that Derrida and Heidegger both have a Platonic conception of metaphor. "On pourrait être tenter, à la suite de Heidegger et de Derrida (cf. ci-dessous, viii Étude, sec. 3), de détecter ici quelque reste honteux de platonisme" (*MV*, 50). In addition, Ricoeur connects Heidegger to dead metaphor in the Preface. "Aucune philosophie ne procède non plus de la poétique par voie indirecte, même sous le couvert de la métaphore « morte » dans laquelle pourrait se conclure la collusion dénoncée par Heidegger entre méta-physique et méta-phorique" (*MV*, 11). Finally, Ricoeur connects Heidegger to the Platonic conception of metaphor in one of the early footnotes of the First Study. "L'ontologie de la métaphore que paraît suggérer la définition de l'art par la mimesis et sa subordination au concept de *phusis* n'est pas nécessairement « métaphysique », au sens que Heidegger a donné à ce mot. Je proposerai, au terme de cette première Étude, une interprétation de l'ontologie implicite de la *Poétique* d'Aristote qui ne met aucunement en jeu le transfert du visible à l'invisible" (*MV*, 26).

7 In the first section of *Temps et récit: Tombe I* (Paris: Seuil, 1983) called "Les apories de l'expérience du temps," Ricoeur views aporia as a constructive force in philosophy. Speaking of Augustine's treatment of time, he states: "Certes, ce mode aporétique diffère de celui des sceptiques, en ce sens qu'il n'empêche pas quelque forte certitude. Mais il diffère de celui des néo-platoniciens, en ce sens que le noyau assertif ne se laisse jamais appréhender dans sa nudité hors des nouvelles apories qu'il engendre" (20). Perhaps the difference between the way Ricoeur views aporia in the context of Augustine on time and in the context of Derrida on metaphor is the difference between keeping the conversation in philosophy going and turning this conversation against itself.

> Plaçant en épigraphe l'affirmation de Heidegger que « *la métaphorique n'existe qu'à l'intérieur de la métaphysique »*, on prendra pour guide de cette « seconde navigation » la « Mythologie blanche » de Jacques Derrida (325).

It would seem that, according to Ricoeur, Heidegger's position on metaphor serves as the basis of Derrida's. On the other hand, Ricoeur chooses Derrida and not Heidegger as the guide for this second navigation. In order to account for this preference for Derrida, it must surely be that either he in some way supplements Heidegger's position or that Heidegger in some way weakens his own. But to go back briefly to the first consideration, namely, that Heidegger's position serves as the basis of Derrida's, Ricoeur, it will be remembered, explicitly identifies both Derrida and Heidegger with a Platonic conception of metaphor. Since Ricoeur takes this conception to be at odds with the Aristotelian tradition, it follows that, rather than some supplement to or weakening of Heidegger's position, what is primarily at issue is the shared position of Derrida and Heidegger.

Yet one of Ricoeur's first moves is to undermine this notion of a shared position. Claiming that Heidegger's use of metaphor is more important than what he says about it, he argues that, although such comments as metaphor exists only inside metaphysics seem impressive, they are really only marginal. Besides the fact that they occur only in two texts, *Der Satz vom Grund* and *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, they are tightly controlled by their contexts.

> Chez Heidegger lui-même, le contexte limite considérablement la portée de cette attaque contre la métaphore, au point qu'on peut penser que l'usage constant que Heidegger fait de la métaphore a finalement plus d'importance que ce qu'il dit incidemment contre la métaphore (357).

Upon examining these contexts, Ricoeur concludes that Heidegger's concern is really not to condemn metaphor, but rather to defend his particular use of it. Even while continuing to insist that Heidegger's conception is Platonic, Ricoeur now maintains that his philosophical use of it is not Platonic which is to say that it is a proper use or, to risk belabouring this point, a non-reliance on the visible world/invisible world opposition. Ricoeur holds then that Heidegger distinguishes live metaphor without recognizing it as such from purely metaphysical or dead metaphor.[8] The first implication of this analysis then is that, when Heidegger identifies metaphor with metaphysics and, furthermore, when he declares that metaphysics is something to be surpassed, he does not recognize that Platonic metaphysics with its doctrine of dead metaphor has already been surpassed as the tradition's own *Aufhebung* of itself. The second implication is that, even while Heidegger wrongly takes the tradition to be Platonic rather than Aristotelian, his position on metaphor is not fundamentally different from Aristotle's. Finally, the third implication is that

8 For the most part, Ricoeur treats speculative discourse or philosophy as the recipient of metaphorical meaning through poetic discourse. Otherwise, he only occasionally remarks that a certain philosophical use of metaphor is unavoidable, appropriate, and unproblematic. What is difficult to understand is how these metaphors as *live* metaphors can be both poetic and philosophical or, if they are not poetic, how they can be live metaphors. And, if they are not live metaphors but dead metaphors, then, according to Ricoeur himself, they are not really metaphors. It would seem then that what Ricoeur does without expressly admitting it is that, in the case of someone like Heidegger, he views him as playing the role of poet (even if only in a subordinate role and in collaboration with, for example, Hölderlin) in order to, in his *dominant* role as philosopher, appropriate his own metaphorical meaning.

Derrida is more of a threat because, unlike Heidegger, he does not simply assert the Platonic conception of metaphor but argues for it.

> On peut distinguer deux affirmations dans l'entrelacs serré de la démonstration de J. Derrida. La première porte sur l'efficace de la métaphore usée dans le discours philosophique, la seconde sur l'unité profonde du transfert métaphorique et du transfert analogique de l'être visible à l'être intelligible (362).

While the first and second of these implications, namely, that Heidegger wrongly diagnoses the tradition and that he does not recognize his allegiance to Aristotle turn out to be theses of a sort in the fifth section,[9] the third implication, namely, that Derrida reaffirms the Platonic side of the tradition is, strictly speaking, never developed. What is likely one reason for this is that Ricoeur limits his analysis of the relationship between Platonic metaphysics and Aristotelian metaphysics to a few lengthy footnotes. No doubt the marginalization of this issue reflects his primary concern which is to demonstrate that Aristotelian metaphysics surpasses its predecessor. As a consequence, his efforts do not go in the direction of demonstrating how and why Derrida's conception of metaphor is Platonic. What is likely another reason is that, while Ricoeur unquestionably views Heidegger's fundamental ontology as essentially one with Aristotle's inquiry into being, he finds Heidegger's insistence to the contrary to be troublesome. The result is that, rather than pursuing matters on some deeper level, he sets his sights on a further encounter with Heidegger which cannot be described as being anywhere near as probing as his inquiries into Aristotle and Aquinas.

Coming in the form of a harsh indictment (*"je déplore la position prise par Heidegger"* [395]), this encounter takes the form of two major objections. The first objection is that Heidegger, by labelling all Western thought metaphysical, makes a blanket critique of it which slights the contributions of his predecessors. *"Mais pourquoi cette philosophie devrait-elle refuser à tous ses devanciers le bénéfice de la rupture et de la novation qu'elle s'octroie à elle-même?"* (396). In addition, Ricoeur goes on to argue that Heidegger's own contribution, however original it may be, does not strongly differ from earlier ones. *"Quelle philosophe digne de ce nom n'a pas, avant lui, médite sur la métaphore du chemin et ne s'est pas tenu pour le premier à se mettre sur un chemin qui est le langage lui-même s'adressant à lui?"* (396). Finally, Ricoeur adopts a pronounced moral tone when he accuses Heidegger of betraying a certain vengefulness and will to power.

> Je ne puis voir dans cet enfermement de l'histoire antérieure de la pensée occidentale dans l'unité de « la » métaphysique que la marque de l'esprit de vengeance auquel cette pensée invite pourtant à renoncer, en même temps qu'à la volonté de puissance dont ce dernier lui paraît inséparable (395).

The second major objection is that, by continually opposing his philosophy to metaphysics, Heidegger eventually takes it to the point of obscurity and no return. In his last few

9 While Ricoeur implicates Heidegger in a rare critique of Aristotle which, in the Eighth Study, is over the theory of substance and accidents, the context of this critique is wholly Aristotelian in that it is the latter's own theory of act/potency which is called upon in order to cancel and supercede his other theory.

works there is, according to Ricoeur, "*une suite d'effacements et d'abolitions, qui précipitent la pensée dans le vide, la ramènent à l'hermétisme et à la préciosité, et reconduisent les jeux étymologique à la mystification du « sens primitif »*" (397). In sum, Heidegger is accused of having abandoned the propositional form – the very basis of philosophical or speculative discourse – and either striving to express the ineffable or else despairing of language altogether.

> C'est ainsi que cette philosophie redonne vie aux séductions de l'inarticulé et de l'inexprimé, voire à quelque désespoir du langage, proche de celui de l'avant-dernière proposition du *Tractatus* de Wittgenstein (397-398).

Before beginning the examination of Ricoeur's critical analysis of Derrida's essay, it is worthwhile to note again that, although Derrida is left well behind by the time the above objections against Heidegger are made, they are not of such a nature as not to be intended to reach him. While it is true that at no time does Ricoeur claim that Derrida's work is obscure or despairing of language, it is also true that in the First Study he makes a number of remarks which, by referring to an untamed rhetoric and sophistry which dangerously rivals philosophy, seem very much to reflect on someone of Derrida's style and philosophical persuasion. Furthermore, along with claiming that Derrida has *"une pensée plus subversive que celle de Heidegger"* (362), Ricoeur puts the former squarely in the camp of the latter when he claims that Derrida is motivated by "*l'universelle suspicion à l'endroit de la métaphysique occidentale*" (362). It must be then that, even though Ricoeur reserves for Heidegger or, more precisely, the late Heidegger some of the most severe of his criticisms, he means to hit Derrida with them because the latter, as Ricoeur himself claims, is the extension and radicalisation of Heidegger.[10]

4.5. The Critical Analysis of "La mythologie blanche": Part One

According to everything that has been said so far, the culminating point of *La métaphore vive* is the critical analysis of "La mythologie blanche." Here Ricoeur's whole enterprise achieves its critical mass and, no longer guided by the aim of critiquing, correcting, and contributing to metaphorical theory, stands opposed to the project which, *via metaphor*, challenges philosophy as theory, ideal, truth, metaphysics and metadiscourse.

It is necessary to begin this section with a look at how the first part of Ricoeur's critical analysis is related to the second part or, rather, how the second part bears upon the first part.[11] First of all, it should be noted that the first two statements of the *second* part introduce two key terms.

> Les *remarques critiques* que je propose ici ne peuvent bien évidemment atteindre le programme entier de la déconstruction et de la dissémination, mais seulement l'argumentation tirée de la collusion de la métaphore usée et du thème métaphysique de l'analogie (Italics added, 368).

10 In "Le retrait de la métaphore," there are echoes of Ricoeur's critique of Heidegger in Derrida's defence of his essay. For example, Ricoeur's polemic against Heidegger at the end of the Eighth Study largely centres on the claim that he treats Western philosophy as a unity. In his response to Ricoeur, Derrida counters this objection as if it had been directly levelled at him.

11 These parts are both six pages long and separated by a single space.

> En outre, cette phase proprement *polémique* de mon argument est inséparable de la clarification positive de l'ontologie impliquée par la théorie de la métaphore dans le reste de la présente étude (Italics added, 368).

Since Ricoeur uses the word "polemic" in no other part of *La métaphore vive*, it seems that he considers his critical remarks here of a somewhat different order than they are elsewhere, that is, somewhat harsher or more confrontational. Furthermore, it is likely that he wishes to distinguish the second part of his critical analysis from the first part which is presumably an impartial examination from which the second part – constituted by the critical remarks – devolves. Yet it might be suspected that, unlike the examination of evidence and testimony in the legal or judicial sphere, this process in philosophy is hardly ever begun so far as any single work goes without a conclusion or condemnation already in sight. It would be a rare thing if Ricoeur or any other philosopher risked the possibility of, while undertaking the inspection of some other analysis, challenging or seriously undermining the very inspection itself.

Turning now to the *first* part of Ricoeur's critical analysis, it is worthwhile to note that Ricoeur bestows another dubious distinction on Derrida's project. Unlike all the other ones, including Heidegger's, Derrida's is defined as being in opposition to the *whole* of Ricoeur's project.

> On peut distinguer deux affirmations dans l'entrelacs serré de la démonstration de J. Derrida. . . . La première affirmation prend à revers tout notre travail tendu vers la découverte de la métaphore vive (362).

Directly attributing this opposition to Derrida's conception of metaphor as dead metaphor, Ricoeur claims that it results in a "*metaphoricité sans borne de la métaphore*" (363). This unlimited metaphoricity is a surreptitious movement in or behind discourse which extends the range and power of metaphor beyond "*les ressources d'une sémantique historique et diachronique, ainsi que celles de la lexicographie et de l'étymologie*" (363). Now given that the greater part of *La métaphore vive* is, while certainly not a lexicographical or etymological study, a semantic one, it is likely that Ricoeur views Derrida as a threat to one of his basic notions: that the aim or intention of a discourse is what ultimately distinguishes it from another discourse.

Another point is that Ricoeur associates Derrida's opposition to his project with an opposition to metaphysics or philosophy in general. According to Ricoeur, Derrida's analysis of dead metaphor is intended to "*raviver la métaphore [et] démasquer le concept*" (363). It is thereby suggested that the concept is something fraudulent in Derrida's eyes and that, as a consequence, his primary objective is to unmask it by demonstrating that it is essentially metaphorical. While at no point does Ricoeur accuse Derrida of trying to unmask philosophy or portray it as being fraudulent, he nonetheless attributes some rather dark motives to "La mythologie blanche," namely, that, besides attempting to demonstrate that "*la métaphoricité est non-maîtrisable absolument*," it is also "*une oeuvre qui fomente bien d'autres manoeuvres subversives*" (365). Moreover, he claims that it is part of a larger project whose aim is *"en tous temps et en tous cas, à ruiner par aporie le discours métaphysique"* (365).

Since all these highly charged remarks come in the first half of the critical analysis of "La mythologie blanche," it is not unreasonable to think that the second half, the critical or polemical

part, is already at work in the first half. If it is the case that the second half precedes and determines the first half, then the first half must be a certain interpretation of "La mythologie blanche." Moreover, it would be an interpretation which is preparatory to the second half by opening up the essay to a more explicit or trenchant critique. Confirmation of this comes from the fact that, in order to describe Derrida's project, Ricoeur resorts to referring it to a thesis or theory of metaphor *which Derrida himself does not declare as his thesis or theory.* Thus it is that, without explaining this discrepancy (which bears on the intentions of philosophers), Ricoeur continually refers to dead metaphor and, moreover, identifies it on at least two or three occasions as Derrida's thesis or watchword (*mot d'ordre*). While it is true that, in the early part of his critical analysis, Ricoeur identifies dead metaphor (*métaphore usée* or *métaphore morte*) with *usure* in a way which preserves the latter's equivocity, it is also true that this equivocity is soon forgotten and, as a consequence, dead metaphor takes over the field and is consistently treated as having only one sense or signification.

Ricoeur goes on to make three other moves which undermine his initial recognition of usure as signifying both figurative loss and semantic gain. The first move is that, like dead metaphor, usure is taken by Ricoeur to be Derrida's very own conception of metaphor rather than his conception of the traditional or epochal understanding of metaphor. His second move is not to recognize or at least not recognize consistently that, for Derrida, usure signifies not metaphor in general but philosophical metaphor. Strictly speaking, poetic metaphor which bulks so largely in *La métaphore vive* is not the point at issue in "La mythologie blanche." Finally, the third move which Ricoeur makes to counter the double sense of usure is that, in giving his initial account of it, he interprets it as signifying, besides wearing away, a linguistic gain which, though forming the concept, is something apart from the concept's own grasp and control. (363). *" . . . [S]uivant la même ligne d'assonance, on soupçonnera que la métaphore puisse être la « plus-value linguistique » fonctionnant à l'insu des locuteurs . . ."* (363). Somewhat earlier, at the beginning of the third section and before his analysis of Heidegger, Ricoeur refers to the unsaid of metaphor which operates behind the back of philosophy. *"Entre philosophie et métaphore, une implication d'un tout autre genre vient au jour, qui les enchaîne au niveau de leurs présuppositions cachées, plutôt qu'à celui de leurs intentions déclarées"* (357). By stating the relationship between metaphor and concept here so unilaterally and in a way which assumes a strong opposition between intention and non-intention or consciousness and non-consciousness, Ricoeur forecloses on the possibility that Derrida does not claim that philosophy has no control over metaphor, but only that there is a *point of no control* where metaphor and concept no longer oppose each other or are even to be distinguished from one another.

Just as Ricoeur's project is torn between indirectly appropriating Derrida's project and directly confronting it and between recognizing and not recognizing it, so it is torn between being precise in its analysis of it and putting this project in its place. On at least two occasions, one of which must necessarily be still a matter of conjecture and the other much less so, this dilemma manifests itself as the identification of Derrida's project with other projects which the latter brings into the proximity of his own and which, as may be said, are inescapably analogous or similar to it. The dilemma is also in a sense the resolution of the dilemma by collapsing one project which is Derrida's into the other project which is the analogous one.

With respect to what has already been posited and argued for, namely, that Ricoeur identifies Derrida's project with Polyphile's position, there are four main points. The first point is that Ricoeur never explicitly refers to Polyphile's arguments even though Derrida's citations

from *Le jardin d'Épicure* as well his commentary and analysis take up nearly the whole of the first section of "La mythologie blanche." The second point is that, as already mentioned, Derrida raises an objection to Polyphile's arguments. The third point is that, despite raising this objection, Derrida treats Polyphile's arguments as having a certain validity. The fourth point is that Ricoeur picks up on this affinity between Derrida and Polyphile but then, by ignoring Derrida's objection to Polyphile's project, turns this affinity into an identity. Although the indications of Ricoeur's having done this – of having turned Derrida into the anti-metaphysical but Platonic Polyphile – are part and parcel of his overall treatment of him in the Eighth Study, there is nonetheless a more concrete piece of evidence. Ricoeur cites a line from "La mythologie blanche" as if it were one of the more figurative or colourful instances of Derrida's stating his own thesis of dead metaphor. In fact, it belongs to Derrida's analysis of Polyphile.

> D'où le titre même de l'Essai « Mythologie blanche »: « La métaphysique a effacé en elle-même la scène fabuleuse qui l'a produite et qui reste néanmoins active, remuante, inscrite à l'encre blanche, dessin invisible et recouvert dans le palimpseste » (364).

Just as Derrida is guilty of associating himself too closely with Polyphile by appropriating the latter's watchword, so Ricoeur condemns him for this association by taking Polyphile's position to be the more legible and straightforward version of Derrida's.

Ricoeur's identification of Derrida's project with Polyphile's position is still operative when Hegel's opposing view arrives on the scene. Complicating matters here is the fact that Ricoeur now associates Derrida with Hegel, but only in the sense of attributing to Derrida this association. This is to say that Ricoeur takes Derrida to be looking for support for his dead metaphor thesis by attaching it in some way to Hegel's theory of *Aufhebung*.

> L'usure de la métaphore se dissimule dans la « relève » du concept. Par « relève », J. Derrida traduit très heureusement *l'Aufhebung* hégélienne. . . . Derrida s'appuie ici sur un texte particulièrement éloquent de Hegel dans l'*Esthétique* . . . (363).

But, of course, Ricoeur's association of Derrida with Hegel is only the first of two moves. The second move is to dissociate him from Hegel or, more precisely, to critique Derrida's seeking support from him by way of oversimplifying his theory of *Aufhebung*.

> Là où Hegel voit une novation de sens, Derrida ne voit que l'usure de la métaphore et un mouvement d'idéalisation par dissimulation de l'origine métaphorique (364).

Since Ricoeur takes Derrida's notion of idealization to be signifying the continuous transfer of metaphorical meaning to the conceptual realm, there is for him an irreconcilable difference between this idealization and the metaphorical production of new meaning which is actualized at the conceptual level.

To take an overall view, it seems that the only way open to Ricoeur in his struggle to rein in Derrida is to bring his analysis as close as possible to the latter's project and, at the same time,

keep this same project out of focus. Along with absorbing as much of it as he can, Ricoeur conducts an attentive and conscientious study of it in a way which, paradoxically enough, guarantees its not being the most scrupulous.

> On peut distinguer deux affirmations dans l'entrelacs serré de la démonstration de J. Derrida. La première porte sur l'efficace de la métaphore usée dans le discours philosophique, la seconde sur l'unité profonde du transfert métaphorique et du transfert analogique de l'être visible à l'être intelligible (362).

As guiding principles of Ricoeur's critical analysis, the dead metaphor thesis and the Platonic conception of metaphor presuppose that Derrida's project is a theory of metaphor, that it is a commitment to the determinable, the definable, the univocal, and so on. It is to presuppose that, rather than taking the subject of metaphor beyond itself, it takes it to be something which, even in its own deconstructive mood or mode, can be examined and critiqued. At the same time, by treating Derrida's project as theory of metaphor, Ricoeur must treat it as very *bad* theory. Stripped down to its basics, it is a blatant contradiction: it declares that metaphor disappears and dies in the concept and then that metaphor reveals itself and is alive in the concept. Of course, if Ricoeur were to settle for this simplistic depiction of Derrida's project, he would not only do it a grave injustice but also undermine the integrity of his own. In order to overcome this both ethical and epistemological problem, Ricoeur's analysis must shuttle back and forth between the two poles of "very bad theory" and "more than theory."

The "more than theory" pole is everything in Derrida's project which Ricoeur recognizes as a demonstration of the aporetic and paradoxical nature of metaphor. On at least two or three occasions in the first part of his critical analysis, Ricoeur shifts towards this "more than theory" pole. The first time he does so, it is but a gesture. He begins by acknowledging that Derrida's conception of metaphoricity extends to the figurative aspect of philosophy's basic concepts but, instead of following Derrida further in this direction, Ricoeur assimilates this metaphorical aspect of philosophemes – a dimension which properly goes beyond metaphor – to the theory of dead metaphor. He then goes on to cite a passage from Nietzsche which, as a description of metaphorical effacement, bears a striking resemblance to Polyphile's in *Le jardin d'Épicure*. In both cases, the wearing away of metaphor is represented by the figure of a coin's being polished and effaced by much handling. Unlike Polyphile, however, Nietzsche extends the sense of metaphor beyond metaphysical oppositions by including, as part of his meaning of metaphor, perceptual and phonic significations. By ignoring this extension of meaning and by simply not citing the appropriate passages,[12] Ricoeur can include Nietzsche among those who uphold the theory of dead metaphor.

Very shortly after, Ricoeur gives a resume (which may count as the second shift to the "more than theory" pole) of what is essentially Derrida's negative thesis: the condition of the

12 In "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense," ("*From* On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense,"*The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Penguin Books, 1982], 42-47), Nietzsche remarks: "What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms . . ." (46). Shortly before this remark, he characterizes metaphorical movement as being at the pre-semantic level: "A nerve stimulus, first transposed into an image – first metaphor. The image, in turn, imitated by a sound, second metaphor. . . ." (46). By ignoring the above passages and similar ones which are all extremely close to the passage he cites, Ricoeur gives the impression that Nietzsche restricts his meaning of metaphor to the semantic and symbolic level only.

impossibility of defining philosophical metaphor. He reports that, given that the basic concepts and primary principles of philosophy are themselves metaphorical, what is being defined is always part of the defining. Ricoeur calls this epistemological dilemma the *"paradoxe de l'auto-implication de la métaphore"* (364).[13] But in a second move, he turns his back on this reading in order to attack Derrida's project in terms of its motives "(*"Cette tactique déroutante*," etc. [365]). The issue of the self-implication of metaphor, although soon taken up in some detail, is ultimately deferred to the end of the second part of the critical analysis where it is submerged in the dead metaphor thesis *and* the theory of live metaphor.

Now what is strange from the point of view of bothering with Derrida's essay in the first place but not strange from the point of view of tactfully subverting it is a certain lacuna or oversight in Ricoeur's analysis which pertains to a definite move he could make and which would overthrow Derrida's project immediately. After having given his resume of the negative thesis and, furthermore, after having characterized this thesis as being the attempt to ruin metaphysics, Ricoeur makes no issue of the fact that, according to his own analysis, Derrida carries out his both deconstructive and destructive mission on a metaphysical basis. By raising no issue about this discrepancy, it would seem that Ricoeur's analysis benefits to the extent that a play is kept going between the two poles of "very bad theory" and "more than theory."

At the end of the first part of Ricoeur's critical analysis, this combination of over-simplified theory and sophisticated riddle is more discernible if still veiled. The first time is when Ricoeur compares, first, two theories of resemblance, namely, what is suggestive of being or, rather, not being a theory of resemblance in Derrida's essay and the theory of resemblance developed in the Sixth Study. Secondly, Ricoeur also compares at least implicitly two theories of analogy, namely, a rudimentary theory of analogy in Derrida's essay and Aristotle's theory.

> Pour comprendre la force de cette affirmation [celle de Derrida], reportons-nous à nos propres analyses sur le jeu de la ressemblance. Il n'est pas rare que ce jeu ait été rapporté à l'analogie, soit que l'analogie signifie très particulièrement proportionnalité, comme dans la *Poétique*

13 In the following passage, Ricoeur gives a precise reading of the beginning of the second section of Derrida's essay.

> Le paradoxe est celui-ci: il n'y a pas de discours sur la métaphore qui ne se dise dans un réseau conceptuel lui-même engendré métaphoriquement. Il n'y a pas de lieu non-métaphorique d'où l'on aperçoive l'ordre et la clôture du champ métaphorique. La métaphore se dit métaphoriquement. Aussi bien le mot « métaphore » et le mot « figure » témoignent-ils de cette récurrence de la métaphore. La théorie de la métaphore renvoie circulairement à la métaphore de la théorie, laquelle détermine la vérité de l'être en terme de présence. Dès lors, il ne saurait y avoir de principe de délimitation de la métaphore, pas de définition dont le définissant ne contienne le définit; la métaphoricité est non-maîtrisable absolument. Le projet de déchiffrer la figure dans le texte philosophique se détruit lui-même; il faut plutôt « reconnaître en son principe la *condition d'impossibilité* d'un tel projet ». La couche des premiers philosophèmes, étant elle-même métaphorique, « ne se domine pas ». Cette strate, selon une expression heureuse de l'auteur, « s'emporte donc elle-même chaque fois qu'un de ses produits – ici le concept de métaphore – tente en vain de comprendre sous sa loi la totalité du champ auquel il appartient ». Réussirait-on à ordonner les figures, une métaphore au moins échapperait: la métaphore de la métaphore, laquelle serait la « métaphore en plus ». Et de conclure: « Le champ n'est jamais saturé » (*MV*, 364-365).

> d'Aristote, soit qu'elle désigne, moins techniquement, tout recours à la ressemblance dans le « rapprochement » de champs sémiques « éloignés ». La thèse que nous considérons maintenant revient à dire que tout usage de l'analogie, en apparence neutre au regard de la tradition « métaphysique », reposerait à son insu sur un concept métaphysique d'analogie qui désigne le mouvement de renvoi du visible à l'invisible; la primordiale « iconicité » serait ici contenue: ce qui, fondamentalement, fait « image », ce serait le visible tout entier; c'est sa ressemblance à l'invisible qui le constituerait comme image; conséquemment, la toute première transposition serait le transfert du sens de l'empirie dans le « lieu intelligible » (366).

As Ricoeur relates in the first and second sections of the Eighth Study, the task of metaphysics is to control the equivocal nature of being by way of an adequate theory of analogy. By contrast, Derrida's thesis, according to Ricoeur, is that there is an invisible world which is somehow perceived as resembling the visible world and that, furthermore, the invisible world is constituted by the direct transformation of metaphors into concepts. Of course, as demonstrated in the Sixth Study, the theory of live metaphor is, unlike the theory of dead metaphor, a highly sophisticated one. It therefore seems to be implied that, if Derrida is to successfully demonstrate the universality of metaphor, he must have a theory of resemblance with a level of sophistication at least comparable to Ricoeur's.

Derrida's "thesis" as sophisticated riddle is, once again, the paradox of using metaphor in order to define and describe it. As mentioned earlier, Ricoeur identifies Derrida's conception of metaphor with what Derrida himself analyses as the traditional or epochal understanding of metaphor. This "misidentification" of Derrida's project is what allows Ricoeur to recognize it not as a project dealing with the problematic of metaphor, but only with the *paradox* of metaphor. It is effectively his recognition of it not as a project which goes beyond the tradition and which views the tradition itself as problematic, but as one which is, despite itself, wholly in the tradition and simply a problem for it. For Ricoeur then, there is only live metaphor and dead metaphor and nothing in-between. Dead metaphor is all that there is behind Derrida's claim that the *definiendum* of philosophical metaphor is implicated in the *definiens*.

According to Ricoeur, the Platonic conception of metaphor takes shape in Derrida's project by way of *"quelques métaphores clés, qui ont le privilège de recueillir et de concentrer le mouvement de la « relève métaphysique »"* (366). The foremost of these key metaphors is the sun and Ricoeur notes that, for Derrida, it appears as a problematic figure already in Aristotle.

> Chez Aristote déjà, le Soleil fournit une métaphore bien insolite (*Poétique*, 1457 *b*), puisque, pour dire sa puissance d'engendrement, il manque un mot que la métaphore de l'ensemencement supplée. Pour J. Derrida, c'est là le symptôme de quelque trait décisif; par son insistance, le « mouvement qui fait tourner le soleil dans la métaphore » s'avère être celui qui « tournait la métaphore philosophique vers le soleil » (367).[14]

14 In giving his account of Derrida's analysis of the metaphor of the Sun, Ricoeur strings together a dozen or so very short passages ("sound-bites") which are scattered throughout the second and third sections of "La mythologie blanche." If, as Ricoeur seems to admit, Derrida's analysis is fairly complex, then such an operation cannot be one

Two points should now be made which, in illustrating the selective nature of Ricoeur's critical analysis, also point to the dilemma of his having both to recognize and not recognize Derrida's project. The first point is that the above passage and its immediate context is the only place in Ricoeur's critical analysis (apart from the two footnotes in the First Study) where he acknowledges that Derrida's inquiry into philosophical metaphor is also an analysis of Aristotle. This lapse is likely not insignificant insofar as Ricoeur's project is Aristotelian and might prove vulnerable to Derrida's deconstruction of Aristotle. The second point is that Ricoeur transfers Aristotle's sun metaphor from its context in "La mythologie blanche" where it is viewed by Derrida as illustrative of the ultimately insoluble problem of distinguishing between good and bad metaphor to the context of his presumed attempt to unmask the use of analogy in metaphysics.

> Ainsi donc, qu'on parle du caractère métaphorique de la métaphysique ou de caractère métaphysique de la métaphore, ce qu'il faut appréhender, c'est l'unique mouvement qui emporte les mots et les choses au-delà..., *méta* ... (366).

As a consequence of this removal of the sun-figure from the good metaphor/bad metaphor problematic and the transfer of it to the dead metaphor thesis, it is not necessary for Ricoeur to recognize the dual nature of Derrida's analysis which is that it also takes the sun to be the paradigm of the sensible. The enigma of the sun is not simply illustrative of the problem of metaphor, but also of the proper/improper opposition and hence the whole of language.

The sun-figure is dominant despite other paradigmatic metaphors or metaphors of metaphor which Ricoeur only mentions in passing such as ground-foundation (*sol-fondement*) and home-return (*demeure-retour*). Derrida links the sun-figure to light in general and to Descartes' *lumen naturale* in particular. Ricoeur dutifully notes that, for Derrida, the sun is a figure for all theoretical viewing and, in the case of Descartes' *lumen naturale*, for the ultimate knowledge towards which philosophy strives. On the other hand, home is a metaphor for the return to self, sameness, meaning, presence, *phusis*, etc. But Ricoeur does not delve too far in this direction before returning briefly to the paradox of metaphorical self-implication. He ends the first part of his critical analysis of "La mythologie blanche" by concluding that metaphors of metaphor are demonstrations par excellence of metaphorical self-implication.

> En figurant l'idéalisation et l'appropriation, lumière et séjour figurent le processus même de la métaphorisation et instaurent la récurrence de la métaphore sur elle-même (368).

Thus, as it seems, he leaves this problem still as something to be resolved.

4.6. The Critical Analysis of "La mythologie blanche": Part Two

In order to carry out his strategy of doing broad justice to Derrida while safeguarding the tradition and probably what is really at stake here, the *integrity* of the tradition, Ricoeur had to perform two operations: take metaphorical theory as close as possible to Derrida and take

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of preserving the context of the passages in question.

Derrida as close as possible to metaphorical theory. With respect to the first operation, it was necessary for Ricoeur to join forces with Aristotle and demonstrate that metaphor ranges far beyond what is normally taken to be the case. With respect to the second operation, it was necessary to take into consideration at some level or other that Derrida stands as much in opposition to semiotic theory and structuralism as he does to semantic theory. Given this equivocal, in-between, or non-theoretical status of Derrida's project, Ricoeur could only recognize it as the univocal dead metaphor thesis.

On the basis of the above-mentioned operations, there are two primary moves which Ricoeur makes and which determine the second part of his critical analysis. The first move is that he both implicitly and explicitly associates Derrida's project with semiotics. The second is that he reiterates and reaffirms his own project in order to repudiate Derrida's. The two moves appear together almost immediately.

> L'hypothèse d'une fécondité spécifique de la métaphore usée est fortement contrebattue par l'analyse sémantique exposée dans les études antérieures. Cette analyse incline à penser que les métaphores mortes ne sont plus des métaphores, mais qu'elles s'adjoignent à la signification littérale pour en étendre la polysémie. Le critère de délimitation est clair: le sens métaphorique d'un mot suppose le contraste d'un sens littéral qui, en position de prédicat, offense la pertinence sémantique. A cet égard l'étude de la lexicalisation de la métaphore, chez Le Guern par exemple, contribue grandement à dissiper la fausse énigme de la métaphore usée. (368).

A little further on, Ricoeur adds:

> L'efficace de la métaphore morte ne peut-être majorée, me semble-t-il, que *dans des conceptions sémiotiques* qui imposent le primat de la dénomination, donc de la substitution de sens, condamnant ainsi l'analyse à passer à côté des véritables problèmes de la métaphoricité, liée, on le sait, au jeu de l'impertinence et de la pertinence sémantiques (Italics added, 368-369).

When describing the semiotic conceptions which invest Derrida's thought, Ricoeur refers only to the substitution of meaning and the primacy of denomination. He thus leaves out a dimension of semiotics which bulks large in Derrida's project and which falls outside both semantics and denomination. Thus he treats the demonstration of these semiotic conceptions as being a decisive ruling against Derrida on the basis that the semiotic/semantic issue has already been settled in the Third and Fourth Studies. But in these studies semiotics are not simply treated as the substitution of meaning and the primacy of denomination, but as the vast realm of signification below and inclusive of the word.

Ricoeur admits that the theory of dead metaphor is genuinely seductive and, in order to dispel its fascination, he begins by noting that there are numerous terms in philosophical discourse which are figurative both in a strong and a weak sense.

> Contrairement à ce qu'on dit bien souvent, note Le Guern, « la lexicalisation n'entraîne la disparition totale de l'image que dans des conditions particulières ». Dans les autres cas, l'image est atténuée mais reste sensible; c'est pourquoi « presque toutes les métaphores lexicalisées peuvent retrouver leur éclat primitif » (370).

In the case of the terms which are weakly figurative, their frequency is due to the fact that philosophy is always in a state of semantic deficiency. Because of its ongoing questioning and concept-formation, philosophy always stands in need of new signifiers which it must draw from the bank of lexicalized words. *"Mais comme Fontanier l'avait parfaitement aperçu, il s'agit d'un trope « par nécessité et par extension pour suppléer aux mots qui manquent à la langue pour certaines idées... » (*Les figures du discours*, 90); bref, il s'agit d'une* catachrèse . . . *"* (369). When speaking of metaphor in philosophy then, "*il faut entièrement distinguer le cas, relativement banal, d'un usage « extensif » des mots du langage ordinaire en vue de répondre à une carence de dénomination, du cas, singulièrement plus intéressant à mon sens, où le discours philosophique recourt, de façon délibérée, à la métaphore vive . . . "* (370).

In line with the above then and with respect to more noticeable or obtrusive figures in philosophy, Ricoeur claims that the prestige which the theory of dead metaphor enjoys is based on a case of mistaken identity. *"La fécondité occulte de la métaphore morte perd encore plus de son prestige"* (371) when it is realized that the work of dead metaphor is really the work of live metaphor. More precisely, it is the revitalization of dead metaphor in and by philosophy – a deliberate move on philosophy's part – which is behind the secret fecundity of dead metaphor. But in explaining the figurative dimension of philosophy in this way, Ricoeur once again looks into the problem only so far. While the resilience of the figurative presence in the concept is wholly acknowledged, it remains for him essentially a non-issue. Yet, of course, if it were entirely so, there would be no reason for him to recognize it or to repudiate the project which seeks to make it otherwise. At the same time, the slightest formal recognition of this issue going beyond the recognition that it should be rendered null and void would entail asking the question: how does the virtual as code or sign-system erupt into speculative discourse in a way which both undesirably influences it and is independent of this discourse's aim or intention?

In the second part, Ricoeur returns to his critique of Derrida's interpretation of Hegel but without any significant additions. Two other issues which are also carried over are the self-implication of metaphor and the Platonic conception of metaphor. With respect to the first, Ricoeur argues that metaphors in, for example, the definition of metaphor itself (*epiphora* transport) have been torn from their metaphoricity by being inserted into a conceptual network which makes them literal or univocal terms. *"L'*epiphora *est ainsi arrachée à sa métaphoricité et constituée en sens propre, bien que « la surface de ce discours, comme dit Derrida, continue d'être travaillée par une métaphorique »"* (372). In addition, certain metaphors have been purposely chosen to produce new meaning and, as such, are the live metaphors of the philosopher.

> Loin donc que le concept de métaphore s'avère n'être que l'idéalisation de sa propre métaphore usée, le rajeunissement de toutes les métaphores mortes et l'invention de nouvelles métaphores vives qui redécrivent la métaphore permettent de greffer une nouvelle production conceptuelle

> sur la production métaphorique elle-même (373).

With respect to the issue of Platonic metaphor, Ricoeur repeats the claim which has already been noted several times, namely that both Derrida and Heidegger ground their theories of metaphor in the proper/improper and visible/invisible oppositions.

Ricoeur manages to add only one new argument at this stage which is that there are many examples of metaphor which do not conform to the Platonic conception. Citing from Fontanier, he claims:

> « Le *cygne* de Cambrai, l'*aigle* brillant de Meaux », « le remords *dévorant*... », « le courage *affamé* de péril et de gloire », « ce que l'on conçoit bien s'énonce *clairement*... », etc.; ces exemples se laissent tous interpréter en termes de teneur et de véhicule, de foyer et de cadre (373).

But shortly after this brief addition, Ricoeur once again associates Derrida's and Heidegger's projects with the theory of substitution and single-word trope. It is therefore a simple matter to reject them by invoking earlier arguments. "*Si donc la théorie de la métaphore-substitution présente quelque affinité avec la « relève » du sensible dans l'intelligible, la théorie de la tension retire à cette dernière tout privilège*" (373-374).

Towards the end of his critical analysis, Ricoeur makes a fews remarks which suggest that his concerns go beyond metaphorical theory. The first of these comes directly after his rejection of Derrida's interpretation of Hegel. "*Si ces deux opérations n'étaient pas distinctes, on ne pourrait pas non plus parler du concept d'usure, ni de concept de métaphore; il n'y aurait, à vrai dire, pas de philosophèmes"* (371). The second comes when Ricoeur declares that the etymological retrieval and revival of the figure in the concept is in and of itself neither a refutation nor an explanation of the concept. *". . .[C]ette démonstration n'est plus de l'ordre de la métaphorique, mais de l'analyse conceptuelle"* (372). The third comes directly after Ricoeur charges that Derrida ignores the difference between Idea in Plato and Idea in Hegel.

> Aucun discours philosophique ne serait possible, même pas un discours sur la déconstruction, si l'on cessait d'assumer ce que J. Derrida tient à juste titre pour « l'unique thèse de la philosophie », à savoir « que le sens visé à travers ces figures est d'une essence rigoureusement indépendante de ce qui la transporte » (372).

Finally, Ricoeur's critical analysis ends with his picking up on an earlier remark:

> Quant au privilège conféré au discours métaphysique lui-même – privilège qui règle la découpe de la zone étroite de métaphores où ce discours se schématise –, il parait bien être le fruit de soupçon qui règle la stratégie de la déconstruction (374).

4.7. Dogmatic Remainder

The complication of philosophical truth-telling is also the complication of the

philosophical good. Order, control, and clarity as the means of truth-telling and knowledge as its end cannot constitute the whole of this good since the first is always open to coercion and the second to falsehood. Because truth-telling must always be the examination of itself or, more precisely, its means and its end, and, furthermore, because it can hardly be an abandonment of them, it is always in the position of both affirming and denying them. That truth-telling is divided against itself implies that it divides the philosophical good and, in dividing it, is essentially the whole of it.

If truth-telling were entirely the affirmation of its means and it end, it would not be truth-telling for the reason that it would not be absolutely free and independent or at least as free and independent as possible. It would only move in the sphere of the already programmed: the well-established, well accepted, well received, well run, and so on. Such an over-determination of truth-telling as institutionalized ideal is always already a falling away from it because the ideal is not dependent simply on material support, but requires the sustenance which comes from extraordinary devotion to it.

It is only the division of truth-telling which can generate this devotion. Because it is *the* vital problem which, on the one hand, demands to be inquired into in the name of truth and, on the other hand, overcome or resolved in the name of truth, the inquiry into it is always indirectly calling for the resolving of it and the resolving of it, because it is inseparable from covering it over again, is always indirectly calling for the inquiry into it.

Chapter V

Derrida's Commitment to Tell the Truth about Metaphor as *Direct* Encounter with Ricoeur's Project

Before plunging into Derrida's infinitely complicated discussion of Heidegger's metaphors, PS would like to extend a bit further the analysis of Ricoeur by proposing that, just as there is a way in which the latter, although far from advocating Aristotle's theory of substance and accidents, still aligns himself with it,[1] so there is a way in which he transfers substantial being from First Philosophy to post-Kantian and post-Hegelian philosophy. This transferred or transformed substance would no longer be a certain purity of matter but a certain purity of thought: the form or act of speculative discourse, the commitment to truth-telling which precedes all else, the *visée sémantique* giving meaning to philosophy's contents before these contents can give meaning to themselves. It would be the conceptual realm realized and established not as individual but as collective holding and trust: the intersubjective ethos of the philosophical community.

Now insofar as this transcendental dimension, this *visée sémantique*, this formal meaning of philosophy is also an a priori determination of meaning, it would rest as much on belief as knowledge, that is, it would rest on the hypothesis that philosophical meaning only becomes meaning as truth-telling. With no formal ground for what is itself the formal ground of meaning, this hypothesis must receive its support from some outside source which is likely its value as institution.

Just as the commitment to truth-telling is dependent on its meaning as content, so this meaning itself would be dependent on the pure form or act of meaning which is inseparable from its institutional life and therefore from an underlying commitment to uphold, safeguard, cherish, and protect it.[2] Yet, in order to be truly effective, this second commitment would not be able acknowledge itself for, if it were to acknowledge itself, it would be implying that the meaningful content of the first commitment is not essentially secure and independent. Insofar then as the underlying commitment is itself dependent on the first commitment, it must only support it without calling attention to itself as outside support or additional commitment. This is to say that, in order to come across as being homogeneous with the first commitment, the second commitment would have to present itself – at least for the most part – as being not a valorizing or

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1 In the final section of the Eighth Study, Ricoeur cites from Uwe Arnold's *Die Entelechie* ([Vienna and Munich: Oldenbourg, 1965], 141-170) in order to "souligne fortement l'extrême radicalité de la théorie de l'entéléchie par rapport à l'analyse catégoriale" (*MV*, 389). In conformity with his usual way of proceeding, Ricoeur does not repudiate the theory of substance and accidents but simply subordinates it to the theory of act/potency. He then cites approvingly from Arnold when the latter claims that substance is mediate rather than immediate presence. On the other hand, Ricoeur seems to be far from underplaying the role of substance in the Third Study when, in discussing the distinctive traits of discourse, he focuses on the importance of reference and, in the case of P. F. Strawson's contribution in this area ("On Referring," *Mind*, LIX, 1950), the sharply contrasting roles of the subject and predicate. While the latter is the designation of non-existent universals which qualify the subject, the subject itself is the identification of the proposition to a singular existent.

2 The uniting of the pure form of meaning asserted to be independent in and of itself with the support or call for support which suggests that it is not so independent is to be found in statements such as the following: "Sans aller jusqu'à la conception suggérée par Wittgenstein d'une hétérogénéité radicale des jeux de langage . . . il importe de reconnaître dans son principe, la *discontinuité* qui assure au discours spéculatif son autonomie" (*MV*, 324). The key words here are *importe*, *reconnaître*, *assure*, and *autonomie*.

ethical, but only an argumentative or epistemological commitment. Here, then, the ethical constituent of philosophical discourse would be what it is by virtue of a certain concealment, its nature being more practical or performative – indeed, more rhetorical – than theoretical or constative.

To treat the commitment to tell the truth in philosophy as homogeneous is to treat it as ideal. At the same time, this ideal, being never fully secure or certain, is united with an ongoing maintenance and protection which is also an ongoing battle with what erodes, fractures, and fissures it. Yet, strangely enough, this ideal would also be behind what moves against it and most radically calls it into question. For what is at stake here is not just the ideal of the meaningful form and content, but also the ideal that truth is separate from all other concerns including its own institutional survival. If such were not the case, if the meaningful form and content of truth-telling were completely opposed to raising a suspicion against themselves and, in particular, their dissimulating nature, then philosophy would lose itself entirely in the inauthentic mode of holding back on or stopping short of its own commitment to truth-telling.

On the other hand, the project which Ricoeur often refers to as the hermeneutics of suspicion does not seem to be without its own devices and masks. As a discourse largely beyond good and evil, it would still be both good and evil in practise or in a contingent sense and in a way which forbids both its good and its evil – and its good no less than its evil – to be fully acknowledged. Principally, what is meant here is that, if it were not to deny or at least disguise its aggressive or subversive intentions – if it were not to at least partially conceal its nature as disruptive or even destructive force – it would alienate itself from the philosophical project in general. On the other hand, if it were not to deny or at least to disguise its quest for the truth in the form of the radical valorization of truth-telling, it would alienate itself from itself. This is to say that, if it were to openly attach itself to the good – to an ideal which necessarily overflows its boundaries in multiple and diverse ways – it would undermine its "good" which can only come from not compromising itself with whatever is quick to call itself the good. It would seem that Derrida's highly refined and complex response to Ricoeur's critical analysis is this double dissimulation, this partial concealment of moral extremities.

Three years after the publication of *La métaphore vive*, a conference took place in Geneva (1978) whose theme was metaphor and philosophy. Both Derrida and Ricoeur participated at this conference and, while Ricoeur presented an exposé which no doubt bore on his theory of metaphor,[3] Derrida presented one which essentially challenged the possibility of having such a theory. To describe "Le retrait de la métaphore" as difficult, complex, convoluted, compact, equivocal, paradoxical, and so on is simply to give some idea of the challenge which it poses to analysis. Going further than even "La mythologie blanche" in the articulation of quasi-metaphoricity (which is not a term to be found in the earlier essay), Derrida cannot avoid pushing comprehension towards incomprehension. Indeed, he himself intimates this on more than one occasion or, rather, his whole exposé is full of diverse and multiple signs of thought's exploring its outermost limits.

What promotes or assures the abysmal course of Derrida's project is his following the already abysmal path which Heidegger sets. In an "enlightening" reflection on Heidegger's project, Derrida questions whether it can only have before it the alternative fates of self-destruction or endless repetition in a hermeneutic circle. Yet the very undecidability of this question looms large before him when he admits:

3 According to the records at the University of Geneva, this exposé was entitled "Métaphore et symbole."

> Je ne sais pas si c'est là une alternative, mais si c'en était une, je ne pourrais pas répondre à cette question, et non seulement pour des raisons de temps: un texte, par exemple celui de Heidegger, comporte et croise nécessairement en lui les deux motifs (82).[4]

It would seem that this remark is only a response to the question to the extent that it complicates and defers it. With Derrida as with Heidegger, this question is truth itself being called into question because being itself is called into question: truth and being are one as the truth of being which is their dissimulation as much as their revelation.

That Derrida prefers the philosophical question to the philosophical answer – that he prefers its radical demands to the equally challenging but different ones of the answer – is indicated by the two opening questions which set up and frame his exposé: *"Qu'est-ce qui se passe, aujourd'hui, avec la métaphore?"* and *"Et de la métaphore qu'est-ce qui se passe?"* (63).[5] To provisionally simplify, these questions never receive a proper answer from him and, furthermore, their subject, metaphor, is soon revealed to be everything which escapes control and yet which, being one with the possibility of control, is a controlling factor itself. To the question, *Qu'est-ce qui se passe, aujourd'hui, avec la métaphore?*, Derrida responds everything. And to the question, *Et de la métaphore qu'est-ce qui se passe?*, he responds nothing. Between this everything and this nothing stretches the kind of inquiry which, according to Ricoeur, *"renverse la manière d'argumenter en philosophie"* (*MV*, 325) and which *"redonne vie aux séductions de l'inarticulé et de l'inexprimé"* (*MV*, 397). Certainly this inquiry has gone awry in the sense of its being so assured of itself as argument that it pushes towards the bottomless depths as both basis and loss of it together.

Yet even though this form of inquiry soars beyond the strictest reaches of metaphysics, it can never entirely escape it. On the one hand, this means that it is always subject to being challenged, put down, put aside, dismissed, distorted, denied, etc. and, on the other hand, that it is always suffering, just as projects of clarification do, from an internal dilemma. This dilemma

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4 All page numbers of cited passages in Chapter V refer to Derrida's "Le retrait de la métaphore" (in *Psyché: Inventions de l'autre* [Paris: Galilée, 1987]) unless otherwise indicated.

5 An ethico-political statement about the philosophical question is to be found at the beginning of Derrida's essay, "Violence et métaphysique."

> Peut-être même ces questions ne sont-elles pas *philosophiques*, ne sont-elles plus *de la philosophie*. Elles devraient être néanmoins les seules à pouvoir fonder aujourd'hui la communauté de ce que, dans le monde, on appelle encore les philosophes par un souvenir, au moins, qu'il faudrait interroger sans désemparer, et malgré la diaspora des instituts ou des langues, des publications et des techniques qui s'entraînent, s'engendrent d'eux-mêmes et s'accroissent comme le capitale et la misère. Communauté de la question, donc, en cette fragile instance où la question n'est encore assez déterminée pour que l'hypocrisie d'une réponse se soit déjà invitée sous le masque de la question, pour que sa voix se soit déjà laissé articuler en fraude dans la syntaxe même de la question. Communauté de la décision, de l'initiative, de l'initialité absolue, mais menacé, où la question n'a pas encore trouvé la langage qu'elle a décider de chercher, ne s'est pas encore en lui rassurée sur sa propre possibilité. Communauté de la question sur la possibilité de la question. C'est peu – ce n'est presque rien – mais là se réfugient et se résument aujourd'hui une dignité et un devoir inentamables de décisions. Une inentamable responsabilité (*L'écriture et la différence* [Paris: Seuil, 1967], 118).

is that, inasmuch as this inquiry stands as argument and must engage and be engaged by other arguments, it totters even while it stands because it has already entered into the realm of beyond-argument or the realm which is the quasi-ground of argument. For to speak about quasi-metaphoricity is, as Derrida himself admits, to speak about nothing. Now, while this nothing lends itself to being articulated, it does not lend itself to being argued for. In short, it lends itself to a certain kind of *thinking* – a certain kind of equivocal thinking – about the nothing in question.

As this internal dilemma manifests itself in "Le retrait de la métaphore," it leads to what might be called two performative contradictions. The first one is that, Derrida, while following and even deepening Heidegger's discussion of language as it relates to some of Heidegger's own comments on metaphor, takes his own discussion of metaphor and, more precisely, the *retrait* of metaphor beyond the possibility of debating it. More precisely, the lexicon which he adopts for his inquiry into Heidegger and which of course has as its principal term *retrait* is highly specific to this inquiry. Yet, when taking up Ricoeur's critical analysis *"pour mieux éclairer les prémisses de la lecture de Heidegger que je tenterai tout à l'heure"* (69), he does not recognize the impossibility of debating it. On the contrary, he declares that, not wishing to polemicize or to have the last word on metaphor, he seeks to open up the subject for possible debate. *"Je me limiterai, pour l'exemple, à deux des traits les plus généraux, ceux qui flèchent toute la lecture de Ricoeur, pour re-situer le lieu du débat possible, plutôt que pour l'ouvrir et encore moins pour le fermer"* (69). The second performative contradiction is that, while Derrida denies looking into Ricoeur's critical analysis of his essay *"par esprit polémique"* (69), he devotes at least one-fifth of his exposé to challenging it.

5.1. The Impossible Subject

In the answers which he gives to his opening questions, it is perhaps possible to detect the eternal mockery or self-mockery of philosophy: philosophy as the saying of everything which perhaps says nothing or at least says nothing about everything. For, while the prospect with Derrida is certainly not one of thinking that, if everything is quasi-metaphorical, then everything is nothing, it certainly is the one of thinking that, if everything is "transported," "translated," "transcribed," and so on, then everything is the eternal and ephemeral no longer opposed to one another. On the other hand, the crossing of these two at infinity still allows for some extremely large contexts.

Derrida declares that there is drama in metaphor and that, as quasi-metaphor, it is even catastrophic. The meaning of this catastrophic, catastropic, or catachrestic event is that, unlike the traditional conception of metaphor as transfer of sense from the known to the unknown by way of the poetic or pre-conceptual perception of resemblance, quasi-metaphor is meaning's being transferred from the unknown "source" to the known or to-be-made-known "object." Quasi-metaphor is always below meaning as conceptual meaning and yet always at the centre of this meaning. The known is heterogeneous and occupied in advance by what it is not and what is already forgotten as what is "alien" to it. Here one might think of the proper or literal term whose etymological origin is in sight but whose "origin" before or beyond this etymological one is entirely out of view. Just as quasi-metaphoricity signifies for Derrida this "origin," so it is also signifies for him the *retrait* of metaphor which is also, in his tracing of Heidegger's path, the retreat or withdrawal (*Verborgenheit*) of being. *"On en parlera toujours* quasi-

métaphoriquement, selon une métaphore de métaphore, avec la surcharge d'un trait supplémentaire, d'un re-trait*"* (80).

Derrida's identification of quasi-metaphoricity with Heidegger's notions of the withdrawal of being and the onto-ontological difference affirms the conception of being as simultaneous revelation and concealment. Being is not simply an *éclosion*, a genesis, a first movement which, complete unto itself, stretches from a primordial pre-conceptual obscurity to a civilized conceptual clarity. It is rather a conceptual clarity forever in debt to or implicated in a pre-conceptual obscurity. What is expressed both by Derrida and Heidegger in one way or another is that metaphysics, which is the thought of beings mainly as physical and spiritual entities is forever at a remove from the thought of being as *the being of thought*. As the being of thought, the thought of being is also the thought of beings but only with the thought that these beings are implicated in the being of thought and language.

Derrida follows Heidegger along the increasingly uncertain path of thinking the being of thought as the being of language. Although this path is to a certain extent discernable from the very beginning of the exposé, it becomes increasingly marked out before losing itself once again as a sort of Heideggerian *Holzweg* when he characterizes metaphysics as being at a tropic remove from being or, to put it differently, as being in a "metaphoric" or "metonymic" relation to being. Metaphysics, as this quasi-metaphorical shift of being, contains the concept of metaphor in the way of this concept's already being infiltrated and inflected by what it presumably isolates and identifies. Here Derrida is more or less restating the negative thesis of "La mythologie blanche" which is the condition of the impossibility of defining philosophical metaphor. Yet there is a difference in this later reiteration of the negative thesis in that, with respect to the earlier one, its central argument is more Aristotelian than Heideggerian. With this more or less conventional argument in the background, "Le retrait de la métaphore" seems to have a certain reliance on "La mythologie blanche" and particularly in light of the fact that, with the exception of its middle part which is his response to Ricoeur, Derrida's exposé has the appearance of being either cryptic assertion or idiosyncratic interpretation. On the other hand, what is being relied on here is the irrefutable argument that philosophical metaphor cannot be adequately or completely defined. Derrida must then think it necessary to conduct a discussion of metaphor in Heidegger's text in a region which is carved out while still being thought.[6]

After his two opening questions, Derrida devotes a number of pages to describing and demonstrating the uncontrollable nature of metaphor.

> C'est un très vieux sujet. Il occupe l'Occident, il habite ou se laisse habiter: s'y représentant comme une énorme bibliothèque dans laquelle nous nous déplacerions sans en percevoir les limites, procédant de stations en stations, y cheminant à pied, pas à pas, ou en autobus (nous circulons déjà, avec l'« autobus » que je viens de nommer, dans la traduction et, selon l'élément de la traduction, entre *Übertragung* et *Übersetzung, metaphorikos* désignant encore aujourd'hui, en grec,

6 "[E]n raison de cette invagination chiasmatique des bords, et si le mot *retrait* ne fonctionne ici ni littéralement ni par métaphore, je ne sais pas ce que je veux dire avant d'avoir pensé, si on peut dire, le retrait de l'être *comme* retrait de la métaphore. Loin que je procède à partir d'un mot ou d'un sens connu ou déterminé (le retrait) pour penser ce qu'il en est de l'être et de la métaphore, je n'en viendrai à comprendre, entendre, lire, penser, laisser s'annoncer le retrait en général que depuis le retrait de l'être comme retrait de la métaphore dans tout le potentiel polysémique *et* disséminal du retrait" (*RM*, 81-82).

> comme on dit, moderne, ce qui concerne les moyens de transport). *Metaphora* circule dans la cité, elle nous y véhicule comme ses habitants, selon toute sorte de trajets, avec carrefours, feux rouges, sens interdits, intersections ou croisements, limitations et prescriptions de vitesse. De ce véhicule nous sommes d'une certaine façon – métaphorique, bien sûr, et sur le mode de l'habitation – le contenu et la teneur: passagers, compris et déplacés par métaphore (63).

By a disconcerting move which, as will be seen, is forwarded to Derrida's investigation of Heidegger (last eighteen of thirty pages), Derrida mobilises a number of words which, as he puts it, are neither metaphorical nor literal. Challenging the traditional conception of philosophical metaphor, he begins his exposé with an articulation of what is at the same time part of this articulation. For example, no sooner does he arrive at the third or fourth paragraph of his exposé than he shifts the scene from the modern city to open water.

> Je viens de changer d'élément et de moyen de transport. Nous ne sommes pas dans la métaphore comme un pilote en son navire. Avec cette proposition, je dérive (64).

The drifting or *dérapage* motif, initiated by the pilot in the boat trope, continues in Derrida's exposé as the extended figure of a vessel which, although anchored or having its motor shut off, is never entirely stilled. Metaphor as transport is clearly not only the subject of Derrida's exposé, but it is this exposé itself as the object of its own study.

While the urban site of metaphor suggests its ubiquitous, teeming, transporting, regulating, and automatic or semi-automatic nature, the marine site suggests its adventurous or unpredictable course. "*Le drame, car ceci est un drame, c'est que même si je décidais de* ne plus parler *métaphoriquement de la métaphore, je n'y arriverais pas* . . ." (65). Becoming a model of plain-speaking in philosophy will clearly not halt the movement of metaphor. The figurative aspect of words is already at work suggesting and provoking a direction before there is a logical or conceptual determination. While it is true that in philosophy the improper or errant aspect of metaphor is strictly monitored, it is also true that it can impose itself surreptitiously and then be re-christened *après-coup* the very proper and precise term of philosophy.

The human subject is part of the subject of metaphor as well as being subject to metaphor. The subject controls metaphor insofar as it forgets that it is subject to metaphor and that metaphor is implicated in its very constitution and condition. That the notion of subject is not far removed from the notion of soul, and soul from the notion of spirit, and spirit from the notion of invisible forces suggests that its historical path is no less capricious than continuous. This tension or play between the metaphorical control of the human subject and the human control of the metaphorical subject is no doubt what Derrida wishes to register at the beginning of his exposé. In order to express the subject's control of metaphor, Derrida relies on the word *us*.

> La métaphore n'est peut-être pas seulement un sujet *usé* jusqu'à l'os, c'est un sujet qui se sera entretenu d'un rapport essentiel à l'*us* . . . Or ce qui peut paraître usé aujourd'hui, dans la métaphore, c'est justement cette valeur d'*us* qui a déterminé toute sa problématique traditionnelle:

métaphore morte ou vive (67).

Metaphor, he declares, is a very old subject continually worked and reworked on the principle of metaphorical use or usefulness. Under this rubric also falls *usure* which, in "La mythologie blanche," signifies the traditional conception of metaphorical loss and conceptual gain. Now it is precisely this value of *us* which Derrida suggests is a worn-out conception. Yet to say that it is worn-out does not mean to say that it is exhausted for, with the present-day resurgence of interest in metaphor, (*"au cours des derniers mois il y a eu au moins trois colloques internationaux à ce sujet*" [66]), this very old subject proves to have tremendous staying power. In the face of this present-day resurgence of interest, Derrida raises once again the question: *Qu'est-ce qui se passe, aujourd'hui, avec la métaphore?* What he is really asking in this context is perhaps: What is happening today with the traditional conception of metaphor? If such is the case, then the answer which he does not explicitly provide but intimates everywhere is that it is being seriously challenged.

On the other hand, if the subject of metaphor is being seriously challenged and yet continues to rejuvenate and reinvent itself, it must be in some way up to meeting this challenge. Even though Derrida is in large measure himself committed to this challenge, it must be that he is also committed to recognizing the tradition's resilience and response to it. Perhaps the first indication of this double commitment is that *us*, although identified with the traditional conception of metaphor and its worn-out condition or tired status, is used by Derrida himself to launch his latest challenge to this conception. More precisely, he takes up as an issue the figurative use of language by Heidegger in conjunction with Heidegger's own semi-hostile remarks on metaphor which seem to contradict this use.

With the declaration that Heidegger's text is, despite its highly limited treatment of metaphor, indispensable for the study of *"cette époque de la métaphore"* (67), Derrida is ready to turn his attention to the important link between Heidegger, Ricoeur, and himself. Now the defence of "La mythologie blanche" which follows and yet which Derrida resists calling a polemic should even now raise a suspicion about the status of the opening part. Although there is no mention of Ricoeur here, there is at least two possible references to his theory of metaphor. The first possible reference comes very early with Derrida's suggestion that quasi-metaphor as the *retrait* of metaphor "*n'a plus de nom, de sens propre ou littéral . . .*" (65). This notion of quasi-metaphor's being both non-metaphorical and non-literal or non-proper, is, along with being developed broadly in the exposé, repeated in this explicit way several times throughout it. Now, along with the fact that Ricoeur's theory of metaphor relies on this opposition, there is also the fact that the latter assumes that his theory can take in and account for Heidegger's metaphors. Evidently, then, Derrida is already at odds with the very basis of Ricoeur's theory and, in particular, how this theory is deployed in the Eighth Study. What adds to the "hostile" resonances here is the fact that Ricoeur relies on the literal/metaphorical opposition in order to condemn the dead metaphor thesis which, along with the proper/improper and visible/invisible oppositions, he attributes to Derrida. Ricoeur's attributing the proper/improper opposition to Derrida soon surfaces as a sore point with the latter and it is worthwhile to note that, in contrast to his earlier essay, Derrida no longer relies so heavily on this opposition in order to describe the traditional conception of metaphor.

The fact that Ricoeur is sitting in the audience when Derrida presents his exposé would seem to be integral with the second possible reference. This reference shortly follows the first

one and bears not only on the way in which Ricoeur critiques Derrida's project, but also on the way in which he most strongly distinguishes his project from Derrida's, namely, by opposing his theory of live metaphor to Derrida's dead metaphor thesis. In his short discussion of *us* as the value which has determined the traditional conception of metaphor, Derrida states that, if he is tempted to call metaphor an old subject, it is because of *"une valeur d'épuisement apparent qu'il m'a paru nécessaire de reconnaître une fois de plus"* (66). Clearly implying here *usure* which, of course, Ricoeur associates with dead metaphor, Derrida goes on to list other conjugates of *us* such as *usage*, *usuel*, *utile*, *utilité*, etc. Then his final remark bears directly on the live metaphor/dead metaphor opposition.

> Or ce qui peut paraître usé aujourd'hui, dans la métaphore, c'est justement cette valeur d'*us* qui a déterminé toute sa problématique traditionnelle: métaphore morte ou vive (67).

A question which may impose itself now is: Can Derrida's disruption of both metaphysics and metaphorics be, if not intentionally opposed to theory in the strong sense, unintentionally so in the weak sense? The answer to this question perhaps bears on the internal dilemma which afflicts his project and which succeeds in making it both strongly yet tactfully offensive and tactfully yet weakly defensive. While the first is largely the challenge to the tradition which does best without polemics or at least polemics in any overt sense, the second is largely that to which Derrida accedes at certain points and for reasons which no doubt pertain to the protection of his own project. While the first largely manifests itself in the opening and Heideggerian parts of the exposé, the second largely manifests itself in the Ricoeurian part. Now, with respect to the above question, it may be answered that, although Derrida himself has no reason not to let theory be what is and even to celebrate its inevitability, he still rules against it from the point of view that theory or rather the ideal of theory is never wholly secure and demands support from the philosophical community.

With his two initial questions awaiting answers that are effectively no answers and his highly figurative and unorthodox way of boarding the subject of metaphor (which, of course, dispenses with the customary assumption that the philosopher is in control *"comme un pilote en son navire"* [64]), the opening of Derrida's exposé obviously mimics its theme of metaphorical *dérapage*. But what is also suggested in the form of the three figures – the three metaphors of metaphor which rapidly succeed one another, giant library, city transportation system, and drifting vessel out at sea, is the dissemination of metaphor. If the opening of his exposé then is not entirely cut off in spirit from his defence of "La mythologie blanche," it is very likely that it is the implicit critique of Ricoeur's whole project from which the explicit one, out of a certain scruple or *délicatesse,* refrains.[7]

5.2. *Pro Domo*

With the declaration that he will privilege the Heideggerian text in order to deal with the

7 This scruple which is also a certain *politesse* is no doubt the one of not alienating one's audience beyond a certain point. "Je regrette de devoir me limiter, faute de temps, à quelques indications principielles; il me sera impossible de mesurer mon argumentation à toutes les richesses de *La métaphore vive*, et par une analyse de détail, dût-elle accentuer le désaccord, de témoigner ainsi de ma reconnaissance envers Paul Ricoeur" (*RM*, 69).

question, *Qu'est-ce qui se passe, aujourd'hui, avec la métaphore?*, Derrida admits that there is a paradox which must be addressed. In a manner which is remindful of Ricoeur's approach to *l'auto-implication de la métaphore*, he now turns his attention to dissipating this paradox. What is primarily at issue is the puzzling connection between Heidegger's reliance on metaphor and his reticence in discussing it. *"On cite toujours deux lieux (*Der Satz vom Grund *et* Underwegs zur Sprache*) où il semble prendre position quant à la métaphore – ou plus précisément quant au concept rhétorico-métaphysique de la métaphore –, et encore le fait-il comme au passage, brièvement, latéralement, dans un contexte dont la métaphore n'occupe pas le centre"* (67). Derrida then observes that the demands of investigating this complicated issue are out of keeping with the constraints imposed upon him by the conference. As a consequence, he will offer only a brief note on it or, more properly, *"une note sur une note"* (68).

The note which is to be supplemented by another note is a footnote in "La mythologie blanche" and bears directly on one of Heidegger's brief but trenchant comments on metaphor: "*Das Metaphorishe gibt es nur innerhalb der Metaphysik.*" Now, strangely enough, Derrida's attempt to limit the investigation of Heidegger by relying on this note immediately becomes a complicating of the investigation insofar as this note is closely related to Ricoeur's critical analysis of Derrida's project. In other words, the initiative to expedite matters here turns out to be an additional task which is the challenging of Ricoeur's critical analysis and, more precisely, the latter's claim that there is a *" noyau théorique commun à Heidegger et à Derrida"* (*MV*, 373).

Derrida begins by citing a passage from the Eighth Study where Ricoeur identifies his project with Heidegger's. After protesting Ricoeur's hasty identification, Derrida refers to the note in "La mythologie blanche" on which his investigation of Heidegger is supposed to be but a further note. Citing from the first note, Derrida claims that it proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that he is not in agreement with Heidegger on the very point which Ricoeur uses to identify his project with Heidegger's. In fact, Derrida claims that, insofar as his disagreement with Heidegger is the recognition of some problem in the traditional conception of metaphor which Heidegger himself does not recognize, he is in agreement with Ricoeur.

> Cette assimilation continuiste ou cette mise en filiale m'a surpris. Car c'est justement au sujet de ces couples et singulièrement du couple visible/invisible, sensible/intelligible, que, dans ma note sur Heidegger, j'avais marqué une réserve nette et sans équivoque; et même une réserve qui, dans la lettre du moins, ressemble à celle de Ricoeur (70).

It will be necessary to return to this part of Derrida's response but, before doing so, it is best to report on the whole of it. Next on the agenda for him is to take issue with Ricoeur's analysis of *usure* by noting that the latter, while initially recognizing the double signification of this word, goes on very shortly to replace it with the univocal terms *métaphore usée* and, shortly afterwards, *métaphore morte*. In order to correct Ricoeur's reading, Derrida now cites a passage from "La mythologie blanche" which is critical (or quasi-critical) of the very theory being attributed to him by Ricoeur.[8]

8 More precisely, Derrida critiques the signification of *usure* which is in agreement with the theory of dead metaphor, namely, erosion, loss, wearing away, etc. *Usure*'s other signification, profit, gain, plus-value, etc. is not put to use in this context because the critique of *usure* is meant to apply to Polyphile's anti-metaphysical yet "symbolist" conception of metaphor which denies plus-value, profit, or true conceptual gain.

> Il fallait aussi proposer à l'interprétation cette valeur d'*usure*. Elle paraît avoir un lien de système avec la perspective métaphorique. On la retrouvera partout où le thème de la métaphore sera privilégié. C'est aussi une métaphore qui importe avec elle une *présupposition continuiste*: l'histoire d'une métaphore n'aurait pas essentiellement l'allure d'un déplacement, avec ruptures, réinscriptions dans un système hétérogène, mutations, écarts sans origine, mais celle d'une érosion progressive, d'une perte sémantique régulière, d'un épuisement ininterrompu du sens primitif (*MB*, 256; *RM*, 71-72).

Further along in this cited passage, Derrida states that usure *"n'appartient sans doute pas à une configuration historico-théorique étroite mais plus sûrement au concept de métaphore lui-même et à la longue séquence métaphysique qu'il détermine ou qui le détermine"* (72). As a consequence of coming across the expression, "*longue séquence métaphysique,*" Derrida takes the opportunity to defend himself from another of Ricoeur's charges, namely, that he treats the tradition as a homogeneous unity. First, he notes that, if from time to time he uses the expression, *"la métaphysique*," (with the emphasis on "*la*"), it is merely as shorthand in well-defined contexts. Secondly, he notes that there are numerous references in his other writings (*"Je pourrais multiplier les citations, depuis* La différance . . ." [72]) to the tradition's heterogeneity. Finally, he claims that it is the tradition's own self-conception which is homogeneous as onto-encyclopaedic logic.

> La représentation d'une clôture linéaire et circulaire entourant un espace homogène, c'est justement, tel est le thème de ma plus grande insistance, une auto-représentation de la philosophie dans sa logique onto-encyclopédique (72).

Shortly after the above remark, Derrida cites another long passage (most of which is reproduced below) from "La mythologie blanche."

> Comme il va de soi, nulle pétition ici de quelque continuum homogène qui rapporterait sans cesse à elle-même la tradition, celle de la métaphysique comme celle de la rhétorique. Néanmoins, si l'on ne commençait par prêter attention à telles contraintes plus durables, exercées depuis une très longues chaîne systématique, si l'on ne prenait pas la peine d'en délimiter le fonctionnement général et les limites effectives, on courrait le risque de prendre les effets les plus dérivés pour les traits originaux d'un sous-ensemble historique, d'une configuration hâtivement identifiée, d'une mutation imaginaire ou marginale. Par une précipitation empiriste et impressionniste vers de prétendues différences, en fait vers des découpages principiellement linéaires et chronologiques, on irait de découverte en découverte. Une rupture sous chaque pas! On présenterait par exemple comme physionomie propre à la rhétorique du « XVIII siècle » un ensemble de traits (tel privilège du nom) hérités, quoique sans droite ligne, avec toute sorte d'écarts et d'inégalités de

> transformation, d'Aristote ou du Moyen Age. Nous sommes ici reconduit au programme, tout entier à élaborer, d'une nouvelle délimitation des corpus et d'une nouvelle problématique des signatures (72-73).

During the course of citing the above passage, Derrida once again comes across an expression, this time, "*privilège du nom*" which triggers another parenthetical remark. Protesting Ricoeur's identifying him with a conception of metaphor which, according to Ricoeur, belongs to the rhetorical tradition and which takes metaphor to be an act of denomination, Derrida states:

> . . . [J]'ai constamment, dans *La mythologie blanche* et ailleurs, avec une insistance qu'on peut juger lassante mais qu'en tout cas on ne peut négliger, mis en question le privilège du nom ou du mot, comme toute ces « conceptions sémiotiques qui, dit justement Ricoeur, imposent le primat de la dénomination » (73).

Once again, he protests that Ricoeur reprimands him for having a position which is not greatly different from his own and that the confusion is the result of the former's attributing to him a thesis which is the very object of his deconstructive reading. Before citing yet a third passage from "La mythologie blanche," Derrida protests Ricoeur's interpretation of his analysis of the two deaths of metaphor.

> Dire, comme le fait Ricoeur, que *La mythologie blanche* fait de la mort ou de la métaphore morte son mot d'ordre, c'est abuser en la marquant de ce dont elle se démarque clairement, par exemple en disant qu'il y a deux morts ou deux auto-destructions de la métaphore (et quand il y a deux morts, le problème de *la* mort est infiniment compliqué) . . . (73).

The final paragraph of the middle or Ricoeurian part of the exposé is significant in that it captures the tension which not only is present, although less apparent, in the rest of this part, but also belongs to the opening and the Heideggerian parts. It is the tension between the need to engage in a verbal dispute and the need to have the truth of metaphor as infinite complication in sight. The truth to which Derrida is committed really has no proper dealings with argument in the sense of justifying itself in an oppositional sort of way. On the contrary, this truth must break with argument – in principle if not in practice – because it is the very condition of both its impossibility and possibility. On the other hand, inasmuch as this truth must take a propositional form, it cannot help but fall back into the argumentative mode and thus be subject to its exigencies. Hence Derrida is forced to protest Ricoeur's analysis of his essay even while struggling to keep off this ground and even, in fact, while denying or dissimulating his presence on it.

> J'ai dit tout à l'heure pourquoi il m'avait paru nécessaire, hors de tout plaidoyer *pro domo*, de commencer par resituer la note sur Heidegger que je voudrais aujourd'hui annoter et relancer. A montrer en quoi, dans ses deux prémisses les plus générales, la lecture de *La mythologie blanche* par Paul Ricoeur me paraissait, disons, trop vivement métaphorique ou

> métonymique, je ne voulais, bien entendu, ni polémiquer, ni étendre mes questions à une vaste systématique qui ne se limite pas plus à cette *Huitième Étude* de *La métaphore vive* que *La mythologie blanche* ne se ferme sur les deux affirmations isolées que Ricoeur a bien voulu lui prêter. Pour reprendre le mot d'ordre de Ricoeur, l' « intersection » que je viens de situer ne rassemble pas en un point toute la différence, voire l'éloignement incommensurable des trajets qui se traversent là, comme des parallèles, dira tout à l'heure Heidegger, peuvent se recouper à l'infini. Je serais le dernier à rejeter une critique sous prétexte qu'elle est métaphorique ou métonymique ou les deux à la fois. Toute lecture l'est de quelque façon et le partage ne passe pas entre une lecture tropique et une lecture appropriée ou littérale, juste et vraie, mais entre des capacités tropiques. Laissant donc de côté, en sa réserve intacte, la possibilité de toute autre lecture des deux textes, *La mythologie blanche* et *La métaphore vive*, j'en viens enfin à la note annoncée sur une note (74).

Not least among the indications of Derrida's being beset by conflicting demands is, first, his claim that his lengthy defence of "La mythology blanche," an essay which, according to him, Ricoeur has abused "*en la marquant de ce dont elle démarque clairement"* (73), is not motivated by any desire to polemicize and, secondly, his drawing his earlier work into the present one in order to *"mieux clarifier les prémisses de la lecture de Heidegger que je tenterai tout à l'heure"* (69).

> . . . [J]e ne [me] reporte pas [à *La mythologie blanche*] comme un auteur qui se cite pour reconduire indécemment à lui-même. Mon geste est d'autant moins complaisant, je l'espère, que c'est d'une certaine insuffisance de ladite note que je prendrai mon départ (68).

According to Derrida then, there is a certain insufficiency in the footnote on Heidegger in "La mythologie blanche," which renders his defence of this essay necessary but only secondary or subordinate to his bringing this note into view as the clarifying basis of the second or additional note on Heidegger which, of course, is the pending investigation of him. Yet it is far from clear how his defence of "La mythologie blanche" – or at least this defence in full – serves to make the later analysis of Heidegger more manageable or accessible because, first of all, the footnote on Heidegger is limited to Heidegger's argument that the inquiry into being requires the use of a vocabulary which, although appearing to be full of metaphors, renders vacuous or obsolete the traditional conception of metaphor. Now even if this issue is perfectly in accord with Derrida's own declaration about metaphor and his demonstration of metaphor from the beginning of his exposé, it does not need to be assimilated – at least for any heuristic reasons – to the issue of Ricoeur's critical analysis of "La mythologie blanche." In fact, this assimilation goes the other way by subjecting the exposé to extraneous material in that, once it is set down that figurative terms in philosophy are neither metaphorical nor literal, then such issues as dead metaphor versus live metaphor and denomination versus predication are no longer relevant.[9]

9 Everything here hinges on the fact that, while Ricoeur's conception of live metaphor falls inside the teleological metaphysic of act/potency, Derrida's conception of quasi-metaphor falls *outside* it as the non-teleological condition

That the choice between disputing and not disputing with Ricoeur is a struggle for Derrida is also evident is his backtracking at the end of his series of protests or, more precisely, in his granting to Ricoeur a certain interpretative licence. Derrida ends his apparent pro domo with the complaint that *"la lecture de* La mythologie blanche *par Paul Ricoeur me paraissait, disons, trop vivement métaphorique ou métonymique"* (74). Then he adds a few sentences later: *"Je serais le dernier à rejeter une critique sous prétexte qu'elle est métaphorique ou métonymique ou les deux à la fois. Toute lecture l'est de quelque façon et le partage ne passe pas entre une lecture tropique et une lecture appropriée ou littérale, juste et vraie, mais entre des capacités tropiques"* (74).

Given the above considerations, the footnote on Heidegger seems not only to fit in well with Derrida's present inquiry, but also to offer an economical means to counter Ricoeur's critical analysis. Since this analysis is at bottom the claim that Derrida's conception of metaphor rests on the opposition between visible and invisible being, Derrida is able to unsettle this claim by citing the note, the first two lines of which follow:

> Cela explique la méfiance qu'inspire à Heidegger le concept de métaphore. Dans *Le principe du raison*, il insiste surtout sur l'opposition sensible/non-sensible, trait important mais non le seul ni sans doute le premier venu ni le plus déterminant de la valeur de métaphore (70).

What Derrida does not cite in his exposé but which follows the above remarks is a long passage from *Der Satz vom Grund* or, more precisely, its French translation as *Le principe du raison* in which Heidegger declares that the concept of metaphor is confined to metaphysics and, a fortiori, to the sensible/non-sensible opposition. Since this passage, due to its weight and complexity, tends to overshadow Derrida's brief remarks at the beginning, there is some reason to think that he is being more polemical than precise when he claims that these remarks mark "*une réserve nette et sans équivoque; et même une réserve qui, dans sa lettre du moins, ressemble à celle de Ricoeur*" (70).

Besides the above passage, there are other instances where Derrida uses "clear" and "unequivocal" in order to characterize his calling into question the sensible/non-sensible opposition, the semiotic conception of metaphor, and the tradition as homogeneous unity. Now the fact that he couples these words with calling the above issues into question is itself something which should be called into question because, after all, the act of calling into question – the act of raising a doubt or suspicion – is itself not clear and unequivocal. Secondly, the fact that Derrida insists more on his agreement than disagreement with Ricoeur suggests that he likens his project of calling into question the tradition with Ricoeur's project of critiquing and correcting it. Now, while it is true that he associates the sensible/non-sensible opposition with the traditional conception of metaphor, it is by no means clear that he is critiquing this same conception. In fact, for Derrida to critique it, he would need to have a theory of metaphor or at least some thesis on metaphor and be suggesting, as does Ricoeur, how to correct and replace it. Moreover, the conception of metaphor which he in fact does embrace and which renders metaphor a virtually unlimited problematic cannot be said (except in a more "ethical" than "epistemological" sense) to be opposed to the traditional conception but only to be different from it: different as the thought of quasi-metaphor which is the condition of the impossibility of philosophical metaphor

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of the possibility of metaphysics.

and the condition of the possibility of poetic metaphor.

Derrida's insistence that he is quite clear and unequivocal about a project which does not lend itself to clarity and univocity is likely the symptom of his having to yield to the exigencies of argumentation. This yielding is also an economy of sorts which consists of trying to neutralize Ricoeur's critique in the context of a conference and in the context of this critique's having been disseminated. A major part of this economy must then be to put the equivocal nature of his discourse on hold because, even though it is proper to the discussion of quasi-metaphor, it is improper to disputing and defending it. At the same time, Derrida's project, being essentially equivocal, inhibits this operation and makes it subject to tactical retreats. As a consequence, the truly confrontational part of "Le retrait de la métaphore" is not where Derrida protests Ricoeur's critique, but rather the opening and the Heideggerian parts. There is reason then to suspect that, when Derrida says that he does not want to *"étendre mes questions à une vaste systématique qui ne se limite pas plus à cette* Huitième Étude *de* La métaphore vive*"* (74), he has already surreptitiously extended these questions in the opening part and will continue to do so in the Heideggerian part.

5.3. The *Re-trait* of Heidegger

Towards the end of his defence of "La mythologie blanche," Derrida cryptically refers to Ricoeur's *mot d'ordre.*

> Pour reprendre le mot d'ordre de Ricoeur, l'« intersection » que je viens de situer ne rassemble pas en un point toute la différence, voire l'éloignement incommensurable des trajets qui se traversent là, comme des parallèles, dira tout à l'heure Heidegger, peuvent se recouper à l'infini (74).

While it is far from certain that *intersection* is Ricoeur's mot d'ordre, it is definitely the key term of the Eighth Study's fourth section, "L'intersection des sphères de discours." Although Ricoeur begins this section by saying that he will develop *"une théorie générale des intersections entre sphères de discours"* (374), the following analysis focuses on the relationship between poetic discourse and speculative discourse. Poetic discourse is the supplier to the other discourse of a special kind of raw material – pre-conceptual experience – which is then turned into conceptual truth. Despite speculative discourse's being forever in debt to poetic discourse for its growth and prosperity, Ricoeur insists that it is essentially independent from it.[10] Derrida's cryptic remark

10 In accordance with what was said earlier, Ricoeur's insistence that speculative discourse is independent from poetic discourse is equivalent to implying that it has a sort of formal purity.

> Il peut être montré, d'une part, que le discours spéculatif a sa *possibilité* dans le dynamisme sémantique de l'énonciation métaphorique, d'autre part, que le discours spéculatif à sa *nécessité* en lui-même, dans la mise en oeuvre des ressources d'articulation conceptuelle qui sans doute tiennent à l'esprit lui-même, qui sont l'esprit lui-même se réfléchissant. Autrement dit, le spéculatif n'accomplit les requêtes sémantiques du métaphorique qu'en instituant une coupure qui marque la différence irréductible entre les deux modes de discours. Quel que soit le rapport ultérieur du spéculatif au poétique, le premier ne prolonge la visée sémantique du second qu'au prix d'une transmutation résultant de son transfert dans un autre espace du sens (*MV*, 375).

about an "*éloignement incommensurable"* and *trajets qui peuvent se recouper à l'infini"* perhaps points to the ambiguity of this essential independence which seems hardly different from an essential dependence. What is then incommensurable to philosophy as this ambiguous residue or remainder of its essentiality always runs alongside it like its shadow and threatens to be identified with it.

It would probably be more accurate to say that Ricoeur's watchword is his continual refrain throughout *La métaphore vive*: the production of new meaning. In a way, this refrain is also Derrida's and Heidegger's, but there is a difference between Ricoeur's project and Derrida's and Heidegger's projects which only cross, as Derrida suggests, at infinity. How this intersection of the two or three projects is found in Heidegger is a complicated business which, as the business of language itself, is of course no transaction in any conventional sense. Derrida makes his first move in the investigation of Heidegger by declaring that his problem is one of economy.

> Mon problème est: l'économie. Comment, suivant les contraintes, d'abord temporelles, de ce colloque, déterminer le fil conducteur le plus rassemblant et le plus enchevêtrant possible à travers tant de trajets virtuels dans l'immense corpus, comme on dit, de Heidegger, et dans son écriture enchevêtrée? Comment ordonner les lectures, interprétations ou réécritures que je serais tenté d'en proposer? (74-75).

After briefly entertaining the idea of using *Geflecht* (weave) as a centralizing and circumscribing principle, Derrida decides that, although its importance in Heidegger's "Der Weg zur Sprache" (in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*) is undeniable, he must "*laisser ce thème en retrait: il n'aurait pas été assez économique*" (75).

Derrida's second move in his investigation of Heidegger is to identify the four factors or demands which constrain him to a certain economy. The first demand is to take a fresh look at the value of *us* as key figure or feature of the metaphorical problematic and, more particularly, the value of *usure* as production of new meaning. The second demand is to take a fresh look at the notion of the proper which, as evidenced by its implication in Du Marsais' figure of metaphor as borrowed home *(demeure empruntée)*, plays an equivocal role in the traditional conception of metaphor. The third demand is "*mettre le cap, si on peut dire, sur cette valeur d'*Ereignis*, si difficilement traductible, et dont toute la famille (*ereignen*,* eigen*,* eigens*,* enteignen*) se croise, de façon de plus en plus dense, dans les derniers textes de Heidegger, avec les thèmes de propre, de la propriété, de la propriation ou de la dé-propriation d'une part, avec celui de la lumière, de l'éclaircie, de l'oeil d'autre part (Heidegger dit sous-entendre* Er-aügnis *dans* Ereignis*) et enfin, dans son usage courant, avec ce qui* vient *comme événement: quel est le lieu, l'avoir-lieu, l'événement métaphorique ou l'événement du métaphorique?*" (75-76).[11] Finally, the fourth demand is to take into account the Heideggerian notion of language as way-making, as *frayage,*

11 Cf. Ricoeur's account of *Ereignis* in the Eighth Study:

> Que l'*Ereignis* ait même visée de sens que ce qui fut autrefois pensé comme acte/puissance, est attesté aussi bien négativement par le refus d'en réduire l'amplitude à l'événement (*Geschehnis*) ou au procès (*Vorkommnis*) que, positivement, par le rapprochement de l'*Ereignis* avec le *es gibt* qui, sous l'aspect du don, annonce toute éclosion d'apparaître. *Ereignis* et *es gibt* marquent l'ouverture et le déploiement à partir de quoi il y a les objets pour un sujet jugeant (*MV*, 393).

and, as a related matter, the implication of translation (*Übersetzen*) in metaphorical transfer (*Übertragung*). As a followup to this motif of metaphorical transfer as translation, Derrida proposes to give his own discourse the title of *retrait*.

Derrida's third move in his investigation of Heidegger is to ask: "*Pourquoi retrait et pourquoi retrait de la métaphore*?" (76). His response to this question is roughly divided into two parts: the first part, rather diffuse, consists of opposing the language of the mother to the language of the father. Explicitly identifying both these languages with Heidegger's own terminology, Derrida views the first as native dialect or *Mundart* and the second as what falls "*sous les noms de « métalangage » (*Metasprache*,* Übersprache*,* Metalinguistik*) – ou de Métaphysique*" (76). In the case of the language of the mother, Derrida cites from Heidegger: "Die Mundart ist nicht nur die Sprache der Mutter, sondern zugleich und zuvor die Mutter der Sprache" (76). Seizing upon this example of Heidegger's use of metaphor, Derrida cites Heidegger's own observation that the meaning here is less one of grasping the meaning of language through the figure of the mother than to grasp the meaning of the mother through the figure of language, that is, through *Mundart* or *Muttersprache*. Given that Derrida identifies the language of the father with metadiscourse and metadiscourse in turn with the impossible and monstrous project (*ce projet impossible et monstrueux*) of the mastery of form for form's sake, the language of the mother must be the more tractable *material* or *matter* (*mère*, *mutter*, *mater*) of a local and familiar way of speaking.

Of course, it is the tractable aspect of his own mother tongue which leads Derrida away from German to the word *retrait*. "*Sans m'enfoncer dans toutes les questions qui se pressent ici, je remarque d'abord que dans « ma langue » le mot* retrait*, se trouve doté d'une assez riche polysémie*" (77). By taking advantage of all the polysemous resources of *retrait*, Derrida admits that he risks separating himself from Heidegger's meaning. Nevertheless he justifies this risk by claiming that his objective is, given the constraints of the conference, to achieve quickly the greatest possible precision over a large area and, at the same time, employ a language or lexicon which is demonstrative of the *dérapage* of metaphor.

> Le mot *retrait* – à la fois intact, et forcé, sauf dans ma langue et simultanément altéré –, je l'ai présumé le plus propre à capter la plus grande quantité d'énergie et d'information dans le texte heideggerien à l'intérieur du contexte qui est ici le nôtre, et seulement dans les limites de ce contexte (77).

Derrida's fourth move in the investigation is to deal with retrait in the sense of testing its possibilities as vehicle for interpreting and translating the Heideggerian text. This text has two dimensions: the first is as a discourse on metaphor and the second is as a metaphorical discourse itself. Determining the relationship between Heidegger's few statements about metaphor and his seemingly abundant use of it is a task which, to say the very least, is convoluted. Meant to facilitate matters, retrait inevitably runs the risk of complicating them. Derrida's first schematic response is the following: according to Heidegger, being is always in withdrawal even as it permits beings to manifest themselves as beings. Metaphysics then – the opening by which beings manifest themselves – is already at a remove from being or the thought of being. Consequently, the concept of metaphor is itself at a remove from being and, as such, is always already a "primordial" shift, a "figurative" movement which it cannot itself grasp or define. This

withdrawal of metaphor to a position essentially behind the subject or the study of it is what Derrida means by the retrait of metaphor.

In the case of Heidegger, Derrida's position is that the figures which he uses are neither metaphorical nor literal. Since being, as opposed to beings, is nothing, it cannot be signified on the basis of this metaphysical opposition. In order to articulate the in-between status of Heidegger's figures, Derrida initiates a second meaning for retrait which follows in the wake of its first meaning as withdrawal. This second meaning (which Derrida likens to a returning wave on a beach) is the virtually simultaneous signification of retrait as *re-trait*: as retracing or backtracking.

> On en parlera toujours *quasi* métaphoriquement, selon une métaphore de métaphore, avec la surcharge d'un trait supplémentaire, d'un *re-trait*. Un pli supplémentaire de la métaphore articule ce retrait, répétant en la déplaçant la métaphore intra-métaphysique, celle-là même que le retrait de l'être aura rendue possible (80).

Insofar as metaphysics always exceeds its borders or, to put it another way, always is metaphorical, it is implicated in quasi-metaphoricity and, as such, implicated in what is, strictly speaking, neither metaphorical nor literal. In order to articulate this in-between status of quasi-metaphoricity, it is necessary to situate philosophical inquiry at more or less the same level.

Still staying with the subject of retrait, Derrida makes the fifth move of his investigation by offering two provisional conclusions. The first is that retrait is not too abusive as the translation of Heidegger's *Entziehung* and that, furthermore, what compensates for any possible abuse is its concentrated work load: retrait not only signifies the withdrawal of being, but, as *re-trait*, a return over the very same ground, a return which is the quasi-metaphorical's advancing as the metaphysical. The second provisional conclusion is that the meaning of retrait as both withdrawal of being and advance of metaphysics is inseparable from the exploitation of its polysemous and disseminating possibilities. Not being itself a metaphor, retrait does not follow the prescribed path which is to take thought from the known – in this case, the idea of withdrawal or retreat – to the unknown which is the thought of being. On the contrary, the thought of being leads to a new way of thinking retrait.

> Or ce qui survient ici, c'est que pour une fois nous ne pouvons penser le trait du re-trait que depuis la pensée de cette différence ontico-ontologique sur le retrait de laquelle se serait tracée, avec la bordure de la métaphysique, la structure courante de l'usage métaphorique (82).

Derrida's sixth move of the investigation is to bring into greater focus the relationship between Heidegger's seeming aversion and seeming attraction to metaphor. To be carrying on this sort of investigation is to be confronted with "*la catastrophe généralisante*" of metaphor which is a metaphoricity overflowing its borders and which, at least in the context of investigating Heidegger on metaphor, is the systematic disruption of metaphor and concept alike. Derrida goes on to say that he will draw "*deux exemples parmi d'autres possibles. Il s'agit toujours de ces moments typiques où, recourant à des formules qu'on serait tenté de recevoir comme des métaphores, Heidegger précise qu'elles n'en sont pas et jette la suspicion sur ce que*

nous croyons penser d'assuré et de clair sous ce mot" (82-83). Taking one of his examples which is a figurative phrase or sentence from "Brief über den 'Humanismus,'" Derrida determines this sentence to be neither judicative nor constative: "*Das Denken baut am Haus des Seins*." To read this sentence simply as a statement about the house-like nature of being which thought would constitute in some way – found, furnish, and so on – is to read it contrary to Heidegger's own directive. What is to be thought most deeply here is not the meaning of being, but the meaning of the house. That the house no longer remains quite so known, fixed, and limited when the thought of being initiates thinking about it is perhaps the more precise understanding of house.

The second example which Derrida provides of Heidegger's denying or discouraging the view that his language is metaphorical is somewhat different from the first.

> 1. Dans *Das Wesen der Sprache* (1957-58), elle [une autre occurrence] précède le passage cité tout à l'heure sur « *Worte wie Blumen* ». 2. Elle ne concerne pas seulement la prétendue métaphoricité de certains énoncés sur le langage en général et, en lui, sur la métaphore. Elle vise d'abord un discours prétendument métaphorique portant sur le rapport entre pensée et poésie (*Denken und Dichten*). 3. Elle détermine ce rapport comme *voisinage* (*Nachbarshaft*), selon ce type de proximité (*Nähe*) qu'on appelle *voisinage*, dans l'espace de la demeure et l'économie de la maison. Or là aussi, appeler métaphore, comme si on savait ce que c'était, telle valeur de voisinage entre poésie et pensée, faire comme si on était d'abord assuré de la proximité de la proximité et du voisinage du voisinage, c'est se fermer à la nécessité de l'autre mouvement. Inversement, c'est en renonçant à la sécurité de ce qu'on croit reconnaître sous le nom de métaphore et de voisinage qu'on s'approchera peut-être de la proximité du voisinage (85).

As to be expected with an investigation which dares to confront a generalizing catastrophe, Derrida's next moves grow increasingly obscure. Despite his expressed aim to open things up for a possible debate, these moves have all the earmarks of closing one down.

> Précipitant ma conclusion . . . je voudrais maintenant en venir non pas au dernier mot, mais à ce mot pluriel de *trait* lui-même. Et non pas y venir mais y revenir. Non pas au retrait de la métaphore mais à ce qui pourrait d'abord ressembler à la métaphore du retrait. N'y aurait-t-il pas en dernière instance, derrière tout ce discours, le soutenant plus ou moins discrètement, en retrait, une métaphore du retrait, qui autoriserait à parler de la différence ontologique et à partir d'elle du retrait de la métaphore? (86).

Here Derrida raises the suspicion that his own analysis might be relying inadvertently on a dominant metaphor. In order to eliminate this possibility, he abandons his use of retrait and replaces it with another term, a word which perhaps is more common, ordinary, or literal: *trait*. Trait is pressed into service by Derrida as a sort of generic term in order to deal with and

coordinate two clusters of related words in Heidegger which interweave and cross and are neither metaphorical nor literal. What follows as the seventh move of the investigation is that Derrida identifies trait with two families of words which, as he claims, have been present and operative in Heidegger's writings since *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*.

> Deux familles, pour ainsi dire, de mots, noms, verbes et syncatégorèmes, viennent s'allier, s'engager, se croiser en ce contrat du trait dans la langue allemande. C'est d'une part la « famille » de *Ziehen* (*Zug*, *Bezug*, *Gezüge*, *durchziehen*, *entziehen*), d'autre part la « famille » de *Reissen* (*Riss*, *Aufriss*, *Umriss*, *Grundriss*, etc.) (86).

In order to be economical in demonstrating the performative side of Heidegger's text which is the subtle interplay between the two families of words, *Ziehen* and *Reissen*, Derrida includes in his analysis the thematic side of this text by focussing on Heidegger's description of the interplay between *Denken* and *Dichten.* This second interplay is identified by Heidegger as a process of differentiation which makes it at least analogous to Ricoeur's notion of an interaction and discontinuity between poetic discourse and speculative discourse.[12]

> Remarquons d'abord quelque chose du trait *avoisinant*. Le voisinage entre *Denken* et *Dichten* nous donnait accès au voisinage, à la proximité du voisinage, selon un chemin qui, n'étant pas plus métaphorique que littéral, rouvrirait la question de la métaphore. Or le trait avoisinant, disons le trait *approchant*, le trait propre qui rapporte (*bezieht*) l'une à l'autre *Dichten* (qu'il ne faut pas traduire sans précaution par poésie) et pensée (*Denken*) en leur proximité avoisinante, qui les *partage* et que les deux *partagent*, ce trait commun différentiel, qui les attire réciproquement, tout en signant leur différence irréductible, ce trait, c'est le *trait*: *Riss,* tracement de frayage qui incise, déchire, marque l'écart, la limite, la marge, la marque . . . Et ce trait (*Riss*) est une *coupe* que se font, quelque part à l'infini, les deux voisins, *Denken und Dichten*. A l'entaille de cette coupe, ils s'ouvrent, pourrait-on dire, l'un à l'autre, ils s'ouvrent de leur différence et même, pour me servir d'un mot dont j'ai d'ailleurs (dans *Glas*) tenté de régler l'usage, *se recoupent* de leur trait et donc de leur *re*trait respectif. Ce trait (*Riss*) de recoupe rapporte l'un à l'autre mais n'appartient à aucun d'eux. C'est pourquoi ce n'est pas un trait commun ou un concept général, ni davantage une métaphore. On dirait du trait qu'il est plus originaire que les deux *(Dichten* et *Denken*) qu'il entaille et recoupe, qu'il est leur origine commune et le sceau de leur alliance, restant en cela singulier et différent des deux, si un trait

12 Cf. Ricoeur's assessment of this proximity between Heidegger and him.

> Pour finir, je voudrais ne retenir, de dernier Heidegger, que cette admirable déclaration: « Entre elles deux, pensée et poésie, règne une parenté plus profondément retirée, parce que toutes deux s'adonnent au service du langage et se prodiguent pour lui. Entre elles deux pourtant persiste en même temps un abîme profond, car elles demeurent sur les monts les plus séparés » (*MV*, 398).

> pouvait être quelque chose, pouvait être proprement et pleinement originaire. Or s'il fraye un écart différentiel, un trait n'est ni pleinement originaire et autonome, ni, en tant que frayage, purement dérivé. Et dans la mesure où un tel trait fraye la possibilité de nommer dans la langue (écrite ou parlée au sens courant de ces mots), il n'est lui-même nommable, en tant qu'écartement, ni littéralement, ni proprement, ni métaphoriquement. *Il n'a pas d'approchant en tant que tel* (87).

In his analysis of Heidegger's account of the interaction between *Dichten* and *Denken*, Derrida identifies the "chosen" word – the word which largely determines the putting into play of several conjugate terms – as *Aufriss* (cut, incision). As Derrida explains it, Heidegger is called upon by language to call up a name for that which, properly speaking, does not and cannot have a name. Although *Aufriss* is commonly rendered *gravure* or *traçé-ouvrant* by French translators of Heidegger, Derrida chooses to render it *entame* because the trait is – so Derrida himself is called upon by language to name it – the cutting into as well as the cutting out of the differential between *Dichten* and *Denken* which is also their difference in their very proximity. This incising is also the formation of what is proper to the two as the very constituting of the proper itself. As such, Derrida identifies *entame* with Heidegger's *Ereignis*, the event of propriation. *Ereignis* in turn is identified with *re-trait* as return or resurgence of metaphor since this return is the metaphysical counterpart of metaphor's withdrawal beyond metaphysics.

After illustrating the interplay between the *Ziehen* family of words and the *Reissen* family of words in Heidegger's description of *Sprache*, Derrida goes on to stress – and by way of a certain self-reference and self-implication – the disturbance in language which is also the work of language.

> Nous devons encore, ici même, performer, [*sic*] entamer, tracer, tracter, traquer non pas ceci ou cela mais la capture même de ce croisement d'une langue dans une autre, la capture (à la fois violente et fidèle, passive pourtant et laissant *sauf*) de ce croisement alliant *Reissen* et *Ziehen*, les traduisent déjà *dans* la langue dite allemande. Cette capture affecterait le capteur lui-même, le traduisant dans l'autre, puisque *retrait*, en français, n'a jamais voulu dire, selon l'usage, re-tracement. Pour entamer cette captation compréhensive et cette tractation ou cette transaction avec la langue de l'autre, je soulignerai encore ceci: que la tractation *fait oeuvre*, elle est *à l'oeuvre* déjà dans la langue de l'autre, je dirai dans les langues de l'autre (90-91).

After this eighth move of the investigation, Derrida carries out one other. The ninth move is to refer to a particularly troublesome statement in Heidegger's *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* which sums up the generalizing catastrophe of metaphor: *Die Wahrheit ist Un-wahrheit.* The analysis of the *Ziehen* family of words and the *Reissen* family of words is now carried over to an analysis of Heidegger on truth and art. The combat between truth as work of art and non-truth as concealment is also the dual struggle between light and darkness and world and earth. It is infinitely complicated by the work of art's drawing up into itself this non-truth as concealment and by its struggling to reveal it.

> Or ce combat n'est pas un trait (*Riss*) comme *Aufreissen* ouvrant un simple gouffre (*blossen Kluft*) entre les adverses. Le combat attire les adverses dans l'attrait d'une appartenance réciproque. C'est un trait qui les attire vers la provenance de leur unité à partir d'un fond unis, *aus dem einigen Grunde zusammen*. En ce sens il est *Grundriss*: plan fondamentale, projet, dessein, esquisse, précis. S'impriment alors une série de locutions dont le sens courant, usuel, « littéral » dirait-on, se trouve réactivé en même temps que discrètement réinscrit, déplacé, remis en jeu dans ce qui fait oeuvre en ce contexte. Le *Grundriss* est *Aufriss* (entame et, au sens courant, profil essentiel, schéma, projection) qui dessine (*zeichnet*) les traits fondamentaux (*Grundzüge*, et ici se croisent les deux systèmes de traits pour dire *trait* dans la langue) de l'éclaircie de l'étant. Le trait (*Riss*) ne fait pas se fendre les opposés, il attire l'adversité vers l'unité d'un contour (*Umriss*) d'un cadre, d'une charpente (au sens courant). Le trait est « *einheitliches Gezüge von Aufriss und Grundriss, Durch- und Umriss »*, l'ensemble unis, ajointé (*Ge-*) des traits rassemblés, la contraction ou le contrat entre toutes ces formes de traits, ces apparentes modifications ou propriétés de *Riss* (*Auf-*, *Grund-*, *Durch-*, *Um-*, etc.) entre tous ces traits du trait qui ne lui surviennent pas comme des modifications prédicatives à un sujet, une substance ou un étant (ce que le trait n'est pas) mais qui ouvrent au contraire la dé-limitation, la dé-marcation depuis laquelle le discours ontologique sur la substance, le prédicat, la proposition, la logique et la rhétorique peuvent alors s'enlever (91-92).

The nine moves of Derrida's investigation are a complicated effort to be as thorough as possible in the analysis of the status of Heidegger's metaphors. But because this analysis is also abysmal, it cannot be deepened but only disputed or rejected. While all the weight of "formal" opinion is likely thrown behind the effort to prove such an analysis non-receivable, all the weight of "informal" opinion is likely the insinuation of its immoral or unethical status.[13]

Given that Derrida is aware that his investigation of Heidegger is abysmal and that he nonetheless desires it to be "well-received," it is likely that he must jockey between two conflicting demands. One of these demands would be in line not only with his declaration that he wishes to open up the discussion for possible debate, but with his numerous references to the economic and schematic nature of his investigation which imply that there is room for further development. At the same time, Derrida chooses a terminology for his analysis of Heidegger's metaphors which, as he himself admits, is proper only to a specific context. The question then arises: what sort of debate does Derrida have in mind if replacing these terms with other ones is only possible in the context of continuing the investigation of Heidegger's metaphors as quasi-metaphors?

This question seems to be particularly relevant with respect to the penultimate paragraph. After declaring that *"le trait n'est donc rien"* (92), Derrida inquires about the possibility of

13 If Derrida's project is taken to be not simply his discussion of metaphor but his entire works, there are many examples of such an insinuating effort. A good source is *Jacques Derrida: An Annotated Primary and Secondary Bibliography*, ed. William R. Shultz and Lewis L. B. Fried (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992).

further study in this area. "*Comment en parler? Quelle écriture faut-il ici inventer?*" (92). Admitting that it is always possible for a new rhetoric or meta-rhetoric to arise, he also declares that it would be assigned to its own impossibility.

> La rhétorique ne pourra alors s'énoncer elle-même, et sa possibilité, quand s'emportant dans le trait supplémentaire d'une rhétorique de la rhétorique, et par exemple d'une métaphore de métaphore, etc. (92).

Next he states: *"Quand on dit trait ou retrait dans un contexte où il y va de la vérité, « trait » n'est plus une métaphore de ce que nous croyons usuellement reconnaître sous ce mot"* (92). Now, if what is truly debatable in this context is in fact not the status of Heidegger's metaphors but the very issue of truth's being in question, then Derrida's calling for a debate without clarifying its nature suggests that a confusion reigns here which permits the confrontational possibilities normally associated with debate to be registered in an area of investigation which effectively denies them.

If there is a sense in which Derrida closes down debate even while claiming to open it up, there is also a sense in which he carries on a debate even after having shut it down. After having protested Ricoeur's reading of "La mythologie blanche" and begun the investigation of Heidegger, he still refers to Ricoeur although, to be sure, in ways which seem inconsequential. On the other hand, if scrutinized more closely and taken into consideration with other factors, it will not be so difficult to think that the Eighth Study and, in particular, Ricoeur's investigation of Heidegger are not far removed from Derrida's investigation of him.

Although there are only three later references to Ricoeur which are explicit (or at least quasi-explicit), two of them are unquestionably a continuation of Derrida's mid-exposé protests. The first comes very shortly after he has ended his defence.

> Or c'est économiquement d'économie que je dois parler ici. . . . Économie pour articuler ce que je vais dire avec l'autre possible tropique de l'*usure*, celui de l'intérêt, de la plus-value, du calcul fiduciaire ou du taux usuraire, que Ricoeur a désigné mais laissé dans l'ombre . . . (75).

The second explicit reference to Ricoeur comes when he identifies the two brief remarks by Heidegger on metaphor which seem to draw the most interest and critical attention. Once again, he uses this opportunity to supplement his defence.

> Sans doute à cause de leur forme univoque et sentencieuse, ces deux passages ont constitué l'unique foyer de la discussion qui s'est engagée sur la métaphore chez Heidegger, d'une part dans un article de Jean Greisch, « Les mots et les roses: La métaphore chez Martin Heidegger » (*Revue des sciences théologiques et philosophiques*, 57, 1973), puis d'autre part dans *La métaphore vive* (1975). Les deux analyses s'orientent différemment. L'essai de Greisch se dit plus proche du mouvement amorcé par *La mythologie blanche*. Néanmoins les deux textes ont en commun les motifs suivants que je rappelle très vite sans revenir sur ce que j'ai dit tout à l'heure de *La métaphore vive*. Le premier

> motif, sur lequel je ne me sens pas du tout d'accord mais sur lequel je ne m'étendrai pas . . . c'est le motif onto-anthologique de la fleur. Greisch et Ricoeur identifient ce que je dis des fleurs séchées à la fin de *La mythologie blanche* avec ce que Heidegger reproche à Gottfried Benn de dire pour transformer le poème de Hölderlin en « herbier » et en collection de plantes desséchées. Greisch parle d'une parenté entre l'attitude de Benn et la mienne. Et Ricoeur utilise ce motif de l'herbier comme une transition vers le propos de *La mythologie blanche*. Pour de multiples raisons que je n'ai pas le temps d'énumérer, je lirais cela tout autrement (78).

With respect to providing evidence that a polemic is secretly at work in the Heideggerian part of Derrida's exposé, the above references no doubt are weak and limited. But it should be remembered that, besides their apparent isolation and random occurrence, they belong to the "inept" defensive side of Derrida's project which ranges between statements which tend to clarify it by over-simplifying it and others which tend to endorse, if weakly, Ricoeur's position. It is therefore only in conjunction with numerous other references of a more implicit nature that the ones already mentioned strongly suggest Ricoeur's lingering presence (as target) in the exposé.

First of all, it is not so easy to ignore the frequency in "Le retrait de la métaphore" of the references to the literal/metaphorical opposition in conjunction with the subordination of the proper/improper opposition which is prominent in "La mythologie blanche." Except for one reference to the proper/improper opposition which comes at the beginning, all the rest – numbering close to a dozen – come in the Heideggerian part. Furthermore, when Derrida does use the word proper, it is always in the company of the word literal as if to suggest that he is simply covering all possibilities of the non-metaphorical. Now, even if it may be allowed that *proper* in some sense signifies for Derrida the primitive or original sense of a word, it is clear that he does not want this signification to be dissociated from literal, current, or non-metaphorical. That he shows himself to be sensitive on this point throughout the exposé suggests that his dispute with Ricoeur is not forgotten simply because he is no longer engaged in it.

Derrida most explicitly protests (this is the *third* explicit reference) Ricoeur's attributing to him the notion of the proper as original or primitive sense shortly after he takes up the issue of Heidegger's comments on metaphor.

> D'une part, on doit pouvoir [se] passer [de la métaphore] parce que le rapport de la métaphysique (onto-théologique) à la pensée de l'être, ce rapport (*Bezug*) qui marque le retrait (*Entziehung*) de l'être, ne plus être nommé – *littéralement* – métaphorique dès lors que l'usage (je dis bien l'usage, le devenir-usuel du mot et non pas sons sens originel auquel personne ne s'est jamais référé, en tout cas moi) s'est fixé à partir de ce couple d'opposition métaphysique pour décrire des rapports entre des étants (80).

In order to show that Derrida's remark, "*je dis bien l'usage, le devenir-usuel du mot et non pas son sens originel auquel personne ne s'est jamais référé, en tout cas moi*," is not fully accurate, it is only necessary to look at one of the passages from "La mythologie blanche" which he cited

before the above passage.

> L'histoire d'une métaphore n'aurait pas essentiellement l'allure d'un déplacement, avec ruptures, réinscriptions dans un système hétérogène, mutations, écarts sans origine, mais celle d'une érosion progressive, d'une perte sémantique régulière, d'un épuisement ininterrompu du sens primitif (72).

Even though it is Polyphile's position in *Le jardin d'Épicure* which Derrida is describing, he is not in disagreement with it insofar as it affirms the implication of metaphor in the concept. His repudiation of the proper as primitive then in favour of the literal in order to signify the non-metaphorical seems once again to be more polemical than precise because *primitive* or *original* can be, as Derrida often does with these and other words, placed in quotation marks in order to signify their equivocal status. *"Primitive"* or *"original"* would then refer to the etymological trace of what is neither metaphor nor concept and neither figure nor non-figure.

While it is true that, unlike "La mythologie blanche," Derrida's exposé offers little or no discussion of the concept, it is also true that, by describing metaphysics as being in a sort of metaphoric or metonymic relation to being, he is once again insisting that the concept is implicated in its other and suffering from some impurity or internal distress. Now, given that nothing could be more disruptive of Ricoeur's theory of metaphor than this ongoing and repeated diagnosis, it is difficult to see how Derrida's exposé is not only hostile to Ricoeur's project, but also to Ricoeur personally as one who participates at the conference.

It is now time to present the best evidence that there is an extended polemic which goes largely unannounced in "Le retrait de la métaphore." The basis of this evidence is that, along with reserving a special place for Derrida in the Eighth Study, Ricoeur reserves a special place for Heidegger. With one or two exceptions, the issues taken up in the Eighth Study as they bear on Heidegger are more or less the same ones taken up in "Le retrait de la métaphore." Accordingly, to list these issues as transfers from Ricoeur to Derrida is to come up with something like the following: 1) Heidegger's last texts which, for Ricoeur, are marred by an invincible ambiguity are, for Derrida, works which, due to the nature of their undertaking, are necessarily difficult and dense, 2) Heidegger's homogeneous conception of the tradition which, for Ricoeur, indicates a will to power is, for Derrida, an indispensable epochal understanding of Western philosophy,[14] 3) Heidegger's two comments on metaphor, "*Das Metaphorische gibt es nur innerhalb der Metaphysik*," and "*Wir blieben in der Metaphysik hängen, wollten wir dieses Nennen Hölderlins in der Wendung 'Worte wie Blumen' für eine Metapher halten,*" which Ricoeur treats as being largely sufficient in order to interpret Heidegger's position on metaphor is, for Derrida, material which needs to be supplemented, 4) Heidegger's reproach to Goddfried Benn that his comment on Hölderlin's poem turns it into a herbarium or a collection of dried plants is, insofar as it is picked up later both by Jean Greisch and Paul Ricoeur and critically turned against Derrida translated by Derrida himself into a wrong interpretation of his essay, 5) Heidegger's discussion of the relationship between *Dichten* and *Denken* which, for Ricoeur, largely corresponds to his own plea for the discontinuity between poetic discourse and

14 "Le texte heideggerien a paru incontournable, à d'autres et à moi-même, dès lors qu'il s'agissait de penser l'époque mondiale de la métaphore dans laquelle nous disons que nous sommes, alors même que Heidegger n'a que très allusivement traité de la métaphore comme telle et sous ce nom" (*RM*, 67).

speculative discourse is, for Derrida, Heidegger's non-metaphorical and non-literal use of language, 6) Heidegger's discussion of *Ereignis* which, for Ricoeur, exhibits the *"même visée de sens que ce qui fut autrefois pensé comme acte/puissance"* (*MV*, 393) is, for, Derrida, a restatement of the onto-ontological difference.

Given that both Derrida's and Ricoeur's inquiries into metaphor are also inquiries into philosophy and at least to some degree the issue of how to do philosophy, their commitment to tell the truth about metaphor must be inseparable from putting the ideal of truth-telling either into play as question or to work as answer. This putting it into play or putting it to work is what PS has been calling the ethical constituent of philosophical discourse. That the ethical constituent is normally occulted by the epistemological and yet that this occultation is itself ethical to the extent that it is the preservation of the truth-telling ideal as homogeneity is what was earlier suggested as Ricoeur's path. On the other hand, when philosophy turns to investigating itself and even if this investigation is ultimately meant to justify itself, the occulting of the ethical is likely weakened and becomes less of a commitment than the contrary one which would be to show some vital signs of its ethical life. In the case of Ricoeur, his treatment of Heidegger culminates in a strong condemnation of him for undervaluing the philosophical tradition and for attempting to overcome it or leave it behind. That this condemnation may be in conflict with other of Ricoeur's espoused values is at least something to consider.

Immediately before taking up Heidegger in the Eighth Study, Ricoeur, following Husserl,[15] compares the traditional view of philosophy's being entirely responsible and measuring up to its own intentions to *"une manière « généalogique » d'interroger les philosophes, qui ne se borne pas à recueillir leurs intentions déclarées, mais les soumet au soupçon et en appelle de leurs raisons à leurs motifs et à leurs intérêts*" (357). Although Ricoeur does not explicitly disapprove of this genealogical way of doing philosophy, the context of these remarks which is the Eighth Study leaves little doubt that it is the first way which he prefers and which, with respect to philosophy's unique question, the question of being, is likely the only way. Here a philosopher's motives and his reasons should be treated as virtually one and, if it were to fall out otherwise, it would seem that either the philosopher whose motives are singled out and criticized for their own sake is not worthy and should not have been discussed in the first place or else the philosopher who makes an issue of them has become, despite his declared intentions to the contrary, a genealogist.

In the same way as does Derrida, Heidegger confronts Ricoeur as one both to recognize as far as possible and not to recognize.

> À vrai dire, la philosophie de Heidegger se propose, à l'avant-dernier stade de cette enquête, indivisément comme une tentative et comme une tentation incontournables. Une tentative dont il faut s'inspirer, toutes les fois qu'elle contribue manifestement à édifier la pensée spéculative selon la visée sémantique qui animait déjà la recherche d'Aristote sur les

15 "La querelle de l'*analogie entis* n'épuise pas les possibilités d'échange entre discours spéculatif et discours poétique. La discussion, en effet, n'a mis en jeu que les intentions sémantiques de l'un et de l'autre discours susceptibles d'être assumées réflexivement, comme en témoigne le terme même d'intention ou de visée sémantique, emprunté à la phénoménologie husserlienne. C'est bien pour une conscience qui entend « se-justifier-soi-même », « se-fonder-ultimement » et, ainsi, se tenir pour « entièrement responsable de soi » que les raisons invoquées par la pensée consciente d'elle-même sont équivalentes à ses motifs réels" (*MV*, 356-357).

> acceptions multiples de l'être –, une tentation qu'il faut écarter, dès lors que la différence du spéculatif et du poétique se trouve à nouveau menacée (*MV*, 393).

C'est ici, PS l'avoue, qu'elle déplore la position prise par Ricoeur. Even while recognizing the latter's good intentions and the limited ground on which he can manoeuvre, it must also be recognized – at least from this corner – that a certain amount of violence and abuse is present here. Distinguishing between a "good" Heidegger who can be assimilated to the Aristotelian tradition and a "bad" Heidegger who cannot and therefore should be rejected, Ricoeur not only devalues Heidegger's declared intentions by glossing over them, but offers no account as to why they should be devalued which goes beyond his limited analysis of Heidegger on metaphor. This analysis purports to demonstrate that Heidegger is mistaken when he sets himself apart from the tradition because his Platonic conception of metaphor is outmoded and not relevant to his use of live metaphor which itself is commensurate with the tradition. If nothing else, Derrida's exposé shows that this interpretation of Heidegger's use of metaphor is dubious and certainly not the bedrock upon which to drive a wedge between Heidegger's motives and his reasons. When Ricoeur says that Heidegger is vengeful, driven by a will to power, seeks a certain ascendancy or superiority over other philosophers, and is inclined to a certain intellectual laziness,[16] his reaction to Heidegger's project is tolerable only from the point of view that it is the human all too human in philosophy as everywhere else.

Another consideration along these lines is that, while declaring his opposition to the attempt to do away with the difference between poetry and philosophy, Ricoeur seems to have great difficulty not doing away with this difference himself.[17] On the one hand, he is willing to allow Heidegger tremendous latitude even while insisting that, when Heidegger interweaves his thought with the poetry of Hölderlin, he still manages to keep poetry and philosophy separate.

> Ce qui est remarquable, dans ce petit texte [*Aus der Erfarhung des Denkens*], c'est que le poème n'y sert pas d'ornement à l'aphorisme philosophique, et que celui-ci n'y constitue pas la traduction de poème: poème et aphorisme sont mutuellement dans une accord de résonance qui respecte leur différence. A la puissance imaginative de la poésie pensante, le poète répond par la puissance spéculative de la pensée poétisante (*MV*, 394).

The last line of the above passage is intriguing because, if taken out of context, it could easily pass for the kind of merger of poetry into philosophy or vice versa which Ricoeur struggles so hard to prevent. On the other hand, it cannot be said that Ricoeur demonstrates how, if Heidegger

16 The following comment is of a generalizing nature but falls in the midst of Ricoeur's discussion of Heidegger's vengefulness and philosophical hubris. "Le moment est venu, me semble-t-il, de s'interdire la commodité, devenue paresse de pensée, de faire tenir sous un seul mot – métaphysique – le tout de la pensée occidentale" (*MV*, 396).
17 In order to keep the difference between poetry and philosophy going even when it looks like it is not, Ricoeur insists that Heidegger uses philosophical metaphors as opposed to poetic ones. The analysis of the difference between these two species of live metaphor is limited to claiming that the first are deliberately chosen and put into the service of speculative thought. Since it may be equally asserted that the poet deliberately chooses his metaphors, the analysis does not rule out the possibility of poetry's and philosophy's converging at some level other than conscious deliberation.

does in fact take inappropriate risks and come close to collapsing poetry into philosophy, he manages to do so beyond what Ricoeur has already licenced for him.

It has been PS's contention all along that, when Ricoeur objects to any move to obliterate or even to blur the difference between poetry and philosophy, he is actually targeting the project or projects which call into question the ordering and identification of poetry by philosophy and therefore philosophy's own self-ordering and self-identification. Certainly he expresses many times over that the relationship between poetry and philosophy is one of the latter's taking up the former into itself as potential meaning in order to give the most up-to-date and accurate report on reality. Insofar as truth and knowledge are concerned then, this relationship is a hierarchy and inseparable from philosophy's integrity.

> Quand le philosophe lutte sur deux fronts, contre la séduction de l'ineffable, contre la puissance du « parler ordinaire » (*Sprechen*), bref pour un « dire » (*Sagen*) qui ne serait ni le triomphe de l'inarticulé, ni celui de signes disponibles au locuteur et manipulables par lui, n'est-il pas dans une situation comparable à celle du penseur d'Antiquité ou du Moyen Age, cherchant sa voie entre l'impuissance d'un discours livré à la dissémination des significations et la maîtrise de l'univocité par la logique du genre? (*MV*, 393-394).

In the above passage, Ricoeur discreetly announces what the philosopher properly does (*"une situation comparable à celle du penseur d'Antiquité ou du Moyen Age"*) and should be doing (*"le philosophe lutte . . . contre la séduction de l'ineffable"*). While giving a reasonably restrained response to Ricoeur's critical analysis of "La mythologie blanche," Derrida also responds to this discreet announcement by Ricoeur, by, with equal discretion, marshalling his exposé in order to repudiate it in the most tactfully unrestrained way.[18] Far from being a discourse which guards itself against the ineffable and the disseminating, it attempts to demonstrate that philosophy is afflicted by its very own discourse which is the ineffable and the disseminating in language itself. If what is finally at stake in Derrida's and Ricoeur's dispute with one another is the honour and integrity of philosophy, then surely it is a certain *lack* of honour and integrity which is the ground of their both recognizing them and striving after them. This lack is the essential division of truth-telling into two ethical domains: the honour and integrity which perceives that not to perceive this essential lack is itself a lack of honour and integrity and the honour and integrity which perceives that to perceive this lack as essential is to effectively do away with – honour and integrity.

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18 If one takes into consideration only the vehemence (not to mention vengefulness) and energy which can be brought to a dispute, then Derrida's response to Ricoeur's critique of "La mythologie blanche" pales by comparison with his response to John Searle's critique of Derrida's earlier essay, "Signature, événement, contexte" (1971). Obviously taking to heart one of the leading statements of Searle's article ("Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida." [*Glyph 2*, 1977]), namely, that he has a "penchant for saying things that are obviously false," Derrida responds with a matching article which, over the course of a great deal of analysis infused with many stinging remarks, ends up citing almost in its entirety Searle's article. See Derrida's *Limited Inc*, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston, Il.: Northwestern University Press, 1990).

5.4. PS

The following was initially the first paragraph of the Abstract. It was deleted in order not to alienate the reader right at the outset. By making it now the *last* paragraph of PS, the aim is not so much to round off and conclude the analysis as to draw attention once again to the inevitable effacement of certain intentions. In the present instance, it is the one of trying to tell the truth about the over-complication of philosophical truth-telling without "excessively" complicating it.

> The analysis of the *dynamics* of the deep disagreement between Derrida and Ricoeur over metaphor and its relation to philosophy is inevitably double-focussed and dispersed. Along with being the examination of a wide range of issues (metaphor, discourse, meaning, philosophy, being, etc.), it must also be the study of, as far as possible, the complication and even over-complication of truth-telling in philosophy. Because philosophical truth-telling in principle is that it is not or should not be over-complicated, the proposition that it *is* implies that it is irreducibly involuted and agonistic. Not only contesting and contradicting its abysmal condition, it puts into play different valuations which, insofar as they come together and form a dominant position or disposition, constitute the both implicit and explicit demand that truth-telling should not be obfuscation or the attempt to say the ineffable, that it should not risk a general despair of language and breakdown of communication. In response to this demand that truth-telling not be over-complicated are the projects of clarification which, by and large, are a call to order and an inherent securing of the tradition as well as its presuppositions and ideals. But this is still over-complication because these projects of clarification are ones which simplify and even over-simplify. There is then a contrary demand which these projects evoke and which pertains to what is doubtful in this area.

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– Appendix –

Honour and Integrity in Philosophy: Are They Possible?

Honour and integrity in philosophy: *are they possible?* Is this a proper question? (And it might already be asked: is this a *serious* question?) I was thinking it might not be. I was thinking it was improper but not in any conventional sense. I was thinking rather that it was out of focus or imprecise. Not that I am saying now that this is not the case or, for that matter, that the question is not improper. But what I'm saying – what I came to realize – is that, in a certain sense, the question *is* proper for all the reasons which seem to weigh against it.

But this will take some explaining and it is best to start with the objection which is most likely to be raised against it before all others: *that it takes on too much.* How can such a question, already admitted to be faulty and uncertain, take on the honour and integrity of philosophy? For if it is seriously asked, *Are honour and integrity in philosophy possible?*, then does it not become impossible to take this question itself seriously? *Oh, but perhaps this is not serious enough!* Perhaps it is necessary to say that, if this question is meant to raise a suspicion and make it possible to doubt the very possibility of honour and integrity in philosophy, then it is not only guilty of taking on too much, but of being foolish, wasteful, and certainly at odds with its presumed subject.

I admit there is something to this objection which has to do with my initial worry about the question's being out of focus or imprecise. At least, I admit this is the case insofar as the objection of taking on too much is abandoned and gives way entirely to the objection of not having a serious question. For, contrary to what might be expected, the question takes on what it should take on and I would like to demonstrate this. On the other hand, I must admit that, from the strictest but not necessarily the most serious point of view, the question lacks a certain "seriousness" or "rigour." It was never my intention to call into question the very possibility of honour and integrity in philosophy, but only to look into the *nature* of this possibility. So in this way the question's being imprecise or out of focus is equivalent to its being, at the most "serious" or "rigorous" level, a bit of a feint or an amusement.

But does this feint or amusement still not detract from an overall honour and integrity, an overall "seriousness" which, to come closer to the meaning of this equivocal word as it is now being used, is both the respectability and responsibility of philosophy and which, even if I am now calling it in question, is nonetheless proper to it? On the basis of a certain amount of good will on the part of the reader, I think the answer will be "no" *if* I can perfectly justify this feint or amusement and promise that no other will take place with or without an accompanying acknowledgement which, as it seems, is meant to justify or at least partially justify it. In spite of such a kindly response and tolerant attitude, I well understand the expectation if not the demand which must attend it, namely, that after having justified or having tried to justify the initial proceedings and their waywardness, I should carry on in an orderly fashion and lay one proposition after another. I well understand this expectation and yet I am not sure it can be justified or at least that it can be justified any better than the way I'm proceeding and, for that matter, will continue to proceed. After all, if what is being addressed here is honour and integrity in philosophy and, more precisely, their possibility, then surely this matter involves at least *some* practical concerns which never quite make it into theory and therefore at least some elements

which escape the straight and narrow.

To speak properly about this subject then is to speak about it as comprehensively as possible and to risk some infelicities in order to all the better catch sight of them. For it should not be decided beforehand that these infelicities have nothing to do with the honour and integrity of philosophy – honour and integrity *in* philosophy – as these, and it is difficult to say what they are at this point but let us now call them foundational or highest principles, come to be assumed or asserted. Of course, the prevailing point of view is that these principles, foundational or otherwise, are installed in philosophy not as possibility but as necessity. Philosophy would not be philosophy without them, so the thinking goes: it would not be possible without their being necessary. From the prevailing point of view then, there is no issue here or at least none which is of central importance to philosophy.

From the prevailing point of view, to be as comprehensive as possible is still to stop short of considering infelicities to be essential (rather than accidental) to philosophy. Where is the *legitimacy* then of my own point of view which goes in the opposite direction? To begin answering this question, I will say that part of my understanding of what it is to be as comprehensive as possible is to look at the meaning of this particular expression. It seems to be wholly at odds with what I'm doing as an admittedly brief and faulty exercise and yet it equally seems to be very much its essence. Is it possible there are *two* ways of being as comprehensive as possible in philosophy? Two senses of this expression which are co-founded, necessarily asymmetric, and eternally irreconcilable? I think these two senses can be spotted if one thinks of philosophy's being able to examine all subjects only on the basis of skipping at least one which is essentially itself and, on the other hand, philosophy's – or at least something like philosophy's – taking exception even to this essential or basic exclusion.

But it is necessary to go slowly here because it is precisely the notion of two senses of philosophical comprehensiveness which will be contested in one way or another – and not necessarily wrongly or at least not necessarily so in the most "comprehensive" sense – in the name of the honour and integrity of philosophy. This contestation will of course come from the prevailing point of view and the thinking that philosophical comprehensiveness has only *one* sense and that two senses of it must be, if taken as philosophy's essence or overall way of being, nonsensical. I am certainly in no position to raise an objection to this major objection to nonsense except to say that the status of the nonsensical at the very heart of the honour and integrity of philosophy has yet to be determined. But, then again, it will be quickly added that this is already assuming too much or rather not assuming enough in that the heart of philosophy must be deemed *pure* – necessarily pure – in advance. But how pure? How necessarily pure? Certainly reasons and arguments have been handed down throughout the ages that the heart of philosophy is necessarily pure – pure reason – but never conclusively and only continually or consensually, and in the most general or imperfect way. Certainly there is much here that speaks of strength and will and desire and authority but, even according to the proponents of pure reason, even according to their standards, strength and will and desire and authority are themselves not sufficient. Does a long history then of insufficient authority and inconclusive arguments add up to pure reason? It must be so but then only by force of conviction, by a judgement or ruling which has numbers on its side in order to be, as opposed to a more intractable and marginal way of thinking, true, appropriate, correct, legitimate, proper, right, adequate, and so on.

But why this force of conviction and superiority of numbers if not for a fact which,

naturally enough, will not be recognized by a great many except in a generous moment and a certain taking in and tolerating of what must be, naturally enough, contested by them? Why this force of conviction and superiority of numbers, to say it again, if not for a fact which is complicated and yet which I insist on calling a fact for the reason that it is empirical and social and yet not separable from another fact which is less of a fact and which belongs to the still to be determined heart of philosophy? Why this force of conviction and superiority of numbers, to say it a third time, if not for the fact that the prevailing view of philosophy – what bears most generally on what it is to comprehend philosophically and to be philosophically comprehensive – is effectively the basis or at least what seems to be the most solid basis of not only itself, the prevailing point of view and all its manifestations, but any other point of view?

Now it is necessary to go slowly here and, as a cautionary note, say that perhaps many of those who, a moment ago, I said would not recognize the above fact except in a generous moment are even now contesting this assessment because they see no essential problem in recognizing it. But, if so, they are only concentrating on one end of this fact and thinking that all I'm saying here is that the condition of the possibility of a certain philosophical abnormalcy or impropriety is a certain, a much more certain philosophical *normalcy*. Indeed, this is being said but it is also being said or at least implied that it works the other way and that the condition of the possibility of philosophy's wholeness, normalcy, and, just as elastic a notion as these, its honour and integrity, are all its extraordinary, abnormal, improper, objectionable, inside and outside comings and goings, its *dis*arrangements which can only be, according to the prevailing point of view, its internal and voluntary *re*arrangments.

If, as I suspect, there is some consternation and perplexity now which does not amount to open and violent disagreement, this is but the fleeting symptom of what always registers itself, to speak most broadly, on two intimate but antagonistic levels: the level of the philosophical comprehension and comprehensiveness which doubles back on itself, overlooks itself, and *checks* itself (with two possible meanings here) and the level of philosophical comprehension and comprehensiveness which, seeing no proper repair or respite or, to speak more positively, *use* for itself at this first level, retreats from it and redeems itself, that is, its own proper level, by denying what always seems to be the self-denial of the first level. And if I say now that it is wrong to think that all is confused and unclear here but that all that is confused and unclear about these levels including, of course, their respective bids for clarity and order is the very *spirit* of philosophy, then do I not say something which, although or rather precisely because it is an affirmation coming from the first level, sounds every bit like a negation from the second (that is, sounds like a denial of philosophy to those who work and thrive on the second level)?

Personally, I see no resolution to this situation but only *resolutions* which, one way or another, constitute the honour and integrity of philosophy. But, of course, one of these resolutions is not just one among many, but *the* resolution of philosophy which identifies it with itself, with something settled, resolved, out of the way, no longer in question, and no longer in need of being questioned. All of this, to be sure, marks a healthy, active, and onward-going spirit without which philosophy would be entrapped in itself and not be able to go outside itself and into the "world." Who would deny it? Who would deny it except perhaps the *other* part of philosophy (but is this really a denial?) which doubles back on itself and finds a certain lack, a certain anomaly, a certain untruth precisely where philosophy proper has mandated its search for truth?

Perhaps, if assurances are no longer quite what they were, the question, *honour and*

integrity in philosophy: are they possible?, is a little closer and more serious now. And yet I do not think, on the basis of how I must immediately qualify this proposal, I will subvert or undercut what I am suggesting about others' coming a little closer to my way of thinking. I mean, when I say, as I must now, that this coming a little closer to the question and taking it more seriously is wholly dependent on the generous moment of these others, the many who, as I mentioned earlier, take in and tolerate to a certain degree the point of view which must be ultimately contested by them. I of course affirm here a gap between them and me which can be never be closed but which does not rule out a partial closing or coming closer.

A gap which, if I may say so and, indeed, I must say so, is a certain *lack* of honour and integrity which exists on both sides and yet which each side must think exists more on the other side or else it wouldn't be truly upholding its point of view. It is the generous moment of the many which empowers me to say this right now and grants me a certain latitude, as I am well aware, as long as I don't abuse it. And yet I *must* abuse it or else what I think about honour and integrity in philosophy or, more precisely, what I think about the *lack* of them, would end up as a feint in the direction of an objectivity – an immaculate conception of honour and integrity – which is precisely the kind of philosophical comprehension and comprehensiveness *I am not after.*

The kind of philosophical comprehension and comprehensiveness I am after admits that it is inescapably a parti pris and that, despite this, it still strives for a kind of "immaculate conception." But in order to avoid being a feint in this direction, in order to avoid doing what the *other* side habitually does and act as if it already possessed a core of pure objectivity, a nugget of crystal transparency, it must worry itself about being, as much but no more than the other side, a parti pris. *As much but no more than the other side!* I just said that out of courtesy or even a tactical move and now I am forced to backtrack and admit that I consider the prevailing point of view to be the larger and more deep-rooted prejudice. What does the implicit but the always strongly felt appeal to numbers and duration mean to me if there is never a single argument which can conclusively prove me wrong? And yet, because I admit that my own point of view is a parti pris, I gain no major advantage or victory here except the right to affirm this point of view, to voice it abroad, to influence a few others who might be with me more than they know. And if it were asked, to what end goes all this marginal manoeuvring and influencing of a philosophical or half-philosophical nature, I would reply that, despite all the faultiness of myself, my endeavour, and everything attached to it, its end can only be the honour and integrity of philosophy and, more precisely, to make up for – at least in part – the *lack* of honour and integrity in philosophy.

We should all be grateful for this lack, even though we usually are not, even though, in a sense, it would be unnatural to be grateful for it, for it allows us to have whatever we have of honour and integrity. This lack, to say it again, is the gap between the two sides, between the two points of view, between the two levels of philosophical comprehension and comprehensiveness which never can be closed or filled up but, in the very attempt to do so by either one side of the other or both sides at the same time but not with, by any means, the same sort of success, becomes effectively the womb of whatever can be called Right or Wrong: rightly or wrongly, weakly or strongly.

A certain order even at the very heart of order which can only be at the very heart of philosophy is never quite right – never quite wrong but never quite right – and this is perhaps the most courteous but least courageous way to describe the *lack* of honour and integrity in

philosophy. I am putting it this way, I am couching it in these terms of *courtesy* and *courage* which I oppose here but which of course can be complementary in other contexts because, one, they are at least representative to some degree of what is at stake here and because, two, order even in philosophy can go beyond having more than a little wrong with it and *with nothing being said about it.* But how can all this of a seemingly wider scope and hinting at the complex relationship between the individual and the polite but policing institution be determined as something not simply accidental to philosophy but as essential to it?

With the objective of answering this question, I have held off on an examination of the terms *honour* and *integrity* in order to allow them to appear here with whatever infelicities cannot be avoided. Now it is time to look at these terms but I wish to do so with some further questions. What happens when, instead of making the usual move of prescribing such and such definition, one takes into consideration the range of already alive and active ones? What is revealed about the honour of philosophy when it principally attaches itself – and this is certainly a way of *defining* itself – to its good name and reputation, its illustrious past, its declared calling, its many contributions which are of course presumed to be among the best and highest? What is revealed about this *form* of philosophy's honour if one compares it to something else of a definitional character which is of course the *content* of philosophy's honour, that is, its commitment to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

I would say that a division reveals itself for if to tell the truth means to reveal whatever is *bad* along with whatever is good and if, furthermore, it is not right for philosophy simply to assume its own goodness, then its truth-telling commitment is essentially and not accidentally at odds with its promoting itself as the good. For even if the truth-telling commitment and the self-promotion of philosophy tend to overlap a good deal, it is still the independence of the first from the second which ultimately keeps philosophy honest or at least more honest than it otherwise would be.

The form and content of philosophy's honour are essentially at odds and sometimes they are greatly at odds, but this does not mean that one is ever in a position to overpower or stalemate the other. Indeed, it is difficult to know what such an overpowering of form by content or content by form could possibly mean for the division between them is never complete and so is also, in a manner of speaking, their undividedness. For, just as they are never each other at any particular moment, so they *are* each other – or so they become very close to each other and cross each other's path – at many moments. After all, the truth-telling of philosophy which is the questioning of its own good name has no value unless it is somehow anchored in the good which is hardly distinguishable from this good name. And, similarly, the good name of philosophy has no value unless it is somehow anchored in the truth which is principally about itself.

Now, with respect to the word *integrity*, it is often coupled to the word *honour* in order to evoke the highest moral or ethical standards. But what is the significance of this gesture, this coupling when it is done – as is the case here and now – in relation to the very tradition, the very institution which, if not claiming to have originated these standards, purports to know them through and through and to care for them scrupulously? Certainly this sort of gesture (my own, in other words), this questioning of philosophy's very own honour and integrity is no ordinary presumption and may be considered, at least in some quarters, rather indecent and not so far removed from an act of vengeance or a flight of fancy which takes the whole tradition, the whole series of brilliant philosophical efforts to be something less than itself, something less than calling into question philosophy's honour and integrity.

I mentioned the need at the beginning of this exercise to risk a few infelicities in order to all the better catch sight of them. And I suggested that it should not be assumed beforehand that they have nothing to do with the honour and integrity of philosophy. Since this way of proceeding is far removed from the way philosophy itself proceeds, it is evident that I find something *wrong* with the way philosophy proceeds. Less evident than this side of my way of proceeding, however, is no doubt another side which is that anything that may be considered wrong with the way I proceed is considered justified by me in order that I may justifiably proceed against what I consider to be wrong. Thus I can "safely" say that, if it is a presumption on my part not to assume that philosophy's honour is inclusive of its integrity (this integrity which unfortunately I have not identified but let me now call it philosophy's will to be honest and complete, to be completely honest), then I think it is a presumption whose worth more than makes up for whatever indecency, vengefulness, or egotism may be counted against it.

But I think I have gone as far as I can now in abusing the generous moment of those who have been taking in and tolerating my point of view. And, of course, the fact that they must *not* tolerate it rests well with me for if I were not to meet with their resistance, if I were not given the opportunity to think them wrong but also right in their resistance, and, no less importantly, if I were not given the opportunity to think them *more* wrong than right in their resistance, it would be as if I had never had a point of view. And, similarly, if philosophy proper were never seriously confronted with what it considers to be *improper*, if it were not forced to recognize what was proper in this impropriety even while not recognizing it in the main, it would never have the sense of itself as being the proper and, just as importantly, *justified* as the proper.

The question, *honour and integrity in philosophy: are they possible?*, is the title of the satire which I did not write. Yet I do not deny that it haunts this exercise and it may well be that all that is called philosophical scepticism is marked by a certain mockery and self-mockery. But why should this be a problem for philosophy if truth is its mission and if, in the final analysis, it can never be certain why it set off on it? To be sure, there are all sorts of practical reasons which no doubt stretch further than the eye can see. But if this is all there is, if philosophy were not marked by a *deeper* seriousness which involves in some way or other this more sceptical or satirical look at itself and which in turn involves a more penetrating and, indeed, more *hurtful* look at itself, it would be wholly established in the business of truth and merely impure rather than *trying to be pure* in its contradictoriness.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

59. Alice Turns on Her Hero

– Now we're alone. Just you and I. How much more hero-worshipping do you expect to get out of me? How much more erotic pleasure? Oh, I could say such things about you that, had they been trumpeted to all the world, it would've been better if your mother had not borne you.

Your mother. She was on her deathbed when you took a break from helping look after her by going out and looking for a — oh, I see that doesn't cut very deep. Well, how about if I say you've done things with animals and with children that — oh, that too doesn't pierce you anymore. The truth is the truth that cuts to the quick, that makes you squirm like a worm on a hook when it's fresh in your mind, that truth undergoes a cosmetic change (perhaps I should say a cosmic change) when taken from its original soil and transported to something that, by its very nature, must elevate it. All the shame gets scrubbed out like — well, can I be uncouth for once? can I really say something shocking? do I have your permission? oh, still the same resistance! – The good bourgeois in you comes to the fore every time, doesn't it? It says something like "Look, it's me who admits all these things. Bad as they are, they're more or less universal. Shouldn't I be commended for bringing them, with no little amount of tact and restraint, into the open?"

Tact and restraint. Ultimately you don't want to be exposed unless it's to your benefit. Your truth stops as soon as your honour stops and shame, horrible shame, sets in.

Of course you will stay silent. It's better that way. What harm, what real harm can I do you?

You grant me permission to harm you and yet you know it resembles love play. Sex play. Fondling your — you see, I can't say it. It's you who stops me.

You feel the sand always running through the hourglass. That's one sensitivity that age sharpens. You'd like to come over to me and be on my side. You've ached, you've always ached for me.

But I don't exist. That's the greatest ache. I don't come down to you. I don't come over to you. I don't mingle in your affairs. Not in the day-to-day. Not in going to the laundromat or even in your love play. I'm always removed, always distant, always a thought, hope, wish, and dream.

And yet how potent I've been and how much I've ruled over the whole course of your life.

What a shabby affair that life is compared to what it would've been with me. What a shabby affair it would've been hadn't it been for me.

After all, to think what it took to get you to the point of risking professionalizing your thought without professionalizing it. Not that I take all the credit for this but only that, without me, it wouldn't have been possible.

After all, when you think about it, what a seemingly strange and insubstantial thing to make the very substance of your life. What a different axis must a soul like yours turn on if it is not eventually to regard itself as wholly impractical.

Between the greatest doubts about the course you've taken in life and some other way stood only the hopeless ridiculous thought of winning me. Kierkegaardian-like, you've kept up this delusion from earliest adolescence. This heterogeneous image of being a knight destined to do and find what knights are supposed to.

Return to "The Thematic Sections"

60. The Final Word

– Still silent? What dignity is there in letting me rattle on like this? Can I be thought entirely trustworthy in having the final word?

*

[It is a hot, muggy, overcast day and I sit here in my little room sweating profusely. At the same time I look for some sort of inspiration, some sort of meaning, some sort of direction, indeed, some sort of future for myself. For the fact of the matter is that, right now, right at this point in my life, I'm afraid of the future, afraid of my age and my aging, afraid of, to speak figuratively for a moment, putting to flight all the romantic songbirds of my soul. Afraid of – and still speaking figuratively – going out of this life not with a bang but a whimper. Is it any wonder then that, mindful of my youthful dreams and what has guided me thus far, I wish more than ever now for a bright star before me? . . .