

Making a Difference

Making a Difference

Rethinking Humanism and the Humanities

Edited by

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Thales

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Susanne Jansson

SUSANNE JANSSON

Introduction

What makes a difference? If an idea is carried out according to the original plan such that the plan is sensed in the result, as in the case of a pyramid, then the difference the plan makes is obvious. On the other hand, some seemingly insignificant detail could make a critical difference to someone without even being noticeable to someone else. Is not the field of the humanities *conjunctive* in the sense that it makes things that are noticed only by the individual a topic of critical concern to many?

The participants were invited to “rethink humanism and the humanities” which, of course, is to a considerable degree a matter of self-reflection and self-critique, an enterprise of looking into what goes on in the space between one’s self as a member of the community of selves and oneself as reflecting on that community and one’s place in it, an enterprise which need not be self-indulgent but can be an enhancement of a mode of *sharing*. In particular, Stanley Cavell’s presence at the conference brings this aspect of humanist thinking to light. As we see it, his understanding of a necessary personal cultivation, a process associated with ideas of moral perfection, is pivotal, but these ideas must not be tainted with either aestheticism or perfectionism.

Sharing instantiates companionship that respects differences and affinities alike. Here we touch upon the working principle of democracy, associated with the UN’s first declaration of human rights, stating that “[a]ll human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” Does this claim not appeal to the therapeutic ambition of thinking-for-onself together with others? How do I set myself apart within “companionable thinking”? Rather than by lines of demarcation we consider

horizons, i.e. how we meet and interact when our horizons coincide or temporarily overlap. What does the field of aesthetics contribute to companionable thinking? Does it not, generally speaking, make things more visible? Does it not provide a plethora of examples by which to distinguish aspects of being human? Is not the field of aesthetics a privileged domain of critical attention in that it invites a sharing of experience? This is attained through, among other things, the aspect of preservation and endurance involved in much art, which in many cases allows for renewed critical assessment. Over the course of time, the ongoing and repetitive again-and-again, by which a particular aesthetic expression very well might prove durably *companionable*, could be seen as an act of acknowledgement of the past that makes a difference. Of course, companionable thinking is not permissive but critical.

Art is prominent in *Lars Hertzberg's* contribution. He sets "making a difference" against the notion of "changing the world," the latter articulated for example in the case of some protagonist promising to "bring down the moon" as a sign of love. In contrast, Hertzberg focuses on down-scaled actions implying responsibility. And we are reminded that there are cases down-scaled to the bare minimum of abstaining from action, which nevertheless are ethically relevant without our even being aware of it. This understanding leads to Hertzberg's conception of a "point of view of hope" in light of which a person can act and argue for an "improved order of things" thus serving and being served by the arts and the humanities.

Sören Stenlund is concerned with a deficient use of historical knowledge becoming more or less obvious in much of the critique of the contemporary. This is a vital reminder because a "defective self-confidence" seems to be a characteristic "mood of the times" in much of the humanities. Stenlund argues for a "creative spirit" which will show itself in examples that are strong enough to become *exemplary*. This, however, is not easily achieved because of a certain submissive wearing-down of a necessary self-critical attitude in an academic climate that does not recognize clearly what the humanist's competence really is about, namely, the capacity for independent considerations and attitudes.

Sabina Lovibond focuses on questions concerning *aesthetic exemplarity*. If it is the case that we have largely left “humanism” behind, then in what sense could there be aesthetic exemplarity at all? It is a relevant question because there could hardly be such exemplarity without the challenging idea of education. This is challenging because there are those who believe in the relevance of aesthetic exemplarity and there are those who disbelieve, and for good reasons. How should we conceive of the sources of Western humanism that have allegedly produced an imagery of great durability? Must not that kind of exemplarity be challenged over and over again within the field of the humanities? Lovibond shows that the challenge can only be met by realizing that the human sciences constitute a field of tension. Humanism is not left behind but lived out by contesting ways of considering the sources of culture.

Sharon Rider’s discussion about relativism in human sciences follows up on Stenlund’s concerns. Relativism, argues Rider, comes with an Academy in the process of getting to know itself. In this quest for “the fact of academics”, Rider engages in a dialogue with Max Weber, who, already a century ago, envisaged a situation in which the complexity of the modern world challenged academic thinking radically in ways reminiscent of today’s situation. Rider’s proposal is a demanding one: one has to “make the best” of the situation, i.e. accept scientific specialization as a proper response to the complexity of the modern world, but without internalizing that same tendency. The critical question of what makes it “worthwhile” to pursue human sciences is tentatively framed as a trial to rediscover “the human impetus to get clear on things of concern.”

Margareta Hallberg discusses biographical writing as an academic genre. In discussing her approach to the *intellectual biography* of the British philosopher of science, Mary Hesse, Hallberg chooses to combine a theoretical and a non-theoretical approach in her efforts to take stock of the clarity afforded by a certain photography. Her claim is that the insight gained from such a combined approach could very well motivate serious reassessment of what it means to pursue research in the humanities.

Martin Gustafsson considers the notion of “retroactive re-descrip-

tion” in the social sciences and humanities. How do we as researchers imagine and make sense of the past? Is it possible to bridge the cultural gaps and set aside the drift of changing times in ways that allow us to reconsider the past in valid ways? Gustafsson investigates cases of abuse in the past, showing that even though those cases might appear transparent at first sight, there is of course no straightforward way of writing about them. Our descriptions are always re-descriptions, the quality of which is a question of whether we, for every individual case, have proper access to the terms and language of the source and whether we have the context-sensitivity appropriate to the case under scrutiny.

In *Richard Shusterman's* view, it is not enough for the humanities to recognize and work out an understanding of the human condition. He argues that the theoretical account should also propose measures for an “art of humanizing,” i.e. for improving the conditions that enable someone to lead his or her life. Shusterman elaborates on this by reference to pragmatism and the kind of cultivation of thinking emanating from Confucius, disclosing *humanism* as a common theme. By cross-fertilizing these traditions, Shusterman conceives of a form of aesthetic education in terms of cultivation, friendship and exemplarity, by which a person can find his or her way (dao). Thus, the notion of a “life-pervading artistry” and enhanced lived experience is conceived of as enriching our understanding of what it is to be human.

To recognize the relevance of silence is also part of our life with language. Qualified silence, writes *Hans Ruin*, “marks a certain experience of thinking and of reason” that reaches far into philosophical literature. Ruin articulates aspects of the significance of silence in different contexts, using as his point of departure Wittgenstein’s famous declaration: “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”. By considering this thought in relation to Heidegger, Ruin helps us see phenomenological nuances in Wittgenstein’s thinking more clearly.

Stephen Mulhall reflects on Heidegger’s “existential analytic of *Da-sein*”, asking how and what it takes for the humanities to acknowledge the human enigma. Mulhall’s contribution responds directly

to the text of the invitation to the conference, namely G.H. von Wright's now classic paper *Humanism and the Humanities*, the latter term of which is defined as "the totality of disciplines which study human nature and the achievements of man as being capable of culture". By the term *Humanism* he proposes "an attitude to life, an explicit or implicit philosophical anthropology", and writes that "the germ of a humanist attitude was laid when man stopped to consider his potentialities in the fight with nature to vindicate his freedom in the face of the gods". Humanism, then, stands for a philosophical interest in man and a concern for human values, above all human freedom, in the face of different naturalist attitudes toward man's place in the world. Mulhall's critique of von Wright targets the latter's all too general conception of Man which does not easily allow for the enigmatic element that resists generalization, and hence also resists a general definition of humanism and the humanities.

Lars-Olof Åhlberg is concerned with the extended range of claims of evolutionary theory in recent years, penetrating even aesthetics in the form of evolutionary psychology. Åhlberg discusses a range of highly problematic effects of introducing propagation of one's genetical material as a dominant operative in the domain of aesthetics. In particular, that approach is handicapped by a simplistic rhetoric about the function of beauty that simply ignores differentiation. Beauty was never the definitive common denominator in art and aesthetics, let alone the humanities, as some evolutionary theorists seem to believe.

Morten Kyndrup responds to the theoretical challenge of a particular work of art, namely Bill Viola's *Quintet of the Unseen*. Does this video lead to a more general revision of criteria in the domain of art and aesthetics? Kyndrup claims it does, because it promotes a displacement of emphasis such that our expectation is pushed in the direction of conceiving of pictorial art in terms of an act and activity, rather than as somehow furthering the traditional attention to the traces and marks of a painter's brush.

Astrid Söderbergh-Widding meditates on what the humanities can learn from cinema's innate making of differences: a movie camera takes one picture after another in such a way that the consecutive pic-

ture repeats the former almost completely, but only *almost* of course. What we have is a medium in which consecutive repetition makes gradual difference frame by frame. Söderbergh-Widding connects her understanding of the medium with the repetitive patterns of routine marking the everyday life of a person, repetitive patterns which likewise, potentially at least, engender change. Söderbergh-Widding discusses a number of film examples revealing the rich potential of drifting repetition and varied reversals in the setting of what Stanley Cavell refers to as “the new creation of the human.”

Joseph Margolis asks: “What is the unique mode of being that human beings manifest?” In his quest for a “definition of the Human”, Margolis sets out on a journey starting in the fixed concepts of *elenchus* articulated by Parmenides leading all the way to Wittgenstein’s “meandering” way of thinking which, without theoretical foundation, nonetheless allows for *elenchus* to thrive. However, in order to arrive at an understanding of the “human mode of being”, we have to acknowledge man as “second-natured,” the possibilities of which as yet have not been extensively explored. Giving more room for the arts as inherently applicable to *elenchus* would make a definite difference in the effort to come to grips with our characteristic mode of being.

In “The World of a Movie”, *James Conant* explores what a movie is. His example is a film that totally fails to show what a movie is, namely *Lady in the Lake*, based on Raymond Chandler’s story with the same name. The point of Conant’s *via negativa* is that it helps “render visible aspects of what kind of a thing a movie is – aspects that constitute such a natural and familiar part of our experience of movies that they have become invisible to us.” It is by way of “the nature of its difference” that this film offers such a provocative example of what a movie is. What makes *Lady in the Lake* serve Conant’s purpose of elucidation? The team behind the movie wanted an enhanced perceptual intimacy by letting the camera-eye coincide more or less completely with the eyes of the leading protagonist, a subjective camera which instead of closing the gap between the beholder and the scene rather opens an odd divide, one that is not easily negotiated.

“*Making a difference?* Of course”. *Gunnar Olsson* makes the theme of difference succinctly clear by driving his point of view right into the heart of experience where it proves to be *the* necessary prerequisite of knowledge and imagination. To *negotiate difference* is the very starting-point of humanism and the humanities, since one would not be able even to conceive of oneself, except as in the negotiated context of now-and-then and here-and-there in which one’s life is lived. This is a cartographer’s business and Gunnar Olsson guides us through uncharted and amazing mental territories.

LARS HERTZBERG

Making a Difference or Changing the World?

So what can a man do where he sees so clearly that what lies before him is not the whole plan? Answer: No more than work faithfully and actively on that part of the plan which lies before him.

G.C. Lichtenberg¹

Someone reacts *like this*: he says “Not *that!*” - & resists it. Out of this, situations perhaps develop which are equally intolerable; & perhaps by then strength for any further revolt is exhausted. We say “If *he* hadn’t done *that*, the evil would not have come about”. But with what justification? Who knows the laws according to which society unfolds? I am sure even the cleverest has no idea. If you fight, you fight. If you hope, you hope.

Someone can fight, hope & even believe, without believing *scientifically*.

Ludwig Wittgenstein²

Parents bringing up their children; teachers educating children and young people in school or at the university; citizens taking part in the life of the community or the state; politicians trying to organize our common affairs; scientists striving to develop a new technology; businessmen working to bring out some new commodity on the market; artists, clergymen, city planners, journalists – for all of them, the outcome of their efforts is in large part dependent on the actions of others which they have no power to control. How then can they retain their faith in the meaning of what they are doing? If their strivings are not taken up by others, were they not wasted? How are they to see their responsibility for the actions of others?

In short, how can our ability to see meaning in our lives survive the recognition that that we live in a changing, tumultuous world beyond our means of control?

I. Wishing to Change the World

Some people see it as their task to change the world. They will settle for nothing less. Marx wrote: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (The 11th Thesis on Feuerbach). Whether this is the first occurrence of the metaphor “to change the world” I do not know; it is certainly one of the most famous. It belongs in a tradition, by no means confined to Marxists, in which wanting to change the world is seen as a noble motive. The thesis seems to invoke a distinction between those who are content merely to live in the world, taking it as they find it, and those who have the courage, imagination and energy to want to *change* it, or who see it as their obligation to do so. The former, of course, are not just the traditional philosophers mentioned by Marx, but people in the mainstream of life, the little men and women going about their everyday business, the *petits bourgeois* in Marx’s terminology.

The world one purports to change is the “life-world” of human beings, made up of the hubbub of the lives people live. This world, of course, is largely constituted by actions, many of which, in turn, have a bearing on what others do, and which hence themselves, strictly speaking, bring about changes in the (life-)world. So if one’s ambition is to change the world, what one is aiming to do is to change something that is in itself essentially constituted by change. One wants to change the way the world changes, as it were.

“Changing the world” is a metaphor and it would be silly to pretend to take it literally. Nevertheless, it seems to be used to mark an important distinction, that between simple change and *real* change. When I set out to “change the world”, the change I bring about must be decisive, irreversible, and unquestionably for the better.

This should alert us to a problem. Bringing about a change is conceivable only against a background of permanence. On the one hand it means that, unless one had brought about the change,

things would have continued, in the relevant respect, more or less as they were before. And on the other hand, after one brings about the change, things will continue in the state to which one brought them. This points to the precariousness of any attempt to change the world. By taking action, say, against an oppressive system, I may at the same time suck away the strength from other forces of opposition, which would, perhaps, have stood a greater chance of achieving a balanced development. One might think here of Lenin and the Bolsheviks wresting the momentum of the Russian revolution from more reformist groups, thus blocking the possibility of a democratic transfer of power. And vice versa, of course: as Lenin clearly saw, small and moderate reforms may destroy the impetus for the radical change which one may deem necessary at some point in history. The German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had the same insight as Lenin though putting it to the opposite use, instituting a social welfare system in order to forestall a revolution. Or, as the young Sicilian aristocrat Tancredi says to his uncle Fabrizio, the Prince of Salino, in Giuseppe di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard*: "Unless we ourselves take a hand now, they'll foist a republic on us. If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change. D'you understand?"

Those who try to institute change may be tempted to focus on the good they are trying to achieve and give themselves leave to disregard any incident consequences. These, of course, may be hard to foresee, and the more so the more radical the change. For instance, those who fought for the emancipation of married women in the Western world in the 19th and 20th centuries may not have anticipated the devastating effect that this change, alongside all its undeniable beneficial effects, would have for the child's right to a secure family environment, in bringing with it a soaring divorce rate.

So if we wanted to measure the real importance of change, we should compare the new state of things, not with how things were before, but with how they would have been unless the change had been carried out – which, of course, is in general impossible to do. So the assessment of change is mostly not a matter of knowledge but faith. And the idea that one might *set out* to change the world is, on the whole, a fantasy. Whether a change will really come about, and

if so, whether it will be for the good, depends on *an infinitude* of circumstances which are impossible to survey.

This brings us to the world-changer's dilemma. He is committed to *consequences*: he is the utilitarian *par preference*. "You have to break some eggs if you want to make an omelette" is his motto. But he can have no way of knowing, at the start, *how* many eggs will have to be broken, or whether it will ever get beyond the breaking of eggs. The Red Brigades who kidnapped and killed Prime Minister Aldo Moro in Italy in 1978 would evidently have to shoulder the responsibility for the *whole* calculation, including the fact that at best their murder accomplished nothing at all, at worst it was a step on the path that made Italy ready for the anti-political Berlusconi regime. It won't do for them to say "up until such and such a point in time, all our calculations were right" – the world doesn't simply stop at some point. So not only did they kill a defenceless human being; *by their own standards* they failed the people of Italy.

Consequences may be unforeseen in other ways too. Hitler's imperialist wars hastened the end of European imperialism, and the conflicts he incited provided the impetus for what became the European Union. But even so, we are hardly ready to thank him.

Of course there may be moments in history where decent people can see no alternatives to bringing about change, such as the abolition of slavery in the United States, or the bringing down of the Iron curtain in Eastern Europe in 1989. The situation here is like the response to being attacked in war, where one abandons the everyday and goes to the defence of one's country without regard to the likelihood of success.

2. The Anxiety of Responsibility

A successful Finnish athlete was asked whether he had made a contribution to the relief funds after the tsunami disaster in December of 2004. He replied that even if he gave away everything he owned it would not have made any difference. Well, the journalist should not have asked, I think, but since the athlete chose to answer, we are permitted to subject his answer to scrutiny. Obviously, what he said

was literally false: even if he were a person of fairly modest means, his giving away all he owned, or even a substantial portion of it, would certainly have *made quite a difference*: so many dysentery cures, so many malaria shots, so many water purification tablets, etc.: so many lives saved. But that, of course, was not the actual question: rather, it was about giving away some small share of his income. And yet, even that would have made some difference. (It would of course be ridiculous to argue, as Peter Singer does, that failing to save a life is just as horrendous as actually killing someone; even so, failing to act *is* in many cases a moral shortcoming.) It is true that the kind of difference it would have made would not even have made a dent in the total scope of the disaster. But why should that matter? It certainly does not matter to the human beings saved.

The athlete's response, I think, strikes a cord in all of us: "The world is a horrible place for a huge number of people, and it would remain horrible even if I sacrificed all I have, gave up my entire way of life, so how can I keep my peace of mind (seeing that I, personally, have, thus far, managed not to be touched by the horror), except by shutting out the world, living in my head, cultivating my garden?" It is not really a question of begrudging the small amount of money, it is a question about opening the door to the anguished recognition that we are all responsible for each other; and that this responsibility can never be met to the full – the anguish of the lawyer who asked Jesus "who is my neighbour?" and was perhaps hoping for a hard and fast criterion. And, let's face it, most of us, for most of the time, share that anguish. One may feel that the only way of coping with the infinite suffering of humanity is to try to blot it out from view. Indeed, someone may argue that that is the only *clear-sighted* response, that, for most of us, imagining that we live, or even that we could live, in full awareness of the suffering of humanity, would itself be a form of self-deception.³

However, calling this response clear-sighted is itself, perhaps, a form of self-deception. It means judging *both* alternatives from a purely self-centred perspective as if no other perspective mattered: keeping one's peace of mind is being weighed against the supposed self-satisfaction of being active in the face of suffering. To think along

these lines is to place oneself in one's own line of vision, blocking the victims from one's view.

The athlete's response could perhaps be considered the flip-side of the world-changer's mentality. He might have been ready to chip in if there had been some guarantee that things would not continue as heretofore. The present cause was not worthy of his effort since it did not qualify as a case of world-change.

3. Making a Difference

In Frank Capra's film *It's a Wonderful Life* from 1946, which is shown every Christmas on American television, an angel, Clarence, is assigned the task of stopping the main character, George Bailey (played by James Stewart), from committing suicide. The angel is shown some flashbacks of Bailey's life. In one of them, the youthful Bailey tells his future wife of his grandiose plans:

Well, not just one wish. A whole hatful, Mary. I know what I'm going to do tomorrow and the next day and the next year and the year after that. I'm shaking the dust of this crummy little town off my feet and I'm going to see the world. Italy, Greece, the Parthenon, the Colosseum. Then I'm coming back here and go to college and see what they know . . . and then I'm going to build things. I'm gonna build air fields. I'm gonna build skyscrapers a hundred stories high. I'm gonna build bridges a mile long...

[---]

What is it you want, Mary? What do you want? You want the moon? Just say the word and I'll throw a lasso around it and pull it down. Hey, that's a pretty good idea. I'll give you the moon, Mary.

However, time and again during his life, the needs of the people around him have intervened, deflecting him from his big plans. Now, facing disaster after misplacing an \$ 8,000 loan, George Bailey is shattered by the realization how far his life has fallen short of his dreams. He wishes he had never been born. However, Clarence lets him see how his town, his family and friends would have turned out if he had

not lived. Bailey is allowed to see, literally, the difference he has made – rescuing his brother from drowning, preventing a pharmacist from causing a lethal accident, taking over his father’s loan company on which the poor people of the community are dependent.

The atmosphere of the film is undeniably somewhat saccharine (though tempered by humour). Nevertheless, it does convey a thoughtful perspective on life: I would suggest it can be viewed as an allegory of acquiring a mature relation to one’s world. The young Bailey, as it were, is ready to swallow the world whole. It is perhaps characteristic of the young (male?) person’s dreams that thoughts of what he will do for himself and what he will do for the world – experience and action – are intermingled. What life teaches him, however, is that the world does not belong to him; he belongs to the world. In his decency he is unable to turn his back on the people who depend on him and to stick to his plans. What the angel must do is to help him bring this insight to consciousness: to make him realize that his responsiveness has not made him lose but rather find himself. This realization is necessary in order to forestall bitterness. Once he has made that realization, the fact that the missing money is also retrieved is superfluous; or rather, it can be seen as symbolic of his rediscovery of himself.⁴

Bailey dreamt about changing the world, then settles for having made a difference. In doing so, he has not traded one way of being extraordinary for another, but surrenders his claim to the right to be extraordinary. I see him as an everyman: in the nature of things, I would suggest, it is given that each one of us will make some difference to the lives of those around us or those we happen to encounter, provided we do not shut ourselves off from others. To some it is given to achieve more, but that will only happen through a special dispensation. On the other hand, putting one’s life plans (or one’s *Lebensanschauung*, one’s ideology) before the way one is claimed by others would be self-centred. Bailey comes to embrace, life teaches him to embrace, an anti-utopian view of life: or rather, he comes to realize that the real utopia should be found in the centre, in our midst, not in the periphery. Thus he avoids having to pay the cost of an unresolved utopianism, which is bitterness.

People may have a psychological need to make plans, but whether those plans are fulfilled will not necessarily matter a great deal for the ways in which they will touch other people's lives. (I am not saying it could not matter.) Thus there is perhaps a deep truth in John Lennon's saying, "Life is what happens while we're busy making other plans". Indeed, I would suggest that a person may pass through life without any clear perception of the good (or the bad) she has brought into the world, though not because of any blindness on her part, but rather because her goodness (just like her badness) may lie precisely in the things she does not think about, in the decisions she does not consider. Our importance to others lies first and foremost in what we *are*. (On this account, if the world "changes" as a result of people doing the decent thing that would be an accidental byproduct.)

Bailey has joined the ranks of all those whose anonymous contributions, rather than change the world, have kept things from gradually getting infinitely worse. This theme is illustrated in another great film illustrating the nature of agency, Akira Kurosawa's *Ikiru* (1952). It is the story of a faceless bureaucrat who is told he has a terminal illness. He decides to devote his remaining days to trying to make a difference: he battles for the construction of a children's playground in a city neighbourhood. At his funeral, the city bureaucrats who had done their best to stall his project are filled with contrition as they recall his unyielding efforts to overcome their resistance. However, by degrees they talk themselves out of their guilt and into believing that the credit for the whole project actually belonged to them. The ending can be considered symbolic of the fact that many of the most important contributions to the edifice of our culture carry no copyright sign.

In answering the calls from the people around him, it might be said, Capra's George Bailey did his bit in trying to keep up the order of things. In saving his brother's life, in preventing an accidental poisoning, in rescuing the loan company, he kept the lives of those concerned from plunging into chaos. Now, "order" has a repressive ring to it, as in the catchword "law and order" often heard in the United States during the Nixon years, or in the even more ominous

associations it carries to National Socialism. But that is because of misuses of the word. A repressive regime is simply chaos in frozen form: the fact that things are static does not mean that they are in order (nor vice versa). Those who fought to abolish slavery or to bring down the Iron Curtain were not attempting to tear down an existing order but rather to enable one to grow.

When order prevails, it means that people are able to retain a sense of meaning in their everyday lives. It prevails as long as they are able to carry on their lives without having to encroach on what gives a sense to the lives of those around them. The order may be torn apart through human aggression or natural disaster, through loss, pain, guilt or humiliation. This may bring people to a state in which they feel they have nothing to lose. The only semblance of meaning they are then able to find may lie in hatred and revenge. A movement like the Palestinian Hamas seems to be an embodiment of this form of despair.⁵

Setting out to change the world is a gamble. It carries with it the risk of disrupting the existing order of things without replacing it with anything of value. In this respect it is difficult to do something that is better than doing nothing at all. In most situations, just trying to help keep up the order is the best we can do.

4. Control vs. Hope

The idea that my efforts are wasted if they do not leave a lasting mark on the world, one that I can claim as my own (which is not the same as saying that I expect to be honoured for them) places the focus on myself as the agent of change. It means acting in a spirit that demands guarantees for the result. This is one way of seeing one's responsibility for the outcome: the underlying thought is that action is only meaningful to the extent that the agent can control what will happen. Real action, in other words, is an exercise of power.

World-change, in fact, is just a special case of this. In a political context the demand for control means that measurable results are the only thing that counts, and that the methods used should have been proven effective. When this view of things is adopted it shapes all

political thought. In contemporary politics, it is expressed in the idea that the government is a caretaker, looking after the trade balance and the tax base. Politics becomes invisible. Society is here regarded under the metaphor of a mechanism. Side-effects and long-term effects are regarded as non-existent. Social engineering, we might say, is the first cousin of world-change.

However, control is not the only form that my responsibility for others may take. Consider the case of parents bringing up their children. Good parents will try to give their children all they can: they try to make sure that their children feel safe and loved, try to nourish their imagination and intellect by reading books to them, by listening to their questions and trying to answer them, etc. They go on doing that although they know that sometimes children may grow up to be miserable or antisocial in spite of having been brought up in a warm and nourishing environment. (Nor do they give any thought to what the odds of any given outcome might be.) On the other hand, a sensible person would not give up on a child just because he had been deprived of the things one considers essential. We have no right, we feel, to abandon hope (which is not the same as saying that our hope should be blind to realities). It seems that *in prospect* there are things we consider necessary for the child's growth and which we still do not consider necessary *in retrospect*.⁶

Again, we do not think of the goals of upbringing in terms of measurable results. Indeed, it could be argued that if we have definite goals in mind and a tested method for reaching them, that would be failing our responsibility as educators. We would then be treating the child as a means rather than an end in herself (that would be so even if the goal we set ourselves were the good of the child). The good parent will rather see his role as that of providing a setting that maximizes the child's chances for becoming who she is: he will strive to make a difference to the child rather than shape her. Of course, "who the child is" is not something that could be established by empirical methods; rather, the notion itself is ethically conditioned. If a child grows up to be greedy or inconsiderate, for instance, we should hardly accept that as a case of having let the child become who she was.

Let us explore this a little more closely. When children are brought up with thought and sensitivity, the form that the responsibility one assumes for the consequences of one's actions takes is different from that of *control*. The guiding principle, we might say, is *hope*. In dealing with the child, the educator is not relying on empirical evidence of the causal efficacy of a method; rather, in responding to the child he is communicating with her, trying to *make himself understood* to her. There are two aspects to this. First, the child is given the space to be, or to become, an agent in her own right. In this respect this form of influence is dialogical. But, second, the dialogue is what might be called Socratic in nature. That means that it is grounded in a conviction that when left to her own devices, the child will have the capacity to see what is best called the truth; i.e. that she will come to recognize how things stand, what is important, how a decent human being must act or cannot act.

Though in trying to make oneself understood one is not trying to mould the child, neither is one abstaining from trying to have an influence on the child. Of course abstaining from influence, too, is in many contexts a pedagogically sound course of action: we may often think the child should have a chance to make her own experiences; sometimes we may even find it reprehensible to influence the child, say, in her choice of friends. In both cases, however, a responsible parent would limit the degree of freedom. There are certainly some kinds of experience he would dissuade the child from testing, or some kinds of friend he would encourage her to avoid.

At this limit, however, if the child is not open to parental influence, the parent will have a dilemma. He may feel that the matter at hand is too important to be left to the child, and at the same time it would be unfortunate to have to use coercion (i.e. some causally efficacious method such as bribes, threats, physical force, etc). The possibility of such dilemmas, I should like to suggest, is internal to the educator's role. In calling them dilemmas, I am suggesting that there can be no formulaic solution to them: the parent will have to make his choice.

In such a case, however, to let the child have her way without even recognizing a dilemma would be an abdication from parental au-

thority (the parent may not care enough to take on the problem; he will perhaps try to belittle it). But neither would one see a dilemma if one thought of education under the aspect of control. On this conception, one would have nothing to blame oneself for provided one used the method that promised to maximize the desirable outcome at the minimum of cost. If this entailed the use of coercion that might be a drawback, but no more than a drawback.

Hope, on the other hand, unlike control, does not require guarantees of success. For someone who regards his role as educator under the aspect of hope, what he would have to scrutinize is not the reliability of the methods, but the spirit in which he was acting. This does not mean that as long as one's intentions were good, one has nothing to blame oneself for. Indeed, if *all* one was ready to bring to the situation was good intentions, those intentions weren't really all that good. But if one can honestly tell oneself that one's choices were lucid, that one had spared no effort, then even if the end result was a failure, there should be no room for guilt. These are the categories in which one will consider one's actions, when looking at them under the aspect of hope: what matters is the *spirit* in which one acts. This form of acting, we might say, involves a different logic of justification than acting under the aspect of control.

The distinction between control and hope as modes of activity may throw some light on public decision-making and on public debate about policies, legislation and the allocation of resources. For instance, on the engineering approach, the place of the humanities and the arts is precarious. Many of us are convinced, for instance, that access to works of art, music and the theatre, public support for libraries and for practising artists and scholars, the room given to art subjects in schools, make a difference to the lives people will live in our culture – maybe not to the life of each individual, still to enough people to matter, and to the overall spirit of human interaction.⁷ At the same time, we recognize that the difference it makes is not quantifiable. We may even feel suspicious of any attempt to *make* it quantifiable: as it were, to operationalize the importance of culture; in part, perhaps, because we feel that it is internal to the kind of importance culture can have that it is itself open to change: art is

constantly looking for new ways of mattering. This means that in defending the continued public support for the arts and the humanities, what needs to be resisted is the very form of argument which belongs to a politics of control.⁸ (It is no accident that world-changers, beginning with Plato, have usually had little room for the arts in their utopias, or else have assigned them to determinate tasks.)

Of course, being open to this possibility means being open to the possibility that the arts may have a destructive impact on people's lives. If the arts do make a difference, that means that those who practise them carry a burden of responsibility. The artist cannot avoid the question whether she is a force for truth, hope, human dignity, compassion, or the reverse. Of course, being a moral question, it is one that can only ultimately be asked by each individual on her own behalf. (It is paradoxical that those who like to speak about the responsibility of the artists are often also the most eager to wrest it away from them, assigning it instead to some supervisory authority – this undoubtedly is what has given the notion of the artist's responsibility a bad name.)

In this connection, one might also consider the role of the mass media. The saturation violence shown at child-friendly viewing times on television has sometimes been defended by arguing that no causal link between violent entertainment and violent behaviour has been conclusively established. Some of the parties to this debate like to hide behind the logic of control: "no known links, hence no problem". Someone who considered this business from the point of view of hope, on the other hand, might ask himself whether he would really *wish* to enrich himself by devoting his life to the continuous portrayal of ever new forms of human pain and degradation.⁹

5. Perennial Politics

Dilemmas analogous to those facing an educator have a prominent role in politics. I would even submit that the dilemmas of hope essentially constitute the arena of political disagreement. Thus, in debating the conditions of democracy or of a market economy, a central issue is this: can the general public be relied on to judge its

own needs and interests? To what extent is its judgment subject to manipulation? Do people need to be protected against themselves sometimes, or should they always be free to run their lives without outside interference? (This issue is closely connected with the contrast between negative and positive liberty famously formulated by Isaiah Berlin.) The issue cannot be answered once and for all. Apart from some academic philosophers, there are hardly any advocates for unrestricted negative liberty. It is true that after the experience of the United States and Finland, the prohibition of alcohol has been almost universally rejected, but in several countries the sale of liquor is strongly regulated. And where drugs are concerned, the advocates of legalization are few. People's attitudes towards regulation tend to depend on the particular issue, however: those who support liberal gun laws are often quite restrictive with regard to drugs, and vice versa. The advocates of liberalist policies usually argue that social problems should be resolved by the use "information", by "enlightening" the public (though it is not always quite clear how the work of enlightenment is to be done, or why it should be expected to work).

Another perennial issue to which the dilemma of hope is central is social welfare. Any policy has to be a balancing act between doing enough to protect people from hardship and not doing so much that their ability to assume responsibility for their own lives is undermined. There can hardly be an empirically grounded answer concerning the correct degree of support.

Some motives pull us in the direction of maintaining control, while others pull us in the direction of abdicating responsibility. Compassion is one of the strongest motives inclining us towards control, a classical case in point being the wife who supports her alcoholic husband, thus enabling him to keep up his drinking habit by avoiding having to face up to the truth. There are obvious analogues to this in politics. But the temptations of abdication may be strong, too. We see this in conflicts which take the form of washing one's hand of responsibility, each side expecting the other to see the truth. Labour conflicts often have this character: thus, in a health-care strike, each party may be content to blame the strike's consequences for the lives and health of patients on their opponent. A

contemporary conflict which has long had this form is that between Israel and the Palestinians: the Israelis have justified their actions as a defence against terrorism (without addressing the underlying motives), while the Palestinians have justified their attacks as aimed against the injustice of the occupation (without regard to the innocence of the victims) – while neither side has stopped to ask itself whether its present policies are really getting it where it wants to go. The temptations of abdication may also take the form of moralism, as in the proposal to combat the spread of the HIV virus through sexual abstinence (a policy that seems particularly irresponsible since the victims of contagion are often innocent: wives and children). Ecologists, too, often strike a moralist tone, as in blaming the threats to the environment on people's ignorance and greed, without assuming the burden of analysing the social and economic conditions for a more tenable development.

The dilemmas of politics cannot be resolved once and for all. Because of that, I believe, they will continue to define the sphere of politics. It is characteristic of them that different horns of the dilemmas tend to be combined with the interests of different social groups; thus, the privileged and the deprived, employers and employees, the wealthy and the poor, the fortunate and the unfortunate, will naturally align themselves with opposite sides on many of the issues. As long as privilege and fortune will tend to vary along with the roles of individuals in the life of society, these issues will be kept alive, the pendulum of opinion swinging at irregular intervals and with irregular force from one side to the other. (In this way, they differ from more particular issues like those, say, of the environment, which today, unfortunately perhaps, are not perceived as having a bearing on the lives of any group in particular, but will – if the environmentalists are right – sooner or later be of equal concern to all.)

It may sound as if I am saying that nothing ever really changes. But this is not my point. Perhaps the misleading word is “really”. It is true that the individual's *ambition* to change the course of history is vain at best and destructive at worst. But if we stop looking for “real” change and look around us instead, we will notice that, like it or not, things are continually changing; and that we will constantly feel called upon

to start certain things changing or to stop other things from changing. And, if we are lucky, a great number of these startings and stoppings may combine to bring about a big change for the better: an improved order of things. But we are not always so lucky.

Notes

- 1 Quoted in M. O’C. Drury, *The Danger of Words* (London, 1973), p. 115.
- 2 *Culture and Value*, p. 69e (13.4.1947), (2nd ed.; Oxford, 1998).
- 3 This line of thought is sometimes brought forward in defence of Finland’s niggardly attitude to refugees (in this respect Finland has one of the worst records in Europe): “we can’t take care of them all, so what’s the use of saving just a few?” This will occasionally be backed up by the do-no-gooders’ ultimate alibi: “Anyway, *you* only want to help them so you can be pleased with yourself.”
- 4 Sidney Lumet’s film *The Pawnbroker* illustrates a similar theme from a very different point of view. In it, a holocaust survivor who has lost all his family in a death camp lives out his life as a pawnbroker in New York. He feels he has had to pay more than his share and is entitled to turn his back on he world, until he is brutally awakened by the murder of someone who was dependent on him. What the film illustrates, I would suggest, is that the world has the power to claim us as long as we go on existing.
- 5 I will not, in the present context, discuss the complex etiology of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But it is clear that the history of this conflict is an example of the type of chain-reaction that is often caused by a disruption of order; going back, in this case, to the Roman conquest of Palestine. Simone Weil’s thoughts about the disastrous consequences of being uprooted are relevant in this connection. See her book *The Need for Roots* (London, 1995; French original *L’Enracinement*, published in 1949).
- 6 For a view of education similar to that suggested here, see R. F. Holland’s essays, “Education and Values” and “Education and the Spirit” in his *Against Empiricism* (Oxford, 1980).
- 7 Those defending the importance of the arts will also have to contend with anecdotes such as those about the death camp commander who went home and read his Goethe after a day’s work of slaughtering people. But that is a problem only for someone who imagines that the impact of art on people’s consciences is somehow magical, independent of what the reader himself brings to the encounter. Especially, an officer who reads Goethe because among German officers one is supposed to read Goethe rather than because he is seeking for ways in which literature might challenge him is not likely to take away a great deal from the experience.

- 8 This realization has unfortunately tempted some advocates of the humanities to use even more corrupt forms of justification, as in appealing to the use of the humanities for political “identity-building”.
- 9 The logic of control sometimes provides an alibi for those in power. After the scandal concerning the torture and degradation of prisoners by American forces in Iraq had broken in 2004, the military authorities were quick to declare that they had not ordered the illegal treatment. I will not raise the question how credible those denials were. What I find interesting is the restricted terms in which the authorities regarded the issue of responsibility, and in which it was also regarded by the press. The authorities failed to acknowledge their responsibility for maintaining an organization in which such dehumanizing practices were possible and widespread. They were blind to the matter of spirit. It is perhaps a sign of the times that the press concurred in this view of the issue.

SÖREN STENLUND

Philosophy and Critique of Culture

I

There has been an increased interest in history and in other cultures during the last decades. This interest appears to be not only an internal academic matter, but to be connected with experiences of crisis and change in society at large in recent years. It has certainly influenced research in the humanities. New orientations of study have been initiated that can be seen as a response to a growing need for historical consciousness, and its expected significance for important issues in our present situation.

There is also a discussion about the relevance and value of historical and humanistic knowledge for contemporary culture. The concern with such issues is connected with an increased awareness that the historical past is not a morally and politically neutral subject matter. The kind of questions that have been asked in humanistic studies and the way they have been stated and answered can, in many cases, be seen to be conditioned by attitudes and prejudices of the present. There are also discussions about more or less suspect usage of historical material: for commercial purposes, in the creation of myths, in entertainment, and in political propaganda. And there are reasons to expect that these kinds of uses of historical material are increasing.

So there is an important *critical task* for the humanities, one that could, I believe, become much more extensive and important than it is at present. There is extensive humanist knowledge and numerous studies within the humanities that have not been used to improve our understanding of the present situation, but which could, I would like to think, be used for such critical purposes.

Having some experience of the administration of research in the humanities at this university, I have been struck by the great amount of humanist knowledge that has been accumulated, but which is never put to use – except perhaps for generating more academic knowledge of the same kind. So despite the new orientations in humanist research, it is still all too rare that humanist studies are related to, and shown to be significant for, important issues in wider human contexts than in the academic specialties where they are produced. What often happens is rather that the new orientations establish themselves as new academic specialties, alongside the traditional ones. But then they also tend to lose their creative spirit and become more concerned with internal issues.

There appears to be a difference here between the humanities and the social and behavioural sciences. Why is it that ideas and results of research in the social and behavioural sciences have received wider use and application outside academic contexts? Perhaps it is due to the prevailing dominance of political and economic perspectives in the public sphere – perspectives that tend to define what we take to be the most important and urgent issues in life?

Another reason may be that the humanities are still strongly connected with a somewhat untimely ideal of classical humanist education, i.e., the idea that human beings should develop into free and self-conscious personalities on the basis of humanistic education. It is supposed that someone who has acquired humanist “cultivation of the soul”, will also be able, and *inclined*, to see its relevance for important contemporary issues.

This idea has not worked out well in times when professional skill and various forms of formal competence are the dominating goals of education. When a spirit dominates in which we all should be trained to become functionaries of some sort, it is difficult to see the relevance and usefulness of classical humanist education – except perhaps for our recreation, as a more sophisticated form of entertainment, as decorative elements in various situations, or as means for private advancement in career or social status.

What I would like to suggest is that the main relevance and value of humanist knowledge and scholarship for contemporary culture

lies in its use for critical purposes. I believe that the humanities could play a much more important role in contemporary official life if the critical task was taken more seriously. It is an important task in our days of rapid communications and flow of information, when we tend to become victims of ideas and attitudes of all sorts. Our entry into the 'knowledge and information society' has not made people less confused about their situation, on the contrary, I would say that the bewilderment has increased.

It seems to me that humanist scholars tend to neglect to *show* how humanistic knowledge could be *used* for making visible important current issues for which humanist knowledge *would make a great difference*. Knowledge of history and of other forms of life can be used to disclose new possibilities that contrast with actual conditions, and with our attitudes and ways of thinking in the present. It is often through a sense of new possibilities opening up before us that we become aware of our prejudices and of the burdens that oppress us.

But I am not suggesting that we should go into service of politics. The critical task is rather to articulate issues and problems that are *not* on the political agenda, problems that are difficult to articulate and tend to resist our recognition. I am not suggesting that it is only more information about humanist research that is needed; I am not saying that everything would be all right if the results were popularised or arranged to suit a wider audience, or if humanist scholars were taking part to a greater extent in public discussions as, for instance, in French intellectual life. It's a change of attitude within the humanities I would like to see. The critical potential of humanistic knowledge would have to show itself in examples, and there *are* good examples, but they are rarely taken as exemplary of the critical attitude that is my concern here (and that I shall say more about soon).

II

That the critical task is not taken more seriously in the humanities may be due to the dominance in several humanistic disciplines of some form of the methodological orientation of scientific empiricism, ac-

ording to which it is believed that we are in possession of a neutral framework for objectively describing and accounting for events and changes of the historical past. It is believed that we are in general capable of describing, for instance, a certain change in the intellectual or social life of 18th century without any evaluative claims being involved in the descriptions; or, if there should be evaluations involved, it is believed that we are aware of them and have full control over them. But when we can see examples of historical accounts where prejudices of the present have blocked our understanding of events in the past, that belief becomes very doubtful. Our alleged neutrality is problematic also, in view of the fact that the events and changes that occurred in the 18th century (in science and art as well as in political and social life) have deeply influenced and shaped our present-day situation, so a more serious self-critical attitude is called for.

Another reason for the neglect of the critical task seems to be confusions about the very notion of criticism or critique. There are current uses of the terms that appear to be strongly influenced by political ways of thinking. Criticism tends to be connected with struggle between parties, or between representatives of conflicting opinions or interests. A critical attitude is often taken to be a dismissive, negative and destructive attitude. 'Criticism' is often understood as mere blame, or as a practice of fault-finding, and not as a process of submitting something to closer examination in order to find better grounds for judgement, which is closer to the original sense of the word.

In its original sense, criticism is the art of judging; its function was that of testing a given circumstance for its validity, so as to arrive at a judgement based on the insight won. According to the historian Reinart Koselleck,

the terms 'critique' and 'criticism', as well as related terms in English, French and German, established themselves in the seventeenth century. What was meant by critique was the art of objective evaluation – particularly of ancient texts, but also of literature and art, as well as of nations and individuals.¹

In view of the theme of this conference, it may be interesting to note that the terms were initially used in this sense by the Humanists.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the sense of criticism was widened. It was not confined to philological, aesthetic or historical concerns but became, more generally, the art of arriving at proper insights through rational thought, which involved the use of all areas of human knowledge and history. The French philosopher Pierre Bayle, who died 1706, appears to have been an important figure in creating the eighteenth century sense of criticism, where criticism is seen as the general medium in the search for truth. One of his main achievements is said to have been to wed the concept of criticism to that of reason. Criticism, for Bayle, becomes the essential function of reason.

'Criticism' became an eighteenth-century catchword. There are countless volumes with the term 'criticism' or 'critical' in their titles. And it is interesting to learn that the words 'critical' and 'rational' were often used interchangeably. Reason becomes a critical process in the search for truth. In his book about the Enlightenment, Ernst Cassirer writes:

The whole eighteenth century understands reason in this sense; not as a sound body of knowledge, principles and truths, but as a kind of energy, a force which is fully comprehensible only in its agency and effects.²

Another important and influential person for the creation of the eighteenth-century sense of criticism was, of course, Voltaire. Pierre Bayle, as well as Voltaire, emphasise the non-political nature of criticism. They consciously exclude the sphere of criticism from politics in order to secure the internal laws of criticism. The political sphere and the State were nevertheless subjected to the judgement of criticism. According to the story that Koselleck tells in his book *Critique and Crisis*, this is the root of the ambivalence of criticism that eventually leads to the decline of criticism into self-delusion and presumption among Enlightenment intellectuals after Voltaire: ostensibly non-political and above politics, criticism nevertheless be-

came political, although, at first, only secretly. Criticism became the victim of its own ostensible neutrality and turned into hypocrisy. Koselleck goes so far as to say the following:

By abolishing privilege, the Enlightenment discards all taboos, causing everything to be sucked into the maelstrom of the public gaze. [...] everything becomes ideologically alienated to the degree that it becomes public. The yearning for naturalness, for a return to nature, is merely a symptom of this development. The day will come when even the type of trousers worn will assume political significance. The at first politically motivated secrecy gave rise to an uncontrollable and secret power of criticism which alienated all expressions of life.³

By the end of the eighteenth century, the political aspiration of criticism is no longer a secret. In the preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant asserts the pre-eminence of criticism over politics as well as over religion. He writes: "Our age is, in especial degree, the age of criticism, and to criticism everything must submit."⁴

Koselleck makes the following comment on this:

Criticism, which had initially kept itself apart from the State so as to be able to function unimpededly, now, by virtue of its own authority, eradicated the boundary line it had once drawn. In the course of its critical self-justification, the claim of critical reason to pre-eminence over the State also became clearly visible. The dominance of criticism over the public assumed political dignity. [...]

This turn changed the heretofore silent and secret role of supreme authority of criticism to a freely and openly proclaimed one. However, the question of sovereignty remained unresolved. So long as the State did not submit to it, critical reason continued to be political criticism.⁵

Koselleck does not develop his suggestion about the political significance of Kant's philosophy in any detail, but there are other commentators who have tried to show, not only that Kant's critical

philosophy has had a deep influence on later political theory, but also that Kant's critical philosophy, even *the Critique of Pure Reason*, is politically significant. It has been pointed out, for instance, that Kant often describes the nature and purpose of critique in political terms and metaphors.⁶ And in Kant's own political writings, it is clear that he means that the philosopher's judgement ought to guide the decisions of kings. But, on the other hand, he did not think that philosophers should become kings. He says, for instance, that "power corrupts the free judgement of reason."

What I find most interesting in Koselleck's account is his description of the growing political importance attached to the concept of criticism in the eighteenth century, as being at the same time a *moral decline* of the idea and practice of criticism. His basic idea is that the separation, or the line drawn, between morality and politics was a precondition of criticism, and a division that criticism had created in order to function independently of the established political authorities. But as soon as critics believe themselves to be in possession of the secure path to the highest truth and values, criticism declines into politics, into aspirations of the right to legislate human life and reality. Something similar is true, it seems to me, of several critical practices of our own time.

III

Returning to contemporary views of criticism, there are, aside from notions influenced by political ways of thinking, conceptions of critique influenced by a sort of technological spirit. In many textbooks on scientific method, the notions of criticism and critical thinking are connected with, and even defined as, the use of certain techniques and formal methods: argumentation theory, hypothesis testing, decision theory, or methods for problem-solving. There is even an established discipline called 'critical thinking', in which textbooks are published where critical thinking is defined as the mastery and use of certain *skills* that someone may acquire as a formal competence.

Mastering skills and techniques of this kind may, of course, be

useful in certain sorts of critical investigations, but a one-sided exercise of such techniques may result in exactly the reverse of critical thinking. Excessive confidence in any specific technique or method whatsoever is not a sign of a serious critical attitude.

So what is then 'a serious critical attitude'? What is it about critique that does not allow itself to be captured in techniques, formal methods, or in theoretical or methodological principles? – My answer is *that there is a moral dimension in critique*; issues of the critic's honesty, responsibility and fairness of judgement are involved in the critical process.

Now, what does this mean? And in what way does it explain why critique tends to evade being characterised by theoretical or methodological principles?

The moral dimension has to do with the critical thinker's conception of 'self'; his or her identity as a critic, and also with the feature of all good critique that it is seriously open to self-critique. The possibility of self-critique tends to become delimited in a critical practice that is defined by theoretical or methodological principles. In the striving to legitimate such a critical practice, its principles and premises tend to be taken, not only as intellectual instruments, but also as *norms* for approaching and regarding the object of criticism, and this affects the critic's 'self'. As norms, they become, so to speak, the limits of his self as a critical thinker, the way he sees things, is open to things, finds things possible or impossible, etc. And when the critic engages in a specific critical enterprise concerning some important issue, it will be – very much as with many politicians – from his critical position, as an advocate of his critical practice, and not in his capacity as a human being who may not yet have settled all questions about his self and his world.

It appears to me that when criticism becomes an instrument for political aims, or a struggle between positions and parties, or a mere expertise of techniques, what is often lost is the moral dimension. I would like to suggest that one common feature of the best examples of critical work is that the position and the attitudes of the critic, as a human being, are not excluded from the examination. The critic approaches the object of his criticism as something in which he has

to recognise something of himself, as something he has a part in and that is a matter of his own concern. And he is prepared to deal with the faults or misconceptions he finds as his own faults or misconceptions.

To submit something to critique, in this sense, is not to submit to a power, norm or authority outside of ourselves. It is to submit to a process that also involves self-examination. Critique is therefore inseparable from self-critique, from a process of self-correction, not only of our views or opinions but also of the self-image that may accompany them. To engage in critique is therefore to engage in work on oneself, a work that may change oneself. This is an aspect of critique that Nietzsche emphasises when he calls it “the art of transfiguration”.⁷

I spoke earlier of the critical *task* of the humanities, but in calling it ‘a task’, I was not referring to the formal duties of the university regulations. I was not thinking of that task primarily as a professional duty. The attitude of academic professionalism, in which we tend to act and respond in our capacity as experts or specialists in certain disciplines and areas, is perhaps the most common way of leaving out issues of our honesty as individuals. The presence of the moral dimension would seem to require our presence, not only as professionals, but also as individual human beings in the critical process.

The features of critique that I have described here may not characterise everything we would call ‘critique’, but they are essential features of critical work that has been important in the past, and of which I would like to see more in the present. Critique would then concern itself with issues that are important and essential for human beings living in the present, in the sense that they may make a difference for who we are and want to be. This is not to say that these issues are necessarily officially recognised as the important and essential ones according to the prevailing standards of political correctness. Issues of the latter kind, and the way they are framed, are often a function of our official self-image, which we may find reasons to call into question.

IV

What would then be an example of an important issue, a problematic circumstance of the present that would motivate new critical work about contemporary culture in the humanities? – I think that the example I have already touched upon is a good one; namely, the defective self-confidence within the humanities about what one can accomplish in improving our understanding of our present situation and thereby hopefully enable a healthy change of our practices. This is a good example to start with, since low self-esteem appears to me to be not just an internal academic problem, but rather a feature of “the mood of the times”, a manifestation of a more general lack of self-confidence in contemporary culture. Doubt about ourselves and about the future appears not to be restricted to academic intellectuals and certain artists in our times.

In an interesting paper about the recent discussion of the concept of reason, the English philosopher Nikolas Kompridis gives a diagnosis of the spirit of contemporary culture that appears to me to be very much to the point.⁸ He says that

‘the mood of the times’ is one which manifests a considerable fatalism in the face of massive change – change which is experienced as happening *to* us, rather than initiated *by* us.⁹

Isn't it a quite common attitude, in many areas of contemporary culture, including the universities, that our main concern should be to adapt ourselves to allegedly unavoidable changes and to a development towards a predestined future? In earlier times, there were authorities who claimed to know the will of God or the verdicts of Tribunal of Reason, and who could tell us what to do on that basis. Today, experts of various kinds who claim to know the future, give advice about what “strategy” to follow in order not to be left behind, and we are assured that there is not much we can do to influence a historically necessary development.

This fatalistic attitude manifests a widespread decline of confidence in our capacity to think for ourselves; it expresses a doubt

concerning our capacity to understand and influence our reality. In its worst manifestations it takes the form of an ironist attitude characterized by an inability to identify with one's social reality. And, as already suggested, I think we can see manifestations of this lack of confidence in the humanities as well.

It might seem as though the new orientations of research in the humanities are exceptions here, in particular the growing interest in recent decades in so-called 'theory'. I am thinking of the influence of trends of radical criticism, such as deconstruction, redescription, genealogy, new historicism, neopragmatism, constructivism, certain forms of feminist theory, postcolonial theory, etc. Are not these enterprises expressions of a desire towards increased self-consciousness? Have they not contributed to a better understanding of our situation through penetrating critique? I am inclined to say yes, to some extent, perhaps even to a great extent, but there is also, I am afraid, a sense in which these intellectual trends have somehow confirmed the fatalistic attitude and justified doubt concerning our capacity for self-determination.

This has to do with the nature and purpose of the form of critique that has been called *unmasking* critique, and that has become, despite differences in various orientations, a dominating sense of critique within the mentioned trends of 'theory' in the human sciences. There has been a one-sided emphasis on unmasking critique that makes it sometimes look as though all we can do is to expose false ideals, misleading analogies, repressive practices and exclusionary identities according to patterns of critical argument that proceed in ways that tend to become more and more predictable and unrelated to real-life concerns.

Unmasking critique is not new in our times. It has been a constituent element in most critical works in philosophy in the past. Unmasking critique has certainly made us wiser. Some of the great critics have made us aware of the degree to which unconscious factors may influence and shape our notions, discourses and practices; we are more aware, for instance, of the extent to which power can operate in the production of truth and knowledge; and thanks to good critical work, we have learned a great deal about how forms

of language can bewitch and constrain our thinking, and we have become more aware of the extent to which our prejudices of the present can influence our conception of the past, etc.

This sort of wisdom and its applications become problematic, however, when the forms of criticism in which it was originally achieved are turned into academic genres of critique and commentary, and the insights are recast as established and legitimated academic knowledge. This transformation often means that insights are taken out of their problem-context and are detached from the *human concern* that motivated the original critical engagement. At that distance from the actual experience of the issues in question, the critique tends to acquire the form of theses or theories or doctrines, and sometimes of slogans and battle-cries in struggles that are more of a political than an existential nature. And I believe that many theses and doctrines of this sort are held to be established truths within current so-called theory in the humanities. Since many of them express limitations and doubt about human reason and language, about the thinking subject, about our capacity to know and understand, they tend to support and justify the fatalistic attitude mentioned before, and to undermine our self-reliance.

Am I suggesting, then, that these theses and doctrines are *not* true? – No, what I want to say is rather that they are *misused* when they are given, more or less, the status of established academic knowledge, of general theses or doctrines.

To give you an idea of what sort of theses and doctrines I have in mind, I can mention, for instance, the following ones, of which there are many variations in the literature:

Scientific truth is made by scientists, not determined by the world.

Validity claims in science as well as in philosophy are tacit, and culturally conditioned, claims of power.

Our language is inherently metaphysical.

The role of reason and rationality is only justificatory, incapable of harbouring genuine change of our practices and ways of thinking.

Most of these theses, and similar ones, have originated in philosophy. In philosophy, however, statements like these are only rough summaries of an aspect of a way of thinking. Taken in isolation from that way of thinking, their content is not clear enough to be regarded as expressions of fundamental truths. It is not clear what they really mean, what difference they would make if they were true. Taken in isolation they may even be misleading.¹⁰ As they stand, they are at most suggestive ideas, questions, problems for further investigation, and not established basic premises for justifying or questioning scientific practices.

Related to this is also the fact that the best examples of unmasking critique in philosophy were addressed to its readers as individual human beings in their thinking and reflection about themselves and their world.¹¹ The great critical thinkers wrote for other (not necessarily great) thinkers. The good models of critique in philosophy were meant to be used in our thinking, which is something we do as individuals, and for this reason their form of presentation, the style in which they were written, their rhetorical features, their tones of voice, were integral to them.¹² But when they are rendered in the language of academic 'theory', an important element of critique is lost, in particular its *creative element*.

The presence of a creative element, of new light being shed on some issue and new possibilities being disclosed, I would call a common feature of the best critical work in our intellectual tradition. A critical attack on a false ideal or mistaken view is successful only when the mistaken view is *dissolved* in the new light shed on the issue. Only in that sense can the target of criticism be *destroyed*. Only in that sense can critique be both negative and positive, destructive and creative at the same time. Its aim then is not some sort of general truth or knowledge, but transformation, a change in our ways of thinking and regarding things.¹³

When critique becomes a one-sided unmasking critique, when its creative element is lost and it becomes an end in itself, it will no longer destroy the allegedly false ideals, views and attitudes it attacks, because it still needs them as its targets, just as a political movement needs its adversaries; the false and bad views are still needed

to motivate the critical practice and its future. And then the targets of criticism tend to attain the status of necessities, manifestations of unavoidable “defects” or limitations of reason, language or life. The necessary limitations acquire the status of *foundations* for the unmasking critical practices.¹⁴

Many of the theses held to be true within current theory in the humanities have this status of foundation for some critical practice or orientation. This shows itself most clearly when the advocates of the critical practices are concerned with securing the academic legitimacy of their critical enterprises and are anxious to nail down their basic convictions and premises.

A remarkable thing about this endeavour is that some form of the thesis of anti-foundationalism is, at the same time, one of the theses held to be firmly true by most of the intellectual trends of theory. But this self-contradictory situation is also seen by some critics as an important and unavoidable destiny that we must live with.

Various manifestations of the Enlightenment faith in reason, such as foundationalism, have been targets of unmasking critique. There is one Enlightenment idea, however, that has not been questioned, but is rather driven to extremes in contemporary unmasking critique, even at the cost of self-referential paradox, namely, the idea of the sovereignty of critique, the idea that “to criticism everything must submit”, as Kant expressed it.

Influential orientations of contemporary critique tend to understand sovereignty as the possibility and legitimacy of totalizing a critical practice, which is, I am inclined to say, a manifestation of a political way of thinking. The sovereignty of criticism is understood as the universal applicability of a certain critical method or technique or style of writing, regardless of the context or subject matter to which it is applied, and regardless of whether a certain critical enterprise is motivated by something beyond the mere performance of the totalizing critique. The alleged sovereign critical practice becomes – like certain political maxims – a basis for redescribing and imposing external requirements on *any* subject matter. Totalizing becomes an expression of the requirement of having everything under full control.

Kant's original idea that everything must be submitted to criticism must not be understood as telling us to act, or design our critical practices in a *particular* way, but rather as the expression of an ideal, something similar to an ethical attitude, and primarily the attitude of anti-dogmatism: dogmatism is a source of untruthfulness and unfair judgement, and even of conflict and war; let us not fall victims to dogmatism, but always try to think for ourselves.

This is not to say that any *one* specific method, thesis, or principle of criticism is always applicable. It may be understood as saying, rather, the opposite: don't rely blindly on any method, principle or technique; try to think for yourself.

I have argued that good models of critical work tend to decline and lose their importance and creativity when they are turned into academic practices. But I don't think that this must happen with some sort of necessity; I can very well imagine a change in the humanities towards a new spirit of increased self-confidence and greater concern for issues of importance in wider contexts. In fact, believe and hope that such a change will come very soon.

Notes

- 1 Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis. Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Oxford/New York/Hamburg: Berg Publishers Ltd, 1988), p. 105.
- 2 Quoted from Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, p. 108.
- 3 Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, p. 116.
- 4 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith, unabridged edition (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1965), p. 9n.a.
- 5 Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*. p. 121
- 6 Kimberly Hutchings, *Kant, Critique and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).
- 7 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, transl. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 35.
- 8 This paper owes much to the work of Nicolas Kompridis, especially to his paper "Reorienting Critique. From Ironist Theory to Transformative Practice", *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, vol. 26 no 4, pp. 23-47. Kompridis is, however, much more optimistic about politics than I am in this paper.

- 9 Nicolas Kompridis, "So We Need Something Else for Reason to Mean", *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 8(3), p. 273.
- 10 Confronted with the thesis "Reason is power" Michel Foucault said in an interview: "You must understand that is part of the destiny common to all problems once they are posed: they degenerate into slogans. [...] you have to understand that when I read – and I know it has been attributed to me – the thesis, "Knowledge is power," or "Power is knowledge," I begin to laugh, since studying their relation is precisely my problem. If they were identical, I would not have to study them and I would be spared a lot of fatigue as a result." Michael Kelly, *Critique and Power, Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1994), pp. 132-133.
- 11 This is not to say that they are only 'for private use'. I don't think that the deep-going and complex bonds between our private and social identities permit that sort of demarcation, except perhaps in a superficial sense.
- 12 For this reason, one might say that the ethical-existential dimension of critique is also an aesthetic dimension.
- 13 In Heideggerian language, this 'creative element' appears to be what is called 'world-disclosing', a notion that is meant (I suppose) to give the matter a more ontological ring and to avoid the overtones of romanticism and aestheticism of the notion of creativity. I am, however, not comfortable with the term 'world-disclosing' since it gives the impression that we have to do with something extraordinary. A great creative achievement, however, may consist simply in reminding us of a few everyday trivialities, *at the right moment*.
- 14 Nietzsche seems to have had something similar in mind when he said "We can only destroy as creators". *The Gay Science*, transl. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 122. And it seems to me that there is also some truth in the converse, in the sense that genuine creative achievements only arise from within a critical engagement. This has been lost and overlooked in the prevailing sense of culture as decorative culture, culture as consisting of items for consumption.

SABINA LOVIBOND

Is Humanism a Thing of the Past?

I

I had better begin with a word on how my title relates to the large family of meanings attaching to the word ‘humanism’ in philosophical and literary discussion. My immediate concern will not be with humanism in the sense of a systematic ethical outlook – a candidate, perhaps, to fill the gap left by traditional religion – but instead with the educational side of the concept.

Anyone engaged (as I am, some of the time) in the teaching of Greek philosophy may well feel that there is something problematic in the cultural position that they occupy. Problematic because, on one hand, this particular teaching role absorbs one *de facto* into the business of transmitting to the next generation what has been known since the Renaissance as the “humanist” tradition; and because, on the other, to be identified today as a “philosopher” is inevitably to be exposed to the force of those theoretical *anti*-humanist considerations which rose to prominence in the social sciences over the last third of the twentieth century. Professional classicists, in Britain at any rate, are quick to insist on the vitality of their discipline and on the healthy level of public interest that exists today in Latin and Greek and in the associated ancient cultures, despite the virtual disappearance of these languages from our public education system; and for all I know they may be right. But beyond the somewhat opportunistic suggestion that classical literature is dripping with sex and violence, and thus not “boring”, there seems to be no very clear consensus in our own time as to the value or purpose of studying it, and this is the question I want to take as my point of departure

– though any results arrived at will also have a bearing on our attitude to the “classic” texts of more recent times, both fictional and non-fictional.

At the heart of our discussion must be the belief, or lack of belief, in something intellectually and aesthetically exemplary at the origin of western civilization: a permanent standard of excellence in human expression which the heirs of that civilization have a duty to keep in view. Historically, it is this idea that has supplied the impetus to reconstruct and interpret whatever texts have come down to us from the Graeco-Roman world, including (in principle) not just acknowledged masterpieces but works held to be of limited merit in themselves; the proposed object of contemplation has been the ancient world as a uniquely significant cultural whole, whose claim on our attention has been felt to extend all the way to the outskirts of the realm of value discernible within it. But even such an undeferential student as Nietzsche, who says that “[i]t is really only quite a small number of books of antiquity which count for anything in my life” and that “the most famous are not among them” (for example, he has no time for Plato), goes on to proclaim: “One will recognize in my writings ... a very serious ambition for *Roman* style, for the *aere perennius* in style”.¹ This is an allusion to Horace, *Odes* III, 30 (*Exegi monumentum aere perennius*: “I have completed a monument more durable than bronze”, namely the poet’s own work), which Nietzsche is in effect endorsing (since Horace is one of the ancient authors he admires) as the correct assertion of a timeless achievement.

In the nineteenth century such points of reference were to a certain extent the common property of educated people, or rather of educated men, in western Europe. A recent book by Christopher Stray on the sociology of classical education in England reports that in 1858 the philosopher Henry Sidgwick, then aged 20, went on a walking holiday in Wales with a friend, Edward Bowen, who apparently reminisced about the trip as follows:

I remember one little inn where we stayed to get lunch ... something suggested a quotation from Horace, and that another, till we fell to an eager competition as to who could begin some stanza of the Ode that

the other could not finish; ... and the attack and defence beguiled the hungry interval, and indeed raged so hotly that the face of the landlord, when he entered with our meal[,] was that of a man who thinks he is witnessing a scene neither comprehensible nor perfectly sane.²

Stray is, on the whole, rather censorious about this kind of thing; his book is heavily laden with remarks about the “gentlemanly” ethos of Victorian classical learning, and after solemnly explaining that the Sidgwick-Bowen episode illustrates the phenomenon of “intense relationships in which classical authors could be used for communication in a kind of subcultural ‘deep play’” (not that I know what the “sub” prefix is doing here), he suggests that the main point of interest reflected in Bowen’s story is the “insulation of the classically educated from the ordinary world and its inhabitants”³ (in this case, the pub landlord). What I, for my part, find more remarkable about this story is simply the evidence it provides of the two men’s immersion in Horace – an immersion which was not just the pet project of a couple of enthusiasts (for as such, of course, it could still exist today), but rather something undergone by each in his early years as a token of group membership, the group in question consisting of those (admittedly few) people selected by social contingency and natural aptitude as trustees, in their own generation, of a text believed to be “*aere perennius* in style”.

There is more than one way in which a present-day reader might receive an impression of remoteness from Sidgwick and Bowen’s Horace game. First of all there is the exclusionary aspect emphasized by Stray: the joint rehearsal of a very distinctive bit of shared culture, not just for the sake of mental exercise – indeed, we will search Stray’s account in vain for some recognition of the sheer learning and cleverness of what these two men were doing – but as a celebration of their intimacy, their “intense relationship”, which undoubtedly turns at this moment on membership of a privileged educational community. (If another man had entered the room and proved himself able to join in, one can be sure the new encounter would not have ended there.) I believe this tradition of scholarship mediated by a sort of country house-party atmosphere of fooling around among

friends lasted well into the twentieth century in England. We find echoes of it, for example, in J. L. Austin's (1957) treatment of the conceptual distinction between doing something "by accident" and "by mistake":

You have a donkey, so have I, and they graze in the same field. The day comes when I conceive a dislike for mine. I go to shoot it, draw a bead [i.e. a gun] on it, fire: the brute falls in its tracks. I inspect the victim, and find to my horror that it is *your* donkey. I appear on your doorstep with the remains, and say – what? 'I say, old sport, I'm awfully sorry, &c., I've shot your donkey *by accident*? Or '*by mistake*'?'⁴

Personally, I love this passage, but I sense that the humour may depend to some extent on familiarity with "middle-brow" English comic writers such as P. G. Wodehouse or Jerome K. Jerome, a familiarity which Austin could probably count upon in his original audience. I doubt if any British philosopher publishing today would allow himself (or herself) such flights of fancy, these being repressed *ab initio* by that authorial superego which reminds us that we must now picture "the reader" as someone whose first language may not be English, or who, if a native English speaker, should not be presumed to have read anything in particular for fun. So what is in question here is the disappearance of a certain local "humanism", on one hand highly parochial and exclusive, on the other wayward and hedonistic, through which certain specialized forms of learned communication were facilitated.

II

But to return to Sidgwick and Bowen, the other factor that comes between ourselves and the Horace game is, I think, the very idea of the *aere perennius* or of expressive "monuments" which are for all time because they represent the highest level of human literary accomplishment. Horace's *Odes*, in the educational world that sustains the game, are worth dinning into the memory because those who know have (so to speak) awarded them a mark of alpha and because

it is assumed that “[w]hat we want [from education or culture]”, in the roughly contemporary words of Matthew Arnold,

is a fuller harmonious development of our humanity, a free play of thought upon our routine notions, spontaneity of consciousness, sweetness and light ... what we are concerned for ... is simply the enabling ourselves, by getting to know, whether through reading, observing or thinking, the best that can at present be known in the world, to come as near as we can to the firm intelligible law of things, and thus to get a basis for a less confused action and a more complete perfection than we have at present.⁵

Our estrangement from this aspect of the game is due in part to the (“post-colonial”) awareness that Europe is just one part of the earth’s surface and its cultural history just one chapter in a larger account of the collective human experience, which presumably no individual person is competent to give, or at any rate not in the sort of terms that would support genuinely synoptic comparative judgements of *aere perennius* value. But it is also due to our exposure (direct or otherwise) to anti-humanist theoretical considerations of the kind associated with Althusserian Marxism and with the work of thinkers such as Lacan, Foucault and Derrida, who in their different ways have called into question the belief in a universal essence of humanity, and with it the idea of moral and political effort as aiming at the actualization of that essence, or of artistic expression as striving to give it a voice.

For present purposes, the main interest of this development lies in the challenge presented to idealistic cultural values – and hence to those values that inform traditional literary education – by the proposal that we should understand the subject (of thought, speech or action) not as a point of origin but as an effect of ideological formations, linguistic systems or power structures. This proposal, implying as it does the historical specificity of each and every form assumed by the “human”, seems to be inherently subversive of the belief in classical standards of artistic or intellectual excellence – a belief that is no doubt rightly regarded by its detractors as indebted

to Platonic-Aristotelian “essentialism”, meaning the doctrine that humanity (or “man”), along with other kinds of being, participates in a natural teleology whereby the proper aim of each is to become in actuality what it is potentially or “in principle”. To the extent that we heed the proposal in question, therefore, the “monuments” of humanist education will come to be seen no longer purely – or perhaps even primarily – as objects to be appraised in terms of values internal to themselves, but rather as items located within a structure of linguistic and/or social relations, and thus potentially exposed to the critical impact of categories indifferent or alien to their authors. Stray’s insistence on the “gentlemanly” identity promoted by classical education in nineteenth-century England provides a not particularly subtle example of this tendency. More generally, though, the increasingly consensual or commonsensical “feel” of the idea that cultural genres have their respective class affiliations seems to be connected (and here again I can speak only from the experience of life in Britain) with an attitude of hostility towards anything perceived as “elitist” – a withdrawal of good will or public hospitality from what appears incapable of becoming popular; or, alternatively, an insistence that it acquire popular appeal in order to justify its existence (as for instance in the case of museums: there is always something delightful and touching nowadays in the discovery of a wholly unreconstructed museum, offering nothing but an array of objects in glass cases, each with its carefully typed label).

To avoid any risk of misunderstanding here, I must stress that I am not suggesting we try to sweep aside the post-humanist or social-constructionist insights of recent decades in favour of a renewal of pure connoisseurship – though it is certainly curious to find the cause of cultural inclusiveness so strongly supported during a prolonged period of defeat for oppositional politics in the more familiar (socio-economic) sense, and we may wonder whether unfriendly pronouncements about the idea of education for its own sake (which a recent UK education minister, Charles Clarke, described as “a bit dodgy”⁶ – that is, of dubious social value, self-indulgent, decadent ...) represent a kind of displacement activity, a convenient way of seeming to be on the side of the people without venturing into the

more hazardous territory of taxation, public ownership and the like. However, current events aside, the lessons in “reading against the grain” assimilated by philosophy and other literary studies from theoretical anti-humanism must now (I believe) be regarded as part of the substance of the humanist tradition itself as we encounter that tradition today. To read intelligently, for us, *is* (among other things) to draw our reading into the service of what Foucault has called the “critical ontology of ourselves”, so that if, say, I read in Plato that democracy is “like a multi-coloured garment”, the kind of thing that appeals to women and children (*Republic* VIII, 557c), I will respond not only by asking “Is that true?”, but also by registering the presence of something very old and enduring in the construction of gender identity; or if I read in Baudelaire that “...*les vrais voyageurs sont ceux-là seuls qui partent/Pour partir...*” (the true travellers are those alone who depart for the sake of departure), I will examine this statement not only from the point of view of its assigned role within the poem in which it occurs, but also from that of the implied constituency of *voyageurs*, whether I (Lovibond) belong to that constituency, if not why not, and so forth.

But now, in what spirit can we continue to study the literature that has been identified as *classical* in relation to modern western culture? I fudged this issue in the examples just mentioned by using the device of “not only ... but also”. That device would, I assume, be dismissed with contempt by anyone who holds that the point of reading – of reading *literature* as distinct from cookery books or revision notes – is to receive and appreciate literary *value*, not to relate to texts as social or ideological documents. Adherents of this (traditional) view may well be prepared to admit without too much embarrassment – like Nietzsche in regard to the “ancients” – that there are only a few books which they know from immediate, personal experience to have genuine merit (or even, more aggressively – like Ezra Pound in “How to Read” (1928)⁷ – to claim that there are only a few in any language that *have* merit, at any rate of that definitive kind by which a book earns its place on the list of those that must be read by literate persons *ex officio*). The point is that the shortness of the list does not matter if the items contained in it

are the right ones (an idea which, incidentally, is itself a *topos* of the Graeco-Roman “aristocratic” outlook: thus Heraclitus, “One man [is worth] ten thousand to me, if he is the best”).⁸

Although I do not myself feel any strong sense of vocation to lay down the law on literary value, it seems to me to be open to doubt whether a “humanism” that no longer insisted on the exemplary status of certain texts – even allowing for some considerable divergence of taste among the “qualified judges” – would in fact be keeping its putative object of study alive at all. In other words, I suspect that we may need to reconcile ourselves to the presence within the humanist project of that “structural idealism” which Derrida has posited as an ineliminable feature of conceptual thought in general.⁹ If this is right, however, our next task is to explain how it might still be defensible to pursue that project under ostensibly post-humanist intellectual conditions: I mean, how we might do so without simply turning a blind eye to those conditions, or adopting the adversarial view that any conception of the text as ideological effect must represent a hostile presence in the space of learning.

It may be helpful here to picture the humanist effort as one of conservation, the potentially endangered object in this case being an ability – not necessarily on the part of every member of a society but at least somewhere within it – to understand and appreciate certain artefacts of the past. Of course in a way this reference to the past is redundant, since we have no access to the artefacts of the future, and those of the present are constantly receding into history: this is why R. G. Collingwood can include mathematics and the natural sciences within the scope of his view that all intellectual engagement with others depends on the hermeneutic principles that enable us to recreate their thought-processes in our own minds (so that even our present-day interlocutors are also “predecessors” in so far as the research paper you can respond to is the one already in the public domain, not the one still waiting to be written).¹⁰ Yet it does serve to focus attention on the reason why conservationist effort is needed in connection with reading skills and other interpretative capacities, namely, the tendency of textual meaning (and its analogues in the visual arts, music, and so on) to slip away from us through forgetful-

ness of the relevant idioms, contexts of utterance, or indeed entire languages (as in the case of Latin and Greek *vis-à-vis* the post-classical world). The teaching of humanistic disciplines has historically been motivated, according to this picture at least, by the belief that educated people stand under an obligation to put up some resistance to the diminution of imaginative and aesthetic experience that occurs automatically, at any period, as we cease to attend to those items of expression which are becoming unacceptably “difficult” or alien. Such resistance has been felt to be worthwhile in virtue of the continuity that exists, despite superficial evidence to the contrary, between our concerns and those of past generations, and ultimately (as the term ‘humanism’ itself suggests) of humanity at large, since “one touch of nature makes the whole world kin”.¹¹

But isn't this precisely the conception of reading – or in general of cultural uptake – which is subverted by the anti-humanist thesis that (as Roland Barthes famously put it) “it is language which speaks, not the author”?¹² Isn't the postulate of a universal “species-being”, whether idealistically or materialistically construed, just what is incapable of coexisting with the idea of the subject as social construct? The very category of “expression” seems to strike a false note in this context, since it is drawn from a model of linguistic exchange within which what I have to “express” is a distinctive inner life of my own (susceptible, under favourable conditions, of imaginative recreation in the minds of others); that is, my own individual mode of participation in the essential humanity which is now under sceptical attack.

To this challenge I would reply: yes and no. (i) Yes, in that I think it is true that there is a kind of pragmatic contradiction in regard to texts, just as there is in regard to everyday conversational exchanges, between two possible perspectives that we can adopt: on one hand, the objectificatory perspective in which utterances are seen as effects (whether of causal episodes or of synchronic phenomena such as linguistic systems); on the other, the dialogical perspective in which the source of an utterance is taken to be its individual *author*, who requires – as such – not to be located within the realm of (causal or structural) law, but to be (humanly) understood, as we hope to be

understood ourselves when we speak. I am not suggesting that in relation to any given conversational partner a once-and-for-all decision has to be made between the two attitudes just mentioned, since there is nothing especially paradoxical in the experience we seem to have from time to time of vacillating or alternating between them (for example, in our dealings with the very young or the very old). The point is rather that these attitudes are in principle at variance with each other and cannot be brought into a stable combination. Hence if it can be shown to be intellectually imperative to commit ourselves, not just locally but in a totalizing or absolute way, to the perspective proposed by theoretical anti-humanism, the dialogical (or “humane”) perspective will become untenable.

(ii) But then again, no (that is: it is *not* true to say that the humanist project of conservation of reading skills, etc. is subverted by theoretical considerations about “language speaking through us”), because despite the undeniably liberating impact of the anti-humanist element in twentieth-century thought, there is reason to believe that the associated perspective or attitude cannot (*a priori*) come to take up *all* the existential space in our understanding of ourselves and others. Donald Davidson and those influenced by him have argued that in order to recognize something as a language at all, we have to be able to get some kind of interpretative grip on its (apparent) speakers, and this involves – as an indispensable principle of method – the construction of semantic hypotheses under which those speakers are assumed, in the absence of contrary evidence, to be lovers of the good and believers of the true (by our own standards, since these are the only standards we have).¹³ In other words, treating others with the respect due to rational thinkers and agents (in the admittedly thin, procedural sense of “respect” flowing from the transcendental argument just outlined), so far from attesting to some kind of ideological delusion, would be the price demanded for access to the point of view that discloses the use of language to us in the first place.

III

As suggested by my reference just now to transcendental argument, there is of course a Kantian resonance in this bit of reasoning. Just as speculative reflection on causal determinism, according to Kant in the *Groundwork*, should not lead us to imagine that we can abdicate from our position as responsible agents (or depart, in our practical capacity, from the narrow “footpath of freedom”),¹⁴ so anti-humanist speculation should not lead us to imagine that we can abdicate (otherwise than locally or intermittently) from the hermeneutic-cum-intentional perspective on our own and one another’s expressive acts. Once again, this is not to deny that such speculation can lead us to understand ourselves differently, or destabilize what might have seemed to be our given (or “essential”) identity. But any attempt to press it to the limit – to enlist it in support of the idea that humanistic modes of thought are *nothing but* an effect of delusion – promptly generates the damaging paradox noted by Kate Soper in a discussion of anti-humanist Marxism:

... either, despite his professions to the contrary, we take Althusser to be claiming that we are really no more than *Träger* [‘bearers’ or ‘supports’ of social relations] – in which case there would seem no reason to tell us so [because in that case we could not think of ourselves as autonomous political agents, and therefore could not undertake to act on our new insight], or we ... [accept] that in our reality we are not pure functions of support – in which case we may be the kind of beings for whom Althusserianism could have political relevance, but we are not really the *Träger* as which we feature in theory.¹⁵

In short, while the moral (or political, or artistically expressive) subject presupposed in the humanist tradition is something from which we can distance ourselves for the purposes of a “critical ontology” of that subject as constituted under specific historical conditions, this gesture of distancing can represent only one moment in a dialectic, calling as it does for an answering gesture from those *thinkers* or *agents* for whom the relevant critical discoveries might hold some interest.

Assuming, then, that the humanist project of conserving textual understanding is not vulnerable to any all-consuming scepticism about the authorship of expressive acts, it is time to review our earlier, impressionistic account of the point of this project.

One theme that may merit further development is that of *sociability*. We have already come across a somewhat reductive and unsympathetic treatment of this in Stray's portrayal of Victorian classical culture as a device for the socialization of young men into "the world of club, Bar and college",¹⁶ where the occasional flash of brilliance in quotation or composition is viewed as essentially epiphenomenal, the underlying reality being a process of reinforcement of ruling class solidarity. Without disputing the importance of that objective in the *milieu* Stray describes, however, we may feel that some more general recognition is due to the socially creative potential – a potential that is not even specifically political in any narrow sense,¹⁷ let alone specifically reactionary – of the business of acquainting oneself with texts, theories or artefacts with which others are also acquainted. Sidgwick and Bowen's Horace game is a learned variant on the presumably universal practice of social bonding through common points of cultural reference, the distinctive feature of their particular game being, precisely, its difficult and esoteric character, and hence the rarity of the bond between any two people who can play it (in contrast to the comparative ordinariness of the bonds established by a shared familiarity with what is familiar to large numbers of people, such as current TV, pop culture or best-selling novels – though even here the significance of the discovery that a stranger has read some book that you have also read, even if "only" a current best-seller, should not be underestimated).

It seems to me that a more affirmative story can be told about the desire to achieve community with others through the shared experience of having dwelt on, studied, memorized, or otherwise taken to heart something that is difficult (or that has *become* difficult) of intellectual access, a desire aroused in part by the very fact of that difficulty and by the promise it holds out of the disclosure of some "new and indescribable beauty".¹⁸ "Genealogically", so to speak, this phenomenon can perhaps be interpreted in terms of what emerges from

the primitive impulse towards human contact (or alternatively from the fear of abandonment) when we learn, through socialization, to attach distinct meanings and values to the various ways in which it is possible to reach out to others. Thus if there is some special “beauty” to be found, say, in Horace, or in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, or in any other product of human invention, we can also learn to find it in the communicative possibilities opened up to us by a continuing public culture – however idiosyncratic – of awareness of these things.

In case the idea of humanistic pursuits as involving a *specialized* form of conviviality should seem, as it does to Stray, to imply an unduly limited constituency for these pursuits, it is worth reminding ourselves that in other contexts we find nothing contradictory in the existence of a *general* human need to set some mark of “specialness” on one’s own life or experience (thus Auden’s remark that what people want is “not universal love, but to be loved alone” is itself a universal claim).¹⁹ In fact, I see no reason why the story I have just been telling should be found to conflict with a democratic educational politics, since it implies neither that any object of study ought to be *made* (artificially) difficult, nor that social class ought to have any part to play in the selection of specialist students of the humanities. The only implication it has that might be found faintly provocative, so far as I can see, is that our educational and cultural arrangements ought to offer protection to the pursuit of some forms of expertise which are unlikely ever to be of widespread interest.²⁰

But this invites the objection: it is all very well to defend unpopular educational causes, but unpopularity is not a virtue in its own right. If we think there is a social obligation to perpetuate the humanist tradition of scholarship, that must surely be because we take the relevant texts and other artefacts to be *worthy* of study: we must believe they embody or in some measure approximate towards the exemplary status alluded to earlier, and that it is the consciousness of a certain shared receptivity to *value* that makes (for instance) the Horace game into something fine – in fact, *pace* Stray, one of the prize blooms in the educational garden – and not just a snobbish alternative to passing the time by playing noughts and crosses. Well, do we believe that, or do we regard it more as a datum for the history

of ideas – a conviction we know to have motivated earlier “humanists”, including the guardians of western literary culture until fairly recently, but which can no longer be reproduced with any clarity in ourselves?

I would like to suggest that although the academic study of the humanities may have entered a phase of philistine over-specialization,²¹ making it natural enough for most of us to decline the role of arbiter of eternal values, we should beware of exaggerating the gulf that separates our own position in this respect from that of previous generations. That is to say, we should not fall into the trap of picturing our predecessors as being able, any more than we are, to make fully transparent to themselves the point they saw in continuing to read the texts which their literate ancestors had read. There has evidently been enormous variation in the extent to which people at different times and places have been able to articulate their reasons for persisting in the study of the ancient world, or more recently of the “classics” of modern European literature; but, scepticism aside, the tradition may be said to have been usefully supported by those who have taken the relevant values largely on trust, as well as by those who have felt themselves called upon to write authoritative lists of Books That Must Be Read. So we should not be too discouraged on our own account if we seem (like Nietzsche, face to face with the ancients) to get no more than patchy intimations of the value of what it has fallen to us to transmit, and to have to rely much of the time, through an unexceptionable intellectual division of labour, on the complementary insights of others.

Still, as I noted earlier, modesty is in order on another point: the study of the humanities in our own time no longer looks much like a mode of access to the “firm intelligible law of things”. The effort to keep the western literary tradition alive in the collective understanding must henceforth be justified, not by reference to the fantasized significance of Europe as a symbol of the *telos* of humanity,²² but simply as one of many possible ways of showing our esteem for the diversity of human expression.²³

Notes

- 1 Friedrich Nietzsche, "What I Owe to the Ancients" in *Twilight of the Idols*, transl. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 105.
- 2 Christopher Stray, *Classics Transformed: Schools, Universities and Society in England, 1830-1960* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 67.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 68.
- 4 J. L. Austin, "A Plea for Excuses" in his *Philosophical Papers*, 2nd edition, ed. J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 185, note 1.
- 5 Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1938), p. 165 (first published 1869).
- 6 BBC News website, 31 January 2003.
- 7 Ezra Pound, "How to Read", in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. with an introduction by T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), pp. 15-40; see esp. p. 38.
- 8 Heraclitus, fr. B 49 (Diels-Kranz).
- 9 Jacques Derrida, "Afterword", transl. Samuel Weber, in *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 120.
- 10 See e.g. R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford University Press, 1946), Part V, §4, 'History as Re-Enactment of Past Experience' (where the examples include Euclid and Archimedes); also his *An Autobiography* (Oxford University Press, 1978; first published 1939), pp. 38-39: '[Y]ou cannot tell whether a proposition is "true" or "false" until you know what question it was intended to answer ... [T]he question "To what question did So-and-so intend this proposition for an answer?" is an historical question, and therefore cannot be settled except by historical methods.'
- 11 William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, III, 3, line 169.
- 12 Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, transl. Stephen Heath (Glasgow: William Collins, 1977), p. 143.
- 13 Donald Davidson, "Radical Interpretation" in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), esp. at p. 137; "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme", *ibid.*, esp. at p. 197; David Wiggins, "Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life", in his *Needs, Values, Truth*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 111-112.
- 14 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, p. 455 (page numbering of German Academy edition).
- 15 Kate Soper, *Humanism and Anti-Humanism* (London: Hutchinson, 1986), p. 109.
- 16 Stray, *Classics Transformed*, p. 65.
- 17 There is, no doubt, a broader sense in which literary education may per-

form the “political” function of strengthening bonds of friendship – or at least of communication – between fellow-citizens (and even between “fellow-citizens of the world”, if we care to speak in this idealistic way: see note 20 below on some relevant views of Martha Nussbaum).

- 18 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, transl. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), §334: “In the end we are always rewarded for our good will, our patience, fairmindedness, and gentleness with what is strange; gradually, it sheds its veil and turns out to be a new and indescribable beauty. That is its *thanks* for our hospitality.”

- 19 W. H. Auden, “September 1, 1939” in Robin Skelton (ed.) *Poetry of the Thirties* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 282:

‘...For the error bred in the bone
Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have,
Not universal love
But to be loved alone.’

What I mean is that the approach of each one of us to the sum total of content offered by humanistic education naturally takes the form of an attempt, not to swallow the thing whole, but to make some (perhaps quite modest) collection of items our own through thoughtful attention. (In the case of massive works such as the Homeric poems or the corpus of Shakespeare’s plays, to be an interested reader is, in part, to develop a set of favourite passages; the taste of previous critics and teachers may of course play a part in our selection.) Here, at any rate, is something we *can* have, whether or not we choose to picture our feelings as being reciprocated by their object (cf. note 18 above).

- 20 Not long after writing these words, I was surprised to discover how widely the view expressed here seems to differ from that of Martha Nussbaum in her *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997) – a book which champions pluralism and diversity in the liberal arts curriculum of American universities against those conservative critics who believe they can see “culture”, understood as the *best* that can be known..., buckling under the weight of “political correctness”. Although I applaud Nussbaum’s cosmopolitan values and her campaign on behalf of new disciplines such as women’s studies, Afro-American studies and the like, I find it hard to warm to her quasi-gymnastic image of literary texts as “training weights for the mind” (p. 35), calculated to strengthen the moral sinews of the democratic citizen. This model strikes me, at any rate, as one-sided: while the study of the humanities may indeed help to prepare us for citizenship, it surely also promotes some sensibilities which have more to do with a need for *withdrawal* from the “public square”. (Think, for example, of your favourite

short lyric poem, whatever that may be. Which piece of gym apparatus does it remind you of?)

- 21 Compare, on this point, the opening paragraphs of Sören Stenlund's essay "Philosophy and the Critique of Culture" in the present volume.
- 22 Cf. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, transl. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 299.
- 23 In addition to its presentation at Uppsala in September 2003, this paper has been given (in a slightly different form) to audiences at Oxford in February 2004 and at Chicago in April 2004. I am grateful to those who offered comments and questions on each of these occasions.

SHARON RIDER

On Relativism and Relativity in the Human Sciences

Introduction

There are a number of ways of understanding the notion of relativism. Here I will discuss one general form, namely, relativism as an umbrella term for a set of problems in and for the cultural or human sciences (historicism, intersectionality, linguistic relativity, etc). This I take to be distinct from the fact of cultural, moral or aesthetic relativity, i.e. the insight that, however self-evident our assumptions, or absolute our convictions in some matter, others may hold quite different convictions, on the basis of different assumptions, not only regarding the same matters, but regarding matters that may well be scarcely conceivable for us. This kind of relativity is something that we, as it were, run up against, as one runs into a wall. We are forced sometimes to notice what Foucault called “the stark impossibility of thinking *that*.”¹ Or we find that all argument stops, for there is not enough upon which we agree to even grasp what it is about which we disagree. The other becomes “the Other”, a kind of “dark continent” which would require years of exploration to understand.

Let me give an example, but as I said, an example of what I will not be addressing. I remember being struck as a young graduate student when I read that Spartan mothers used to send their sons off to war with the admonition: “Come back with your shield, or on it”. (Returning with the shield being proof that the soldier made no attempt to flee the scene of battle swiftly by lightening his load, returning on it as proof of honorable death in battle). And indeed I was struck by the stark impossibility of my thinking *that*. But this in itself says nothing about the superiority of our civilization over

the Spartan (to the contrary, we cannot assess what we cannot begin to understand). To the extent that the Greeks are intelligible to us, or that our culture could be to them, we can imagine what disdain a Spartan mother could have for our decadent attitudes toward virtues such as duty, courage and self-sacrifice (as I understand it, the attitude they had toward the Athenians). The impossibility of my offering my son for a greater cause would simply be a sign of vice, or lack of civic virtue, in their eyes. (We might bear this in mind today, when we remonstrate, mock or just psychoanalyze mothers of suicide bombers or American soldiers, who find meaning and even solace in the heroic deaths of their children, or interpret their pride in terms intelligible for us, such as through ideology critique). Here we have a value-relativity that will not be bridged by argument. One might call this a *tragic relativity*, a relativity that is our human fate, not our choice.

But if this is the case, what is there of importance for the human sciences to do? In short, if ideology critique, for example, is just more western Enlightenment thinking, or logocentrism, or white mythology, or grand narrative, or whatever term one likes, wherein lay the claims to validity of our philosophy, our anthropology, our historiography? When we notice that even our conceptual claims, scientific discoveries, technological advances, are inextricably bound up with any number of non-scientific, pre-logical values (such as the preference for quantitative methods over qualitative ones, for elegance and simplicity in theories, etc.), we seemed to be confronted with a choice.² One is to seek grounds for those values (this is something that has largely occupied the theory of science, for instance); or we choose not to seek grounds, on the view that there are none to be found. If this latter position is used to call into question the validity of the former, it is often termed “relativism”.

In what follows, I will examine the problem of relativism as a problem in and for the humanities and social sciences. The paper is divided into two sections. In the first, I briefly describe what I take to be our present situation, using certain themes from the sociology of knowledge as my starting point. I then contrast some of the conclusions that have become commonplace, or even implicitly assumed,

in response to those studies with my understanding of Max Weber's attempt to come to terms with similar tendencies a century ago. In the second section, I take up the problem of historicism as one way of formulating the relativist position, and propose an idea of scholarship, inspired by Weber, but also by Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Foucault, as a helpful way to find our way out of the bottle. Finally, I conclude with a few remarks about the role of philosophical thinking for science and scholarship.

Objectivity in the Human Sciences

One could say that relativism in the human sciences is a product of, but also a motor for, the recognition of a cultural/academic/political/religious/moral loss of consensus. In some fields, such as science and technology studies (STS) and Cultural studies, the view is that once we recognize the ungroundedness of academic subjects in some objective "subject matter" that is independent of the tools, traditions and institutions of knowledge, we must also concede that the university and its institutions can no longer act as the main source of knowledge production, but are relegated to "trading zones".³ In a word, Lyotard's prophecy⁴ of an increasingly dispersed knowledge society has come to fruition; it is merely a question of accepting this fact. From this perspective, the classical university and its disciplines and other institutions are parasitic on the full range of human life, and the traditional academic notion of knowledge is seen as ranging *prescriptively* (even in the name of description) over the resources of thinking and action *intrinsically*.⁵ That is, not by accident, but by design. In short, one might say that relativism is the result of the academy coming to know itself.

There are a number of elements to this emerging awareness, many of which have been analyzed in studies in the sociology of knowledge, but I want to focus on a couple of philosophically relevant dimensions. One of these has been termed "loss of trans-generational memory", and it is linked to our contemporary cultural impatience (for social progress and increased tolerance, fair treatment and better opportunities for women and minorities, sustainable development,

etc). Steve Fuller notes that this impatience leads to a sense that universalist projects were just a mistake from the outset (due, for example, to a faulty “totalizing” conception of gender, disregarding just how much better things have gotten in this regard, or to a naive European ethnocentrism, disregarding what a modern, urban and intellectualist identity that is). What is interesting about this point is that it shows how a cultural *mood* can not only color but even give rise to certain forms of conceptualization. (In a Nietzschean fashion, one could probably read the history of western thought through the mood of the period conveyed in even the driest treatises). This mood of impatience is at the same time an expression of alienation, resignation and world-weariness, in which even the hope of getting things right (knowledge) or making them right (politics) doesn’t even feel like a genuine possibility. Thus we make the best out of being “born too late”, as Nietzsche would say, and either revel in our distance to the object of study (this is the point of Latour’s method of “following the actants”), or jump theoretical hurdles and do methodological somersaults to justify our attempts to give voice to the unsaid (that is, to justify our speaking in the name of the Other – the oppressed, voices silenced by official history, etc.).

Bloor⁶ and Latour & Woolgar⁷, whose early works had a decisive influence on the development of contemporary sociology of knowledge, are seen as having revealed the captivity of “normative” philosophy of science (i.e. traditional analytic philosophy of science) to wishful thinking about the history and social life of scientific thinking. Fuller writes:

Philosophers wrote as if scientists were trying to live up to their normative ideals, even though the philosophers themselves could not agree on what those ideals were. STS showed that philosophers suffered less from bad faith than sheer credulousness [...] They [...] made the fatal mistake of believing their own hype. Like over-zealous imperialists, philosophers failed to recognize the ‘made for export’ quality of their own normative discourse.

He concludes that the much-touted “scientific method” had more impact on “disciplining school children and regimenting the non-sciences” than in regulating the practices of real scientists⁸. But does our recognition that the material, social and economic conditions of academic instruction and research are genuine conditions and not merely anecdotal background mean that those conditions are the sum and substance of scientific inquiry? In what respect does the recognition of conceptual relativity force us to accept the thesis of relativism?

In an often-cited speech to students, Max Weber likened the polymorphous complexity of modern European civilization to ancient polytheism, and suggested that there are limitations as to what science can achieve in addressing this fact of modern life:

We live as did the ancients when their world was not yet disenchanted of its gods and demons, only we live in a different sense. As Hellenic man at times sacrificed to Aphrodite and at other times to Apollo, and, above all, as everybody sacrificed to the gods of his city, do we still nowadays, only the bearing of man has been disenchanted and denuded of its mystical but inward plasticity. Fate, and certainly not “science”, holds sway of these gods and their struggles. One can only understand what the godhead is for the one order or for the other, or better, what godhead is in the one or in the other order. With this understanding however, the matter has reached its limit so far as it can be discussed in a lecture-room and by a professor. Yet the great and vital problem that is contained therein is, of course, very far from being concluded. But forces other than university chairs have their say in this matter.⁹

In much literature in the sociology of knowledge, there is an emphasis on the researcher as a member or, representative for, a collective (his time, his field, his country, his department, his research group). But if we grant the point that thinking, however communal, linguistically formed and culturally specific, nonetheless occurs in the individual as individual, then we can allow for the possibility of the scholar, researcher or teacher striving, that is, quite simply doing his

or her best, to leave the values that may very well be the motivation, aim and source of inspiration for her scientific activity, out of that activity (teaching and research). Now that is a value itself, of course. But according to Weber, this is the *sine qua non* of the scientific impulse. In the case of science, it is the *supreme value* insofar as we are working as scientists (in scholarship, insofar as we are working as scholars, etc.). Weber claims that a good scientific study is one which can be read and understood by someone whose values were completely alien to those of the author(s) and, even if the knowledge gained were deemed useless, pointless, banal or even harmful by this reader, he should be able to judge the validity of those useless, pointless, banal or harmful results. If this radically alien reader understands enough of the question guiding an inquiry to judge it as uninteresting or foolish, he can also judge the answer to be adequate or inadequate as an answer to that question, whatever its value.

It is not entirely clear if this objectivity sought is “real” for Weber; my impression is that he sees it as a kind of regulative ideal, but one that is pre-requisite for their being knowledge at all:

[t]he transcendental presupposition of every cultural science lies [...] in the fact that we are cultural beings, endowed with the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude towards the world and to lend it significance. Whatever this significance may be, it will lead us to judge certain phenomena of human existence in its light and to respond to them as being (positively or negatively) meaningful. Whatever may be the content of this attitude – these phenomena have cultural significance for us and on this significance alone rests its scientific interest.¹⁰

Objectivity then is the promise of genuine intersubjectivity, whether or not the promise is ever fulfilled in practice (for we could hardly know for a fact if it were; intersubjectivity is not a fact about the world in the sense of a scientific fact, but rather a pre-condition for their being such facts). The thought here is that we who are interested in human culture, by virtue of our humanity, *can strive* to ascertain the significance of the phenomena under investigation in such

a way that our own values with regard to the object of study play no determining role in the *results* of our inquiry. If we can not, there is no such thing as a scientific study, there is only politics, rhetoric and ideology. Weber thinks that by admitting the limitations of science, he can save the ideal, and therewith, the practice. In other words, he thinks that it is still possible to take the idea of science seriously, even with regard to the cultural sciences. But that means self-critically examining its nature. He asks:

What stand should one take? Has 'progress' as such a recognizable meaning that goes beyond the technical, so that to serve it is a meaningful vocation? The question must be raised. But this is no longer merely the question of man's calling for science, hence, the problem of what science as a vocation means to its devoted disciples. To raise this question is to ask for the vocation of science within the total life of humanity. What is the value of science?¹¹

His answer seems to be fundamentally Kantian: science is possible as an idea, a goal, an aim. And it is this idea that should guide practice, not faith in a given theory or method. Here Weber has a very different sort of faith in science than one normally associated with advocates of "scientific method". It seems to me that sociologists of science often implicitly agree with the very positivist spirit that they criticize: they accept the notion that the essence of science lay in its methods. And having shown that these methods do not live up to their own claims to universality, they take themselves to have shown that "science is as science does". But those social scientists, philosophers, linguists, etc. who retain a strong faith in science as a universal method, develop and cluster themselves in areas of specialization, theoretical and methodological cottage industries, which they work to advance and expand, in competition with other fractions ("networks"), thus behaving exactly in accordance with the picture of science as primarily a social, political and economic activity portrayed in much sociology of science. Weber's trust in the idea of social and cultural science, on the other hand, explicitly accepts methodological "polytheism" as a fact of scientific life, as long as it serves the higher

ideal, without which we are left with a formless heap of methods, -isms, schools, techniques and tools without aim and without end, a scientifically irresponsible eclecticism. But, like Husserl, he argues that the justification of the ideal of science is not something that can be provided by science itself. Thus while he discusses the various practical benefits of value-neutrality in teaching and research, his argument for leaving values out of science is ultimately *moral*.

Here I will use what I take to be a Weberian distinction between science as a means and science as an end in itself, between the interest and values that guide the questions we ask, and the scientific goal of understanding, clarity, and seeing what is the case (or, to use a quaint little word, seeking *truth*). This is actually a very difficult thought, despite its apparent simplicity, because it entails, among other things, that scientific results turn out to be the means, and the activity of science, the proper end:

In science, each of us knows that what he has accomplished will be antiquated in ten, twenty, fifty years. That is the fate to which science is subjected; it is the very *meaning* of scientific work, to which it is devoted in a quite specific sense, as compared with other spheres of culture for which in general the same holds. Every scientific “fulfillment” raises new “questions”, it *asks* to be surpassed and outdated. Whoever wishes to serve science has to resign himself to this fact. Scientific works certainly can last as “gratifications” because of their artistic quality, or they may remain important as a means of training. Yet they will be surpassed scientifically – let that be repeated – for it is our common fate and, more, our common goal. We cannot work without hoping that others will advance further than we have. In principle, this progress goes on *ad infinitum*. And with this we come to inquire into the *meaning* of science. For, after all, it is not self-evident that something subordinate to such a law is sensible and meaningful in itself.¹²

One is inclined today to roll one’s eyes at such expressions of devotion to the essence and value of scientific thinking, and to view it with the same suspicion with which one responds to the sort of

outdated scientific optimism of, say, Karl Popper. But Weber's point is radically different. Weber sees our contemporary situation, the conditions of our real lives, as the singular condition for all social and cultural science. And naturally, that situation will, for each and every one of us, differ with regard to experiences, values and assumptions. But the very particularity of our lives, our familiarity with a common world, is what makes it possible for us to study culture or society at all; it is the condition for whatever more general claims we make about historical developments, ethnological differences, and so forth. Which is all to say that the scientific study of culture begins in specific questions arising out of a certain way of life, and the discourses and practices involved in it; the problems addressed by the social and cultural sciences ought to be the kinds of questions and concerns that someone might actually have, simply by virtue of sharing that way of life and reflecting upon it. What happens often enough in the humanities today, however, is that the questions addressed are so arcane, so internal to the scientific activity itself, that is, so integrated with a certain assemblage of established doctrines and the debates and technical issues arising out of these, that the original question to which these theories and techniques were originally formulated as partial answers, is long lost. But recalling the question of the value of the scientific endeavor, the justification of the social and cultural sciences cannot be the practice itself. Medicine does not raise the question whether or not a certain life should be saved, aesthetics does not ask if there should be works of art. And

[w]ho—aside from certain big children who are indeed found in the natural sciences – still believes that the findings of astronomy, biology, physics or chemistry could teach us anything about the *meaning* of the world?¹³

But more relevant to our purposes,

Consider the historical and cultural sciences. They teach us how to understand and interpret political, artistic, literary and social phenomena in terms of their origins. But they give us no answer to

the question, whether the existence of these cultural phenomena have been *worthwhile*. And they do not answer the further question whether it is worth the effort required to know them. They presuppose that there is an interest in partaking, through this procedure, of the community of “civilized men”. But they cannot prove “scientifically” that this is the case; and that they presuppose this interest by no means proves that it goes without saying. In fact it is not at all self-evident.¹⁴

It is important here to recall that it is not the individual scholar who finds the object of study “worthwhile” as a matter of personal preference. Rather, there must be some living concern in a culture which impels the researcher in virtue of his humanity to devote himself to the scientific study of that problem or question. Weber distinguishes between science as an inward calling and the external conditions for science. Notice that the distinction is not between scientific thinking as a method and the *de facto* conditions of science (i.e., the distinction between context of discovery and context of justification), but between the activities of the researcher or teacher *qua* academic, and the reasons for his being one, the kind of world in which someone might be inclined to choose to be a scholar or scientist. Thus, the difference between a scientific approach and a non-scientific approach is fundamentally a difference of the individual’s attitude or intention, even if these can only arise under certain cultural conditions. But because of the perpetual movement toward increased specialization, to feel confidence in one’s own scientific achievements, the scientist is prone to internalize this external necessity. One consequence of this development, I would say, is the transformation of what Weber characterizes as the scientific spirit into a technical spirit, in which the means of science become the ends, even in the individual scientist. For the individual teacher or researcher in the humanities, avoiding strict specialization, remaining true to his original motivation for studying philosophy, psychology or anthropology, means sacrificing this sense of accomplishment. It means remaining in doubt as to the value, not only of his own work, but of the shared tools and techniques, theories and concepts, of his discipline. In so doing, he

attends to the questions that arise, not out of his areas of expertise, but out of his humanity. So there are two kinds of conditions for scientific work: material, social, political, organizational and economic, on the one hand, and the human impetus to get clear on things of concern, on the other. The first leads inevitably to specialization, and it is this principle that seems to guide out contemporary understanding of science and scholarship. This is surely something that we have to accept, but it also seems to me that we have lost sight of the second, and that it is essential for the survival of the humanities and social sciences, both as institution and idea, that we re-discover it.

Following Weber, we can allow for a unity of purpose to the human sciences which does not stand in opposition to the fact of historical, cultural and cognitive relativity, at least not necessarily. One might say that the purpose of the human sciences is precisely to remind us of who we were (history, literature, etc.), indicate where we may be headed (economics, sociology, cultural studies, political science etc.), and, perhaps above all, help us see more clearly how certain standard accepted notions have their own history, their own purpose(s), which can and do change. The human sciences cannot tell us what we ought to do, how we ought to act, or what we should think, but ideally, they can help us to reflect critically for ourselves on these matters (for example, by showing that a certain course of action will likely not have the intended results, due to certain laws of economics, for instance). On the other hand, the more programmatic, politicized and ideological the human sciences become, explicitly or implicitly, the less likely it is that they will fulfill this vital purpose. And not because there is a single Truth toward which all scientific or scholarly thinking is aimed at revealing, but precisely because there is not.

Relativism, Philosophy and the Limits of Theory¹⁵

If we can no longer take seriously generalized discourses about “human nature”, for example, are we forced to accept relativism as a starting-point for humanist studies? Again, I would say that we may very well bump up against the fact of historical relativity (for in-

stance, the inherent difficulty in grasping texts produced in periods very different from our own), but this is a fact of our lives as working academics, not a general thesis. We do not have to advocate a relativist view, simply by virtue of the failure of ahistorical, universalist thinking. We can grant a number of historicist assertions about particular cases, without embracing historicism as such, that is, we may grant its point as critique in any number of contexts, without granting it as a philosophical thesis or doctrine.¹⁶ Historicism construed as a general thesis (the thesis of historical relativism) assumes rather *in advance* of the formulation of any specific problem that the problem *ought* to be formulated as primarily one of historical context. But shouldn't we first get clear about what it is that we want to know before assuming an historicist stance?

As critique, historicist works mostly describe the *de facto* conditions under which past thinkers worked, the intellectual debate of the period, the connotations of certain terms and ideas in a given epoch and so forth. The motivation behind such studies is the need to respond to, correct or modify the prevalent practice, especially in intradisciplinary historiographies, of treating thinkers of the past as if there were no such conditions, as if scientists and philosophers did not in fact write in a certain context and not another, but only in the highly refined air of scientific, philosophical discourse (the boundaries of which are, oddly enough, determined *ex post facto* in terms of research interests today that have often enough evolved over the last hundred years). As such, historicism describes a practice the value of which is demonstrated in the relative success or failure of such attempts to reveal inadequacies in the narratives they aim to supplement or undermine. As an epistemological thesis or starting-point, however, resolute historicism (as all forms of strong relativism) is clearly problematic. First, the prioritizing of questions concerning cultural bias, for example, is often simply taken for granted, given the historicist starting-point. The historicist position provides a kind of metaphysical justification for posing certain questions, and simply disregarding others, as those become nonsensical within the historicist framework (if one accepts the historicist thesis as a universal principle, she cannot coherently argue that, say, Kant's descrip-

tion of women as intrinsically timid and incapable of principled thought and action is incorrect). Second, it presumes that one can say something sensible about a culture as a whole, and thus moves from being a *modus operandi* to an ontology (by arguing, say, that the development of European intellectual history is characterized by an all-embracing rationalist culture deriving from fear of the body, sexuality and women). If we follow this line of thought to its natural conclusion, we seem to be forced to embrace one of the following, conclusions:

Past thinkers (or agents) were limited by the culture they inhabited. Because of our historical distance, can see more clearly the conditions that formed their thinking than they could.

We, as thinkers (or agents) are limited by the culture we inhabit. Therefore, whatsoever we take ourselves to understand of other cultures are in fact own cultural projections.

But what is it that makes us reticent to accept such drastic formulations without reservation? I would say that one lesson to be drawn from our disinclination to accept either proposition as it stands is that our own experience inoculates us from such theoretical extremism in scholarly practice (although not in theory). We cannot do research on the basis of the first thesis, because it leads inexorably to the second. Our own cultural products, – including the results of our research, will also come to be seen from an historical distance, in which case it will be interpreted in terms of the cultural conditions for its production to which we are blind. The second thesis denies explicitly any other possibility, that is, it is a straightforward statement of epistemological value-nihilism. We are incapable of doing research on the basis of either of the claims above (just as there are no whole-hearted atheists in foxholes, so too there are no whole-hearted relativists in archives). In practice, general theories about the conditions for knowledge are too general to have any use. Thus one way of dealing with historicist claims is to treat them as something that must be decided from *case to case*, issue to issue. We cannot, in

advance of inquiry, decide, for instance, that either (i) there is no such thing as sex and death *per se*, but only different cultural practices of, say, courtship and religious mysticism, or (ii) there is only copulation and expiration, and these are the basis for various arbitrary cultural expressions such as marriage and religious institutions. The question of the constancy of human nature can only be decided in the context of a much more specified question, and with respect to a predetermined and presumably narrow use of the notion of constancy. As a hermeneutic principle, this means that the extent to which ancient texts, for example, are intelligible or unintelligible to modern discourse is simply the extent to which they are intelligible or unintelligible. The question is, what problems are you trying to solve? If an ancient text does, effectively, shed light on a problem, then it is apparently intelligible in the relevant sense (even if only to very few), namely, to those have similar problems and sufficient interest and training to be able to recognize the problem as genuinely similar): “[i]t is our perception of human nature that makes Plato and Aristotle intelligible to us.”¹⁷ But to ask if such perception *in general* is an historical artifact or a part of the natural order, is to pose a question that cannot be decided once and for all. It is not a question about which we can attain clarity through further investigation.

One way of getting a hold on the sort of problems arising from our thirst for generality, is by noticing that we can be lead to accede to claims that we can hardly make sense of. For instance, the geometric notion of a line, someone might want to say, is relative to the cultural and linguistic horizon it inhabits. At first, one thinks that this must be right. It is not natural to assume that all cultures use the notion of line in all or even any of the various and sundry ways we do in English: we have clotheslines, fishing lines, county lines, telephone lines, outlines, party lines, script lines, lines of merchandize, lines on our faces, lines of argument, lines of thought, lines of cocaine, lines of kings, lines of work. We can be in line, on-line and, of course, out of line. And we have the mathematical definition of line as a set of points (x, y) that satisfy the linear equation $ax + by + c = 0$ (but this is hardly the most common usage). One might think that the notion of line is so multifarious that it hardly has

any coherent sense in modern English (or that English is regrettably impoverished). Yet there is clearly some sort of family resemblance between the many uses of the term in English, and it seems to have to do with extension, continuity, range, or length. So if we take extension to be a general characteristic of the ordinary, geometrical use, for example, one might ask: what would it mean to say that there are cultures in which straight lines have no length? (I chose straight lines as an example for the sake of simplicity, i.e., because “straight” also carries with it the notion of uniform, unidirectional extension). One might imagine, for instance, that in some culture straight lines are not perceived as we perceive them; such a thought-experiment might seem to provide counter-evidence to the notion that the association between length and lines is some sort of fact about human psychology, or to a realist conception of measurement. In this respect, one might say that the attribution of length to straight lines is a convention. But what is meant by convention here? Conceptually, the relationship between length and the notion of a straight line is internal to our practices of measurement and delineation; length or extension belongs to our use of the notion of a straight line. A notion of a straight line without length would be a *different use* of the word, a different concept, than our ordinary geometrical one. Insofar as the length of straight lines is relative to and contingent upon all the practices in which we are inclined to use and talk about straight lines, one could call that use a convention. But that does not mean that it is “merely contingent” in the sense of arbitrary or optional? When the traffic police check the sobriety of suspect drivers by asking them to walk two meters along a straight line, for example, there is no room for the conceptual possibility of there being lines without length; that is to say, that conceptual possibility, in that context, is meaningless (has no use). But this remark is neither normative (it is not a prohibition against using words as one wishes) nor informative (it provides no explanation); it is a description of a defining feature of the ordinary use of the concept “straight line”. To stress the absolute relativity of notions such as straight line is really just the flip-side of the kinds of dogmatic conceptions that seek universal properties; in both cases, one relegates the case in point to an exemplification of

a theoretical construction that has been decided beforehand on the basis of other concepts and problems (usually within the discipline of philosophy).

The point of the foregoing example is to note that explanations of how we have the notion of a straight line will always rely on the shared concepts "straight" and "line", lest they not know what it is they are explaining or disagreeing about in the first place. In fact, they would have nothing to explain (they would have no problem to pose). *All* empirical explanations (that is, explanations of states of affairs) rely upon shared concepts of this kind. To say that a straight line has length is to reach bedrock. It is the sort of remark that few would dream of questioning, but not because it's an implicit or tacit theory. Rather, it is the sort of statement one arrives at when trying to define what it is that one is talking about, what it is one is trying to explain, what it is that one means. It is in a sense a "transcendental" remark, insofar as it tells us nothing that wasn't already there with us from the moment we learned the meaning of "straight" and "line", and which simply has no use outside of the context of such reflection. I take this to be Wittgenstein's point when he remarks: "The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose. If one tried to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them".¹⁸ The various ways we were trained to use "straight" and "line", the nearly infinite number of circumstances at home, in the playground and even the first-grade classroom cannot be cursorily stated in a general theory without falsification or unwarranted speculation (which is not to say that such speculation and even simplification is always unwarranted. One can imagine uses for it in, for example, early childhood development studies, where one is interested in testing various methods of early instruction to improve spatial comprehension among schoolchildren).

One might want to say here that this is just a way of avoiding taking a stance: it must be the case that *either* there is natural order/universal truths/objective reality/innate ideas *or* there is only construction/fiction/narrative/fabrication/rhetoric. But it is not self-evident that this assumed dichotomy tells us anything we want to know

about a number of important issues for the human sciences, because the terms are formulated at the outset before the posing of the particular question. That straight lines have length is not a “construction”, if by that we mean an *arbitrary* convention. Again, we cannot dismiss the possibility of using the notion of straight line in a way that does not presuppose extension in some respect, but to notice that this would entail a host of consequences for other concepts and practices, that is, it would be a different use. So too, it makes no sense to say that sex or death as such *are* contingent cultural constructions, except in some very particular respect with regard to some particular, well-defined phenomenon (say, changes in the rules and practice of courtship in northern agrarian villages as a result of the Christianization of Sweden).

How is this relevant to the question of historicism or relativism in the human sciences? To assert a relativist stance with regard to knowledge is to see all that we call nature and human life in scientific and scholarly inquiry as a theoretical construction; but there is also a tendency to conflate our scientific and social theories with ordinary use. The idea that ordinary language and social practice, such as what we are inclined to say and do when using “straight lines” or mourning a death, are “theoretical constructions” in the same sense as scientific facts and discoveries can be described as constructions is often assumed without further ado. Why? One partial answer is that there is a prevalent use of the notion of nature that *is* a theoretical construction, namely, the “nature” of the natural sciences that is often assumed in an unspecified and fluid manner in theoretical discussion in the humanities and social sciences. Words such as “nature” and “culture” tend to play the field in theoretical discourse. Here it is tempting to cite Wittgenstein’s famous remarks about bringing back words from their metaphysical to their everyday use, that is, bringing them back to the language-game which is their original home,¹⁹ or rather, calling them back to work when they’ve gone, as Wittgenstein says, “on holiday”.²⁰ This is the sense of the “extraordinary use” of words in theoretical discourse that we have to learn to resist if we are to attain clarity. But is clarity knowledge? Can we say that we “know” that straight lines have length? How could I, even in prin-

ciple, satisfactorily demonstrate that all straight lines have length? Or more to the point, how can I even begin to doubt that straight lines have some length? What would such doubt mean? In a sense, it is indubitable, because we would hardly know what it means to deny it (unless, of course, the intention was to introduce a *new* use). Thus the length of lines is not a fact about the world, but a reminder about a certain way we talk about and move around in the world. Thus it is not susceptible of proofs. Evidence and justification, after all, belong to cases in which doubt is introduced. To state the matter perversely, we can only know to be true something about which we can be wrong. I may well be right or wrong when I estimate the length of a straight line to be 7 inches; or I may measure the length in centimeters rather than inches. But does it make sense to say, "Yes, that's right. That line has length." It is difficult to imagine an instance in which that would be a meaningful answer to a question, a situation in which someone would be inclined to state that a particular line has length: no specific length, just length in general. In this respect, one does not "know" as a general proposition that straight lines have length; what we can *know* is how to use the concept of "straight line" (which, of course, can change, but not overnight. We do not change basic features of our language the way we change our shirts). But this does not open the floodgates of wholesale relativism; to accept that there are certain things regarding which there simply is no room for doubt, to admit that we have hit rock bottom, is merely to acknowledge *the limits of theory*.

It has been argued that the very idea of philosophy is obsolete.²¹ If philosophy still has a role to play in our thinking today, it is arguably if it takes as its task to remind us of what we can make sense of and what we cannot. This means, among other things, leaving justification and meeting evidentiary demands to other disciplines. But it also means that other disciplines should not look to philosophy to provide interesting new theories about the nature of language, human thought or the world, but focus on the real problems arising in and through their own work. Cultural relativity may well be an example of the kind of problem that arises repeatedly in certain disciplines (history, anthropology), but then it is the specific nature of the problem to be ad-

dressed that requires philosophical reflection (such as “how are we to weigh and interpret the different factors involved in the outbreak of the American Civil War, given the radically different perspectives on its causes both then and now?”), not “relativism” in general. But here we have to be careful. Specification of a question or set of questions need not necessarily mean specialization. We might remind ourselves that problems having to do with the consequences of specialization, or fragmentalization, of the sciences has been with us since the early 18th-century. By the second half of the eighteenth century, the great encyclopedist Diderot complained that he could not keep up with all the latest developments in different fields and, more importantly, did not have the time to reflect upon how they all fit together. The sense that knowledge was falling apart at the seams led some, most notoriously Hegel, to argue that encyclopedic knowledge was not enough; we require an overview of the relation between sciences, i.e., a philosophical system. In the wake of the demise of faith in rational systems, there arose in the twentieth century a need for some way of conducting the human sciences that was on the one hand, relevant and useful, and on the other, made no pretences toward systematicity. It seem to me that Max Weber revitalized the human sciences simply by trying to formulate new, relevant and meaningful questions, largely disregarding traditional disciplinary boundaries in order to find helpful answers. His investigations most often begin with a problem or question, rather than a theory or methodological framework. But like Nietzsche, while he was deeply skeptical of systematization, he managed to integrate vastly different fields of inquiry in his work. Focusing on real problems is all too often construed in the humanities and social sciences today as focusing on one’s problems as a representative of a certain theoretical position or discipline (one’s area of expertise), that is, on the doctrines and methods which come to us ready-made, as it were, when we are working as professional anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers or historians. But uncritically employing some preferred set of methods, techniques and concepts to some presumed category within one’s discipline reflects a bureaucratic, technical understanding of what constitutes a genuine problem, not a human understanding.

There has also been a great deal of discussion of late as to whether or not the very idea of humanities is obsolete, or at very least, “untimely”. Most scholarship and teaching simply assume the value of the disciplines without further reflection or argument. When pushed (by dwindling interest among students, lack of interest from funding institutions, etc), one easily falls into one of two legitimating strategies. Either one argues for the value of humanist studies in building and enhancing character, civic virtues and “critical thinking”. Alternatively, one stresses the “liberating” dimension, where desired political goals and aspirations (multiculturalism, gender equality, etc) are decisive for the form and content of study. But apparently, such defenses ring hollow to all too many, including humanists themselves, the result of which is the popularity of the “anti-humanism” and doctrinal relativism of the last few decades, even (or especially) in the academy. I think that we have to come to terms with the fundamental lack of coherence and unity of purpose in the human sciences, if the latter are to survive as a vital part of education and culture. And here it will not do to point to the consensus of the most excellent researchers at the finest universities who publish in the best journals, for that would mean implicitly accepting that the criteria for serious humanist thinking are the criteria of the professoriat seen as first and foremost a profession. But I would argue that the study of literature, philosophy and history as areas of human inquiry cannot and should not be reduced to their institutions (power structures, economic conditions, internal doctrinal disputes, networks, departments, journal rankings and funding agencies). If we ourselves cannot see a point and purpose beyond political utility or professionalism, the content of our activities will be reducible to the latter.

Certain schools of thought and institutions will, for various historical and political reasons, be more influential at any given time. That influence will have decisive consequences for what is deemed relevant and interesting. Historically speaking, however, the most radical and best thinking of an epoch is often decades ahead of academically sanctioned thinking in the humanities (this is particularly true of philosophy: think of Saussure, Nietzsche, Foucault, none of whom were professional philosophers). For this reason, it is crucial

that the meaning of literature, philosophy and history as areas of human inquiry not be reduced to their institutions. Or rather, if we humanists cannot offer a compelling description of the aims and purposes of our studies that does not consist in arguments for political utility or vague gestures toward some assumed shared cultural inheritance, then we are in fact admitting that the reduction is not only reasonable, but adequate. It means essentially reducing right to might, one of the first formulations of the relativist thesis. Weber's suggestion regarding how to respond to the intellectual polytheism that is our lot is to accept it as what I have called a "fact of academic life", that is, to acknowledge the conditions of our current situation. But this does not mean internalizing external necessity. Rather, it means accepting that, in the end, we are left to our own commitments and judgments, including our commitments and judgments regarding what is a relevant question to pose and which criteria to use to determine the adequacy of our answers. And that is something that requires genuine human reflection, not "research".²²

Notes

- 1 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Science* (New York, 1970), Preface, p. xv.
- 2 I use the example of "qualitative versus quantitative research" with some hesitation. In point of fact, the prevalence of the notion that certain methods are "qualitative", while others are "quantitative", deserves more careful consideration. What is meant by the distinction is, of course, that certain technical methods are constructed to yield mathematical results, such as statistics, whereas the products of discourse analyses, close readings, biographical and comparative studies, most forms of exegesis and so forth do not lend themselves to quantification. That is, the objects and the results of such research are qualitative, rather than quantitative. The claim that the humanities and certain forms of social science have their own set of methods, distinct from *but comparable to*, those of the "hard sciences" seems primarily to serve a legitimating function. Many of these "methods" are not actually methods at all, but theoretical reflections upon method (hermeneutics, deconstruction, phenomenology, etc.).
- 3 Nowotny, H., Scott, P. & Gibbons, M., *Re-thinking Science: Knowledge and the Public in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge, 2000).

- 4 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (1979; Minneapolis, 1983).
- 5 See Steve Fuller, "Is STS truly revolutionary or merely revolting?" (Science Studies vol 18, 1/2005)
- 6 David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery* (London, 1976).
- 7 Latour, B. and Wolgar B., *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (London, 1979).
- 8 Fuller, "Is STS truly revolutionary or merely revolting?", p. 79.
- 9 Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation", in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, trans. & ed. (1919; New York, 1946), p. 148.
- 10 Max Weber, "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy", in Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1949), p. 81.
- 11 Weber, "Science as a Vocation", p. 140.
- 12 Ibid., p. 138.
- 13 Ibid., p. 142.
- 14 Ibid., p. 145.
- 15 An earlier version of parts of the following section of this paper appeared in "Where my Spade Turns: On Philosophy, Nihilism and the Ordinary", in *Eros and Logos: Essays Honoring Stanley Rosen*, ed. N. Ransinghe (South Bend, 2006), pp. 229-245.
- 16 Here Reinhart Koselleck's historicizing of historical thinking in *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Boston, 1988) is relevant. The historical coincidence of the development of "historical thinking" in the modern sense and the advent of "critique" is a useful reminder to us that we are not nearly as self-critical in our perpetual gesturing to "historical contingency" as some kind of neutral fact as we ought to be.
- 17 Stanley Rosen, *Metaphysics in Ordinary Experience* (New Haven, 1999), p. 221.
- 18 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford, 1958), §127, §128.
- 19 Ibid., §116.
- 20 Ibid., §38.
- 21 For an overview, see *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?*, Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman & Thomas McCarthy, eds. (1987; Cambridge, MA, 1996).
- 22 I would like to thank Sören Stenlund and Pär Segerdahl for valuable comments and suggestions.

MARTIN GUSTAFSSON

Seeing the Facts and Saying What You Like

Retroactive Redescription and Indeterminacy in the Past

In chapter 17 of his book, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory*, Ian Hacking makes the disquieting claim that “perhaps we should best think of past human actions as being to a certain extent indeterminate.”¹ Against what may appear like the self-evident conception of the past as fixed and unalterable, Hacking suggests that when it comes to human conduct and experience, there are reasons to adopt a more flexible view. This suggestion has caused lively debate, in the journal *History of the Human Sciences* and elsewhere.² Central to this debate is the question of what it means to use a recently invented vocabulary to redescribe past human affairs. In particular, it is asked: How do the linguistic, cultural and social differences between past and present matter to the possibility of such a redescription’s being true? We who do research in the humanities and social sciences often make retroactive redescriptions of precisely this sort. Hence, the debate is clearly of some general importance for how to conceive the goals and methods of our inquiries. My overall aim in this paper is to clarify what we may learn from the clash between Hacking and his critics.

I. Hacking on Past Indeterminacy

What Hacking calls past indeterminacy is supposed to arise when we develop new ways of describing previous action and experience, forms of description that were not available to the persons whose ac-

tions and experiences get described. Hacking gives us many examples to think with, most of which are deliberately controversial. He asks us to consider the case of Alexander Mackenzie, a famous Scottish-Canadian explorer. At the beginning of the 19th century, when he was forty-eight years old, Mackenzie married a girl of fourteen. There is no evidence of physical violence or of his having treated the girl very differently from how he would have treated an older woman. And yet, an author writing in 1987 in *New York Times* did not hesitate to describe Mackenzie as a child molester and child abuser.

Hacking questions this description. He asks, "Should we retroactively apply terms such as child abuse so generously?" noting that the term 'child abuse' is of relatively recent origin.³ It was launched in 1961-62 by a group of pediatricians in Denver. In the 60's and 70's, it gradually replaced the older, Victorian term, 'cruelty to children'. And this replacement was not just a terminological shift. According to Hacking, the uses of the terms 'cruelty to children' and 'child abuse' differ fundamentally in respect of class, evil, sex and medicine. Paradigmatically, cruelty to children was considered to be a lower class phenomenon, and was perceived as one among many evils in society. Sex was not conceived as central, and the perpetrator was not regarded as sick but simply as a wretch to be punished. By contrast, child abuse is supposed to be classless, and is held to constitute a special and perhaps *the* ultimate sort of evil in our society. The sexual aspect is central, and the perpetrator is regarded as a person in need of medical or psychological treatment.⁴ Obviously, this relatively recent term did not belong to the conceptual resources available to Mackenzie, his fourteen-year old wife, or to anyone else in their community. Moreover, at the beginning of the 19th century, their sort of marriage was legal, conventionally acceptable, and not very unusual.

Importantly, Hacking is not claiming that Mackenzie was not a child abuser. Rather, he suggests that there is no determinate yes-or-no answer here. Whether Mackenzie's behavior was an instance of child abuse or not is indeterminate.

Here is another one of Hacking's examples. A royal physician in 17th century France has given an extensive description of how, when

Louis XIII was an infant and child, it often happened that the adults around him played with his genitals in public. This story has been interpreted in two opposite ways. Philippe Ariès takes it as evidence that (in Hacking's words) earlier centuries offered "a freer, franker, less sexually cluttered life for humans before and short after puberty," a life in which "[h]umans in that age group were not harmed, were not conceptually capable of being harmed, in ways that we now harm children."⁵ Lloyd DeMause, by contrast, takes the story as evidence for widespread abuse, arguing, indeed, that Western Civilization as a whole is the history of child abuse. Hacking thinks neither account is satisfactory: "As a cautious philosopher, I am inclined to say that many retroactive descriptions are neither definitely correct nor definitely incorrect."⁶

What Hacking seems to be arguing in connection with these examples is that there is an indeterminacy in the application of certain new ways of talking to certain past events. This may not seem like a very remarkable claim, especially since the application of such terms even to contemporary phenomena is not always a straightforward matter. However, Hacking thinks imposing these new terms on a past which is so different from our own time involves special difficulties. For the terms are supposed to pick out kinds of action, kinds of experience, and kinds of people, and actions, experiences and people are not independent of the particular historical circumstances under which they exist.

The exact character of their dependence on such circumstances is a fascinating topic and, as so often with such topics, it is difficult not to get muddled. Hacking struggles with, and sometimes seems to succumb to, the temptation to construe the notion of past indeterminacy in a truly mind-boggling fashion. His difficulties come to the surface when he discusses examples that differ from the ones described above, in being such that he wants to say that our retroactive descriptions are not indeterminate in the sense specified before, but definitely *true*. For example, Hacking asks us to imagine what we would now regard as an obvious, though not particularly gross, instance of sexual harassment that took place in 1950 – a piece of behavior that was completely legal at the time and did not in any

clear way transgress accepted norms of conduct. In light of the fact that our present term 'sexual harassment' was not in use in 1950, Hacking raises the question if the imagined piece of behavior really was an instance of sexual harassment. He says,

I do not think it was determined, in 1950, that there would come into being a pivotal American concept of sexual harassment. I asked you to imagine some plain, but not entirely gross, example of sexual harassment that took place in 1950. I am not at all sure that it was determinate, in 1950, that this was an intentional act of sexual harassment. Indeed, some people, with whom I strongly disagree, will say that it definitely not was sexual harassment, then. Others will insist that of course it was. In this case I do judge that it was intentional sexual harassment in 1950.⁷

Here, Hacking unwittingly starts employing the notion of past indeterminacy in a way that differs noticeably from how he used the same term earlier, when he argued that calling Mackenzie a child abuser means saying something that is neither true nor false. The new usage is bound to leave the careful reader perplexed. After having suggested that it was perhaps *not* determined in 1950 that the act was an intentional act of sexual harassment, Hacking goes on to say that the act *was* intentional sexual harassment in 1950. Isn't this manifestly incoherent? Probably, what he says only one paragraph earlier is meant to clarify things:

[I]f we describe past actions in ways in which they could not have been described at the time, we derive a curious result. For all intentional actions are actions under a description. If a description did not exist, or was not available, at an earlier time, then at that time one could not act intentionally under that description. Only later did it become true that, at that time, one performed an action under that description.⁸

But this is still very perplexing. Taking the two just quoted passages together, it seems reasonable to read Hacking as suggesting (i) that in 1950 it had not yet become true that the act that we are asked to imagine was one of intentional sexual harassment, and (ii) that this somehow became true only later when the concept of sexual harassment was invented. Hacking seems tempted to argue, not just that the invention of new forms of description makes it possible to state certain truths about the past for the first time, but that those truths somehow become true only with the creation of those new linguistic resources. Why would Hacking want to make such a strange claim?

To answer this question, we need to understand how three features of Hacking's conception interact to engender such a conclusion. The first feature is visible in the passages just quoted, and, indeed, permeates Hacking's discussion as a whole. What I have in mind is his wavering between talking of what is required for an action's falling under a certain description, and talking of what is required for an action's being *intentional* under that description. As Adrian Haddock has pointed out in his criticism of Hacking, it is one thing to ask,

- (1) Was the imagined 1950 behavior an instance of sexual harassment? Did Mackenzie's having sexual intercourse with a girl of fourteen constitute child abuse?

and another thing to ask,

- (2) Was the imagined 1950 behavior an instance of *intentional* sexual harassment? Did Mackenzie *intentionally* abuse the girl?

It seems entirely coherent to say both that MacKenzie's behavior constituted child abuse and that it was not intentional *qua* child abuse.⁹

The second feature is Hacking's committing himself to a general thesis about the connection between descriptions and intentions. The thesis is that a person can have an intention of a certain kind only if the corresponding description is accessible to him. For exam-

ple, if the description 'child abuse' (or some synonymous equivalent) was not available at a given time, then at that time people could not act with the intention to abuse children.

If you think that acting with the intention to abuse a child requires having access to the description 'child abuse', and then unwittingly slide from 'acting with the intention to abuse a child' to 'abusing a child', you will end up claiming that unless a person has access to the description 'child abuse' his action cannot be an instance of child abuse. As the passage quoted above indicates, Hacking is tempted to draw that sort of conclusion. But now there is a rather obvious tension between this conclusion and a third feature of Hacking's conception to which I have already pointed, namely, his wish to say that there are cases in which our retroactive redesignations are *true*. Suppose, for example, that it turns out that Mackenzie regularly and brutally forced himself upon his young wife. Hacking would then, I suppose, want to describe Mackenzie a child abuser, just as he wants to classify the imagined 1950 behavior as sexual harassment.¹⁰ But, as we saw, Hacking also seems to have considerable difficulties avoiding the conclusion that no matter what Mackenzie did, it could not have been child abuse since the description 'child abuse' was not available to him at the time. Hacking seems to know that this conclusion is absurd. But how can he steer clear of it?

Well, he could remind himself that an action may have been child abuse, or sexual harassment, even if it was not intentional under that description. Or, he could retract from the thesis that having the intention to abuse a child or to harass someone sexually requires having access to the descriptions 'child abuse' or 'sexual harassment'. Or, he could do both of these things. But Hacking takes a less promising route: he starts tampering with the notion of truth. Again, let us imagine that Mackenzie brutally forced himself upon his young wife. If so, Hacking would presumably want to classify Mackenzie as a child abuser, but, it seems, with the following caveat: even if it is true *now* that Mackenzie was a child abuser, it wasn't true at the beginning of the 19th century. It *became true only later*, in the 1960's, when our concept of child abuse was invented. That is how Hacking seems to try to get around the objection that his way of reasoning

leads to the conclusion that child abuse was conceptually impossible before 1961. The first two features of his conception make him strongly inclined to argue that in earlier times people were indeed conceptually prevented from abusing children. However, he seems to think that this conceptual barrier can somehow be teared down *post facto*, by retroactive redescription. Supposedly, with the invention of the concept of child abuse, it became both possible and true of earlier times that children were abused.

Consider the following paragraph:

When we remember what we did, or what other people did, we may also rethink, redescribe, and refeel the past. These redescriptions may be perfectly true of the past; that is, they are truths that we now assert about the past. And yet, paradoxically, they may not have been true in the past, that is, not truths about intentional actions that made sense when the actions were performed. That is why I say that the past is revised retroactively. I do not mean that we change our opinions about what was done, but that in a certain logical sense what was done itself is modified. As we change our understanding and sensibility, the past becomes filled with intentional actions that, in a certain sense, were not there when they were performed.¹¹

This is a tortured passage. Hacking seems half-consciously aware that there is something confused about saying that the past can become filled with intentional actions that were not there when they were performed. Hence his half-hearted attempt to defuse the idea that what is true now *of* the past might not have been true *in* the past, by suggesting that this mind-boggling thesis boils down to the considerably less startling claim that there are true statements about the past which could not be expressed in the past because they make use of terms that had not been invented then. In a later discussion of *Rewriting the Soul*, Hacking complains that he equivocated between the *object* of child abuse and the *idea* or *concept* of child abuse, and remarks that he should have been more careful to emphasize that the object – the real behavior or practice of child abuse – was there in earlier times, even if the concept had not yet been constructed.¹² I

take it that he would be prepared to acknowledge that his tendency to slide from, say, 'In 1950, the statement that we now express by the words, "Susan was sexually harassed by Peter", could not be expressed' to 'In 1950, it was not true that Susan was sexually harassed by Peter' constitutes a conflation of the very same kind.

Locutions such as 'becoming true' and 'revising the past retroactively' heap confusion on confusion. Rather than succumbing to the temptation of making use of such notions, Hacking should have taken a second look at the line of reasoning which seems to lead up to the mind-boggling variety of his notion of past indeterminacy. To begin with, he should have distinguished clearly between what it is for an action to fall under a description, and what it is for an action to be intentional under that description. Again, actions in the past are imaginable such that we might say that they constituted child abuse and sexual harassment, even if they were not intentional *qua* such abuse and such harassment. For example, it seems quite possible to imagine a version of the Mackenzie story such that Mackenzie's behavior is rightly characterized as child abuse, even if that characterization does not capture the intention with which Mackenzie acted. Suppose that the marriage involves no physical cruelty, and that Mackenzie does his best to be a good husband according to the conventions of his time. Yet he is numb and insensitive enough not to realize that the girl suffers, in an inchoate and quiet sort of way, from what she has learnt to perceive as her duty to provide sexual satisfaction to an old man she does not love and to whom she is not attracted. Given these details about their marriage, it seems quite reasonable to say that Mackenzie was abusing the girl, even if it was not his intention to do so. (Of course, this does not mean that he bears no moral responsibility for his insensitive mistreatment of his young wife).

Distinguishing carefully between what it is for an action to fall under a description and what it is for an action to be intentional under that description may suffice to make the idea that retroactive redescription can somehow change the past lose much of its attraction. More particularly, one may well reject the notion of such retroactive change without *also* questioning Hacking's general thesis

that an action can be intentional under a description D only if the agent has access to the description 'D' (or some synonymous equivalent). As long as one consistently refrains from ascribing *intentions* retroactively to agents who did not have access to the corresponding descriptions, all one needs to do to avoid the mind-boggling variety of the indeterminacy thesis is to keep in mind that a description might be true of an action and yet fail to capture the intention with which the action was performed.

As a diagnosis of Hacking's confusion, however, this is insufficient. For he does *not* consistently refrain from retroactively ascribing intentions to people who did not have access to the corresponding descriptions: recall his claim that what we conceive as a plain example of sexual harassment in 1950 can be retroactively described (not just as sexual harassment but) as *intentional* sexual harassment. What is confusing, of course, is that we have *also* seen him defend the general thesis that acting with the intention to D requires having access to the description 'D' (or some synonymous equivalent). Apparently, this general thesis entails that an action could not be intentional *qua* sexual harassment in 1950. So, Hacking seems to be flatly contradicting himself at this point.

This is why the temptation to invoke the distinction between being true 'in' and being true 'of' the past would still be there for Hacking, even if we reminded him that a description may be true of an action and yet fail to capture the intention with which the action was performed. The distinction between being true 'in' and being true 'of' the past might seem to allow him to hold on to the general thesis that an action can be intentional under a description only if the description is available to the agent, and yet maintain, for example, that during the 1960's it became true *of* some 1950 behavior that it was intentional under the description 'sexual harassment'.

This sort of maneuver is desperate and unwarranted. It only obscures what should be obvious, namely, that to claim that intentional sexual harassment occurred in 1950 is to suggest a counterexample to the general thesis that acting with the intention to D requires having access to the description 'D' (or some synonymous equivalent). Hacking cannot have it both ways: he must either retract from that

general thesis, or retract from the particular claim that intentional sexual harassment occurred in 1950 (and from other particular claims of the same sort that he might be inclined to make).

Many influential philosophers of history would want to preserve the general thesis. Quentin Skinner famously insists that the “special authority of an agent over his intentions [...] does exclude the possibility that an acceptable account of an agent’s behavior could ever survive the demonstration that it was itself dependent on the use of criteria of description and classification not available to the agent himself.”¹³ Hacking invokes another philosophical authority, Elizabeth Anscombe, to the same effect. As several critics have pointed out, however, it is not at all clear that Anscombe subscribes to the thesis in question. Adrian Haddock reminds us of what she says about a bird that lands on a twig and in the process gets stuck on birdlime. She says both these descriptions are “satisfied by the same occurrence, which was something that the bird did, but under one description it was intentional, under the other unintentional. That the bird is not a language-user has no bearing on this.”¹⁴ Analogously, one might want to argue that there is no good reason to deny that there are cases in which humans have intentions the contents of which are captured by concepts invented only later. Hacking is prepared to call a piece of 1950 behavior an instance of intentional sexual harassment, while adding the confused proviso that this description became true only with the invention of the concept of sexual harassment in the 1960’s. But why not skip the proviso, and feel free to say, without qualification, that intentional sexual harassment occurred frequently in 1950? It may be argued that insisting that such behavior could not have been intentional *qua* sexual harassment only manifests the unwitting (and, hence, dogmatic) hardening of a fallible hypothesis into an imposed rule; *nothing* is allowed to function as a counterexample to the general principle that having an intention requires having access to the corresponding description.

This is very difficult philosophical territory. Fortunately, there is no need to explore it in any more detail here. Just to sketch my own tentative views on the matter: On the one hand, it seems clear to me that examples such as Anscombe’s bird *are* genuine counterexamples

to the principle that acting with the intention to D requires having access to the description 'D'. Other, similar examples would be a sheepdog's intending to keep the herd of sheep together, or an eight-months old infant's trying to get hold of a piece of bread.¹⁵ On the other hand, when it comes to concepts such as child abuse and sexual harassment, it is not at all clear that analogous counterexamples can be constructed. *Pace* the line of argument sketched at the end of the previous paragraph, I am inclined to say that no matter how horribly Mackenzie treated his young wife, we should not say that his behavior was intentional *qua* child abuse. Of course he might have had other deplorable intentions. For example, he might have acted with the intention to satisfy his sexual desire regardless of the suffering his behavior may cause. He might even have intended to hurt and humiliate the girl. There is perhaps a temptation to argue that if Mackenzie had such horrible intentions, that by itself would suffice to make his behavior intentional *qua* child abuse. If he intended to harm and humiliate this child, shouldn't we say that he intended to abuse her? Well; my point here is not to legislate against such usage. Rather, the important thing is to notice that if we start using the term 'child abuse' in this sort of way, the example will lose its relevance for the present discussion. For we would then conceive the term 'child abuse' simply as equivalent to a set of descriptions that were already in use at the beginning of the 19th century ('hurt', 'humiliate', and so forth). Whereas the very starting-point of Hacking's discussion is that expressions such as 'child abuse' and 'sexual harassment' were *not* introduced and are usually *not* employed as mere substitutes for, or abbreviations of, already available terms. This is the insight from which the philosophically interesting problems about retroactive re-description arise. To construe the terms in question as equivalent to a set of old concepts is to bypass the worries that I am addressing in this paper.

Above all, what I want to emphasize is that I do not think there is a *single* answer to the *general* question whether acting with a certain intention requires having access to the corresponding description. We need to be more specific. We can ask if intending to land on a twig requires having access to the term 'land on a twig' – and then,

the answer will probably be 'no'. We can ask if intending to abuse a child requires having access to the term 'child abuse' – and then, the answer will perhaps be 'yes'. But no clear sense has been given to the general question if intending to D requires having access to the description 'D'. The relations between intentions and descriptions look different in different cases. The sensible approach is to look at individual cases one at a time without presupposing that those individual cases must all be treated according to a single general principle.

A similarly 'particularist' qualification applies to my earlier point, that we should distinguish carefully between an action's falling under a description and an action's being intentional under that description. Making this distinction is not something that can rightly and usefully be done in every particular case and under any particular set of circumstances. There are *various* interconnections between descriptions, intentions and actions, and those interconnections are often very complicated and multifarious. We can say little at a general level that is useful for an adequate understanding of particular cases. We need to look carefully at each instance and consider the details of the situation.

In fact, this is in line with what Hacking himself often says about the connections between descriptions of human affairs and those human affairs themselves. He rightly emphasizes that inventing a new description of some aspect of human life is not an innocent matter, for such descriptions are not mere reflections of a passive, inert subject matter. Unlike rocks and electrons, human beings interact with their self-descriptions, and sometimes even become what they are partly because of how they characterize themselves. Hacking uses the term 'dynamic nominalism' as the name of the claim that inventing new ways of classifying people does not always mean identifying already existing kinds. Sometimes it means participating in the very creation of those kinds:

The claim of dynamic nominalism is not that there was a kind of person who came increasingly to be recognized by bureaucrats or by students of human nature, but rather that a kind of person came into being at the same time as the kind itself was being invented. In some

cases, that is, our classifications and our classes conspire to emerge hand in hand, each egging each other on.¹⁶

I want to emphasize the word ‘some’ in the last sentence. Hacking wisely refrains from making a general claim to the effect that it is always the case that people are what they are or do what they do because of how they have learnt to describe themselves and their actions.

At other places, he talks of “looping effects” between descriptions and their human subject matter. “People,” he says,

can make tacit or even explicit choices, adapt or adopt ways of living so as to fit or get away from the very classification that may be applied to them. These very choices, adaptations or adoptions have consequences for the very group, for the kind of people that is invoked. [...] What was known about people of a kind may become false because people of that kind have changed in virtue of what they believe about themselves. [...] Think what the category of genius did to those Romantics who saw themselves as geniuses, and what their behavior did in turn to the category of genius itself. Think about the transformations effected by the notions of fat, overweight, anorexic.¹⁷

Hacking points out that such looping effects may look very different in different cases. Dynamic nominalism, he says, should not be seen as an abstract philosophical thesis, but as an invitation “to do serious philosophy, namely, to take a look: to examine the intricate origins of our ideas of [say] multiple personality or of suicide.” The goal of such particular investigations is not to draw general conclusions. Indeed, we should not expect such general conclusions to be found: “just because dynamic nominalism invites us to examine the intricacies of real life, it has little chance of being a general philosophical theory. [...] I see no reason to suppose that we shall ever tell two identical stories of two different instances of making up people.”¹⁸

I completely agree with what Hacking is saying here. Indeed, my earlier criticism can be seen as an attempt to turn this particularist

strand in his thinking against his opposite tendency to reason from general premises about how descriptions are related to human action and intentionality. Again, the possibility of *some* actions and intentions is directly and straightforwardly connected to the availability of the corresponding descriptions. To take a simple example: in a society where the concept of chess playing has not been invented, people cannot play chess and cannot intend to play chess. The concept of chess playing, chess playing itself, and the possibility of intending to play chess come in a package; they are inseparable from each other. Here we do have a case where the invention of a description is also the invention of the possibility of certain actions and intentions.

In most cases, however, the connections between descriptions, actions and intentions are less straightforward and yet of considerable importance. Consider again the notion of child abuse. A third variation on the Mackenzie example may hint at some of the complications. Let us imagine that both Mackenzie and his young wife regard themselves as happily married. They enjoy each other's company and would say, honestly and without hesitation, that their relation is characterized by mutual respect and devotion. The girl does not see herself as a victim, and she often finds herself thinking of how lucky she has been to find herself such a good husband. And Mackenzie does, indeed, treat the girl much better than most men would treat their wives at the time. He is faithful; he would not dream of beating her; if he happens to hurt her feelings, he is genuinely remorseful; and so on and so forth. Suppose, moreover, that this mutual happiness lasts. Even as she grows older, the woman never finds reason to revise her opinion about the marriage as a very happy one. When she is 45, her husband dies. As a widow, she looks back with satisfaction on their life together, thinking that she could not have wished for a better man.

In this case, was Mackenzie a child abuser? It seems weird to say that he was. But it also seems doubtful to say he was not. I find it difficult to picture the relation as described above without thinking that both Mackenzie and the girl must have been naïve about, or, perhaps better, blind to certain aspects of their relation, aspects having to do with the wider social and cultural environment in which their rela-

tion was set. I find it plausible, or even irresistible, to say that they both unreflectively accepted inherited structures of oppression, and that they unwittingly fulfilled exploitive expectations on how to be husband and wife. Of course, one would want to know more about their married life and their place in the society in which they lived. But I find it hard to see what further details would make it entirely unproblematic to say that Mackenzie was definitely not abusing his fourteen-year old wife.

The notion of child abuse was not part of the conceptual repertoire available to Mackenzie and his wife. Does that matter to our imagined example? Yes, certainly. The unavailability of the concept at the time is one thing that makes it problematic to say that Mackenzie was a child abuser. To realize this, try to imagine a similarly happy relation today between a forty-eight year old man and a fourteen-year old girl who have grown up and live in contemporary Western culture. Suppose they are both, say, native Swedes whose families have been living in Sweden for generations. Arguably, this contemporary relation would *not* be similar to Mackenzie's, and one reason it would not be similar is that we find it much harder not to conceptualize it in terms of child abuse. And "we" here includes everyone, even the man and the girl. So the point is not merely that their relation would be classified as child abuse by the people around them, but that they themselves would have considerable difficulties not to think of and experience their relation in such terms. And to the extent that they do think of and experience the relation in such a way, it would indeed be child abuse – not just in a legalistic but in a morally full-fledged sense of the term. Arguably, it makes little sense to say that sexual intercourse between a forty-eight-year old man and a fourteen-year old girl that is experienced by one or both parties as an act of abuse is not child abuse in such a full-fledged sense of the word.

Perhaps I should not reject *a priori* the possibility of telling a story about such a contemporary couple that allows us to see their relation as not involving child abuse in a morally full-fledged sense of the word. But I do want to say that the fact that they are at home in contemporary Western culture, where the concept of child abuse

is accessible to everyone, at least makes such a story much, much harder to tell than if they had lived two centuries ago. While I find it relatively easy to describe Mackenzie's marriage so that calling him a child abuser becomes doubtful, it is not clear to me that a plausible story to a similar effect about his contemporary counterpart can be given.¹⁹

2. Redescription, Relativism, and Two Different Ways of Using Wittgenstein

In 2002, Wes Sharrock and Ivan Leudar published a criticism of chapter 17 of *Rewriting the Soul*.²⁰ Some of the points I made in the previous section were also made by them, and in a reply Hacking conceded that his discussion had been confused in various ways. Still, he maintained that, in an important sense, Sharrock's and Leudar's criticism was off target. Indeed, he argued that their approach was quite alien to the overall aim and spirit of what he had written. According to Hacking, Sharrock and Leudar took it for granted that the problems he was interested in could be adequately dealt with from a distanced, second-order point of view. But this was precisely the sort of distanced perspective Hacking meant to avoid. "I was not aware of anything second-order in my descriptions of various cases in my chapter. They were with one exception all real cases, cited as such, and I was trying to work as closely as possible to the level of those cases and the participants involved in them. [...] On many occasions [Sharrock and Leudar] lift what I wrote to a higher level of description than was present in the chapter."²¹ In this section, my aim is to clarify what I take to be the correct and important point in this response.

Hacking emphasizes that his book was written in 1994, in "the days of virulent skirmishes around memory, false memory, about who did what to whom psychically as well as physically, and about who felt what."²² In the book, Hacking urges his readers to consider the possibility that the opposite sides in those skirmishes might both be distorting the issue of false memory by presupposing that memories are either definitely true or definitely false. According to

Hacking, some memories are definitely true and others are definitely false, but there are also memories that are neither. Was I abused as a child? In some cases, yes, certainly; in other cases, no, definitely not; but then there are cases where the correct answer is neither a clear yes nor a clear no. Hacking wants us to have the courage to face such indeterminacy. He wants to avoid both the Schylla of irresponsible therapists who want to see child abuse wherever they look and do not hesitate to “help” their clients to “recover” repressed memories of such abuse, and the Charybdis of people who tend to think that all or nearly all memories of past abuse are simply and straightforwardly false. According to Hacking, both sides are often insensitive to the intricacies involved in applying recently developed concepts to past events and experiences that were not conceptualized in those terms when they took place. Hacking’s talk of past indeterminacy is above all an attempt to reveal the mistaken assumption taken for granted by both sides in those skirmishes, the assumption, that is, that there is always a determinate yes-or-no answer to the tormenting questions under debate. “I was regularly asked to serve as an ‘expert witness,’” he writes. “After the lawyers had talked to me for a while, they told me to get lost. They heard that in my opinion we often did not know what to say, even after as many facts were known as could be expected to be known. You do not want someone like that in the witness-box!”²³

My complaints in the previous section were not directed against the sound and important point that there are cases in which it is unclear what we should say when we want to apply new concepts to past events, and that such indeterminacy often have to do with looping effects caused by the interaction between humans and their self-descriptions. Rather, my dissatisfaction had to do with Hacking’s tendency to obscure these insights by talking, mind-bogglingly, as if we could literally change the past by retroactive redescription. I think this makes Hacking’s attempt to navigate between the Schylla of irresponsible therapists and the Charybdis of their equally dogmatic opponents less convincing than it could have been. That mind-boggling variety of the indeterminacy thesis makes it seem as if Hacking takes himself to have found a way of, as it were, agreeing and dis-

greeing with both sides in the conflict: on the one hand, he says it might be true *of* times before 1960 that, say, children were abused; on the other hand, he says it was not true *in* those times. By contrast, a sounder version of the point about indeterminacy makes no use at all of the distinction between “of” and “in” the past. What this version says is just that careful considerations of past cases – considerations which include reflections on the multifarious ways in which humans and their self-descriptions interact – may leave us in a position where any clear yes-or-no verdict will look dishonest. What characterizes the virulent skirmishes against which Hacking is reacting is precisely the unwillingness to engage in such careful reflection. People on either side cowardly refute to recognize even the possibility that there might be cases that are indeterminate in the relevant sense.

I will clarify the sense in which Sharrock and Leudar are blind to the character of Hacking’s investigation by comparing their and Hacking’s very different ways of using Wittgenstein. Here is how Sharrock and Leudar start their discussion of the Mackenzie example:

The thing which strikes us about this case (which Hacking treats as important) is that *the facts* of the case (as the case is presented, at least) may be plainly seen and, as Wittgenstein advised, say what you like so long as it does not make you blind to the facts.²⁴

According to Sharrock and Leudar, the facts of the Mackenzie case, as presented by Hacking, are transparent. “These facts”, they say,

could be summarized in this way: at the time that McKenzie [*sic*] married the 14-year-old girl, this was considered a harmless thing to do, whereas it was *what we would now call* ‘child abuse’. If we do not say that it *was* child abuse, that is only to mark its relations to the conventions of its time, but if someone did that now it most definitely would be child abuse. The difficulties begin to arise if we insist on pressing the issue further than this, as if there was something that will be further clarified by asking: well, then, *was it child abuse when McKenzie did it?* Actually, the difficulty is if the question is asked thus: *was it child abuse when McKenzie did it, yes or no?*

The second formulation confirms that it is the desire to force a yes-or-no answer to the question that creates the difficulty here. It is one which, plainly, can be answered both ‘yes’ *and* ‘no’, but, like so many questions in the social studies, the best answer is: it all depends.²⁵

On what does it all depend, then? According to Sharrock and Leudar, how to characterize Mackenzie’s behavior depends on what viewpoint one adopts. The idea is this. As long as we look at what Mackenzie did from our contemporary point of view – as long as we insist that Mackenzie’s action should be judged according to present conceptual and moral standards, standards which include the recently invented notion of child abuse – we will have to describe his behavior as an instance of child abuse (and, hence, as something really bad). If we do not describe his behavior as child abuse, this is because we have chosen not to think of it in contemporary terms. And, supposedly, this latter alternative is open to us. If we like, we may lay aside our 21st century spectacles – in particular, our concept of child abuse – in favor of concepts that are closer to Mackenzie’s own linguistic repertoire. Or, as Sharrock and Leudar seem to be recommending at the end of the quoted passage, we may decide not to adopt any one of these two alternative schemes, but detach ourselves from both of them and say, “It all depends”.

Thus, Sharrock’s and Leudar’s discussion of this example is characterized by their taking it for granted that we can comfortably ascend to a level from which our contemporary linguistic habits and “the conventions of [Mackenzie’s] time” are both looked at from without, or from above – a level at which it appears as if we can choose to adopt either one of these different “viewpoints”, or simply remain outside. They picture our pondering the differences between Mackenzie’s time and our own, not as part of our first-level contemporary practice with the term ‘child abuse’, but as part of a second-level reflection *on* that practice and its relations to alternative conceptual frameworks. Sensitivity to variations in historical context is conceived as something we take into consideration only as we detach ourselves from our post-1960 linguistic habits and instead occupy a meta-level at which present conceptual standards appear side by side

with those of the early 19th century. So, the controversial question is not supposed to be whether Mackenzie was a child abuser according to our post-1960 point of view. On the contrary, Sharrock and Leudar take it as unquestionable that the standards governing the post-1960 use of the term ‘child abuse’ entail that Mackenzie was a child abuser. Rather, the controversial question is supposed to be which viewpoint to adopt: should we measure Mackenzie’s behavior according to present standards or according to the conventions of his own time? Allegedly, it is not that the differences between Mackenzie’s time and our own make it any less certain that from our post-1960 point of view Mackenzie was a child abuser. Rather, to the extent that variations in historical context matter at all, they are seen as having a quite different function, namely that of giving us reason to *abandon* our post-1960 point of view, as embodied in the concept of child abuse, in favor of a viewpoint closer to Mackenzie’s.

This conception is deeply problematic. For we should not be so confident in thinking that we know what it is to treat our own linguistic habits as something that can be abandoned at will, in favor of some different set of standards that are supposed to have governed people’s thinking at an earlier time in history. Do we really understand what it is to ascend to a meta-level at which such a decision can be made? The difficulties come to the fore if we think a little harder about what it would mean for us to abandon our post-1960 point of view. Would this involve a genuine *withdrawal* of the claim that Mackenzie was a child abuser? Or is it simply that we choose to no longer mention this fact about Mackenzie? Does it mean that we have given ourselves substantial reasons not to describe Mackenzie’s behavior as child abuse? Or do we willfully make ourselves blind to the post-1960 insight that Mackenzie was a child abuser? The exact nature of such a decision remains utterly obscure.

The contrast with Hacking’s approach is striking. His starting-point is this: It is not clear that what Mackenzie did was child abuse, *even according to our present way of talking*. Hacking thinks the differences between Mackenzie’s time and our own may matter even as we remain within our own, post-1960 usage. Consideration of such linguistic, cultural and social differences is not a meta-activity, but is

integral to the responsible use of our concept of child abuse. Hacking never so much as suggests that we can abandon our present way of talking in favor of some earlier conceptual framework, or even that the idea of such abandonment makes sense. In his investigation, our post-1960 use of the term ‘child abuse’ does not figure as the application of a fixed set of rules according to which what Mackenzie did was definitely an instance of child abuse, but as a flexible practice which itself includes reflection on differences between present and past; reflections which, though far from arbitrary, follow no mechanical algorithm, but require our full and unregularizable engagement as morally and historically sensitive beings.

Like Hacking, Sharrock and Leudar claim that the question whether Mackenzie was a child abuser should not be pressed for a yes-or-no answer. And yet, their view is utterly different from Hacking’s. Hacking never ascends to the meta-level at which Sharrock and Leudar are operating. He remains firmly within an engaged, first-order discussion of the issue. His refusal to provide a yes-or-no answer expresses no “say what you like”-attitude, but constitutes a head-on rejection of yes-or-no answers as *wrong* (rather than just optional). For Hacking, questions such as whether Mackenzie was a child abuser arise and are dealt with within our contemporary way of talking. The conventions of Mackenzie’s time – or, better, the whole conceptual, social and cultural environment in which Mackenzie lived and had been brought up – enter Hacking’s discussion, not as an alternative viewpoint that we may choose to adopt, but as something we need to consider in thinking about how *we* should describe and judge Mackenzie’s behavior from our present point of view. Mackenzie’s behavior, in its cultural milieu, is there as a conceptual and moral problem for *us* post-1960 users of the term ‘child abuse’.

Hacking notes that Sharrock’s and Leudar’s approach to the Mackenzie example “characteristically ignores the didactic message of the author in the *Times* – just don’t forget that Alex was a child molester! They are interested in the question of how a calm and distanced social scientist should describe the explorer, and lose the moral passion that informed the author with whom I started.”²⁶ Hacking remains

at the same level as the author in the *Times*. He argues, straight on, that the author's claim that Mackenzie was a child molester is mistaken, and that we should have the courage to see that our term 'child abuse' has no determinate application in this case. By contrast, Sharrock's and Leudar's meta-perspective manifests itself precisely in their wanting to avoid such direct confrontation. According to them, the author in the *Times* gives expression to one outlook among others, an outlook that we may choose or not choose to adopt.

It is unclear how to make sense of the idea of viewing social phenomena from Sharrock's and Leudar's aloof, amoral perspective. It is equally unclear for what purposes adopting such a perspective would be useful. In any case, Sharrock and Leudar are clearly confused about what those purposes might be. I just called their perspective "amoral", but they actually seem to think of their stance as one from which it is possible to do justice to the moral dimension of the Mackenzie example. It is an important sign of their confusion that they find it natural to transform this moral issue into what seems very similar to a conflict between relativism and anti-relativism.²⁷ The difference between the claim that we should judge Mackenzie's behavior according to the standards of his own time and the claim that we should apply our contemporary conceptual apparatus and classify Mackenzie's behavior as child abuse is, they argue,

in fact primarily a moral one, between the view that the right thing to do is to respect the autonomy and independence of communities other than our own, to grant them jurisdiction over the moral status of actions done within them, or not. Against this, however, we may insist that our morality requires general application, that we can make judgements on people's actions that override those that they would themselves make.²⁸

Transforming the moral problem about how to characterize Mackenzie's behavior into a meta-question about whether "our morality requires general application" makes the issue quite elusive and, indeed, barely coherent. After all, what would it mean for our ways of talking *not* to have "general application" but somehow merely "local"

scope? If careful historical reflection convinces me that I should not describe Mackenzie's behavior as 'child abuse', this by no means entails that I am imposing a restriction on our present use of that term. Rather, I may regard my conclusion as itself a result of the unregularizable employment of the term 'child abuse'. If so, what my historical reflections have convinced me of is that *our* concept of child abuse is such that Mackenzie's behavior does not fall under it. I conceive of myself as still engaged in our post-1960 practice with the term 'child abuse', even as I conclude that that term is not properly used to characterize what Mackenzie did. According to my judgment, our contemporary way of talking is such that Mackenzie's behavior, in its historical setting, should not be characterized as child abuse.

Sharrock and Leudar are blind to this possibility, since they simply take it for granted that our post-1960 use of the term 'child abuse' are governed by standards that entail that Mackenzie was a child abuser:

[W]e can *all* agree that what Mackenzie did then is what would nowadays be called child abuse [...] – not least because that includes 'all sexual contact with a 14-year-old girl'. In other words, all sexual contact of that type, *regardless of all other circumstances*, comprises harassment [*sic* – should be "abuse"]. In that usage, of course, the fact that McKenzie was conventional and by no means exceptional in his time *counts for nothing*.²⁹

Given this presupposition, Sharrock and Leudar are forced to argue that if there is a problem about how to classify Mackenzie's behavior, this problem arises only as we ascend from a first-level engagement in our contemporary practice to a detached, second-level meta-reflection. Hence, they get the peculiar result that this moral and conceptual problem can arise only at a point located outside of the relevant parts of "our morality"; the problem gets transformed into a question *about* our moral and conceptual standards, about their legitimate range of application. But do we really understand this question? And do we understand the answers that may be proposed? Again, suppose we decide that, in the Mackenzie case, our morality does not

require general application, but that we should grant Mackenzie and his contemporaries jurisdiction over the moral status of the actions performed in their society. What is this supposed to mean? Presumably, we are trying to say that even if Mackenzie's behavior falls under the concept of child abuse according to the standards that govern our post-1960 use of that word, we can somehow stop it from falling under that concept by refraining from applying those contemporary standards. But this is confused, and, indeed, brings out the fundamental incoherence of Sharrock's and Leudar's conception. If something falls under a concept, we cannot stop it from doing so by volition. We cannot both say that our own post-1960 conceptual standards *would* classify Mackenzie's behavior as child abuse, and *also* claim that since we *refrain* from applying those standards, that behavior does not count as such. Once we say that according to contemporary standards Mackenzie's behavior was child abuse, we thereby commit ourselves to the claim that his behavior was, indeed, child abuse. The attempt to somehow retract this claim by a posterior restriction of the scope of our contemporary conceptual standards makes no sense at all.

According to Hacking, we are inclined to suppose that we have the past well in hand – that questions about what happened raise only ordinary, empirical problems, and, hence, that an inability to answer such questions can only be due to a lack of empirical information. But then we invent new descriptions and new classifications, and it suddenly becomes unclear what we should say about the past, even if we have access to all the empirical information we may want. If the relevant parts of the past are of great concern to us, such indeterminacy can be quite shocking. Indeed, this shock may be almost unbearable, and, hence, we tell ourselves that the past *must* have been in either one way or the other. In particular, if the relevant parts of the past are parts of one's own life, and if what suddenly becomes indeterminate is how one should describe one's own memories, it may take an enormous strength not to seek comfort in an illusion of determinacy.

Hacking writes:

I would compare the situation with familiar observations by many, including Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* §80. If a chair kept appearing and disappearing before our very eyes, we would not know what to say. “Have you rules ready for such cases – rules saying whether one may use the word ‘chair’ to include this kind of thing?” He imagined a bizarre turn of events for which our ways of talking are not prepared. Less bizarre but otherwise comparable things really do happen. We are not prepared, I think, for periods of consciousness-raising and changes in ways of life that lead to revised moralities, new evaluations, new emotions, new feelings.³⁰

In the section of *Philosophical Investigations* to which Hacking is referring, Wittgenstein imagines that reality starts behaving in hitherto unprecedented ways, which make the application of customary forms of description indeterminate. Most of Hacking’s own examples illustrate a somewhat different sort of case, in which it is the development of new forms of description that constitutes the source of indeterminacy. Still, I think Hacking is right to connect his point to Wittgenstein’s. The crisis is similar in both cases, and there is the same temptation to suppose that the conceptual apparatus we find ourselves wanting to use must always allow us to pin down the phenomena we want to describe. Hacking is not denying that the invention of descriptions such as ‘child abuse’ and ‘sexual harassment’ raises our consciousness, but he is questioning the idea that such consciousness-raising consists simply in our becoming aware of terrible things that have always existed but whose existence has not been acknowledged before. Certainly, some instances of past child abuse and sexual harassment do fit this simple picture. But in many other cases, the picture is too simple. Consciousness-raising has a price. Disquietudes may be created, disquietudes which it would be dishonest to try to silence either by pretending that the new concepts give us mechanically applicable rules that provide unswerving guidance, or by pretending, à la Sharrock and Leudar, that “the facts” are still transparent and agreed-upon and that all that has happened is that an alternative and optional way of describing these facts has been invented.

3. Across Time, Across Cultures

As I showed in the first section of this paper, Hacking flirts with a mind-boggling thesis about past indeterminacy, according to which retroactive redescrptions can modify the past itself and somehow fill it with actions that were not there when they were performed. I argued that his being tempted to embrace this astounding view has to do with the way in which three features of his reasoning interact. First, there is his failing to distinguish clearly between what is required for an action's falling under a description, and what is required for an action's being intentional under that description. Second, he presupposes that acting with the intention to D always requires having access to the description 'D' (or some synonymous equivalent). Third, he nonetheless wants to say that there are cases in which retroactive redescrptions of past human affairs are true, even if the people whose actions and intentions get described did not have access to the concepts used in that redescription.

I argued that it is often of crucial importance to keep in mind the distinction between characterizing an action and characterizing the intention with which the action is performed. Moreover, I claimed that at least with respect to some descriptions, the presupposition that acting with the intention to D requires access to the description 'D' (or some synonymous equivalent) is questionable. However, I did not deny what Hacking calls "dynamic nominalism". Human action and experience often depend on the linguistic resources available at the relevant point in history, and those linguistic resources may themselves change as a result of human action and experience. Such looping effects are diverse in character. There is little useful to say at a general level about how humans and their self-descriptions interact. We have to look carefully at individual cases in order to see what is going on there. Such historical reflections may yield surprising results and shatter narrow-minded, anachronistic prejudices, but they will not give us reason to say that the past itself is revised retroactively.

Once Hacking's conception has been freed from this idea of revising the past, it is easier to see what is original and valuable in his

approach. His way of proceeding illustrates how to take historical context-sensitivity into account without ascending to the sort of meta-level at which Sharrock and Leudar presume that social scientists should be operating. It may seem as if Hacking's dynamic nominalism commits him to some sort of relativist constructivism, and this impression is certainly strengthened by his tendency to talk of the past as something we can revise by inventing new forms of description. Once that unfortunate way of talking is rejected, however, we can see, in Hacking's confrontation with Sharrock and Leudar, that his dynamic nominalism is not relativist or constructivist in any reasonable sense of those words. Nor is it anti-relativist or anti-constructivist. Rather, it shows how to take historical context-sensitivity into consideration while refusing to play the relativist/anti-relativist game.

In this respect, we researchers in the humanities and the social sciences seem to have much to learn from Hacking's investigation. As far as I can see, we are still much too inclined to think that taking variations in historical circumstances into consideration is something we can do only as we ascend from our contemporary and supposedly parochial way of talking and thinking, and look at that scheme from without, as one among a number of different and equally parochial conceptual apparatuses that have existed at various times in history. According to this way of thinking, as long as we remain within such a parochial scheme we will judge according to the historically insensitive rules of that scheme. For example: as long as we remain within our post-1960 way of using the term 'child abuse', we will have to judge, parochially, that Mackenzie abused his wife.

This whole way of thinking should be rejected. Hacking's response to his critics helps us realize how misleading it is to conceive of linguistic practices as "schemes" that are inherently "parochial". Certainly, *individual users* of, say, the term 'child abuse' may be parochial, such as the author in the *Times* who unhesitatingly classified Mackenzie as a child abuser. But parochialism is not essential to the use of this term. Others who employ it in its contemporary sense might not be parochial – Hacking himself, for example. To say that Hacking is free from the other author's parochialism is not to say that

he is any less immersed in our contemporary way of talking of child abuse. Linguistic practices are flexible enough to leave room for the sort of careful yet unregularizable historical, conceptual and moral self-reflection which Hacking's investigation exemplifies. Arguably, in many cases such self-reflection is even *called for* by the practice. Hence, the right thing to say seems to be that Hacking's engagement in the practice is in fact deeper, or more serious, than the engagement exhibited by the author in the *Times*.

In section 2, I quoted Hacking as saying that Sharrock and Leudar are interested in the question of how "a calm and distanced social scientist" should describe a case like that of Mackenzie's marriage. It seems to me that in this passage, Hacking concedes too much to his opponents. Not because adopting Sharrock's and Leudar's "distanced" viewpoint leads to bad social science. Rather, my point is that Sharrock and Leudar have made no coherent sense of what such a "distanced" viewpoint may be. Certainly, their discussion gives the reader a sense of how tempting it might be to think that we can ascend to a viewpoint from which all the "facts" will be "transparent", and from which the apparent opposition between the post-1960 framework and the framework of Mackenzie and his contemporaries seems like a quibble between equally parochial perspectives; a point, that is, from which we are able to see everything as it really is, and defuse the quibble by saying, "it all depends". In this paper I have argued that this temptation is the temptation of a mirage, and should be resisted. In the end, imagining that one can occupy such a detached viewpoint does not result in calmness. On the contrary: As the over-heated contemporary debates about relativism and constructivism may be taken to suggest, the main result of the idea of such detachment is muddled and fruitless polemics.

One reason why Sharrock's and Leudar's conception might look appealing and intelligible is perhaps that it is easily conflated with another, quite different point. What I have in mind is the entirely sensible observation that, for a working historian, the question of whether Mackenzie is to be classified as a child abuser or not might be of little interest. After all, not every fact about a person matters to an historical investigation. Unless he has very special interests, an

historian would not care much about, say, Bismarck's shoe size, or Cleopatra's favorite color. When it comes to the question of whether Mackenzie was a child abuser, it is likely that answering this question does not contribute to the sort of understanding or explanation that a historian is typically looking for. One thing that seems to characterize that sort of understanding is that questions about whether a certain piece of behavior deserves moral denunciation or not are laid aside, or, at least, that such questions are not the primary focus of the investigation. The moral convictions of people *at the time* might of course be important to take into consideration in order to understand past human affairs. But typically such consideration does not involve deciding whether those old views were in fact justified or correct.

It is important to get clear about the difference between this point and the conception of historical research that Sharrock and Leudar are advocating. It is not part of the approach to history that I have just sketched to answer the question, 'Was Mackenzie a child abuser?' by saying, 'It all depends'. In a sense, the historian might be said to bracket his one's own moral convictions, but this does not mean that he relativizes them. The historian, as I am imagining him, might be quite prepared to deliver a straightforward answer. He might say, 'Yes, Mackenzie abused his wife', or 'No, Mackenzie did not abuse her', or 'It's not determinate whether this was an instance of child abuse'. My point is just that this is not an issue he cares much about in his actual research.

Bracketing one's moral judgments in this sort of way is not always possible or sensible. In particular, approaching one's own past and one's own memories in such a historicizing fashion may often be both insincere and beside the point. Indeed, what matters in such a case may be precisely the adequacy of a retroactive moral verdict. Another interesting case is when we are dealing, not with retroactive redescription of the past, but with redescription across presently existing cultures. Many readers may already have wondered to what extent the points I have been making about retroactive redescription are valid also with respect to cross-cultural redescription. After all, it happens today, not only in non-Western parts of the world but

also among cultural minorities in almost every major city in Europe and North America, that 48-year-old men get married to 14-year-old girls (of course the wedding itself will have to take place in countries where such marriages are legal). Are those men child abusers in a morally full-fledged sense of the word? Or are there reasons not to describe them as such?

Most of the points I have made about retroactive redescription apply also to cross-cultural cases. Just as in the historical case, linguistic, social and other differences do matter to the adequacy of cross-cultural redescriptions. This may at first sight appear to imply some sort of relativism. But rightly understood it does not imply any such thing. Considerations of cultural differences are internal to the responsible use of the relevant concepts, rather than part of a meta-reflection on their employment. Appreciating this point involves seeing *both* that characterizing what people in a foreign culture do in terms that are distinctively ours may, in many cases, be not just permissible but very illuminating, *and* that deciding in a particular case whether such a description is adequate requires the conscientious employment of our full, human sensibility. The word 'sensibility' should be taken quite seriously here: we should expect no general recipe for how to determine, in a given case, whether a concept applies to the action or experience we want to characterize and understand. Indeed, the wish to find such a general formula is likely to cloud rather than sharpen our sensibility.

Of course there are also interesting differences between retroactive and cross-cultural cases. Let me end this paper by mentioning briefly two differences that come to the fore as soon as one starts reflecting more carefully on what it is to describe the practices of a foreign culture.

To begin with, there is the question of what, exactly, it means to say that a certain description is or is not "available" to the persons whose actions, intentions, experiences, and so on, get described. In my discussion of retroactive redescription, I was not very precise about what the relevant notion of availability involves. Given the points I wanted to make in that context, and the particular examples discussed, I do not think further exactness was required. In all the

examples I was working with, it was sufficiently clear what it meant to say that the persons whose actions were described did not have access to the relevant concepts.

With respect to many interesting cases of cross-cultural redescription, however, it seems as if we need to think harder about what “having access” to a concept is supposed to involve. Consider a man who immigrated to Sweden when he was 35 and who lives in a segregated suburb outside of Stockholm. In his native country, nobody talked about child abuse, and marriages between 48-year old men and 14-year old girls were common and generally accepted. Suppose this man’s interaction with native Swedes is very limited. His close friends all belong to the same cultural minority as himself, and at work his contact with people who do not share his background is formal and businesslike. He rarely watches Swedish television or read Swedish newspapers. He has of course noticed that there is a term ‘child abuse’ being used in Swedish society, and he even has some grasp of what this use looks like. But he feels quite estranged from that way of talking. Certainly, he shares the horror with which most native Swedes react to the cruel mistreatment of small children, but he does not really understand the worries that they have about marriages between middle-aged men and women in their early teens. If the parents of the bride think this is the right thing for their daughter to do, and if the husband is a decent man, he finds it completely absurd to group such marriages together with those other, horrible instances of mistreatment to which the term ‘child abuse’ is also supposed to apply.

Does this man have access to the term ‘child abuse’? Is it part of his linguistic repertoire? We should not take it for granted that such questions always have a yes-or-no answer. In this and similar cases, the answer may be indeterminate. Such indeterminacy does not mean that we cannot get clear about the man’s relation to the term ‘child abuse’, as it is being used in Sweden and other Western countries. The point is just that we should not expect that this relation is best understood in terms of the term’s being either “available” or “not available” to him. What is in fact present, and what we need to take into account in order to understand the situation, is a bewil-

deringly complex set of relations between the man and the culture of the country to which he has immigrated. The fruitful thing to do is to try to describe and understand this complex set of relations, rather than to insist that this man must either have access or not have access to the term 'child abuse'. In this sort of case, "availability" itself goes indeterminate.

Of course there are many examples of cross-cultural redescription where no such indeterminacy is present. It might, for example, be perfectly determinate that the members of a very recently discovered New Guinean tribe do not have access to our concept of child abuse. Conversely, retroactive cases are imaginable in which it is indeterminate whether the people in the past whose behavior we are trying to understand had access to the words we use to describe their actions and intentions. So, my point here is not to identify a sharp or principled difference between the retroactive and the cross-cultural case. My suggestion is just that, unlike *most* historical examples, interesting cross-cultural examples are *very often* such that it is central to keep in mind that the relevant concepts might be neither determinately available nor determinately unavailable to the people whose actions and intentions we are trying to characterize.

Some paragraphs ago, I made the point that in the context of historical inquiry, retroactive moral denunciation is often beside the point. The working historian might not be very interested in whether or not Mackenzie was a child abuser. Given the sort of understanding he is looking for, such inherently disapproving characterizations have no central role to play. This brings me to the second difference between retroactive and cross-cultural cases that I wanted to mention. It is certainly true that in academic research about foreign cultures, moral denunciation of the foreign practices is often as beside the point as in historical investigations. The approach of a working anthropologist is in this sense similar to that of a working historian. Outside the special context of such anthropological investigations, however, cross-cultural cases often do have a special moral urgency. The point is simple and straightforward: in contrast to instances of retroactive redescription, what we are dealing with here are views and habits that we can try to *do something about*. After all, one reason

why it may seem of relatively little interest to decide whether Mackenzie's behavior constituted child abuse is that what has happened has happened. There is no hope of changing the habits of Mackenzie and his peers. By contrast, it makes sense and is in some cases perhaps even mandatory to criticize and try to alter the practices of a foreign contemporary culture, insofar as those practices are morally unacceptable. It would therefore seem to be of great importance to decide whether those practices really are unacceptable. For example, it may be of great importance to decide whether some of those foreign activities are correctly described as 'child abuse', or if such a characterization is unfair.

My aim in this paper has not been to take a stand on the adequacy of particular retroactive or cross-cultural redescriptions. Consider a foreign culture, past or present, in which marriages between middle-aged men and girls in their early teens are common and generally accepted. Does this practice amount to child abuse, in a morally full-fledged sense of the word? I have discussed three possible answers: (i) Yes, it does; (ii) No, it does not; and, (iii) It is indeterminate whether or not this is child abuse. Which answer to give will depend on the further details of the case. My discussion of different imaginable variations of the Mackenzie example was meant to illustrate ways in which such details may matter, and to suggest that no general recipe can be given for how to judge the relevance of such contextual elements. We have to rely on our good sense of how the adequacy of a retroactive or cross-cultural redescription may depend on the multifarious differences between past and present, or between a foreign culture and our own. Concrete historical or anthropological research may help us refine this good sense, and so may real experience of previously unfamiliar ways of life. General methodological precepts or philosophical meta-theories, however, will be of much less use.

I criticized two ways of misunderstanding the sort of indeterminacy referred to in answer (iii) above. The first sort of misunderstanding is manifest in Hacking's mind-boggling suggestion that retroactive redescription can somehow change the past. The second sort of misunderstanding is manifest in Sharrock's and Leudar's confused idea that we can ascend to a detached meta-level from which

we can see that the adequacy of a yes-or-no answer to a question like ‘Was Mackenzie a child abuser?’ depends on what historical or cultural viewpoint one chooses to adopt. I have tried to show that the notion of such a choice is spurious. I agree that what we need in order to reach a correct verdict on a case like Mackenzie’s is a clear perception of the relevant facts. But the idea that the facts are already “transparent” and that we can therefore “say what we like” is not conducive to such clear-sightedness. On the contrary, that idea makes us blind to those facts and their real significance.

Notes

- 1 Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 243.
- 2 Contributions to this debate include Wes Sharrock and Ivan Leudar, “Indeterminacy in the Past?”, *History of the Human Sciences* 15:3 (2002): pp. 95-115, “Changing the Past?”, *History of the Human Sciences* 16:3 (2003): 105-121; Steve Fuller, “Making Up the Past: A Response to Sharrock and Leudar”, *History of the Human Sciences* 15:4 (2002): pp. 115-123; Paul A. Roth, “Ways of Pastmaking”, *History of the Human Sciences* 15:4 (2002): pp. 25-143; Kevin McMillan, “Under a Redescription”, *History of the Human Sciences* 16:2 (2003): pp. 129-150; Ian Hacking, “Indeterminacy in the Past: On the Recent Discussion of Chapter 17 of *Rewriting the Soul*”, *History of the Human Sciences* 16:2 (2003): pp. 117-124; Adrian Haddock, “Rewriting the Past: Retroactive Description and Its Consequences”, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 32 (2002): pp. 3-24.
- 3 Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul*, p. 242.
- 4 It deserves to be noticed, however, that the use of the term ‘child abuse’ has fluctuated considerably during its brief time of existence. Hacking gives a fuller description of the use and history of this term in “The Making and Molding of Child Abuse”, *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991): pp. 252-288.
- 5 Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul*, p. 242.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 243.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 243f.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 243.
- 9 Adrian Haddock, “Rewriting the Past: Retroactive Description and Its Consequences”, p. 16. Barry Allen disagrees: “Child abuse (I mean not the old sense of negligence but the current sense of sexual abuse) is not something that can happen unintentionally or by accident. It must be a deliberate, intentional action.” (Barry Allen, “The Soul of Knowledge”,

- History and Theory* 36 (1997): pp. 63-82, at p. 69.) But this is simply false. As I will soon show, variations of the Mackenzie example are imaginable in which his behavior is rightly characterized as child abuse even if Mackenzie's intention is not to abuse his wife.
- 10 Why would it otherwise be so important for him, in his earlier description of the case – the description which leads him to conclude that Mackenzie's behavior neither was nor wasn't child abuse – to emphasize that we do not have evidence of such physical cruelty?
 - 11 Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul*, pp. 249f.
 - 12 Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 28-9.
 - 13 Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas", *History and Theory* 8 (1969): pp. 3-53, at p. 29. Thanks to Lorenzo Casini for reminding me of Skinner's significance for my discussion.
 - 14 G. E. M. Anscombe, "Under a Description", in *The Collected Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe: Volume 1 – From Parmenides to Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), p. 210. Quoted in Adrian Haddock, "Rewriting the Past: Retroactive Description and Its Consequences", p. 15.
 - 15 Many philosophers have attacked our everyday practice of ascribing intentions and similar attitudes to animals and infants. An illuminating counter-attack can be found in David Finkelstein's "Holism and Animal Minds", in A. Cray (ed.), *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Cora Diamond* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).
 - 16 Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 106.
 - 17 Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?*, p. 34.
 - 18 Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology*, p. 114.
 - 19 It may be argued that Mackenzie's contemporary counterpart is not someone who has grown up and live in contemporary Western culture, but someone from a non-Western culture in which marriages between 48-year old men and 14-year old girls are not very unusual and are generally accepted. In section 3 of this paper, I make some further comments on the issue of cross-cultural description.
 - 20 Wes Sharrock and Ivan Leudar, "Indeterminacy in the Past?", *History of the Human Sciences* 15:3 (2002): pp. 95-115.
 - 21 Ian Hacking, "Indeterminacy in the Past: On the Recent Discussion of Chapter 17 of *Rewriting the Soul*", *History of the Human Sciences* 16:2 (2003): pp. 117-124, at p. 119.
 - 22 Hacking, "Indeterminacy in the Past: On the Recent Discussion of Chapter 17 of *Rewriting the Soul*", p. 117.
 - 23 *Ibid.*, p. 118.
 - 24 Sharrock and Leudar, "Indeterminacy in the Past?", p. 105. (Original em-

- phases.) The passage from Wittgenstein to which Sharrock and Leudar are alluding is in *Philosophical Investigations* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1953), §79.
- 25 Sharrock and Leudar, “Indeterminacy in the Past?”, p. 105. (Original emphases.)
- 26 Hacking, “Indeterminacy in the Past: On the Recent Discussion of Chapter 17 of *Rewriting the Soul*”, p. 121.
- 27 Sharrock and Leudar pay lip-service to a supposedly Wittgensteinian denial of the intelligibility of the conflict between relativism and anti-relativism: “we do not think [...] that as philosophical positions either moral universalism or cultural relativism makes any sense.” (“Changing the Past?”, p. 115.) As I will show, however, their rejection of this conflict does not go deep enough. In fact, they are still very much held captive by the sort of pictures that fuel the relativist/anti-relativist controversy.
- 28 Sharrock and Leudar, “Indeterminacy in the Past?”, p. 106.
- 29 Ibid. (Last emphasis added.)
- 30 Hacking, “Indeterminacy in the Past: On the Recent Discussion of Chapter 17 of *Rewriting the Soul*”, p. 118.

HANS RUIN

The Silence of Philosophy

Introduction

Probably the single most often cited statement from the philosophical literature of the 20th century is a statement about silence, about the need for a specific and qualified philosophical silence, Wittgenstein's famous words from *Tractatus*: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."¹ Read in combination with several of the other provocatively reticent statements from this book – such as the line that "There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical"² – it suggest a fundamentally Manichean image of thinking and of philosophy. On the one hand we have that of which we can speak, which are the facts of this world in their relations, configurations, and causal interdependencies. On the other hand we have that of which we can not speak, which are not only issues of value, such as ethical and aesthetical matters, but also basically everything which metaphysics has previously taken to be its principal tasks; such as the nature of being, life, God, and the epistemological relation between mind and world.

Silence, even more than words, is destined to be interpreted in the most varied ways. And Wittgenstein's silence is no exception. In a very general sense it provided inspiration to the credo of logical positivism, that philosophy should abandon its previous attempts to speak of the world at large and leave this business to the development of science. The task of philosophy can henceforth only be to criticize the claims of metaphysical thinking and science, and to help the scientific community to sharpen its tools. From this perspective, Wittgenstein's call for silence is primarily a normative call to cease speaking about that of which there is no use speaking in the first

place. A very different track, however, is the one that follows Wittgenstein's own suggestion, that what we can speak about is really not that important, and that we should instead aspire to get beyond precisely this level. From this perspective, his thinking instead radiates of an enchanting hope, a promise of a privileged insight for those who have managed to climb the ladder of philosophical reasoning.

The famous distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown then obtains a decisive philosophical significance. For what can be shown is in the end what really matters, as the privileged concern of philosophical insight. The seeing to which we can aspire in and through thinking is not one simply communicated by means of ordinary discursive reasoning, but one to which we can at best be led. Such a seeing is cultivated in a qualified silence, which permits things to present themselves, but which no longer aspires to secure a fixed point from which a discursive description of the totality of being can be once and for all accomplished. Obviously, silence is here not just a common sense caution to keep away from nonsense, but instead something that would seem to permeate and underlie Wittgenstein's entire work, "as the repeated realization of the loss of a fixed center of thinking." This last formulation is in fact a quotation from a little known book by Steven Bindeman, published in 1981, entitled *Heidegger and Wittgenstein. The Poetics of Silence*.³ It traces the theme of silence in the two philosophers, relating it both to the language of art, and to Eastern thinking, in particular Zen Buddhism. According to Bindeman, the interest in and appreciation of silence arises both in Wittgenstein and in Heidegger as a result of a certain experience of the limit of language. In both of them he detects a similar distinction between what can be said and what can be shown, which in both is connected to an ideal of *description*, over and against explanation.

It is not my purpose here to say more about this particular book, which is an early example of a rapidly growing literature on the similarities and points of contact between these two seminal 20th Century thinkers. Nor is it my purpose to explore this comparison further at this particular point, though my chosen theme could certainly serve as the basis for such an exploration. The present text is prima-

rily devoted to the topic or theme of silence in the phenomenological tradition, and in Heidegger's writings in particular, but set in the context of a more general preoccupation in modern philosophical thinking with the ineffable and with the limits of discursive speech to which Wittgenstein's silence also belongs in its own inimitable way. In what follows I will first provide a brief general introduction to this theme, and then move on to an interpretation of its articulation in Heidegger's two major works, *Sein und Zeit*,⁴ and the posthumously published *Beiträge zur Philosophie*.⁵

I

Let me then begin again by raising a few general questions concerning philosophy and silence. As we approach this theme we experience perhaps both a certain apprehension, as well as excitation. On this ground, it could seem as if we were extending our words and thoughts toward what is not only foreign to our normal means of expression, but also in a more profound way perhaps even contrary to their very being. For who is the philosopher, if not the one always capable of speech, of providing the *logos*? We may recall here Plato's attempt in the *Sophist* to approach the nature of the sophist. This attempt forces him to extend the previous Parmenidean notion of philosophy as concerned only with being, since the sophist is someone who supposedly dwells in the region of non-being, or simply non-truth. The will to capture the being of the sophist thus forces Plato to expand his very notion of being, so as to contain also its own negation. When we as philosophers, working in the medium of the *logos*, attempt to approach silence we are perhaps in a parallel situation to that of Plato, repeating the movement of the stranger from Elea. We are involved in a risking of our own means of exploration, not knowing where this experiment will lead us.

Plato's *Sophist* has more to tell us as we try to approach silence in the guise of philosophers. Plato here says about the Sophist that he is characterized by the ability to speak about everything. But this is precisely what marks him as a fraud. For no one, Plato declares, can reasonably speak about everything. Whoever claims to do so must

be an impostor, which is precisely what Plato holds the sophist to be. But who then are we, the philosophers, and what in the end separates us from the sophist? Plato settles this vexing question by showing how philosophy can define – and thus capture – the sophist, precisely by *speaking* about him in such a way as to encircle and confine him by means of its words. The attempt to draw the demarcation line between philosophy and sophistry has been a challenge ever since, and it will no doubt continue to haunt philosophy as long as it maintains its heritage as a supreme form of giving grounds and definitions, as a *logon didonai*.

From the perspective of the competition between philosophy and sophistry there seems to be two very different ways of looking at modern philosophy's increasing interest in silence. One would be to see it as just another step in its continued struggle to conquer hidden layers of being by means of its *logos*. A very different way of viewing this tendency, however, would be to see it as a signal of the recognition of its own limited means. In this regard, silence is not so much just another domain of philosophy, but rather the sign of a certain, perhaps quite recent, admonition of the finitude of its reach. I will have reason to return to both of these two alternatives below.

In every encounter there is always room not just for words, but also for silence. As one gives his or her words there is also a gift of silence in return. But apart from this obvious and necessary polite offering of silence – as simply the offering of one's ear – every sincere human encounter also involves another giving of silence, to which we must attune ourselves in order to perceive its full significance. When we meet a stranger, we learn something of him or her not just through what is said, but also through what is not said. We carry our silence with us as our shadow, without normally perceiving it as such. It is only in and through the confrontation with the stranger that this silence is revealed. My silence may be what the stranger hears, precisely in terms of what is lacking. But in order to understand this silence of the stranger it is not necessary to encircle it and bring it to articulation. To understand the other's silence can also be to learn to follow its movements, as one would follow a new and different tune. In this sense, to learn something of the other is to learn to hear his or

her silence, and in a more profound sense to learn to be silent with the other. In a short laudatory note on the occasion of Paul Natorp's death, Heidegger, in one of his published lectures, describes this outstanding representative of German neo-Kantianism as a man "in whose company one could keep silent". To Heidegger and to his silence I will turn shortly, but first I want to say just a few words about the importance of this theme to phenomenology at large.

II

It is in fact a rather striking feature of the second generation of phenomenologists that so many of them, at some point or other, came to take an interest in the phenomenon of silence. This is true not only of Heidegger, but also of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, to mention only the most important among the followers of Husserl in this respect. How should we assess this orientation? Is it due to some general feature shared by these philosophers, or is it perhaps something which is anticipated already in the work of Husserl himself? Husserl is obviously a philosopher of the *logos* in the great tradition of German idealism. He is a philosopher whose work is animated by the belief in the possibility of giving grounds, of explicating what is implicit in every possible human experience. The *Logische Untersuchungen*, which initiates phenomenology as a philosophical school at the turn of the century, is the outline and partial fulfillment of a program whose purpose it is to explore the conditions of meaning in the form of a pure logical grammar. In this program there is no room for silence; or rather, silence as the implicit ground of meaning is precisely what is to be conquered through the reflection of the phenomenologist.

Whereas this general description would seem to rule out any systematic philosophical interest in silence, there is still another way of describing the project so as to make room for precisely this extension of its interests, a description which can also partly account for the very different developments of Husserlian and Fregean logical semantics. Whereas in Frege, the task of logic is to bring out the formal structure of truth-preserving sentences and sequences of such

sentences, and to develop an appropriate mathematical language for expressing this structure, Husserl's project is already from the start oriented toward the nature of the *acts* through which meaning is generated and communicated. While these acts should not be confused with actual psychological acts – a project dismissed by Husserl himself as psychologism – they nevertheless signal an interest in the *genesis* of meaning in a way that was foreign to Frege. There is still perhaps another sense in which Frege can be said to anticipate the philosophical silence in Wittgenstein, through his awareness of the ineffability of the most basic level of logical grammar. But his reason for this position is of a strictly formal nature; the most basic descriptive level of the workings of language cannot be defined in terms of anything else. But, and as opposed to Husserl, he takes no further philosophical interest in the *genesis* of these elementary concepts.

This brief remark suggests a partial explanation of the very different developments of Husserlian and Fregean logic. Whereas the heritage of Frege was cultivated in the construction of symbolic logic, Husserl's work gave rise to a deepened reflection on the nature of subjectivity and on the theoretical significance of pre-theoretical comportment in general. This is also where the problem of silence enters the discursive field of phenomenology; as precisely one form of non-theoretical, non-discursive, and yet meaningful comportment. Silence can hereafter be seen not just as the negation of speech, but also as its secret and co-constitutive foundation. But in saying this I am already moving ahead of the present argument.

III

In Heidegger's view, as expressed in his lectures during the early and mid-twenties, Husserlian phenomenology had made three fundamental contributions to philosophy; its new understanding of the *apriori*, its theory of categorial intuition, and finally its discovery of intentionality. I will focus briefly here on the third aspect which is the most important one, in particular for our present topic. Intentionality in Husserl's sense is the general name for every possible act of meaningful experience or expression. Consequently phenom-

enology understands itself as the mapping out of different forms of intentionality, as the different ways of intending an object in general. Every type of being has a way of being intended, which is also the way in which meaning is conferred to that specific being. The very idea of such a research program opens a vast field of questioning; namely, the field of *givenness* as such. Phenomenology explores ways of being given, thus reopening the Aristotelian question of the categoriality of being, through the modern lens of a subject's mode of having and intending its world.

It was Heidegger's great contribution to see the ontological significance of this pursuit, which Husserl on his part primarily described in epistemological terms. In Heidegger's view, Husserl had provided the tools for exploring the different modes of being through a study of the intentionality of man's being in a world. In this exploration, intentionality, while constituting the bond between subject and object, need not be reduced to any of these poles. Instead it could be seen as the name for the field of meaning-constitution itself, a field not exclusively generated by a subject (factual or transcendental), but rather as a field to which such a subject was thought to belong. The being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) which Heidegger investigates in *Sein und Zeit* constitutes precisely such a quasi-transcendental field of intentionality. It cannot—as Heidegger explicitly declares—be reduced to any one of its constitutive elements, but must be understood as a functioning totality.

Yet, and this is very important in this particular context, Heidegger was already from the start much more acutely aware of the reflexive aporias that this kind of theorizing about human life and subjectivity generates. If Husserl sometimes appears to have believed that the ordinary human subject could simply elevate itself, through the phenomenological reduction, above the workings of normal life and language, and gaze out from a supra-temporal and extra-linguistic position, Heidegger, on the contrary, held it to be philosophy's task to reflect also on its own possibility from the perspective of its finite existence. For this reason it was always extremely important that we account for the transition between the everyday and the theoretical attitude. If the philosopher believes him- or herself to be able to

rise entirely above the everyday he will produce not a convincing account of the life which he is trying to describe, but instead an abstraction and a philosophical fiction, which in the end betrays its own purpose. The issue of philosophical language becomes decisive here. Once we construe a theoretical terminology to account for intentionality, meaning, and experience, we are easily tempted to believe that we have captured an independent, ideal reality. Thus we forget that these supposed entities are indeed abstractions produced by philosophical language. In order to avoid this temptation we must view our philosophical concepts not as descriptions of entities in the normal sense, but rather as what Heidegger repeatedly in his early lectures refers to as “formal indications”, *formale Anzeige*, as tools by means of which we point to something which is in the end our own forms of life and ways of meaning.⁶ This, we could perhaps say, is Heidegger’s version of the Wittgensteinian distinction between saying and showing, which is extensively elaborated during the early twenties.

In *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger does not refer to the formal indication except in passing, but the book must nevertheless be understood as working philosophically under the same premise. Its technical terms are leads or indications by means of which human existence grasps its own being, as something ultimately non-objectifiable. Its technical term for the very nexus of subject and object, and thus an absolutely central term within the work as a whole, is Dasein’s *Erschlossenheit*, its disclosedness. This concept serves to designate the way in which Dasein is its “there”, its *da*, as a situatedness which is also an opening to beings as well as to the meaning of being in general. It is the name for the “space” of meaning, its *Spielraum*.⁷ The importance of this theme can hardly be overemphasized, not just with regard to the argument of *Sein und Zeit*, but also to the further development of Heidegger’s thought. For this disclosedness is also what he, in *Sein und Zeit*, will present as another name for “truth”, as precisely the disclosedness of beings. It is also in the context of this theme that he will explore the phenomenon of silence.

Disclosedness is explicated in *Sein und Zeit*, along three parallel axes, *Befindlichkeit*, *Verstehen*, and *Rede* (normally translated as

“state-of-mind”, “understanding”, and “discourse”), supplemented also by the possibility of Dasein’s *Verfallen*, its tendency to fall. To put it very briefly, the general idea of disclosedness as defined by the first three aspects is that every instance of disclosedness, every instance of a giving of being, simultaneously involves all three. Dasein is always already thrown into a situation and thus determined by a specific state of mind or mood, likewise it is always projected towards what is given in an understanding which, finally, is also an articulation of it, though not necessarily linguistically expressed. All of these modes are then also organized according to the overall scheme of authenticity or inauthenticity as another way of describing that every thrown and projected discursiveness can be either in the “fallen” mode or not. Readers of Heidegger have often tended to emphasize either the existentialist or the more neutral ontological implication of his analysis. But in the end both of these elements must be seen as operating along each other over the course of the analysis. This is the case in the general description of disclosedness and, as I will try to show below, it is very clearly the case in the treatment of the phenomenon of silence.

The theme of silence appears first in *Sein und Zeit* precisely in connection with its exposition of disclosedness, and more specifically in connection with the third element of this structure, that of *Rede* or discourse which is analyzed in section 34 of the book. Here the purpose is to develop a description of the linguistic nature of Dasein, what it means for it to have a language, or to put it in Aristotelian terms, what it means for it to be a *zoon logon echon*. The language, or rather the linguisticity, which Heidegger is after is not the having of any particular language. Instead he seeks to lay bare a more fundamental structure which, in its turn, constitutes the possibility for there being specific languages and linguistic assertions. This structure is not something which can be formulated in terms of rules of linguistic behavior, nor is it something that can be understood as learned during a specific period of Dasein’s life. As an essential trait of Dasein’s being-in-the-world-with-others it signals a transcendental feature of availability of beings in general.

The formula being-with-others, or *Mitsein*, is essential in this con-

text. The discourse pertaining to Dasein's disclosedness is a way of being with others, not necessarily as actualized in communication, but as a potentiality. This feature is clearly accentuated by the rather brief description Heidegger gives of this phenomenon. For apart from constituting the "articulation" of the primordial meaning given in understanding, discourse is also characterized by "hearing" and by "keeping silent", *Hören* and *Schweigen*. To be hearing is to be open to the voice of the other as well as to the voice that one always carries within oneself. It is a hearing which also and at the same time signifies a *belonging*, as Heidegger writes, playing on the German *Zugehörigkeit*. But why the mentioning of keeping silent? Silence, Heidegger continues, also constitutes a way of speaking as itself a mode of discourse. This is exemplified by the one who makes himself more authentically understood precisely by keeping silent. This signifying silence is obviously not the same thing as being mute, i.e., as being incapable of speech. It is a way of making and conveying meaning by refraining from explicit articulation. In order to be silent in this way, Dasein must already have something to say.

The short analysis of silence thus provided by Heidegger in the context of his exposition of discourse could perhaps be summarized as follows: a certain non-verbal mode of communication. As such it may not seem very significant in the larger perspective. But we should here be attentive to its implicit ramifications. Simply by mentioning silence in the context of an analysis of speech, Heidegger has indicated the need to view language from a broader perspective than what is normally the case. Language is not just the ability to produce and to decipher sequences of signs; language rests on a being in the world with others, it rests on a foundation of meaningful experience and action from which it issues as the possible articulation of given significations.

So far we have seen how silence emerges as a characteristic of discourse, in other words as a neutral ontological trait of Dasein. But as stated earlier this neutral ontological aspect runs parallel to an exploration of the possible authentic mode of Dasein's disclosedness. When the theme of silence reappears again at a later stage in *Sein und Zeit*⁸ it is in the context of Heidegger's attempt to describe

the “resoluteness” (*Entschlossenheit*) of Dasein, as a name for the authentic disclosure of its own existential predicament. These sections have often been misunderstood as simply echoes of a timebound existentialist rhetoric. But a more careful reading of the text shows that there is more at stake here. For the purpose of securing an authentic disclosure is not only concerned with finding a proper attitude to one’s own existence. Within the broader context of the book, it also concerns the possibility of raising and grasping the question of being as such.

How should we understand the possibility of the existential transformation from the inauthentic mode of *das Man* to authentic selfhood? This is the question elaborated by Heidegger in these sections. The ambition is to understand it from within Dasein’s own horizon where the transition signifies a splitting up of the common self of *das Man*, and a releasement of a deeper form of selfhood. The means of this transformation is presented by Heidegger as the “voice of conscience”, a voice coming from within Dasein itself, and yet from a strange and different place, a place he also speaks of—with a term made famous by Freud—as the uncanny, *das Unheimliche*. This voice rises up from within Dasein, urging it to affirm its own existential predicament. But what is really striking in Heidegger’s description of this event is that the voice accomplishes this not by saying anything in particular, but rather by being *silent*. The voice of conscience “speaks in the uncanny mode of silence”⁹ And it is precisely through this silence, this refusal to act in and through the common language, that it can also call Dasein back to the “taciturnity” (*Verschwiegenheit*) of its existence. A silence prevails throughout the being of man, and it is only by listening to the silent voice of this silence that we can attune ourselves to its being.

A few sections later in *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger summarizes the traits of the authentic disclosedness as revealed through this voice of consciousness. And again silence emerges as the ultimate characteristic of the one who has genuinely responded to what the voice called for. The attitude of “resoluteness” (*Entschlossenheit*) comprises all the three elements of disclosedness in general, i.e., a state-of-mind, an understanding, and a mode of discourse. The resolved Dasein has

understood itself as a finite projection toward death and it has done so in the mode of anxiety. Finally the mode of discourse in which this openness for and toward being is preserved is precisely silence or taciturnity.¹⁰ When Dasein is most vividly aware of its situation, when it is most perceptive and awake, it can testify of this only through a certain qualified silence.

Through this brief presentation of the role of silence in *Sein und Zeit* a pattern of the book emerges, to which was alluded earlier. Whereas silence on the one hand constitutes an aspect of what it means to have a language in general, it also marks the language of the one who is most fully aware of these general conditions of existence. Formulated in this way, it presents a striking similarity to Wittgenstein's concluding credo of the *Tractatus*. In Heidegger, these silences condition one another, in a reciprocal manner. From the position of a certain qualified silence we can see – or rather, we can perhaps hear – a silence resonating throughout existence itself.

IV

The interconnectedness between the mode and the matter – the how and the what – of philosophical research is never abandoned in Heidegger's thinking. On the contrary, the bond between them is only strengthened as he continues, in the writings following *Sein und Zeit*, to articulate the question of being through the event of truth, as also an event of Da-sein. This is brought out very clearly in *Beiträge zur Philosophie (vom Ereignis)*, often referred to as Heidegger's second major work, written during the years 1936-38 and published posthumously in 1989.¹¹

In *Beiträge* the historical conception of philosophy is emphasized in a much more radical way than in *Sein und Zeit*. It is the task of thinking here to enter into the play of the historical transformations of being that have produced it, with the ultimate goal of confronting the origin or beginning (*Anfang*) so as to release this beginning in the present as a new or second beginning. There is no ahistorical transcendental perspective from which to conceptualize this procedure; whatever remains of the uniqueness of philosophical thought is

available only through the projection of oneself onto the conflictual space of its continuous happening. There is no way of determining what or who the projecting being is in advance, i.e., there is no clearly definable ontology of Dasein to be elicited independently from the question of being. The beginning which thinking should seek to project is therefore described as itself a moment of being, as “event”, or *Ereignis*, as the central theme of this work. Heidegger speaks of a thinking which is capable of meeting this new challenge as a “beginning thinking” (*anfängliche Denken*). It is his definition of this particular form of thinking which interests us here, since it is explicitly conceived in terms of a certain silence and taciturnity.

The beginning thinking means, Heidegger writes, “to let being prevail among beings through the taciturn (*erschweigenden*) saying of the comprehending word”.¹² Furthermore, this thinking is said to be in itself “sigetic” (*sigetisch*), and precisely “taciturn”. The word “sigetic” is elicited from the Greek *sigao*, to be silent (translated into latin as *taceri*). This unusual term, which seems to appear only in the context of *Beiträge* is here repeated on several occasions. It is the characterization of a thinking which explicitly presents itself as “unusual and strange”.¹³ It characterizes a thinking which perceives itself as moving on the border of what can possibly be said, not as defeatist gesture with regard to the supposedly ineffable – and in this way not altogether similar to that of Wittgenstein – but rather as an ultimate way of signifying in its own right. In this respect it could be understood as an elaboration of the description in *Being and Time* of Dasein’s authentic disclosure. In the thinking of the other beginning the ultimate signifying gesture issues from an essential silence and “reserve” (*Verhaltenheit*); only thus can it truly correspond to what is to be thought.

Just as in *Sein und Zeit* this silence is not restricted to the side of the subject as an attitude or a mode of comportment; for silence also belongs to being itself. In section 37 of *Beiträge* Heidegger speaks of taciturnity as the “logic of philosophy”, at least to the extent that this philosophy seeks the other beginning. This provocative statement is then followed by the obscure explanation that the truth of being is the “signifying-resonating concealment (the secret) of the event (the

hesitant refusal)” [*“winkend-anklingende Verborgenheit (das Geheimnis) des Ereignisses (die zögernde Versagung)”*].¹⁴ Stated in somewhat different words, this could be interpreted to mean that the truth of being which is sought is itself characterized by a certain concealment, of only partly making itself known, and even as a kind of “refusal” – Heidegger speaks explicitly of it as *Versagung* – in its very appearing. One reason for this condition of saying is that language itself belongs to what is to be disclosed. It is this self-reflexive situation of knowing that in the end leads to the conception of logic as a “sigetic”. This is not meant by Heidegger to replace traditional – or dialectical – logic by a new discipline. We should rather understand it as yet another indication of the new condition of thinking.

The kind of silence or taciturnity envisioned by Heidegger as the supreme form of disclosure, issues from an awareness of the relation between language and being. As we stand in the space of meaning opened up by language we cannot see this space as such. By operating within it, by means of the tools made available by it, we cannot disclose it as such. This remark could be understood simply as a restating of the well known idea of the impossibility of a meta-language, often echoed in modern philosophy. But Heidegger is saying something more, or rather something different. He is continuing the path opened up already by his early reflections on the formal indications, the experience of the unavoidable indirectness of philosophical signifying. But here he is also saying that there is a possible experience of the ineffable being of language, as also an experience of being itself, which is preserved not by repeating – in language – a logical-dialectical truism, but precisely through a certain qualified silence. This kind of taciturnity, Heidegger writes, issues from out of the origin of language itself.¹⁵ Its word, or its way of saying, is not a sign for something else, something entirely out of reach, but rather the instantiation or manifestation of a silent refusal belonging to being itself.¹⁶

Can such a word ever really take place? Does it take place in Heidegger’s own cryptic mode of saying in *Beiträge*? Heidegger himself seems uncertain. At times he appears to claim this speech for himself, at times he suggests that the true accomplishment of

this kind of discourse is reserved for poetry,¹⁷ or simply for an articulation yet to come. We need not pass the final judgment with regard to Heidegger's own text. Of greater importance is the problem which he has raised, concerning the predicament of a philosophical thought that wants to remain true to the experience of being as something over and against which it cannot posit itself as an independent (rational) entity. It is a thinking animated by the experience of somehow being claimed by, and thus belonging to, that which it simultaneously seeks to describe.

The theme of "belonging" (*zugehören*) is essential to *Beiträge* where it is repeated in various contexts. Already in *Sein und Zeit* this theme is introduced in connection with the description of discourse as hearing and keeping silent. Hearing is also a mode of belonging, as the German *Zugehörigkeit* permits us to think. In the thinking of the other beginning philosophy is understood both as claimed by and belonging to being. In one of the most condensed passages of *Beiträge* Heidegger writes of how the preparation for an exposure to the truth of being gathers "that which hears and that which belongs" (*das Hörige und Zugehörige*) for the sign of the approaching event. In order for the turning (*Kehre*) to take place, the event "must use Dasein" for its own needs by placing it under a calling. The turning is then experienced in the space delineated by this calling and hearing, the *Zuruf* and the *Zugehör*.¹⁸ This, however, requires an initial need (*Not*) as being "hearing-belonging" (*zugehörig*) to the calling itself.

V

It would be all too easy to conclude that Heidegger, in this strange book with its partly almost incomprehensible formulations, definitively moves beyond the territory of philosophy altogether. But what is most significant in his gesture is not its apparent disrespect for prevalent standards of traditional philosophical discourse and argumentative practice, but rather its claim to fulfill what was previously unthought and unspoken in this very tradition. If the gesture of reason has always been marked by a certain illegitimate objectification of its own field of exploration, while claiming to say the truth of this

domain, then an honest continuation of its original ambition cannot avoid the challenge of this forgetfulness. If it then turns out that this forgetfulness cannot simply be repaired by means of the adding of a conceptual articulation, but that it requires instead a certain transformation of the knower in his or her relation to the known, then this consequence does not automatically belong outside the logic of the original philosophical pursuit. If indeed it is our belonging to being and to language that permits us to think and articulate them, then this belonging must at some point be made to surface in their thematic treatment. However, this situation cannot simply be articulated as yet another characterization of a specific phenomenon. It can only be grasped – to the extent that it can be grasped at all – in the form of an attunement of Dasein to its own inexhaustible origin. This origin is itself that which withdraws from our gaze and our grasp, and as such it is preserved not in speech, but only in a qualified silence.

The mentioning of this silence does not constitute the end of philosophy, nor its culmination. It is not a general and final description, nor is it an appeal to abstain from conceptual thinking. Neither is it the name for a new and promising domain of philosophical research. Rather, it marks a certain experience of thinking and of reason, which will remain valid as long as we continue to project our existence onto that strange horizon known as *the logos*.¹⁹

Notes

- 1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, transl. C. K. Ogden, third impression (London: Keagen Paul, 1947), § 7. (“Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.”)
- 2 *Ibid.*, § 6.522.
- 3 Steven Bindeman, *Heidegger and Wittgenstein. The Poetics of Silence* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1981), p. 129.
- 4 Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1927/79).
- 5 Heidegger, Martin, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (vom Ereignis), Gesamtausgabe* vol. 65 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1989).
- 6 For a somewhat more extended discussion of the theme of formal indication in the early writings, see my “At tænka I ruiner – Liv, død og destruc-

- tion I Heideggers tidlige skrifter”, in *Den unge Heidegger*, eds. D. Zahavi et als (København: Akademisk Forlag, 2003), pp. 114-134.
- 7 The notion of a “space” of meaning has been elaborated in very fruitful ways in a study by Steven Crowell, *Husserl, Heidegger and the Space of Meaning* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001).
- 8 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §§ 57-60.
- 9 Ibid., p. 277.
- 10 Ibid., p. 296.
- 11 For a more elaborated reading of this work, cf. my “Contributions”, in *A Companion to Heidegger*, eds. H. Dreyfus & M. Wrathall (London: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 358-374 and also the last chapter in my *Enigmatic Origins. Tracing the Theme of Historicity through Heidegger’s Works* (Stockholm: Almqvist&Wiksell, 1994).
- 12 Heidegger, *Beiträge*, p. 58.
- 13 Ibid., p. 59.
- 14 Ibid., p. 78.
- 15 Ibid., p. 79.
- 16 For a fuller treatment of Heidegger’s later thinking on language, see my “Origin in Exile: Heidegger and Benjamin on Language, Truth, and Translation”, in *Research in Phenomenology* XXIX (1999), pp. 141-160.
- 17 Cf. Heidegger, *Beiträge*, p. 60.
- 18 Ibid., p. 407.
- 19 Parts of this text were first presented in the course of a seminar on “The Philosophy of Silence” at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro in 1995, organized by Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback. Some of the material from this meeting was later published and edited by her in a small bilingual volume *Towards a Phenomenology of Silence* (Rio de Janeiro: Sette Letras, 1996). Another version was later presented during a seminar in Uppsala in 1999, devoted to the relation between phenomenology and Wittgenstein.

STEPHEN MULHALL

Heidegger and the Enigma of the Human

In those parts of the Anglo-American philosophical world with which I'm most familiar, Heidegger has achieved a certain influence in the humanities or the human sciences (let's call them, as Von Wright suggests, 'the totality of disciplines which study human nature and the achievements of man as being capable of culture') primarily through the impact of his existential analytic of Dasein, as presented in *Being and Time*, and as interpreted by such commentators as Charles Taylor and Bert Dreyfus. Taylor has utilized Heidegger's conception of Dasein as that being for whom its own being is an issue in order to defend the claim that there is a sharp break between the methods appropriate to natural scientific enquiry and those appropriate to the human sciences, and to argue more specifically that naturalistic programmes for understanding human beings and human nature are fated to overlook that which is distinctive about their subject-matter – the constitutive role of their self-interpretations, the ineliminability of structures of meaning and value in human existence, and hence their ineliminability in any attempts to make sense of human existence (such attempts themselves necessarily being further structures of self-interpretation). Dreyfus has been even more influential than Taylor; his work on Heidegger, and its inheritance by a generation of his students and readers, has had an impact that extends beyond philosophy of mind and language into the domains of cognitive science, experimental psychology and theory of education.

Without wishing to deny the many local and strategic insights to be found in these kinds of appropriation of Heidegger's early writings for 'analytical' philosophy, I want to focus today on one of their central weaknesses or limitations – at least viewed as read-

ings of Heidegger. Dreyfus' commentary on *Being and Time* is the clearest exemplification of the problem; for it presents a reading of Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein as a sophisticated and nuanced species of pragmatism – an account of human beings as inherently social and socialized creatures whose primary mode of apprehending intra-worldly entities lies in the know-how embedded in their practical activity within it. At the same time, however, the commentary which elaborates this reading notoriously restricts itself to Division One of *Being and Time* (with the very limited exception of a long, co-authored appendix which devotes more time to Kierkegaard than it does to Heidegger) – quite as if the second Division of the book had no essential role to play in Heidegger's analysis, or at least led the analysis of Division One off into the trackless depths of morbidity and nihilism.

I don't wish to deny that Division One does much to invite such a conception of itself as free-standing or self-sufficient, as having brought the existential analytic to a satisfying conclusion. Heidegger's initial introduction of Dasein as the being who questions, and hence as the being for whom Being is an issue, quickly leads to the claim that Dasein's Being is Being-in-the-world. To be sure, the subsequent analysis of Being-in-the-world proceeds by isolating and clarifying specific elements of Dasein's worldly mode of Being (first the world, then Being-with and Being-one's-self, then Being-in), and hence can easily give the impression of merely accumulating local insights into Dasein's Being without ever bringing them together, so that we might perspicuously survey the whole they constitute. But Chapter Six is explicitly presented as aiming to overcome that lack. For there, Heidegger tells us that there is a specific state-of-mind through which Dasein discloses itself to itself in a simplified way; and its very simplicity is what allows it to give Dasein access to itself as a structural totality. This is the phenomenon of anxiety (angst, dread), a distinctively objectless state-of-mind; and it reveals that the Being of Dasein means Being-ahead-of-itself in Being-already-in(-the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world). In short, it reveals that the Being of Dasein is care.

It is, then, not at all surprising that even a sophisticated and by

no means uncritical commentator should feel that Division One of *Being and Time* constitutes a self-contained whole, and that he should see its unity as residing in a certain emphasis upon practical activity and the realm of the social (in concern and solicitude as internally related aspects of care). Such a commentator might well acknowledge that Heidegger's hermeneutic conception of any act of human understanding implies that all such analytical claims are provisional, and hence capable of being re-articulated and refined; he might even acknowledge that Division Two aims at just such a re-articulation of the care-structure in terms of temporality. But this can be seen as deepening our grasp of the full implications of what Division One initially articulates, and hence as not posing any threat to the thought that the care-structure constitutes a complete, even if initial and hence relatively superficial, articulation of Dasein's Being as a totality.

But to anyone who goes on from here into Division Two, it quickly becomes plain that Heidegger himself is not at all satisfied with this supposedly unifying invocation of care, even understood as a provisional whole; he rather finds that the perspective it delivers contains the seeds of its own subversion. For, once introduced into his analysis, the concept of angst can no more be anchored to its specific initial role than its existential counterpart can be anchored to its apparent object of concern. In effect, Heidegger finds himself thrown into a state of anxiety about the whole of his analysis in Division One. But why?

First, anxiety reveals that we are typically living inauthentic lives, relating to ourselves and others as 'das man', caught up and dispersed or dissociated from ourselves in the realm of idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity. And this should remind us of Heidegger's warning at the outset of Division One that his phenomenological focus throughout that stretch of the book would be average everydayness, that mode of Dasein's being from which authentic everydayness must be achieved or wrenched. Hence, the apparently complete portrait of Dasein presented in Division One in fact lacks any concrete analysis of its capacity to exist authentically; and it raises the worry that any reading of Heidegger's existential analytic that focuses exclusively on

Dasein in its average everyday state risks being guilty of repeating at a methodological level the inauthenticity on which it focuses.

Second, one aspect of the structural totality of care itself all but declares that any analysis of Dasein that terminates with care represses an aspect of Dasein's Being that resists the very idea of completeness. For the care-structure includes Dasein's Being-ahead-of-itself – its existence is a matter of its being endlessly delivered over to the task of actualising some specific possibility-of-its-Being. But then, for as long as Dasein exists, it can never achieve wholeness; it will always be ahead of itself, essentially related to a possibility, to something that it is not yet. And if Dasein cannot bring its own existence into view as whole, ontically speaking, how can it do so ontologically? How can it produce an existential analytic of its own kind of Being that might bring it into view as a whole?

And yet, of course, Dasein does have an end. In Being-ahead-of-itself, Dasein also understands itself as relating to, standing out towards, its own future completion, towards a point at which there will be nothing of itself left outstanding. But the point at which Dasein's span of existence completes itself is also the point of its own non-existence, its 'no-longer-being-there' – its death. Hence, any complete analysis of Dasein's Being must contain some account of this structural paradox – of the fact that Dasein's conception of itself as necessarily ahead of itself and hence incomplete essentially incorporates a conception of itself as necessarily subject to death, and hence as necessarily having an end or completing its existence.

But Heidegger's philosophical approach is such that taking death as his topic engenders a reiteration of this structural difficulty at the level of method. For his existential analytic of Dasein is supposed to result from an application of the phenomenological method in philosophy, which involves allowing phenomena to disclose themselves as they really are, and in the manner that befits their nature. In other words, his account of Dasein's Being exemplifies the fundamental capacity that it attributes to Dasein – the capacity to encounter phenomena comprehendingly. But if a complete account of Dasein's Being must include an account of its end, this aspect of Dasein constitutively resists Heidegger's method. For when Dasein reaches its

end, it is also not there. Death is not something that any Dasein has or could directly experience; it is not an event in any Dasein's life, not even the last. But how, then, can there be any phenomenological understanding of death? How can a philosophical method which draws exclusively on Dasein's capacity to allow every phenomenon to appear to it as it really is provide any mode of access to a phenomenon that is essentially incapable of appearing to, of being experienced or grasped comprehendingly by, any Dasein?

So, the opening pages of Division Two identify a constitutive resistance on three levels to any sense of completion with which the conclusion of Division One might have left us. Completeness or totality with respect to Dasein's existence appears out of reach for any individual Dasein, for the existential analytic of Dasein's Being, and for the philosophical method that generated that analysis. Hence the anxiety with which Heidegger is compelled to begin his analysis again. For even in the face of this three-fold resistance, he doesn't want to give up on his desire for completeness or totality in his analysis, on his sense that it is an undismissible criterion for the adequacy of any philosophical account of phenomena; and as a consequence, that resistance threatens the ruination of his project as a whole.

His specific resolution of the difficulty with respect to death is exemplary in its elegance, and in the themes it sounds; for they reverberate throughout the rest of Division Two, and entirely recalibrate our sense of its tone, or mood – its attunement to Dasein's Being. After dismissing the thought that we can grasp death phenomenologically by comprehending the death of Others (for this would repress the mineness of death), and rejecting any attempt to model our relation to our own death on any present-at-hand or ready-to-hand object's relationship to its own end, Heidegger claims that we must understand death as we understand the being whose end death is – we must grasp it existentially. We must, in other words, grasp death not as an actuality but as a possibility – a possibility that we relate to, or fail to, not when we die but in our life. And in these terms, death distinguishes itself as our ownmost, non-relational and not-to-be-outstripped possibility. It is that possibility in which what is at issue is nothing less than Dasein's Being-in-the-world; it impends at every

moment of our existence; its realization at some point or other is certain, and hence inescapable; and in relating to it, all our relations to any other Dasein are undone – no-one can die my death for me.

Note, however, that we cannot regard this analytical shift from actuality to possibility as resolving the methodological resistance that death posed to Heidegger's phenomenology. For death cannot coherently be thought as an existential possibility. Any genuine existential possibility is one that might be made actual by the Dasein whose possibility it is; we might eat the meal we're cooking, or play the game for which we're training. But we cannot actualise our own death in our own life; if it becomes actual, we are no longer there. Death, then, is not just the possibility of our own non-existence, of our own absolute impossibility; it is an impossible possibility – an existential impossibility, a contradiction in existential terms. Hence death still cannot, it appears, be made accessible by existential analysis.

This is where the true elegance of Heidegger's treatment becomes clear. For if death cannot be viewed as a very unusual, even a unique, kind of existential possibility (since an impossibility is not an unusual kind of possibility), then we cannot understand our relation to our death on the model of our relation to any genuine possibility of our Being. And this shows that death does not stand on the same level – the ontic or existentiell level – as any genuine existential possibility. So Heidegger talks of our relation to our own death as 'Being-towards-death' precisely to present it as an ontological (that is, an existential) structure of Dasein, rather than one existentiell state of the kind that that structure makes possible. And he thereby gives himself room to claim that we should think of our relation to death as manifest in the relation we establish to any and every genuine possibility of our Being, and hence to our Being as such. Precisely because death is an ungraspable but undeniable aspect of every moment of Dasein's existence, Dasein can only relate to it in and through its relation to what is graspable in our existence. Death thus appears as graspable only indirectly, as an omnipresent condition of every moment of Dasein's directly graspable existence. It is that against which specific features of the existential terrain configure

themselves, a self-concealing condition for Dasein's capacity to disclose things (including itself) as they really are.

For Heidegger, death is a phenomenon of life; it shows up only in and through life, in and through that which it threatens to render impossible. Phenomenologically speaking, life is death's representative, the proxy through which death's resistance to Dasein's grasp is at once acknowledged and overcome, or rather overcome only in and through its acknowledgement. Heidegger's point, then, is that life is our ownmost, non-relational, not-to-be-outstripped possibility. For Dasein to acknowledge that is for it to acknowledge that there is no moment of its existence in which its Being is not at issue – that its existence matters to it, and that what matters is not just its individual moments but the totality of those moments: its life as a whole. Its life is its own to live, or to disown; it makes a claim that cannot be sloughed off onto Others. And insofar as Dasein's life is fated to be utterly nullified by death, Dasein must acknowledge its utter non-necessity – the non-necessity of our birth, of the actual course of our life, of its continuation from one moment to the next. Being-towards-death is thus a matter of living in a way that does not treat the merely possible or actual or conditionally necessary as a matter of fate or destiny beyond any question or alteration – the stance that “das man” exemplifies and inculcates. It means stripping out false necessities – becoming properly attuned to the real modalities of finite human existence.

This clarifies the kinship between angst, in its objectlessness, and Being-towards-death. For no object-directed state-of-mind could correspond to an existential phenomenon that utterly repels any objective actualisation within Dasein's worldly existence; only a state-of-mind that discloses the sheer worldliness of Dasein's Being, beyond any specific world in which it finds itself, could also disclose the sheer mortality of that Being, its inherent non-necessity beyond any specific array of contingent circumstances and possibilities it finds itself confronting. And this is why an anxiously resolute anticipation of death is Heidegger's central way of characterizing the authentic way of Being-in-the-world. For in the objectlessness of anxiety, particular objects and persons fade away and the worldli-

ness of our Being announces itself as such i.e. as more or other than any particular worldly situation in which we find ourselves. Hence, anxiety discloses that in inauthenticity we identify ourselves with the particularity of our situation – treat it as if a necessity or fate, regarding what we do as simply what is done, beyond any question; and anxiety thereby discloses authenticity as a recognition of ourselves as not identical with any particular worldly situation, as essentially not coincident with what we presently are, as always transcending our present articulation and so as uncanny, our worldliness precluding our ever being fully at home in any particular world.

This uncanniness or non-self-coincidence is the binding thread of the analyses of Division Two, as the chapters on guilt and conscience make abundantly clear. When Heidegger claims that Dasein is Being-guilty, he means that we are doubly related to nullity. As projecting, every possibility we actualise we negate qua possibility, and in so doing we negate other accessible possibilities; and as thrown, we find that our projectiveness has its ground outside itself, in the situation from which any specific projection must emerge and which is accordingly beyond its specific determination, so that each such projection necessarily lacks power over itself from the ground up. Dasein thus appears as necessarily non-self-grounding; but since it remains the being for whom its own Being is an issue, it is also necessarily non-other-grounded. Dasein is, then, essentially lacking in ground, groundless or ungrounded – another way in which it necessarily fails to coincide with itself.

And when Heidegger introduces the voice of conscience as the pivot between inauthenticity and authenticity, he presents it as Dasein discoursing to itself about itself in the mode of keeping silent i.e. as saying nothing. A demand that activates objectless angst concerning an existential impossibility cannot specify any particular thrown projection as capable of satisfying it; it demands simply that Dasein regard its existence as making demands on it at any and every moment, as being inherently demanding beyond the satisfaction of any specific demands we choose to address in and through that existence. And it is not that the voice of conscience speaks silently at specifiable moments; it is rather that any specific existentiell demands we

interpret it as making on us always also make the further demand that we regard our subjection to demand as such as unredeemable through the satisfaction of those specific demands. What the voice of conscience speaks against, therefore, is our inveterate tendency to conflate our existential potential with our existentiell actuality; what it silently opens up is Dasein's internal otherness, its relation to itself as other, as not self-identical but rather transitional or self-transcending.

But if inauthenticity is characterized by Dasein's enacting an understanding of itself as essentially self-identical, as capable of coinciding with itself and fulfilling its nature, then interpretations of Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein which present its Being as unproblematically and exhaustively to be identified with the care-structure must themselves count as inauthentic philosophical exercises. Deceived by the apparent completeness and self-sufficiency of Division One, they fail to see that these aspects of that part of Heidegger's book reflect exactly the inauthentic absorption in specific work-environments (the self's untroubled identification with its world), and the undifferentiatedness of *das man* (the self's untroubled coincidence with Others and with itself), that signals average everyday concern and solicitude. They fail to see that the internal differentiation within *Being and Time* between Division One and Division Two is pivotal to its claim to be providing an authentic existential analytic of Dasein; for it enacts the way in which an authentic self-understanding is to be wrenched from the inauthentic grasp of ourselves with which the book itself tells us we will always already begin, both as individual Dasein and as philosophers. Hence, an authentic grasp of Heidegger's existential analytic depends upon grasping it as deliberately, unavoidably disrupting itself from within, and thereby achieving the non-self-coincidence that is the mark of anxious, anticipatory resoluteness.

At its most general, the phenomenon which enacts this internal disruption of the analysis of Division One is that of nothingness, nullity, negation; when I talked earlier of non-self-identity, we should read that phrase as telling us both that the self is not identical with itself and that the self is internally related to nullity, or nega-

tion. And of course, as Heidegger's analysis of death exemplifies, it is at this point that the existential analytic reaches the limits of its methodological capacity to represent its subject-matter. For just as Being-towards-death succeeds in allowing death to appear to us as it is in itself only by conceding the impossibility of it ever so doing, and Being-guilty shows us the true nature of our thrownness only by conceding that something about the ground of our projections will always exceed our comprehending grasp (will always be a brute datum), so the testimony of the voice of conscience can be attested to in this analysis only as being beyond any particular speech-act, and as originating neither entirely within us nor entirely without. In short, from the point of view of phenomenology, nothingness does not appear as such and is not an object of a possible discursive act; it is neither a phenomenon nor of the logos. It is not a representable something, and not an unrepresentable something either; hence it can be represented only as beyond representation, as the beyond of the horizon of the representable, its self-concealing and self-disrupting condition. And phenomenological philosophy can only acknowledge it by allowing 'nothing' first to conceal itself and then to disrupt its concealment, to constitute itself as that upon which the existential analytic is shipwrecked. Only in this way can an existential analytic of Dasein achieve the only kind of completeness that its condition allows – by presenting itself as essentially incomplete, beyond completion, as completed and completable only by that which is beyond it.

To displace a phrase that Heidegger uses in the opening pages of *Being and Time*, Division Two “makes manifest that in any way of comporting oneself towards entities as entities – even in any Being towards entities as entities – there lies *a priori* an enigma.”¹ Since Dasein's Being is Being-towards-entities, this amounts to the claim that there is an enigma at the heart of Dasein's Being – or better, that Dasein's Being, in any and every mode of its comportment, is enigmatic, mysterious, riddling. Dasein is not unknown, or unknowable (as if further information were either guaranteed to solve the difficulty or utterly irrelevant to it); it does not present us with a puzzle (which might, in principle, have a solution). An enigma is an

obscure or allusive sign; a riddle requires not just a solution but the imaginative construction of a space or horizon in which that solution can appear as such, as a solution to just this riddle; a mystery is to be acknowledged, not dissipated.

What, then, might be the implications for the human sciences of taking seriously Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein? That analysis certainly cannot be seen as presenting us with a communitarian and pragmatist philosophical anthropology, or with an ontological underwriting of any such project in more specific contexts of intellectual inquiry; and hence it cannot rightly be seen as giving us reason to pursue the implications of such an anthropology for any specific discipline in the humanities more broadly understood. It would rather suggest that insofar as any such discipline, and any philosophical anthropology, failed to acknowledge an enigma lying a priori within its subject-matter – insofar as our attempts to contribute to, and to clarify, any aspect of human culture failed to find themselves confronting, and acknowledging, a constitutive resistance to its desire for a complete and total account of its object – then to that degree they will have failed to comprehend the distinctive nature of the being whose life-forms it wishes to understand. And the idea that the humanities taken as a whole might form a totality – the idea that they can be taken as aspects or elements of a whole at all, as von Wright's explanation of his use of the term implies – must itself be seen as indicative of a complete misunderstanding of the inherently enigmatic nature of the human mode of being.

And what of humanism, of what von Wright defines as germinating from the moment when 'man stopped to consider his potentialities in the fight with nature to vindicate his freedom in the face of the gods'? This reading of *Being and Time* does not exactly add anything new to Heidegger's later critique of humanism (in his famous letter to Jean Beaufret); but it gives us a reason to qualify its immediate critical animus, and it more generally suggests that its general and local insights are rather less new – rather less dependent on a fundamental turn from the concerns of *Being and Time* – than one might otherwise have thought. For of course, to see the invocation of nothingness as pivotal to Heidegger's attempt to wrench his

existential analytic of Dasein towards authenticity is to acknowledge that certain fundamental themes of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* are more deeply rooted in *Being and Time* than Heidegger seems willing to admit, either in his 'Letter' or in any other context. But this reading of *Being and Time*'s new beginning also suggests that many of the key twists and turns in that 'Letter' are presaged in the earlier text. Heidegger's hesitation about the idea that his emphasis on care commits him to a certain kind of humanism²; his stress on Dasein's existence as a kind of ex-sistence or ec-centricity – a standing outside oneself³; his reiteration of the thought that Dasein is essentially homeless⁴; his later characterization of the Being of Dasein as nihilation, its essential addressing of itself to the 'not'⁵ – these and other emphases make Heidegger's further claim that his turning 'is not a change of standpoint from *Being and Time*'⁶ appear to be a significant understatement. It would seem more accurate to suggest that it is *Being and Time*'s willingness to induce and suffer internal self-differentiation and non-self-coincidence through its invocation of Dasein's mysterious, riddling internal relation to nothingness that gives Heidegger's writing and thinking throughout the rest of his life its uncanny integrity and wholeness.

Notes

- 1 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 23.
- 2 Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in *Heidegger: Basic Writings*, edited by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1977), pp. 199f.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. 205-209.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 218.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 236-238.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

LARS-OLOF ÅHLBERG

Humanism, Scientism and the Study of Culture

Two philosophers

Darwin's theory has no more to do with philosophy than any other hypothesis in natural science.

— Ludwig Wittgenstein (1922)

The Darwinian Revolution is both a scientific and a philosophical revolution.

— Daniel Dennett (1995)

Two scientists

The existence of life, and indeed of the universe itself, all are part of the *mysterium tremendum*.

— Theodosius Dobzhansky (1971)

Philosophy and the subjects known as 'humanities' are still taught almost as if Darwin had never lived.

— Richard Dawkins (1976)

Introduction

The aim of my paper is to discuss certain aspects of contemporary scientific approaches to human behaviour and human culture, especially theories informed by evolutionary theory.

I had better first comment briefly on the "isms" in my title, since most, if not all, "isms" are at best umbrella concepts useful for pinpointing some salient features in a heterogeneous field of ideas, styles and approaches, at worst empty labels blocking thought, the main purpose of which is to dismiss that which one disapproves of. Many

“isms” have, in fact, been invented by the opponents of the style or school in question, in order to stigmatize it, many labels ending in “ism” carry therefore negative implications.¹ “Scientism” and “scientistic” are such terms. They do not denote a specific school of thought or a movement, but rather various approaches to science, (philosophy and the humanities), one disapproves of, not unlike “positivism”,² a term with several fairly definite meanings in the history of ideas, but which was often applied in particular Marxists and Critical theorists, to reactionary or otherwise objectionable approaches and attitudes. In contrast to “humanism” and “humanist”, which are hardly ever used with pejorative implications (excepting the Heideggerians, Foucaultians and post-structuralists), this is not the case with “scientism”, and “scientistic”. I haven’t come across anyone who prides him- or herself of being “scientistic”, whereas many call themselves “humanists”.

According to *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* “the philosophical term ‘humanism’ refers to a series of interrelated concepts about the nature, defining characteristics, powers and values of human persons”, whereas the term “the humanities” derives from the Renaissance educational programme, *studia humanitatis*.³ The term “humanism”, apparently coined in 1808 by the German philosopher and educator and Hegel’s friend Friedrich Niethammer, to refer to “a program of study distinct from scientific and engineering educational programs” has been applied to a variety of attitudes, approaches and points of view.⁴ It has been used to refer not only to educational programmes “founded on the classical authors and concentrating on the study of grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and moral philosophy” but also to “a commitment to the perspective, interests and centrality of human persons”, to “a belief in reason and autonomy” as contrasted to a reliance on authority and revelation as well as to a great many other things.⁵ Among the senses of “humanism” listed in *The Oxford English Dictionary* we find “devotion to human interests”, as well as “Devotion to those studies which promote human culture”, particularly “literary culture”.⁶

“Scientism”, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is a term applied with negative connotations “to a belief in the omnipotence of scientific knowledge and techniques”, and in particular to the

“view that the methods of study appropriate to physical science can replace those used in other fields such as philosophy, and esp., human behaviour and the social sciences”.⁷ The eminent economist, Friedrich von Hayek, for example, speaks of “‘scientism’ or the ‘scientistic’ prejudice” whenever there is “a slavish imitation of the method and language of science” as contrasted with “the general spirit of disinterested inquiry”.⁸ Scientism can be defined in many different ways for various purposes. Nevertheless there seem to be two recurrent themes in the history of philosophy and in the history of science associated with the concept of scientism: reductionism and the ideal of unified science. “Reductionism”, of course, is not a univocal term, for my purposes the following description in Antony Flew’s *A Dictionary of Philosophy* suffices. Reductionism is “[t]he belief that human behaviour can be reduced to or interpreted in terms of that of lower animals, and that, ultimately, can itself be reduced to the physical laws controlling the behaviour of inanimate matter”, and more generally, “any doctrine that claims to reduce the apparently more sophisticated and complex to the less so”.⁹ One person’s reductionism (in the bad sense), however, is another person’s science, “[r]eductionism”, says the ethologist Richard Dawkins, “is just another name for an honest desire to understand how things work”.¹⁰

Reductionism and the idea of unified science, although not the same, are interconnected ideals. The philosopher and spokesman for a neo-Darwinian outlook (on almost everything), Daniel Dennett, for example, claims that “Darwin’s dangerous idea is reductionism incarnate, promising to unite and explain just about everything in one magnificent vision. Its being the idea of an *algorithmic* process makes it all the more powerful, since the substrate neutrality it thereby possesses permits us to consider its application to just about anything”.¹¹

The Programme of Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology

Although the programme for a unified science did not originate with the Vienna circle, the ideas of the logical empiricists became widely known through the publication of the *International Encyclopaedia of*

Unified Science. This encyclopaedia should, according to the perhaps most enthusiastic spokesman for the unity of science, Otto Neurath, include “the history of art as well as crystallography, [. . .] education as well as technology, [. . .] jurisprudence as well as [. . .] mechanics”,¹² and, of course, the hard and rigorous sciences of physics, mathematics and logic. According to the vision of the logical empiricists the natural sciences as well as the social and the human sciences should be purged of all metaphysical ballast and return to their empirical roots. Observation and experiments and the application of the explanatory model explicated by Carl Hempel (“the covering-law-model”) were regarded as the hallmarks of genuine science.¹³

Today sociobiology, and its off-shoots, evolutionary psychology and theory of culture, is an influential, if not the most influential form of scientism embracing the ideal of a unified science. There are nowadays courses as well as chairs in evolutionary psychology in several universities in Britain and the USA, many science writers, scientists as well as some philosophers have presented more or less, often more, ambitious syntheses between the theory of evolution, evolutionary psychology and cognitive science.

In the introduction to the anthology, *Alas Poor Darwin: Arguments against Evolutionary Psychology* (2001) the sociologist Hilary Rose and the biologist Steven Rose point out that the terms “‘Darwinian’ and ‘evolutionary’ have become adjectives to attach to almost anything”. “Not only do we have evolutionary biology, medicine, psychology and psychiatry” but also “evolutionary economics and evolutionary sociology”.¹⁴ We might add evolutionary epistemology and evolutionary aesthetics to their list. The term “Darwinian”, they note, is employed “to explain processes as seemingly varied as the origin of the universe, the expansion of companies on the Internet and the growth of competition of rival scientific theories”.¹⁵ According to the “ultra-Darwinism” they oppose, “‘Darwinian methods’ are supposed to underlie everything from computer technology to the processes of human thought”.¹⁶ The evolutionary approach to everything, Hilary and Steven Rose claim, “has become one of the most pervasive of present-day intellectual myths”.¹⁷

In a similar vein the influential American philosopher Thomas

Nagel remarks that “[s]ome may be tempted to offer or at least to imagine an evolutionary explanation [for the possibility of objective knowledge]”, adding that “[e]volutionary hand waving is an example of the tendency to take a theory which has been successful in one domain and apply it to anything else you can’t understand – not even to apply it, but vaguely to imagine such an application”. The belief in the power of evolutionary explanations is, he claims, also “an example of the pervasive and reductive naturalism of our culture”. “Survival value”, he continues, “is now invoked to account for everything from ethics to language”.¹⁸ In Nagel’s view evolutionary psychology and epistemology is the dominant form of scientism in our culture.

What do the “ultra-Darwinian” programmes of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology amount to, and why do the supporters of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology believe that evolutionary theory provides the key to human culture and experience? I shall first present two formulations by well-known practitioners of sociobiology and then discuss some of the explanations of human experience and behaviour offered by sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists.

A relatively early synthesizing research programme was proposed by the biologist Richard Alexander in his book *Darwinism and Human Affairs* (1979) claiming that contemporary evolutionary theory provides “the first simple, general theory of human nature with any likelihood of widespread acceptance”.¹⁹ Human behaviour and culture is to be understood in terms of what biologists call “inclusive fitness”, “inclusive fitness” being defined as “the sum of an individual’s own fitness plus all its influence on fitness in its relatives other than its direct descendants,²⁰ fitness being roughly an organisms’ ability to survive and reproduce, sometimes called just its “reproductive success”.

III. Biological and Genetic Causation

The zoologist Edward O. Wilson defines sociobiology as “the systematic study of the biological basis of all forms of social behaviour, including sexual and parental behaviour, in all kinds of organisms including humans”.²¹ He claims that since there are analogical and homological relations between animal and human behaviour “it is difficult to imagine why the same reasoning cannot be extended with proper care to the human species”.²² Wilson’s programme for sociobiology is, however, much more ambitious than that, because he believes that sociobiology can serve as “the bridging discipline between the natural sciences on the one side and social sciences and humanities on the other”, but apparently the bridging has to go one way, since “social theory must incorporate the natural sciences into its foundations”, Wilson says.²³ And in the preface to his controversial book, *Sociobiology*, first published 1975 and republished in 2000, he maintains that we must seek “cause-and-effect explanations leading from biology into culture” in order to “grasp human nature objectively”, an enterprise that eventually would be “to approach if not to attain the grail of scholarship, and to fulfil the dreams of the Enlightenment”.²⁴ One of the most ardent spokesmen for the Darwinian world-view and the Darwinian approach to man and culture is the philosopher Daniel Dennett. In his book *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* (1995), tellingly subtitled *Evolution and the Meaning of Life*, Dennett claims that Darwinian evolution has “far-reaching implications for our vision of what the meaning of life is or could be”.²⁵ “The Darwinian revolution is” according to him, “both a scientific and a philosophical revolution”,²⁶ he believes that the application of Darwinian thinking to issues such as mind, knowledge, and ethics will “illuminate them in ways that always eluded the traditional approaches”,²⁷ since culture “like life itself must have a Darwinian origin”, Dennett claims.²⁸ Darwinian theory would overthrow “the cherished compartmentalizations of science”, he has the divide between the natural and the human sciences in mind, eventually “an engineering perspectives will spread from biology up through the human sciences and arts”, he hopes.²⁹ One of the most extravagant

claims on behalf of neo-Darwinian thinking is perhaps the Richard Dawkins's belief that all answers to the question of the meaning of life and what man is offered before Darwin's *The Origin of Species* are worthless.³⁰ Equally extravagant is his claim that "there is no reason to doubt the efficacy its [the principle of natural selection] throughout the universe" since "[t]he Darwinian Law may be as universal [. . .] as the great laws of physics".³¹

The conviction that the cultural sciences (i.e. the social and the human sciences) are in need of Darwinian underpinnings seems to assume first that explanatory theories are the exclusive goals of the cultural sciences, and second that Darwinian theory is relevant to the problems of the cultural sciences. In the first place it should be said that description and interpretation plays a major role in the cultural sciences perhaps more so in the humanities than in the social sciences, and secondly that it is difficult to see how Darwinian theory in the shape of evolutionary psychology (EP) could be relevant to the analysis of say the impact of the French Revolution on Europe, to an account of the development of Cézanne's style or the interpretation of Kafka's novels. These, to my mind fundamental questions, are not addressed by the Darwinian supporters of a new unified science. Equally one-sided is the view advanced by some feminist philosophers and sociologists of science to the effect that the "natural sciences are illuminatingly conceptualized as part of the social sciences".³² The natural sciences, Sandra Harding claims, "should be considered to be embedded in the social sciences because everything scientists do or think is part of the social world".³³ We might equally well claim that linguistics or logic is the foundational science since scientist talk and argue. Why should we need a queen of the sciences?

Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene* (1976) and Dennett's books I have referred to might be viewed as popular science, and should therefore be treated as such, that is, one should not take them too seriously. The philosopher Antony Flew, for example, who admires Wilson's work regards Dawkins's book as "a major exercise in popular mystification", producing "obfuscatory specialities" in attributing selfishness to the genes.³⁴ Whether popular or not – there is no mathematics in Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene* – his theory that the unit of evolutionary

selection is neither the individual organism nor the species, but the gene has been taken seriously by geneticists and biologists. It has, for example, been criticised by the philosopher Elliott Sober and the prominent geneticist Richard Lewontin in an article in the *The Philosophy of Science*, a work definitely not in the popular genre, “the selfish gene” has moreover entered the textbook *Human Evolutionary Psychology* (2002) by members of the Evolutionary Psychology and Behavioural Research Group at Liverpool University. The aims of evolutionary psychology are, according to these authors, breathtakingly ambitious, for they claim that there is a theory that can explain such seemingly disparate and heterogeneous phenomena as some women’s attempts to preserve their youth by means of plastic surgery, the fact that Dogon women in Mali spend five days every month alone in a hut, that stepchildren are at greater risk of fatal abuse than a parent’s biological offspring, that men with fast cars and strong chins are perceived as more attractive than basic Mr Average.³⁵ The theory that explains the connections between these phenomena is the theory of evolution by natural selection, they claim. The same confidence in the explanatory power of EP is in evidence in Randy Thornhill’s and Craig Palmer’s controversial book *A Natural History of Rape: The Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion* (2000) where they claim that when we consider “any feature of living things, *whether* evolution applies is never a question. The only legitimate question is how to apply evolutionary principles”, not only to rape, but to such things as “cosmetic surgery, the content of movies, legal systems, and fashion trends”.³⁶

The philosopher of science Philip Kitcher makes the interesting distinction between on the one hand “Popular Sociobiology”, or “Pop Sociobiology”, which as he puts it “appeals to recent ideas about the evolution of animal behavior in order to advance grand claims about human nature and human social institutions”, and “the subdiscipline of evolutionary theory that studies the behavior of nonhuman animals”.³⁷ Most of the so-called pop-sociobiologists, however, are or have been active in biological research about the social behaviour of nonhuman animals. Edward O. Wilson, for example, is a world authority on ants and social insects, and would have avoided

charges of scientism, sexism, and conservatism had he not applied the principles of sociobiology to humans, especially in his book, *On Human Nature* (1978). The whole point of evolutionary psychology in contrast to sociobiology, however, is to apply principles applicable to the nonhuman animal world to humans. I shall now move on to consider some philosophical aspects of sociobiological and EP (evolutionary psychologists') claims about human nature and culture, beginning with the question of biological determinism.

Evolutionary psychologists and sociobiologist in particular have been accused of espousing biological determinism, or even worse, genetic determinism. As far as I know no reputable evolutionist, has endorsed genetic determinism, yet the pronouncements of leading sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists are often ambiguous and inconsistent. Richard Dawkins, for example, says that the purpose of his book *The Selfish Gene* is "to examine the biology of selfishness and altruism",³⁸ that "we, and all other animals, are machines created by our genes",³⁹ the predominant quality of successful genes being their "ruthless selfishness", something that in Dawkins' view gives rise to "selfishness in individual behaviour" both among animals and humans.⁴⁰ If one's ideal is a society "in which individuals cooperate generously and unselfishly towards a common good", Dawkins continues, "you can expect little help from biological nature".⁴¹ A society based on "the gene's law of universal ruthless selfishness would", in his view, "be a very nasty society", but "however much we might deplore something, it does not stop being true",⁴² Dawkins says. "We are", Dawkins declares "survival machines – robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes".⁴³ Responding to criticisms by the philosopher Mary Midgley to the effect that talk about *selfishness* in genes rests on serious conceptual confusions,⁴⁴ Dawkins explains that he didn't intend this statement to be metaphorical, "it is the literal truth", he says, "provided certain key words are defined in the particular ways favoured by biologists".⁴⁵ He counters the charge of genetic determinism by claiming that "the genes exert a statistical influence on human behaviour", that can be "overridden or reversed by other influences",⁴⁶ these presumably being cultural and social. The views Dawkins advances when not

under pressure from critics are deterministic; he claims, for example, that “[t]he genes are master programmers”, they are “the primary policy-makers; brains are the executioners”, the genes “exert ultimate power over behaviour”,⁴⁷ but when accused of genetic determinism he reverts to talk about “influences” and “statistical tendencies”. Sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologist realize of course that human beings are not only biological creatures but also cultural beings. “Most of what is unusual about man can be summed up in one word”, says Dawkins, namely “culture”.⁴⁸ When writing about political phenomena such as the welfare state or practices such as contraception Dawkins has nothing to say about their historical and political background and significance, he is content to say that the welfare state and contraception are very “unnatural”, which doesn’t mean that he is against them, they simply don’t make biological sense.⁴⁹ It is tempting to counter, that of course they are not natural, since they are cultural, but so is science including the theory of evolution. Dawkins has, however, something more to say about culture, namely that culture can be understood in terms of cultural replicators, the so-called *memes*, a term coined by him and taken up by later writers.⁵⁰ The “meme” is defined by the EP Handbook as “[a] unit of cultural information that replicates itself in human minds and is transmitted by initiation and teaching”.⁵¹ The “meme” has even entered the *English Oxford Dictionary*.⁵²

Sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists admit that cultural traditions and practices provide the motivations for human actions and for human behaviour, although explanations of human actions and behaviour in terms of social and cultural factors are never final. They claim that social and cultural explanations are therefore incomplete, the real scientific explanation of human behaviour is provided by evolutionary theory and evolutionary psychology. In order to make room for social and cultural factors in the explanation of behaviour evolutionary theorists avail themselves of the distinction between “ultimate causes” and “proximate causes”, a distinction they are in love with and which I believe they have borrowed from medical and legal discourse.⁵³ Dawkins, for example, says that “genes exert ultimate power over behaviour”, implying that there are many

intermediate causes between the ultimate biological ones and the behaviour that is viewed as the effects of the ultimate causes. It is not always clear what is meant by “ultimate cause”, sometimes it seems to mean causes that are ultimate in a temporal sense, lying deeply hidden in the prehistory of *homo sapiens*, sometimes they are conceived of as structural causes of a fundamental kind or something like that. Edward Wilson, for example, claims that the ultimate causes of human behaviour are “certain deep-lying genetic qualities”, they are “the prime movers of evolution” (notice the Aristotelian language) and “operate only over long spans of time”, whereas the proximate causes consist of “[t]he anatomical, physiological, and behavioral machinery” created by the ultimate causes, “this machinery carries out the commands of the genes”, as Wilson puts it.⁵⁴ This distinction is put to many imaginative uses by sociobiologist, the biologist and researcher in animal behaviour John Alcock claims in his book *The Triumph of Sociobiology* (2001) that “striving for high social status . . . is an evolved male reproductive strategy”, which facilitates as he puts it, “access to sexually receptive females”.⁵⁵ The ultimate cause of the striving for status is thus “the evolved male reproductive strategy” which consequently “is in the genes”. The proximate causes of striving for high social status are presumable psychological, social and cultural. In Alcock’s view the social sciences “have a long established, highly productive focus on the proximate causes of human behavior”,⁵⁶ but they are in his view sorely in need of a foundation in evolutionary theory, capable of providing analyses of the ultimate causes of human behaviour. Even in cases where certain phenomena, such as the lack of a positive correlation between “social and reproductive success . . . in some modern human populations” disappoints the expectations of the sociobiologist,⁵⁷ who unquestioningly accepts Darwin’s thesis that “every single organic being around us may be said to be striving to the utmost to increase in numbers”, social and cultural explanations for the phenomenon of family planning and for voluntary childlessness are regarded as specifying proximate causes, the ultimate causes must as always be couched in evolutionary terms the Alcock tells us, for there is no reason according to him to suppose that “we alone among animal species have somehow

managed to achieve independence from our evolutionary history".⁵⁸ he assumes as sociobiologist and evolutionary psychologist are wont to do that there are "universal features of human nature that found their final evolutionary form during the infancy of our species some 100-600,000 years ago".⁵⁹ Similarly Wilson declares that it is his aim "to reconstruct the earliest evolutionary history of social organization and to discern its genetic residues in contemporary society" by "comparing the diagnostic features of human organization with those of other primate species".⁶⁰ Even if it is true as Darwin wrote in the last sentence of *The Descent of Man* (1871) "[m]an still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin",⁶¹ our psychology could still be radically different from the mindset of the prehistoric Flintstones. The favoured method is what has been called "reverse engineering", which means that one tries to reconstruct the evolutionary background and function of observable human behaviour. Reconstructing the evolutionary path of biological evolution differs, however, from a reconstruction of behaviour and the functions of mental capacities since in mental evolution there is nothing comparable to the fossil record to go by.

There are problems with the EP-people's cavalier attitude to notions of causality and causal explanation. I hesitate to bring up the difficult problem of causality, where angels fear to tread I rush in, but it seems to me that there are others who storm in. Since the proponents of EP are empirical scientists and philosophically speaking convinced scientific realists and materialists it may not be inappropriate to recall what two of the most influential philosophers in the empiricist tradition had to say about causality.

David Hume writes in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1772) that "no philosopher, who is rational and modest, has ever pretended to assign the ultimate cause of any natural operation, or to show distinctly the action of that power, which produces any single effect in the universe".⁶² Thus talk of ultimate causes is, according to Hume, never warranted. The problem is that we can always assign several causes to some phenomenon to be explained. According to the standard view of causation "a *causal condition* of an event is any *sine qua non* condition under which that event occurred

or any condition which was such that, had the condition in question not obtained, that event (its effect) would not have occurred, and *the cause* of the event is the totality of those conditions".⁶³ It is easy to see that the distinction between ultimate and proximate causes in the hands of evolutionary psychologists and sociobiologist doesn't hold water. Some of the difficulties with the EP approach to human behaviour could have been avoided had they heeded John Stuart Mill's warning that since the cause of an event is a whole set of conditions, we have "no right to give the name of cause to one of them, exclusively of others".⁶⁴ Remarking on "invocation of non-human, but purposeful-sounding beings" (such as the genes and DNA), in sociobiology, and treating them as "real calculating agents", Mary Midgley claims that "this habit of personifying genetic causes as governors is meant to indicate that they are the only 'ultimate' causes".⁶⁵ In fact, this habit only conveys "the determination of sociobiologists to insist that their own causes are more important than those which are found by other methods of enquiry".⁶⁶

Evolutionary psychologists reject what they call "the Social Science Model", according to which human nature, in so far as it is legitimate to speak of it all is infinitely malleable and socially constructible, human nature is a blank slate.⁶⁷ The view that everything human depends on culture, or, is determined by culture seems to be as one-sided as biological determinism. The scientific critics of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, among them leading geneticists, who wrote the book *Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology and Human Nature* (1984) remark that "cultural determinists identify narrow (and exclusive) causal chains in society which are in their own way reductionist. Humanity cannot be cut adrift from its own biology, but neither is it enchained by it".⁶⁸ This is a more reasonable position than the extremes of biological or cultural determinism, the latter being the politically correct view in the 70s and 80s according to Rose, Lewontin and Kamin.⁶⁹ Social determinism was illustrated by a cartoon in *The New Yorker*, where a woman in the witness stands says, that her husband beat her because of his childhood and she killed him because of hers.⁷⁰ Biological determinism is the other side of the coin of cultural and social determinism, and has much the same re-

sult, denying or severely restricting human autonomy. It is one thing to claim that our capacity for reasoning and other mental operations has been formed through evolutionary processes, another to claim that the actual use of that capacity as well as the results of using that capacity can be fully explained in evolutionary terms. It is rather a matter of “enabling” than “causing”, as Steve Rose puts it.⁷¹

There are several other philosophical difficulties with the EP programme, which I shall touch upon briefly, the risk of explanatory vacuity and the paradox of self-reference. I begin with the last. If the human mind is solely “a device for survival and reproduction” as Wilson puts it, and “reason . . . just one of its activities” this casts doubt on the reliability of the results of mental activity such as science.⁷² Patricia Churchland’s puts it graphically: “Boiled down to essentials, a nervous system enables the organism to succeed in the four F’s: feeding, fleeing, fighting and reproduction. [. . .] Improvements in sensorimotor control confer an evolutionary advantage: a fancier style of representing is advantageous *so long as it is geared to the organism’s way of life and enhances the organism’s chances of survival*. Truth, whatever that is, definitely takes the hindmost”.⁷³ Darwin himself felt this difficulty, that is, if the human capacity for reasoning is the result of “blind” evolutionary processes, what reason do we have to trust the veridicty of our reasoning, including the results of science and *a fortiore* evolutionary theory itself. “With me”, writes Darwin in a letter 1887, “the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which have been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or are at all trustworthy. Would anyone trust the convictions of a monkey’s mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?”⁷⁴ The theory of evolution may lead to scepticism about human knowledge including scientific knowledge and the theory of evolution. Perhaps this difficulty can be circumvented, it might be easier if one had a Kuhnian view of science, but most evolutionists and evolutionary psychologists espouse more or less unreflectively espouse scientific realism and materialism. If consciousness and mind are the long-term results of evolution, it is difficult to see how scientific theory including the theory of evolution can be anything more than an expression of our species’ biological

Umwelt, Bernard Williams argues. “Evolutionary epistemology”, he says, “must allow some autonomy to abstract scientific theory construction”.⁷⁵ This does not mean that the research programme is flawed from beginning to end, it only means that there are certain limits to what can be achieved within the programme, Williams reasonably concludes. In this last (and wonderful) book, *Truth and truthfulness* (200), Williams argues that “[t]he generic human need to listen to music [...] might be explained at the level of evolutionary psychology, but the emergence of the classical symphony certainly cannot.” Evolutionary psychologists tend to overlook and underplay “the massive development of non-genetic learning”.⁷⁶

The second problem is the risk of explanatory vacuity. When attempting to come to terms with the apparent lack of a positive correlation between wealth and what the authors of *Human Evolutionary Psychology* call “reproductive success”, they look for proximate causes for the phenomenon in question, what as they say, “has been used to question the appropriateness of an evolutionary approach to human behaviour”.⁷⁷ Rather than modify their claims about the power of evolutionary psychology they offer the following extraordinary explanation: “the relationship [between wealth and reproductive success] might persist in a modern population were it not for two factors that work against it: modern contraception and socially enforced monogamy”.⁷⁸ That means in effect that when an evolutionary explanation in terms of ultimate causes fails, one reverts to counterfactual reasoning arguing that the result that was to be expected from an evolutionary point of view would have occurred if there had been no proximate causes cancelling the predicted result. In this way the authors protect their evolutionary framework from troublesome counterexamples thus saving the theory from downright falsification at the price of threatening vacuity.

The advocates of evolutionary psychology and sociobiology argue that the explanatory power of the EP approach to human behaviour is proven by its ability to handle behaviour which seemingly does not fit the evolutionary framework. “[T]he central problem of sociobiology”, says Wilson, is to explain how “altruism, which by definition reduces personal fitness” could evolve by natural selection.⁷⁵ The an-

swer, Wilson claims, is kin selection. Similarly the textbook, *Human Evolutionary Psychology*, asserts that altruistic behaviour, which seems to be inconsistent “with the hard-nosed economic approach that an evolutionary approach entails”, nevertheless can be accommodated by the theory, since “people tend to behave in a manner consistent with evolutionary theory”.⁸⁰ I shall discuss some particular cases of altruism and how they are “explained” by evolutionary psychologists in the next section, here I am only concerned with the confidence in the omnipotence of evolutionary explanations and a certain “logical” naiveté this confidence is a sign of. For even if evolutionary explanations of altruistic behaviour were convincing, if they were internally consistent and conceptually unproblematic as well as consonant with the behaviour to be explained that would not show that evolutionary explanations were true, for there may be several other explanations equally consonant with the evidence. To argue otherwise is to commit what might be called “The Sherlock-Holmes-Fallacy”. In Conan Doyle’s novels Sherlock Holmes is depicted as a master of deductive argument, his deductions, however, are invariable invalid, which the following episode from *The Boscombe Valley Mystery* illustrates:

Holmes . . . carrying with him the stone which he had picked up in the wood.

“This may interest you, Lestrade”, he remarked, holding it out, “The murder was done with it”.

“I see no marks”.

“There are none”.

“How do you know then?”

“The grass was growing under it. It had only lain there a few days. There was no sign of a place whence it had been taken. It corresponds with the injuries”.

(*The Boscombe Valley Mystery*)⁸¹

Holmes’s reasons as follows: If the stone is the murder weapon it would not have lain long in the grass and the shape of the stone would correspond with the injuries, and since the stone had not lain long in the grass and the shape of the stone corresponded with

the injuries it was the murder weapon – an argument exemplifying the fallacy of affirming the consequent. What Holmes had proved is that it is not excluded that the stone is the murder weapon. Holmes' reasoning is often, as in this case, an argument "to the best explanation", which is a kind of inductive argument, "abduction" in Peirce's terminology. In other words, Holmes's explanation is a possible one, but it is not deductively valid.⁸² Similarly evolutionary explanations of human behaviour such as altruistic behaviour are of course possible, and it can be argued that they are the best explanations, but the fact (if it is a fact) that they can account for altruistic behaviour in no way shows that they are actually true. By dogmatically assuming that evolutionary explanations of human behaviour must be the most satisfying, they rule out explanations in terms of social and cultural factors, explanations that might equally well or better account for the phenomena under scrutiny. If one is in the grips of a favoured theory and approach it is, of course, easy to overlook the possibility of alternative explanations and to regard every explanation consistent with the theory as yet another proof of the theory's truth. But fitting the facts is certainly not enough.

VI. Altruism, Sex, Art and Memetics

I now turn to some more specific matters, and discuss the way how EP deals with altruistic behaviour, and the question of sexual selection, what is called "mate choice" and "reproductive strategies". Altruism is, on behalf of persons one is not genetically related to, one of the main problems for evolutionary theory according to its exponents as is altruism in nonhuman animals. "Altruism", says the textbook on EP, "can be defined as any act that confers a benefit on the recipient of the act at some cost to the donor. In evolutionary terms, these costs and benefits are measured in terms of reproductive success, or, more strictly, fitness (the number of copies of a gene passed on to succeeding generations)", therefore "altruism creates something of a problem for the theory of natural selection".⁸³ Traits that "appear to reduce the reproductive chances or genetic success of individuals are inherently surprising", Alcock claims, and are in

need of explanation by evolutionary theory. In fact, “anything that appears to reduce an individual’s chances of reproducing successfully” becomes “by definition a Darwinian puzzle”,⁸⁴ something recognized by Darwin himself. The difficulty Darwin has in mind and which seemed insuperable and “fatal to [his] whole theory”,⁸⁵ is the existence of “altruistic” insects such as working or sterile ants. The problem, Darwin thinks, is solved by realizing that “selection may be applied to the family, as well as to the individual, and may thus gain the desired end”,⁸⁶ that is, sterile ants are produced because they are useful to the ant community, “[w]e can see how useful their production may have been to a social community of insects, on the same principle that the division of labour is useful to civilized man”.⁸⁷ This “evolutionary anomaly” is not uncommon in the animal world, prairie dogs and some monkeys, for example, give alarm calls to warn their fellows about potential predators, thus increasing their own risk of being detected and increasing the chances of survival for other members of the group.

The geneticist William D. Hamilton, thinking about how capacities for altruistic behaviour could be passed on in evolution, realized that an individual animal can increase its fitness “indirectly by aiding the reproduction of other individuals who are likely to carry the same gene”⁸⁸ – this altruistic behaviour he called “kin-selection”. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the mathematical theory of kin-selection was suggested by the biochemist and evolutionary theorist, J.B.S. Haldane. Having hit on the idea in a British pub, so the story goes, Haldane started making calculations, concluding that “he would willingly lay down his life if he could save more than two brothers, four half-brothers, or, eight cousins”,⁸⁹ because the genetic effect would be the same. According to Hamilton’s mathematical version of the kin-selection theory “altruistic acts are expected to occur with greater frequency between close relatives than between more distant relatives” and not at all between strangers.⁹⁰ This is all very well, but human beings sometimes behave altruistically towards complete strangers, what becomes a problem for the evolutionary psychologist since the same principles are thought to apply to nonhuman animals as to humans, since in nonhuman animals only altruistic behaviour

explainable by kin-selection occurs. So-called reciprocal altruism or “tit-for-tat” – I scratch your back you scratch mine – is then invoked in cases where this is not possible, acts such as giving away money to charities or being a blood donor are explained as actions boosting the donor’s reputation, and thus are ultimately selfish.⁹¹ “Blood donation”, we read in *Human Evolutionary Psychology*, “may operate through the desire to be seen as an altruist by others, rather than merely the desire to help others who are less fortunate”.⁹² Altruism directed towards complete strangers, so-called “reciprocal altruism”,⁹³ the very concept of reciprocal altruism implies that there is no such thing as altruism pure and simple, i.e. acts which are performed without any regard for possible advantages to oneself.

If suitably modified, explanations in terms of evolutionary theory can accommodate all the hard cases, that seemingly contradict the expectations of evolutionary theory. Adoption is such a case, since it seems to “go entirely against the predictions of the theory”.⁹⁴ An explanation in evolutionary terms, however, is forthcoming, there is, the authors of *Human Evolutionary Psychology* claim, “an in-built biological urge for children”, which accompanied by strong cultural motivations makes people “wish to raise children no matter what, even if this makes no sense in fitness terms”.⁹⁵ The explanatory rationale of this move is, that although adoption does not enhance “the inclusive fitness of adoptive parents”, neither does it “have any adverse effects if the majority of couples who adopt are infertile”.⁹⁶ Therefore, it seems that no exceptions to the principles of evolutionary psychology can be found, or, rather, no behaviour is allowed to count against them. The price to be paid, however, is explanatory emptiness.

Blood donation, supporting charities or adopting children one is not related to count *prima facie* against the preferred explanations of evolutionary psychologists. But there are, in fact, even harder cases to consider, what might be called “the Mother Theresa syndrome”, discussed by Wilson at some length. Mother Theresa lived a life of “total poverty and grinding hard work”, he says, she is “an extraordinary person but it should not be forgotten that she is secure in the service of Christ and the knowledge of her Church’s immortality”,⁹⁷

Wilson concludes. She is after all not that altruistic according to Wilson, but it is hard to see how his explanation squares with evolutionary principles, what he offers is a piece of Hobbesian egoistic psychology. It is of course true that many apparently altruistic acts can serve egoistic interests directly or indirectly, altruistic acts may, for example, have positive side-effects on those who perform them in terms of social prestige and a good conscience. People who have acquired great wealth by more or less shady transactions, sometimes make huge donations to the sciences and the arts thereby ensuring that their reputation is enhanced and that their names are immortalized. But there are cases of altruism and self-sacrifice that cannot be so easily explained in terms of evolutionary kin-selection or in terms of Hobbesian egoism. The names of the non-Jews who rescued Jews in the countries occupied by Nazi Germany are listed in the Garden of the Righteous among the Nations in Jerusalem. The majority of the names are Polish in spite of the fact that Poland was the only occupied country where there was a death penalty for hiding Jews and in spite of the fact that there was a wide-spread popular anti-semitism in pre-war Poland. About two thousand Poles lost their lives in actions trying to save their Jewish neighbours. These are admittedly extreme cases in extreme circumstances. A theory, moreover does not necessarily have to cover all possible and extreme cases, so why not leave it at that. Wilson and others, however, do not seem to be willing to admit any exceptions to their evolutionary Hobbesian psychology, otherwise Mother Theresa wouldn't pose a problem. One more comment on altruism versus selfishness is in place. If we were to accept the evolutionary psychologists' explanations of the possibility of altruism that in one way or another can be shown to be selfish after all, we would still distinguish between the selfishness of a person taking the last biscuit and the embezzling corporate official on the one hand and the person feeding the neighbours cat and the Mother-Theresa-kind of selfishness on the other. In *Animal Farm* everybody is equal and some more than others, here it appears that everybody is selfish, and some more than others. The picture evolutionary psychology paints of human life is that it is short, brutish and a bit longer than it used to be.

I now move on to the evolutionary psychologists' views on sex and so-called mate selection, an area rich in speculations, many of which are God's gift to feminist critics. According to David Buss's standard work on *The Evolution of Desire* (1994) women look for various cues in men that signal either the possession or the likelihood of acquiring resources, that is resources for taking care of the offspring, apart from the minimal requirement that their partners be free of open sores and lesions, women like their men tall.⁹⁸ Men, according to John Alcock, look for women with facial averageness because it may signal resistance to parasites, prominent cheekbones are attractive because it signifies sexual maturity and large, firm, symmetrical breasts indicate youthfulness and immune system competence.⁹⁹ Alcock tends, like other evolutionary psychologists and sociobiologists to conflate beauty with sexual attractiveness, a thesis that fortunately is not true.

Evolutionary psychologists are prone not only to generalize non-human animal behaviour overlooking for example that there are many species in which the male is not dominant and aggressive, and to extrapolate without further ado to human behaviour. Wilson, for example, claims that from the evolutionary point of view it pays "for males to be aggressive, hasty, fickle and indiscriminating", whereas "it is profitable for females to be coy, to hold back until they can identify the best genes", humans, Wilson, contends obey this biological principle faithfully.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the middle-class women of Wilson's youth fit this pattern, in any case he doesn't produce any evidence. Even rather specific behaviour and "beautification", such as the use of eye-shadow have an obvious evolutionary explanation. The Liverpool psychologists claim that women use "eye shadow [. . .] to mimic natural signs of fertility [. . .] while rouge mimics the way the skin flushes when aroused",¹⁰¹ men on the other hand try to attract women by conspicuous consumption, expensive cars and so on. Humans as a species mildly promiscuous, male and female unfaithfulness, however, differ because of our evolutionary past in certain ways. Men want to spread their genes, women look for a partner who can be relied on to provide for the off-spring. Two anthropologists at Rutgers University, appropriately named Tiger and

Fox, have come to the conclusion that “[m]ale primates who exert dominance tend to mate and reproduce much more. Politics (in the broadest sense of struggle for dominance) is thus primarily a male game, the end of which is ultimately reproduction”.¹⁰² Now powerful men have been known to engaged in extra-marital sex, but these authors overlook the fact that off-spring is the last thing they want from the liaison. Much of the evolutionary psychology of sex seems to be what Philip Kitcher calls “barroom gossip” which should stay in the barroom. It is indeed astonishing how little empirical support and how much conceptual confusion there is in evolutionary psychology’s speculations about sexual relations.

Evolutionary theorizing and speculation has in more recent years been extended to aesthetics and art as well. In the introduction to *Sociobiology and the Arts*, the authors claim that sociobiology is capable of explaining not only “the favourite themes of human art”, but also “its form”. “Our aesthetic preferences”, they claim, “are certainly influenced by our evolutionary past”,¹⁰³ and Ellen Dissanayke, claims in her contribution to this volume, that it is undisputable that the “arts today serve, and probably always have served, individual sexual purposes”. Art like sport is “competitive”, “a way of showing one is superior in certain respects, hence more sexually desirable”.¹⁰⁴ Art is considered a courtship ritual, the artist indicates to the women inspecting his work that he is very skilled and is able to invest a considerable amount of time, energy and material resources in courtship. When the British artist Neil Andrew Megson composed the exhibition “Prostitution” in 1976, consisting of explicit photographs of lesbian love and macabre assemblages of rusty knives, syringes, blooded hair and used sanitary towels one of which is growing mould, one wonders if he expected many women to offer him their reproductive favours, and what individual sexual purposes could be served by Anthony-Noel Kelly’s exhibition in 1998 of cast body parts made from human remains. These are perhaps extreme cases, but examples could easily be multiplied from modernist and contemporary art where beauty is not the aim and where it is difficult to see how the production of the works in question could make the artist sexually more desirable to the opposite sex. In my view, the el-

elementary mistake evolutionary psychologists interested in aesthetics and the arts make, is to equate art and the aesthetic with beauty. In his programmatic contribution to the ambitious collection of essays, *Evolutionary Aesthetics* (2003), Randy Thornhill introduces the starting point “for the Darwinian of aesthetics” in the following manner: “The Darwinian theory of human aesthetic value is that beauty is a promise of function in the environments in which humans evolved, i.e. of high likelihood of survival and reproductive success in the environments of human evolutionary history”.¹⁰⁵ It is true that beauty has played an important role in the production of art, but beauty is certainly not the only artistic, or, if you prefer, aesthetic value of art, as Thornhill seems to think. His grasp of the phenomena to be explained by evolutionary aesthetics leaves a lot to be desired, for he believes that “the arts, as well as other areas of the humanities, are fundamentally concerned with beauty”.¹⁰⁶ Much contemporary art, visual art at least, seems to have much more to do with outrage and provocation than with beauty.¹⁰⁷ If the *explanantia* of an evolutionary theory of art and the aesthetics is characterized in such an inadequate manner, it is not surprising that the *explanations* are equally flawed. Evolutionary theory applied to the arts and to art criticism becomes positively ridiculous when it is claimed that the disvalue of much modern and postmodern art, in particular the disdain for beauty, can be shown to be a mistake on evolutionary grounds.¹⁰⁸

Notes

- 1 “Impressionism” is a case in point, it first appeared in a satirical magazine, mocking the loose brushwork of the paintings exhibited in the first “impressionist” exhibition in 1874. See James H. Rubin, *Impressionism* (London: Phaidon, 1999), p. 9.
- 2 The term “positivism” was coined by Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon, Comte’s teacher, and gained currency with the publications of Comte’s *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-42). See Roger Smith, *The Fontana History of the Human Sciences* (London: Fontana, 1997), p. 424 ff. Today “positivism” refers to various forms of philosophical thinking, social science and humanistic scholarship, very different from Comte’s conception of science.
- 3 John Luik, “Humanism”, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. Craig

- (London: Routledge). Retrieved June 19, 2003 from <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/NO25>
- 4 “Humanism”, *Early Italian Renaissance. World Civilization: An Internet Classroom & Anthology*, ed. Richard Hooker (Washington State University, 1996).
 - 5 John Luik, “Humanism”.
 - 6 “Humanism”, *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2003).
 - 7 “Scientism”, *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2003).
 - 8 Ibid.
 - 9 “Reductionism (or reductivism)”, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Antony Flew (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 300-1. Cf. John Losee’s discussion of the reduction of one scientific theory to another in John Losee, *Theories of Scientific Progress: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2004), ch. 4 “Progress through Reduction”. Ernest Nagel’s chapter on “The Reduction of Theories” (ch. 11 in *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961]) is the *locus classicus* of the reduction of thermodynamics to statistical mechanics. In the last chapter of this work, ch. 15: “Problems in the Logic of Historical Inquiry”, Nagel defends the applicability of the Hempelian model of deductive explanation to historical research.
 - 10 Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 13. Dawkins offers a nice illustration of the reductionist attitude: “at bottom the behaviour of a motor car is to be explained in terms of interactions between fundamental particles” (ibid., p. 12). What Dawkins overlooks, among other things, is the fact that for the motor car “to behave” at all, it needs a driver.
 - 11 Daniel Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 82.
 - 12 Otto Neurath, “The New Encyclopedia”, 1938, in *Unified Science*, ed. Brian McGuinness (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1987), pp. 140-1.
 - 13 Rudolf Haller gives a fascinating account of the theories and the activities of the Vienna circle in *Neopositivismus. Eine historische Einführung in die Philosophie des Wiener Kreises* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993).
 - 14 Hilary and Steven Rose, “Introduction”, *Alas Poor Darwin: Arguments against Evolutionary Psychology*, eds. Hilary & Steven Rose (London: Vintage/Random House, 2001), p. 1.
 - 15 Ibid.
 - 16 “Ultra-Darwinism” is contrasted with “Naturalism” (i.e. “normal” Darwinism) in Niles Eldredge’s *Reinventing Darwin: The Great Debate at the*

- High Table of Evolutionary Theory* (New York: John Wiley, 1995).
- 17 Hilary and Steven Rose, "Introduction", p. 1.
- 18 Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), p. 78.
- 19 Richard D. Alexander, *Darwinism and Human Affairs*, 1979 (London: Pitman Publishing, 1980), p. xii.
- 20 Edward D. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, 1975, 25th Anniversary Edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2000), p. 586.
- 21 Edward O. Wilson, "Introduction: What is Sociobiology?", in *Sociobiology and Human Nature: An Interdisciplinary Critique and Defense*, eds. Michael S. Gregory, Anita Silvers & Diane Sutch (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass), p. 1.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, 25th Anniversary Edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2000), p. vii.
- 25 Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*, p. 19.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 341.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 189. The Swedish convert to neo-Darwinism, Nils Uddenberg, who is somewhat more cautious about prospects of Darwinism applied to human behaviour and human culture, never the less believes that sociobiology or evolutionary psychology can serve as the foundational science for the social and the human sciences (Uddenberg, Nils, *Arvsdygden. Biologisk utveckling och mänsklig gemenskap* (Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 2a uppl. 2003, p. 26). [Original Virtue: Biological Evolution and Human Solidarity]).
- 30 Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 2nd.ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), p. 1.
- 31 Richard Dawkins, "Universal Darwinism", in *Evolution from Molecules to Men*, ed. D. S. Bendell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 420-423.
- 32 Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), p. 14.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- 34 Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*.
- 35 Antony Flew, *Darwinian Evolution* (London: Paladin, 1984), p. 118.
- 36 Louise Barrett, Robin Dunbar, Robin & John Lysett, *Human Evolutionary Psychology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 1.

- 37 Philip Kitcher, *Vaulting Ambition: Sociobiology and the Quest for Human Nature* (Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press, 1985), pp. 14–15.
- 38 Quoted from Tom Bethell, “Against Sociobiology”, *First Things* 109 (2001). Retrieved 9 September 2003 from <http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0101/articles/bethell.html>, p. 9.
- 39 Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, p. 1.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. vii.
- 45 Mary Midgley, “Gene-juggling”, *Philosophy* 54 (1979), pp. 430–458.
- 46 Richard Dawkins, “In Defence of Selfish Genes”, *Philosophy* 56 (1981), pp. 572.
- 47 Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, p. 331.
- 48 *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 62.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 189.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- 51 See Daniel Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, pp. 342–369.
- 52 Louise Barrett, Robin Dunbar & John Lysett, *Human Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 386.
- 53 The *OED* defines a meme as “[a] cultural element or behavioural trait whose transmission and consequent persistence in a population, although occurring by non-genetic means (esp. Imitation), is considered as analogous to the inheritance of a gene” (*Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2003)).
- 54 “Proximate cause” is defined by the *Dorlands Medical Dictionary* as “that which immediately precedes and produces an effect” and “Ultimate cause” is defined as “the earliest factor, in point of time, that has contributed to the production of a specific result”.
- 55 Edward Wilson, *Sociobiology*, p. 23.
- 56 John Alcock, *The Triumph of Sociobiology* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), p. 190.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 221.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 183.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 223.
- 60 Hilary Rose and Steven Rose, “Introduction”, *Alas Poor Darwin*, p. 1.
- 61 Edward O. Wilson, “Introduction: What is Sociobiology?”, in *Sociobiology and Human Nature*, p. 5.
- 62 Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 1871 (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1998), 643.
- 63 David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1772 (In-

- dianapolis: Hackett, 1983). Retrieved 4 May 2005 from <http://marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/en/hume.htm>
- 64 Richard Taylor, "Causation", *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 2, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 63.
- 65 Quoted from Taylor, p. 63.
- 66 Mary Midgley, *Evolution as a Religion: Strange Hopes and Stranger Fears*, 1985, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 150.
- 67 *Ibid.*, p. 151.
- 68 See Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (London: Allen Lane, 2002.)
- 69 Steve Rose, R. C. Lewontin, & Leon J. Kamin, *Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology and Human Nature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 10.
- 70 Today "social constructivism" seems to have replaced social determinism. According to the former view everything from scientific knowledge, the laws of nature and logic to our biology, politics and self-image are socially constructed. For an interesting discussion of these issues see, Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999) and, with particular regard to evolutionary theory, Michael Ruse, *Mystery of Mysteries: Is Evolution a Social Construct?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).
- 71 Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, p. 179.
- 72 E.O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), p.2.
- 73 Steven Rose, "Escaping Evolutionary Psychology", in *Alas Poor Darwin*, p. 251.
- 74 Patricia Churchland, "Epistemology in the Age of Neuroscience", *Journal of Philosophy*, 84 (1987), quoted in Alvin Plantinga "Introduction: The Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism", in *Naturalism Defeated? Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism*, ed. James Beilby (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 3-4.
- 75 Quoted in Plantinga, "Introduction: The Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism", p. 3.
- 76 Bernard Williams, "Evolutionary Theory and Epistemology" (1989) in Bernard Williams, *Making Sense of Humanity and Other Philosophical Papers 1982-1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 98.
- 77 Louise Barrett, Robin Dunbar & John Lysett, *Human Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 132.
- 78 Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) p. 28.
- 79 *Ibid.* Explaining away relevant evidence in this manner seems to be standard procedure among evolutionary psychologists and sociobiologists. Cf. Alcock's explanation of the lack of the expected correlation between "social

- and reproductive success” (John Alcock, *The Triumph of Sociobiology*, p. 183). Alcock argues that we should not accept that “human reproductive activities are purely arbitrary, a phenomenon with only cultural causes” (ibid., p. 184) as if something having “cultural causes” implies that it is an arbitrary phenomenon. His argument for an evolutionary explanation of the phenomenon to be explained, however, is “arbitrary” and speculative: “One possible argument is that during human evolution, our ancestors were subject to selection that favoured those with an interest in controlling the timing of the production of the first child and the duration of the interval between births” (ibid.).
- 80 E. O. Wilson, *Sociobiology*, p. 3.
- 81 Louise Barrett, Robin Dunbar & John Lycett, *Human Evolutionary Psychology*, pp. 67-8.
- 82 Conan A. Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (London: John Murray, 1974), p. 76.
- 83 Interesting analyses of Holmes’s reasoning can be found in *Sign of the Three: Dupin, Holmes, Peirce [The]*, eds. Umberto Eco and A. Seboek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).
- 84 Louise Barrett, Robin Dunbar, Robin & John Lycett, *Human Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 24.
- 85 John Alcock, *The Triumph of Sociobiology*, p. 33.
- 86 Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, 1859, ed. J. W. Burrow (London: Penguin 1968), p. 257.
- 87 Ibid., p. 258.
- 88 Ibid., pp. 259-60.
- 89 Louise Barrett, Robin Dunbar & John Lycett, *Human Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 26. See also E.O. Wilson, *Sociobiology*, ch. 5 “Group Selection and Altruism”, pp. 106-129.
- 90 Philip Kitcher, *Vaulting Ambition: Sociobiology and the Quest for Human Nature* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), p. 79.
- 91 Louise Barrett, Robin Dunbar & John Lysett, *Human Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 26.
- 92 Ibid., pp. 85-6. See especially “How ‘selfish’ genes lead to non-selfish people”, p. 90.
- 93 “The theory of natural selection can be extended still further into the complex of relationships that Robert L. Trivers [. . .] has called *reciprocal altruism*. The paradigm offered by Trivers is good Samaritan behaviour in human beings. [- - -] A population at large that enters into [. . .] reciprocally altruistic acts, will be a population of individuals with generally increased fitness. The trade-off actually enhances personal fitness and is less purely altruistic than the acts evolving out of interdemetic and kin selection” (E.O. Wilson, *Sociobiology*, p. 120).

- 94 Louise Barrett, Robin Dunbar & John Lycett, *Human Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 50.
- 95 *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- 96 *Ibid.*
- 97 Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 165.
- 98 David Buss, *The Evolution of Desire* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p. 41.
- 99 John Alcock, *The Triumph of Sociobiology*, pp. 134 ff.
- 100 E.O. Wilson, *On Human Nature*, p. 125.
- 101 Louise Barrett, Robin Dunbar & John Lycett, *Human Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 124.
- 102 Quoted from Philip Kitcher, *Vaulting Ambition*, p. 180.
- 103 Marcel Roelie & Jan Wind, "Sociobiology and the Arts: An Introduction", in *Sociobiology and the Arts*, eds. Jan Baptist Bedaux & Brett Cooke (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 20-1.
- 104 Ellen Dissanayke, "Sociobiology and the Arts: Problems and Prospects", in *Sociobiology and the Arts*, eds. Jan Baptist Bedaux & Brett Cooke (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), p. 35.
- 105 Randy Thornhill, "Darwinian Aesthetics Informs Traditional Aesthetics", in *Evolutionary Aesthetics*, eds. Eckart Voland & Karl Grammer (Berlin: Springer, 2003), pp. 9-10.
- 106 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- 107 See John A. Walker, *Art and Outrage: Provocations, Controversy and the Visual Arts* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).
- 108 See Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, ch. 20: "The Arts".

MARGARETA HALLBERG

Struggling with Academic Biography

What difference can it make
to the humanities?

The objective of this article is to relate theoretical debates and conceptual revisions within the humanities to academic biography. I am interested in the status of biography among scholars in the arts and the humanities as well as among social analysts; why academic biographies are written, how biographers themselves understand their task, and if and how they relate their work to theoretical movements in their own or neighbouring fields. However, I am also interested in the possible contributions from biographical work to those of us who wish to reinforce ideas of knowledge as embodied. Obviously, it is not possible to address all of these meta-biographical issues in this short paper, but I will at least touch upon most of them.

One question to ask is, of course, why engage in these matters at all? Part of the answer is found in my own struggles with biographical writing. Some years ago I happened to see a photo from a philosophy of science conference held in Great Britain in 1957. That particular photo set my thoughts in motion in the direction of biography. Simply put, I wanted to find out more about the only woman in the photo, the British philosopher of science Mary Hesse. I moved in two different directions. On the one hand, I made contact with Mary Hesse in Cambridge, asked her for an interview and took my first stumbling steps towards a book about her life and work. On the other hand, I tried to find out what kind of genre it was into which I was about to enter when I decided to start writing an intellectual biography. I went to conferences, met biographers, read biographies

and searched for meta-biographical comments both from biographers and others. Of particular interest to me were the reflections on biography by the philosopher Ray Monk.¹ Monk is one of few contemporary philosophers who have taken biography seriously enough to make it his central preoccupation. At the end of this article I will discuss Monk's views more thoroughly, and also exemplify from my own work. But let me start from a different angle.

The humanities and theoretical debates

In recent years, the humanities and social sciences have met severe challenges from theoretical transformations within themselves. Both individualism and humanism have been radically called into question. As terms, they are used with varying degrees of precision but most generally both are features of Cartesian epistemology, closely linked to self-consciousness, epistemic authority and universalism.² Ultimately, the previously self-evident view of the detached, knowing subject come to be questioned and criticized. Voices from across the disciplines have increasingly contended that the appeal to individualism and humanism rests upon a homogenizing form of universalism, which threatens the recognition of the crucial and irreducible differences that exist between social and cultural groups. The human subject, and particularly the idea of the unified and intrinsically rational individual, has become so problematic to so many theorists and scholars today to have a tangible influence on the disciplines concerned with human culture and its conditions. Whether this effect will fundamentally alter the disciplines or not in the long run is an empirical question, and it is simply too early to tell, but the intensity of the debates and the wide circulation of similar ideas among academics indicate that the objections to traditional views ought to be taken into account both in education and in research.

The proliferation of anti-humanist ideas in the academy can be said to have begun approximately forty years ago, with the then dominant trends of structuralism and left-wing university politics. But the doubts and oppositions to Cartesian epistemology have been embedded in philosophy itself for centuries.³ It would take this arti-

cle too far astray to bring up all different kinds of criticisms towards individualism and humanism, originating as they are from a number of sources. A few recent examples will do. In the sociology of scientific knowledge, it is widely assumed that an isolated individual cannot be in a position to identify correct applications of knowledge.⁴ In feminist theory, critique of individualism and the traditional understanding of the human subject is mainstream and closely related to the dismissal of the concept of rational man.⁵ Constructivist approaches to psychology, where identity is understood as a social construction, is a growing field.⁶ Also in the current “posthumanist turn” the concept of the human is strictly at odds with liberal and rational ideas of the individual.⁷ These and other similar approaches all support the idea that the classic definition of the individual has come to a dead end, leading to the search for new concepts of what it means to be human.

To reconsider basic assumptions within a discipline or academic field is to maintain the value of analytical and critical practices with no obvious outcome. In such practices, one finds advocates, believers, and activists as well as doubters, sceptics, even cynics, but they do have one activity in common which, for lack of a better term, I choose to call a *theoretical* activity. Activities of this kind consist in the conscious effort to question older epistemic traditions, the invention of new words and concepts, attention to critical voices, and the exploration of unconventional ways of designating human and nonhuman conditions and human/nonhuman intersections. Differently put, such efforts encourage analysts and scholars to take issue with the Cartesian knowing subject and the claims of epistemic authority evolving from it. Although different practical and personal experiences could be expected to play a decisive role in the shaping of both new concepts and new academic identities, they are, I would argue, accompanied by intellectual struggles and theoretical conflicts. Needless to say, I find that engaging in theoretical activities constitutes an essential element of academic work.

In the humanities and the social sciences, perhaps to a greater degree than in philosophy, *theory* has become an elusive and contested term with many uses. I have no intention of defining theory in this

paper; I merely wish to point out its many uses. As a term it is notoriously loose, covering as it does a multitude of meanings in various contexts. It is used often as an umbrella term covering both post-structuralism, post-colonialism and all of its forerunners (Marxism, psychoanalysis, feminism, critical theory and so on), but also for intellectual and critical sins at lower levels. In some academic fields, such as literary criticism, “theory” has a more distinct meaning, explicitly referring to post-structuralism, but in many other branches of the humanities, theory has become equivalent to perspective. Regardless of its exact meaning, theory is always an issue. Theories are like genes; they float from one generation to the next, taking on new meanings with new contexts and provoking changes in the way we see the world. When scholars in the humanities and the human and social sciences teach, work out research projects, join each other at seminars and conferences, apply for funding, write articles and books, they refer to, acknowledge, and confront influential theories and theorists. Hence, theoretical matters play a decisive role in the shaping of academic identity.

If one looks at biography with the theoretical lenses that bring much contemporary work in the humanities together, it seems to be a bit of an exception to the rule. Biographers do not appear to care much for theoretical problems in the above sense. Asserting “theoretical unawareness” among biographers is not to say that they in general are hostile to theory. Sub-genres such as “psychobiography”, “social biography”, and “existential biography” are possible to discern and it is fair to say that biographers have made use of theory in so far as it helps to contextualise the biographical subject. Sartre, for example, wrote philosophical biographies of Baudelaire and Flaubert using psychoanalysis as a theoretical framework. And David Macey’s biography of Frantz Fanon provides the historical, cultural and social context essential for understanding Fanon.⁸

Nevertheless, theory in a more reflexive sense, i.e., as a problem for the biographer himself and for biography as a genre of writing, in most cases seems to be absent. Theoretical debates among biographers concerning problems having to do with the role of theory and perspective for the analysis seem to be fairly rare. In the introductory

chapter to one of the few current meta-theoretical works on biography, “Telling Lives in Science” (1996), the editors comment on the absence of theoretical remarks from professional critics of the genre. According to them, “[t]hose who write about biography are in the main those who write biography, and it is still comparatively rare to find professional critics or historians at conferences on biography (...)”.⁹ This being the case, it is not strange that biographers inhabit a world separated from the one constituted by the trends, styles and visions of theoretically engaged scholars. Most likely, these scholars do not turn to biography for reflections on the human subject because most biographers just get on with their story after a short preface or introduction. Hence there seems to be a gap or a cleavage between biographers and their enthusiasm for personal lives, on the one hand, and theoretical analysts on the other.

Biography – a contested genre

Biography has as its main goal to write a life (cf. bio= life, graphein = writing). Normally, life means human life even if there are exceptions.¹⁰ Normally, a biography is about a real living or dead human being, however complex the ‘real’ might be. Real persons have a history, a childhood and, unless we think of people with multiple-self disorders, a self and a subjective awareness. Life has a beginning and an end, with various events and experiences in between, which the biographer hopes to narrate intelligibly. Although the idea of the unified, uncomplicated and rational individual has lost its grip on academics, biography is a genre where the coherent biographical subject still remains. In this respect, the biographical subject seems to conform to the old liberal, individualist view of what it means to be human.

Biography is quite a popular genre to a wide variety of audiences. Writing about celebrities, extraordinary successes or life tragedies attracts a great deal of attention and a wide audience. Popularity and prestige, however, do not necessarily overlap, and sympathy from various consumers of a genre and the reputation that will accompany the producers may differ. There may be an increasing interest in bi-

ography for enjoyment and entertainment, because it is fascinating to read about people's lives, but from this only it does not follow that biographies are highly valued. Even academic biographies of authors, scientists, and philosophers are published to such a degree that they appear to be of great interest to different kinds of readers. It is difficult to tell if this interest is increasing or not. In any case, the sheer number of books with biographical intent seems to be greater than ever. According to the historian of science Thomas Söderqvist, the last decade has shown a number of high quality biographies of scientists. "Although still within the traditional confines of the genre, these and similar biographies are more detailed, better researched, more stylishly written, and more penetrating than almost any biography written just a generation ago".¹¹

Still, only in exceptional cases do biographies seem to receive the same serious reception as good novels or academic work. Generally speaking, biography is often thought of as too easy-going, gossipy and impertinent to be taken seriously. It is said to take the individual subject too much for granted or even to romanticise it, and to have little or no value for research and scholarship. Few scholars take a serious interest in the lives of great figures. Aside from anecdotes sometimes told in class to lighten the mood, or as an amusing diversion at academic receptions, as, biographical information is generally dismissed. As rule, the status of biography appears to be rather low in most contemporary academic discourses.

Among influential thinkers who have been associated with "Theory" (with a capital T), i.e., Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, de Man and Bourdieu, biography has been dismissed together with the abandonment of the author, the writer, and the subject or as a consequence of "the biographical illusion" and the disturbing border between 'life' and 'work'. Michel Foucault, for instance, points out that juridical systems of power *produce* the subjects they subsequently come to represent.¹² He claims that "man", as author of his own thoughts, speeches and actions, is nothing more than an effect of discourses. Since such thinkers emphasise the discontinuity of the self rather than coherence and stability, individuals are basically unknowable in their endless variations. Regardless of the intelligibility of these

views, and the criticisms raised against them, the impact of these writers on humanist research and scholarship during the last decades is without question substantial.

When literary theorist and feminist Toril Moi introduces her book on Simone de Beauvoir, she carefully avoids the term biography, because she wants to emphasise “the idea of production or construction”, and thus to indicate that she sees ‘Simone de Beauvoir’ as “an extraordinarily complex effect of a whole network of different discourses or determinants”.¹³ Moi notes that in biography “the life/text distinction normally carries an explicit or implicit value judgement: biographers often consider life more ‘real’ or more ‘true’ than text”.¹⁴ Thus she calls her work a “personal genealogy”, which she says is to biography what genealogy is to traditional history for Michel Foucault. “Like traditional history, biography is narrative and linear, argues in terms of origins and finalities and seeks to disclose an original identity. Genealogy, on the other hand, seeks to achieve a sense of emergence or production and to understand the complex play of different kinds of power involved in social phenomena. Personal genealogy does not reject the notion of the ‘self’ or the subject but tries instead to subject that very self to genealogical investigation.”¹⁵ The idea that biography is linear and teleological and “seeks to disclose an original identity” distances the genre from theoretically inclined academic practitioners who, to a great extent, are often inclined to problematize original identity-talk. Moi, then, is doubtful of the possibility of disclosing an original identity, and distances herself from the underlying purpose of biography.

As has been noticed by Michael Shortland and Richard Yeo, when both history and philosophy of science became professional academic pursuits – after 1940 – “most of the influential theoretical frameworks relegated biography to the sidelines”.¹⁶ Shortland and Yeo also argue that the main reason for this was positivism and its pure interest in the context of justification. Positivists paid no attention to the process of discovery, and, to most historians of science, scientific thought was abstracted from its context. Lately, this view has undergone changes, largely due to the rise of sociological approaches to the history of science.¹⁷ The context in which science

evolves is now at the forefront of work in the history of science, and biographical elements have come to attract more serious interest.¹⁸

The social turn in history and philosophy of science has provided severe criticism of individualist and rationalist visions of knowledge production.¹⁹ In science and technology studies, biography is, with few exceptions, missing. Almost every other aspect of science, technology and medicine has been treated extensively and in depth in meta-scientific literature, but not scientific lives and scientific biography. Biography as a genre of writing and a cultural phenomenon is largely absent from major textbooks and handbooks of history of science and science studies. One possible conclusion to draw is that unless a biographical work is mainly concerned with the institutional settings and the social and historical context shaping a person's intellectual contributions, it will hardly fit into the sociological frameworks for explaining science. To be sure, people do feature in these accounts, but rather as ideal-types of wider social events than as embodied persons. Söderqvist puts it quite bluntly: "The merger between history and sociology of knowledge has further strengthened the doubts about the value of biography".²⁰ Sociologists prefer collectivist stories to individualist accounts, and warn that a concentration on the individual may lead to particularism. As a result, the task of exhibiting the social construction of knowledge has been carried out at the expense of embodied persons.

Partly as a critique of a too heavily sociological emphasis, historians of science have introduced the concept of "scientific persona" to mediate between the individual biography and the social institution. Persona is defined as: "a cultural identity that simultaneously shapes the individual in body and mind and creates a collective with a shared and recognizable physiognomy".²¹ Together with other approaches both within and outside of the history of science, such as works on the history of the self by Michel Foucault and Charles Taylor, among others, the persona concept makes it possible to carve out a middle course between scientific biography and the history of institutions, "attentive to how cultural categories intersect with individual lifelines".²² Personae differ from individuals, and the concept is put forward as a fruitful way "to reject a social ontology that treats

only flesh-and-blood individuals as real, and dismisses all collective entities as mere aggregates, parasitic upon individuals.” I will have more to say about this concept towards the end of my text.

While not denying the relevance of embodied persons when examining the conditions of knowledge, these attempts to move beyond the limits of biography demonstrate the presence of critical views on more conventional ways of understanding the biographical subject. They also demonstrate a discontent with biography and its traditional accounts of the individual, which they want to replace with more culturally and historically sensitive perspectives.

Biography – a non-theoretical enterprise in a theoretical body of knowledge

Most interesting for my purposes here, however, is that there is finally a theoretical discussion of biography as contributing to knowledge. I believe that the missing link between academic biographers and scholars in the arts, the humanities and the social sciences is due, at least in part, to the unconcern for theoretical matters on the part of biographers at the same time as there has been an explosion of theory-talk in those areas. What is striking about biography, at least to an outsider, is the absence of meta-theoretical reflections or analyses. It is quite astonishing to discover that the predominate debates in most academic fields have not affected biographers – at least not to such an extent that it has slipped into the texts. Most biographers make use of the individual self as something completely self-evident and theoretical complications do not seem to have disturbed their faith in the biographical enterprise. Biographers write about persons and personal lives, look for connections between life and work, and try to find a basis for ordering facts about lives in reliable ways. James Clifford once coined the phrase “the myth of personal coherence.”²³ According to Shortland and Yeo, this myth has shaped and stunted biography. “Many have claimed that the sense of personal coherence, deriving from an ordered narrative, arranged interpretatively or chronologically, and the expression of a subject’s inner life (...) is ‘elemental’ to biography.”²⁴ The consequence is that the self easily

becomes an obsession to the biographer; a means of evoking an essential character and personality, an agent of humanism.

It is not obvious why this is the case, although one might suspect it has something to do with the naiveté that easily follows from biographical projects in search of the true story of a life. The questions asked by biographers fit uneasily with the concerns of the modern academic community. “Biographers have been concerned with the usefulness and truthfulness of biography, with its status as art and literature, and with its claims to be able to present an authoritative or even definitive life”.²⁵ These concerns are very far from recent issues of the self, the subject, and the rational thinker.

Therefore it is not unreasonable to suppose that the a-theoretical position has had a negative effect on the genre of biography itself. Having a good reputation as a genre makes it easier to attract creative and successful scholars, build research programmes, receive funds, and to spur interest from undergraduates and doctoral students. Analysts in the humanities have neglected the genre, and the critical attitude has prevented potentially interesting biography from being written. Together with the aversion toward biography expressed by influential thinkers, the indifference to theory from biographers themselves have affected the reception of biography negatively and prevented younger scholars, who often are sensitive to the trends and visions of their disciplines, from engaging in biographical practices. Even those who explicitly *oppose* theory are inheritors of influential thinkers, conversant with certain terms and concepts, and trained in an exclusive way of thinking called “anti-theoretical”. Opposing theory is an active commitment, realizable only if accompanied with reflections on what theory does and does not do. Hence, also anti-theoretical work belongs to the theoretical realm, where issues that engage and preoccupy scholars in the humanities are articulated.

My view that theory makes a difference to the humanities should not however be understood normatively. On the contrary, it is based on my experience of academic work. My own work in the genre of biography would never have gotten started were it not for a certain theoretical gaze at the photo I mentioned in the introductory section, and to which I will turn in more detail in a moment. Perhaps

surprisingly, I am not at all convinced that “more theory” would lead to “better biographies”, whatever that would mean, but I do believe that a more serious interest in theoretical matters among biographers would improve the reputation of the genre among academics in general. On the other hand there is Ray Monk.

Biography without theory

Biographer and philosopher Ray Monk has related life and work in one biography of Ludwig Wittgenstein and another one (in two volumes) on Bertrand Russell.²⁶ He has also remarked on biography as a genre. Of particular interest here is his view that theory might be an obstacle to biography. In an interview he says: “One of the virtues of biography is that it’s a non-theoretical enterprise”.²⁷ According to Monk, biography is irrelevant to the assessment of the greatness of a work but does enrich understanding in two ways: “by attending, so to speak, to the tone of voice in which a writer expresses her/himself and by accumulating personal facts that will allow us to see what is said in a different light”.²⁸ Monk defends an a-theoretical stance in relation to biography. In fact, he does more than that: he objects to the idea of operating with a theory and replaces explanation with description.

Monk is openly critical of “theoretical explanations” in biographical works. One example of this is his view of Jean-Paul Sartre’s theory-laden biographies: “read a truly great biography, such as Boswell’s life of Johnson or Richard Ellmann’s life of Oscar Wilde, and then compare it with the biographies of Jean-Paul Sartre and then you will see the difference between revealing character through *description* and trying to *explain* it through theorizing”.²⁹ Further commenting on Sartre, Monk says: “in Sartre’s Baudelaire, it is not the poet’s voice we hear, but Sartre’s own telling us his theories of narcissism, consciousness, being and nonbeing”.³⁰ Later on he adds: “The problem with Sartre’s biography of Baudelaire is not that he tries to reveal Baudelaire’s inner life, but that he tries to say what ought to be shown.”³¹ To Monk, then, the duty of philosophical biography is *showing*, not *saying*. “Biography, I believe, is a nontheoretical activ-

ity (...). The insights it has to offer have to be shown rather than stated.”³²

Monk’s view falls back on Wittgenstein’s and he quotes from *Philosophical Investigations*, where Wittgenstein towards the end of the book raises the question of whether there is such a thing as “expert judgment” about mental states. Wittgenstein answers by saying that, yes, “there are those whose judgment is ‘better’ and those whose judgment is ‘worse’”.³³ Monk continues the reference to Wittgenstein by adding:

More correct prognoses, he says, ‘will generally issue from the judgments of those with better knowledge of mankind’. Can one learn this knowledge? ‘Yes: some can. Not, however, by taking a course in it, but through *experience* – can someone else be a man’s teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right *tip* – this is what ‘learning’ and ‘teaching’ are like here. What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgments.’³⁴

Like Wittgenstein, Monk emphasises experience rather than “taking courses”, and good descriptions rather than theoretical approaches.

In the same spirit, Monk also states that the purpose of philosophical biography is to *understand* a philosopher. In fact, he begins his essay “Philosophical Biography: The Very Idea” (2001) with the following statement: “The purpose of philosophical biography is very simply stated: it is to understand a philosopher”.³⁵ Understanding a person is like understanding a piece of music. It has nothing to do with theory, nor with the evaluation of someone’s work; understanding is seeing. Monk recalls Wittgenstein’s later work, where to *see* clearly, to look at things in a certain way, is the opposite of advancing and defending a thesis. Understanding is about *seeing connections*, which in itself opens up for the possibility of different understandings: “Seeing connections provides at once the most familiar form of understanding and the most elusive. What eludes us, in particular, are direct statements of *what*, exactly, is understood.”³⁶ If someone else cannot see the connections the biographers is drawing out, the only thing one can do about it is to regret they are missing some-

thing, “that they are suffering, as it were, from a kind of blindness, what Wittgenstein called “aspect-blindness.”³⁷

When I consider these remarks, certain questions come to mind. While I think I understand the difference between showing and saying, I still hesitate about the enormous divide that seems to be the outcome of the separation. It is as if showing is clean and saying is contaminated; as if showing is simply the result of direct and careful attention to details, while saying is muddled with all possible kinds of suspicious activities. However, nothing substantial in the work we do as scholars seems to fit the either/or model. When writing a text or teaching in class, part of showing something is to say it. We make use of illustrations, examples and different perspectives in order to clarify what we mean, we point at similarities and differences with our words – in short *we show and say simultaneously*, in mangled interactions.³⁸

To “see things clearly as they are” is extremely difficult, I would say. We live in a multifaceted world of conflicts and contradictions, science and technology, religion and politics, trust and distrust, art and media, visions and limits. So we live in a world permeated with thoughts and actions, which appear self-evident to some, foreign to others. From where might a clear look possibly originate?

Thirdly, I dare to say that the concept of understanding embraces more than seeing connections. Apart from all the work done in hermeneutics that has shown how complicated the process of understanding is, is it really fair to say that understanding a person is like understanding a piece of music? If I say that I understand a piece of music, that particular piece of music cannot respond to my interpretations and tell me I am right or wrong; the piece does not react to my understanding one way or another. When it comes to understanding another person, however, the situation changes dramatically. There are good reasons to believe someone might object to my understanding of her – or at least have more to say about it. The connections I can draw out from what I see, no matter how clear my vision is, are neither the only ones, nor unobjectionable. Certainly, this remark is basically practical, perhaps moral, but still decisive for one of the discrepancies I believe exists between understanding music and persons.

Consequently, in many respects I see the purpose of biography differently from Monk. The strong position of *Theory* in the humanities is not always salubrious and it has even provoked “after-theory” debates.³⁹ Still, I regard the a-theoretical view as misguided. Theory is not something that is applied to *reality*; theory is interwoven in all our seeing. Seeing with a theory is not an obstacle to good descriptions; it is rather an essential part of the complex work analysts perform to see things *differently*. The “same thing” might be analysed in many ways with different theories, and entirely new things may appear with new theories. Sometimes theory is that what makes us see in the first place. Let me illustrate these reflections by turning to my own biography-project.

What theory can do for biography

When I was cleaning my office desk a few years ago, I happened to come across the photo mentioned earlier, from the philosophy of science conference held in Colston in 1957. This picture shows 42 philosophers, and there is also a nameplate at the bottom. One of the names is M. B. Hesse. I know that the M stands for Mary. The picture itself is striking: everyone in the picture is dressed in grey or dark colours, except for someone dressed in a white blouse. Assuming that in the 1950’s philosophers of science rarely cross-dressed, or at least not at conferences, I inferred that the person wearing the white blouse must be Mary Hesse. The white blouse is a detail, which distinguishes and disturbs the composition and attracts and even provokes my attention. Following Roland Barthes, one could say that it is the “punctum” of the picture. “A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)”, he says.⁴⁰ The *punctum* is often a partial object, in this case the white blouse, and that is, according to Barthes, “what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*.”⁴¹

So, what is *already there*? There is this partial object, the white blouse; there is a nameplate with one feminine name; but there is also just a group of people with names. Perhaps the photo is incomplete – several other persons may be standing nearby without being

captured by the camera. Still, the caption categorises the event – this is a philosophy of science conference. Instead of merely representing a group of people in front of a photographer, the composition of the photo emphasises the presence/absence axis, where an asymmetry appears. What *I add* is the effect of the punctum on my seeing, that accident, which makes it sufficiently tempting to start asking questions that go beyond what is in the photo itself. One woman at a philosophy of science conference in the 1950s draws my attention to the personal element in science and philosophy in a broad sense, gender aspects included.

A picture may be seen in different ways and here there are several possibilities with regard to what can be seen and described *even with very careful attention to detail*. My focus is on the only woman, although it would have been plausible to notice other asymmetries as well. The philosophers attending the conference are all white and European, including the only woman. However, the way I look at the photo, that is, the way the punctum pricks me, is, I would say, dependent on the theoretical emphasis on gender in the humanities during the last decades. To contemporary scholars this particular picture has the potential of exposing a *gender imbalance* because it stands out that the woman is an exception.

When I, positioned as an academic woman in the beginning of this new millennium, *see* a young woman philosopher at a male-dominated conference held in a male-dominated discipline, I *see* a *difference*. What is more, I find this difference intriguing and challenging for even if I do not know exactly what it means, it triggers my imagination in a certain direction where the significance of gender in philosophy of science has become an issue. Would I have taken any notice of the *sign* of a woman (someone dressed in a white blouse) had I looked at the photo a few decades ago? And secondly, would it at the time have had any academic or intellectual interest to me or anyone else? My point is not that it is remarkable that only one woman attended the conference, nor that it necessarily was or should have been a problem to Mary Hesse herself or anyone else at the time. Arguably, the question of gender was hardly recognised when the conference occurred. Nevertheless, something makes contempo-

rary scholars *see* gender and that “something” has been made possible through theory. Feminist theories, of course, emphasize the gendered gaze, but it is not only feminists who see woman as marginalised. Derrida, for instance, notes that “In our culture ... the woman is so to speak excluded or in an asymmetrical relationship. She represents precisely the one who is outside of the system, excluded from the system”.⁴² Academic movements such as post-colonialism or cultural studies point out the differences between “being within or outside of” a system where women are one minority group among many.⁴³

To *see* gender is not necessarily the same however as to consider it important. This second step needs a more profound analysis of why and in what sense a gendered gaze would make a difference to the aspect of a situation under scrutiny. In my case, it is relevant to take into account whether this particular conference was an exception to the rule or rather just business as usual. Historical data tell us that the number of women in philosophy was small in the mid-fifties, not that Mary Hesse was the only one. Had I looked at other photos from other conferences I would have seen two or three more women aside from Hesse.⁴⁴ Still it is true to say that there were very few women among professional philosophers at the time, and even fewer in the philosophy of science. In fact, Mary Hesse was the only woman in philosophy of science at Cambridge. It is hard to say if her gender has been of relevance for her academic career. Several of her colleagues in philosophy of science are better known: Thomas Kuhn, Norward Russel Hanson, Imre Lakatos and Paul Feyerabend to mention a few. Has their fame anything to do with them being men? And how could that be established?

On the other hand, Mary Hesse is a successful and highly respected and frequently quoted philosopher of science. Has the accomplishment of her work anything to do with her female sex? Intuitively, an affirmative answer to that question doesn't seem even plausible; but why is it reasonable to ask the same question about her male colleagues? Using feminist theory to explain why the number of women in philosophy is low, it makes sense to link successes among men to male bonding, masculine styles of reasoning, and exclusion of women. Likewise, the success of one woman could be explained

either positively by individuality and brilliance, or negatively by conspiracy such as unholy alliances to male networks. However, in concrete situations we often don't know if and how gender played a role. Strong theoretical claims are often problematic, and lead to further difficulties.

Today it is standard practice to treat woman as a category already constituted in society through the social roles that shape women's life-worlds. A photo of a woman becomes a *sign* of what we conventionally associate with feminine gender, although we cannot know anything for certain about that particular woman. Each time the female body is exposed, the question arises as to what it is and what it expresses; however, except from the white blouse and the name Mary, there is nothing traditionally feminine in this picture. Sex and gender are too swiftly and easily conflated *when sex signifies gender*. A traditional conclusion to draw from the photo is that the person in the white blouse is a woman, and that therefore I can see her functions clearly. Seeing is believing; what you see when you see a picture of a woman is a woman, and expectations and interpretations of the life she must have lived are easily assumed in advance of any inquiry.

So my "gender-gaze" at the photo gets me started. Still, any "application" of a feminist approach to Hesse's philosophy of science is objectionable for several reasons. From the fact that gender has become a category to notice and to explore at a general level does not follow that every woman fits into the actions, thoughts and structures inherent in a theory. To Mary Hesse herself, gender issues were never acute. The photo was a surprise to her: she never thought of it in the way I did. Of her many articles in the philosophy of science, only one takes issue with feminism, and there she explicitly rejects feminist claims.⁴⁵

Although it is appealing to theorize about the sex/gender distinction and to speculate about how female sex and feminine gender were connected in philosophy of science some decades ago, there is no evidence at all that *She* suffered from gender inequality, male chauvinism, sexual harassment, marginalisation, or an outsider position, nor that she was made invisible or was less appreciated than the

men all dressed in grey. Nor can we know in advance if the logical or theoretical structure of philosophy of science in the mid- twentieth century was constraining or otherwise alienating to a woman who chose to engage in it – or if it was liberating and empowering. There is also a reflexive question here to consider: Why do I see a woman when I see a philosopher? Mary Hesse attended the conference because she is a philosopher, not because she is a woman. So why tie her female sex to her profession, as if a philosopher could ever be reduced to her/his sex?

Still, as a woman philosopher she was an exception to the (male) rule. To catch sight of and admit such categories that organise and regulate our thinking, the identification of patterns is essential. In this case, a certain way of conceptualising gender differences is made possible through the classification and separation of male/female attributes. It is reasonable to surmise that the experiences Mary Hesse had throughout her professional career were to some degree restricted by her feminine gender. In the many conversations we have had, she also admits that having now reflected upon gender aspects of her experiences, she looks at things slightly differently than when she was in the thick of things.

Scientific persona

Before concluding this article, I would like to return to the previously briefly introduced concept of “scientific persona” as mediator between the individual biography and the social institution. You will remember that the “persona” concept is used to define the creation of certain scientific types of person where “personae are creatures of historical circumstances, who emerge and disappear within specific contexts”.⁴⁶ Personae are not individuals, nor are they stereotypes or social roles; they’re more like categories of people, of collective ways of thinking, feeling, judging, perceiving, and working. *Scientific* in this context is understood broadly enough to include “the instrument maker, the scholar, the technocrat and the professor, as well as the experimenter and the naturalist”⁴⁷. The scientific persona is like a model, a prototype, a historical construction of something new,

which moulds and constrains the individual scientist and makes him/her behave, feel, act, and relate to his or her professional career in a characteristic way. In my own intellectual biography of Hesse, it is a challenge to make sense of the concept of “persona” through considering how she fashioned herself in relation to the expectations of a philosopher of science in a certain time and place.

The woman philosopher in the photo, which inspired my biographical interest, is in this sense an anomaly. Arguably, there was at the time no *feminine* counterpart to the male scientific persona. Mary Hesse’s profession was shaped by a certain image of a philosopher of science, which she could either adopt or reject, but never entirely escape, and her academic life had to meet with certain professional expectations. Even her private life was circumscribed by social rules and claims. On the other hand, “(t)he match between person and persona is never exact, however, and the management of the dissonance between the two shows how great the restrictive pressure of the persona on the individual can be”.⁴⁸ My work on Hesse attempts to find the strategies she adopted to manage her different roles.

What biography can do for the humanities

Thus far I have argued that the subject of biography is a confusing topic within most academic areas. It is either neglected or called into question, and the great majority of biographies are not written for academic purposes at all. In popular versions, biography clearly has entertainment and commercial value; its value for intellectual, scholarly or academic purposes and concerns however, is either disputed or simply ignored. Nevertheless, there are some indications that the genre has something vital to offer those of us who understand knowledge as a personal, social, and embodied activity. In order to *show*, not only to say, that knowledge is not merely an assemblage of disembodied ideas, it is vital that we explore in greater detail what methods of analyses are the most fruitful. Historian of science Steven Shapin deals with these and similar issues in much of his later work. In one article, “The Philosopher and the Chicken”, he draws attention to “systematic changes in the topical content of intellec-

tual biographies from the period before ca. 1850 – ca. 1930 to more recent treatments”.⁴⁹ He states that biographies in the earlier period routinely gave descriptions of a person’s life conditions, while more modern biographies have great difficulty delineating the relationship between the personal and the intellectual. This means, among other things, that biography as a genre is subject to modifications, and that it can move in new directions. It also points to the need for continuing work in the field if the purpose is to find out more about what it means for knowledge to be embodied. The disappointment with biographical practice during the last decades need not be an obstacle to the prospects of revitalizing the genre.

I have suggested two ways in which this could be done. On the one hand, there is a need for new concepts that will open up for richer and more comprehensive narratives of life and work among scientists and scholars. Such stories are important to tell if the intellectual products that are often understood abstractly are to be humanized. The concept of “scientific persona” with the inherent ambition of combining the personal and the societal through a model, a prototype, which moulds and constrains the individual scientist in relation to specific historically and socially shaped ideals, is one conceptual option. On the other hand, I have suggested that biographers would benefit from engaging in the regular activities of scholars in the humanities and social sciences, including their theoretical disputes. Intellectual isolation of groups with different agendas and different objectives usually result in divisions and misunderstandings. In biography, one describes a singular, stable, existing subject. But this subject is also fragile and unstable, a product of its situation and in continual interaction with others. To admit the complexity of traditional concepts of the human facilitates interactions between academic biographers and other scholars in the humanities, and gives rise to a theoretical sensitivity that is all too rare among biographers. To oppose theory as such, claiming that biography is a non-theoretical enterprise, is to engender isolation at the expense of intellectual fellowship and exchange.

Having said this, a slight reservation is in order. I believe it’s fair to say that theory helps us to *see*. A theory might guide the formula-

tion of initial questions, or help us look at things in new ways, but there has to be a critical distance between the theory at hand and the object of analysis. Derrida has an interesting way of portraying a vacillation between nearness and distance, inspiration and hesitation, in response to the function of theory. He talks about “a relation of fidelity and betrayal” and says: “In reading Freud and many others I try not to betray them; I try to understand what they mean and to do justice to what they write and to follow, to follow them as far as possible and as closely as possible, *up to a certain point* (my emphasis). When I say ‘up to a certain point’, I mean that there is a moment that I betray them.”⁵⁰ To follow and to betray is in my view a very suggestive way of describing the necessarily ambivalent attitude towards theory among scholars in the humanities.

To defend theory is not to say that one specific theory helps us see better, more, deeper, truer or more objectively – only differently. The usefulness of theory evaporates when it turns into a dogma. It helps us to see, but also complicates, refines, and points out certain problems that would not have been noticed without a particular theoretical gaze. Theory offers analytical tools and perspectives on the world, makes us attentive to our presuppositions encourages and commends reflexivity. Still, to admit theory into one’s thinking is risky. Theory can also obscure our view of relevant possibilities and ideas that have no place in the theory and thus even prevent important questions from being asked. That is why theory must be handled with care.

Concluding remarks

Finally, I want to return to two the positions outlined earlier in relation to philosophical or intellectual biography, represented here by Ray Monk and myself. Monk rejects theory because it can be an obstacle to biography. I share the view that theory often comes to play a too decisive role, but I don’t want to throw out the baby with the bath water. As I have argued, I can see the advantages of theoretical alertness and I find the strong anti-theoretical view extremely problematic.

It is interesting to note that while we have divergent points of departure, where Monk opposes and I defend theory, our attitudes regarding how to relate to the material are not that far from each other when it comes down to biographical practice. Monk is in favour of good descriptions, which, I agree, is an incontestable virtue in biographical writing. I also heartily advocate the use of good stories to make visible how and in what sense intellectual work is a “form of life”, where embodied women and men lead lives of the mind. To Monk’s claim that the purpose of biography is to *understand* the thinker (or philosopher), I would add the necessity of also understanding the time, the place and the prototype of a professional that both encourages and constrains the academic thinker. In that sense, I regard the theoretical concept of “persona”, defined as “a cultural identity that simultaneously shapes the individual in body and mind and creates a collective with a shared and recognizable physiognomy”, more valuable than the common sense concept of “individual person” when practising academic biography.

However, a biography is *in itself* part of the shaping of a person, not just a practice of observation. Like any other scientist or scholar, the biographer constructs a world in accordance with her own theoretical dispositions and shared concepts. Hence, the result of the story is a co-construction of both the researcher’s intentions and of the situated subject. To write about the life and work of Mary Hesse is to *make her* a person she possibly never was.

Notes

- 1 Ray Monk, “Philosophical Biography: The Very Idea” in *Wittgenstein. Biography and Philosophy*, ed. James C. Klagge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Ray Monk, “Philosophical Biography. In conversation with Ray Monk” in *New British Philosophy. The Interviews*, eds. Julian Baggini and Jeremy Stangroom (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).
- 2 For a discerning discussion of Descartes’ Method, see Naomi Scheman, “Though This Be Method, Yet There Is Madness in It: Paranoia and Liberal Epistemology”, in *A Mind of One’s Own*, eds. Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1993).

- 3 See, e.g., Sharon Rider, *Avoiding the Subject* (Stockholm: Thales, 1998).
- 4 Barry Barnes, "How Not To Do the Sociology of Knowledge" in *Rethinking Objectivity*, ed. Allan Megill (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994).
- 5 For some examples, see Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*, (London: Free Association Books, 1991), *Feminist Epistemologies* eds. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (N.Y. and London: Routledge, 1993), *Feminist Contentions. A Philosophical Exchange* eds. Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, Nancy Fraser, (N.Y. and London: Routledge, 1995).
- 6 Mike Michael, *Constructing Identities* (London: SAGE Publications, 1996).
- 7 It is of course a matter of debate whether posthumanism is a strong enough challenge to humanism to call it 'a turn' and partly it depends on how the posthuman is defined. However, there is a growing literature around posthumanism and the concept itself is open to several interpretations. See N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman. Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1999) for an overview.
- 8 David Macey, *Frantz Fanon. A Biography* (New York: Picador, 2000).
- 9 Michael Shortland and Richard Yeo, "Introduction", in *Telling Lives in Science. Essays on scientific biography* eds. Michael Shortland and Richard Yeo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 3.
- 10 See, e.g., *Biographies of Scientific Objects* ed. Lorraine Daston (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000) and Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (New York: Vintage, 2001) (2000).
- 11 Thomas Söderqvist, "Existential Projects and Existential Choice in Science: Science Biography as an Edifying Genre", in Michael Shortland and Richard Yeo eds. *Telling Lives in Science. Essays on Scientific Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 45.
- 12 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1 (New York: Vintage, 1980).
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- 23 James Clifford, “Hanging up Looking Glasses at Odd Corners”, in Aaron, D.. *Studies in Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).
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- 30 Ibid.
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- 33 Ibid., p. 6. Monk is quoting Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G..E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953) p. 227.
- 34 Monk, “Philosophical Biography”, op. cit, p. 6.
- 35 Ibid., p. 3.
- 36 Ibid., p. 5.
- 37 Ibid., p. 6.
- 38 The term ‘mangle’ is chosen by Andrew Pickering to describe what is going on in scientific practices. See Andrew Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, & Science* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1995).
- 39 See, e.g., *life.after.theory* eds. Michael Payne and John Schad (London and New York: continuum, 2003).

- 40 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage Classics, 2000) (1980) p. 27.
- 41 Ibid., p. 55.
- 42 Jacques Derrida, “following theory”, in ed. Michael Payne and John Schad (2003) op. cit., p. 12.
- 43 See, e.g., Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).
- 44 I know this because I have seen quite a few since my project on Mary Hesse got started.
- 45 Mary Hesse, “How to be post-modern without being a feminist”, *The Monist*, 77, pp. 445-461 (1995).
- 46 Lorraine Daston and H. Otto Sibum, “Introduction: Scientific Personae and Their Histories”, in *Science in Context*, 16 (1/2), 2003, p. 3.
- 47 Ibid., p. 2.
- 48 Ibid., p. 6.
- 49 Steven Shapin, “The Philosopher and the Chicken. On the Dietetics of Disembodied Knowledge” in eds. Lawrence and Shapin, (1998) op. cit., 45, note 72.
- 50 Derrida, “following theory”, op. cit., pp. 9f.

MORTEN KYNDRUP

Artwork as Act as Difference

The Quintet of the Unseen

Let me start by presenting a work of art. The work is Bill Viola's *The Quintet of the Unseen* (2000), which was shown at the Biennale di Venezia in 2001. Unfortunately this work of art cannot be reproduced in an article (or even at an oral presentation) since the original is in the New Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, which owns it.

However, a still photo may help to illustrate the work's properties. *The Quintet of the Unseen* is a video film running in a loop of fifteen minutes and nineteen seconds. It was made as a slow motion version of what was originally a 35 mm film of about one minute. This means that the duration has been extended approximately fifteen times. The work is back-projected onto a transparent screen and presents itself mounted in a frame. So what you see is a surface almost similar to that of a figurative painting, on which five persons are witnessing something terrible, something cruel beyond description. Obviously they are feeling deep pain. At a first glance these suffering human beings are motionless as if this were a photograph, a frozen moment. But soon you discover that they are actually moving, very, very slowly and almost undetectably. So basically you watch this as if it were a painting, since no significant action or movement occurs. On the other hand, when watching this work of art for the first time you do not know whether some kind of action or even dramatic narration – that is, a change of setting – might occur at some point. As a matter of fact this does not happen; the loop goes on endlessly. But as a beholder you do not know this, and thus you do not know when to stop watching the screen. So when you leave this artwork, when you

interrupt your watching of it, the artwork itself seems to be continuously going on, even after you have left it.

The Quintet of the Unseen invokes several genres and traditions simultaneously – still, in every single case it also monstrously resists these connections. First of all, it is evidently related to painting, to representations of suffering in Italian and Nordic Renaissance art. But in comparison to that genre this artwork includes a course of time; a *duration* is included within the work. Video and film are obviously also related. But compared to these genres this work is deprived of action and sound, is deprived of diegesis, of narration, of beginning, middle and end. It represents itself, so to speak, as pure *sujet* without *fabula*, at least explicitly. Furthermore, this work of course points to photography. But compared to photography it is supplied with duration and some action.

Enunciational analysis

How should one analyse or interpret a work of art like this? Given its character it seems obvious to look at it in terms of enunciation as defined by Émile Benveniste.¹ A model of the “real enunciation” of this work (based on the Karl Bühler’s traditional model for communication and taking into consideration Roman Jakobson’s work) gives us four positions: sender, sign (work), referent and beholder, the sender being of course Bill Viola and the beholder perhaps Professor K. visiting the Biennale. But beyond these innumerable possible singular real enunciations, an artwork may be construed as itself containing an enunciational act, called an enounced enunciation (*enonciation enoncé*).² This is based on the analysis of the positions of implied sender and beholder within an artefact conceived of as enacted communication. With these concepts from narratology and *Rezeptionsästhetik* the implied sender is the representative in the work of the will of or the intention of the actual sender *as realised in the work*, that is, as a textual element – whereas the implied beholder is the specific position with which we are confronted as actual beholders, that is, the prescribed act or proposition for a model reception of the work. This is a textual element as well. Consequently, all in all

this enounced enunciation may be held in the notion of an *intentio operis*, the implied intention of the work.³ At this level the work is construed as if in the perfect tense: you can differentiate between these positions of sender and beholder within the work, but in themselves they are frozen once and for all – “enounced”. They produce a certain potentiality of signification in the work; the work’s real significance and real enunciations will be based on that potentiality, but of course in practice they will not be restricted to it. We shall return to this interplay between the work’s implied perfect tense and its actual imperfectability.

In the case of *The Quintet of the Unseen*, the work itself (that is, the “sign” position of the model), the motif itself, performs an act of communication or is part of one. What we see is somebody seeing something. They are beholders. We do not see what they see – nor why they see it or where they are. What we see is their reaction, their position of being forced into witnessing something unpleasant, something unbearable and painful.

So this artwork pinpoints its own character of being an act. It emphasizes the question of time, asking the beholder a delicate question about time. Whose time prevails here? Usually a painting unfolds a stasis in time (as does photography, but with different indexical implications) which is confronted with the continuity of your time. Film, on the contrary, takes you through its own mounted time, producing an alternative time within your time. *The Quintet of the Unseen* is a monstrous in-between these two enactments. It presents itself as a kind of endless duration in the shape of a prolonged stasis which on the other hand is still moving. It performs a kind of mobile immobility, yet it does not offer you the chance to stop cosmic time at a moment which might correspond to a given “now” in your mortal time.⁴ Nor does it offer to suspend the perceived aporia of time levels by offering to bridge cosmic and mortal time with a new fictional time, a real narrative.

You meet something apostrophic, something emphatically addressing an implicit beholder; you are placed by force in a position of *not* witnessing something terrible but witnessing somebody witnessing something terrible. What do they witness? What is the

fabula? Is it you, the beholder, they regard? Is it the world as such (i.e., something extradiegetic in relation to the fictional space)? Or is it something fictionally concrete, a traffic accident, a hanging, an execution (i.e., something diegetic, something within the fictional frames of the work referred to)?

You do not know, that is, the work does not tell you. In any case, there is something intrusive and intimidating about this in a double sense. As a beholder you yourself feel like an intruder watching the pain of these people (just as one does not want to look at people suffering in everyday life without being of any kind of help or comfort). On the other hand, however, you also feel intruded upon; the work is intrusive to you since you cannot escape this exhibitionist confrontation with pain. The work is not nice to you, leaving you no spatial or conceptual room for escape.

All this refers to positions actually being enounced. This work is extremely deictic in its enunciational artificiality. It points out the pointing out position, the implied sender (the director, the camera, the will, the intention?) and leaves us with the question of what it wants. What does the pointing one want from us? For what reason has this been set up? (With the help of actors, slow motion procedures etc. etc.) The work, however, does not answer. On the contrary, it unfolds itself in terms of “disappointing cadences”. On the one hand, collaterally and referentially it subscribes to and invokes certain kinds of *doxa*, something familiar in the sense of a genre which we recognise, which is well known, which is a part of “us”. On the other hand, it leaves us behind, not answering our questions, pinpointing the monstrous helplessness of the beholder’s position in its state of being a victim, being isolated, being a prisoner. It does this in a double sense: By thematically showing helpless witnesses on the screen, but also by forcing us as spectators into the exact same situation as helpless, victimised witnesses, observing something unpleasant. Furthermore, it expands this double thematization over time, turning it into an act – making it quite concretely difficult to decide when to leave this work of art in which something happens although nothing really happens except for the happening of this emphasised non-happening.

“Meaning”

What am I aiming at with this? I am presenting an artwork which can only be conceived of as an act, literally speaking. This work is obviously in the present tense, from a grammatical point of view. But this present tense is an internal present tense, an imbedded, completed present tense. Your own mortal irreversible time is confronted with this present tense when you watch this artwork: a loop or a stasis in time. This act is not reducible to some underlying “substance”, for instance to some privileged knowledge about our world, or some “truth”, as a traditional hermeneutic depth model of interpretation would claim. If this artwork points to any kind of “truth” it is one inherent to the act, to the gesture of the work. The truth is in the act as such in this singular form rather than behind it. So in terms of truth this does not “stand for” truth but is a “becoming-truth” – if one should absolutely link it to “truth”.

Extension

This, I hope, is evident as concerns Viola’s work. But moreover it is valid in general.

One might take a look at what has in a certain sense been called the first avantgarde or modernist work of art: Gustave Courbet’s *Les casseurs de pierres* (1849), which was destroyed by civilisation in 1945 (the Dresden Blitz). As we know, this work caused a scandal at the Salon in Paris when exhibited. Why was that? It was nicely painted. It depicted people who looked like stone-breakers working in a world similar to ours; or at least in the world of mid 19th century in France. So how could this in any way be provocative?

The scandal is not the depicted motif as such; the scandal is the act of pointing out this motif. The motif is “nothing special”, which in itself may constitute a provocation. But the real provocation is that this “nothing special” is depicted emphatically as if exactly “nothing special”, the faces of the stone-breakers being turned away, anonymizing these representatives of an already anonymous object. This very gesture reveals that the purpose of this painting is not to render

the motif, as had more or less been the tradition of painting up to that point. No, the purpose is to expose the act of pointing out this “nothing special” motif; in other words, the motif is the act committed by the artist’s point of view.

Whether this painted gesture was the first of its kind or not, it certainly was not the last. The so-called permanent scandal, the ready-made, was to become the seeming peak point of this further development, this overall transition within art from object to affect, from enounced pointing at something prior to the artwork to an enunciation pointing to the work’s becoming-meaning. A process which changed art irreversibly and which profoundly changed its object status in general and the directions of its representational effects in particular.

Difference

How does this make a difference? It is a long story, but one short version is that, taken seriously, it interrupts the unhappy and unsubstantiated marriage between artwork and truth which has obscured philosophical aesthetics in its continental version ever since Romanticism. In other words, not since the founding endeavours of Baumgarten or Kant but from Romanticism onwards, as initially formulated in the so-called earliest system programme in the mid 1790es and then through Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics and the whole so-called continental tradition, which identifies aesthetics with art theory and includes figures such as Nietzsche, Benjamin, Heidegger, Adorno, Marcuse and many others. This is the tradition the French theorist Jean-Marie Schaeffer criticises as the “speculative tradition” in a series of books including *Adieu à l’esthétique* (2001).⁵ He accuses it of systematically confusing prescriptive and descriptive approaches; of being ecstatically cognitive, or reducing art to its truth content and eventually to philosophy; of having ruined art, creating the “what is art” reflection in art and making this question the privileged one for art in general and thus depriving art of its original sensuous qualities in terms of individual, singular experience.

I’m not sure I would push it that far; works like Bill Viola’s in

themselves would contradict this. Indeed, the “what is art” paradigm has also contributed to developing and strengthening art’s capabilities; and besides, it has actually been there. One can’t just make it disappear and rewrite the history of which it has been a part. However, art itself has resisted aesthetics’ reductive inscription of artworks by cognitive emphasis, by producing and insisting on works which were un-inscribable into conceptual figures like that. In any case, art has survived – it has even survived the confusions of reason and effect in an Arthur Danto’s Hegelian proclamation of the end of art. As a matter of fact, the situation seems to be even worse within the thinking of art within the arts and the humanities as such than it is within art itself. The thinking of art is and has been characterised by widespread and sometimes systematic conflation of judgmental approaches (pertaining to taste, to truth) and descriptive, explanatory approaches; between normativity and exploration, between positions acting as if they represent or “owe” these values and perspectives studying them from the outside. In short approaches characterised by an ambivalent approach to the artworks’ *illusio*, as Pierre Bourdieu has expressed it, which so far has kept the art studies in – to borrow another term from Bourdieu – their childhood.⁶

Of course, this is a very long story, but the recognition of the perspective of artwork as act (the engendering of which has had its own long story since the mid 20th century) installs us – as beholders – in something which may take place any time, that is: something which has its own time, its own perfective present tense, its proper *sub specie aeternitatis*, by offering us this embedded first-person perspective, this position as participant in this very act by inviting us in and still keeping us out. In this sense – as expressed by Wolfgang Iser⁷ – the artwork makes it possible for us to be ourselves and have ourselves simultaneously or – as it has also been expressed – makes it possible for us as beholders to see ourselves see, to remain – at one and the same time – situated in our own mortal time with its aporias *and* be relieved of this time, be brought into another independent ever-present loop of time; cf. Viola’s work.

The researcher, *par contre*, analyses this process – the interaction between the first person positioned inside and the second person

positioned outside the work of art, and the way the work unfolds or designs this interaction. The analysis from a scientific point of view will be a position of so-called third-order observation. As a researcher one might find the analysed process miraculous, fantastic, outstanding – just as a biologist may find photosynthesis fantastic. However, this is of no relevance to the investigation as such. Aesthetic relations are indeed “hot” in the sense that they include judgements of taste, i.e., evaluative levels. As a matter of fact this is part of what makes them aesthetic. But this fact should by no means enhance analyses of aesthetic relations to become “hot” in this sense as well. An analysis of the artwork as act includes a calculation of its “heat potential” for participants in that act. But in itself this analysis is cool. The possibility of establishing cool analyses of hot relationality (implied and/or real) may be compared to the difference between elaborating a theory of love and being in love. Of course you need to know what it is to be in love; it may help you elaborate the theory. But the very state of being in love (or the personal impression of that state) cannot replace the theory as such.

As regards humanities in general, the case of artworks as acts may count as an emblematic allegory. To represent humanist values is different from studying how these values work – different from studying how they are enacted through the interchanges that human beings perform – in artworks, in mass media, in communication in general or in society. Our society has actually been “modern” for quite a long time in the sense that it lives within and by its ability to create and develop internal, immanent distinctions – distinctions which in turn determine not only society’s material production, but also its production of figures of understanding and self-understanding. The emergence of artworks resistant to understandings which do not grant them their status as acts forms part of this modern differentiation process. By acknowledging this, including the difference between the artwork’s beholder and a scientific observer of the relationship between the artwork and its beholder, the understanding of art in academia and aesthetics may finally become modern as well. If so, that would make a difference.

Notes

- 1 See Émile Benveniste, "L'appareil formel de l'énonciation", *Problèmes de linguistique Générale II* (Paris 1974).
- 2 Cf. A.J. Greimas, Joseph Courtés, "Énonciation", *Semiotique. Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* (Paris 1979).
- 3 Umberto Eco, "Intentio Lectoris: The State of the Art", *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington 1990).
- 4 See Paul Ricœur, "Les apories de l'expérience du temps", *Temps et récit*, t.I, (Paris 1983).
- 5 J.-M. Schaeffer, *Adieu à l'esthétique* (Paris 2000).
- 6 See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Cambridge 1996), pp. 167; 296.
- 7 Wolfgang Iser: "Fictionalizing Acts", *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, (Baltimore 1993).

RICHARD SHUSTERMAN

The Art of Humanizing

Between Pragmatism and Chinese Thought

I

Though rightly recognized as America's distinctive contribution to philosophy, pragmatism can also be seen as a productive mixture of older British and German philosophies that were creatively brewed in the crucible of the New World, where they could be more fruitfully mixed with greater freedom because they could function free from the constraints imposed by their old national cultural fields.¹ And the multiple roots of pragmatism also extend to Asian thought. Ralph Waldo Emerson, widely recognized as a prophet of pragmatism before the movement's explicit beginning with C. S. Peirce, was deeply inspired by the Upanishads and the doctrines of Buddha. William James' explorations of religious experience likewise drew significantly from yoga, Vedanta, and Buddhism. John Dewey, who spent a few months in Japan, was fascinated by the life-pervading artistry of that "most highly civilized culture."² But he was still more deeply influenced by his experience of living in the volatile culture of China from 1919-1921. As his daughter Jane confirmed, this experience "was so great as to act as a rebirth of [Dewey's] intellectual enthusiasms," and he henceforth held China as "the country nearest his heart after his own."³ Dewey's appreciation of China was reciprocated warmly by the enthusiastic reception of his lectures there, which were widely published and influential in the New Culture movement of that time.⁴ Beyond the particular historical instance of Dewey, I see a great deal of promising overlap between the general orientations of pragmatism and classical Chinese philosophy, which

has been, of course, an important source for Japanese and Korean thought as well.

Among the many important themes that Chinese philosophy seems to share with pragmatism, perhaps the most central and comprehensive could be called humanism. This is the term used by the distinguished scholars Wing-tsit Chan and Tu Wei-Ming to define Chinese philosophy, but also used by James, Dewey, and especially their Oxford ally F.C.S. Schiller to characterize or explain pragmatism.⁵ Such humanism, which need not exclude a wider spiritual dimension, is not the hubristic view that ordinary human existence is the supreme expression of the universe and that humanity is defined by its oppositional contrast to the natural world. It is rather the insistence that philosophy is inevitably shaped by the human condition and human purposes and that it should be primarily directed to the aims of preserving, cultivating, and perfecting human life. As knowledge and value cannot be rigidly separated, and as human experience is essentially social experience, philosophy has an ineliminable ethical and social purpose. In other words, philosophy is aimed principally at human benefits and improving our humanism, not at describing reality for the mere sake of producing true sentences.

Philosophy, as James and Dewey always insisted, deals with realms of experience, action, and meaning that are wider than the realm of formulated truths. As James highlighted the importance of nameless feelings that escape the web of discourse, so Dewey urged that philosophy's discursive truths find their true value in promoting "concrete human experience and its potentialities," "to clarify, to liberate, and to extend the goods" of our lives and practices.⁶ The fixed formulations of discursive truth, though often useful in dealing with the experienced world of continuous flux, cannot pretend to capture its essence or value. Ancient Chinese philosophers, similarly impressed by the world of change, were likewise more interested in perfecting our humanity than in providing a precise linguistic representation of reality. In fact, as Chad Hansen has argued, classical Chinese thinkers primarily regarded language not as a medium for describing the world but rather, more pragmatically, as a means "of guiding behavior."⁷

To the general thesis that philosophy's job is to improve our lives rather than to compile true propositions, there is a clear aesthetic corollary: that the highest function of aesthetics is to enhance our experience of art and beauty, rather than to produce accurate verbal definitions that precisely reflect the extension of these concepts, an aim that has been central to much recent analytic aesthetics. In *Pragmatist Aesthetics* I criticize such definitions as "wrapper theories," since they aim at perfectly covering a concept's logical extension rather than at illuminating the importance and enhancing the value of what is defined. In aesthetic matters, as Dewey recognized, such "formal definitions leave us cold". And William James, whose keen aesthetic sense inspired his early ambition for a painting career, was equally critical: "no good will ever come to Art... from the analytic study of Aesthetics", since the key things in art "escape verbal definition, yet verbal definitions are all that [such] Aesthetics will give". In short, the real value of aesthetic discourse, including definitions, is of pragmatic guiding toward an improved experience of art; hence Dewey rightly claims that "a definition is good when it points in the direction in which we can move expeditiously" to having such an experience.⁸

Confucian aesthetics seems similarly pragmatic. While Confucius speaks often and passionately about music (noting its varieties, uses, and values), he does not try to offer a formal definition of this art. Suspicious of mere verbal solutions (and more generally wary of linguistic glibness), Confucius instead provides guidance of how to realize musical value in experience by noting examples of musical excellence (and failure), by offering brief but illuminating critical commentary, and by proposing exemplary methods of musical practice. "The Master said of the *shao* music that it is both superbly beautiful (*mei*) and superbly effective (*shan*). Of the *wu* music he said that it is superbly beautiful but not superbly efficacious." "The Master said 'The Cry of the Osprey' is pleasing without being excessive, is mournful without being injurious." In contrast, Confucius claimed, "the Zheng music is lewd" (3.25; 3.20; 15.11).⁹

Besides these evaluative examples, he suggests some concrete methods to heighten the quality of our musical experience. "The Master

talked to the Grand Music master of Lu about music, and said: ‘Much can be realized with music if one begins by playing in unison, and then goes on to improvise with purity of tone and distinctness and flow [or sincerity], thereby bringing all to completion.’” “When the Master was with others who were singing and they sang well, he would invariably ask them to sing the piece again before joining the harmony.” (3.23; 7.32). Though these pragmatic ways of improving our understanding of music may seem rather fragmentary, thin, or partial, we must not forget that they are meant to be filled in by the rich concrete context of experience, whose enhancement in practice is also the purpose of musical theory.

If pragmatist and Confucian aesthetics aim not at elegantly precise verbal definition, but at improving our experience of art, this does not simply mean increasing our personal enjoyment and understanding of artworks. For art is not only a source of inner pleasure (important a value as that is); it is also a practical way of giving grace and beauty to the social functions of everyday life. Art is also a crucial means of ethical education that can refine both the individual and society by cultivating our sense of good order and propriety while instilling an enjoyably shared experience of harmony and meaning.

The Confucian insistence on the importance of music and ritual (*li*) as key elements in both cultivating the self and civilizing society makes this aesthetic model of education very clear. These aesthetic practices are more than *merely* aesthetic; they concern the formation of proper order and good government in the character of the individual and of society as a whole. As Confucius stressed, “in referring time and again to observing ritual propriety (*li*) how could I just be talking about gifts of jade and silk? And in referring time and again to making music (*yue*), how could I just be talking about bells and drums?” (17.11). He thus urged his disciples, “My young friends, why don’t you study the *Songs*? Reciting the *Songs* can arouse your sensibilities, strengthen your powers of observation, enhance your ability to get on with others, and sharpen your critical skills. Close at hand it enables you to serve your father, and away at court it enables you to serve your lord” (17.9). Confucius likewise urged the study of ritual, without which one would not know “where to stand” or

how to behave (16.13). But the broader goal of “achieving harmony” in both self and society “is the most valuable function of observing ritual” (1.12).¹⁰

The aesthetic model of good government through good character and harmony is a model that works by exemplary attraction and emulation rather than by commandments, threats, and punishments. “The exemplary person attracts friends through refinement (*wen*), and thereby promotes virtuous conduct (*ren*)”. Attracted to such people, we want “to stand shoulder to shoulder with them” by emulating their virtue (12.24; 4.1; 4.17). So “if people are proper in personal conduct, others will follow suit without need of command. But if they are not proper, even when they command, others will not obey” (13.6). Moreover, the propriety of good conduct or character is also understood aesthetically; it is not a matter of mere mechanical or grudging compliance to fixed rules, but rather requires maintaining the proper appearances that expresses the proper feelings.¹¹ Hence the Confucian emphasis on “the proper countenance”, “demeanor”, and “expression” that virtue should display and that contributes to social harmony and good government (8.4).¹²

Pragmatism likewise emphasizes the crucially formative ethical and political power of aesthetic practices. But this is what makes the very idea of pragmatist aesthetics sound perversely paradoxical to mainstream philosophers, since the prevailing Kantian view defines the aesthetic precisely by its oppositional contrast to the practical. So Confucianism’s strong emphasis on the essential, wide-ranging functionality of art and aesthetic experience provides a useful support for pragmatism by showing that pragmatic aesthetics is not a recent philosophical aberration due to America’s aesthetic poverty and cultural philistinism, but rather finds forceful expression in a rich, long, and influential philosophical tradition that was distinguished by its refined aesthetic taste and artistic achievements, and which indeed was sometimes criticized for excessive aestheticism.¹³ Indeed if we look beyond our myopic European modernism, we see that the compartmentalized, purist, functionless aesthetic of modernity is instead the historical anomaly. That aesthetic practices have clear pragmatic and ethical value for forming proper character and so

contributing to good government was certainly an insight that Plato shared with Confucius. Plato's violent denigration of the mimetic arts of his time in Book X of *The Republic* was a logical, if paradoxical, conclusion from his earlier arguments for the instrumental power of aesthetic education to shape people's souls and affect their sense of good order, which in turn affects their contribution to the harmonious order of good government. If Friedrich Schiller's *Letters on The Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795) could still advocate art's great ethical and political potential, the aestheticism of art for art's sake has made the idea of pragmatic functionality seem base and repugnantly philistine. Still later and worse, the Nazis' shrewd use of imagery and pageant provoked Walter Benjamin's timely but ultimately short-sighted equation of fascism with "the introduction of aesthetics into political life." This misleadingly suggests that aesthetics could not play a more positive democratic role.¹⁴

Pragmatism affirms this progressive role for aesthetics in ethical and political education. Art is more than a private affair of personal taste; and taste itself is always more than personal, since it is socially formed. As an essentially communicative and social practice, art is "the incomparable organ of instruction" with a Confucian harmonizing function (AE 349). In Dewey's words, art is "a remaking of the experience of the community in the direction of greater order and unity," and he cites "the power of music in particular to merge different individualities in a common surrender, loyalty and inspiration (AE 87, 338). If this sounds too close to a fascist demand for the unity of conformity to a fixed social order and vision¹⁵, Dewey counters by insisting that "art is more moral than moralities" because it imaginatively offers new visions of better orders than the community's status quo and by reading respect for the individual into the very essence of aesthetic form. Explicitly linking aesthetics to democratic theory, Dewey claims that just as significant aesthetic wholes

must be constituted by parts that are themselves significant apart from the whole to which they belong... no significant community can exist save as it is composed of individuals who are significant" (AE 207-8).

But I think we also need to go beyond the Deweyan appreciation of harmony and organic unities in art and society. Art can divide as well as unify, as we see in the conflict of different taste-groups, and such conflict can be a competitive spur to creativity. Besides the satisfactions of unity, there can also be aesthetic, educational, and even social value in artistic experiences of heightened fragmentation, dissonance, and disruptive difference. That is one reason why I devoted considerable attention to rap music and why much contemporary visual art is concerned with images of rupture and disharmony. Moreover, we need to remember more clearly that the aesthetic dimension (in both the creative and appreciative process) involves a crucial critical moment, where the artist or observer critically assesses the values and limitations of what is being expressed so that she can go on to produce or demand something better. This means that an aesthetic appreciation of social harmonies should always be alert to discordant voices that are being muffled or excluded from the mix.

Once we recognize its social, communicative, and critical dimensions, aesthetic cultivation, in the widest sense of the term, should be viewed as crucial not only to the individual's private ethical quest for self-perfection but also to the wider, public task of political reconstruction.¹⁶ Moreover, as I argue in *Practicing Philosophy*, we can provide a pragmatist justification of democracy based on the aesthetic values of enriched communicative experience and self-realization.¹⁷ There are three interrelated arguments in this "aesthetic justification of democracy". First, any individual of a community is a social individual who has needs, habits and desires associated with and affected by communal life. Thus, the individual's free and active participation in democratic life – in participatory public interaction and not just in the protection and exercise of her personal freedom – will make her experience and her self much richer and more interesting than if she had no opportunity to participate in the governing of society through public action. Since democracy provides better opportunity for the free participation of more individuals in government, it can provide them a richer life and fuller self and so is in that sense aesthetically superior. The second argument is closely related. If nothing (in Dewey's words) is "as fulfilling and as reward-

ing as is concerted consensus of action”, then because participatory democracy promotes such action, it should be valued and pursued also for the experiential satisfactions such action brings. Democratic practice, like communication, is not only a practical means but a rewarding end in itself, since, as Dewey claims, “shared experience is the greatest of human goods” (EN 145,147).

The third argument appeals again to the idea of experiential enrichment, but develops it through democracy’s respect for difference and the right of every individual to have and develop her distinctive perspective on life. Democracy’s advocacy of the free and equal (though not identical) participation of all different types of people in directing community life can greatly enrich the experience of each, because it not only provides the spice of variety, but gives the individual a heightened sense of her own distinct perspective and identity through the contrastive background of different others.

To cooperate by giving differences a chance to show themselves because of the belief that the expression of difference is not only a right of the other persons but is a means of enriching one’s own life-experience, is inherent in the democratic personal way of life.¹⁸

While pragmatism is focused on human improvement, it does so by recognizing that human nature is inextricably and usefully situated in the larger arena of nature in which human beings productively participate. One’s agency is always situational and relational (to the surrounding social and natural context); it is never perfectly autonomous. In the terms I have learned from Chinese philosophy, *ren* belongs to a more encompassing *dao*. Thus wider natural forces need to be discerned and utilized to advance our human projects, including the global project of perfecting our humanity. In aesthetics, this means recognizing that art’s rhythms, forms, and energies emerge from and fruitfully build on those of the environing natural world (as in the way that the pointed style of Gothic architecture emulates both the forest’s towering trees and the energetic yet humble uplift of our feelings as we gaze up at the inspiring heavens). Dewey thus described art as “the complete culmination of nature,” for “under-

neath the rhythm of every art and of every work of art, there lies the basic pattern of relations of the live creature to his environment” (EN 269, AE 355).

To say that art is rooted in and shaped by larger natural forces does not mean that it is just doing what comes naturally as an innate ability with no need for cultural conventions and rigorous training. Art is clearly shaped by human history and conventions, but since human history and culture are themselves partly structured by the natural world they help reshape, pragmatism can see art as a cultural product while equally recognizing the formative power of art’s natural roots and energies. Similarly, as Robert Eno argues, although the conventional rules of ritual can be contrasted with merely natural action, Confucianism can still regard “ritual as a natural art”, because “the forms of ritual and social order...are induced through the dynamic interactions of nature with the structure of the human mind ... [and] are the teleological culmination of the natural cosmos.”¹⁹

II

The primary concern with improving the human condition through philosophy is evidence of the deeply practical nature of pragmatism that I also see in Chinese thought. The Confucian tradition insists on linking knowledge and action, theory and practice. The Master said: “To fail to cultivate excellence (*de*), to fail to practice what I learn, on coming to understand what is appropriate (*yi*) in the circumstances, to fail to attend to it, and to be unable to reform conduct that is not productive – these things I worry over.” “Exemplary persons would feel shame if their words were better than their deeds.” “How could one but comply with what model sayings have to say? But the real value lies in reforming one’s ways” (7.3, 14.27; 9.24). Even if we wish to ascribe it some special intrinsic value of its own, philosophy’s prime value is the instrumental value of improving human life, which is why Dewey urged that philosophy be directed not at merely academic “problems of philosophers” but at the real “problems of men” and women.²⁰ In making it a means to this higher end of improved experience, one is not degrading philosophy as deficient in value. For

if we value and want to achieve the end, then we must equally respect the best means to secure that end (provided, of course, that there is nothing objectionable about those means).²¹ As a philosophy that takes means seriously, pragmatism also appreciates the importance of finding the most useful mean that lies between various extremes, recognizing that this proper mean is no fixed, mechanical average but a dynamically balanced measure of what is appropriate in terms of the pluralities of changing contexts. Sensitivity to changing contexts is also crucial to Chinese thought. This is not surprising since the *Yijing* or *Book of Changes*, as “the first among the canonical classics” of Chinese philosophy, has been widely influential.²² Confucius repeatedly advises different behavior according to whether or not *the way* currently prevails in the place where one lives (8.13, 14.3, 15.7), and he also famously offers conflicting advice to two disciples, which he explains in terms of the different contexts of their very different personalities (11.22).

Chinese philosophy enjoys an inclusive open-mindedness of approach that reminds me very much of pragmatism’s fundamental pluralism. Rather than seeking truth by excluding all alternative views, these philosophies have an appreciation of the contributions of complementarities, so they try to combine the insights of different views in a more productive and flexible synthesis. If Confucianism still survives as a flourishing influential philosophy, it is partly because it knew how to embrace the conflicting doctrines of Mencius and Xunzi within the fold of classical Confucianism and to absorb the insights of Daoism and Buddhism in the great synthesis of Neo-Confucianism. If the knowledge that constituted wisdom were simple and one-sided, then it would not be so difficult to express or attain. One very important dimension of wisdom is humility, which pragmatism expresses through its doctrine of fallibilism — the recognition that any truth we now hold could eventually be refuted by future experience. Fallibilism is not skepticism, however, because it continues to believe firmly in those truths that we have the right to hold, until we have strong grounds to doubt them. But fallibilism requires that we do not hold on to them rigidly in the face of new experience that puts them seriously in question; so even our firmness

must also be flexible. Confucius expresses this idea by repeatedly cautioning against “inflexibility” and refusing to “claim or demand certainty” (1.8; 9.4; 14.32).

If philosophy seeks primarily to preserve, cultivate, and perfect human life, this quest for improvement has at least two parallel dimensions: first, there is the person’s own inner self-realization, a desire to achieve a certain unity and integrity of character, expressed in harmony with oneself and with others. But a purely personal inner state is not enough for pragmatist philosophy. It requires some external expression in the realm of action, a certain excellence in the conduct of life, the ability to dignify and improve the world through one’s practical efforts and exemplary life. In Chinese thought this double ideal of inner and outer perfection, of self- and social fulfillment, is nicely conveyed through the notion of “sageliness within and kingliness without.”²³ Nor should these inner and outer dimensions be seen as essentially separate. Just as the self’s agency is a situational power rather than an autonomous inner force, so the self’s character is not a hidden, permanent inner essence but rather a dynamic albeit habitual fabric of behavior and experience that is largely visible. The ways we act and react, walk and talk, dress, eat, and enjoy ourselves, etc., all form an important part of who we are, which is why Confucius claims one can know a person by observing him.²⁴ If appearances are not radically contrasted with reality but instead form a rich part of it, then we have another reason why aesthetic cultivation is crucial.

The philosophical life of self-cultivation and self-perfection is sometimes criticized as an isolating narcissism. Should we not devote philosophy to larger public concerns and to the universe as a whole? Isn’t the individual self a product of far wider social and natural forces that should instead form the true focus of all our philosophical efforts? Pragmatism does not deny that individuals are shaped by social institutions and natural forces that are far greater than any individual. But individuals, as the expression of these larger powers, are also instruments through which these powers are in turn animated and reshaped. We can best work on the wider social and natural world only by mastering our primary instrument of action,

which is our self. Even if the higher end is the good of society or the universe as a whole, the improvement of the self is a crucial means to this end. And pragmatism argues that if we value certain ends, we must also respect the means needed to achieve them.

This attitude resonates with Chinese thought. In *The Great Learning*, Confucius says: “The ancients who wished to manifest their clear character to the world would first bring order to their states. Those who wished to bring order to their states would first regulate their families. Those who wished to regulate their families would first cultivate their personal lives.”²⁵ Many evils in human life result from harmful external conditions, but by abandoning our care for the self (that is, by failing to perfect our perception, knowledge, virtue, health, and humanity), we will be less capable of overcoming and transforming those conditions.

If philosophy aims at self-perfection, how should this ideal of goodness and wisdom be understood? While recognizing that Western philosophy has often construed this ideal through the model of spiritual health and therapy, my book *Practicing Philosophy* argues for an aesthetic model of self-perfection through philosophical living. The philosopher works to make his life an attractive exemplar by thoughtfully sculpting his thoughts and actions, his mind and body, his past history and projected future, into an aesthetically appealing whole. In pragmatism, the aesthetic is not separated from the moral and the cognitive, so the most beautiful lives cannot be lived in ignorance or evil. Textual practice is not enough; philosophy must be more robustly embodied in action. Moreover, since the aesthetic cannot be separated from the social – which forms our taste and nurtures our creative, expressive powers – the most beautiful lives cannot be lived in lonely self-absorption. A truly attractive pragmatist exemplar must address the public and its problems, even when conditions are not propitious. Some would regard this as a departure from Confucian policy that seems to counsel withdrawal when times are not favorable (8.13, 15.7).

The work of sculpting the self not only gives direction and fulfillment to the particular philosopher but also serves as an inspiring exemplar to others in their own quest to realize beauty in their lives. Legend tells that Socrates was the son of a sculptor and that he

wondered why artists spent so much care and effort shaping wood and marble but let their own selves remain as misshapen objects – haphazard products of chance, blind habit, and neglect. This aesthetic model of self-perfection is also important to Chinese philosophy, which helps explain why Chinese philosophers have often been accomplished artists.²⁶ Confucius, who insists that the exemplary person requires the right aesthetic blend of natural substance and cultural refinement (6:18), likewise urges an aesthetic model of perfecting the self and society through education.

The only way for the exemplary person to civilize the people and establish good customs is through education. A piece of jade cannot become a work of art without chiseling, and a man cannot come to know the way (*dao*) without education.²⁷

A person, he argued, must be shaped through aesthetic education: “inspired by poetry, established by ritual (*li*) and perfected by music” (8.8)²⁸. Virtue and “the way” (*dao*) are not merely things to know, to will, and to perform, but things that we should delight in so that we can love and fully embody them. When asked what he thought of “the saying ‘Poor but not inferior; rich, but not superior’”, Confucius “replied: ‘Not bad, but not as good as: ‘Poor but enjoying the way; rich but loving ritual propriety’” (1.15). He further urged, “To truly love it [the way] is better than just to understand it, and to enjoy it is better than simply to love it” (6.20).

Because my pragmatist aesthetics is often criticized for celebrating the hedonic,²⁹ I am greatly encouraged by the Confucian emphasis on pleasure (*le*) and enjoyment (*yue*). It shows the error of thinking that a philosophical concern for pleasure is merely the selfish, feeble, fetish of a degenerate and trivial postmodernism, a falling off from modernity’s focus on truth and progress. Since Hegel, the prevailing idealism of Western aesthetics has been unfriendly to pleasure, which it opposes and subordinates to the ideal of knowledge. This is partly because pleasure has a strong association with sensuality, desire, and the body, which modern Western philosophy (along with Christianity) has tended to see as obstacles or dangers to true knowl-

edge. Adorno exemplifies this opposition of pleasure to knowledge, arguing that “people enjoy works of art the less, the more they know about them, and vice versa.”³⁰

Pragmatist aesthetics denies this sharp division of between pleasure and cognition, feeling and knowing, enjoyment and understanding. It instead closely links these concepts, affirming the insight of T. S. Eliot that “to understand a poem comes to the same thing as to enjoy it for the right reasons.”³¹ Rejecting the empiricist view of pleasure as a passive sensation existing only in the private mental world of the experiencing subject, a shrewder pragmatism follows Aristotle in construing pleasure as a quality of activity that enhances that activity by making the activity more zestful or fulfilling. Pleasure is thus inseparable from the activity in which it is experienced and tends to promote that activity by intensifying interest in it. And as we share our activities, so we can share our pleasures.

Closely connecting pleasure and knowledge, Confucius presents pleasure as active enjoying that implies more than a private mental state. The very first passage of the *Analects* affirms pleasure’s link to knowledge, practice, and community:

Having studied, to then repeatedly apply what you have learned – is this not a source of pleasure? To have friends come from distant quarters – is this not a source of enjoyment? (1.1).

Confucius then further links pleasure and knowledge with activity: “The wise are active. . . The wise find enjoyment” (6.23). And he goes on to describe himself as “a person [who] is driven by such eagerness to teach and learn that he forgets to eat, [and who] . . . enjoys himself so much that he forgets to worry” (7.19). Since pleasure is intrinsically linked to the activity it enhances and promotes, and since a person is shaped by the activities in which she habitually engages (17.2), pursuing appropriate pleasures provides a path not only to knowledge but to an improved self. Hence Confucius recommends that “finding enjoyment” in activities of ritual propriety and music, in praising excellence, and in associating with friends of good character “will be a source of personal improvement” (16.5).

The true aesthetic way of self-cultivation is a path of pleasure, which is why it is better to love and enjoy *the way* rather than merely to understand it. Philosophy typically opposes aesthetics to asceticism and regards the latter as the true instrument for cultivating ethical character. But a wiser pragmatism regards the aesthetic/ascetic opposition as a false dichotomy, since even the simple, ascetic life involves a creative regime of self-stylization and affords its own enjoyment and beauty. Confucius confirms this: “To eat coarse food, drink plain water, and pillow oneself on a bent arm – there is pleasure to be found in these things,” (7.16) and he praises the “character” of his favorite disciple Yan Hui for being able to enjoy an ascetic life of material hardships (6.12).

Even apart from such physical hardships, the Confucian path of aesthetic self-cultivation involves the *askesis* of ethical perfectionism, the uncompromising drive for continuous improvement through ever more efforts of intense study and devoted practice. This meliorist, perfectionist *askesis* – which can also be found in such pragmatist ideals as the “endless seeker” for the higher self (Emerson), “the strenuous mood” (James), and the quest for unending “growth” (Dewey) – is expressed in a permanent dissatisfaction with the level one has reached because of a permanent desire to go higher. Confucius embodies this aesthetic-ascetic life. In refusing to consider himself a sage or an exemplary person, Confucius claims “I have accomplished little...What can be said about me is simply that I continue my studies without respite and instruct others without growing weary.” (7.33-34). Virtue, in this perfectionist vision, is not an absolute state but a comparative measure of striving to be better. One who has already reached a high level of self-cultivation but wants to go no further is thus less virtuous than one who may be lower but struggles to improve.

In *Practicing Philosophy* I argue for the rich, multiple values of the aesthetic model of philosophical living and compare it favorably to the “therapeutic” model advanced by Pierre Hadot and others. But I also insist that there are very different yet useful versions of the aesthetic model, because there are very different and competing visions of what qualities are most important for being *aesthetic*. While

some visions emphasize unity and harmony, others stress novelty, intensity, or complexity. *Practicing Philosophy* presents only some of the different ways that pragmatism and other Western philosophies have portrayed and practiced the aesthetic-philosophical life. Chinese thought displays similar variety. With Confucius, for example, the aesthetic ideal of self-cultivation tends more toward complexity and sophistication, where *li* and music are advocated as crucial tools of self-regulation and self-development to perfect one's *ren*. In contrast, Laozi urges an aesthetic life of greater simplicity through basic harmony with nature, with less striving to regulate the self through the measures of ritual and art.

Pragmatism suggests another reason why there cannot be only one model of philosophy's art of living. One's life cannot be isolated from the environmental conditions in which it is lived and from which it draws energies and occasions for action. Different conditions provide very different tools and possibilities for making one's life into an attractive fulfilling project, and pragmatism is a philosophy that is very appreciative of changing contexts and the need to adapt our thinking and behavior according to the context. There must be a certain amount of pluralism with respect to the philosophical life, since different individuals have been differently shaped by the different conditions in which they live. This deep appreciation of pluralism and contextualization is another point where pragmatism converges with Chinese philosophy. Even within Confucianism, with its emphasis on ritual's strict scripting of behavior, there is clear recognition not only of different contexts but of different personalities, as exemplified by Confucius's different disciples whose differences play an important role in *The Analects*. Thus, as Tu Wei-Ming argues, even Confucius himself was not taken as the single "rigid model for human flourishing... Confucian followers rejected the idea of imitating Confucius but insisted on the relevance of his example for emulation."³² Though we can learn much from great exemplars of beautiful living (and also, by contrast, from the errors of failed lives), one must work out the aesthetics of one's own life for oneself in terms of one's conditions and personality.³³ Philosophy, in this sense, can be a personal project for everyone.

III

There is an aspect of philosophy as life practice that my version of pragmatism emphasizes more than most Western philosophies — cultivation of the sentient body as a central tool of self-perfection, a key to better perception, action, virtue, and happiness. To properly treat this bodily dimension of philosophy, I have been working on a discipline called “somaesthetics,” which I introduced in *Practicing Philosophy* and explain more fully in *Performing Live*.³⁴ Briefly defined, somaesthetics is the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one’s body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic perception (*aesthesis*) and creative self-fashioning. It is therefore also concerned with the various forms of knowledge, discourse, practices, and bodily disciplines that structure such somatic care or can improve it. A discipline not only of theory but of concrete practice, somaesthetics seeks to enhance the fundamental unity of bodymind in aiming to realize some of philosophy’s oldest and most central goals: knowledge, self-knowledge, virtue, happiness, and justice.

When challenged by my Western philosophical colleagues for paying so much attention to the body (which is seen as a necessarily narrow and narcissistic interest that interferes with the wider and nobler concerns of ethics and politics), I find support from Asian philosophers’ wise respect for the body. They realize that virtue, care for others, and even the political practice of good government cannot be achieved without bodily means. As Mencius says,

I have heard of those who, having kept their bodies inviolate, could serve their parents, but not of those who failing to do so, still served their parents. Whichever duty I fail to perform, it must not be my duty to my parents, for that is the duty from which all others spring. Whichever trust I fail to fulfill, it must not be that of keeping my body inviolate, for that is the trust from which all others arise.³⁵

He later claims, “The functions of the body are the endowment of Heaven. But it is only a Sage who can properly manipulate them.”³⁶

Moreover, how can one properly govern a state, if one cannot properly care for oneself by properly caring for one's body? As Laozi says, "He who loves his body more than the empire can be given the custody of the empire."³⁷ Chinese philosophy further realizes that the most persuasive lessons in the art of living can be conveyed without theoretical texts, but through the wordless power of bodily bearing and graceful action of the teacher, who instructs by the exemplarity of his person that complements and interprets the words of his teaching. As Mencius says, "His every limb bears wordless testimony."³⁸ Consider the exemplarity of wordless teaching exhibited in the bodily behavior of Confucius as recorded in *Analects* 10:4:

On passing through the entrance way to the Duke's court, he would bow forward from the waist, as though the gateway were not high enough. While in attendance, he would not stand in the middle of the entranceway; in passing through, he would not step on the raised threshold. On passing by the empty throne, his countenance would change visibly, his legs would bend, and in his speech he would seem to be breathless. He would lift the hem of his skirts in ascending the hall, bow forward from the waist, and hold in his breath as though ceasing to breathe. On leaving and descending the first steps, he would relax his expression and regain his composure. He would glide briskly from the bottom of the steps, and returning to his place, he would resume a reverent posture.³⁹

Asian culture has combined theoretical affirmation of the body with the development of practical somatic disciplines of meditation and martial arts that improve our powers of movement and mental concentration, while giving greater grace to our actions and greater pleasure and acuteness to our consciousness. My efforts to establish the field of somaesthetics as a discipline of theory and practice have been greatly inspired by the insights of Chinese and other ancient Asian philosophies, but also by some modern Western body-mind disciplines such as the Feldenkrais Method in which I have become a professional practitioner.⁴⁰

Notes

- 1 See Richard Shusterman, "Comment l'amérique a volé l'identité philosophique européenne" in S. Douailler, J. Poulain, and P. Vermeren (eds.), *L'identité philosophique européenne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993), pp. 253-266.
- 2 John Dewey and Alice Chipman Dewey, *Letters from China and Japan* (New York: Dutton, 1920), p. 50.
- 3 See Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," in P.A. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, 2nd ed. (New York: Tudor, 1951), p. 42.
- 4 Dewey's popularity in China was unfortunately short-lived. By the time he wrote *Art as Experience* (1934), there was not sufficient interest in his work for the book to be translated. As of January 2004, a Chinese translation of it has still not been published, but one is currently being prepared by Dr. Jianping Gao.
- 5 See Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 3: "If one word could characterize the entire history of Chinese philosophy, that word would be humanism." This opinion is endorsed in Tu Wei-Ming. "Self-cultivation in Chinese Philosophy," *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), vol. 8, pp. 613-626, which describes Chinese humanism as tending "to incorporate the spiritual and naturalist dimensions in a comprehensive and integrated vision of the nature and function of humanity in the cosmos" (p. 613). This description is also appropriate to the pragmatist vision of James, Dewey, and F.C.S. Schiller, though James tended to use the term "humanism" in a more limited, technical sense that focused on issues of epistemology and metaphysics; for example, the theses that that philosophy cannot purport to provide a God's-eye view of the world; that its truths are not absolute and fixed but pluralistic and changing; and that such fallibilism and pluralism reflect the changing nature of reality and our plural, changing human interests.
- 6 William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 244f. John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), pp. 41, 305; hereafter EN.
- 7 Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 42. Hansen argues that the ways Chinese language differs from Indo-European languages encouraged Chinese thinkers to theorize language differently than in India and Europe, and thus to different views of philosophy and its problems. Some of these differences resemble ways that pragmatism also differs from mainstream has from the mainstream Western philosophical tradition.

- 8 See John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), pp. 155, 220; hereafter AE; and William James, *The Correspondence of William James*, vol. 8 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), p. 475. This is why I argue (in *Pragmatist Aesthetics* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1992]) that Dewey was basically right to define art as experience even though that definition, by logical-extensional criteria, is clearly inadequate.
- 9 My citations and references, indicated in parentheses, are based on the translation of Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine, 1998).
- 10 The Confucian Xunzi (Hsun-Tzu) explains ritual's capacity to harmonize in terms of its nurturing our human senses, emotions, and desires while informing them with a sense of order and distinction so that they will not run wildly astray but will issue in "pleasure and beauty." A key to ritual's power of refinement is by providing the proper "mean." See "Discourse on Ritual Principles" in *Xunzi*, trans. John Knoblock (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), vol. 3, pp. 57, 60, 62, 65.
- 11 When "asked about filial conduct", the Master replied: "It all lies in showing the proper countenance. As for the young contributing their energies when there is work to be done, an deferring to their elders when there is wine and food to be had – how can merely doing this be considered being filial?" (2.8)
- 12 When asked what kind of person is fit to govern, Confucius replies "a person who honors the five beauties (*mei*) and rejects the four ugly things (*e*)," and then he goes on to explain what these things are in such saliently ethical language that leads Ames and Rosemont to translate these terms as "the five virtues" and "the four vices" (20.2). In the Waley translation, the terms are translated as "the Five Lovely Things" and "the Four Ugly Things." See Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Random House, 1938), p. 232. The validity of both translations is evidence of the great overlap of ethics and aesthetics in Chinese thought, which was also common in ancient Greek philosophy as the popular expression of *kalon-kai-agathon* ("the beautiful and good") makes clear.
- 13 Note, for example, the Mohist critique of Confucian aestheticism: "They bedeck themselves with elaborate dress to poison the world. They strum and sing and beat out dance rhythms to gather disciples. They proliferate *li* of ascending and descending to display their manners. They labor over the niceties of ceremonial gaits and wing-like gestures to impress the multitudes" (in the *Mo Tzu, Fei Ju*: 9.40-41) cited in Robert Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven: Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), p. 53.
- 14 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1988), p. 241. In stressing that

aesthetics has positive ethical and political uses or dimensions, I am not trying to reduce all values to the aesthetic, but rather highlighting how the plurality of values is so closely mixed in experience that they cannot be neatly segregated into purely ethical, cognitive, aesthetic, political compartments. In some cases of ethical judgment, there are basic principles of rights and duties that seem to be fundamentally different from aesthetic considerations of harmony, propriety, fairness, good grace, etc., and that seem clearly to outweigh the latter. But I would still maintain that in most cases our ethical deliberation of weighing and balancing is governed not by any arithmetical model but on an aesthetic model of balance, reflective equilibrium, and feeling of what is appropriate – what one might call an ethical sense of taste.

- 15 Dewey himself later notes (in *Freedom and Culture*, 1939) the use of art and other aesthetic practices to support totalitarian regimes by making dictatorship seem more attractive than “repressive,” and likewise mentions the Church’s use of aesthetic power to sustain its influence on “the masses.” Dewey also cites the saying “that if one could control the songs of a nation, one need not care who made its laws.” See *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 13 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), pp. 69-70.
- 16 This is one of the points where my neopragmatist position differs significantly from that of Dewey’s most influential contemporary champion, Richard Rorty, who argues (for reasons not unlike Benjamin’s) that the aesthetic should be confined to the private sphere.
- 17 Richard Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (New York: Routledge, 1997), ch. 3.
- 18 John Dewey, “Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us” in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, 14:228.
- 19 Robert Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven*, pp. 138-9, 162. Cf. “Discourse on Ritual Principles,” *Xunxi* (19.6), 66-67.
- 20 “Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men,” from “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy”, in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, 10: 46.
- 21 The crucial role of means is expressed in the ancient Chinese classic *Guanzi* (*Kuan-Tzu*): “Men all desire knowledge, but no one seeks the means to obtain it. What they know is the ‘that’. But the means to obtain it is the ‘this’. If they do not cultivate the ‘this’ how can they know the ‘that?’” See *Kuan-Tzu: A Repository of Early Chinese Thought*, trans. W. Allyn Rickett (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1965), vol. 1, p. 147.
- 22 See Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects*, 13-14, who note the probable influence of this book on Confucius himself, who interprets one of its hexagrams in 13.22.

- 23 The expression is from Zhuangzi (Chuan-tsu). See *The Zhuangzi Index* in the Harvard-Yenching Sinological Index Series, Supplement 20 (Peking: Harvard-Yenching, 1947), p. 91 (chapter 31, line 14).
- 24 “Watch their actions, observe their motives, examine wherein they dwell content; won’t you know what kind of person they are?” (2.10) “My young friends, you think I have something hidden away, but I do not. There is nothing I do that I do not share with you – this is the person I am” (7.24) Confucius also notes that exemplary persons are “keen observers of demeanor” (12.20).
- 25 See *The Great Learning (Ta-Hsueh)* in *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 86f.
- 26 Two striking examples are Su Shi (1037-1101) a Daoist and Buddhist philosopher who was an outstanding poet, calligrapher, and painter, and the neo-Confucian Zu Xi (1130-1200) who was a distinguished poet and calligrapher. There is evidence that Confucius himself was a musician and perhaps edited the *Book of Songs*. Since the Confucian tradition urged intense and continued education in the six arts – ritual, music (including poetry and dance), archery, riding, writing (including calligraphy), and arithmetic – one would expect any accomplished Confucian philosopher to have some skill in these arts.
- 27 From *The Book of Rites (Li Chi)*, trans. Lin Yutang, in *The Wisdom of Confucius* (New York: Modern Library, 1938), p. 241.
- 28 I here slightly amend the Ames translation by rendering some words in the manner of Wing-tsit Chan, p. 33.
- 29 See, for example, the criticisms of Rainer Rochlitz, “Esthétiques Hédonistes,” *Critique*, 540 (1992), pp. 353-373; Alexander Nehamas, “Richard Shusterman on Pleasure and Aesthetic Experience”, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 56 (1998), pp. 47-51; and Wolfgang Welsch “Rettung Durch Halbierung? Zu Richard Shustermans Rehabilitierung ästhetischer Erfahrung,” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 47(1999), pp. 111-126.
- 30 T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Routledge, 1984), pp. 18-21.
- 31 T. S. Eliot, *Of Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1957), p. 115.
- 32 See Tu Wei-Ming, p. 615. This is because they recognized the contextual character of anyone’s life: “Confucius’ attainments depended so much on a confluence of conditions involving economic circumstances, social class, political situation and cultural milieu that it is unique and unrepeatable” (ibid.).
- 33 This implies that philosophy, while grounded in the past, must be forward looking. Though some might be tempted to contrast pragmatism and Confucianism with respect to the issue of tradition, seeing the former as future-directed and concerned with consequences while the latter essentially oriented to the past, these philosophies actually share a vision of

- tradition as a resource that uses the past to improve the present and future – “reviewing the old as a means of realizing the new” (2.11); cf. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, pp. 163, 270.
- 34 Richard Shusterman, *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), chapters 7-8. I relate somaesthetics to the original Baumgartian project that founded modern aesthetics in “Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal”, the concluding chapter of *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 2nd ed.
- 35 See *Mencius*, trans. W.A.C.H. Dobson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 138 (4A.20).
- 36 See *Mencius*, 144 (6A.14). Proper bodily comportment and skills are, of course, crucial to the key Confucian idea of ritual.
- 37 See *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D.C. Lau (Baltimore: Penguin, 1963), p. 69. (XIII).
- 38 *Mencius*, p. 181 (7A.21)
- 39 Book 10 is full of such descriptions of Confucius’s instructive bodily comportment, including matters of dress, posture, the taking of food, drink, and medicine, table manners, style of sitting, resting, sleeping, and riding in a carriage. An important counterpart of wordless teaching is wordless understanding, also emphasized in Chinese thought.
- 40 Further discussion of somaesthetics can be found in a recent symposium on *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 2nd edition (with articles by Antonia Soulez, Paul Taylor, Tom Leddy, and my response) in *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 16:1 (2002) and in a symposium on *Performing Live* (with articles by Kathleen Higgins, Casey Haskins and my response) in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 36:4 (2002). The same issue of *JAE* also contains articles by Martin Jay (“Somaesthetics and Democracy: Dewey and Contemporary Body Art”) and Gustavo Guerra (“Practicing Pragmatism: Richard Shusterman’s Unbound Philosophy”) that discuss somaesthetics. See also the critique by Richard Rorty, whose pragmatism involves a linguistic essentialism of the self that excludes the relevance of somatic cultivation for philosophy, in “Response to Richard Shusterman” in Matthew Festenstein and Simon Thompson (eds.), *Richard Rorty: Critical Dialogues* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 152-157.

JOSEPH MARGOLIS

The Definition of the Human

If you take the long view of the career of Western philosophy, you may be forgiven for yielding to the fiction that its continuous history confirms a legible thread of discovery spanning the speculations of the Ionians and Eleatics and our more baffled inquiries at the start of the twenty-first century. It hardly matters whether you believe the tale or merely trust it as an economy that cannot finally be toppled. In either case, I shall need your patience. I have the pieces of an imaginary history that yields a more than plausible sense of the entire human world by way of a sequence of conceptions that were never construed in quite the way I recommend. I trust that history, though I don't believe it to be strictly true.

Its intended benefit lies entirely in bridging twenty – five hundred years of the West's intellectual history in a way that legibly provides a working sense of the emergence of the modern conception of the human; and, of course, the point of doing that is simply to get clear – quickly, compendiously, without serious distortion – about a clouded notion we cannot permit ourselves to be unclear about. We need to know what kind of being we are, if we are ever to understand what we have achieved in forming an encultured world in which we ourselves are formed. The whole of art and science and philosophy depends on it. What is the unique mode of being that human beings manifest?

I

Canonical history has it that Plato and Aristotle sought to reconcile changing and changeless being in the spirit of the Ionians and against the excessive strictures of Parmenides's dictum, which makes no allowance for the changing world. If that dictum had never been

contested, the whole of science and our grasp of the human condition might have remained hopelessly paradoxical – in the Eleatic way. I accept the usual reading, therefore, as the sparest narrative (fiction or not) that might be true. Except for two caveats: the first, that the actual lesson of the best work of classical philosophy could never have been formulated within the horizon of the Greek world anyway; the second, that what Plato and Aristotle accomplished in their heroic way remains distinctly uneasy, unfinished, un compelling in their own time, just at the point they manage to harmonize the opposed notions of the changing and the changeless. That's to say: the point at which they simply compromise with Parmenides.

Consider a philosophical aside, therefore, to help us get our bearings. If there are two distinct worlds – the one changing, the other changeless – it is hard to see why the changeless world would ever be needed to ensure the presence of the other; and if its own intelligibility presupposed or entailed that change “is” necessarily what it is only relative to what is changeless, then how could that be demonstrated if we ourselves are confined within the changing world? If our world is a fluxive world and we have no inkling of the changeless world – beyond Parmenides's dictum, or conjectures like those spawned in the *Republic* (provided by disputants who admit they do not know the changeless world), or like Aristotle's faulty paradoxes ranged against those who affirm the fluxive world – then the classical account of the human must be more limited than history affirms. Otherwise, read more generously, the matter may require conceptual resources the Greek world never dreamed of – possibilities discovered only in a later age. *If* the changing world were not (not known to be) in need of a changeless stratum, we would hardly need to admit that human nature must itself be changeless, or depend in some ineluctable way on a changeless world. That would already be a gain decisive enough to challenge two thousand years of unproductive quibble.

Both Plato and Aristotle seem to recognize Protagoras as the arch-foe of Parmenides – Plato in the *Theaetetus*, Aristotle in *Metaphysics* Gamma – where the arguments against Protagoras's relativism are singularly thin and un compelling; though they are, it should be said, nearly the whole of contemporary objections to modern forms of

relativism.¹ At this point in my story, it's not the championing of relativism that counts; it's defending the coherence of the flux, *not* chaos, not the sheer absence of all order, but the discursibility of the changing world itself – alone and enough for all there is. Here, Protagoras is surely more interesting than Heraclitus; read anachronistically, “Man is the measure” is very much ahead of its time, an idea at least as advanced as any the post-Kantians hit on – except for the small fact that, like Plato and Aristotle, Protagoras lacked our modern conception of historicity, the historied nature of thought itself. It's missing in Protagoras as much as in Aristotle.

I want to suggest that the narrative outcome of the classical phase of Western philosophy lies more with abandoning Parmenides's constraint altogether – placing it under a charge of irrelevance and arbitrariness – than with reaching a verbal compromise (any compromise) in the way Plato and Aristotle seem to have found impossible to avoid.

In short, the upshot of the contest between both Plato and Aristotle and Parmenides is not so much the classic compromise they wrest from Parmenides (which has dominated Western philosophy down to our own day) as it is to experiment with the complete abandonment of the invariances of thought and being by exploring the new vision that begins to find its voice (and conceptual adequacy) in the late 18th and early 19th centuries – in, say, its first full incarnation in Hegel's encultured and historicized “empiricism,” that is, in his experiential phenomenology.²

The Greeks were simply disadvantaged, struggling in Parmenides's shadow, because they lacked the conceptual resources that might have helped them escape – as those resources helped Hegel in his own attempt to escape the corresponding fixities of Kant's transcendentalism. They lacked what we now realize is a novel conception of the regularities of ordinary cultural life – with which perfectly ordinary people are now acquainted, without exceptional training – just the reverse of what would be true of the Platonic Forms, or “what is” in Parmenides's sense, or the essences of natural things directly grasped by *nous*, or the powers of transcendental understanding or pure phenomenology in Husserl's sense,³ or anything else of such a

crazy kind. Hence, I suggest, the Greeks were unable to construct an adequate account of what it is to be a human being – beyond, say, the rather comic biology Plato offers in the *Statesman* or, more earnestly though by the same sort of fumbling, in the quasi–divine biology of Plato’s *psyche* and Aristotle’s *nous*.

We learn that if *we* mean to define what a human being is, we must, somehow, settle first the ancient question of the conceptual or, more grandly stated, the ontological linkage between the changing and the changeless. For, of course, Parmenides’s conception of thinking is inseparable from his conception of Being (or reality), as is true, in a more ingenious way, in Kant and the post-Kantians. I need to assure you, here, that, in speaking of the “ontological,” I have no intention of invoking any privileged source of knowledge about some secret changeless order of reality indiscernible by ordinary means, without a knowledge of which we could never confirm the validity of our beliefs about the changing world. Once we give up all such baggage, “metaphysics” or “ontology” is no more than a benign abstraction from the world we claim to know. Nothing quarrel-some hangs on the term.

If this line of thinking leads us well enough out of the ancient labyrinth, we may claim to have grasped the defect of classical philosophy: the fact that, for the Greeks, *faute de mieux*, human nature must embody a changeless (or necessary) structure of its own that could account, in principle, for the intelligent grasp and application in thought and act and productive labor restricted within the changing world. The Greek solution is no more than a *deus ex machina* that falls back to its compromise with Parmenides. It misperceives the *sui generis* nature of the human: it must, if we have no facultative grasp of the changeless fixities of “what is.” That, at any rate, is my charge.

If this is a fair assessment, it’s a stunning fact that an adequate conception of the human – in a sense we now think impossible to avoid – cannot have been philosophically available before (or much before) the interval already mentioned, the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. Alternatively put: the concepts of historicity and enculturation – on which, as I suggest, the very prospect

of grasping the unique features of “human being” and the whole of the human world depends – may be, indeed *is*, the gift of a very small interval of discovery confined within the span of Western European thought, fashioned a bare two hundred years ago. By now, these notions belong to the entire world, of course. But I draw your attention to their first appearance in order to remind you that the definition of the human is itself a historicized undertaking subject to the evolving conceptual resources and saliences of human thought itself; also, to feature the radical difference between the immense flexibility of Hegel’s dialectical picture of human history and the stubborn rigidities of Eleatic influence on both classical philosophy and our own. I think there cannot be an adequate philosophy that does not approve the charge. And I suggest that there is no comparable innovation in the first two millennia of Western philosophy.

Plato is surely the best of the ancient critics of the ideal Forms and of what we take to be the Parmenidean claim. The discussion (in the Dialogues) of the soul has very little point, for instance, if separated from the theory of the Forms. Aristotle’s conception of *nous* seems to have no biological basis at all, is little more than a transparent device designed to shore up the Eleatic theme: in both his biological and ethical tracts, there is a noticeable slippage from the essentialized invariances of science and morality.⁴ All this begins to explain the deeper joke of the *Republic* as well as Plato’s patience with the inconclusiveness of the early dialogues and the questionbegging fixities never completely dispelled in the best work of Aristotle’s attractive empirical rigor.

I am moving here, I assure you, in the direction of defining the human. I have chosen an oblique route partly to dramatize the fact that the Greeks did not understand the human in the same way we do; though, reading them, we instantly translate into our own idiom what they actually say, so that we often fail to see the enormous difference between our respective views. If you doubt this, just consider, closer to our own world, that Kant very nearly abandons the human altogether in the strenuous analysis of his “transcendental subject.” There actually is no sustained analysis, in Kant, of what is merely or essentially human, although, of course, Kant’s rational

agents are forever occupied with human concerns! Literally, Kant's transcendentalism makes it impossible to define the specifically human, though there's evidence enough that Kant anticipated returning to some sort of reconciliation between the mundane and the transcendental aspects of the human mode of being.⁵ Certainly, in his *Aesthetics*, Hegel pointedly takes note of the alien quality of what Kant offers as his abstract picture of a "human agent," which, Hegel suggests, cannot fail to disable the entire undertaking of explaining the creation, criticism, use and appreciation of the entire world of art.⁶ He's right, of course. You cannot rightly understand the nature of art or language or history or thought if you do not rightly understand the human condition.

My own impulse is to infer, by association, that Aristotle's treatment of the *polis* as the proper setting for grasping the philosophical import of more than Greek ethics and politics is instantly imperilled by Alexander's attempt to extend the normative role of the classical *ethos* to an empire meant to bring the Greek and Persian together in a new way, with no attention to those historicizing consequences that Alexander (under Aristotle's sway) could never have understood. The same disquieting lesson, I'm afraid, must surely, in our own time, haunt Martha Nussbaum's loyal "Aristotelian" account of Henry James's novels as well as her own UN-oriented attempt to universalize Aristotle's conception of the virtues.⁷ You cannot, however, determine the normative in practical life by empirically statistical methods of any kind or by discounting the historicity of social practices. You begin to see the need for an important correction here. A place must be found for historical forces. There are no such forces in Aristotle's *Ethics* or, for that matter, in Nussbaum's. Otherwise, we would need to have explained the very sense in which relatively discrete virtues could possibly be found to form a common core of virtues across all peoples and the whole of history. Universalism of this sort is an ancient disorder even if visited on ourselves.

I see no way that Kant's hoped-for reconciliation could possibly succeed, unless Kant would have been willing to abandon the quasi-divine powers of his transcendental subject. He was, finally, unable to historicize his account of the human condition along the lines,

for instance, that Herder recommended and Hegel found congenial. It is, in fact, in Hegel's innovations that a truly modern conception of the enculturating formation of the human "subject" (self, agent, person) begins to dawn in a way that still fits contemporary intuitions. And yet, a very large swath of twentieth-century philosophy actually opposes the adoption of the defining themes of historicity and enculturation, which, beginning approximately with Hegel, are closely fitted to every philosophically viable account of the human.

You realize that the speculative theme I am pursuing has been battered, throughout the history of philosophy, from the vantage of at least two profoundly opposed strategies of analysis, both of which are wedded to a changeless order: one favors appropriating the divine, or what seems close to the divine, in our earthly world: what belongs to Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle, the medieval world, Kant and the post-Kantians, and, more recently, thinkers as diverse as Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas, and some of the British Idealists; the other prefers description and explanation in terms restricted to the inanimate physical world: what belongs to the reductive and eliminative convictions of the unity of science program, positivism, the radical forms of neo-Darwinism, computationalism, and other manifestations of what may not unfairly be called scientism.⁸

The first is persuaded that the human cannot be defined in terms restricted to the natural world; the other, that an adequate definition can be rendered in terms sufficient for the entire inanimate and subhuman world – so that, one way or another, language, culture, history, agency, creativity and responsibility are rightly seen to be, in principle, no more than complexifications of basic states and processes that need no conceptual supplementation (or at least no irreducible supplementation) drawn from the cultural world itself.

Both strategies fail, in the plain sense that the human is entirely natural, as natural (or naturalistic) as anything we might otherwise specify; and yet, in being natural, the human is also *sui generis*, uniquely competent in ways that cannot be conceptually captured by categories drawn from anything less (or more) than what the distinctive processes of history and culture immediately display. That is what the Greeks and Kant lacked or largely lacked, although, of course, they

were able to refer to (but not to analyze) what *was uniquely human in a naturalistic but sui generis way*. If you think of natural language as the exemplar of the cultural, you see the problem at once.

II

Let me change direction here. I don't really believe Plato ever championed the doctrine of the Forms. He was not, in my opinion, a closet Eleatic or Parmenidean – or a Platonist – of any kind. On the contrary, his best work, which I associate with the Socratic *elenchus*, shows very clearly that he was fully aware – was perhaps worried, puzzled, enchanted all at once by the fact – that the “Socratic” inquiries, paradigmatically addressed to the definition of the virtues, proceeded in a fluent way without relying on strict invariances or necessities of any substantive kind and (more pointedly) without a clear definition of the actual origin of its elenctic fluency. The early dialogues did their work, apparently, without ever achieving their appointed purpose or explaining the reason for their failure. I take Plato's continually testing and retesting the powers of the *elenchus* to be a sign of his interest in the possibility of abandoning the Parmenidean constraint altogether (if he could); but it's the classical world itself, of course, that made a breakthrough impossible.

The Forms are never featured in the early dialogues; and when they begin to appear – at first, as one says, under the mode of absence, in fact even more strikingly in the *Statesman* than in the *Republic* – they are perfunctorily dismissed in a burlesque of the elenctic process itself. In the *Statesman* (a dialogue never easily placed), Plato pointedly returns to the *elenchus*, once it is explicitly conceded that we don't know the Forms at all – though we admit we must decide (there's the point) on a rational way to rule the featherless bipeds we know ourselves to be! Hence, Plato reverses or replaces the inquiry begun in the *Republic*: he assigns the instructor's role to an Eleatic Stranger, under the terms of an expressly diminished *elenchus*, though Socrates is present throughout the discourse. This way of reading the *Statesman* goes completely contrary to Gregory Vlastos's influential ordering of the Dialogues.⁹ But it makes perfect sense.

Plato, I suggest, returns repeatedly to test the mettle of Socrates's subversive practice, which is itself a daring transformation of the original Parmenidean *elenchus*. It seems he cannot discharge the Greek longing for invariance, but he obviously sees that invariance is neither required nor accessible in a fruitful discussion of the moral/political virtues. Still, Socrates never really succeeds in defining any virtues. If only Plato had had Hegel's conceptual resources, say, regarding the *sittlich* nature of the virtues themselves – in effect, a full conception of what a culture actually is – he might have penetrated to the heart of his own fascination with those ordinary modes of discourse that begin to yield a grasp of valid norms and encultured competences, without invoking any changeless order whatsoever. *That* I take to be the convergent meaning of Plato's perseveration and Hegel's conceptual breakthrough. Both depend – the first, uncomprehendingly, the second, with stunning clarity – on a conceptual strategy that draws on the pre-philosophical fluencies of ordinary practical life. Hegel seizes the advantage; but Plato seems forever baffled. Both test the import of abandoning “Parmenidean” fixity – whatever Parmenides's true intentions may have been.

Plato's scruple leads him to an impasse, which he reenacts again and again without apparent comprehension. But he surely senses that the “secret” of the human world, which eluded Western philosophy for more than two thousand years, must lie, somehow, in the elenctic process itself or in what makes the process productive at all. Plato *has* an inkling of its exemplary importance, but he has no idea of what he's found. So he clings somewhat disfunctionally to the remnants of Parmenidean fixity. Hegel, of course, invents a dialectical model of a conversational critique bridging opposed (so-called “contradictory”) tendencies within, or between, the salient options of historical life. He appears to resolve the Platonic impasse by an evolving series of transformative reconciliations (within the flux of history) that preserve as well as make possible the normative claims of the contending customs and traditions that confront us.

Hegel accepts the initial validity of the norms of *sittlich* life; he therefore has no need for invariances of any substantive sort or for any changeless ground of normative validity. He finds the elenctic

mechanism already in play in the human reconstruction of human history. There's the grand solution that eluded Plato, the breakthrough of the most daringly modern of all modern conceptions: in a word, the sufficiency of *sittlich* order as a complete replacement for the changeless world of the Forms or of universals (or transcendental fixities).

At times, Hegel seems besotted with his own device. He invents his "discovery" of the rational self-understanding of the whole of endless history: it is, at its best, a heuristic instrument of the supplest possibilities; at its worst, it's the march of God in the world. (Hegel may well have faltered at times in understanding the limits of his own discovery.) But *we* need not pretend to grasp Napoleon's or Alexander's "world-historical role," as Hegel claims to do, in order to appreciate the novel advantage of his conception of history. Both the Socratic *elenchus* and Hegel's dialectic must be fitted, *in* evolving time, in essentially the same way, to emerging history. Plato senses the goal but never masters the process. Hegel masters both but loses something of the reflexive sense of the human limitation of just such an understanding.

The briefest overview of the continual near-chaos of the actual emergence of the modern state – for instance, according to something not unlike Michael Oakshott's well-known and plausible summary¹⁰ – would soon persuade you of the completely contrived nature of Hegel's picture of the entire course of history. Hegel confronts us with the profoundest contingencies as if they were all the ineluctable necessities of Reason. Doubtless, he knew the difference: otherwise, his innovation would make no sense.

He knew he was transforming Kant's entire vision in a radical way – by historicizing it, by reading Kant's system as less than necessary. He knew he was completing Plato's elenctic dream. But he had no patience with the piecemeal scatter of a merely human understanding of history. No more did Jean-Paul Sartre, more modestly of course – as Foucault complains.¹¹ Hegel relies, as does Plato, on the entrenched stabilities of societal life. But, viewing them in terms of the distinctive explanatory structures of cultural history, he takes them at once to provide a ground for normative validation as

well; whereas Plato, viewing social practice as mere convention and contingency, never finds a sufficiently strong reason to replace the Forms by human practices as such. Plato never realizes that what is provisionally normative in our practices is not merely discernible but actually part of the formative forces that determine the very mode of being of human beings. Plato felt but never formulated the nerve of a *sittlich* form of reflection on normative and practical matters. Hegel is the first to master that conception under historicity, though he is also drawn too far by its enchanting possibilities.

In any event, I view the *elenchus* and the dialectic as two closely related strategies of inquiry that are: (a) presuppositionless, (b) *sittlich*, (c) free of Parmenidean infection of any kind, (d) lacking any formal or criterial method, (e) cast as forms of discursive reason, (f) inherently incapable of claiming or validating any uniquely correct analysis of whatever sector of the world we choose to examine, (g) committed only to what, as a practical matter, is adequate to our salient interests from time to time – or committed in such a way that theoretical inquiry is seen to be dependent on, or derivative from, or internal to, our practices of discursive inquiry, (h) applied to what is intrinsically interpretable without end,

(i) unable to discover in any simple or direct way the objective structures of the independent world, (j) hence, applied to what is culturally constituted or constructed relative to our evolving experience of the world, (k) applied to what is local, contexted, not strictly universalizable, validated in *sittlich* ways, (l) historicized and known to be such, and (m) insuperably phenomenological, that is, grounded in, and restricted to, our encultured (our reportable) experience of the world.

All this counts as a summary of the sense in which I view Plato's use of the *elenchus* (more in promise than in fact) and Hegel's dialectic (viewed as more tentative, more plural, more provisional, more contested at every turn, more discontinuous too, than Hegel may at times have supposed), as bearing in a decisive way on the definition of what it is to be a human being, or what counts as the human world.

If the tally holds, then two important lessons may be drawn from

it without delay: one, that both the Greek and Kantian accounts have almost no philosophical grasp at all of the human or cultural world as such; the other, that the cultural world, however embedded in physical nature and (for that reason) not adequately described or explained in physicalist terms alone, has no fixed structures of its own, is subject to the flux of history at every point of interest, and yet confronts us (contrary to Plato's worry) with all of its evolving, perfectly legible stabilities – that is, with the regularities of *sittlich* practice. Both Plato and Kant retreat to the safety of proposed invariances: Plato, possibly less tendentiously than Kant, since Kant requires fixity in order to secure his conception of the closed system of the first *Critique*, whereas, paradoxically, Plato sees no way at all to save the *elenchus* he assigns to Socrates. There's the abiding failure of the first two thousand years of Western philosophy. Bear that in mind, please. For the saving resource is the conception of historied culture – which surely generates the principal part of any valid moral theory or valid theory of the arts. (Very probably, also, any valid theory of science.)

III

Before I press any part of my own answer to the “secret” of the human (a perfectly open secret by this time), let me add to our elenctic company a third voice closer to our own than either Plato's or Hegel's, that catches up the intuitive directness of the first (without Eleatic temptations) and yields to the historicizing effect of the second (without properly acknowledging the explicit role of history). This third voice illuminates, obliquely again, certain inherent limitations in the “method” of cultural analysis, which counts as little more than an improvisational “meander” shared by the apt members of a particular culture in a way that entrenches (consensually but not criterially) the collective understanding of the world they share.

In this way, they become aware of the *determinable* – never fixedly *determinate* – *sittlich* ground on which all their inquiries and commitments ultimately depend: especially what, by various strategies (elenctic, dialectical, now meandering), prove to be legible and sup-

portable in the way of diversity, extension to new cases, correction, transformation, opposition, sheer scatter, *and* normative standing. Sophocles's *Antigone* offers an elenctic example at least as telling as the Socratic practice, perhaps even closer to an understanding of cultural history than the Dialogues could claim, since, in the play, one and the same society acknowledges the valid but contingently competing priorities of throne and family.¹² *Antigone* may be the clearest specimen text we have, against the backdrop of which Socrates and Hegel may be seen to subscribe to the same conceptual resources. For, without an incipient sense of history, the central conflict would have had to be assigned to the cosmic order itself – a palpable scandal. At any rate, that is a judgment we find ourselves drawn to, viewed from a contemporary vantage.

Plato fails because he neither vindicates nor overthrows the Parmenidean dictum. Strictly speaking, the Socratic *elenchus* is not a method or a rule or an algorithm of any kind. It is only an informal practice that comes out of the fluencies of ordinary conversation. But Plato never seems to fathom (*or*, he grasps but cannot defend) the power and sufficiency of elenctic informality against the Parmenidean prejudice that defines rational rigor. That informality will help to define, in turn, precisely what “human being” means.

The same tolerance for transient *sittlich* opposition marks the nerve of Hegel's dialectic, though Hegel, of course, presents his account of history in much too high-blown a way. Hegel was obviously enchanted by the brilliant applications of his “method” to the whole of the *geistlich* world; but historicism could never have assigned his interpretive tales a principled advantage without actually cheating. Otherwise, he would have returned history to the changeless world itself – which would have made no sense! Any such bias would surely go contrary to Hegel's immense grasp of the contingency of cultural change.

Perhaps the theory of Forms began to seem as feasible to Plato as the rationality of *Geist* may have seemed to Hegel – incipiently in the *Meno* (say), where the dialectical play of the *elenchus* begins to evolve in a new direction. But Plato surely senses the distinctive power of culturally formed debate, though he cannot see how to free the force

of the *elenchus* from the fixities of Parmenides's strategy. He obviously considers yielding. And yet, as in the *Republic* and the *Statesman*, he never betrays the insuperable contingencies of the cultural world. That is his instinctive scruple. But what of Hegel?

For the moment, I suggest that, within the tale I'm telling, Hegel's dialectic is, effectively, the historicizing analogue of the Socratic *elenchus*, productively applied to the entire *geistlich* world. Plato has no *geistlich* categories, though he knows the human world as well as anyone. In that same sense, Kant plays a sort of Eleatic role in Hegel's work rather like the role Parmenides plays in Plato's; and both Plato and Hegel share a distinct sense (less than actualized in the one, more than fully formed in the other) of how, through its *sui generis* resources, we may analyze the process of self-understanding in the cultural world. In fact, there's a first-rate Kantian who reinterprets Kant's "fixities" along the lines of Hegel's historicizing reform, namely, Ernst Cassirer, who applies the strategy in nearly every sector of scientific and philosophical work,¹³ replacing transcendental invariances with provisional (but seemingly fundamental) "symbolic forms"; so that we begin to see how an analogous elenctic reading of the Forms might have been available to Plato.

Here, then, is the gist of the argument thus far, cast in a more familiar light. The ancient quarrel – the quarrel between *physis* and *nomos* – has almost nothing to do with solving the puzzle the *elenchus* poses. It leads rather to stalemate, as the Dialogues confirm. More than that, the disjunction it offers actually precludes any fresh option that might have construed the relation between those notions differently. The fact is, the issue before us has little to do with specific preferences among the virtues or man-made laws or norms: it concerns rather the right definition of the human as such – at a deeper level of reflection that must infect all of our human undertakings. Once you see this, you see the promise of the modern conjecture that the human is an artifact of cultural history. That is precisely what the *physis/nomos* contest never broaches – in effect, actually disallows.¹⁴ Because, of course, the contrast is never brought to bear on a fully developed analysis of the human condition.

To this expanding conjecture, I now add, as a third exemplar, the

voice of the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* and related texts. Plato, as the author of the Socratic *elenchus*, confirms the stalemate the Eleatic constraint imposes on the resolution of our puzzle regarding the practical problem of choosing a right form of ethical discipline and political self-rule. It's as if Plato realized we cannot abandon these normative concerns *if* we are to be the human beings that we are; and yet, the Parmenidean dictum proves completely powerless – in fact, unsuitable – in helping us find our way. We need another insight altogether. Plato *exhausts* the possibilities of the Socratic practice. The *elenchus* seems to have a grip on resolving normative disputes that (as far as Plato is concerned) remains completely unexplained, since it secures (or might secure) its objective without ever invoking the canonical Forms. Plato, we must suppose, grasped the paradox, but had no idea of what to make of it.

Hegel offers an incomparably richer sense of how to apply the categories of cultural life to cultural life itself – to grasp what Plato misses: that is, the fact that the objectivity and validity of every such application is *reflexive* and culturally constructed, at once empowered and constrained by the historicized conditions that account for the construction of the “human” as well. Plato loses the very possibility of sharing anything akin to Hegel's insight – which, in its own age, goes well beyond the Kantian and Fichtean lessons – wherever Plato invokes the myth of recollection. That alone, I would say, is a frank admission of failure. Recollecting, of course, is also, in its own way, a myth of self-understanding – except that, as in Noam Chomsky's “Platonism,” the self that we finally fathom (if we do) is never the familiar creature of historically formed habit and practice – ourselves!

In the Dialogues, the myth of recollection is simply a philosophical wave of the hand – capitulation to Eleatic fixities. In Chomsky, it has proved to be the admission of a failed (perhaps impossible) analysis and the return of the still-opaque encultured world to the distant visions of contemporary scientism.¹⁵ For what Plato, Kant, and contemporary scientisms lack is, precisely, Hegel's phenomenology of culture – that is, what moral theory and the theory of art cannot afford to be deprived of.

None of this entails, for Hegel, the recovery of the changeless or the necessary. Hegel, I would say, is the first philosophical master to map a comprehensive account of our understanding of human culture and ourselves along historicized lines. Hegel's dialectical resolution of evolving, *geistlich* "contradictions" provides a sort of abstract template (an *elenchus* of sorts) for identifying the free-wheeling interpretive possibilities that cultural history requires. Hegel's interpretive practice is a better and more adequate instantiation of any would-be mode of self-examination than the Socratic *elenchus*; although, by virtue of the tally given a moment ago, I treat Plato and Hegel as fellow investigators of the *sui generis* mode of human being.

Only when we have such a tally firmly in mind can we see what Plato was attempting to capture. Plato confirms the inherent limitations of classical thought, which he sometimes seems on the verge of breaching. Certainly, the *Theaetetus* introduces, within the Eleatic milieu, the possibility of analyzing and explaining the nature of our world in terms that eschew every form of invariance. But the analysis founders on too easy a refutation of Protagoras: Plato is forced back to the Eleatic constraint.

Hegel masters in a particularly commanding way the main themes of the advance required; although he also encumbers his study of the essential categories in a way that makes it difficult to free his innovations from the peculiar architecture of his own huge vision (which betrays at times a taste for the invariant). Our world is admittedly "Hegelian," because we can hardly claim to recognize the human condition if we refuse the fine-grained distinctions of historicity and enculturation. But contemporary philosophy would never agree to be governed by Hegel's extravagances. Hegel uniquely grasps the great advance of Kant's transcendentalism over Plato's Eleatic tendencies; but then he must have seen the dangerous temptation of his own practice. Hegel never brought the historicized dialectic of *sittlich* conflict back to the simplicities of the Socratic *elenchus*. He was drawn too deeply in the direction of *geistlich* reflection.

Wittgenstein is particularly instructive here – remarkably spare in the best sense. Because, by an unexpected turn of events, his self-trained intuitions recover important strands of the Hegelian concep-

tion of cultural life, without addressing history at all and without (it seems) an actual acquaintance with Hegel's texts – *and*, indeed, against his own mentor's (Bertrand Russell's) deliberate effort to erase all evidence of "Hegelianism" from British philosophy! Certainly, Wittgenstein shows no disposition at all to follow a "*geistlich*" logic, though his analysis of language is surely *sittlich*.

Wittgenstein's notions of *Lebensform* and *Sprachspiel* seem to have developed partly in tandem with his continuing attention to the *Tractatus* (say, from 1929 to his revisions of the text).¹⁶ But a good part of the motivation for these "later" conceptions has more than a little to do with the paradoxes and limitations of the *Tractatus* itself – and with what Wittgenstein took to be the misguided labors of the academic philosophy that actually spawned his earlier effort. The fact is, Wittgenstein's "method" in the *Investigations* was never a method at all: it was a gifted, even brilliant, "meander" (a kind of *elenchus*, if you please) that worked its spell very quietly – plausibly, transiently, always in surprisingly effective and untried ways, always informally, without the use of any academic armature, and never in search of any fixed structures of thought or world or *telos*. Russell and Frege may have been poor substitutes for Parmenides, but they proved to be Wittgenstein's philosophical demons.

All seems to be in flux for Wittgenstein,¹⁷ within the human *Lebensform*: the conceptual concatenations he identifies in his surefooted way plainly follow no pre-appointed path. Indeed, many seem as much invented as discovered. What he offers is peculiarly congenial to practical life: we find ourselves heartened by the discursive resources of the unanticipated meander he leads us through. Put another way, Wittgenstein never finds fixed structures in our language games, though he remains confident that we can find our way easily enough to the "bedrock" of our form of life: we are supported by the human pace of the variable rate of change among our habituated practices. There is no settled conceptual path that leads from one example to another. Curiously, the same is true of Hegel's grander dialectic, though, of course, Wittgenstein's "meander" is sparer in the way of disturbing our cultural ecology!

Our complicity, our validation in effect of what Wittgenstein of-

fers, is essential here, because, of course, we are as “well informed” as he, being apt speakers of the language. (Construe all this as a sign of a more spontaneous *elenchus* to replace the uncertain Socratic original, now informed by its own reflections on our *sittlich* ways without reference at all to Hegelian convictions.) We are made agreeably aware that we simply never noticed certain discursive linkages in thought and action, which Wittgenstein brings to our attention, which often help clarify otherwise intractable academic puzzles, and which define unexpected conceptual alignments that promise to extend their application (without apparent artifice) in ways we sense will doubtless keep us from many a philosophical blunder.

We begin to grasp the *plural* possibilities of our habits of thought and action and, as a consequence, a fresh sense of the adequate stabilities of our pre-philosophical discourse – a contingently evolving culture that, reciprocally, spawns and responds to Wittgenstein’s own meander. We realize that we’ve been relieved of the least Parmenidean twinge! We need only replace an outmoded conceptual fixity with the discursive fluencies of encultured self-discovery. The key to recovering Socrates lies through Hegel – a Hegel shorn of his own excesses, as by way of the critique offered by figures like Marx, Nietzsche, Dilthey, even Dewey and Heidegger, that brings us back to the *sittlich* world Plato and the Sophists explore in their tantalizingly innocent way.

In this sense, Wittgenstein is himself an artifact of the “cunning of Reason.” What I mean is: we are never sure – in fact, we are inclined to doubt – that what Wittgenstein displays *are* actual structures he’s discovered in our language or associated practices of thought. What he shows us rather is that our “form of life” builds on, supports, incorporates and abandons by pieces, the transient, potentially useful but not altogether ephemeral concatenations of the kind he tracks. He shows us by unexpected example the *determinable* possibilities of having mastered our cultural resources, *not just any determinate structures in any parts of that culture*. There seem to be no fixed structures at all. He shows us by his own assurance how far we might go in envisioning the whole of our “everyday” world as a tolerated flux of graded stabilities that have no need of fixity! We rely on our capacity

for *sittlich* consensus or regularity. Nevertheless, in admitting that, we are not bound to concede that there's no use in formulating different theories – even throwaway and transient theories – that begin to mark the *sui generis* order of our world.

Remember: the cultural world is determinable but not determinate. That may be the principal lesson of the *Investigations*. There are structures of thought and speech to be drawn from our *sittlich* practice, but they are as much “constructed” as “found,” more determinable than simply determinate, not ephemeral but contingent, tolerable within the society to which we belong but never fixed for or by its members, never convincingly cast as a closed system. Wittgenstein's improvisations provide the key to how closed theories begin to take form. They even show us how the grandest philosophical visions tend to become too fixed, too abstract, too intolerant of change – they show how they stray too far from the bedrock of societal practices – too far to be relied on without risk. Wittgenstein is never tempted in this way. Read in this spirit, Wittgenstein's innovation deepens the import of recovering the Socratic and Hegelian strategies. He is closer to Socrates than to Hegel, but he remains “Hegelian” nevertheless, though in the leanest possible way. *That* I take to be as close as we can possibly come to an indispensable philosophical discovery about the right way to view morality and the arts and even the sciences. Because, of course, it's no more than a corrective – a “therapeutic” – warning, rather than a rule or foundational doctrine. Wittgenstein shows us that our practices are entirely reliable though they are not strictly determinate. There's the profound puzzle that haunts our every attempt to link the analysis of physical nature and human culture indissolubly.

Of course, Wittgenstein is hardly an adequate guide in a “post-Hegelian” world. But it is Wittgenstein, more than anyone else in the recent Eurocentric world, who shows us how to simplify in the most stripped-down way the superfluous complexity of Hegel's necessary innovation – centered now in terms of our *lebensformlich* “second nature.” In short, Wittgenstein provides what amounts to a version of the Socratic *elenchus* enriched by a “Hegelian” transformation and then brought back, more comprehendingly, to its original spontaneity.

Wittgenstein intuitively hit on the tactic of *Entfremdung* amid what was completely familiar to his audience: the fluxive world of ordinary language and ordinary social habits and activities, viewed (reflexively) as the public sharing of a contingent cultural practice within whose terms we rightly count on answering all our quotidian philosophical questions about the meaning of what is said and done, our choice of norms in practical and theoretical matters, the continuing coherence of our engagement in a changing world, and what it is to be a human being. Wittgenstein almost never admits the play of history or historicity. And yet, in perfecting what I am calling his philosophical meander, in the untendentious way he does, he fashions a kind of moderate *elenchus* under an attenuated “Hegelian” sense of the *sittlich* and the *geistlich*.

In all its forms, the *elenchus* is the resource *par excellence* of conceptual improvisation, cast as discovery, within and about the “everyday” world. It can always be overridden for cause, but it cannot be bypassed or ignored. It fixes the sense in which what is “given,” as by a kind of *sittlich* phenomenology, cannot be derived from any deeper facultative competence; on the contrary, it affirms that all precision and exactitude derive, consensually, from the very stability of our practical world. (That is precisely what allows us to outflank the Eleatic scruple.) For example, we may approach, constructively, by deliberate testing, the palpably limited tolerance of altering or extending our linguistic and habitual practices by graded and sequential negations. Wittgenstein often works in just this way, though “uncomprehendingly,” that is, without an explicit grasp of the Hegelian theme of his entire elenctic meander. Here, for instance, is one of its best-known characterizations:

“So, you are saying [Wittgenstein offers in the spirit of his “method”] that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?” – It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life [*Lebensform*].¹⁸

I cannot see how this could exceed the cultural flux that eluded Plato.

Wittgenstein is, then, a bit like the author of the Socratic *elenchus*: he is not entirely aware, it seems, of the full range of the *sui generis* contingencies of cultural life. Certainly, his characteristic specimens are of a narrower gauge than those of the large world Hegel addresses – or, that the more radical post-Hegelians might advance along the lines of historicity and the open logic of interpretation. But what is most compelling in Wittgenstein is the sheer simplicity and intuitive force of his “method”: it is as open to counterinstance as it could possibly be, even against his own occasional “metaphysical” preferences. Plato, you recall, was probably more conservative than the *elenchus* required and Hegel was probably more daring and ambitious than the dialectic could actually endorse. We need these diverse practitioners – and more – for it is hard to deny, even now, that we are only at the beginning of a proper inquiry into the human.

IV

Very pretty, you say, but you’ve missed the mark. What, then, *is* the human? Let me venture a few clues in accord with my account of the *elenchus*. The human is artifactual; socially constituted; historicized; enlanguaged and encultured; “second-natured” (I would say); real only within some culture’s collective life; embodied through the cultural transformation of the infant members of *Homo sapiens; sui generis*; emergent through mastering a first language and whatever aptitudes such mastery makes possible; indissolubly hybrid, uniting biological and cultural processes and powers; capable therefore of hybrid acts or “utterances” (speaking, making, doing, creating) incarnate in the *materiae* of any part of physical nature; self-transforming through its second-natured powers; empowered and constrained by the collective history it shares with similarly emergent creatures; capable, thus, of functioning as a self, a person, a subject, an agent, within an aggregate of similarly formed selves, that is, free and responsible, capable of causally effective (incarnate) initiatives, capable of self-reference, of reporting its inner thoughts and experience in a

public way, of understanding the utterances and acts of similarly endowed selves; inherently interpretable and subject to change through being interpreted; not a natural-kind entity but a history, or an entity that has a history rather than a nature, or a nature that is no more than a second-natured history. All in all, a unique sort of being, you must admit, but an individuated being nevertheless: emergent in part by natural (biological) means and in part by cultural (artificial) transformation – possibly, then, a conceptual scandal or even the living refutation of many a convention of canonical philosophy. Is that enough?¹⁹ Perhaps not quite.

We do not understand ourselves well enough – philosophically – and I cannot hope to put my conception in a more compendious way, given the kind of narrative I’ve been airing. It would require an entirely new beginning, which may strike you, of course, as a strange complaint. But I can indeed collect some useful questions here, linked to the tally just offered and keyed to what I’ve been suggesting about elenctic thinking – which may indeed now serve as a place marker for a stronger analysis. The single most important question that must be settled concerns whether “human being” – the mode of being of “human beings” (if you don’t mind this way of speaking) – is itself, in belonging to the natural world, a “natural-kind” distinction or something else. There’s an equivocation there and a puzzle to be resolved.

Heidegger, let me remind you, pointedly affirms that human beings, the plural manifestations of the “human *Dasein*,” exist. They appear to be the only beings that do exist (in Heidegger’s sense); mere “things” (of whatever complexity) do not.²⁰ Heidegger means by this that *Dasein* is *not* a part of nature, for to be entirely a part of nature is, it seems, to be a mere “thing.” For my part, what Heidegger says here cannot persuade us *if he* cannot, or will not, specify some feature or other of being human that could never, without paradox or incoherence or inconsistency, be admitted to be distinct or unique when compared to all else that is “found in nature” – while remaining “natural” itself, subject in every respect to the forces of the natural world. I daresay Heidegger never meets the challenge. Nor, within my reading, does anyone else who follows a similar in-

tuition.²¹ Heidegger flirts with the notion that *Dasein* is a kind of ontological “presence” that is not a countable entity at all. But that cannot but be a false lead if he (or we) intend(s) to speak of *Dasein*’s ever acting in its own right – doing or making anything in an intentionally effective way. All speech, art, responsible commitment would have to be abandoned.²²

I myself take persons or selves to emerge from biological nature – naturally but not by biological means alone, hence not in the way of natural-kind change. The equivocation is resolved by admitting *sui generis* cultural processes within the bounds of nature.²³

I concede that “*Homo sapiens*” is a natural-kind kind; but I hold that (human) selves or persons or subjects are not, though they “exist” entirely in the natural world. I mean, by this, that “language,” “history,” “culture,” “art,” and similar distinctions are not “natural-kind” distinctions of any kind – which is to say, they are not reducible in natural-kind terms. Persons are not the mere members of any biological species, though, in our earthly world, there seem to be no other kinds of persons (unless we admit fictions: legal persons, corporations for instance, that are not human in the precise sense that qualifies the members of *Homo sapiens*). If I understand him rightly, Heidegger may be forced to admit that *Homo sapiens* isn’t “human” or that the strictly numbered members of that species do not exist; or that, in existing, *Dasein* manifests a mode of being beyond all biology and nature. I don’t understand this line of thinking, unless it’s just an expression of extravagant respect. In my opinion, this signifies that Parmenides and Kant and Husserl and Heidegger and Levinas may at times be practicing philosophy beyond the pale; and, if selected extravagances on the part of Plato and Aristotle and Aquinas and Schelling must be read literally, then they need not apply either.

No, what I offer in the way of a direct challenge to any theory of what it is to be a human being is this: that all the available evidence points to the fact that the members of *Homo sapiens* are (shall we say) “transformed” into selves or persons in the process of acquiring a natural language and the culturally formed aptitudes that that makes possible. *Homo sapiens* harbors, as such, no selves, in the plain

sense that languageless creatures, including wild children, are incapable of self-reference and reporting their inner mental states; *and* that *that* extraordinary ability, unmatched anywhere else in nature, fully justifies our speaking, uniquely, of selves as “second-natured” hybrids – “ontological” transforms, if you don’t mind. By this, I mean no more than that the “emergence” of human selves obtains in a perfectly natural way – is a *sui generis* process, not at all like mere biological evolution or growth. The emergence of selves is, rather, an “artifactual” process, in that it occurs only through acquiring a natural language and a natural culture – where language, having evolved at least incipiently from sublinguistic skills, cannot then be explained in any merely biological or other natural-kind terms.²⁴ There is no algorithm, for instance, that accounts for the emergence of language in the way in which self-replicating proteins are said to have emerged for the first time.²⁵ Furthermore, what holds for embodied second-natured selves holds (for logically trivial but philosophically momentous reasons) for all the incarnate utterances and acts and creations of such selves. Hence, if selves are *sui generis*, so are the arts and the sciences and language and history – as well as the descriptive, interpretive, explanatory, and logical resources that we judge to be required in each domain.

It’s for these reasons that I characterize a human self as a *hybrid* creature whose native biological gifts are startlingly transformed through a human infant’s internalizing the ability to speak the language of its home society. In that sense, a self is itself a cultural artifact. But to say only that is to be prepared to explain in sufficient detail the natural (not natural-kind) process of cultural emergence (enculturation, the “second-naturing” of *Homo sapiens*). I see no difficulty there – no more than a familiar sort of empirical ignorance. Furthermore, “hybrid” is meant to signify our successfully obviating both dualism and reductionism with regard to selves and their characteristic forms of “utterance.” It is, in short, the simplest, perhaps the only, viable alternative we have. Even a confirmed neo-Darwinian like Richard Dawkins admits he sees no way of explaining cultural transmission in terms of genetic processes or of any variant of environing physical conditions.²⁶

There are, of course, endlessly many questions that would need to be answered if the thesis of the hybrid being (or nature) of human being were adopted. But there is no *a priori* barrier against its general coherence or the coherence of cognate solutions applied to problems in the theory of science or mind or language or art or morality. I have addressed elsewhere a good many of these smaller questions and I see no crippling paradox in the offing. I concede that adopting this single theorem requires altering in considerable depth the entire canonical picture of nature and science. But that's hardly a reason for opposing such a change.

Let me, therefore, add another consideration from another quarter – touched on earlier. I am persuaded that the constructivist solution to the paradoxes of early modern philosophy – the paradoxes of Kant's magnificent innovation as well, which reached its strongest and most original form (against Kant, of course) in Hegel's historicism – is essentially the same achievement as that of explicating the concepts of historicity and enculturation. Surely, the first counts as one of the most decisive advances in the whole of the history of Western philosophy; the second counts as the single most important modern contribution to philosophy's conceptual resources and, as a result, to its most radical reinterpretation of the general problem of human knowledge and self-understanding: the key to the elenctic puzzle itself. But if that is so, then, even the natural sciences are *constructive posits* of, and within, the constituting forces of history and enculturation: all this, in spite of the alleged fact (the canonical view) that the natural sciences need never, in their descriptive and explanatory work, invoke the *sui generis* categories alleged to be essential to our understanding of the cultural world. So the definition of the human profoundly affects the reception of the familiar canons of physical science.

On the admission of cultural emergence, both vocabularies (that of the physical sciences and that of cultural studies) take form *within* (and only within) the terms of a constructive realism (drawn as economically as possible from Kant's and Hegel's analyses). If so, then we cannot defend *any* principled disjunction between the natural and the human sciences, and every science will be a human science: the vocabulary of the physical sciences will then be read as

an economy imposed on a more inclusive inquiry, *not* as an independent idiom independently achieved or validated. Indeed, I take this to be the neglected lesson of Thomas Kuhn's ill-fated *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.²⁷ You begin to see, therefore, just how and why the elenctic process (in any of its forms) is bound to color the definition of the human.

The lesson of the *elenchus* is still too elliptical as it stands. Let me put it another way. Parmenides, who originates its dialectical economy, does so in the name of his supposed necessities of thought and of the truth about Being. Plato's brilliant stroke lies in his converting the original strategy into the Socratic *elenchus*: which is to say, first, that the *elenchus* is applied (by Socrates) only to the changing world, never to "what is" in Parmenides's sense; second, that its argumentative resources are confined to *sittlich* beliefs, whether in logic or method or experience or convention; third, that it centers on questions of normative conduct and character, just those that are likely to yield (we may suppose) to a society's accumulated wisdom; and, fourth, that whatever success it achieves is never more than consensual, persuasive, provisional, endlessly open to revision and diverse conviction and application, grounded in whatever may be given in the practical life of a viable society. I take that to be the deeper meaning of Socrates's "ignorance" – as pertinent a lesson under the changed circumstances of modern thought as it ever was in its original setting. That's to say: all our powers of cognition and intelligence are, however critically refined, finally artifacts of cultural history and consensual tolerance. (Socrates knows he has no knowledge, because he knows he has no knowledge of the Forms!)

Modern philosophy since Hegel (as distinct from Kant and Fichte) transformed in a new way (but never abandoned) the question regarding what we should understand as the grounds of knowing in the human fashion. Hegel may rightly be thought to have anticipated Wittgenstein in holding that the ground of knowledge is not a "proposition" (or "opinion") of any kind, but a "form of life."²⁸ Hence, knowledge no longer requires foundations or a source of certainty; it requires just what moral and political objectivity require, namely, a constructive grounding in historical life itself. That is pre-

cisely what the Greeks could never penetrate, but also what Plato (to his credit) saves in the Socratic *elenchus*.

It would be a mistake to infer from all this, however, that the post-Hegelian world rejects the possibility of knowledge. Hardly! Its entire purpose is to outflank skepticism. It shows, rather, that human knowledge and understanding must take a constructivist turn if they are ever to escape the Cartesian (and Parmenidean) paradoxes. It is in just this sense that, through the “cunning of reason,” Hegel’s dialectic has become the perfect clue to the larger lesson of the Socratic *elenchus* – which, of course, Plato could not have fathomed.

If you concede this lesson, you see the sense in which to admit the role of enculturation in the “construction” of the human self is tantamount to admitting the inescapability of a constructive and historicized realism; that to admit that is to abandon every form of fixity and privilege in, say, science and morality; *and* to admit all *that* is to admit that we have lost the *a priori* right to oppose the compatibility of historicism and/or relativism and a constructive realism – if, that is, it should prove true, independently, that either option of the first pair *was* coherent and viable in its own right.

There’s no need to apply these radical options everywhere or everywhere at once: it’s more reasonable to invoke them wherever they fit best. But once we gain the high ground of the post-Hegelian world, we can afford to let Plato’s philosophical stone roll down its hill for the last time. For, to be able to bring relativism and historicism within the pale of knowledge *is* to have superseded the Parmenidean constraint once and for all! In that sense, even Wittgenstein’s meander may be viewed in a different light. We may ultimately have no other resource than elenctic reason. I think that’s true. But the *elenchus* runs much deeper than we ever supposed. For example – though it counts as more than a mere example – the *elenchus* introduces an inherent and insurmountable logical informality and provisional diversity that must color every dream of extensional rigor and determinacy of analysis that (up to the present time) has furnished the most admired moments of the whole of Western philosophy.

There remains a considerable gap in the argument nevertheless, a gap that must be filled: not so much in the way of what we might

wish to add as a fuller account of our elenctic powers, more in the way of explaining the conceptual relationship between agents capable of such powers (selves, ourselves) and the members of *Homo sapiens* from whom they somehow arise. In the modern world, any tenable answer would implicate some form of evolution or emergence that would avoid the defeated options of dualism and reductionism and therefore would need to admit formative processes ampler than the merely biological. As far as I know, the Greeks never sought to explain the relationship between selves and *Homo sapiens* in emergentist terms of any kind; they spoke primarily of education and maturation within the telic cycle of the natural creature, though they were attracted very early, of course, to the meaning of cosmic order, which they took human intelligence to resemble.

When Aristotle speaks of man as the “political animal,” he obviously treats the political as a fully biologized process, though biology is for him a much more generous category than it is for us. There’s the difficulty: the biological or natural is so expansive that it proves impossible to speculate in classical terms about the difference between “our” conception of biology and what we regard as cultural process. Ultimately, both *physis* and *nomos* are subsumed within the pale of nature; so that even our being governed by *nomos* (or convention) is, finally, read as being governed by nature. If you insist that the distinction between the two still preserves the distinction between “nature” and “culture,” you place yourself under an obligation to deliver an analysis of “custom” or “justice” (or language or art) that would support your claim. It can’t be done in Aristotle’s terms!

Furthermore, where Aristotle may have been nonplussed along related lines, where he needed a concept of reason (*nous*) adequate to his theory of knowledge, as in the *De Anima*, he simply invents out of whole cloth an ad hoc faculty, more divine than human, for which he never deigns to offer a biological clue – although it is true that he weaves the powers of *nous* (so conceived) together with the powers of biologized perception in an interesting way. Aristotle never regards his device as a sign of failure, although its obvious epistemological compromise would never pass muster within the precincts of Socrates’s *elenchus*.

This entire line of thinking anticipates the sense in which the theory of the fine arts is bound to match the theory of human being: Aristotle's *mimesis*, for instance, is the perfect counterpart of *nous*. Hence, if we accept the declension of the *elenchus* along the lines I've sketched, we begin to see the near-inevitability with which we must abandon necessity and fixity. We begin to view the human world as a hybrid and constructed world – and thereupon find it impossible to avoid exploring the distinction between the physical (or natural) world and the cultural world – even if, in a more radical setting, we choose to reclaim the whole of this new unity for nature once again. For, then, we will have done so only within the sparest limits we imagine we could ever imagine.

In fact, there is a very pretty rendering of this thesis cast by Marjorie Grene in evolutionary terms and a cognate idiom drawn from Helmuth Plessner's ingenious biology, that collects her own "basic intuition" – that is,

the principle of the *natural artificiality* of man. We become human [she says,] not just by being born *Homo sapiens*, but by relying on a complex network of artifacts: language and other symbolic systems, social conventions, tools in the context of their use – artifacts which are in a way extensions of ourselves, but which in turn we actualize in our personal lives. It is our nature to need the artificial, art in the broadest sense of that term, or, indeed, poetry in the broadest sense of that term: making and the made.²⁹

The breathtaking intuition behind this lovely finding, which Grene shares with Plessner, is that, much as with human birth itself, *Homo sapiens*, phylogenetically conceived, is already profoundly *incomplete* in a moral sense, already in "need" (Grene's term) of the forms of cultural transformation. "All" that is missing is the theory of art and cultural artifacts. But that, of course, *is* the whole of what we need. If we isolate the differences between the biological and the cultural and reinterpret Grene's intuition (if I may coopt her notion thus) in terms of an actual theory of the self, we would find it very natural to treat the self as hybrid and second-natured, along the lines already

sketched – and along additional lines that have still to be introduced (involving the arts particularly) – *and*, we would find (I daresay) the remarkable flexibility and power of the elenctic theme confirmed and vindicated.

Notes

- 1 Compare, for instance, Myles Burnyeat, “Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato’s *Theaetetus*,” *Philosophical Review*, LXXXV (1976); and Hilary Putnam, “Materialism and Relativism,” in *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).
- 2 See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977).
- 3 See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Macmillan, 1931), §32; and *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), Fifth Meditation.
- 4 On Aristotle’s biological tracts, see Allan Gotthelf and James G. Lennox (eds.) *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle’s Biology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
- 5 See John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- 6 See G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. I, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), pp. 56-61.
- 7 See Martha C. Nussbaum, “Flawed Crystals: James’s *The Golden Bowl* and Literature in Moral Philosophy,” in *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); and “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach,” in *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).
- 8 See Joseph Margolis, *The Unraveling of Scientism: American Philosophy at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).
- 9 See Gregory Vlastos, “The Socratic Elenchus: Method Is All,” in *Socratic Studies*, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- 10 See Michael Oakeshott, *Of Human Conduct* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).
- 11 See Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reasoning*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997-), particularly, I, Ch. 7; also, “Foucault Responds to Sartre,” in *Foucault Live (Interviews 1966-84)*, trans. John Johnston, ed. Sylvia Lorringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), cited by Flynn.

- 12 See Hegel's account of the *Antigone*, in *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, pp. 220–221.
- 13 See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, 3 vols., trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953–1957).
- 14 For a compendious account of the pertinent literature, see W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), Ch. 4.
- 15 See Noam Chomsky, *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and *The Unraveling of Scientism*, Ch. 1.
- 16 See Georg Henrik von Wright, *Wittgenstein* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).
- 17 For a sense of recent speculation about Wittgenstein's notion of the *Lebensform*, see Newton Garver, *This Complicated Form of Life: Essays on Wittgenstein* (Chicago: Open Court, 1994). There seem to be very few clues about what, precisely, Wittgenstein intended by the idea.
- 18 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), I, §241.
- 19 Contrast the view of Paul M. Churchland, *A Neurocomputational Perspective: The Nature of Mind and the Structure of Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), Ch. 1.
- 20 See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), §12; also, *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. John van Buren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).
- 21 See Frederick A. Olafson, *Naturalism and the Human Condition: Against Scientism* (London: Routledge, 2001).
- 22 Consider, for example, the strange turn (the *Kehre*) of Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism," trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, in Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 23 For a genuinely interesting speculation about the first emergence of life – and the unavoidability of transitional developments very different from the forms of life we know – see A. G. Cairns-Smith, *Genetic Takeover and the Mineral Origins of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
- 24 For a general sense of the argument, see my *Historied Thought, Constructed World: A Conceptual Primer for the Turn of the Millennium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
- 25 See Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Vantage, 1971).
- 26 See Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), and *The Extended Phenotype: The Long Reach of the Gene*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 27 See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, expanded ed. (Chicago: University Press, 1970), especially Section X.

- 28 See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, I, §§241, 481; cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), §110.
- 29 Marjorie Grene, "People and Other Animals," *The Understanding of Nature: Essays in the Philosophy of Biology* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1974), p. 358. The phrase "extensions of ourselves" catches up the best of Merleau-Ponty.

Same Old Pictures

Cinema, Repetition and Recreation

It should come as no surprise that Charles Baudelaire hated photography. Or at least, he denied all of its artistic pretensions. In his famous Salon review of 1859, he “loudly lamented the triumph of naturalist idolatry”, as Martin Jay so eloquently has put it. And he continues: “Of the vulgar masses’ desire for the perfect reproduction of nature, he [Baudelaire] wrote, ‘An avenging God has heard the prayers of this multitude. Daguerre was his messiah... It was not long before thousands of pairs of greedy eyes were glued to the peep-holes of the stereoscope, as though they were the sky-lights of the infinite.’”¹ This contemptuous quotation serves to illustrate a point that has later become central in the historical understanding not only of photography but just as much of the film medium – and exactly for the same reason. Generally, these media have been considered means of reproducing or simply *repeating* the image of reality. In consequence, photographic cinematic expression has been interpreted as being of little importance to the central task of the medium, namely to mediate by reproducing. Thus, historically it has often been taken for granted that neither aesthetical, nor technical aspects in this mediating process can contribute actively or productively to representation, which remains a mere mechanical repetition of a reality forever out of reach. But repetition as such, or more precisely the repetitive aspect of the medium, has also been commented upon and questioned in a number of films during the first century of cinema.

Akerman: Repetitive images

Belgian filmmaker Chantal Akerman, whose films provide forceful comments on repetition in relation to the film image, is among those who have been preoccupied by the theme. However, her focus lies less on the film image as “repetition” of reality than on the repetitive relation between images. Stanley Cavell has offered an original analysis of her breakthrough film *Jeanne Dielman* (1975), probably one of the most repetitive films in the history of cinema. To Cavell, the film “can be taken as a study, or materialization, of the self as a collection, in the particular form in which the one who is the subject of the collection is not free (or not moved?) to supply its narrative.”² In his comment on this reading, J M Bernstein observes that “Cavell’s cataloguing of moments in the first hour seeks to mimic the patient detachment of Akerman’s camera; the film, covering three days, each explicitly announced, runs three-and-a-half hours.” He also notes that Cavell “recounts how the film shows that on the next day the same routine events occur but slightly awry: a button is missing from her son’s shirt, she lets the potatoes burn, she can’t make her coffee taste right and has to remake it, and so on.”³ From hour to hour, Akerman patiently uncovers the process of dissolution, as Jeanne gradually loses control over her day, over her life. At the same time, her being-in-becoming is also gradually revealed. More and more, Jeanne seems to gather control over objects or fragments that together are more than sufficient to make up a life.

If the main point of the analysis is that the film is about the self as a collection, then it also suggests that this collection, though grounded in moments repeated, also carries about a change, and thus that mere repetition as such is not possible, but that there is always a slight alteration that makes a difference. As an example of this opening for a difference, Bernstein mentions Cavell’s detailed account of *Jeanne Dielman*, and particularly the conclusion concerning the main protagonist’s routines of opening and closing doors, of endlessly repeating the same gesture over and over again, but at the same time also of separating different cinematic spaces from each other. As Cavell unexpectedly states: “The spaces are kept as separate as those

in a cabinet of curiosities. (What would happen if they touched? A thought would be ignited.)”⁴

But also one of Akerman’s more recent films, *La Captive/The Captive* (2000), loosely adapted from Marcel Proust, may be interpreted as a study of the self as collected, through multiple repetitions and slight variations. It all starts under the sign of mechanical reproduction, with an amateur film sequence from a beach being projected over and over again, the male main protagonist thus hoping to uncover a secret message of love from one woman to another. The message being registered mechanically also leaves it open to an infinite series of repetitive screenings, each contributing to a potential fuller understanding of the event registered and repeated. But in projecting the sequence over and over again, the viewer in the film first and foremost also strives to gain control over the woman on screen with whom he lives, and whom he suspects of having relations with other women. The whole film is constructed as a recounting of their story of love, jealousy and fear of deceit. And this story is told by a series of repeated daily routines: first him asking her what she intends to do during the day, then following her and investigating her whereabouts while she is away, and finally questioning her again in the evening. Here again, repetition is shown to bring about a difference: gradually, his suspicions are increased and he comes to a decision: to break the relationship. Though this initial decision is never carried out, it has nonetheless altered the relationship forever. It has consequences; the difference produced is real.

It is as though *The Captive* presented the spectator with an altered version of Stanley Cavell’s vision of “the new creation of the human”, of human relationship, of friendship and mutual education between the sexes that he presents both in his book on the Hollywood comedy of remarriage and the later book on Hollywood melodrama of the unknown woman.⁵ Here, he characterizes the relation between man and woman as a mutual learning process, which provides the ground for a renewed relationship based on tenderness, love, desire, dialogue and equality. This also brings about the conquest of a specific mode of time, the eternal return or the infinite repetition of a situation in everyday life. According to Cavell, it is within this di-

mension, this specific mode of time, that life turns into an ongoing, maybe never-ending symposium of the intimate sphere, where being together is revealed as the true meaning of life itself. But whereas in Cavell, this dimension is described as a utopia turning real through cinematic fiction, in *The Captive* the eternal return of everyday situations becomes unbearable, and being together – though it may be the ultimate meaning of life – is on the contrary depicted as something problematic or even impossible to achieve.

Resnais: Repetitive sounds

All this however, one could argue, concerns only fictional matters, though they communicate with the real. But what then about the repetition brought about by time-based media themselves, a repetition which Akerman's films can be said to offer a comment upon on a secondary level? Is it merely an identical repetition of a mere mechanical reproduction, as the early slanderers of the film medium argued? Or does it allow for a productive difference introduced by the very series of repetitions? In an interesting essay by Roland Barthes, where he discusses Andy Warhol's famous multiple portrait of Marilyn Monroe, a condensed answer to this question is provided. To Barthes, it seems to be precisely the repetitive aspect in this series of still images that produces a difference, by turning photography – at least to a certain extent – into a time-based medium. The repetition can never be identical. Something is bound to happen and to change during the process of looking.⁶ Cavell also mentions this portrait in his essay on collecting: "It thus, I suppose, not only declares the issue of a painting's facing us but posits that the singularity of a face may be visible only in its repetition".⁷

Another, more elaborated way of dealing with the same question of repetition may be found in the French philosopher Bernard Stiegler's writings, in his distinction between three types of retention of a temporal object, the first and second type already being defined by Husserl. The first or primary retention is perceived in the present, e.g. when a song is first performed, the secondary being the imaginary memory of the same song. The third retention, according to

Stiegler, occurs with the identical repetition of the song by prosthetic means (that is, by mechanical reproduction): an exterior memory which allows for its being reproduced again, thus by an identical object creating two separate temporal phenomena. This, Stiegler argues, *makes a difference* – the song is never exactly the same to the listener the second or third time – but it may also *make indifferent*, as the song is repeated over and over again.

In the first volume of his book *De la misère symbolique*, Stiegler attempts an analysis of these two possibilities offered with the third, or so called tertiary retention, which is exemplified by a film by Alain Resnais: *On connaît la chanson/Same old song* (1997).⁸ This film provides him with nothing less than the opportunity to formulate the central idea of the book by means of another medium. The characters in Resnais' film express their feelings in songs – as could be expected from a film musical – or rather, appropriate enough in the age of mechanical reproduction, they do so by mimicking famous songs already reproduced on the sound track. But the spectators/listeners, above all those belonging to a French cultural context, are also offered a repertoire of well-known melodies from their recent past: songs by Édith Piaf, Eddy Mitchell, Serge Gainsbourg or Jane Birkin.

Beside that, the film presents the spectator with a tale of two sisters: the older, Odile, played by Sabine Azéma and the younger, Camille, by Agnès Jaoui. Odile is a modern girl who leads a life in the present, with her career as the main goal, and typically enough looking for a bigger apartment with a panorama view of Paris. Camille on the other hand – a historian who earns her living as a Paris guide – is obsessed by the past, but at the same time she always feels uncomfortable about her narrow focus in the future dissertation and also about the fact that she always has to describe and excuse or defend her own choices. She happens to fall in love with a real estate agent – one of these men of progress that would suit Odile better – which turns out to be one of the typical paradoxes created by the film. The constant tension between past and present, old and new, is a central motive throughout the film. The songs in focus, however, also bring the motive to the fore by adding yet another dimension only through

their presence, apart from the polarized position between these two extremes.

Resnais thus not only points to, but also seems to sympathise with Camille's discomfort within contemporary culture. This, however, is not all. The film offers not only a limited critique of technology. Neither does it indulge in nostalgia, turning towards the past. According to Stiegler, the message of *Same old song* rather seems to be the determination to win back a lost territory – that of shared aesthetic experience. The advantage of this experience is that it has turned out to be capable of formulating a “we”. It may be continually questioned, but still it contributes to forming a future aesthetic community, built upon both the multiplicity of different experiences, with respect for the other and his/her specific experience.

Same old song thus not only rejects the idea of reproduction as repetition, but in consequence also the supposed conformity of mediated aesthetic experience. The musical hits that dominate the film are more or less forced upon everybody in modern or postmodern society, always already overheard many times from loudspeakers in shopping malls or other public places. They might therefore be considered as prototypical of the mechanical, predetermined perception that according to Stiegler excludes personal experience. Here, however, one is invited to rediscover the hits and make them one's own. The film spectator is offered the pleasure of discovering her/his personal relationship to the music, regardless of whether this relationship is one of closeness or of distance. This oscillation between closeness and distance, between personal and collective experience, also renews the possibility of an authentic relationship, grounded in a shared culture. Thus, new light is also shed upon the seemingly trivial, lightweight film musical, which all of a sudden appears as a powerful metaphor of the exploitation of the mind in hyperindustrial society.

Godard: Repetition as Recollection

Given Jean-Luc Godard's highly developed taste for references, it is difficult to imagine that there would be no relation between the title of Resnais' film and the title of a more recent film: *Notre mu-*

siquel/Our music (2004) directed by Godard himself. This cinematic essay, like Dante's *Divine Comedy*, is divided into three parts or "kingdoms": Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. Hell is composed of an elaborate montage sequence of different war pictures cited from film history, ranging from highly stylized, fictitious costume dramas to documentaries, like Resnais' *Nuit et brouillard/Night and Fog* (1956), which shocked spectators upon its release by the terrible real images of dead bodies and other remains from the concentration camps; the very image of hell on earth.

Purgatory, then, might in Godard's case be interpreted as an allegory of life itself. The central part of the film's narrative develops in Sarajevo, a city marked by war, which yet in this film is turned into an unexpected meeting place for people from different cultural backgrounds and with quite different motives for their appearance on screen. Some are fictitious characters, while others are "real people", like a couple of writers – and, of course, Godard himself. Among the fictions is the story of a Russian descendent, the French/Jewish girl Olga, obsessed by the idea of death. After her talking about this, the tragic story of her end is also told: she acts as a suicide bomber, and is thus immediately shot to death – but her bag only contained loads of books.

Paradise, finally – by far the most difficult category to interpret in images – is situated in nature, on a beach where young people quite simply enjoy being together, but where the destructive forces of hell and purgatory are still being traced; here Olga appears again as resurrected, thus repeated or doubled: or maybe on the contrary with a crucial difference being made.

It is, however, in the Purgatory episode that the central theme of the film which is repetition by doubling, is uncovered. The spectator here discovers that there are two women resembling each other, one Olga and the other Miss Lerner, who keeps questioning people throughout the film. But there are also two men resembling each other: Godard himself and another man who bears a vague resemblance to him. As the latter talks to Miss Lerner, when they are about to get into a taxi upon their arrival in Sarajevo, he asks: "So, Miss Lerner, ever been stung by a dead bee?", repeating a classical line

from Howard Hawks' *To Have and Have Not* (1944), already cited by Godard in *Nouvelle Vague* (1990) and thus further underlining the repetitive character of film narration. And, as a quotation in the film states: "The dream of the individual is to be two". This in turn might mean repetition – but it also opens for difference. But the other half of the quotation – characteristically divided into two parts, the first both repeating and differing from the second – reads: "The dream of the state is to be one". This passage is later exemplified with the case of Israel/Palestine, which reveals the dream of the state to be impossible – there is always difference and in this case, conflict.

Within the same episode, Godard also delivers a speech that provides one of the keys to his understanding of cinema: "The shot and reverse shot are basics of film grammar. But look closely at these shots from the Hawks movie... [here two stills of the two main protagonists, a man and a woman, from *His Girl Friday*, 1940 are shown] you'll see that it's the same thing twice. That's because the director is incapable of seeing the difference between a man and a woman. It's worse with two things that are alike. For instance, two pictures of the same moment in history. Then you see that truth has two faces." It is precisely here that images from the Israel/Palestine conflict are used to illustrate the shot/reverse shot structure and its film historical – or rather philosophical – scope. Over and over again, Godard repeats the same complex pattern. Two become one becomes two again. And it is the process in itself that makes the difference.

One of the writers appearing on screen as a visitor to Sarajevo in the Purgatory episode is Juan Goytisolo. He also delivers one of the most central comments in the film on its purpose: "As our age has endless destructive force, it now needs a revolution of a comparative creative force, that reinforces memory, clarifies dreams and gives substance to images, that reserves for the dead a better fate, gives ephemera a splendid sense of its transparency, and escorts the living on a safer, more serene crossing of darkness." This revolution, at least according to Godard, can be brought about by cinema, and perhaps by cinema alone; to him, it can never be a merely repetitive medium. Or rather: it is its very repetitiveness that brings about change – or even revolution.

But why the title, where does “our music” come into the picture? The answer – characteristically enigmatic, as it should be in a Godard film – can be found in this central line, pronounced by the director himself: “The principle of cinema: go towards the light and shine it on our night. Our music.” This quotation evidently echoes of Goytisoló’s “crossing of darkness”. Thus Godard seems to interpret Goytisoló’s lines as a powerful metaphor of cinema, which points to the medium as a means of throwing light upon darkness in the night of our times. But at the same time, he also seems to designate music as a major metonymy for cinema, which through the partial reaches out to cinematic expression as a whole. But beside its functioning as metonymy, music also plays an important part in the film by itself.

In this film, as in all his late works, Godard appears above all as collector, gathering together fragments of words, images or music. The latter, ranging from Jean Sibelius to David Darling, including pieces as different as those by Peter Tchaikowski or Meredith Monk, indeed collects an impressive amount of modern music.⁹ Like in Resnais’ film, music here appears as counterpart to the images, as a means of investigating the interfaces between image and music and the possible new dimensions emerging from their juxtaposition.

If cinema, then, through the montage of music, words and images, really produces a difference, and not only a reproduction of reality – why is that? Why not instead turn directly to philosophy instead to discover the two faces of truth? In his article on Cavell, J M Bernstein provides a possible answer:

philosophy cannot by force of will alone take on the concreteness, the sensuousness, the dependence on experience that has been the prerogative of art; what created the aesthetic problems of modern philosophy will often leave philosophy beached in abstraction, yearning for a sensuous particularity it cannot quite achieve. And sometimes an odd fragment might manage the difference.¹⁰

This collecting, or rather recollecting, of separate, odd fragments suddenly appears as the most precise purpose of Godard’s films. The process also opens for further questions, once again echoing of Cavell,

as he – in summarizing his discussion on collecting – characteristically enough only concludes with new interrogations: “Why do we put things together as we do? Why do we put ourselves together with just these things to make a world? What choices have we said farewell to? To put things together differently, so that they quicken the heart, would demand their recollecting.”¹¹ It is indeed precisely by recollecting that Godard’s films also seem to quicken the heart.

Jaoui: Recollecting and Recreating

Another take on the self as recollection – here: of images and sounds repeated – is presented by Agnès Jaoui in her film *Comme une image/Look at me* (2004). Somewhere towards the middle of the film, a man is watching a sequence from a classical western movie on TV. A woman passing by confesses her dislike of westerns: “Same thing over and over”. “Over and over”, the man repeats, as he switches over to another channel with publicity – an even more markedly repetitive genre. But the spectator will soon also discover that this repeated “over and over” is just as true of the fictional reality within the film s/he is actually watching as it is of any western.

The English title of the film renders poorly the complexity of the original French title. *Comme une image* – like an image – points in direction of a classical interpretation of the image as likeness or repetition, not least because it also evokes the expression *sage comme une image* – which seems to suggest qualities as still or quiet (that is: static) as central characteristics of the image. Throughout the film, it is also revealed how the characters construct their own images over and over again, how they mirror themselves in each other and project themselves upon others, like infinitely repeated screen images.

Music teacher Sylvia (played by Jaoui herself) is married to the not-so-famous writer Pierre, but admires famous writer and publisher Étienne, whose daughter Lolita takes classes with her. At first annoyed by Lolita’s admiration, Sylvia’s attitude is completely changed as she discovers who her father is. However, more things are about to change. Pierre enjoys a huge success with his last novel, whereas Étienne is no longer able to write and seems to spend most of his time

with pathetic comments on the beauty of different young women – these living images surrounding him everywhere. And as Pierre all of a sudden becomes famous, he immediately becomes preoccupied with his own screen image on TV. Consequently, he now discovers or positively re-evaluates TV celebrities for which he earlier felt only contempt or did not see at all. All remain captured in their self-images, in their own imaginaries.

But Lolita is the person who is perhaps the most vulnerable of all in this exchange of images. Looking at herself, she seems to feel only despise for her own body; she is also convinced that no one likes her for her own sake, but that everybody only wants to be seen by her father, something which she herself desires just as much as anybody, but without any success at all. Lolita has offered her father a tape where she sings, a gift from deep down her heart, which she to her immense disappointment discovers unopened after no less than six months, even after having tried to remind him over and over again. And when she later gives a concert with some friends, Étienne leaves the place as soon as she starts to sing.

These two examples, however, also clearly reveal to what extent music plays a pivotal role in the film. Jaoui's presence as actor in *Same old song* also creates a concrete link between Resnais' film and Jaoui's own; it is little surprising that music turns out to have a similar function in both films. Lolita learns to live not only in the imaginary, but also in the real, by music only: by her own singing, which all of a sudden makes a difference in the endless series of her negatively projected self-images. Towards the end of the film, Sylvia too is liberated, both from her own made-up image of Étienne and from her desire to impress him, to become herself an image in his eyes. This liberation is also created by means of music. It is as Sylvia discovers both that Étienne left the concert and left his daughter's tape behind that her image of him all of a sudden is changed. Before she leaves his house in the middle of the night, she puts on the tape with Lolita singing on high volume, thus finally forcing Étienne to take in his daughter's skills. As the music fills the house, or rather fills screen space, the rehearsals repeated over and over again appear anew as tertiary memory, which – by the irresistible force of the context

where it is presented – really makes, or marks, a difference: Lolita has just discovered that her boyfriend had refused a job offered by her father, and consequently that his motives to see her were quite other than she had dared to presume. She thus happily leaves the house to join him. To Sylvia on the other hand, the difference made is rather negative by itself – but still, it represents liberation to her. Finally, she is freed of her own prejudices, her adjustment to “the taste of others”, to quote the title of Jaoui’s earlier film. If the self in this film thus turns out to be recollected by multiple repetitions, these same repetitions also carry along the possibility of recreating, of turning the earlier negative self-image into a newly created, positive one. This is brought about by means of mechanical reproduction, through its capacity to change reality in the very process of rendering it.

Two tendencies, then, seem to be struggling within the culture of mechanically reproduced images and sounds. One is the forceful tradition of regarding photographic images or recordings as mere repetitions, both of reality and of other images. In ideological readings, this tendency is often associated with commercialised but also with popular image culture: standardized, stereotypical and incapable of making a difference. Another tendency rather emphasizes the potential change that is inherent in any process of representation; the fact that already the mediating process is productive. Though these ideas have often been associated with art cinema – it is probably no coincidence that my examples come from European art films – this view is by far too limited. If cinema, in its montage of images, sounds and music, can provide something of the creative force that Goytisolo dreamed of, it is only because it recollects and is nourished by visual and acoustic images and imaginations vital to our culture. As they are recollected and repeated, they also appear anew, as recreating.

Notes

- 1 Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1994), p. 138.
- 2 Stanley Cavell, “The World as Things. Collecting Thoughts on Collecting”, in *Rendezvous: Masterpieces from the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Guggenheim Museums* (Paris 1998), p. 73.

- 3 J M Bernstein, "Aesthetics, Modernism, Literature. Cavell's Transformations of Philosophy", in *Stanley Cavell*, ed. Richard Eldridge (Cambridge 2003), pp. 135f.
- 4 Cavell, p. 75.
- 5 Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness* (Harvard 1976), *Contesting Tears* (Chicago/London 1996).
- 6 Roland Barthes, *L'obvie et l'obtus, Essais critiques III* (Paris 1982), pp. 181ff.
- 7 Cavell, "The World as Things", p. 81.
- 8 Bernard Stiegler, *De la misère symbolique, 1. L'époque hyperindustrielle* (Paris 2004).
- 9 Except for Tchaïkowski and Sibelius, all music included in the film has been recorded by ECM; this underlines the vital role of this recording process to musical reception – once again, a similar point to that made by Resnais.
- 10 Bernstein, op. cit., p. 138.
- 11 Cavell, "The World as Things", p. 88.

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The World of a Movie

Upon its release by MGM films in 1947, the ads promoting *Lady in the Lake* ran as follows: “YOU accept an invitation to a blonde’s apartment! YOU get socked in the jaw by a murder suspect!” James Pallot in *The Movie Guide* describes *Lady in the Lake* as the first film noir to employ “a subjective camera” and awards it three and a half stars for its originality. The *Time Out Film Guide* says the film is “shot entirely with subjective camera” and pans it – not for this reason, but because: “It really needed the magnificent panache of an Orson Welles ... in the same subjective style.” *Halliwel’s Film Guide* criticizes the film for its “over-reliance on the subjective camera method” and concludes that it is “an experiment that failed because it was not really understood”.

One way into the topic of this paper is to ask whether we can be satisfied with these descriptions: Is *Lady in the Lake* correctly described as employing (what we ordinarily want to mean by the words) “subjective camera”? Could an Orson Welles have shot a movie in the *same* “subjective” style and carried it off with magnificent panache? Does this movie involve an over-reliance on a sort of camera method that is routinely employed in other movies, only more sparsely? If it is “an experiment that failed”, why does it fail? What is it here that “was not really understood”?

I will be using *Lady in the Lake* as a philosophical example of a particular sort – the sort that Wittgenstein tends to introduce by saying something along the following lines: “Now let us try to find a case for which that sort of description might fit.” Perhaps the most famous such example in Wittgenstein’s corpus, occurs in the opening of *Philosophical Investigations*.¹ After introducing us to a theory of meaning that he finds incipiently present in his opening quotation from Augustine’s *Confessions* – namely, the theory that the meaning

of a word is the thing that it stands for (and thus that we learn the meanings of words merely by having the things that they stand for pointed out to us) – Wittgenstein goes on, in the second section of the book, to introduce us to his example of the builders: inviting us, in effect, to contemplate a case for which Augustine’s description of language might appear to fit. That Augustine’s description can so much as appear to fit such a case, helps to bring out how it involves, at best, a conception of a language rather more primitive than anything which we are usually accustomed to calling a language, and, at worst, how it involves an altogether primitive conception of what language (even a primitive language) *is*. As we try to press Wittgenstein’s example – this is part of what makes it a *philosophical* example – it can dissolve on us, illustrating the ways in which even the sorts of uses of language for which Augustine’s description can appear to fit only make sense against the background of a multiplicity of other things that we are able to do with words (things which we are asked to imagine the builders as *ex hypothesi* unable to do). Part of how Wittgenstein’s example confers illumination is by introducing us to a seemingly intelligible scenario that appears to fit our theories of how language must work and then by showing us how our assumption that language must be possible on such a scenario begins to fall apart on us as we try to think it through, thereby helping to render visible aspects of language that are so immediate and familiar that they have become invisible to us.

I think *Lady in the Lake* allows us to see what happens if we take some of what film theorists and film critics have to say (sometimes about certain films, sometimes about the nature of film) *au pied de la lettre* – in particular, some of what they have to say with regard to the question how it is that movies are able, through a judicious juxtaposition of visual images, to construct an intelligible and immediately apprehensible narrative world. In accordance with Wittgenstein’s injunction “Try to find a case for which that sort of description might seem to fit”, I offer the example of *Lady in the Lake*. That the claims of many film theorists can so much as appear to fit such a case, helps to bring out how such theories involve, at best, a conception of a kind of film rather more primitive than anything which we are

usually accustomed to calling a movie, and, at worst, how they involve an altogether primitive conception of what a movie (even a *bad* movie) *is*. If the example fulfills its purpose, it will help render visible aspects of what kind of a thing a movie is – aspects that constitute such a natural and familiar a part of our experience of movies that they have become invisible to us.

“Philosophy”, Aristotle said, “begins in wonder.” That is a nice way to put it. But what this means in practice can often be experienced as something rather annoying. Philosophy often consists in the asking of questions that are so elementary that it can seem that their answers must be obvious. One thing that can make the activity of philosophy annoying is that when one attempts to answer these seemingly infantile questions, one discovers that it turns out to be surprisingly difficult to do so. Philosophical questions often have the form of asking something that it seems we all already cannot help but know, but when we try to say what it is that we thus all already know, we find ourselves unable to say anything that satisfies us. We find ourselves beset by puzzlement. When Socrates would stop his fellow Athenians in the Forum – especially those of them that had a reputation for knowledge and wisdom – and ask them one of his opening questions (what is knowledge?, what is justice?, what is virtue?) they would often respond: “Socrates, when are you going to grow up and stop asking such childish questions?”

My talk today will, in this sense, be an exercise in philosophy: a call for us to become childlike in the face of certain apparently trivial questions – for us to wonder that certain familiar phenomena are so much as possible. I want to call forth wonder, first and foremost, at the fact that there are such things as movies. I hope to do this by causing you to become puzzled – to reflect upon questions to which you cannot help but already know (in some sense of “know”) the answers, and yet when you try to say what it is that you thus already “know”, you will find it difficult to do so. I, secondarily, aim to help you to take a few steps towards answers to these questions. But my primary aim is to introduce you to the questions themselves. The questions I want to place before you are the following: What is a movie?; and: What is it to watch a movie?

Now there are lots of things one can or might mean by the word ‘movie’. I have no desire to legislate how the word should be used. But, for the purpose of homing in on the topic that interests me here, I will employ the word in a somewhat restricted sense. I shall use the word ‘movie’ to refer not to any kind of film, but rather only to a certain species of *narrative photographic film*. (I will say more about what species in a moment.) So by ‘movie’, in particular, I will mean (what we might begin by calling) a “fictional” – as opposed to a non-fictional – film (therefore not documentaries, newsreels, home movies, etc.). And by “fictional”, I don’t just mean “not true”, say in the way, certain kinds of propaganda films can fail to be true; but I mean *narrative film* – that is, the sort of film that tells a story. And for it to be a movie, in my sense, it must have a basis in the photographic medium of film – it must be something that has been enacted for and shot by a movie camera (hence, for instance, not a cartoon). Some of what I will have to say about movies will apply to other forms of video narrative, but I want to confine myself here first to trying to understand what kind of a thing a movie is.

This might be a good moment to allow a bit of pent-up annoyance to be released. I imagine I hear someone saying: “What is there to *understand* here? I see what you mean by ‘movies’. Now what’s the problem? Haven’t you just told me what a movie is? It is a narrative photographic film. And what is the problem about what it is to *watch* a movie? Given that we know what movies are, and given that we know what it is to watch something, then we know what it is to watch a movie, it’s like watching anything else, say, a parade.” No, it is not at all like watching a parade. Watching a movie go by is not just a matter of watching a series of images go by in the way we watch a column of soldiers in a parade march by. When a movie cuts from one shot to the next, in order to watch the movie – that is, in order to be able to see these consecutive shots as views of what is happening in the world of the movie – we need to understand the principle of unity that governs their connection. It will suffice for the moment to consider merely one of the various dimensions of unity at issue here – the temporal dimension: two consecutive shots can represent two actions taking place in immediate temporal succession, but they

can also represent parallel actions (two actions taking place at the same time but in different places), or the second shot can represent something that happened long before the action represented in the first shot (as in a flashback), or a long time forward in the future (as in a soothsayer's vision). And there are many other dimensions of unity at issue in apprehending the connection between any two consecutive shots in a movie – to name only a few: there is a spatial dimension (so we can ask: is what is represented in two consecutive shots happening in the same place or different places?), a causal dimension (we can ask: did the first event cause the second?, or vice versa?, or are they causally independent of one another?), a point-of-view dimension (we can ask: does the image on the screen represent how things look from the point of view of someone in the world of the movie?, if so whose point of view is it?), an objectivity dimension (does an image in the movie represent something that is happening in the world of a movie?, or merely something that is imagined or feared or hallucinated by someone in the movie?). A movie can leave the answers to certain such questions undecided, but only because there is something that can count as deciding them. (And some very artsy movies can leave the answers to a great many such questions undecided; but our ability to watch such movies is parasitic on our having first learned to consume more traditional forms of cinematic narrative.) Such questions might, on the face of it, appear to be *epistemological* questions – that is, questions about how we are able to *know* what is going on in the world of the movie. But our ability to know such things presupposes a prior understanding of what kind of a thing a movie is. It is a form of understanding that we now take for granted. It has become a ubiquitous, invisible dimension of our daily lives as consumers of movies.

The sort of question that I am most interested in here is a version of the sort of question that Heidegger calls an *ontological* question. Heidegger seeks to make perspicuous “the different senses of being” that are in play when we say things such as “There is a table in this room”, “Dominic is a person”, “Seven is a number”, and so on. He wants us to come to see how the sense of the “is” in each of these propositions differs. He wants us to come to see that there is a differ-

ence in *the kind of being* that each of these entities (that is here said “to be”) has. What I want to understand is the kind of being it is that the world of a movie has – the character of the nexus of unity that characterizes such a world – and therefore the kind of being that the beings caught up in such a nexus have.

These are large questions and we will only be able to make a beginning on them today. I will take up two aspects of these questions here. I think reflection on these twin aspects of the being of movies is a helpful way into the larger question of what movies are and what it is to watch a movie. The aspects of movies I will be concerned with today are (what Heidegger might have called) the *worldhood of the world of a movie* and *the mode of disclosure of such a world*. I will say: for something to be a movie it must offer us *glimpses of a world*. That is, in order for something to be a movie, first, it must visually *present a world* into which it can invite us and in which we can become absorbed; and, second, our mode of absorption must be one of *watching* it: we *see* what happens in that world. It is these twin modes of *visual presentation* and *visual absorption* that I wish, first to make puzzling and then to try to understand. Not every narrative photographic film succeeds – or necessarily even attempts – thus to present, and to absorb us in, its narrative world: not every film is a “movie” in the technical sense in which I will be employing the term ‘movie’ here. But most things we call “movies” are movies in this sense. *Lady in the Lake*, however, does not succeed in being a movie – in this slightly demanding sense of the term. There are features of its manner of construction – of its mode of attempting to present a world – that, for better or worse, systematically defeat our efforts to enter into that state of absorption that ordinarily characterizes our mode of engagement with a successful movie. So part of my interest in this rather peculiar and altogether remarkable product of Hollywood has to do with the specific manner in which it is able, precisely through the nature of its differences from an ordinary Hollywood movie, to highlight features of our ordinary experience of movies – features that have become invisible to us.

A less Heideggerian way of putting the topic of this talk is to say that I want to understand the fundamental earmarks of the

sort of *aesthetic medium* that a movie is. The tendency in most film theory is to take the properties of the aesthetic medium of the movie to be a direct function of the properties of the *physical* medium by means of which films are delivered to the viewer. So, for example, much early film theory tried to deduce the aesthetic properties of the medium through a reflection on the possibilities for aesthetic expression specific to a medium comprising bits of celluloid that have been photographically exposed and then chopped up and rearranged. In his remarkable essay on motion pictures, the art historian Erwin Panofsky handles this issue with more delicacy than most. He writes:

The legitimate paths of evolution [for the film] were opened . . . by developing it within the limits of its own possibilities. Those primordial archetypes of film productions . . . could blossom forth into genuine history, tragedy and romance, crime and adventure, and comedy, as soon as it was realized that they could be transfigured – not by an artificial injection of literary values but by the exploitation of the unique and specific possibilities of the new medium.²

Part of what Panofsky appreciates here is that the invention of movies did not automatically come with the discovery of film. That film could be sculpted into the specific configurations of visual narration constitutive of movies was a possibility of film that it took much time and hard work to bring to light. Only once these possibilities were discovered and mastered did the medium of the movie come fully into existence. The medium of the movie therefore should not be confused with that of film and “the unique and specific possibilities” of that medium cannot be derived from mere reflection on the physical properties of film. Nevertheless, even as acute a thinker as Panofsky tends to fall into the trap of thinking that “the unique and specific possibilities of the new medium” are derivable through a priori reflection on the medium-specific properties of film. Panofsky defines these “possibilities of the medium” as *the dynamization of space* and *the spatialization of time* – that is, roughly, in a movie things move, and you can be moved instantaneously from anywhere to

anywhere, and you can witness successively events happening at the same time. He speaks of these properties as “self-evident to the point of triviality” and, because of that, “easily forgotten or neglected”. I think Panofsky is dead-right that the most fundamental properties of the medium of the movie are “easily forgotten or neglected”. But I don’t think they can be identified in the manner in which he seeks to uncover them. One way of beginning to see this is so is to notice that the properties of the medium adduced here by Panofsky are fully exploited by *Lady in the Lake*. An account of the medium of the movie that restricts itself to adducing these particular “self-evident” properties of film will never be able to account for what misfires in the presentation of the world of *Lady in the Lake* – but that leaves us with the question: why it is that that film is unable to draw us into its narrative world? Something Stanley Cavell says is helpful here:

[W]e still do not understand what makes [such] properties “the possibilities of the medium” . . .

Why, for example, didn’t the medium begin and remain in the condition of home movies, one shot just physically tacked on to another, cut and edited simply according to subject? (Newsreels essentially did just that, and they are nevertheless valuable, enough so to have justified the invention of moving pictures.) The answer seems obvious: narrative movies emerged because someone “saw the possibilities” of the medium – cutting and editing and taking shots at different distances from the subject. But again, these are mere actualities of film mechanics: every home movie and newsreel contains them. We could say: To make them “possibilities of the medium” is to realize what will give them *significance*. . . . It is not as if film-makers saw these possibilities and then looked for something to apply them to. It is truer to say that someone with the wish to make a movie saw that certain established forms would give point to certain properties of film.

This perhaps sounds like quibbling, but what it means is that the aesthetic possibilities of a medium are not givens. You can no more tell what will give significance to the unique and specific aesthetic possibilities of projecting photographic images by thinking about them or seeing some, than you can tell what will give significance

to the possibilities of paint by thinking about paint or looking some over.... The first successful movies – i.e., the first moving pictures accepted as motion pictures – were not applications of a medium that was defined by given possibilities, but the creation of a medium by their giving significance to specific possibilities.³

It is a fact that has been insufficiently pondered that the art of film might have, but did not, remain stuck in the condition of the home movie, “with one shot just physically tacked on to another”. According to the terminology I will employ here, the world of a home movie is not a movie-world. The world depicted in a home movie is *our* world – that is, the world that we who watch the home movie inhabit – it is a representation of that world as photographed by a camera. The being of the world of the home movie is in this respect ontologically akin to that of the newsreel and the documentary. The presentation of the world of (what I am calling) a movie presupposes a nexus of unity different in kind from that which unifies the sequences of images in any of the aforementioned genres of non-fiction film. This is not to deny that among the events that can occur in (what I am calling) a movie-world is the screening of (what is called) “a home movie”. But there is all the difference in the world between an ordinary home movie (i.e., one that is both of and in our world) and a home movie in a movie (i.e., one that is both of and in the world of a movie). But what sort of “nexus of unity” is at issue in the latter case? How does it confer the appropriate sort of “significance” on a series of consecutive film images – so that a given sequence is able to present something that is immediately visually apprehensible to someone who knows how to “watch” a movie as the visual disclosure of a coherent and absorbing narrative movie-world?

This takes us back to our question about the worldhood of the world of a movie. I have already allowed myself repeatedly to employ the locutions ‘movie-world’ and ‘the world of a movie’. Thus, for example, in trying to say something a moment ago about how watching a movie is not just a matter of watching a series of images go by, I said: “When a movie cuts from one shot to the next, in order to watch the movie – that is, in order to be able to see these consecutive

shots as glimpses of what is *happening in the world of the movie* – we need to understand the principle of unity that governs their connection.” In explication of one such principle of unity, namely, that of point of view, I noted that we can ask of a shot in a movie: does the image on the screen represent how things look from *the point of view of someone in the world of the movie*? The capacity to exercise such forms of discernment – the discernment of what is and what is not an event in the world of a movie and the discernment of what is and what is not a presentation of a point of view of someone in the world of the movie on such an event – are fundamental presuppositions of the possibility of movie-watching and hence of there being such things as movies to watch. In order for there to be such entities as movies there must be films that possess resources of visual narration sufficiently rich to draw these sorts of distinctions and a host of other related distinctions.

It is worth spelling this point out a little further by means of a few examples. I said: in order to watch a movie, we need to be able to distinguish between what is an event that is happening in the world of the movie and what is not. Not everything that appears on the movie screen – not everything that happens within (what we might call) the frame of a movie – is an event in the world of the movie. A trivial example of something that appears on the screen that is not in the world of a movie are the credits that appear at the beginning of a film superimposed on the opening images of the movie. (A related case is the subtitles in a foreign film). A slightly less trivial example is when the changing shapes and shades of visual light on the screen “represent” a fade, or dissolve, or a black screen that serves to punctuate a transition between scenes. There is a difference between the following two cases: the case of everything dissolving or going black *in the movie-world* (that is, in the portion of the world of the movie we glimpse in watching the movie) and the case of everything merely dissolving or merely going black *on the screen* (that is, the case in which the dissolve or the black merely forms a part of the grammatical techniques of narration employed by the movie, without itself representing a cataclysm or advent of sudden darkness in the world of the movie). If you were systematically unable to tell the difference

between these sorts of cases, then you would not be able to watch a movie – movies would not exist for you. And there is a difference between cases in which what you see in a movie is something that is happening in the world of the movie but not from the point of view of anyone in the world of the movie, and cases in which what you see is something that is happening (or has happened) in the world of the movie but as seen from the point of view of someone in the world of the movie. Sometimes when film theorists employ the language of “subjective” and “objective” point of view (or “subjective” and “objective” camera shots) it is *this* distinction (between comparatively perspectival and comparatively non-perspectival representations of the world of the movie) that they have in mind. Sometimes they have a different distinction in mind (and very often they fail to distinguish clearly between these two distinctions). For there is an equally fundamental difference between cases in which what you see is something that is happening in the world of the movie as seen from the point of view of someone in the world of the movie and cases in which what you see is not an objective event in the world of the movie, but *merely* what appears to someone as seen from that character’s “purely subjective” point of view – for example, the contents of a dream.

And it is worth pausing to notice that these two pairs of distinctions are themselves very schematic and can be made more determinate in a wide range of ways. There are a great many kinds of perspectival yet objective point-of-view shots – that is, shots in which what you see is something that is happening (or has happened) in the world of the movie as seen from the point of view of someone in the world of the movie: there are shots that represent someone’s perception of an occurrent event in the world of the movie, and there are shots that represent someone’s memory of an actual but temporally distal event in the world of the movie (as in a flashback), and there are shots that possess a peculiar kind of counterfactual objectivity, representing something that “almost” happened and genuinely could have happened in the world of the movie as it would have appeared to someone in the world of the movie had the actions which would have brought that event about happened (such as a shot or sequence

of shots that represent what would have happened had someone done something in the world of the movie which he fortunately at the last minute decides not to do). And there are also a great many kinds of merely subjective point of view shots – misperceptions, false memories, dreams, visual representations of the contents of a subject's fantasy, waking visual hallucinations, daydreams, involuntary occult visions, voluntary attempts at imaginative visualization, and so forth. And in order to watch a movie, you need to be able not only to distinguish all such merely subjective point-of-view shots from the various forms of objective point-of-view shots (that is, from shots that visually present in a comparatively reliable fashion objective happenings in the world of the movie) but also to discriminate the multiplicity of cases of such modes of subjectivity that can be represented in a movie – you need to be able to discriminate misperceptions, from false memories, from dreams, from waking visual hallucinations, from occult visions, from daydreams, and so on. And, in watching a movie, we make all of these discriminations and many other equally subtle ones, effortlessly, all of the time. This is not to deny that there are movies in which the distinctions between these dimensions of objectivity and subjectivity remain systematically blurred or otherwise problematized throughout. But it is to affirm that our ability to understand movies that employ such comparatively non-transparent modes of visual narration presupposes the prior availability of highly transparent modes of narration and the prior cultivation of an ability to schematize these more traditional and familiar techniques of film narration.

I said earlier that for something to be a movie it must offer us *glimpses of a world* and that this involved both a very particular mode of *visual presentation* of a world on the part of the movie and a very particular mode of *visual absorption* in that world on the part of a viewer. My preceding remarks were meant to hint at the extraordinarily rich array of techniques of visual narration typically deployed in order to achieve the visual *presentation* of the world of a movie. Now I would like to offer some remarks that aim to hint at some of the respects in which our ordinary mode of visual absorption in such presentations constitutes an equally elusive and complex phenome-

non. In order to be able to watch movies we must be initiated into an utterly *sui generis* mode of aesthetic experience – one that makes our mode of access to the world of a movie possible. With the invention of movies comes the disclosure of the possibility of this mode of experience. There is an ontological interdependence between the mode of experience here at issue and the sort of entity – movie-worlds – that are thus disclosed. The relevant modes of *visual presentation* on the part of the movie and *visual absorption* on the part of a viewer are, as Heidegger might have put it, equiprimordial. It is neither the case that first there are movies and then we watch them (that is, first there are the entities that recognizably have the sort of being that only movies have and then we learn how to visually engage with them, nor is it the case that watching movies is just something we already knew (prior to the invention of movies) how to do – as if we had just been waiting for the day when movies would be invented and this appetite could then finally be catered to.

The hero of this talk will be the French philosopher Denis Diderot. I will claim that in his theory of painting suggestions are to be found for how to understand some of the most puzzling aspects of the modes of visual presentation and visual absorption at issue here. It is *prima facie* surprising that the most promising place to look for help on this topic should be in the writings of someone who lived over one hundred years before the invention of film, let alone the movies. But Diderot's topic bears an important affinity with our own. He wanted to put forward a theory of *dramatic painting* – that is, a theory that set forth the conditions of the possibility of a painting furnishing an immediately apprehensible yet utterly convincing narrative that is conveyed by exclusively visual means. Reflection on the very possibility of such a category of painting can induce philosophical puzzlement. How can a painting convey an utterly convincing representation of a dramatically complex event? A dramatic event is of its nature something that unfolds in time, while the pictorial image on the surface of a painting might appear to be something that can only fully adequately represent an event frozen in time – an event that has the temporal duration of a single moment in time. How can a painting ever offer us anything more than

a snapshot of an event? I will say a bit about the details of Diderot's theory of painting at the conclusion of this talk. For the moment, it will suffice to mention just the following feature of Diderot's theory: a successful narrative painting, he held, must call forth a certain sort of response on the part of beholder – it must transfix his attention and cause him to become absorbed in the action depicted on the canvas before him. Michael Fried summarizes this aspect of Diderot's theory as follows:

For Diderot ... the painter's task was above all to reach the beholder's soul by way of his eyes.... [A] painting ... had first to attract and then to arrest and finally to enthrall the beholder, that is, a painting had to call to someone, bring him to a halt in front of itself, and hold him there as if spellbound and unable to move.⁴

All that I want to call attention to here for the moment is the following: Fried's description of Diderot's aspiration for the best that painting can hope to achieve is a perfectly accurate, literal description of the condition of the average viewer of a movie.

This envisioned *extraordinary* possibility for the highest that narrative painting can hope to achieve is the *ordinary* situation of a viewer of a film. For Diderot, the capacity to elicit such a state of absorbed beholding on the part of a spectator is a criterion of the aesthetic excellence of a painting. Whereas, in the present age, the very forms of words that Diderot called upon to formulate his criterion of aesthetic excellence can serve now to express a structural feature of the kind of entity a movie is – even a fairly bad movie.

As biologists and psychologists will tell you, often the best way to understand the normal is to study the pathological. If you want to understand what it is for a normal healthy organism to flourish, then it helps to look carefully at what happens when the organism breaks down and the possibility of healthy functioning becomes impeded. So, too, in seeking to understand what it is for a movie to present a world, it helps to study cases in which attempts at such presentation break down and the correlative modes of aesthetic experience are consequently inhibited. This brings us to *Lady in the Lake*.

You might be tempted to say of *Lady in the Lake* – along with Stephen Halliwell or the *Time Out Guide* – that it is a bad movie. But this implies that it fails *as* a movie – i.e., that it fully succeeds in *being* a movie, but that *qua* movie it happens to be a bad one. This idea is clearly present in the suggestion that Orson Welles could and did employ the same camera technique with more panache. I think it is more accurate to say that in a certain fundamental respect *Lady in the Lake* simply *fails to be* a movie. More specifically, the film is constructed in such a way that we are unable to enter into the experience of visual absorption that is a condition of the possibility of our entering into the world of a movie – or to put the same point more elliptically: it fails in its attempt to visually present a world. Simply to conclude that it is a bad movie is to miss the interest this film can assume in the context of an investigation into the kind of entities movies are. There are lots of bad movies, but there are hardly any that fail in *this* way. And it is no simple matter to say just *how* or *why* this film fails.

I note in passing, it is no part of my brief to argue that *Lady in the Lake* constitutes an aesthetically significant work of art, be it one that amounts to something less, or more, or simply other than a movie – or to argue the contrary. The peculiar sort of interest that I wish to claim on behalf of this film for the aesthetics of movies is not *qua* film that possesses a peculiar sort of aesthetic merit, but *qua* philosophical example – one that embodies in an illuminating fashion a certain sort of failure to visually present the narrative world of a movie. This is not to deny that there are aesthetically compelling films – made, for example, by directors such as Bunuel and Godard – that employ visual conventions permitting the presentation of a compelling narrative film world in an intentionally tentative or intermittently non-transparent manner with the aim of eventually subverting or calling attention to or otherwise neutralizing these very conventions, thus disrupting our visual absorption in the world of the movie in a manner that is able to assume an aesthetic significance within the context of the film as a whole. But *Lady in the Lake* is not such a film: it does not interrupt or intermittently subvert the presentation of a movie-world; its mode of visual narration systematically obstructs

the possibility of absorption in such a world for almost the entirety of the duration of the film.

If I asked you to try to say what is unique about *Lady in the Lake*, your first attempt might well take the form of saying what most of the authors of film encyclopedias and movie guides say about the film. As we have seen, in such books you find sentences such as the following: “*Lady in the Lake* is an attempt to make a film that resolutely employs nothing other than first-person point of view.” Or: “The movie consists entirely of subjective camera angles.” But neither of these descriptions or anything at all like them will do. The problem is not simply that the notions of a “first-person point of view” or a “subjective camera angle” can be unpacked in a variety of ways. The more fundamental problem is that the “point-of-view shots” or “subjective camera angles” in this film are unlike (and are far more unsettling than) those generally found in any ordinary movie – that is, in the sort of film that offers the possibility of that mode of aesthetic experience constitutive of movies. Eventually, in attempting to illuminate the chasm of difference between the “point of view shots” or “subjective camera angles” in this film and those that can be found in an ordinary movie, I hope to illuminate a fundamental aspect of what is involved in the presentation of and absorption in the world of a movie. But, first, before we consider further what it means to speak of “first-person point of view shots” or “subjective camera angles”, let us take up the question what it is that such “shots” or “angles” are supposed to contrast with. We have seen how unclear the expression “subjective point of view” or “subjective camera angle” can be. But let us now ask: What is an “objective” point of view or camera angle?

If I asked you, what is the difference between an “subjective point of view shot” (or a “subjective camera angle”) and an “objective point of view shot” or an “objective camera angle”, then you might in response find yourself saying something like this: “A subjective point-of-view shot (or subjective camera angle) is a representation of just how things would look if actually viewed from a particular person’s point of view and an objective point of view shot (or objective camera angle) is a representation of how things would look if viewed from no point of view, or at least from no one’s point of view in

particular.” If taken at all literally, neither half of this response happily withstands scrutiny. The first half of this response – “a subjective point-of-view shot (or subjective camera angle) is a representation of just how things would look if actually viewed from a particular person’s point of view” – is actually a pretty good first stab at a description of the rather unique mode of visual presentation of the world that we find in *Lady in the Lake*. It captures a feature of the way that very unusual film attempts to presents “point of view” – a feature of that film that radically distinguishes it from any ordinary movie. The following are examples of shots we get in that film that we don’t get in an ordinary movie: the way in which we see part of the telephone or the end of a cigarette obtrude onto the screen, or the way the cigarette smoke rises up from just below the eye of the camera into our field of vision, or the way in which we are afforded a view of the protagonist of the narrative only when he steps in front of a mirror. If we want to be picky, we will have to conclude that, if taken quite literally, this formulation of what a “subjective point of view” is won’t even fully do as a description of what we see even in *Lady in the Lake*. For instance, our protagonist never seems to blink. More subtly, when we are afforded a view of him in the mirror, the angle of his gaze into the mirror tends to be slightly off what it should be if his gaze is to coincide with ours. (If the gaze of the camera did coincide with the point of view of the character, then we would be treated to a view of a camera in the mirror). Nevertheless, “a representation of just how things would look if actually viewed from a particular person’s point of view” does seem to be a pretty good account of (what we might call) the regulative ideal to which the mode of visual presentation in *Lady in the Lake* aspires. But it is also just this feature of the film that distinguishes it from almost any other movie you have ever seen; and, as I shall argue later on, it is just this feature of the film that inhibits our absorption in its world. So this description will hardly do as an account of what it is that we generally want to mean when we say of a shot in an ordinary movie that it is first-personal or subjective. For the shots that we get in ordinary movies that we seek to designate by means of such terminology are nothing like the shots in *Lady in the Lake*.

Let's turn now to the other half of our answer above: "an objective point of view shot (or objective camera angle) is a representation of how things would look if viewed from no point of view, or at from least no one's point of view in particular." On the face of it, this is self-contradictory. Doesn't the very idea of a point of view presuppose the idea of an observer *whose* point of view it is? Isn't the notion of *a point of view that is no one's point of view in particular* a "notion" of which no sense can be made? Yet if we want to try to put into words the kind of "point of view" that goes missing entirely in *Lady in the Lake* and that occurs frequently in every ordinary movie, it is hard to avoid calling upon some seemingly paradoxical form of words such as these.

The problem of trying to say what an "objective camera shot" involves is one with which film theorists have struggled. The version of the problem that figures in the history of film theory tends to be given an epistemological slant. It takes the form of a question about how the viewer is able to *know* what is happening at any given point in the world of a movie. Film theorists have, in this context, allowed themselves to become puzzled about how it is that we are able to apprehend, when watching a slice of photographic film narration, what is going on in the narrative – and how it is that we are so often able to know what we are supposed to in a remarkably immediate and apparently effortless manner. In theoretical discussions of classical narrative film, these problems tend to be raised in connection with *editing*. It was realized very early on in the theory of film that perspicuous exposition of narrative action has to rely upon the possibility of cutting from shot to shot. At the same time, the transitions between shots, in various forms and styles, seemed to such theorists, to constitute a series of discontinuous breaks from one viewpoint on the action to another. As such, these transitions, apart from some understanding of the principles that unite them, would appear at first blush to be at least potentially disorienting interruptions in the viewer's attempt to follow the progress of the dramatic events in a movie.

This puzzle about movie viewing (how it is that the viewer is able to follow the narrative of a movie) and the related puzzle about movie editing (how it is possible to juxtapose slices of film in say

a way that they are able to form a coherent narrative) are merely symptoms of an underlying, comparatively repressed puzzlement concerning what a movie is and what is involved in the presentation of the world of a movie. But let us for a moment follow some of the more sophisticated attempts to address the puzzle in its classical form. This will allow us to see some of the ways in which intelligent theorists, when faced with this puzzle, find themselves wanting to say something very much like what we found ourselves wanting to say before when we attempted to offer a characterization of an objective camera shot: namely, that in order to construct such a shot one must find a way to represent how things would look if viewed from a point of view that is no one's point of view in particular.

Back in the days when movies were still a recent phenomenon, so that it was not yet unfashionable to be filled with wonder at the very possibility of such entities, the early film theorists marveled at the following fact: When we watch a movie we are subject to interruptions in viewing utterly unlike anything that happens to us in normal perceptual experience. They repeatedly asked questions such as the following: How does a film spectator tolerate and comprehend these abrupt and unnatural intercessions? Which sorts of shifts are merely disorienting and unintelligible and which sorts confer modes of orientation and intelligibility upon the narrative of a film? Let us consider one early attempt at an answer to this question due to V.I. Pudovkin. It goes as follows: the cuts within a scene should correspond to the natural shifts of attention of a hypothetical, interested spectator who observes, on the spot, the action we see depicted on the screen.⁵ Let's call this Pudovkin's proposal. It has gained a remarkable number of adherents. It has seemed to many to offer an attractive explanation of the style of so-called "invisible" editing characteristic of the typical classical Hollywood film. The central underlying thesis is that an audience does not consciously notice the fragmentation that is enforced by judiciously invisible editing, because given the way in which their sense of the integrity of space and time is maintained, each new shot supplies the visual information demanded and schematically anticipated by "the normal mental mechanism by which we alter our attention from object to object in real life."

This proposal, however, is in many ways a better description of what happens in *Lady in the Lake* than in any ordinary film. First of all, it tends to suggest that our point of view onto the world of a movie is always the point of view of *someone* in the world of the movie. (In its classical formulation, it also tended to suggest that there was only one such point of view.) But I would like now to consider instead a further objection to it – one that receives its most famous formulation in Karel Reisz’s classic text on the fundamental principles of film editing. Reisz rejects Pudovkin’s proposal on the grounds that many of the instantaneous spatial transitions produced by elementary and standard patterns of editing patently do not correspond to anything that a single fixed or limitedly mobile observer could achieve. In response to this difficulty, Reisz goes on to suggest his own alternative proposal:

Instead, the director’s aim is to give an ideal picture of the scene, in each case placing his camera in such a position that it records most effectively the particular piece of action or detail which is dramatically significant. He becomes, as it were, a ubiquitous observer, giving the audience at each moment of the action the best possible viewpoint. He selects the images which he considers most telling, irrespective of the fact that no single individual could view a scene in this way in real life.⁶

There are a number of phrases in this formulation that appear to pull in different directions. Nonetheless, taken as a whole, it is an immensely suggestive and helpful first stab at a description of part of what goes into the presentation of the world of a movie and thus of part what goes missing in *Lady in the Lake*. First, we have here the idea that the director should aim “to give an ideal picture of the scene”. This suggests that the picture thus presented over the course of the whole of a movie is not simply to be identified with any actual picture or set of pictures enjoyed by the envisioned possible inhabitants of the world of the movie, taken individually or collectively. Second, Reisz says that the director is to “place his camera in such a position that it records most effectively the particular piece of action

or detail which is dramatically significant". This allows for the point of view of the camera on occasion to coincide with that of someone in the world of the film without requiring our point of the view on that world to remain thereby confined to such comparatively embedded points of view. More suggestively still, Reisz adds – speaking to the puzzling question of what is involved in those moments in which we are offered an “objective” mode of presentation of the world of a movie – there is “a ubiquitous observer, giving the audience at each moment of the action the best possible viewpoint”. This is certainly a comparatively promising proposal, in that it fits many facts about where the camera is placed in the filming of the action of a movie that Pudovkin’s proposal is obliged to neglect. But it is not altogether satisfying. The idea of a ubiquitous observer – like our earlier idea of a point of view that is no one’s point of view in particular – teeters on the brink of absurdity. This involves not only the comparatively modest claim that the point of view in question here is not to be identified throughout with how things might appear to someone in the movie; but, as Reisz says, “no single individual *could* view a scene in this way in real life”. Indeed, some of what Reisz says, quite astutely in my view, seems to require that what must at issue here is the idea of an observer whose standpoint is quite unlike that of any observer of which we can form a coherent conception. But the concept of an observer of which we can form no coherent conception threatens to fail to be a concept of an observer at all – ideal, ubiquitous, or otherwise.

One might try to save Reisz’s suggestion by domesticating it into the idea of an imaginary but nonetheless imaginable observer. A “ubiquitous” and “ideal” observer is perhaps an observer that is free of all of the grosser limitations of embodied perception. George Wilson helpfully asks with regard to this way of cashing out Reisz’s suggestion:

Is it part of the idea that members of the audience are supposed to see the series of shots as representing the visual field of Reisz’s observer, so that they identify their perception and attention with that of this fictional observer? In other words, do all such films have, in this

sense, a visual narrator who mediates the action in a manner that is standardly effaced? Certainly, something like this is a cliché of a lot of writing on film: the camera is or has an eye, and the screen image is understood as its phenomenological product.⁷

I share Wilson's skepticism that the fashionable idea that the camera is or has an eye (and the related idea that the screen image is to be understood as its phenomenological product) can do justice to the mode of presentation characteristic of a typical (so-called) "objective" camera shot. Such an account tends in the direction of suggesting that the main difference between the mode of presentation of a world in an ordinary movie and that in *Lady in the Lake* is one merely of degree, rather than of kind: it is just that the point of view of the objective narrator in a movie is such that the observer is able to jump around a lot more than any possible observer ever could and able to jump to places so high up or so far away that no real observer could ever reach them. Such an account, Wilson argues, is unable to do justice to (what he, suggestively, calls) "the transparency of the film image". And it is this that we must understand, if we are to understand the manner in which a movie affords us glimpses of a world. Wilson is also right, I think, to insist that Reisz's original suggestion is considerably more paradoxical than the domesticated reading of it allows:

Reisz seems to envisage the audience as viewing – that is, sharing the same view – of a scene that is paradoxically felt to be both right in front of them and yet existing in its own impenetrable system of space.⁸

This suggests that in an "objective" shot what we are offered is not a view of the scene from some possible but practically unattainable point of view, but rather something far more paradoxical – something we might call "the view from nowhere". This is a form of words that philosophers sometimes reach for in attempting to explicate the concept of objectivity. I have little sympathy with the philosophical views that result from attempts to give sense to this form of words.

But what the frequency of such attempts does testify to is a deep-seated attraction on our part to a certain *fantasy* of what objectivity ought to entail. Even though it may be the case that the ensuing conception can not fully be made sense of, it does not follow that such a conception – however inchoate – plays no role in constituting our aesthetic experience of the narrative worlds to which we have access when reading a novel, sitting in a theatre, or watching a movie. So it is not necessarily an objection to an account of our mode of access to the world of a movie that involves a paradox. But such an account must be able to pay its way: it must be able to illuminate how the paradox it posits is rendered an aesthetically fruitful one – how can it be made to issue in forms of aesthetic experience. It is no accident that some of the most suggestive and helpful accounts we have of the mode of presentation of the world of a movie are ones that do not shrink from courting paradox. Here is Jean Mitry taking a stab at our topic:

Thanks to the mobility of the camera, to the multiplicity of shots, I am everywhere at once.... I know that I am in the movie theater, but I feel that I am in the world offered to my gaze, a world that I experience “physically” while identifying myself with one or another of the characters in the drama – with all of them, alternatively. This finally means that at the movies I am both in this action and outside it, in this space and outside this space. Having this gift of ubiquity, I am everywhere and nowhere.⁹

What is this idea of a point of view that seems to presuppose a spectator who is at once everywhere and nowhere? And what would it mean to get clear about such a notion – one that appears to be in its essence paradoxical? This much should be clear by now: we cannot make sense of a movie unless we are able to tell that a particular shot of a something represents a point of view on it that is not to be identified with that of anyone in the world of the movie, and that we can tell, in contrast to such a shot that a subsequent shot is to be so identified, and that we can tell, in contrast to both of these cases, that yet a further shot represents something altogether

more “subjective”, and so on, in widely differing and ever ramifying ways. And this much should also be clear by now: the cases of screen imagery of the latter so-called “subjective” sort – cases that seek to represent episodes of dreaming, hallucination, unreliable visual memory, and so on – can only intelligibly occur as segments that are apprehensible as subjective if they occur in the context of a space of significant contrasts with other, further segments that are apprehensible as comparatively “objective” modes of presentation of the world of the movie. “It is this ‘objectivity’ in the visual depiction of narrative fiction that we want to understand more clearly. What do we take to be objective about the way in which the screen and its images present the narrative facts?” Wilson attempts to answer this question as follows:

The answer, I believe, is given by a famous analogy. In the objective mode that is primary for classical narration the screen is experienced as a rectangular window or opening that faces onto the movie’s secondary world. It is to be, in a new sense, a “picture window” set before locales within that world. The screen is meant to be taken as an almost perfect transparency between the audience and the fictional objects and events they see. . . . A fictional world of the cinema is essentially a visible world and that which is presented in the imagery is meant to be the immediate, intersubjective visual appearance of the fictional objects and events as their appearance is manifested to a position within the world’s apparently real space.¹⁰

The most obvious problem with this suggestion is one that also beset Pudovkin’s proposal: we seem to be dealing with a picture window that possesses remarkable properties: “The screen window is remarkably – to use Reisz’s word – ubiquitous. The views that are delivered to the audience change frequently, abruptly, and discontinuously, and the changes are felt to be guided by a mind other than their own.”¹¹ These properties of the cinematic picture window would seem to place an unbearable strain on the initially apparently straightforward analogy that was intended to illuminate the phenomenon in question. But instead of worrying this point, I would like to focus

on a more subtle and fundamental inadequacy of Wilson's proposal – one that is by no means unique to it – indeed, one that it shares with both Pudovkin's and Reisz's proposals. An mischievous way of putting what will be my eventual fundamental objection to Wilson's proposal would be to say that it is insufficiently respectful of the paradox that lurks at the heart of the notion of an objective camera shot. In attempting to make progress on the suggestions of thinkers such as Reisz and Mitry, Wilson takes a step in the wrong direction, by attempting to get things that are murky in their formulations clear in the wrong way.

First, however, I need to call attention to one of the features of *Lady in the Lake* that most radically differentiates it from any ordinary movie – one that is essentially connected with why its ostensibly “subjective” or “first-personal” shots are so utterly unlike the immediately compelling counterparts of such shots that predominate in any ordinary movie. The characters (or should we say: the actors?) in *Lady in the Lake* look *directly into* the eyes of the viewer (or should we say: the eye of the camera?). They visually address themselves directly to the beholder of the film; their gaze is experienced by a viewer as acknowledging his presence – the presence of a spectator who is situated on the far side of the screen. We are accustomed to encountering such direct gazes from TV news anchormen and from little children in home movies (who are perhaps being concurrently instructed by a filming family member “Look at the camera!”, Look at the camera!) Why should it matter so tremendously to the possibility of the sort of aesthetic experience that allows for disclosure of the world of a movie that it be the case that the viewer never be directly visually implicated in this manner? This is a matter that we are not yet quite ready to tackle.

I would like to note at this juncture that there is nothing in any of the proposals we have considered thus far that in any way rules out or even discourages such direct visual implication. Pudovkin's proposal would seem almost to require the possibility of such a mode of address. Reisz's and Wilson's proposals are more adequate in that they at least seem to move away from the postulation of such a requirement. But they do nothing to preclude the occurrence of such a mode of

address. If what is required is simply Reisz's ideal and ubiquitous observer and nothing more, then why shouldn't the actors caught up in the drama this ideal observer contemplates happen occasionally to look squarely in his direction? If it suffices to account for the possibility of "objectivity in the visual depiction of narrative fiction" to say, as Wilson does, that the screen is "to be taken as an almost perfect transparency between the audience and the fictional objects and events they see", then why shouldn't it occasionally happen that those who live on the far side of that transparency look straight into our eyes, as the characters in *Lady in the Lake* never cease to do. And why should their unceasingly doing so in *Lady in the Lake* be so profoundly disruptive of our aesthetic experience of the world they inhabit? Why does such a mode of address inhibit our becoming visually absorbed in their narrative world?

It is here that Diderot is helpful. Diderot starts not with the question of the beholder's absorption in a painting, but with a different question: what is required for the successful visual representation of an absorbed beholder? He begins not with the topic of absorption in a representation, but with the topic of the representation of absorption. For Diderot, the persuasive representation of absorption entails evoking the perfect obliviousness of a figure or group of figures to everything but the objects of their absorption. Those objects do not include the beholder standing before the painting. Hence the figure or figures must seem oblivious to the beholder's presence if the illusion of absorption is to be sustained. Moreover, Diderot thought a similar principle held in the theatre: a compelling representation of dramatic events on the stage must transpire in such a way that the actors never acknowledge the presence of an audience before them. Here are some attempts on Diderot's part to express the demand in question:

[E]ven though a dramatic work is made to be represented, it is necessary that author and actor forget the beholder.¹²

Whether you compose or act, think no more of the beholder than if he did not exist. Imagine, at the edge of the stage, a high wall separates you from the orchestra. Act as if the curtain never rose.¹³

In a dramatic performance, the spectator has no more importance than if he did not exist. Is there anything there which is addressed to him? Then the author has deserted his theme and the actor has stepped outside his role. They both come down off the stage. I see them both in the pit and as long as the tirade lasts, the action is halted as far as I am concerned, and the stage remains empty.¹⁴

This last remark nicely captures an aspect of the experience of a viewer of *Lady in the Lake*. In the drama of the film, the spectator of the film does not retain his usual position (of having “no more importance than if he did not exist”); rather everything is addressed directly to him. With just the result that Diderot foresees: the mode of direct address shatters the possibility of the beholder becoming visually absorbed in the world of the narrative. The director seems to have deserted his theme and the actors seem to have stepped outside their roles. They all come down out of the world of the movie – or better: the possibility of the visually effective presentation of such a world seems to disintegrate altogether. The narrative world of the movie is emptied out; it collapses into our world.

One common criticism of *Lady in the Lake* is to say that it involves a great deal of bad acting. This fails, I suspect, to put a finger on what it is that really unsettles one when subjected to the performances of the actors in this film. I do not think the acting is worse than that in many a mediocre Hollywood film that is far less disruptive of our capacities for cinematic enjoyment. Moreover, the stars in this film are all actors who discharge their duties admirably in the other movies in which they appear. The kernel of truth contained in this common criticism of the film has to be reformulated to take account of the ways in which this film systematically inhibits our capacity for cinematic absorption. By directly addressing themselves to us, the actors subvert our capacity to apprehend them as characters inhabiting the narrative world of a movie. This subversion of our capacity for the visual apprehension of movie narrative has something in common with the aesthetic experience of bad acting: in both cases our attention is obtrusively drawn to the actor in a manner that eclipses our capacity to see through the actions of the actor to those

of the character. But this happens for very different reasons in a film in which the acting is simply bad and in one in which – such as *Lady in the Lake* – there is a systematic rout of the conditions of the possibility of a compelling visual presentation of the world of a movie. Michael Fried says:

Diderot's works ... called ... for the illusion that the audience did not exist, that it was not really there or at the very least had not been taken into account. In the absence of that illusion no amount of realism could provide the dramatic experience that Diderot sought.¹⁵

This claim (whatever its merits within theory of painting) expresses something approximating a basic law governing the presentation of the world of a movie. No amount of realism lavished on the sets or invested in the quality of the cinematography or achieved in the performance of the actors in a film can restore the illusion of worldhood that is shattered through a systematic failure to respect a supreme underlying fiction that is a constitutive condition of the possibility of the presentation of a movie-world: namely, that the camera – and its viewpoint onto the world of the movie – does not exist. In Diderot's theory of painting, the injunction in question (i.e., the beholder does not exist) functions as a regulative principle of aesthetic excellence; in the realm of movies, it functions as a constitutive principle of the medium.

Notice, however, how utterly paradoxical Diderot's injunctions to the actor are: If the actor were to do just as Diderot says, if he were simply to act as if the audience did not exist, then there is no reason why he should not wander offstage, or lower his voice below the audible threshold, or stand in a way (or in a place on the stage) that renders his dramatically most significant gestures invisible to the audience. Any attempt on the part of an actor to take Diderot's advice at all literally would spell instant dramatic catastrophe. And the same holds for much of his advice to the painter. If the painter were simply to represent the visual action of the narrative of a dramatic painting in a manner that in no way takes account of its effect on a beholder in front of the canvas, then the result would fail to achieve

the very forms of radical intelligibility that Diderot demands of successful dramatic painting. A painter obviously must take account of how the painting will appear to a beholder. A dramatic painting, according to Diderot, must possess a sort of pictorial unity that can be apprehended at a glance, in a single *coup d'oeil*. This demand of Diderot's on the pictorial representation of drama – that the image be as a whole instantaneously and radically intelligible – comes to achieve a measure of fulfillment beyond Diderot's own wildest dreams in (what Wilson calls) “the transparency of the film image” in classical narrative film. But, in both dramatic painting and in the movies, such a mode of transparency can be attained only through a mode of representation that rests on a thorough appreciation of how things on the canvas or on the screen will be schematized by a beholder of such images.

I said before: Any attempt on the part of an actor to take Diderot's advice at all literally would spell dramatic catastrophe. This might suggest that there is some more figurative or metaphorical way to unpack Diderot's remarks on this topic. But this is not right. One cannot attain a full understanding of the logic of the demand in question unless one first comes to terms with the reasons why any attempt at a concise formulation of it will inevitably embody an element of paradox. Fried attempts to explicate the paradox in question as follows:

[T]he recognition that paintings are made to be beheld and therefore presuppose the existence of a beholder led to the demand for the actualization of his presence: a painting, it was insisted, had to attract the beholder, to stop him in front of itself, and to hold him there in a perfect trance of involvement. . . . [I]t was only by negating the beholder's presence that this could be achieved: only by establishing the fiction of his absence or nonexistence could his actual placement before and enthrallment by the painting be secured.¹⁶

The painter should present things in a manner that is controlled by the ambition to depict a world that everywhere registers *the absence of the gaze of a beholder*, and the measure of the success of such a mode

of representation is constituted by the degree of painting's power *to exercise a certain effect upon the beholder*: namely, the tripartite effect of attracting, arresting and entralling him.

One way to bring out the utterly paradoxical character of this demand is to explore aspects of its counterpart as it functions as a condition on the presentation of the world of a movie. A manifestation of the paradoxical demand in question can be seen to arise in an especially acute form if we consider what is involved in the problematic of movie acting. An aspiring movie actor is repeatedly enjoined (in terms roughly opposite of those screamed out by the parent filming his children in a home movie): "Don't look at the camera!" He must never to look directly into the lens of the camera. A related skill that is often difficult for inexperienced movie actors to acquire is the following: one must be able to allow one's gaze to gradually pan across a room without visually registering, even momentarily, the gaze of the camera. This requires the suppression of a deep natural human instinct. The tendency is, without even realizing it, to have one's gaze, as it passes by the camera, ever so momentarily, slightly visually register the gaze of the beholder. But if we say to an aspiring actor: "Forget about the camera! Act as if the camera did not exist!", he must know how to understand our injunction. What the actor must learn to do is something far more paradoxical and difficult than forgetting about the camera: he must learn always to be aware of precisely where the camera is and just how he comports himself with respect to it – where the test of whether he has fully achieved this mode of awareness consists in its being the case that nothing he ever does, not even a glance or a facial expression, offer any indication of his controlling awareness of the presence of the camera whose absence his every glance and gesture serves to declare.

The enactment of such a mode of comportment vis-à-vis the camera on the part of a movie actor is a local aspect of that more global fundamental paradox that lies at the heart the presentation of the world of a movie: namely, that the default mode of disclosure of such a world consists in a view of it as it appears from the view from nowhere. The fantasy of the possibility of such a mode of disclosure is the constitutive myth of the medium of the movie; and the

practical embodiment of such a myth in the classical conventions of visual movie narration constitutes the condition of the possibility of a particular sort of *sui generis* mode of aesthetic experience – one of the attraction, fixation and enthrallment of the beholder – that is what the watching of a movie is. It is a mode of experience that we have come to take so much for granted that is difficult for us to achieve a reflective understanding of the peculiarity and complexity of its constitution. And this is why a viewing of *Lady in the Lake* can serve as a means to philosophical clarity: by engendering in us a very particular sort of state of aesthetic frustration – one that is the product of this film's systematic failure to respect the conditions of the possibility of the constitution of this otherwise so readily available mode of aesthetic experience. The film helps to render visible aspects of the constitution of this mode of experience that otherwise remain invisible to us, thereby helping us to appreciate the extraordinariness of a mode of experience that has come to seem so ordinary to us.

Notes

- 1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, second edition, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998 [1953]).
- 2 Erwin Panofsky, "Style and Medium in the Moving Pictures," in Daniel Talbot, ed., *Film* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1959) p. 28.
- 3 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 31f. (The passage continues: "Only the art itself can discover its possibilities, and the discovery of a new possibility is the discovery of a new medium. A medium is something through which or by means of which something specific gets done or said in particular ways. It provides, one might say, particular ways to get through to someone, to make sense.... To discover ways of making sense is always a matter of the relation of an artist to his art, each discovering the other.")
- 4 Michael Fried, XXX
- 5 V.I. Pudovkin, XXX
- 6 Karel Reisz, XXX
- 7 George Wilson, XXX
- 8 Wilson, XXX
- 9 Jean Mitry, XXX
- 10 Wilson, XXX

- 11 Pudovkin, XXX
- 12 Diderot, XXX
- 13 Diderot, XXX
- 14 Diderot, XXX
- 15 Michael Fried, XXX
- 16 Michael Fried, XXX

GUNNAR OLSSON

A Local Habitation and a Name

Making a difference? Of course, for if we did not know how to negotiate difference we would know neither here nor there, neither now nor then. Without difference there would in fact be no facts to notice and no reason to reason, no brides to strip and no bachelors to bare. Pushed to its own limits the truth is that without difference there would be neither knowledge nor imagination, hence no humans either. What, then, is truth, asked Nietzsche. And what does it mean to know?

My own non-philosophical answer is that to state a scientific truth is to claim that something is something else – and be believed when you do it. An exhibition of difference, an exercise in translation, a belief which in its most minimalistic and paradigmatic form boils down to the expression

$$a = b$$

But anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear immediately retorts that *a* equals *a*, not *b*, a sophomoric objection well taken. How small shall this difference be to turn me into a trustworthy truth-teller and how big must it be to make me a despicable liar? An issue not so easily settled, especially as the statement

$$a = a$$

is the tautological fix-point not only of Greek logic, but of monotheistic religion as well. *I am who I am*, Yahweh's name, by definition true but not informative; the inexplicable name of a power so supreme

that it never sits still; a self-referential entity which hops capriciously about; a turn-coat doing exactly what it pleases. Yet it is the purpose of the mapping expedition which has just begun to capture the nature of this evasive creature of understanding, to grapple with the dialectical relations of identity and difference, certainty and ambiguity.

My first companion in this endeavor is Ludwig Wittgenstein, the dedicated explorer of invisible limits, the imaginary land-surveyor who once observed that

If I were sometime to see quite new surroundings from my window instead of the long familiar ones, if things, humans and animals were to behave as they never did before, then I should say something like 'I have gone mad'; but that would merely be an expression of giving up the attempt to find my way about... But the important thing for me is that there isn't any sharp line between such a condition and the normal one.¹

Rephrased: How are they constructed, the invisible maps and internalized compasses which tell us both where we are and where we should go, not merely in the material landscapes of earth and air, fire and water, but in the invisible universe of the socially taken-for-granted? Is madness the price we pay for penetrating the abyss between the five senses of the body and the sixth sense of culture? How do I communicate my findings in such a way that they at the same time appear true to me and trustworthy to you? How do I grasp the meaning of a text which I never saw before? Through which mechanisms are we made so obedient and so predictable?

At least since the time of Plato's *Republic* the common answer is that we find our way in the intelligible by treating it *as if it were* sensible; just as the map and compass serve as our major navigation tools in the world of sense-things, so the same instruments are our guides in the world of thought-things as well. The only difference is that in the world of things the maps are visible documents and the compass tied to the magnetic north pole, while in the world of meaning the map is an invisible picture of the invisible and the compass hooked to the norms of the socially taken-for-granted, a concept otherwise

known as the collective unconscious or the synthetic à priori. In that latter context it is significant that Immanuel Kant explicitly thought of his philosophy not as a single unified system, but as a form of performative experimentation.

And so it is that even if a lion could talk, I would not understand him,² because in my capacity as a human being I will never know what the lion feels when *his* paws touch the ground, never hear with his ears how the wind rustles the elephant grass, never see with his eyes the antelope at the waterhole, never smell the scent of the prey, never slit its throat with my teeth, never taste its blood with *my* licking tongue. None of this because my body is the body of a human being, his that of a lion, my imagination lodged in the mind of a cultivated male, his in the leap of a wild animal. It is an integral part of being human that while I may well think beyond the limits of my experience, I can never know the objects of such thoughts.



This issue of truth and trust – the ultimate question of what it means to be human – permeated everything Immanuel Kant ever wrote, not the least in the detailed analyses of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. And nowhere was this issue more precisely captured than in the first paragraph of the pivotal chapter ‘On the ground of distinction of all objects in general into phenomena and noumena’, at the same time a summary of what in his book had gone before and an anticipation of what was later to come. In Max Müller’s old fashioned translation:

We have now not only traversed the whole domain of pure understanding, and carefully surveyed each part of it, but we have also measured its extent, and assigned to it everything in it its rightful place. This domain, however, is an island and enclosed by nature itself within limits that can never be changed. It is the country of truth (a very attractive name), but surrounded by a wide and stormy ocean, the true home of illusion, where many a fog bank and melting iceberg tempt us to believe in new lands, while constantly deceiving the adventurous mariner with vain hopes, and involving him in adventures

which he can never leave, and yet can never bring to an end. Before we venture ourselves on this sea, in order to explore it on every side, and to find out whether anything is to be hoped for there, it will be useful to glance once more at the map of that country which we are about to leave, and to ask ourselves, first, whether we must not be content with what it contains, nay, whether we must not be content with it, supposing that there is no solid ground anywhere else where we could settle; secondly, by what title we possess even that domain, and may consider ourselves safe against all hostile claims.³

What a wonderful passage, what a fantastic illustration of the problem of how we find our way in the unknown, in my judgment the master key to Kant's entire philosophy. No wonder that this time-bound traveler has been called *the* student of limits, his very name a handy revelation of his predilections – the German word *Kante* means literally 'edge', in all respects the sharp counterpart to Anaximander's fuzzy *to apeiron*. The secret code to Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy as well, for already in the Preface of the *Tractatus* he made it clear that his aim was "to set a limit to thought, or rather – not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts."⁴

The point of these juxtapositions is that even though both Kant and Wittgenstein of course were theoretical philosophers in what they were thinking *about*, they were practicing geographers in the languages they were thinking *in*. Who knows, perhaps the time has finally come for a fourth critique, an explication of the cartographic mode of reason which the two masters took so much for granted that none of them was able to clearly see it.

It is well known that Kant, whose body reputedly never left Königsberg, regularly offered a lecture series in Geography, not just once or twice but a stunning total of forty-seven (or was it forty-nine) times – to current readers an orgy in superstition and political incorrectness, to himself a mandatory introduction to the rest of his oeuvre. When the university authorities suggested that he might use his time more profitably, then he retorted that anyone who wished to attend his philosophy lectures must first take his geography and

anthropology courses, in his own words a propedeutic for everything else; while the goal of his philosophy was to know *what* to think, the purpose of his geography was to learn *how* to think. Der Herr Professor was obviously well aware that the history of western philosophy – perhaps of all philosophy – is one with the philosophy of cartography, both fields closely linked to astronomy and theology, the sea-farers observing the stars, the clerics reading the Bible. My own conclusion is that if war is God's way of teaching the Americans geography, then geography is the critic's way of learning philosophy.



Not as strange as it might seem, for my own definition of Geography is that

Geography is a Geometry with names

And here, as everywhere else, Plato casts his shadows, not only from the dialogues but from the anecdotes too. For how often have we not heard the rumor that above the entrance to the Academy there was a sign, at the same time inviting and forbidding. Nothing stupid like

I love you

or that

Arbeit macht frei

but the epistemological slogan that

Here nobody is let in who does not know his Geometry

I now imagine that at the exit there is a sign as well, admittedly not as handsomely wrought as the motto over the entrance, merely a hand-written note to the effect that

Here nobody is let out who does not know his Geography

As a way of bringing clarity, first imagine a triangle – three points, three lines and one plane – and then try to name those same entities, thereby effectively moving from the sciences of geometry to the arts of geography. Seemingly a simple trick, in reality a most sophisticated practice, for whereas baptizing the points (*S*, *T*, *G*) is a fairly straight-forward exercise in pointing and denoting, naming the lines is another matter entirely. To see why, merely let *S* stand for Susanne, *T* for Thomas, *G* for Gunnar. Then let the connecting lines (*ST*, *TG*, *GS*, *SG*, *GT*, *TS*) symbolize the relations between us.

What this thought experiment immediately reveals is that while the names of the points tend to stick, those of the lines do not. The reason is, of course, that to a considerable extent the three persons Susanne, Thomas and Gunnar are visible, laudable, touchable, lickable, smellable things open to the five senses of the body. In contrast the social relations that tie us together are doubly untouchable, unknown and taboo-ridden even to ourselves. No wonder that these names from the interface between the material and the cultural tend to run off with the baptizing water which is meant to bless them. Even more difficult, perhaps impossible, is the naming of the plane (), the reflecting screen which through its resistance brings everything into being, a set of Batesonian differences great enough to make a difference.

In this bewildering situation it is instructive to recall Plato's comment that the mathematicians deal with visible things (like the imagined triangle) in a very special way. In particular he noted that the images which the theoretician is working with are not material objects, which can be readily grasped by the human body, but something higher and more abstract – not ordinary shadows or reflections in water, but imitations in drawing of concepts unseen, the type of relations "which only thought can apprehend."⁵

And in the sense just illustrated all mapping is in effect an exercise in translation, like the art of Wassily Kandinsky a geometric constellation of points, lines and planes. In a similar manner, William Shakespeare – another practitioner of car-

tographical reason – knew that it is by applying the force of imagination that we make the absent present and the present absent. ‘Let there be,’ utters the creative logician, well aware that without violence there will never be any difference. ‘And there is,’ observes the mimicking empiricist, equally aware that without prediction there is nothing to capture.



The map itself is the answer to Kant’s question about the title by which we possess the country of truth (a very attractive name). And exactly like his latter-day descendants, Arthur Schopenhauer and Ludwig Wittgenstein, Kant too knew that the purpose of his self-defined mission was to establish the boundary between the empirically verifiable, on the one hand, and the utterly unthinkable, on the other; the shore-line of the Kantian Island of Truth does in fact coincide with the outer edge of the Human Territory. However, no matter how abstract this surveying task may initially seem, every critic is bound to learn that the cardinal points of the taken-for-granted are anchored in the human body itself, most beautifully codified in the various versions of the Vitruvian Man. But whereas the navel of this arch(itectual) figure is always at the center of the circumscribing circle, the diagonals of the square are sometimes intersecting in the omphalos, sometimes in the groin; while both the *Homo ad circumulum* and the *Homo ad quadraticum* have their legs and arms outstretched to embrace you, Leonardo’s version is a jumping-jack waving to the crowd. Much is to be learned from this geometric shiftiness, not the least as it was embodied in the well known figure of Osiris, at the same time Egyptian fertility god and King of the Underworld. Quite predictably, many tombs show him with his member angled, albeit no longer set in its normal place between the legs, but sticking out of (or is it stuck *in*) the sanctity of his sacred navel. In contrast,

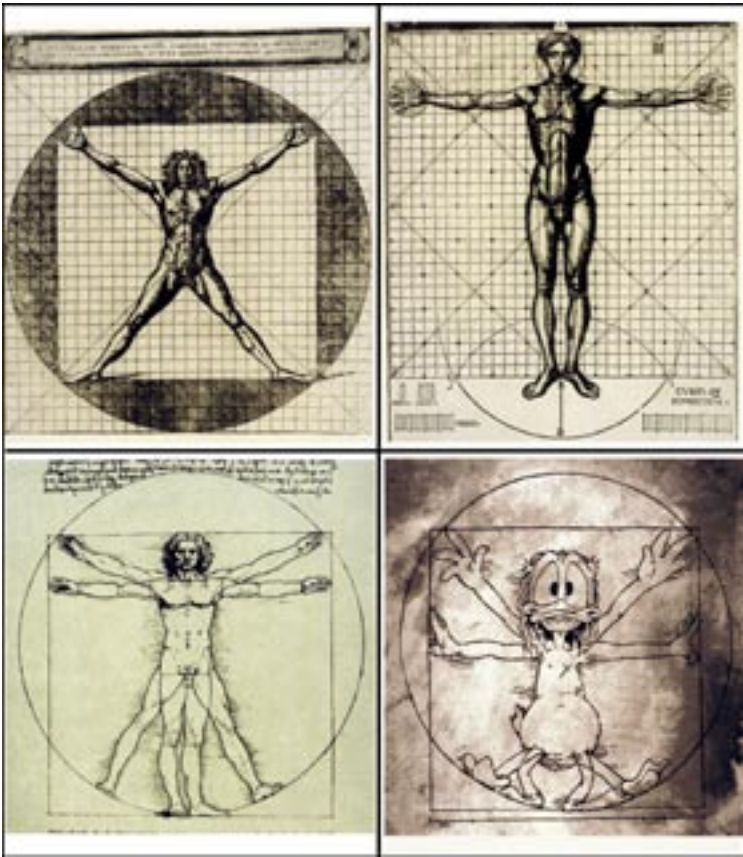


Figure 1. *Vitruvian men*. Photo montage by Tommy Westberg.

Donald Duck always carries his heart in the right place, perhaps because ducks do not have any navels, perhaps because Donald Duck is not a real being but a Hollywood imagination. Therefore, whenever you see some quite new surroundings from your window, when things, humans and animals behave as they never did before, you must not conclude that you have gone mad but rather stand up and be counted – head up and feet down; eyes up front, arse in the behind; the sinister to the left, the righteous to the right.

Risky business, those tricks performed in the Bar de Saussure, the legendary establishment where material Signifiers are

searching for their souls and cultural signifieds groping for their bodies. The resulting issues go to the heart of what it means to be human, for it is in the rhythmic interchange between the sensible and the intelligible that life gets its meaning, hence its sense and direction. For the critic of cartography this means that he takes every map to be a projection of the self, every self a projection of its culture; in the words of Gottlob Fichte, “everything we see, we see within ourselves. We see only ourselves,”⁶ partly because imagination is essentially memorial, partly because memory is more an art of spatial invention than of poetic recitation.

Of these processes William Shakesperare was well aware, not the least in the last act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where he lets Theseus observe that

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
 Are of imagination all compact
 ...
 And as imagination bodies forth
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
 Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
 A local habitation and a name.⁷

By letting his conception of airy nothing body forth in a local habitation with a name, the bard effectively twined together in the same work of triangulation the point-like places, the line-like relations and the plane-like takens-for-granted, logic itself an outstanding illustration of the same mode of cartographic reason. For what is logical deduction if it is not a journey between three local habitations, two of them named ‘premises’, the third called ‘conclusion’; as every rhetorician knows, the easiest way to be believed is to tell a travel story, and, as every cartographer knows, an itinerary consists of an infinite chain of metonymies in which one wor(l)d slides into another, a postmodern narrative with multidimensional meanings. The very purpose of the map is in fact to tell me not only where I am but to where I should go, a communicative task so demanding

that every map is at the same time a picture and a story, hence by necessity a violent transgression of the censorship paragraph of the second commandment with its prohibition against graven images and its ban on the (mis)use of the Ruler's name. No wonder that in the palaces of power, admission to the map room is highly restricted, its doors barred to anyone but the dictator himself.

The times are nevertheless changing and old secrets turn out to be no secrets any more. Thus it is now possible to reveal that in order to make a map all one needs are three primitives, viz.

- a fix-point or a hook on which the world is hung – now the pole in the north in the Middle Ages paradise in the east, social welfare in the speeches and world dominion in the weapons of mass destruction;
- a scale or translation function that governs the relations between what I see and what it means; and
- a screen or canvas onto which the particular constellation of indicatives and imperatives are projected.



Fix-point, scale and canvas. These are the cartographer's primitives, together necessary and sufficient. Yet it seems that the third condition – the canvas – plays a more crucial role than the other two; by no coincidence, the Latin term *mappa* means 'table-cloth or napkin', while *charta* stands for 'parchment or sheet of paper'. Tell me your name, and I shall tell you what you are; translate your name into a definite description and I shall know both whence you came and to where you are heading.

The roots reach deeply into the culturally taken-for-granted, not the least because each and every one of Plato's dialogues is structured like a map, at the same time a set of meticulously established thought-positions and an explication of the routes by which these particular topoi have been reached. Nowhere is this more striking than in the *Republic*, whose overriding purpose was to charter the way to the good life in the good city and there-

by provide an answer to Socrates' question of how one should live. Moreover, the entire text is founded on the idea that the only guardian of the guardian is a proper education, a program which gets operationalized into a discourse "which is spatialized through a series of metaphors that accompany a chain of primary or guiding questions around which the dialogue is organized."⁸ To Plato, however, no one is a dialectician by nature and that explains why the Republic may be better read as a practical manual of pedagogy than as a theoretical treatise on justice.

It is with the purpose of teaching Glaucon how to paint the picture of the Good in the just person's knowledge that Socrates introduces him to the three figures of the analogy of the Sun, the allegory of the Divided Line and the parable of the Cave. Similarly (and equally skilled in the art of rhetoric, some claim in the art of lying) every cartographer knows that Plato's Sun corresponds to the mapmaker's fix-point, the Divided Line to his scale, the Cave Wall to the canvas or the mappa itself, the latter a screen without which there are no shadows to capture, hence nothing to see and no differences to analyze. It follows that mapping the Republic is to draw the lines of what it means to be human, to mount the instruments of cartographical reason in the thin boundary between the two prepositions *of* and *in*, to face once again the Beckettian challenge of writing in such a way that it is not *about* something but *is* that something itself. Three maps are forthcoming.

The first of these imaginations is a metaphysical base map drawn with the aim of determining the limits of language and thereby the boundaries between the Territory of the Humans, on the one hand, and the surrounding Lands of the Totally Alien, on the other. While the characteristics of the latter are so utterly unthinkable that they can be neither noticed nor named,⁹ the homelands of the former lie entirely within the limits of language, albeit split into two realms of equal size and shape. One of these areas, here called The Realm of *Objects* of Cognition, is essentially ontological, the other, here named The Realm of *Kinds* of Cognition, is essentially epistemological.

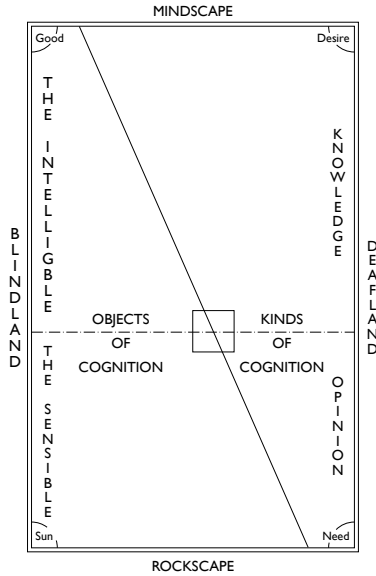


Figure 2. Base map of Plato's *Republic*.

Marking the boundary between them is a straight line which in standard textbooks is depicted as the *dividing* (that is the vertical) part of the original version of the Divided Line. In my atlas, however, it is drawn at an angle, partly as an expression of its non-muteness, mainly for reasons to be specified later.

Cutting through the Human Territory, reaching all the way from the invisible Blindland to the inaudible Deafland, runs yet another frontier. In most commentaries this is depicted as the major (horizontal) *divider* of the Diving Line, the interface between the Intel- ligible Region in the upper part of the Human Territory and the Sen- sible Region in the lower, the former area illuminated by the Form of the Good the latter by the light of the Sun. The same traits are conspicuous in the present maps as well, but here the horizontal line encapsulates also the fraction line of the Saussurean Bar-in-Between, that magic wand through which word turns to flesh and matter to meaning. It is exactly here, in the intersection of the two lines, that we find the semiotician's counterpart to the astronomer's Greenwich, the conventional mapmaker's fix-point of fix-points.

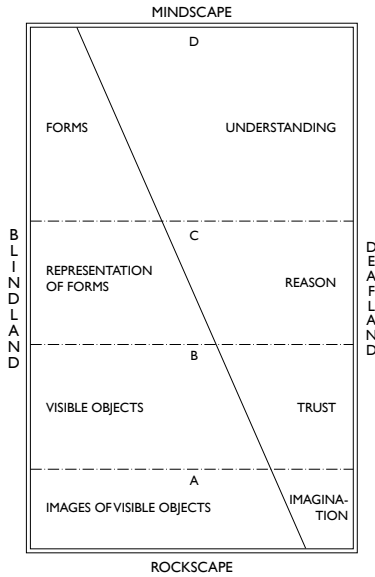


Figure 3. Administrative map of Plato's *Republic*.

The second imagination is an illustration of how the two realms of cognition are divided into four provinces all positioned along a gliding scale of concreteness and abstraction; while provinces A and B together form the Sensibility Region of the Human Territory, C and D constitute the Intelligibility Region. Each of the four provinces is then further divided into two districts whose names and sizes are specified on the map itself.

Grasping the construction of this many-faceted universe is crucial to anyone who wants to know what it means to be human, for whatever I happen to say is doubly bound to the types of objects I am talking *about* and to the modes of understanding that I am talking *in*. Hence it is well known that the objects of Province B are actual things of which the shadows of Province A are nothing but likenesses. In parallel herewith one should recall firstly that everything in Province C concerns mathematical reflection, secondly that mathematicians deal with visible things in a very special way. Thus, even though the human triangle which I imagined a few paragraphs ago in some sense is a real thing – its black lines are easily projected

onto a white page – the drawing itself is a shadow not of a concrete being but of an abstract idea, not an entity I can hold in my hand but a relation which only thought can comprehend. My own drawings are obviously themselves objects of this kind, peculiar images of the Platonic form of the invisible map itself. In Province D, finally, the objects of cognition are as far removed from the material world as anyone may imagine; the actual things which we earlier encountered in Province B are here replaced by the concept of pure Forms, untouchable creatures of the mind, objects which only a proper understanding of dialectics is capable of grasping. It is in fact here, in the mappae of mappae, that we can hope not merely to learn how to live within the confines of the taken-for-granted, but to understand it and reform it as well. To be a Platonic Form – viz. to be a citizen of Province D – is consequently to be an entity which is radically self-referential, unique, intelligible and immutable. A primal scream in the analyst's echo chamber.

Finally, the third imagination is best described as an ethical or socio-economic map, the only one in our series which explicitly focuses on the concept of power and therefore on the socialization processes through which we are made so obedient and so predictable. Also in this case the ties to the Divided Line are strong, even though the more immediate connections are to the allegory of the Cave and consequently to the architectonics of the House of Plotinus; most significantly it is the wisdom-loving philosophers who are living in the splendid seclusion of the penthouse, while it is the food- and sex-loving workers who are crowded in the dungeons of the basement.

Although the different population groups are all communicating through some type of language, they differ drastically in the relative weights they assign to the sensible and the intelligible, the former expressed primarily through the Saussurean Signifiers, the latter invoked through the signifieds; while the workers and artisans tend to emphasize their bodily needs, the guardians are more concerned with their mindful desires.

Once this blueprint of the Plotinian House has been drawn, I imagine the slanted line as an elevator shaft with two doors on every floor, one opening up to the five senses of the body (roughly the ob-

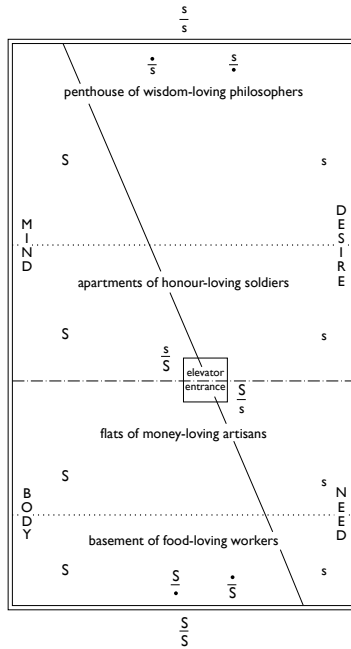


Figure 4. Socio-economic map of Plato's *Republic*.

jects of cognition), the other to the sixth sense of culture (roughly the kinds of cognition). The main entrance to this imaginary construction – effectively the *agora* of social and political exchange – is on the level of the horizontal line, the elevator boys the only ones who know difference well enough to communicate with whoever comes their way. And whispering to anyone who cares to listen, the Janus-like janitors keep repeating Thomas Pynchon's observation that

Nothing will produce bad History more directly or more brutally, than drawing a Line, in particular a Right Line, the very Shape of Contempt, through the midst of a People, – to create thus a Distinction betwixt them, – 'tis the first stroke. – All else will follow as if predestin'd, unto War and Devastation.¹⁰

The political history of the barbed wire is a gripping geography of intentional cruelty, a paradigmatic case of how living minds are destroyed by dead matter, of how the Other is a fruit of violence.¹¹ In that context the question also arises of whether it is the human actors who are moving across the coordinates of the three maps or whether it is the spatial structure of the atlas that is moving over the actors; the differences between James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Andrei Belyi's *Petersburg* (the former an example of the first kind, the latter of the second) come readily to mind.



With this atlas as my guide I now return to the three primitives of mapmaking – the fix-points, the scale and the canvas – and to the definition of the map as a merging together of picture and story, hence of metaphor and metonymy. Indeed there are strong parallels between the history of cartography, on the one hand, and the history of pictorial art, especially the development of the perspective, on the other. Pivotal in that story is Roger Bacon, the Franciscan friar who some time around 1260 wrote a famous letter to his benefactor Pope Clement IV.

Bacon's argument in this correspondence was that if the Church wanted to succeed in the struggle against the Muslims, then the preachers should be less worried about telling the truth and more concerned about being believed. With that motivation Bacon then recommended that the propagandamakers should make practical use of the newly rediscovered fields of geometry and optics and the artistic techniques associated therewith. The rhetorical argument was that if the pictures of Jesus, Maria and the Lord of Hosts were drawn to look like three-dimensional figures from daily life, not as flat oblations showered from heaven, then the stories would be more convincing. And with that idea the door was opened for all the geniuses to come: Brunelleschi, Dürer, Tintoretto, Cézanne, eventually Marcel Duchamp.

When that long and complicated story is made short and simple, then it says that the counterpart of the mapmaker's fix-point is the painter's vanishing-point, an illusion which is the same as the viewpoint of the painter himself; what I happen to see depends on where I happen to stand.¹² Furthermore, the mapmaker's scale is one with the painter's straight lines of projection, these invisible constructions themselves closely related to the different segments of Plato's Divided Line, a sort of ontological thermometer where the zero point of 'let there be' coincides with the boundary-line between Provinces C and B, hence between Reason and Trust, the different modes of reasoning that were originally known as *dianoia* and *pistis*. Finally, the cloth of the mappa shares many characteristics not only with the painter's picture plane but with the psychoanalyst's concept of the socially taken-for-granted. It is telling that whereas the traditional aim of cartographical projection has been to flatten the globe, the goal of painterly perspective has been to fatten the nude.



The histories of cartography and painting are tied together by the irresolvable tension between a three-dimensional origin and a two-dimensional copy. Not surprisingly, these same issues of appearance and apparition permeate the entire oeuvre of Marcel Duchamp, unwittingly one of the most profound critics of cartographical reason ever to be. To be precise, the structural similarities between his *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* and my own mappings of Plato's Republic are stunning.

The first thing to notice is that the lower panel of the *Large Glass* – the bachelors' domain with its three-dimensional machines – corresponds directly to Plato's world of sensible objects. Likewise, the upper panel – the bride's domain with its four-dimensional conception of the milky way – is clearly relatable not only to Plato's region of the intelligible, but to Kant's imagination of the stormy ocean as well. Marking the boundary between the two panels are the three

glass staffs – the coolers – on which the stripped bride eventually hangs her clothes, in my mind another version of the Saussurean Bar, that horizontal line which keeps the Signifier and the signified together and apart. Peering out of the windows of the cloud is the wisdom-loving bride, toiling with the glider are the onanistic bachelors.

The second parallel is that just as every map is a conjunction of picture and story, so is *La Mariée*. To be more exact, the picture is etched onto the surface of the glass itself while the story is told in the cryptic notes of the *Green Box*, the former to be seen and admired for its sheer beauty, the latter to be read for their intricate meanings. And so it is that in the metaphysical map of the first republic the picture belongs primarily to the Realm of Objects, the story to the Realm of Meaning. In its fullness, however, the Large Glass is Duchamp's rendering of what on my maps appears as the slanted line. The connections are made even more obvious by the fact that the exact positioning of the slanted line comes directly from the artist's own geometry, the grinding machines to one side, the dripping desire to the other. And the slope of the line is 23.5 degrees, by design or coincidence the same as the slope of the earth axis. "Amusing," might have been Duchamp's own comment, for 'amusing' was one of his favorite expressions.

I am less certain about the correct word for the fact that when the Large Glass in 1954 was installed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Duchamp insisted that the wall behind it should be broken and a rectangular window with a view to the courtyard be installed.¹³ The result of that interference is that there are really two picture planes, two windows *through* which the artist sees the world and two windows *onto* which he projects his desire. And out there in the courtyard could be seen a splashing fountain, perhaps a version of the waterfall that drives the entire machinery, the power source which the artist deliberately excluded from the Glass itself lest he fall to the temptation of becoming a landscape painter.

Even more interesting than the fountain, however, is the fact that through the water cascades one could catch a glimpse of a

small sculpture, a nude female figure with her hands clutched in wonder and her eyes meeting our own. A wonderful illustration of the artist's saying that "between two beings in love language is not the deepest.... The exchange occurs through the eyes."¹⁴ Quite significantly, this particular eye-catcher (later inexplicably removed) was sculpted by Maria Martins, the wife of the Brazilian ambassador to Washington, a lady who according to her own daughter could seduce anybody. Evidently also the handsome Frenchman, who by several accounts fell deeply in love with her, perhaps because he somehow sensed that she would never leave her successful husband, perhaps because he thought of her as an incarnation of the virgin who became a bride but never a wife.

Who knows, but this might well be the real theme of the Large Glass: to render a desire so desirous that it can never be satisfied, hence never be stopped. Another version of the seductive play which is regularly performed in the Bar de Saussure, the legendary establishment where the Signifier and the signified are equally obsessed by the non-achievable goal of becoming one with the other. No wonder that Duchamp in 1923 abandoned the work unfinished, perhaps because at that stage the glass of the Glass had helped him see through what he saw. But what would he have discovered, if instead of standing the two-sided mappa at a ninety degree angle to the horizontal floor he had tilted it, thereby vastly complicating the well-learned rules of perspectival construction? Even geniuses have their blind spots.



Much more could obviously be said about this pivotal study of fix-points, perspective and the transparent curtain of the picture plane. Yet, even more relevant to the critic of cartographical reason is Duchamp's final work, the assemblage of mixed media which took him twenty years of secret work to complete, in Jasper Jones's word "the strangest work of art in any museum."¹⁵ In French it was signed and dated as

ETANT DONNÉS: 1° LA CHUTE D'EAU
2° LE GAZ D'ÉCLAIRAGE

Marcel Duchamp

1946-1966

in English simply *Given: 1. The waterfall, 2. The illuminating gas.*

Like the Large Glass before it also the architectural structure of the Given comes in two versions, one as a picture, the other as a story.¹⁶ The latter – in a sense the blueprint of the gigantic stereoscope – is in Duchamp's *Manual* of how the assemblage should be taken apart and put together again. First a door which is less of a door and more of a window; then a dark antechamber whose sides are dressed in black velvet; further on a brick wall with a hole that looks as if it had been made by the iron ball of a wrecking machine; beyond the wall an interior which no one ever saw before: close by a nude on a bed of twigs and dried leaves, further away a kitschy landscape with a brilliant waterfall, a backdrop that looks more like a postcard or an advertisement for Coors beer than as the work of a serious artist. A finger in the eye of retinal art.

But what is it that you see, when you set your eyes to the two holes drilled in the door which is not a door? A dumped dummy, a raped corpse, a woman in post-coital repose, a pornographic whore?

All and none, but most immediately an image impossible to resist, the sight of a bared cunt. (Pardon the term, but no other seems appropriate.) And exactly in that most taboo-ridden of all places – the most holey of the holy – lies what seems to be the vanishing point of the entire construction, its prominence further enhanced by the slightly plunging perspective and the interplay of different light sources.

Easy, though. For when the aroused teenager gets a little more experienced (s)he is likely to discover that what initially looked like a stable fix-point is neither fixed nor stable, not an end in itself but a means to another end. To be precise, the professional critic will quickly inform the youngster that the cunt is less of a cunt per se

and more of the artist's commentary on those who went before him, Gustave Courbet and August Rodin not the least. Even more importantly, closer inspection will reveal that what initially looked like a woman's genitals no gynecologist would ever recognize as such; under the eyes of the voyeur the shaven female gradually changes into a dismembered (not castrated) male, the imagined clitoris taking on traits of a symbolized scrotum, the real pouch which on ordinary men encloses the testicles. More miraculously still, the cut-off penis seems to move – Osiris-like – from its proper place in the crouch to the firm grip of the nude's left hand, where it can sometimes be seen flickering as a gas lamp, sometimes beaconing like the torch of the Statue of Liberty. But look a little longer still and you will catch a glimpse of something strikingly similar to the artist's own mouth – somber, guarded, watchful, unsurprised. Smiling nevertheless, for even in this somewhat awkward position Duchamp sticks to humour as his preferred weapon. The double conclusion is first that you see what you see and then that what you see depends not only on where you stand but on the cultural processes through which you have arrived at that particular vantage point.

A self-portrait in the making, for in everything he did Duchamp meticulously followed the textbook instructions on pictorial construction, always more of a practicing civil engineer than a conceptual artist. As in my own maps of the Republic he first placed his theodolite in the intersection of the major lines, then aimed his sighting tube at the two landmarks of the sensible Cunt and the intelligible Desire, the former located in the lower left-hand corner of the Realm of Objects, the latter in the upper left-hand corner of the Realm of Meaning. And so it is that like Socrates in the *Symposium* Duchamp here shows how a body can be purified and transformed into ecstatic contemplation of the pure form of desire and beauty;

'But Diotima,' said I, 'who are those seekers of wisdom, if they are neither the wise nor the ignorant?'

'Ah, even a child could tell you that! Those in-between, of course. And most prominent among the in-betweens is Love. For wisdom is one of the loveliest things and Love is love of the lovely. It follows that

Love must be a philosopher, a seeker of truth who stands between the wise and the ignorant.... Such, my dear Socrates, is the spirit of love.¹⁷

“Doff thy name,” said Juliet to Romeo, “and for that name, which is not part of thee, take all myself.”¹⁸ Not a relativism but a strangely ordered translation function.



Likewise with Duchamp’s dummy, a figure caught in a most peculiar coordinate net, in reality an anamorphic distortion which like all anamorphic constructions can be viewed from one vantage point only. For the critic of cartographical reason this connection is especially important because “the difference between the peepshow and an anamorphic image is that the viewer of the [perspective] box is required to approach the illusion from the point at which it works, whereas an anamorphosis deliberately presents a scrambled image from the anticipated viewpoint, and often leaves the viewer to find the secret of its optical trickery by searching out its wildly improbable viewing position.”¹⁹ It was Duchamp’s genius that he showed, never said, how these two techniques can be mixed together.

But precisely because the anatomical eye of the *perspectiva naturalis* is at the same time the cultural eye of the *perspectiva artificialis*, it is crucial to investigate the relations between the sighting organ and the concept of imagination, that uniquely human faculty by which the absent is made present and the present made absent. What in this context makes the Given so important is that the cultural imaginations indeed have no parallels in the world of physical reality; even though the viewer automatically thinks that the nude figure has a face, a right arm, a neck and a back, in the actual contraption there is none of it. Nothing hidden but the artist’s agenda.

Such is in fact the function of Duchamp’s dummy that it projects itself out of the realistic *perspectiva naturalis* and into the imaginary *perspectiva artificialis* all with the effect that what is absent to the eye of the natural becomes present in the mind of the artificial. No

wonder, then, that he consistently criticized the cubists for their failure of not being abstract enough, indeed for being naive propagators of the retinal art which he himself so heartily despised. The very purpose of his installation is consequently not to bare a shaven cunt (although it does that as well), but to experiment with the faculty of imagination and, by extension, with the translation function of the mapmaker's scale.

Duchamp's command of the anamorphic techniques – literally the skewing of the scale – is so masterly that even the voyeur gradually realizes that what he is watching is himself watching. Thus it is that the really given of the Given is neither in the waterfall nor in the illuminating gas but in the peep-holes drilled at eye-level seven centimeters apart, the entire contraption a strange verification of Jacques Lacan's proposal that "at the scopic level we are no longer at the level of demand, but of desire, of the desire of the Other."²⁰ And rarely has that desire been more revealingly unfolded than in the *Etant donnés*, art history's most exemplary example of how the geometral perspective is a mapping of space, not of sight. All of this paradoxically brought together in the well established fact that the actual shape of the somewhat dingy sculpture is a mixture of two living beings, one the rather strong-bodied Maria Martins, the lady behind the waterfall in the Museum courtyard, the other the blond Teeny Matisse, the woman who Duchamp later married and whose characteristic hand holds the *Bec Auer*, the illuminating gas of his happy end.

Finally there is the picture plane itself, the artist's version of the mapper's mappa, a direct descendant of the glass of the Glass. As with everything else in Duchamp's work this capturing screen is not where it would seem to be – not in the backdrop of the distant landscape – but in the irregularly shaped breach in the brick-wall. Although the contours suggest that the breach was struck by the iron ball of a wrecking machine, there is no debris to indicate whether the blow came from the inside or the outside, whether the striker was the exhibitionist, who wanted to get out, or the voyeur, who wanted to get in. Yet, since it is highly unlikely that the sixty-nine carefully numbered bricks were assembled with less thought and less care than the rest of the tableau, it is natural to hypothesize that the irregularity

of the window is somehow related to the anamorphic projection of the nude. In my analysis the hole is in fact a non-touchable version of the glass of the Glass.

Whatever may be said about that idea, the shape of the hole nevertheless remains a mystery, for somehow it is reminiscent also of the amoeba-like picture which Duchamp once sent to Maria Martins, a smear that subsequent analysis has shown to be made with human semen presumably ejaculated by the artist himself, his penis functioning as a tube of readymade paint. If this is the shoot that created the nude (and by anamorphic extension the hole of the picture plane), then it is hard to imagine an onanist more creative.

Much left to discover. Not the least the fact that hidden from the Peeping-Tom, is the floor, *the* foundation of the entire contraption. Not just any floor, however, but a support which is covered by two pieces of checkered linoleum that comes from the New York kitchen in which the *Etant donnés* originally was put together.²¹ No doubt the devoted chess player's homage to his artistic forerunners in Italy, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands. Another smile on an invisible face, for at this stage it should be clear that Duchamp's entire oeuvre is one of the most profound critiques of cartographical reason ever formulated.

And now, when I finally find myself inside the mausoleum of the Philadelphia Museum, my nose poking the slit between the two boards in the door, then it strikes me that I am totally alone, that even though it can never be said, solipsism is the only honest philosophy. For now, on closer inspection, the slanted line of Socrates' republic turns out not only to mark a no-man's land forbidden to enter but to merge with a double-painted canvas, a projection screen which on one side tells the story of a bride stripped bare by her bachelors (*La Mariée*) on the other shows the picture of a wife covered up by her husband (*Etant donnés*). And once inside the excluded middle of that folded canvas, I suddenly understand how

solipsism, when its implications are followed out strictly, coincides with pure realism. The self of solipsism shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality coordinated with it.... What

brings the self into philosophy is the fact that 'the world is my world'. The philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the meta-physical subject, the limit of the world not a part of it.²²

Frightening insight: I am who I am. Not what we have been made to believe, a creature made in the image of the LORD, but exactly the reverse. Not an informative

$a = b$

but a small and self-referential

$a = a$

And for these reasons there is no cartography without power, no power without cartography. A fourth critique in the making.



The point of the point, a conclusion not to be missed: Making a difference is by necessity an act of violence, the marking of a boundary. *The* expert on boundary-making is the land-surveyor, by training cartographical reasoner par excellence, weaver of coordinates and shaper of the taken-for-granted. Another way of saying that even though Plato, Kant and Wittgenstein all were philosophers in theory they were geographers in practice, forgers of the uncreated consciousness of the utopian No-where of Now-here, sacralized baptizers of local habitations.

Such is the condition of being human that without names we are nothing, for without names the Kantian *as-if* has nothing but its own trickery to hook on to. It was Marcel Duchamp's genius to smash this readymade idol, slaying the ghost of cartographical reason in the process. In the emerging world of globalization the fix-points are in fact so invisible and unstable that they are not at all; the scaling lines

so twisted and the angles so skewed that the threads which once were woven into a net of longitudes and latitudes now form a hopelessly tangled skein; the screening mappa not a smooth surface but a set of warped and rhizomatic napkins, culture-stained and with a scent distinctly their own.

No wonder that people tend to get lost. Not, however, because we are all mad, but because our navigational tools have become badly outdated, ordering directives designed for another time and another place, politics itself a clandestine case of anamorphic art.

Notes

- 1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, 2nd edn, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe & G.H.W. von Wright, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 393.
- 2 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 223.
- 3 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. F. Max Müller (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1966), A236/B295.
- 4 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears & B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 3.
- 5 Plato, *Republic*, 510. Quotation from F.M. Cornford, *The Republic of Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 225.
- 6 As quoted in J. Sallis, *Force of Imagination: The Sense of the Elemental* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 90.
- 7 William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V.i, lines 7-8 and 14-17. Quotation from *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. H. Craig & D. Bevington (Glenview, IL.: Scott, Foresman & Company, 1973).
- 8 A. Ophir, *Plato's Invisible Cities: Discourse and Power in the Republic* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 8.
- 9 As the *Tractatus* insists, a limit can be approached only from the inside.
- 10 Thomas Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), p. 615.
- 11 Reviel Netz, *Barbed Wire: An Ecology of Modernity* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004). In this context of violence also Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
- 12 The outstanding discussion of the history of the perspective is Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of the Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).
- 13 Cf. Gunnar Olsson, *Abysmal: A Critique of Cartographic Reason* (Chicago

- & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), picture of La Mariée on p. 392.
- 14 Duchamp as quoted in Dieter Daniels, *Duchamp und die anderen: Der Modellfall einer künstlerischen Wirkungsgeschichte in der Moderne* (Köln: Dumont, 1992), p. 287; my translation.
- 15 Jasper Jones as quoted in Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (London: Pimlico, 1996), p. 451.
- 16 Cf. Olsson, *Abysmal*, pictures of Etant Donnés on pp. 394f.
- 17 Plato, *Symposium*, 204a – 204b. Here quoted as a blend of two translations, the first by M. Joyce in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. E. Hamilton & H. Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961); the other by myself based on the Swedish version by Jan Stolpe in *Platon, Skrifter, Bok 1, Gästabudet* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2000).
- 18 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, II. ii, lines 33-48. Quotation from *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*.
- 19 Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 208. The most sustained treatment is in Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphic Art*, trans. W.J. Strachan (Cambridge: Chadwick-Healy, 1977).
- 20 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), p. 104.
- 21 Cf. Olsson, *Abysmal*, pp. 404f.
- 22 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 5.64 and 5.641.

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