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## Educating by ‘the Question Method’: The Example of Kierkegaard

Mark W. Sinnett

“There was a young man as favorably endowed as an Alcibiades. He lost his way in the world. In his need he looked about for a Socrates but found none among his contemporaries. Then he requested the gods to change him into one.” This is an entry in the *Journal* of Søren Kierkegaard from the winter of 1842,<sup>1</sup> when he was putting the finishing touches on his first great aesthetic work, *Either/Or*. It is a reference to the pseudonymous author of the texts that compose the first volume of *Either/Or*, and as such it contains within it both the purpose and the origin of Kierkegaard’s entire literary work. Kierkegaard’s works embody the attempt of this gifted young man to be the Socrates whom he could not otherwise find among his contemporaries; they represent Kierkegaard’s attempt to educate by what he calls “the question method,” to educate by the method he has learned from his own teacher, “the simple wise man of antiquity.”

### In My Left Hand and in My Right

In the midst of the long-standing and ongoing disarray of scholarly interpretation of Kierkegaard, there are two facts on which there is general agreement. The first of these presents us the fundamental problem in understanding Kierkegaard’s work, while the second, as I argue, presents us the solution.

Everyone knows, first, that Kierkegaard divided his writings into two streams: the works, such as *Either/Or*, *Fear*

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Mark Sinnett is a tutor on the Annapolis campus of St. John’s College. This lecture was delivered at Annapolis on April 6, 2001.

and *Trembling*, and *Philosophical Fragments*, which are populated by various pseudonymous authors and editors; and the “religious” works, such as the six volumes of *Edifying Discourses* published concurrently with the above works in 1843-44, and signed in Kierkegaard’s own name.<sup>2</sup> Kierkegaard’s rather elliptical explanation of this curious procedure is given in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* which he wrote (but did not publish) in 1848. Written in anticipation of the republication of *Either/Or*, the *The Point of View* emphasizes that his writings have been misread and misunderstood, but that from the proper “point of view” they can be understood “in every detail” (16). The misunderstanding in question, Kierkegaard explains, is inseparable from the fact that he has come to be regarded as an aesthetic writer turned religious. He asserts, to the contrary, that he has been a “religious author” from the beginning; that “the whole of my work as an author is related to Christianity, to the problem ‘of becoming a Christian’, with a direct or indirect polemic against the monstrous illusion we call Christendom” (5-6). This is demonstrated, he says, by the fact that from the beginning of his authorship his pseudonymous, “aesthetic” works were accompanied by “religious” works signed in his own name. The “duplicity,” thus, “dated from the very start. For the *Two Edifying Discourses* are contemporaneous with *Either/Or*. The duplicity in the deeper sense, that is, in the sense of the authorship as a whole, is not at all what was a subject of comment at the time: the contrast between the two parts of *Either/Or*. No, the duplicity is discovered by comparing *Either/Or* and the *Two Edifying Discourses*” (11).

Unfortunately, however, not only did no one undertake this comparison, virtually no notice of any kind was taken of the little volume of discourses, notwithstanding its relatively greater significance. “Although *Either/Or* attracted all the attention, and nobody noticed the *Two Edifying Discourses*, this book betokened, nevertheless, that the [upbuilding]<sup>3</sup> was precisely what must come to the fore, that the author was a

religious author, who for this reason has never written anything aesthetic, but has employed pseudonyms for all the aesthetic works, whereas the *Two Edifying Discourses* were by Magister Kierkegaard” (12).<sup>4</sup> The popular success of the pseudonymous work was very gratifying, especially that of “The Seducer’s Diary”—“how wonderful!”—but it was of no avail since no attention was paid to the “contemporaneous” discourses, another instance of the all too frequent phenomenon that “things of the most vital importance often seem insignificant, . . . [like] ‘a little flower hidden in the great forest, not sought out either for its beauty, or for its scent, or because it was nourishing’” (19). And he summarizes the mishandling of his works as follows: “I held out *Either/Or* to the world in my left hand, and in my right the *Two Edifying Discourses*; but all, or as good as all, grasped with their right what I held in my left” (20); and, we may add, grasped not at all what he held in his right.<sup>5</sup>

These remarks, brief as they are, furnish certain basic parameters for the interpretation of Kierkegaard’s authorship, namely, that what is offered with the left hand is to be received with the left hand and, simultaneously, what is offered with the right is to be received with the right. Until quite recently there have been no interpretations of the writings that satisfy these parameters. The “true explanation,” nevertheless, “is at hand and ready to be found by him who honestly seeks it” (16). It is to be found, as we shall see, in Kierkegaard’s references to his “dialectical position” (6), to the “dialectical” character of his authorship (15), to “dialectical reduplication” (16, 17), to his “indirect method” that “arranges everything dialectically” (25), to “patient finger exercises in the dialectical” (38), to “the criss-cross of dialectics” (39)—and many more can be adduced.

This brings us to the second generally accepted fact about Kierkegaard’s work; namely, that his “dialectical method” is also his “Socratic method” (40); in other words, that his procedure is inspired by the “simple wise man of antiquity” who is his “teacher” (41). Although many have written about

Kierkegaard's use of Socratic "irony," and referred to Kierkegaard's maieutic role as "midwife," and even to Socratic "dialogue," we find nowhere in the secondary literature a detailed comparison between Kierkegaard's efforts and his Socratic model as presented in Plato's dialogues.

The insight that emerges from a close, comparative reading of the chronologically associated texts, and that makes sense of the "duplicity" of the authorship as a whole, is that these texts constitute between them the question and answer of Socratic dialectic. The reason both sides of the authorship are needed—the reason the *dramatis personae* on both sides have a real dramatic role to play—the reason Kierkegaard insists his intended meaning will emerge only through "comparing" the pseudonymous works with their associated discourses—is that the associated texts constitute between them a "conversation" (*dialektos*), a dialogue, within which "Magister Kierkegaard," speaking in his own voice, is able to critically examine the perspectives of his own pseudonyms, and thus to apply his "indirect polemic against the monstrous illusion we call Christendom."

The task of understanding this dialectical structure of the authorship of Kierkegaard requires that we understand the inspiration he received through the example of Socrates. We begin our quest for this understanding with Kierkegaard's discussion of Socratic dialectic—what he calls "the question method"—in his doctoral dissertation, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates*.

#### The Question Method

The significance of Socrates in *The Concept of Irony* lies in his being, in Kierkegaard's view, the originator of irony (9). Among the members of the "Socratic movement" known to him—Xenophon, Plato, and Aristophanes—Kierkegaard prefers the latter two, laying particular emphasis upon the "narrative" and "dramatic" dialogues of the one and the *Clouds* of the other. Clearly realizing that all of these texts are artistic constructions, Kierkegaard nevertheless believes that

the "genuinely Socratic" can be recovered from them through careful comparative study. But this brings us to what Kierkegaard regards as the single most important source of the "Socratic," Plato's *Apology*, which, he believes, presents us "an authentic picture of the actual Socrates" (80).

The first lesson we learn from *Apology*, according to Kierkegaard, concerns the utter "negativity" of Socrates. This is illustrated in the course of Socrates' defense by his indifference to the order of the family (184-85)<sup>6</sup> and to the collective authority of the state (193-94).<sup>7</sup> This implies, says Kierkegaard, Socrates' "completely negative relation" both to the "state" (160) and to "the established order with respect to religion" (168). The latter is especially clear in Socrates' reliance on the *daimonion*, whose silence in the face of the Council's death penalty persuades Socrates that he has nothing to fear from it (*Apol.* 40B-C). This suggests, according to Kierkegaard, not only the privacy of Socrates' religious life in what is otherwise a very public Greek world (160-61), but the silence that is here substituted for the "divine eloquence" that permeated the whole of Greek religion (161). This is consistent with the characteristic of the *daimonion*, which, even if it is "something divine," is "something that precisely in its abstraction is above definition, is unutterable and indescribable, since it allows no vocalization" (158). And the negativity of Socrates is confirmed, Kierkegaard asserts, by the same qualities of abstraction and silence in the "dramatic" dialogues: the negative character of love as an "empty longing" in *Symposium* (45, 46, 49); the "total negativity" of teaching in *Protagoras* (52); the completely "negative" views of death and of the soul in *Phaedo* (64, 71); and the "negative conclusion" of *Republic*, book 1 (111, 115). What is significant, Kierkegaard insists, is that in each case the discussion ends, not simply with no conclusion, but with a "negative conclusion"; in other words, that it ends, not simply with no positive result, but with Socrates' "ironic smile" at the vacuous result (57).

This suggests the quality that is actually Kierkegaard's principal concern, namely, the irony in which the negativity of Socrates is properly expressed. *Apology*, once again, is a good illustration, for its "total structure" lets "Socrates' position become apparent as irony" (79). For example, in speaking, not in his own defense but on his accusers' behalf (*Apol.* 30D), "lest they sin against the gift of the deity" (96), the relation of prosecution and defendant has been unexpectedly reversed, demonstrating not only the lack of any real point of contact between Socrates and his accusers (88), but "the ironic infinite elasticity, the secret trap-door through which one suddenly plunges down . . . into irony's infinite nothing" (26). In Socrates, in short, Kierkegaard sees "irony in all its divine infinitude, which allows nothing whatever to endure" (40).

That "irony levels everything" (79), moreover, is in Kierkegaard's view no accidental circumstance: it is not simply expressive of Socrates' "negative relation" to the established order of things, but the means of his conscious and unrelenting challenge to it. The irony of *Apology*, thus, is not simply Socrates' failure to present any real defense, but the fact that it is Athens that is on trial and Socrates who is proceeding as "counsel for the prosecution" (173). The irony of his "wisdom" was the weaponry of his "campaign" (175), the means of his "cutting off all communication with the besieged, . . . which starved the garrison out of opinions, conceptions, time-honored traditions, etc. that had been adequate for the person concerned." He purposed, not to supply "the idea" which he had glimpsed, but, by the application of that "causticity . . . which nothing can resist" (206), to strip away anything and everything that stood in the way. Although his "total skepticism" (115) often invited comparison with that of the Sophists, Socrates singled out the "teachers of wisdom" for his most intense "polemic" (209, 210): "When the Sophists, in good company, had befogged themselves in their own eloquence, it was Socrates' joy to introduce, in the most polite and modest way of the world, a

slight draft that in a short time expelled all these poetic vapors" (37). Socrates' irony was the means of his challenge to both the ancient order of the *polis* and the Sophists' attempted "surrogate" order; it was the "the glaive, the two-edged sword that he swung like an avenging angel over Greece" (211).

Of course Socrates is especially known for the particular means by which he presented his challenge: As illustrated by his examination of Meletus and Anytus in *Apology* (24C-28A), his "customary way is that of asking questions" (45). The "question method" (55), which Kierkegaard also describes as Socrates' "dialectical method" (124), was precisely the means of his challenge to the surrounding culture. Socrates begins his inquiry where people already are—"on the periphery, in the motley variety of life endlessly interwoven within itself" (32)—and "an exceptional degree of art is needed to unravel not only itself but also the abstract of life's complications." The "art" in question is "the Socratically disciplined dialogue," "the rather well-known Socratic art of *asking questions* or, to recall the necessity of dialogue for Platonic philosophy, the art of *conversing*" (33).

This art is preserved by Plato, the dialogical form of whose writings appear, in Kierkegaard's view, to be not only inspired by but also intended as an extension of Socrates' life and teaching (30, 188-89). What we find in Plato's dialogues, according to Kierkegaard, is a Socrates created by "poetic productivity" (15, 18, 125), and a literary form engendered by the "epoch-making" experience of him (29). And thus is revealed Socrates' significance "in the world-historical development"; namely, "to be the infinite beginning that contains within itself a multiplicity of beginnings" (216-17), including the "beginning" undertaken by Kierkegaard himself in 1843.

We are surely entitled to ask, however, what this "beginning" really amounts to. If the result of Socratic inquiry is simply "negativity"—if, as already suggested, this method "allows nothing whatever to endure"—is it not better described as the *end* rather than as a "beginning"? What we

will now discover in considering somewhat more fully Kierkegaard's understanding of the nature of inquiry is that "the question method," both in the classical tradition and in his own employment of it, is neither "negative," nor "positive," but always in between the two.

#### The In-Between Structure of Inquiry

"To ask a question," Kierkegaard insists, "ultimately became the primary issue for [Socrates]" (37). The crucial point is that Kierkegaard regards this endeavor as being a form of knowing. The polemic Socrates directed at the established religious tradition, for instance, reflected his intimation of better things to come: "The heavenly host of gods rose from the earth and vanished from mortal sight, but this very disappearance was the condition for a deeper relationship" (173-74). Socrates' insight represented, in this respect, "the beginning of infinite knowledge" (174) and a "new direction" for the age (175). According to Kierkegaard all of Socrates' inquiry implies his apprehension of a reality worthy of being explored and more fully understood. He describes Socrates' questioning of his fellow citizens as the means by which "the bonds of their prejudices were loosed . . . [and] their intellectual sclerosis was softened" (190)<sup>8</sup>; but "when his questions had straightened everything out and made the transformation possible, then the relation culminated in the meaningful moment, in the brief silvery gleam that instantly illuminated the world of their consciousness."<sup>9</sup>

Kierkegaard elaborates on this image by means of a story about "an Englishman who traveled in order to see the sights":

When he came to a mighty forest and found a place where he could open up an amazing vista by having the intervening woods cut, he hired people to saw through the trees. When everything was ready, when the trees were sawed through for toppling, he climbed up to this spot, took out his binoculars, gave the signal—the trees fell, and his

eyes instantaneously delighted in the enchanting view, which was even more seductive because in almost the same moment he had the opposite. (190)

"So also," Kierkegaard says, "with Socrates. By means of his questions, he quietly sawed through for toppling the primeval forest of substantial consciousness, and when everything was ready—look, then all these formations vanished, and the eyes of the soul delighted in a vista such as they had never seen before."<sup>10</sup> This illustration is significant in that it suggests the directionality of questioning. Just as the traveler, glimpsing the light filtering through the trees, "found a place where he could open an amazing vista by having the intervening woods cut," so Socrates knew how to direct his inquiry so as to reveal to "the eyes of the soul . . . a vista such as they had never seen before." The "ideality" that irony demands is clearly already present in the desire because, as Kierkegaard claims, "intellectually that which is desired is always in the desire already, inasmuch as the desire is regarded as the agitation of the desired itself in the desiring" (213). "In Socrates' demand," otherwise said, "the satisfaction was [*kata dunamin* (potentially)] present" (214). The challenge of Socrates' polemic, therefore, was just as much a beginning as it was an ending, "for the destruction of the earlier development is just as much the ending of this as it is the beginning of the new development, since the destruction is possible only because the new principle is already present as possibility."

This invites comparison with the importance placed upon questions and the process of questioning in the thought of such modern philosophers as Gadamer, Lonergan and Polanyi.<sup>11</sup> Kierkegaard's account of questioning is particularly reminiscent of Eric Voegelin's understanding of philosophical inquiry "as a movement in the psyche toward the [divine] ground *that is present in the psyche as its mover*."<sup>12</sup> The philosopher's wondering and questioning, Voegelin argues, is itself a form of cognitive participation in the reality being sought—a "knowing questioning and a questioning knowledge."<sup>13</sup> As such, "the questioning unrest

carries the assuaging answer within itself inasmuch as man is moved to his search of the ground by the divine ground of which he is in search.”<sup>14</sup> “The man who asks questions, and the divine ground about which the questions are asked, . . . merge in the experience of questioning as a divine-human encounter and reemerge as the participants in the encounter that has the luminosity and structure of consciousness.”<sup>15</sup>

This realm of divine-human encounter is further characterized by Voegelin as the “In-Between,” or the “metaxy”:

Question and answer are intimately related one toward the other; the search moves in the *metaxy*, as Plato has called it, in the In-Between of poverty and wealth, of human and divine; the question is knowing, but its knowledge is yet the trembling of a question that may reach the true answer or miss it. This luminous search in which the finding of the true answer depends on asking the true question, and the asking of the true question on the spiritual apprehension of the true answer, is the life of reason.<sup>16</sup>

The symbolism of the *metaxy* is derived from Diotima’s account of the “spiritual realm” in Plato’s *Symposium*, a discussion which it will be helpful (in the following sections) to bear in mind.<sup>17</sup>

Inhabited not only by “the great spirit,” *Erôs*, but also by the man who has “skill” (*sophos*) in spiritual matters, “the whole realm of the spiritual,” Diotima explains, “is in between [*metaxu*] the divine and the mortal”; it “is the means of all relation [*homilia*] and converse [*dialektos*] of men with the gods and of the gods with men” (*Symp.* 202E-203A). The “spiritual man” is also described as a “lover of wisdom” (*philosophos*); that is, as one (like *Erôs*) who is neither “resourceless” or “wealthy,” but “is in the middle between wisdom and ignorance [*sophias te au kai amathias en mesô estin*]” (203E). In order to explain this, Diotima notes that neither the “gods” nor the “ignorant” (*amatheis*) are “lovers

of wisdom” (*philosophousin*) (203E-204A). The former already possess wisdom and the latter, though they utterly lack it, are satisfied with themselves and have no desire for that of which they feel no defect (204A). “Who then,” asks Socrates, “are the lovers of wisdom, if they are neither the wise nor the ignorant?” Diotima responds: “They are the ones in between [*metaxu*] the two, and one of them is *Erôs*” (204B). The “lovers of wisdom” are subsequently characterized by Diotima in terms of their loving quest of wisdom and beauty: Each of them climbs aloft, “as on the rungs of a ladder, from one to two, and from two to all beautiful bodies, . . . to beautiful institutions, . . . to beautiful learning, and from learning at last to the special lore which is study of none other than the beautiful itself [*ho estin ouk allou ê autou ekeinou tou kalou mathêma*]” (211C). “Whoever has been initiated so far in love-matters [*ta erôtika*], viewing beautiful things in the right and regular order [*theômenos ephexês te kai orthôs ta kala*], suddenly, as he draws near to the end of his dealings in love, an amazing vision, beautiful in its nature, may be revealed to him [*pros telos êdê iôn tôn erôtikôn exaiphnês katopsetai ti thaumaston tên phusin kalon*]; and this, Socrates, is the final object of all those previous toils” (210E).

Here we see the in-between structure of inquiry, the character of inquiry as being neither empty nor full, neither ignorant nor wise, neither “negative” nor “positive,” but always in between. Accordingly, we see also the character of inquiry as a form of knowing, displaying a rational structure (as indicated by Diotima’s “ladder”) and providing a sense of orientation through the intimation of a reality worthy of being more fully understood, a reality, indeed, that invites the philosopher into the quest for understanding. This is especially clear in *Symposium* in that Socrates, in attacking the uncritical opinion of Agathon as to the beauty of *Erôs*, admits that he is only re-enacting the examination by which the priestess “honored by the god” (*diotima*) had challenged the same viewpoint in himself (201E).<sup>18</sup> The philosopher’s

inquiry, in other words, is an encounter in which the philosopher “is moved to his search of the ground by the divine ground of which he is in search,” or, otherwise said, in which what is desired is recognized to be “in the desire already, inasmuch as the desire is regarded as the agitation of the desired itself in the desiring.”

That Kierkegaard does indeed share this understanding of the in-between structure of inquiry is confirmed in an entry from his *Journal* from 1851: “I certainly do think that my presentation or illumination of the essentially Christian comes some points closer to the truth than the proclamation of Christianity hereabouts ordinarily does—but I am only a poet.”<sup>19</sup> Commenting on this disclaimer, Kierkegaard concedes that “‘the pastor’ can make capital of this; he can say: To be a pastor is something higher; a poet, and Magister Kierkegaard is right here, is inadequate when it comes to the essentially Christian, and Mag. K. is only a poet—oddly enough, says so himself.” Kierkegaard then emphasizes, however, that this is *not* what he said: “I have not said that I, measured against ‘the pastor,’ that is, every pastor as such, am only a poet, but *measured against the ideal, I am only a poet*” (emphasis added). Similarly, a little farther on, he notes that:

I have also said “that before God I regard my whole work as an author as my own education”; I am not a teacher but a learner. Every teacher of religion, every music teacher, every gymnastics coach, every part-time teacher may make capital of this if he wishes and say: There you see what it is to be a teacher if Magister Kierkegaard, who is for all that a gifted person, is only a learner, as he himself says. But I have not said that I, measured against every part-time teacher, could not be called a teacher, but that *before God, measured against the ideals for being a teacher, I call myself a learner.* (emphasis added)

Recalling the ironical stance of Socrates in *Symposium*, we recognize here the *daimonios aner*, the “spiritual man,” who moves “in between” the *amatheis*, the spiritual dullards (represented especially by the “pastor,” complacent in his authoritative possession of what is “higher”), and transcendent reality (represented here as the “ideal,” embodying the inexhaustible challenge and invitation of God’s truth); we find, in other words, the one who is wise only in his admission of ignorance, who is a teacher only because he is first and always a learner.

As we now turn to Kierkegaard’s account (in *The Point of View*) of his own application of “the question method”—what he calls the “criss-cross of dialectics”—we will find Plato’s *Symposium* a useful guide.

#### The Criss-Cross of Dialectics

We begin with Kierkegaard’s description of the “monstrous illusion” of Christendom that he seeks to challenge. A situation in which everyone is automatically certified by the church and state as a Christian (22-3) indicates the presence of “a tremendous confusion, a frightful illusion” (23). At the motivating center of this illusion, Kierkegaard maintains, is a profound horror at the possibility of uncertainty in relation to God: in a manner analogous to those in Socrates’ time who sought the *technai*, the techniques, with which to insure the attunement of human society to divine reality,<sup>20</sup> the common characteristic of those residing comfortably within Christendom is to have suppressed all conscious awareness of “the problem of ‘becoming a Christian.’” Given that “the problem,” as a problem, is for Kierkegaard inherent to Christian faith, the “monstrous illusion” of Christendom can only be maintained through suppression of this fundamental question. Kierkegaard’s endeavor, in turn, may then be described as the effort by means of “the question method” to restore to his society conscious awareness of “the problem”; in other words, to gain a hearing for this fundamental question.

The first thing to be understood about this task, Kierkegaard says, is that it cannot proceed directly. "Direct communication," after all, "presupposes that the receiver's ability to receive is undisturbed" (40), a condition that is not satisfied in the case of those who live in a state of illusion. In a manner reminiscent of Plato's contrast between Socratic inquiry and Sophistic speech-making, Kierkegaard asserts that there is "an immense difference, a dialectical difference, between these two cases: the case of a man who is ignorant and is to have a piece of knowledge imparted to him, so that he is like an empty vessel which is to be filled or a blank sheet of paper upon which something is to be written; and the case of a man who is under an illusion and must first be delivered from that" (40).<sup>21</sup> The "dialectical difference," furthermore, corresponds to that "between writing on a blank sheet of paper and bringing to light by the application of a caustic fluid a text which is hidden under another text" (40). This "caustic means" is also described as "negativity" (40), indicating again the ambition which Kierkegaard shares with his "teacher" to dispel the mists and clouds of illusion.

Kierkegaard subsequently says that "negativity understood in relation to the communication of the truth is precisely the same as deception" (40). This "deception," Kierkegaard explains, "begins with self-humiliation: the helper must first humble himself under him he would help, and therewith must understand that to help does not mean to be a sovereign but to be a servant, that to help does not mean to be ambitious but to be patient, that to help means to endure for the time being the imputation that one is in the wrong and does not understand what the other understands" (27-8). In this way, precisely as he describes his "teacher" doing, Kierkegaard begins by getting in touch with a person where he is (26); not by vaunting himself over the other as teacher over learner, but by identifying himself with the other as a fellow learner (29), and thereby submitting himself to the other's perspective (30).<sup>22</sup>

At this point, however, we discover the ultimate purpose of the deception, for of course, neither for Socrates nor for Kierkegaard, is it an end in itself. There is one thing, indeed, "the author must not forget, namely, his purpose, the distinction between this and that, between the religious as the decisive thing and the aesthetic incognito—lest the criss-cross of dialectics end in twaddle" (39). The "criss-cross of dialectics" refers to the conversational collision between the aesthetic and the religious in which Kierkegaard's aesthetic deception is intended to involve his unsuspecting readership:

If a man lives . . . in categories entirely foreign to Christianity, in purely aesthetic categories, and if some one is capable of winning and captivating him with aesthetic works, and then knows how to *introduce the religious so promptly that with the momentum of his abandonment to the aesthetic the man rushes straight into the most decisive definitions of the religious*—what then? Why, then, he must take notice. What follows after this, however, no one can tell beforehand. But at least he is compelled to take notice. (37, emphasis added)

Just as Socrates seduced his interlocutors into conversation through his repeated admission of ignorance, the religious writer must begin with the aesthetic in order to gain the attention and willing participation of the person lost in aesthetic illusion, but "he must have everything in readiness, though without impatience, with a view to *bringing forward the religious promptly, as soon as he perceives that he has his reader with him*" (26, emphasis added). The "simultaneous achievement of aesthetic and religious production," thus, was no accident (31-32), for it is the "criss-cross" of the two—the dialectical interrogation of the former by the latter—that was intended to bring the inhabitants of Christendom unexpectedly and unwittingly into collision with the challenge of the "religious."

As we began the section by noting this occurs indirectly: the “indirect method,” in fact, “loving and serving the truth, arranges everything dialectically for the prospective captive, and then shyly withdraws (for love is always shy), so as not to witness the admission which he makes to himself alone before God—that he has lived hitherto in an illusion” (25-26). By directing the critique of the discourses at the pseudonymous perspectives of the aesthetic works, Kierkegaard leaves his reader free to judge the state of his own existence, just as the readers of Plato’s writings are left free to judge between the different participants in the various dialogues.<sup>23</sup> Only insofar as the reader is indeed made “captive” to the pseudonymous perspectives—only insofar as the reader finds himself in them—is he then possibly, and “indirectly,” subject to the challenge of reality, which is what Kierkegaard means by “the most decisive definitions of the religious.”

This leads to the further similarity with Socrates that is clear in Kierkegaard’s understanding of his work as commissioned and empowered by “Governance.” His work, Kierkegaard explains, had to be performed under conditions of strict “divine discipline” (67). Unlike the poet, who is supplied his thoughts under inspiration of the divine muse, Kierkegaard “needed God every day to shield [him] from too great a wealth of thoughts” (68). From the beginning, God’s “aid” was experienced by Kierkegaard in his being “under arrest” (69), in his vast talents for “poetical” and “aesthetic” productivity being under restraint by God. “It is as if a father were to say to his child: You are allowed to take the whole thing, it is yours; but if you will not be obedient and use it as I wish—very well, I shall not punish you by taking it from you; no, take it as yours . . . it will smash you. Without God I am too strong for myself, and perhaps in the most agonizing of all ways am broken” (69-70). In the midst of the overwhelming riches of his imaginative capacities, he repeatedly confronted “the frightful torture of starving in the midst of abundance” (70).

This tension between his poetic talents and the divine “arrest”—what Kierkegaard refers to as the “dialectical factor” (69) in his work—is subsequently described in terms of a conversation between himself and “Governance.” The actual work began with “an occurrence,” a “collision”; namely, his failed engagement with Regine Olsen.<sup>24</sup> “What was to be done? Well, obviously the poetical had to be evacuated, anything else was impossible for me. But the whole aesthetic productivity was put under arrest by the religious. The religious agreed to this elimination but incessantly spurred it on, as though it were saying, Are you not now through with that?”

It had been Kierkegaard’s original plan to be “through with that” (i.e., through with the aesthetic work) very quickly indeed. “In a certain sense it was not at all my original intention to become a religious author. My intention was to evacuate as hastily as possible the poetical [by publishing *Either/Or*—and then go out to a country parish” (86). On its own, Kierkegaard emphasizes, *Either/Or* did not communicate his religious intentions, for “there was as yet no scale presented, nor was the duplicity posited” (85, n.). He had initially thought that “the most vigorous expression of the fact that I had been a religious man and that the pseudonyms were something foreign to me was the abrupt transition—to go immediately out in the country to seek a cure as a country parson” (86); but “the urge of productivity” remained so great within him that he sought another way to present the “scale” that was needed for the proper interpretation of *Either/Or*: “I let the *Two Edifying Discourses* come out, and I came to an understanding with Governance. There was allowed me again a period for poetical productivity, but always under the arrest of the religious, which was on the watch, as if it said, Will you not soon be through with that?” The “duplicity” of the authorship, thus, is the outward expression of the “divine arrest” of “Governance,” the outward expression of the divine inward challenge to Kierkegaard’s own poetic “reflection.” The dialectic of

pseudonym and discourse, in other words, is the outward expression of the inward “dialectical factor,” an outward expression of Kierkegaard’s inward conversation with God.

Kierkegaard, furthermore, clearly understands the outer, literary expression of this inner dialogue as the means of his transmission of God’s challenge to the surrounding society. He writes, he claims, “without authority” (87), since the critique that the discourses present to the aesthetic perspectives of the pseudonyms has its origin in the inner “divine arrest” to his own “poetic production.” Governance, thus, has “educated” him, “and the education is reflected in the process of the productivity” (73); he has been “conscious of being under instruction, and that from the very beginning.”<sup>25</sup> This, however, far from disqualifying him as the agent of God’s challenge to others, is the real source of his power:

And now as for me, the author, what, according to my opinion, is my relation to the age? Am I perhaps the ‘Apostle’? Abominable! I have never given an occasion for such a judgment. I am a poor insignificant person. Am I then the teacher, the educator? No, not that at all; I am he who himself has been educated, or whose authorship expresses what it is to be educated to the point of becoming a Christian. *In the fact that education is pressed upon me, and in the measure that it is pressed, I press it in turn upon this age*; but I am not a teacher, only a fellow student. (75, emphasis added)

The comparison with Socrates is, once again, irresistible. In *Symposium*, as we have seen, the examination to which Socrates subjects the Sophist Agathon is presented as the re-enactment of the examination to which Socrates had himself been subjected by Diotima. In both cases, thus, the Socratic figure not only begins by sharing the delusions of those around him, but is able to challenge others outwardly only by means of the challenge he himself has received

inwardly; he “press[es]” upon others the challenge that “is pressed upon [him], and in the measure that it is pressed.” Kierkegaard, in particular, seeking a hearing for the question—“the problem of ‘becoming a Christian’”—pursues outwardly, through the dialogue of discourse and pseudonym, the inward dialogue within which he himself has heard the question posed by God.

Finally, there is one further similarity with Socrates to which Kierkegaard draws our attention in *The Point of View*, namely, to the fact that the Socratic figure is, in both cases, entirely without assurance as to the effect of “the question method.” Kierkegaard *can* hope, as we saw, that “with the momentum of his abandonment to the aesthetical [a] man rushes straight into the most decisive definitions of the religious”; and Kierkegaard is confident that thereby the man “must take notice.” “*What follows after this, however, no one can tell beforehand*” (emphasis added). As with Socrates, who could reliably arouse in his interlocutors the “sacred rage” but could not guarantee their response to it,<sup>26</sup> Kierkegaard admits that “it is impossible for me to compel a person to accept an opinion, a conviction, a belief . . . [even though] I can compel him to take notice” (35). This is by way of contrast with the standards of Sophistic education, with its emphasis upon the assurance of reliable techniques and predictable results.

We will now find that this contrast between Socratic and Sophistic education is an important theme in Kierkegaard’s first dialogue, that which unfolds between *Either/Or* and the *Two Edifying Discourses* of 1843.

### Educating the Poet

In *Either/Or*, the first of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works, we are presented with a conversation between two friends. The first volume (*Either*) contains various texts pertaining to the “poetic” life, written by an extraordinarily gifted young man (hereafter referred to as “the poet”). Through a bewildering variety of compositions, ranging from the seemingly

random aphorisms of the “Diapsalmata,” through several essays in literary and musical criticism of a very high order, to the concluding “Seducer’s Diary,” all of it communicating an equally bewildering variety of moods and emotions, many troubling aspects of human existence are examined, many comfortable conventions of respectable life exploded. In volume two (*Or*), as if in response to the poet’s challenge, we find two long letters from a magistrate, Judge William, along with a sermon by his friend, a Jylland pastor, all of it intended as advice for the guidance of the errant young poet. Here we find an elaborate and rather clever defense of the sort of respectable life—and especially of married life—the poet appears to hold in derision. Here also, especially with the help of the pastor, we find reliable techniques for the overcoming of the despair that the poet does in fact clearly display. The two volumes together present (what appear to be) two very different views of life in conversation with each other, the “poetic” life on the one hand challenging, and being challenged by, the “ethical and religious” life on the other.

As we learn from *The Point of View*, however, the “two sides of *Either/Or*” do not by themselves fulfill Kierkegaard’s intentions for his writings. Several months after the publication of *Either/Or* there appeared, signed in Kierkegaard’s own name, *Two Edifying Discourses*, through which Kierkegaard shows us exactly what he thinks of the characters of *Either/Or*.<sup>27</sup>

The question of educational method is explicitly addressed in the first of the discourses, “The Expectancy of Faith,”<sup>28</sup> and is, in and of itself, a main point of Kierkegaard’s challenge to Judge William. In the introduction to the discourse (8-16), Kierkegaard presents us a man—the “perplexed man”—who is seeking to share his faith with a friend and falling into greater and greater perplexity in the attempt. He learns that, while it is indisputably a good gift, faith is the one gift he cannot give his friend by wishing it for him, realizing in the process the questionable character of his

own faith.<sup>29</sup> Finally giving over care of his friend to God, who alone, the man realizes, is the teacher all men can equally claim (12-13, 14-15, 28-29), he contents himself with the essentially negative, maieutic role of challenging the delusions which, as he knows from his own experience, shut his friend off from faith (15-16).<sup>30</sup> Like Socrates in his inner dialogue with Diotima, and like Kierkegaard in his inner dialogue with “Governance,” the perplexed man has no pretensions to question his friend except in terms of that which has first questioned him. The “perplexed man,” in other words, precisely in his perplexity, has been equipped as the expert practitioner of “the question method.” He is to be assisted in his task by the main section of the discourse (16-28), which is devoted to description and analysis both of the forms of “expectancy” by which human beings seek to maintain control of their own lives, and of “the expectancy of faith” in which alone that control is given over to God.

The “friend” Kierkegaard really has in mind, however, is the poet of *Either* (1.17-445). The categories of expectancy in the discourse, in fact, correspond exactly to the measures taken by the poet to defend himself from the threat of time. The essence of the “poetic life,” in fact, is the “making” (from the Greek verb *poiein*) of an illusory world in which the poet can shield himself from the anxieties of temporal existence. As he says at the close of the “Diapsalmata,” from the sorrow which is his “baronial castle,” sitting “like an eagle’s nest high up on the mountain peak among the clouds,” “I swoop down into actuality and snatch my prey” (42, no. 88). He does not stay there, of course, for the whole point is to bring his booty home,

and this booty is a picture I weave into the tapestry at my castle. Then I live as one already dead. Everything I have experienced I immerse in a baptism of oblivion unto an eternity of recollection. Everything temporal and fortuitous is forgotten and blotted out. Then I sit like an old gray-haired man, pensive, and explain the pictures in a soft

voice, almost whispering, and beside me sits a child, listening, although he remembers everything before I tell it.

Depicted here is one whom the poet himself calls “the unhappiest one,” a man “turned the wrong way [in time] in two directions” (225), hoping for what lies behind him, recollecting what lies ahead, a man utterly lost in the illusion of his own “making.”

The matter receives particularly clear treatment in the poet's essay entitled “Rotation of Crops.” This refers not to an agricultural procedure but to the necessity of constantly varying our experience, and more importantly to a technique for the proper “cultivation” of experience. The recommended procedure is to achieve an appropriate balance “between recollecting and forgetting.” No part of life should be allowed such importance that it cannot be forgotten at will; neither should any part of life be relegated to such triviality that it cannot be remembered at will (293). The key is to throw hope “overboard” (292), for only then “does one begin to live artistically; as long as a person hopes, he cannot limit himself.” “It is indeed beautiful to see a person put out to sea with the fair wind of hope,” but hope makes for a dangerous pilot of one's own ship, steering a course and speed which threaten the greatest of all calamities (292-93). For he who “runs aground with the speed of hope will recollect in such a way that he will be unable to forget” (293). Far better to throw hope overboard than to collide with that experience so recalcitrant as to defy every attempt at the *poesis* of recollection.

The challenge Kierkegaard seeks to present the poet through the discourse is to set sail with hope still on board, to face the future as it really is, in all its threatening and indeterminate contingency, and yet with the “expectancy of faith [which] is victory,”<sup>31</sup> the trust that whatever comes will reflect the will of God, that it will be the victory to which no one can give a shape beforehand. And there is reason for confidence that Kierkegaard's challenge may not fall on

entirely deaf ears. The poet says himself that he can imagine being converted from his boredom and despair through experience of “the faith that moves mountains,” but this remark only serves to demonstrate that he has never had that experience. To the contrary, in several further remarks in “Diapsalmata,” he emphasizes his disdain for the “timorousness” of the representatives of Danish Christendom (33-34, no. 67) who are pale and bloodless, without sufficient courage to passionately affirm or deny anything (23, no. 22), and who can know nothing of salvation (20, no. 8), since they are too “wretched” even to sin (27-28, no. 41). The poet, we recall, is the gifted young man looking for a Socrates, looking for someone who can question him, who can give his confusion direction and sharpen it into the joyous perplexity known as faith.<sup>32</sup> The poet's despair, therefore, is part of Kierkegaard's indirect polemic against the society that could not challenge him.

We most directly encounter the society in question in the person of Judge William (*Either/Or* 2.3-333). As husband, father, magistrate, church member, and devotee of fashionable philosophy, the good Judge is representative of respectable Danish society in every respect. Judge William is Danish society writ small. Kierkegaard's “direct” attack on the Judge's “ethical and religious” life, therefore, is also simultaneously his “indirect” critique of the spiritual poverty of Danish Christendom. Particularly at issue is the Judge's educational method. Judge William, too, is anxious to help the poet, and, unlike the “perplexed man” of the discourse (as well as the perplexed man who wrote the discourse), he knows exactly how to go about it. The poet is afraid of the uncertainties and discontinuities of time, so the Judge shows how the disjointed and contingent facts of “outer history” may be “transformed and transferred” into the “continuity” of “inner history” (98-9, 250-51). The poet is afraid of the rigors of duty and responsibility, so the Judge explains that duty is the road sign that never directs a person anyplace he doesn't already wish to go (149), the old friend that never

commands anything a person is not already ready to do (146).

The poet is afraid of dependence upon the uncertain things around him, so the Judge shows him how he can posit his own "self" in "absolute security" (213). Choose something, says the Judge; choose anything; choose even to despair (208-9). By freely choosing to despair the poet will have posited an "either/or," one of many possible either/or's, and this, being a realm which implies a discernible distinction between what he will have chosen and its alternative, will lead him to the "ethical." Since this choice will have been made in freedom, moreover, the self which chooses will have been established in complete independence from anything outside itself (180).

A particularly important case of this desired independence is that of the complete independence of the self from God. This is to be achieved, says the Judge, by that free choice in which we place ourselves always in the stance of "repentance" before God (216). Only by the freedom of this choice, in which human love for God is unmotivated by God's love for humanity, and in which humility before God bears no relation to the majesty and holiness of God, can the self choose itself "absolutely" (216). By placing ourselves reliably in the wrong before God, more importantly, we also deny ourselves the perspective from which to notice what the Judge regards as being otherwise unavoidable, the necessity to "take God to court" for the ills and injustice of human existence (216-17, 237). To do otherwise would be to confront the "riddle" that throws everything into confusion; it would be to acknowledge the possibility that we may not know what God intends for us in this life, the possibility that the complacent joys of hearth and home may not be God's ultimate purpose for us; it would be to acknowledge the contingencies of existence in time which would be for the Judge of all things the most horrifying.

These procedures, the Judge claims, not only produce predictable results for himself, but will do so as well for

anyone who employs them. His pretensions to "absolute" security notwithstanding, the real goal of the Judge's technique is to fight down his own despair in facing the uncertainties of life, to bring the threat of time (and, in particular, of the poet) under control. As in various of Plato's dialogues we find a sharp contrast of educational method between the Socratic figure who is powerful only in his perplexity, and the practical man of affairs (like Callicles in *Gorgias*, to whom Kierkegaard clearly compares the Judge<sup>33</sup>) who, if he is not himself the Sophist, ideally represents the end-form of Sophistic education. He thus also represents the society that Paul Shorey (in his edition of *Republic*) calls "the Great Sophist,"<sup>34</sup> the society in which the Sophist has become the representative human being.

The Sophist himself we find in the Jylland pastor, whose "edifying discourse" comprises the "final word" (*ultimatum*) in *Or* (2.335-54). It has often been asserted, of course, that the pastor's sermon is actually Kierkegaard's, that it represents Kierkegaard's commentary on the conversation that unfolds between the poet and the Judge.<sup>35</sup> This, however, is inconsistent with the dramatic structure of the dialogue; with the fact, namely, that the Judge sends the sermon to his younger friend *in support of his own writings* (337-38). The pastor, like Judge William, is deeply troubled by the ills of human life as well as by the merest possibility of uncertainty in our human dealings with God (342-44). As with the Judge, moreover, the solution is to lay hold of "the upbuilding that lies in the thought that in relation to God we are always in the wrong." In this way, not only do we establish for ourselves a determinate relation with God, we also avoid the necessity of imputing evil to God. The pastor asks his listeners to imagine that they have been wronged by a beloved friend. In this situation, he reasons, we would derive no comfort from the thought that we were entirely in the right with our friend. "If you loved him, [the thought that you had done right by your friend] would only alarm you; you would reach for every probability, and if you found none,

you would tear up the accounting to help you forget it, and you would strive to build yourself up with the thought that you were in the wrong" (348). "So also," he continues, "in your relationship with God. You loved God, and therefore your soul could find rest and joy only in this, that you might always be in the wrong" (349). In effect, as an expression of his love for God, the pastor has extended to God a mercy and forgiveness that he believes God doesn't deserve. The pastor's "God," in other words, is "without hope except in the sovereign grace and mercy of [humanity]." The pastor is indeed the Sophist, the man who can make the worse appear the better case, the man possessing the technical virtuosity to disguise his cowardly "projection" in the persiflage of Christian proclamation. He is precisely the man who can provide the Judge the intellectual support he needs to defend himself from the terror of contingency in relation to God.

He is also a man who has placed himself in the direct line of fire from Kierkegaard's second discourse, "Every Good and Every Perfect Gift Is from Above."<sup>36</sup> The two discourses are in fact mirror images of each other: whereas the pastor emphasizes the "upbuilding" that arises only through free choice, Kierkegaard emphasizes the power of the Omnipotent One to crush such arrogant pretension and the repentance that arises only through the challenge of God's Word (38); whereas the pastor extends his grace to God, Kierkegaard emphasizes the creative power of God's grace through which alone we celebrate each circumstance of life as "the good and perfect gift of God" (40-2); whereas the pastor seeks the security of a relationship—being always in the wrong before God—that can never change, Kierkegaard emphasizes the mercy of God that is even greater "than the anxious human heart," the mercy that may place us unaccountably in the right before God (48). Kierkegaard's brightest hope is therefore the pastor's (and the Judge's) worst nightmare, that we cannot know the future God has prepared for us. The sense of contingency that both the Judge and the pastor fear, especially in relation to God, is the whole

point of the "conversation" Kierkegaard pursues with his characters, the whole point of the question for which he seeks a hearing in the midst of the "monstrous illusion" they represent.

#### The Conversation Continued

The conversation Kierkegaard began with the personalities of *Either/Or* continued throughout the remainder of his short life. We meet them again in *Stages on Life's Way*, published on 30 April 1845, one day after the publication of *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, a volume of "edifying discourses" signed in Kierkegaard's own name. And, of course, they appear again with the republication of *Either/Or* on 14 May 1849, the exact same day as the publication of *The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air*, a collection of "three devotional discourses" which, once again, are signed in Kierkegaard's own name, and which seek to gain a hearing for the same question—"the problem of 'becoming a Christian'"—that the personalities of *Either/Or* are variously attempting to ignore.<sup>37</sup>

In the course of our brief consideration of Kierkegaard's "direct" conversation with the personalities of *Either/Or*, we have noted some indications of the "indirect" conversation Kierkegaard was hoping to pursue with his fellow Danes. The subtlety of his dialectic, however, was too great, and the shades of meaning that distinguished him from the plausible Sophistry of his pseudonyms too fine, for his critique to be generally noticed. Kierkegaard's "indirect" conversation with Danish Christendom, thus, never really came off; nor, with the passing of that cultural arrangement, will it ever do so.

Other conversations remain, even today, a lively possibility. Kierkegaard's "interrogation" of the pseudonyms, in the first place, will now be "indirectly" applicable to those moderns, such as the philosophers of existentialism, who are variously adherent to the pseudonymous perspectives. Thus may Kierkegaard's strategy finally be vindicated: having gotten his readers with him—even if not quite the readers he had

in mind—it is still possible to bring “the religious” promptly forward so as to effect the “collision” through which one can be compelled to “take notice.” There are surely as many in our day as in that of Socrates or of Kierkegaard who look about them for a practitioner of “the question method.”

There are many in our day, in fact, who resemble no one so much as that gifted young man with whom we began: He lost his way in the world. In his need, he looked about for someone who could transmit to him, someone who could be for him, the “true question”: He went to the “good people,” looking for the “the faith that moves mountains,” only to find them comfortable, and competent, and full of good advice. He went to the magistrate, longing to see the self-sacrifice of duty; only to learn that duty is an old friend who never demands anything we are not already prepared to perform. He went to the pastor hoping to hear of the grace of the Omnipotent One to call his fantasy in question and to remake him in the divine image; only to hear of the “God” who stands in need of our human grace to avoid indictment for the ills of human existence. He looked about for a Socrates, but found none among his contemporaries. Then he requested the gods to change him into one.

We have the evidence before us, in the dialogue of discourse and pseudonym, to know who that gifted young man was, and to know also that his request was granted.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP* 5.5613 (*Pap.* 4 A 43).

<sup>2</sup> *Cf.* the appended “Publication Schedule of Selected Works of Søren Kierkegaard.”

<sup>3</sup> The term *opbyggelig* is variously rendered as “edifying” (W. F. Lowrie) or “upbuilding” (H. V. and E. A. Hong). The latter, more recent, translation is preferred as implying a more broadly existential development of life than a merely intellectual growth.

<sup>4</sup> See also the “First and Last Explanation” at the close of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, in which Kierkegaard claims responsibility as “the dialectically reduplicated author of . . . the [pseudonymous] authors” (627); but also insists that “in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me” (626).

<sup>5</sup> *Cf.* the Preface to the *Two Edifying Discourses* of 1844 (in *Eighteen Edifying Discourses*, 179), where Kierkegaard describes “that single individual whom I with joy and gratitude call my reader, who with the right hand accepts what is offered with the right hand.” The same point is emphasized in the Preface to *The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air: Three Devotional Discourses*, in Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> This is indicated, according to Kierkegaard (184-85), by Socrates’ assertion that sons should not necessarily be taught by their fathers, as was traditional, but by whoever was most competent.

<sup>7</sup> This follows, according to Kierkegaard (193-94), from the fact that in remarking on the closeness of the vote by which he was condemned Socrates indicates his exclusive concern for the beliefs of people as individuals and his utter indifference to the “opinion” of the Council as a whole.

<sup>8</sup> The imagery of “bonds” refers to the imagery of the Cave in *Republic*, 7.514A-515D.

<sup>9</sup> *Cf. Symp.* 210E; *Rep.* 515E; and *Ep.* 7.341D.

<sup>10</sup> For subsequent uses of this notion of a “clearing in existence,” see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 171 (and n. 2), 214, 401; and Voegelin, “Anxiety and Reason,” in *Collected Works*, 28.87.

<sup>11</sup> *Cf.* Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 362f; Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 22f; and *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 33-46, 309-15; and Polanyi, *Knowing and Being*, 117f.

<sup>12</sup> Voegelin, “Reason: the Classic Experience,” in *Collected Works*, 12.277, 272 (emphasis added). For an introduction to Voegelin’s thought, see Webb, *Eric Voegelin: Philosopher of History*; Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution*; and Sinnett, *Eric Voegelin and the Problem of Theological Paradox*.

<sup>13</sup> Voegelin, “What Is Political Reality?” in *Anamnesis*, 148.

<sup>14</sup> “Reason,” 271.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," in *Collected Works*, 7.175.

<sup>17</sup> The importance of *Symposium* for Kierkegaard is demonstrated by his extensive discussion of it in *The Concept of Irony* and by his use of it as a model for his own "banquet" dialogue, "In Vino Veritas," in *Stages on Life's Way*. For an extended version of the following discussion, see Sinnett, "Eric Voegelin and the Essence of the Problem"; and *Restoring the Conversation*, ch. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in *Republic* (515E-520A), the philosopher who seeks to free the prisoners from their bonds is one who begins as a prisoner himself, only to be mysteriously freed, forced to turn around, dragged "by force up the ascent which is rough and steep . . . [and] drawn out into the light of the sun."

<sup>19</sup> Kierkegaard, *JP* 6.6786 (*Pap.* 10<sup>6</sup> B 145) n.d., 1851, in the Supplement to *Eighteen Edifying Discourses*, 488-89.

<sup>20</sup> In *Symposium* the first speeches in praise of *Erôs* by Phaedrus (178A-180B), Pausanias (180C-185E), and especially by Eryximachus (185E-188E), variously praise the *technai* of sacrifice and divination which reliably establish that "communion between gods and men" which is the basis of the right order of society.

<sup>21</sup> *Cf. Symp.* 178A-D: In response to Agathon's request to have Socrates sit next him in order that he might be able to share in "the piece of wisdom" that "occurred" to him as he was entering the banquet hall, Socrates denies that genuine wisdom is so easily, or so directly, transmissible: "I only wish that wisdom were the kind of thing one could share by sitting close to someone—if it flowed, for instance, from the one that was full to the one that was empty, like the water in two cups finding its level through a piece of wool."

<sup>22</sup> *Cf. Symp.* 175D-E: "[If direct communication of wisdom was possible,] I'm sure I'd congratulate myself on sitting next to you, for you'd soon have me brimming over with the most exquisite kind of wisdom. My own understanding is shadowy, as equivocal as a dream."

<sup>23</sup> *Cf.* Gadamer, "Plato's Unwritten Dialectic," in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 128: "In [Plato's] dialogues we ourselves are the ones (thanks to the lasting effect of Plato's artful dialogical compositions)

who find ourselves addressed and who are called upon to account for what we are saying."

<sup>24</sup> *Cf.* Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 1.191f.

<sup>25</sup> *Cf.* Diem, 187-88.

<sup>26</sup> *Cf. Symp.* 215D-E.

<sup>27</sup> *Cf.* Sinnett, *Restoring the Conversation*, Part 2.

<sup>28</sup> Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Edifying Discourses*, 8-29.

<sup>29</sup> The challenge that brings the "perplexed man" to this realization is supplied in an excursus on the nature of faith (10-13) which interrupts his meditations.

<sup>30</sup> *Cf. esp.* "The Expectancy of Faith," 15: "And if he does not possess it, then I can be very helpful to him, because I will accompany his thoughts and constrain him to see that it is the highest good. I will prevent it from slipping into any hiding place, so that he does not become vague about whether he is able to grasp it or not. With him, I will penetrate every anomaly until he, if he does not possess it, has but one expression that explains his unhappiness, namely, that he does not *will* it—this he cannot endure, and then he will acquire it."

<sup>31</sup> Kierkegaard, "The Expectancy of Faith," 23.

<sup>32</sup> *Cf.* "A," "Diapsalmata," in *Either/Or*, 42-3, n. 90.

<sup>33</sup> *Cf.* "B," *Either/Or*, 2.16: "The intellectual agility you possess is very becoming to youth and diverts the eye for a time. We are astonished to see a clown whose joints are so loose that all the restraints of a man's gait and posture are annulled. You are like that in an intellectual sense; you can just as well stand on your head as on your feet. Everything is possible for you, and you can surprise yourself and others with this possibility, but it is unhealthy, and for your own peace of mind I beg you to watch out lest that which is an advantage to you end by becoming a curse. Any man who has a conviction cannot at his pleasure turn himself and everything topsyturvy in this way. Therefore I do not warn you against the world but against yourself and the world against you." Compare this description of the poet by the Judge with Callicles' description of Socrates in *Gorgias*, 485A-C: "It is a fine thing to partake of philosophy just for the sake of education, and it is no disgrace for a lad to follow it;

but when a man already advancing in years continues in its pursuit, the affair, Socrates, becomes ridiculous; and for my part I have much the same feeling towards students of philosophy as towards those who lisp or play tricks. For when I see a little child, to whom it is still natural to talk in that way, lisping or playing some trick, I enjoy it, and it strikes me as pretty and ingenuous and suitable to the infant's age. . . . But when one hears a grown man lisp, or sees him play tricks, it strikes one as something ridiculous and unmanly, that deserves a whipping."

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Paul Shorey's Loeb Classical Library edition of *Republic*, 2.34, n.d.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. W. Lowrie, "Translator's Preface," in *Either/Or*, 2 (1944), 19.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Edifying Discourses*, 31-48.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Sinnett, ch. 10.

## Publication Schedule of Selected Works of Søren Kierkegaard

Pseudonymous ("Esthetic") Works	Signed ("Religious") Works
<p><b>20 Feb. 1843</b> <i>Either/Or</i>, I-II edited by Victor Eremita</p>	<p><b>16 May 1843</b> <i>Two Upbuilding Discourses</i></p>
<p><b>16 Oct. 1843</b> <i>Repetition</i> by Constantin Constantius <i>Fear and Trembling</i> by Johannes de Silentio</p>	<p><b>16 Oct. 1843</b> <i>Three Upbuilding Discourses</i></p> <p><b>6 Dec. 1843</b> <i>Four Upbuilding Discourses</i></p>
<p><b>13 June 1844</b> <i>Philosophical Fragments</i> by Johannes Climacus</p>	<p><b>5 Mar. 1844</b> <i>Two Upbuilding Discourses</i></p>
<p><b>17 June 1844</b> <i>The Concept of Anxiety</i> by Virgilius Haufniensis <i>Prefaces</i> by Nicolaus Notabene</p>	<p><b>8 June 1844</b> <i>Three Upbuilding Discourses</i></p>
<p><b>30 April 1845</b> <i>Stages on Life's Way</i> published by Hilarius Bookbinder</p>	<p><b>31 Aug. 1844</b> <i>Four Upbuilding Discourses</i></p>
<p><b>27 Feb. 1846</b> <i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</i> by Johannes Climacus</p>	<p><b>29 April 1845</b> <i>Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions</i></p>
<p><b>14 May 1849</b> <i>Either/Or</i>, I-II edited by Victor Eremita</p>	<p><b>27 Feb. 1846</b> "A First and Last Declaration," appended to <i>Postscript</i></p>
	<p><b>14 May 1849</b> <i>The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air: Three Devotional Discourses</i></p>

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## What It Means To Be Human: Aristotle on Virtue and Skill

Corinne Painter

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle argues very forcefully that virtue and skill are distinct. Although a distinction between virtue and skill can be seen as philosophically important in a number of ways,<sup>1</sup> and despite the force with which Aristotle argues for this distinction, it is nonetheless the case that Aristotelian virtue runs the risk of being mistaken for a sort of skill, and vice versa. In fact, Aristotle's lengthy argument for their distinction suggests that he was aware that this risk existed. The likely reason for such a mistake is that virtue and skill to some extent share two important qualities: each has a necessary connection with the knowledge of how to do something and the exercise of each is connected to a desired end that is taken to be of distinctive "value."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, because of these "shared qualities" it is even possible to associate both virtue and skill with happiness, since knowledge of how to do those things that we take to be of value, i.e., those things that are connected to our desired ends, is usually considered an essential ingredient of a happy life. To speak more generally, it is even understandable to conceive of the virtuous person as the one who has mastered "the art—*the skill*—of living," indeed as the one who knows how—has the requisite skills—to do whatever he or she deems is necessary to bring about a fulfilled and satisfying life. In this case, it would seem to follow that exactly those persons who possess this so-called "skill of living" will enjoy the happy life.

In this essay, I will carefully reconstruct Aristotle's argument for the distinction between virtue and skill, in order to bring out why he argues for it. In so doing, I will

attempt to show that this crucial distinction is intimately bound up with Aristotle's conception of the essential relationship between virtue and happiness. Toward this end, I will first examine the key claims that attempt to establish the distinction between virtue and skill, which appear in Book 2, chapter 4 and Book 6, chapter 5 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*,<sup>3</sup> and, second, I will consider Aristotle's account of the relationship between virtue and happiness, which we find within various chapters in Book 1. Finally, I will conclude by arguing that because of the distinctive nature of virtue, which serves to separate it in fundamental ways from skill, and which links it to the distinctive nature of being human, and because of the distinctive nature of happiness, which characterizes the way of life of those human beings who live most excellently, virtue alone is a prerequisite for attaining happiness in the full Aristotelian sense.

#### Virtue and Skill

In Book 2, chapter 4 as well as in Book 6, chapter 5 of the *NE*, Aristotle argues that the exercising of virtue is not analogous to the exercising of skill. Aristotle firmly establishes virtue's distinction from skill by offering several related arguments that show how the two activities are fundamentally different. One argument for their distinction is that while what might be called the "value"—or, more appropriately, the "being-well-made"<sup>4</sup>—of a product of skill is independent of the actual ability (skill-level) of its producer, so that the value of such a product is the same regardless of how (e.g., by accident) or by whom (e.g., an unskilled laborer) it is produced, the "value" or the "being-well-made" of a virtuous act depends on whether it is done virtuously, on whether, that is, the person performing the act is virtuous or not. As Aristotle states in a central passage in Book 2:

It is not the same in the case of the arts as with the virtues, for the things that come into being by means of the arts have their being-well-made in

themselves, [so that] it is sufficient for these [i.e. the products] to come into being in a certain condition. But with the things that come about as a result of the virtues, just because they themselves are a certain way it is not the case that one does them justly or temperately, but *only if the one doing them also does them being a certain way*: if one does them first of all knowingly, and next, having chosen them and chosen them for their own sake, and third, being in a stable condition and not able to be moved all the way out of it. (1105a27-35, emphasis mine)

A second, closely related reason for maintaining that virtue and skill are distinct lies in the latter's necessary connection to external results as compared to virtue's connection not to external results or achievements, but rather to the internal source from which acts done in accord with virtue<sup>5</sup> are generated, namely, acting virtuously or being virtuous; for according to Aristotle, "the end of making is different from itself, but the end of action could not be, since acting well—virtuously—is itself the end" (1140b6-7). In appealing to the differing ends of making or exercising skill and acting well or exercising virtue, this passage intimates that for Aristotle one of the primary ways in which virtue and skill are distinct involves the motivation or reason for exercising a skill in comparison to the motivation or reason for exercising a virtue.

Interestingly, in emphasizing the distinction in the ends, this passage in a sense binds together the first and second ways in which virtue and skill are said to be distinct one from another. It should be clear that Aristotle holds that one exercises a skill in order to bring about or produce a good that is other than or distinct from the activity by which it is brought about, so that skills are not exercised simply for the sake of themselves. Skills, then, in Aristotle's view, are intimately related to the distinctive products that they are responsible for bringing into being. Virtue, however, is engaged in for the

sake of itself and not simply for the sake of bringing about another good that is wholly distinct from itself,<sup>6</sup> which it is said to “produce.” Thus, in connection with the first argument, we may reaffirm that the “value” of exercising a skill is determined on the basis of evaluating the worth of the *product* of the skill rather than on evaluating either its producer or the process by which it came to be produced. In contrast, the value of virtue lies primarily in its exercise, which is dependent upon the character of the person performing the virtue and not simply on its “result.” As Aristotle himself claims, “it is possible to produce something *literate by chance or by being advised by someone else*” (1105a23-24, emphasis mine), whereas this is not possible in the case of virtue (1105a27). In connection with this, it may be instructive to appeal to Aristotle’s discussion in Book 1 of the possibility of engaging in an activity either for the sake of itself or for the sake of some thing other than itself. While exercising virtue belongs to the former sort, according to Aristotle, exercising a skill belongs to the latter, and, given that the former kind of activity “is more complete (*teleion*) than an activity pursued on account of something else” (1097a31-33), exercising virtue is more complete than performing a skill. Later, I will return to this point in order to argue why virtue is essential to happiness while skill is not.

A third and equally important way in which virtue is distinct from skill can be formulated thus: skills are abilities that stem from knowing how to do something, such that the “knowing how” has (at some point) been satisfactorily demonstrated in practice, whereas virtues are firm and stable character traits of an agent, indeed, active conditions of the soul. This suggests that, although it is possible for one to have a skill and not exercise it even in a situation in which its exercise is called for, it is impossible for a person to possess a virtue and knowingly fail to exercise it, given the proper circumstance and barring any exceptions.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in the case of skill, Aristotle writes, “these things [i.e., choosing the act for its own sake as well as performing the act from a firm and

unshakable condition] do not count, except the mere knowing, but for having the virtues, the knowing is of little or no strength, while *the other conditions have not a little but all the power*” (1105b1-4, emphasis mine). Here we can see that for Aristotle, possessing virtue, which is to say, acting in accord with virtue, is a “taller task” than possessing a skill. As an example of this, one can properly be characterized as a skilled basketball player if one has satisfactorily demonstrated in practice that one knows how to play basketball well, so that if the skilled player chooses not to play in perfect playing conditions, he will not lose his status as a skilled player. In contrast, one may not be properly characterized as virtuous, as possessing, e.g., the virtue of courage, just in case one has demonstrated in practice that one “knows how” to hit the middle mark between cowardice and rashness that courage, as the mean condition between these two (vicious) extremes of deficiency and excess, is said to represent. Rather, in addition to “knowing how” to be courageous, whenever the conditions call for courage, the virtuous person will actively and willingly choose to be courageous from out of a firm and unshakable character. To put this in the words of another scholar, “unlike skills, virtues are entrenched character traits that one cannot turn on and off as one pleases. Virtues are always on, so to speak, and if one fails to perform virtuous acts, it is either because one has encountered an exception or because one is not [really] virtuous.”<sup>8</sup>

The discussion of the conditions that must be met in order for an action to be properly characterized as virtuous brings us to a fourth way in which Aristotle attempts to establish that virtue and skill are distinct. Although it is preferable for the skilled person to make mistakes willingly, so that the mistakes are not made accidentally or unintentionally, as this would certainly call into question the actual skill, it is “better” if the practically wise person—i.e., the virtuous person—make mistakes only accidentally and not knowingly, especially as one cannot purposefully behave nonvirtuously and remain virtuous. Aristotle claims, in fact, that “in art

someone who makes an error willingly is preferable, while in connection with practical judgment this is worse, as it is in connection with the virtues" (1140b24-27).

Thus far we have discovered that the following conditions must be met in order for an act to be rightfully called virtuous: (1) it must be done with knowledge, that is to say, knowingly, (2) it must be freely chosen for its own sake, and (3) it must stem from a firm and unshakable character. Given these conditions, we must attempt to understand what Aristotle might mean when he claims that it is "better" if the virtuous person make mistakes only accidentally rather than knowingly or willingly. For on the basis of what we have discovered, it would seem that virtue cannot be exercised erroneously, unwillingly, or accidentally. Aristotle in fact states repeatedly (e.g., at 1111b5-7, 1113b4-6, 1114b29) that this is the case. Consequently, what renders virtuous acts "better" or "more valuable" than those acts "performed by accident" or "in error" cannot be that virtuous acts are performed intentionally and with knowledge. Indeed, virtuous acts are *always* and in the strictest sense voluntary acts of choice<sup>9</sup> for Aristotle, and thus they simply cannot be performed accidentally<sup>10</sup> or unwittingly by a person who lacks the virtue in question.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, even though action comes first, virtue grows out of it, so that truly virtuous action can only come about after the formation of virtue occurs, through repeated actions. In this connection, Aristotle writes "active states [e.g., virtue] come into being from being at work in similar ways. Hence it is necessary to make our ways of being at work be of certain sorts, for our active states follow in accordance with the distinctions among these" (1103b23-25).<sup>12</sup> This passage indicates that while a person may unwittingly perform an act that could be said to "look like" or "imitate" a virtuous act, and while he must willingly attempt such acts in order to become virtuous, strictly speaking, Aristotle would not permit us to characterize these acts as virtuous until they are the result of an active virtuous character at

work. It is for this reason that he writes: "while *actions could be called* [e.g.] *just or temperate* whenever they are the sorts of things that a just or temperate person would do, *the one who does them is not just or temperate unless he also does them in the way that just and temperate people do them*" (1105a29-b9, emphases mine). Admittedly this passage most directly thematizes the conditions that must be met in order for a person to be correctly called virtuous. Nevertheless, I submit that it at the same time shows that unless an act is performed by such a person, it is at best a virtuous act "in name only," but it is not truly virtuous, given that it is not performed by one who does it while "being in a certain way" (1104b32).<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, we must reject the notion that virtuous action can be the result of an intentionally performed mistake, as seems possible in the case of exercising a skill. For in the case of skill, it seems at least possible that the skilled person can actually demonstrate skill by intentionally making a "mistake" in the performance of the skill. For example, the skilled person might intentionally make a different product than is expected, or may intentionally proceed differently as he or she exercises the skill. Interestingly, both cases reveal that "intentional mistakes"—"willing deviations," if you prefer—could be ways to display skill rather than call it into question, especially since such deviations point to the skilled person's ability to exercise skill creatively. Alternatively, to intentionally err in hitting the middle mark between the vices of excess and deficiency that virtue is said to consist in does not produce virtuous action, it produces precisely the opposite, namely, vicious action. Indeed, it is not only impossible for the virtuous person to demonstrate a virtuous character by accidentally hitting the middle mark, since a virtuous act must be performed knowingly, it is also impossible to willingly stray from hitting the middle mark between the vices of excess and deficiency and still act in accord with virtue, for to act virtuously requires that one deliberately hit the appropriate middle mark.

Finally, then, the claim that prompted us to consider what Aristotle could mean when he suggested that it is “better” for a virtuous person to make a mistake accidentally rather than on purpose is meant to point out not whether the knowing, deliberate and intentionally chosen virtuous act is better than the accidentally or erroneously performed virtuous act; rather, this claim is meant to highlight a fundamental distinction between virtue and skill, namely, that while it is possible and even preferable for the skilled person to err in the exercise of skill willingly, since this could be a way to demonstrate skill, to do so in the case of virtue has the opposite effect, as it brings to a crashing halt the possibility of acting in accord with virtue.

#### Virtue and Happiness

Having considered the central Aristotelian arguments for the distinction between virtue and skill, we are now in a position to consider the special relationship that Aristotle claims exists between virtue and happiness, so as to show that only virtue is a prerequisite for attaining happiness in the full Aristotelian sense.

Notwithstanding the sense in which the exercise of virtue is to be understood as an activity whose goodness lies in its very doing, as argued earlier,<sup>14</sup> if we are to fully understand how Aristotle conceives of virtue, we must not make the mistake of claiming that virtue remains completely untied to any good or activity that is distinct from itself. For as we learn in Book 1 of the *NE*, virtue in its very essence is linked to human happiness, which is not to be identified with virtue but should be understood as the proper end of virtue. This is to say that virtue functions as the means for achieving the end of human happiness (1097b5-6), which constitutes the ultimate good for human beings, as it is the only good that is sought only for its own sake and never for the sake of another good, whereas virtue, in contrast, is chosen both for its own sake and for the sake of bringing about happiness (1097b1-8).

Indeed, happiness, as we will see shortly, is not a fluctuating, fleeting, temporary, circumstance-dependent, or incomplete good or activity, as are all other goods and activities to some extent, including moral virtue, about which Aristotle states that as great as virtue is, “even it seems too incomplete” (1095b30-33) to be awarded the role of the highest and most complete good. No doubt this is hardest to understand in the case of virtue; as we have taken great care to show, it would be incorrect to characterize the truly virtuous person as being virtuous in a merely fluctuating, fleeting, or temporary manner. In addition to the passages we considered earlier, which show quite clearly the stable and unwavering nature of the virtuous character as well as of the action that comes from such a character, Aristotle, speaking of moral virtue in Book 1, confirms virtue’s stable nature, claiming that “in none of the acts of human beings is stability present in the same way it is present in ways of being at work in accordance with virtue” (1100b12-14). Notwithstanding virtue’s stability, we must also admit that the actual exercise of any particular virtue is connected to certain conditions that present themselves within the context of varying circumstances. For virtue as a whole is itself “divided,” that is to say, it breaks up into many kinds—e.g., courage, temperance, patience, generosity, justice—each of which is called for in a particular situation, given certain circumstances, but none of which alone is enduring, self-sufficient, complete, or final. In this connection, it is instructive to consider what Aristotle writes in the context of discussing the distinction between moral virtue and the intellectual virtue of contemplation: “a just person still needs people toward whom and with whom he will act justly, and similarly with the temperate and the courageous person and each of the others” (1177a32-34). Here we see rather clearly that the particular virtues are not always performable, as certain external conditions, over which the actor has no or very little control, must be met in order for their performance to take place.

In contradistinction to virtue, happiness is an active (1100b19-20), enduring and permanent (1100b18), self-sufficient (1097b8-9), complete (1097b1-2; b20-21), and final way of life (1100b34, 1101a8); for happiness is the “that-for-the-sake-of-which” every other activity is ultimately performed (1097b5-7; 1102a2-3). Happiness does not need particular external circumstances or conditions in order to be exhibited; once one’s life has earned the “right” to be characterized as happy, that life exhibits happiness at each and every moment (1100b21-22). Indeed, happiness is the active condition—the constant being-at-work of the soul—that describes or defines the way of living of the excellent human being. More specifically, happiness characterizes the kind of life that is lived by those who are able to live excellently, which is to say, by those who exercise moral virtue regularly (1098a15-17; 1099b5-7; 1101a15; 1102a4-5), in the varied and distinct ways that are called for on the basis of the specific circumstances with which one is faced at different intervals in one’s life.<sup>15</sup> In this way, happiness characterizes the whole of the virtuous person’s life, while the exercise of moral virtue characterizes the way in which the virtuous person responds to each individual practical situation with which he or she is confronted, where the exercise of such virtue constitutes the means by which the happy life comes into being (1099b17). “[T]he virtue of a human being,” Aristotle writes, “would be the active condition *from which one becomes* a good human being and *from which one will yield up* one’s own work well” (1106a24-25, emphases mine).<sup>16</sup> This passage highlights the sense in which the exercise of virtue yields or brings about a good that is distinct from itself, to put it simply, the good—the happy—life, albeit certainly not in the same sense in which the exercise of a skill produces a “product.”

In order to better understand the relationship between virtue and happiness, particularly how the former is said to bring about the latter, as well as why happiness is ultimately that condition of being for the sake of which we do every-

thing else, it may be instructive to remember that according to Aristotle while virtue is “praiseworthy” (1101b13-15; b32), “happiness is . . . the *prize of virtue* . . . the *highest end* and something divine and blessed” (1099b15-18, emphases mine). Acknowledging both the supremacy of happiness that this passage suggests as well as its status as the “prize of virtue” allows us to go a long way towards understanding the special place that happiness occupies in the thought of Aristotle, as well as how he conceives of virtue’s relation to it. If we add to this our recognition of what we noted earlier, namely (a) Aristotle’s claim that “no one chooses happiness for the sake of . . . anything else at all” (1097b6-7), (b) his claim that happiness is complete and self-sufficient (1097b20-21), together with (c) his related claim that happiness constitutes the only good to which nothing may be “added” in order that it become “better,” given that happiness is lacking in nothing (1097b14-21), then it becomes clear why happiness is characterized as that condition of being towards which all human activity ultimately aims and beyond which there is nothing else.

At this point we have recounted how Aristotle establishes that happiness is the final “that-for-the-sake-of-which” all other human activity ultimately aims; so also have we elucidated its completeness, self-sufficiency, and permanence. But in order to bring our consideration to its proper end, we must say more clearly why Aristotle claims that happiness characterizes the *most excellent human life*, for as Aristotle himself admits, “perhaps to say that the highest good is happiness is . . . something undisputed, while it still begs to be said in a more clear and distinct way what happiness is” (1097b22-24). Here, we would do well to follow Aristotle’s lead and elucidate what it is about virtue that causes it and not skill to serve as the means for becoming happy. Indeed Aristotle suggests that if we “examine virtue . . . we might get a better insight into happiness” (1102a7-8), and, thus, into the life of human excellence.

If we are to discover what kind of life is most excellent for man as distinct from all other living creatures, we will have to determine what work is distinctive to him and his unique way of being (1097b25f). In a central passage about this in Book 1, Aristotle maintains:

If we set down that the work of a human being is a certain sort of life, while this life consists of a being-at-work of the soul and actions that go along with reason, and it belongs to a man of serious stature to do these things well and beautifully, while each thing is accomplished well as a result of the virtue appropriate to it—if this is so, the human good comes to be disclosed as a being-at-work of the soul in accordance with virtue. (1098a12-17)

From this passage we get a clear statement of just how uniquely special virtue is, since we are told without ambiguity that virtue consists in the “being-at-work” of the human soul who lives its life and acts in accord with reason in the most beautiful and best way. That such a life, i.e., the virtuous life, is the most beautiful and best for man, that it is the way in which man shows forth his unique way of being in the way that he ought—for this is what is meant when we claim that something is “best”—immediately leads us to link virtue to the good life for man, whatever this turns out to be. But if we are led to make the connection between virtue and the good life for man, then given what we know about happiness, we should be compelled to further understand both (a) that the good life for man is nothing else than the life of happiness, and thus (b) that virtue is therefore linked to happiness. For indeed, happiness, according to Aristotle, is that condition of being that characterizes the human life of excellence, that is to say, the life of virtue.

Notwithstanding the clarity we have gained concerning the nature of happiness, one last step must be made if we are to understand why Aristotle does not think that skill plays an

essential role in securing the life of happiness. Toward this end, we should not forget that unlike virtue, skill is less stable and less complete than virtue, since (a) skills seem to be performed, or not, according to the “moods” of the skilled person, which are easily changeable, and (b) skills are never exercised for the sake of themselves but only for the sake of the distinctive products that they produce. Alternatively, whenever virtue is called for it is exercised, and, moreover, it is exercised both for the sake of itself and for the sake of happiness. Thus, given that exercising virtue is a more stable and complete activity than exercising skill, naturally it will be a better candidate for the role of securing happiness, even if only because it is a more reliable and satisfying activity. If, then, we understand the reasons why exercising virtue brings about the life of happiness, we should immediately understand why exercising skill does not. For virtue secures the life of happiness because (1) it is that activity on account of which “people become apt at performing beautiful actions” (1101b32-3), (2) it allows one “to live well and act well” (1098b24), and especially, (3) it is the way in which man, as man, does what he ought to do and is how he ought to be. But skill, in stark contrast, neither makes one apt to perform beautiful actions (inasmuch as skill can also be connected to knowing how to perform ugly actions) nor makes one live and act well (since skills bear no necessary association, for Aristotle, with living or acting well). Furthermore, while the exercising of skill allows one to demonstrate a special ability to perform a particular act or to make a particular product, as our earlier consideration of skill should have made apparent, there is nothing about skill that suggests that it allows one to do or be what one ought to do or be as a human being. Consequently, since the life of happiness constitutes the fullest expression of the most excellent human life, which is to say the human life that is in the best and fullest way what it ought to be most essentially, skill will not be able to get the job done, so to speak. Indeed, the only virtue can fulfill

this important task, which is nothing short of the human project itself.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For instance, contemporary ethical theorists may employ Aristotle's arguments for the distinction between virtue and skill to support the general consensus that whatever moral virtues are, they are not best conceived as skills. However, although the distinction between virtue and skill is fairly widely maintained in the Ethics literature, some scholars argue against a (strong) distinction, including Julia Annas, Paul Bloomfield, and Robert Roberts. See: Julia Annas, "Virtue as a Skill" in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 3 (2), 1995: 227-43; Paul Bloomfield, "Virtue Epistemology and the Epistemology of Virtue" in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 60, No. 1, 2000: 23-43, as well as *Moral Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); and finally, Robert C. Roberts, "Will Power and the Virtues" in Robert B. Kruschwitz and Robert C. Roberts, eds., *The Virtues: Contemporary Essays on Moral Character* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1987): 121-136.

In addition to the relevance of this distinction within ethics, Aristotle's arguments for the non-identity of virtue and skill can also be of use within contemporary debates in epistemology. In fact, the movement referred to as "virtue epistemology" has as one of its primary goals to call in to question the paradigmatic status that perceptual knowledge has enjoyed in the tradition, by showing how something like Aristotelian virtue is necessary for knowledge. The scholarship that discusses the connection between virtue and knowledge, or "virtue epistemology," is extensive, and thus I will not give a listing of sources here, except to mention that the literature includes work from scholars such as Robert Audi, Lorraine Code, Alvin Goldman, Alvin Plantinga, Ernest Sosa, and Linda Zagzebski (just to mention a few). For quick reference to an introductory essay on virtue epistemology, I refer the reader to an article published on the world wide web, which can be found at the following address: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology-virtue>. Especially impressive is this article's extensive bibliography, which offers many references to works that deal with the question of the connection between virtue and knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> Shortly, I will discuss my employment of the term "value" in this context, as it is in need of explanation.

<sup>3</sup> All references to the *Nicomachean Ethics* (except where the translations are my own) are from: *Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics*, Translation, Glossary, and Introductory Essay by Joe Sachs (Newburyport, Mass.: Focus Publishing/R. Pullins Company, 2002). Hereafter, in this essay, the text will be referred to as *NE*.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle never really speaks of "value" when discussing the "being-well-made" or the excellency of a thing or an act, but as we can easily understand what is in a significant sense at issue here for Aristotle, namely, what makes a product or a virtuous act "full of worth," by using the English term "value," I have chosen to include it in my explanation of the text.

<sup>5</sup> Not incidentally, a closer translation of the Greek demonstrates that Aristotle never uses the phrase "virtuous action" or "virtuous act"; rather, he uses always "action resulting from (or, in accord with) virtue."

<sup>6</sup> Although later, in the second part of my paper, in the context of considering the special relationship between virtue and happiness, I will discuss how virtue is also exercised for the sake of bringing about happiness, as it is the means for securing the happy life.

<sup>7</sup> In order to respond to a possible objection to this strict view—which many scholars advance against Aristotle's "virtue ethics"—we should acknowledge that Aristotle does not rule out the possibility that the virtuous person might, in some, *very infrequent and exceptional cases*, fail to act virtuously. These cases would likely only include, however, the following scenarios: (1) the virtuous person is deceived by others; (2) the virtuous person accidentally (i.e., non-willingly and unknowingly) makes an error in determining how to attain the virtuous end; and possibly, (3) different virtues prescribe incompatible actions.

<sup>8</sup> This formulation comes from a paper delivered by Heather Battaly at the *Northwest Philosophy Conference* held at Lewis and Clark University, Portland, Oregon (October 2002), entitled "Linda Zagzebski and Aristotle on the Distinction between Virtues and Skills."

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle distinguishes between willing acts and chosen acts, claiming that while chosen acts are always willing (voluntary) acts, chosen acts cover a narrower range (1112a15-16), since they involve greater capacities (1111b8-18ff), most especially, the capacity to “reason and think things through” (1112a16). For a fuller discussion of what is involved in choice, especially its connection to deliberation, see Book 3, chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>10</sup> This is also the case for vicious acts (see: 1113b6-15ff and 1114b21-25).

<sup>11</sup> In this connection it might be helpful to remember Aristotle’s discussion of the praiseworthiness of virtuous acts and the blameworthiness of vicious acts (which actually begins in Book 2 and is filled out in Book 3). This discussion strengthens his claim that neither virtuous acts nor vicious acts are performed accidentally, since people typically do not praise or blame persons for committing an act accidentally, without knowledge, intent, or choice.

<sup>12</sup> For a fuller discussion of this, see 1103b7-26.

<sup>13</sup> Recall the central passage quoted in its entirety early on in the paper, for it directly confronts us with the strict conditions that must be met in order for an act to be rightfully called virtuous.

<sup>14</sup> There are in fact numerous passages in which Aristotle claims that virtue is exercised for the sake of itself, some of which we considered earlier, many more of which are dispersed throughout the *NE*.

<sup>15</sup> And this is to neglect mention of the practice of contemplation, which also figures into the happy life, and which is, according to Aristotle, unlike the exercise of moral virtue, “the only activity that is loved for its own sake, for nothing comes from it beyond the contemplating, while from things involving action [e.g., moral virtue] we gain something for ourselves, to a greater or lesser extent, beyond the action” (1177b3-5).

<sup>16</sup> Some scholars might object to the use of the words “yield up,” preferring the more usual translation of “perform,” but in agreement with Joe Sachs, I submit that “yield up” better captures the true sense of Aristotle’s meaning: to give back a return on one’s effort.

## Kant’s Afterlife

Eva Brann

“Better late than never” is the motto of this review. The work known as Kant’s *Opus Postumum* occupied him during the last fifteen years of his working life, from 1786 to 1801. (He died at 80 in 1804.) The first English translation, which underlies this review, was published in 1993. The first German printing began in bowdlerized form in a Prussian provincial journal in 1882.

1882—that is the year after Michelson and Morley carried out their epoch-making experiment in search of the ether wind that must sweep over the earth if it indeed travels through space filled with some sort of observable matter. It had a dramatic null result. The ether, however, had a huge role in Kant’s final project—final in both senses: last and eschatological. Whether Kant’s ether is in principle amenable to experiment or not is, to be sure, problematic; nonetheless there is, to my mind, a certain pathos to the posthumous work’s first publishing date, a pathos over and above the fact that it took nearly a century to appear.

Eckart Förster’s English edition of 1993 (which I should have studied ten years ago) is both an ordering and a selection. Kant left a manuscript, its pages covered in small tight writing with even tinier marginalia, of 527 sheets (1161 pages in the great Prussian Academy edition). The unnumbered leaves had at one time evidently been dropped on the floor—It was a labor to arrange and date them, a task mainly performed by Ernst Adickes in 1916, and then to make the

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Immanuel Kant. *Opus Postumum*. Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Eckart Förster. Translated by Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Eckart Förster. *Kant’s Final Synthesis: An Essay on the Opus Postumum*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Harvard University Press, 2000.

Ms. Brann is a tutor at St. John’s College, Annapolis.

work accessible by judicious selection, which is what Förster has done in the Cambridge edition. The latter effort was called for by the character of Kant's writing—and, evidently, thinking—which is obsessively repetitive, ever circling about the issues in the terminological German of the Critiques glossed by formulaic Latin, only to explode suddenly into astounding new resolutions.

But then, this whole post-Critical legacy is astonishing. In 1790, Kant declared in his third Critique, the *Critique of Judgment*, that here “I conclude my entire Critical enterprise” (§ 170). Only the dependent metaphysical doctrine was to be worked out, that is, the system of *a priori* cognitions that are implied in the Critical foundations. But almost simultaneously finished business turned into unfinished business.

People who first saw the discombobulated manuscript put about the rumor of Kant's senility. On the contrary: If in the three Critiques we see everything fall into its systematic “architectonic” place, in the *Opus Postumum* we see the foundations of the edifice broken open in the attempt to make the system more encompassing. Not that Kant is countermanding any major postulate of the Critical system but rather that, in the effort to specify it, to make embodied nature and man fall out from it, he opens up its abysses, not only for the enthralled reader but, palpably, for himself—though the one chasm he steps over without the slightest regard is, to my mind at least, the most abysmal one; more of that below. In any case, during the last years, before he stopped writing, Kant seems to have returned not to a second childhood but to a second vigor, to the searching modes of his pre-Critical years.

Here I want to insert a personal note. Why ever, I ask myself, did it take me so long to come to this remarkable work, especially when I was trying to think about Kantian topics: imagination, time, memory, and nonbeing? Well, I sought help in the Critiques and then elsewhere, in Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Russell, Meinong, Husserl. Of the *Opus Postumum* only one—unforgettable—fragment had penetrat-

ed to me: “I, the Proprietor of the World.” It should have been intimation enough that the Critiques were—possibly—being transcended.

To me Kant had never been primarily the systematician, whose thinking was a relentlessly unificatory construction and whose expression was an intricate terminological rococo. He was rather the philosopher who, more than the self-avowed tightrope dancer Nietzsche, built his edifice over an abyss. I found this the more absorbing since Kant seemed to me the soul of probity, a philosopher of originality *and* rectitude, the rarest of combinations in a vocation whose business ought to be not novelty but truth, though it has occasionally incited its professors to the self-exaltation of invention and the blue smoke of mystification. Kant is the man who reconceived philosophy as *work* (in the essay “On a Refined Tone Recently Raised in Philosophy,” 1796). Yet in that sober mode he works himself late in life into strange new territories. Förster, to be sure, ends his book by saying that it is a futile exercise to speculate on the ultimate—unachieved—destination of this last phase. But to me this speculation, though it may well be beyond the reach of scholarship, has a particular attraction: Do these late second sailings, to be found, for example, in Homer (*Odyssey*), Plato (*Laws*), Shakespeare (e.g., *Cymbeline*), Jane Austen (the unfinished *Sanditon*), as well as in the great musicians, express a necessary development implicit in the work of their *floruits* or novel, adventurous departures into *terra incognita*?

So as not to mystify the reader let me say here, for later amplification, what seems to me the drift of the *Opus Postumum*: It is a drift toward solipsism, the radical self-authorship or “autogenesis” of the human subject and the nature with which it surrounds itself.

Now to Kant's work itself. My advice is to reverse good St. John's practice and to read Förster's explication of the *Opus Postumum* first. It is a conscientious and in places brilliant introduction to what is, after all, an unwieldy, unrevised and unfinished masterpiece.

Since, however, the *Opus Postumum* takes off from the three Critiques, particularly from the first, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A edition 1781, B edition 1786), I will give a very stripped-down and tailored version for those few alumni who don't perfectly recall that high point of their junior year (1). Then, since I can make the attraction of the *Opus Postumum* most plausible by listing the above-mentioned rifts and chasms in the first Critique, I will articulate the global perplexities that have always accompanied any local understanding I thought I had achieved (2). Then, with Förster's help, I shall give a brief sketch of the main topics of the *Opus Postumum* (3), which I shall follow with a summary of the way in which Kant's last work confirms or reshapes or resolves my perplexities (4). Finally I will attempt to say a word about the work's bearing on Kant's afterlife in our contemporary thinking (5).

1. Though Kant did not expect, while working on the first Critique (which deals with theoretical reason as it constitutes nature), to write a second Critique on practical reason (that is, on moral action), it is arguable that his central concern is all along with morality, with human reason as it causes deeds. From that point of view, the mission of the first Critique is to ground a system of deterministic nature in deliberate juxtaposition to the spontaneity of the freedom evinced by the rational will when it acts as it ought, from duty. The realm of nature is a system of necessary and universal rules which we ourselves both constitute and cognize: We can know nature with certainty because we are its authors. (The terms pertaining to this cognition itself rather than to its objects are called "transcendental," or almost synonymously, "Critical": concerned with the conditions that make knowledge possible.) Though the first Critique, as it finally appeared, has as its positive consequence the grounding of experience, meaning the real knowledge of nature, its negative impact is to clear a region for human freedom conceived as autonomy, self-subjection to self-given law. Kant does this by showing

that the theoretical understanding and the reason which organizes it are strictly limited to human experience and incapable of dealing with transcendent questions except in terms of "ideals" expressing the human need for completeness.

The crucial difficulty in establishing a sure and certain knowledge of nature is for Kant the doubt cast by Hume on causality: Cause is nowhere to be observed; we see constant conjunctions of events but never necessary interconnections among them. Kant's answer, the crux of his solution, is that we know our way through nature with complete certainty because and insofar as we make it. Thus its laws are ours from "the very first"—*a priori*.

Our cognitive constitution is twofold: by our understanding we think spontaneously (that is, originatingly, out of ourselves) and also discursively (that is, by connecting concepts), thereby unifying manifolds; by our sensibility we are affected receptively by intuitions which are already given as unities. The understanding is thus a formal, logical faculty whose categories are adapted from a well-established tradition. But these categories are empty grasps in the absence of the pure material of the intuition to fill them, where "pure" means unaffected by ordinary sensory influence.

To me this pure, pre-experiential sensibility and its pure, non-sensory matter is Kant's most original, not to say mind-boggling, discovery (or invention—I am as perplexed about it now as ever), for a sensibility is, after all, usually understood to be a capacity for being affected by the senses. It has two branches. The pure "inner" intuition is our sense of time. It is pure because it is analytically prior to sensation. It is "inner" because it is, in ways that become progressively more unclear in the second edition of the Critique and in the *Opus Postumum*, closer to our ego, called the "transcendental apperception," meaning the subject, the I that underlies every object we present to ourselves. For that is what human consciousness means for Kant: presenting objects to ourselves. Self-consciousness or apperception is awareness of the I that is putting this object before itself. It is that

awareness which is said in the first Critique to represent itself to us as a phenomenon in inner sense; we know ourselves as pure egos when we attend to numerable time as it ticks away.

The corresponding outer sense is pure space. All we intuit (except ourselves—*so far*) we give the form of space; space is not formal (as is thinking) but *formative*. In this pre-sensory sensorium we find externality within us. Or better, to assume the form of externality objects must be within our receptive sensibility, together with the sensations that give them their quality, the material manifold that gives them body. Nothing could be more contrary to our ordinary sense of things, where “outside” means precisely not within.

What is the purpose of this dizzying reversal, Kant’s sequel to the Copernican revolution? That first revolution made the sun stand still and our earth move, while this one makes us again home base, though now the world moves to our measure rather than to a divine maker’s plan. Kant’s purpose is to bring causality from an outside world, where it is objectively non-observable, into us where it is subjectively an inherent necessity of our cognitive constitution.

There is a missing step in this sketch, the notoriously fugitive “Schematism of the Pure Concept of the Understanding” (B 176 ff.). It is the crux of the crux of the positive Critique, and its brevity should warn us that something is the matter. Schematizing is the work of the imagination; it is not the capacity for fantasy but a “transcendental” faculty, one that makes knowledge possible. It is, in its depths, responsible for the mystery of conjoining the unconjoinable. It effects this by bringing forth a general diagram (Kant calls it a “monogram”) intended to draw together the absolutely disparate effects of the formally functioning understanding and the formatively receptive intuition. Thus time and space are to be conceptualized or, if you like, the concepts of the understanding are to be time- and space-affected.

Kant hurriedly carries out this “dry and boring dissection” for the case of time. For example, *the concept of cause, when time-imbued, becomes the necessary succession of one*

*thing upon another according to a ruling concept.* At this moment the possibility of a causal science that has certainty is grounded. (Here “possibility” does not refer to what *might* happen but to that which enables knowledge to become real.)

Kant silently and completely omits the schematizing of space. I had always supposed that, whatever difficulties I might have, Kant thought it was too easy. I couldn’t have been more wrong. Förster shows that it was too hard, and thereby hangs the tale of the *Opus Postumum* (59).

2. First to me among those deep perplexities that gives the Critiques their philosophical poignancy have been the space puzzles already alluded to (the underprivileging of space in the Schematism) along with other, related ones.

In the second edition of the first Critique Kant inserted a sort of time bomb, the famous section called the “Refutation of Idealism” (B 274, xxxix), in which he aimed to show that time itself can only be perceived as a determined phenomenon by us when observed against “something permanent in space,” that is, against matter: “The consciousness of my own existence is at the same time a consciousness of other things outside me” (B 276). Where, I ask myself, has the first function of the “inner” sense gone? What is now particularly internal about my self-perception?

But so is the very meaning of space as “outer sense” a puzzle. Outerness seems to mean three things at once: It means *extension*, the way a spatial dimension consists of parts outside of each other, stretching away from themselves. It means, second, *externality*, the way objects are experienced as outside of the subject. And it means, third, *outside* and “going beyond” us—the literal sense of “transcendent” (as distinct from “transcendental”), though this is a region in principle unreachable. For what we know, we know *in* us. That is, after all, what Kant intends to show in the negative part of the Critique, the “Transcendental Dialectic” which exposes the illusions reason falls into in going beyond the

limits of our experience”—and is thus the *critique* of pure reason proper.

There is, second, a puzzle that arises incidentally from the multivalence of Critical terms. The categories, Kant repeats emphatically, have no being on their own and achieve meaning only as they grasp intuitive material. Take then the category of unity which imposes oneness on manifolds of sense. There is, however, also the unity that reason strives for as an ideal but can reach only illusorily. And there is “the synthetic unity of apperception,” the unifying work of the subject deep beneath appearance, its chief theoretical effect. Whence, we might ask, does Kant get the notion of unity to begin with? Is there not something suspect about this transcendental notion—and others, for example, “thing”—which are necessary to establish the transcendental terms of the Critiques but which are in traditional metaphysics terms of transcendence, the attributes of Being that are beyond sensory experience? How does Kant come to know these terms of Critical thought that are antecedent to properly certified knowledge?

A third enigma is immediately connected with the space puzzles. The dialectic of reason is intended to clear the decks for human freedom and for the exercise of practical reason, which expresses itself in deeds. But the system of nature grounded in the positive part of the Critique is deterministic. There are no loose joints. How then does moral action *appear* in the natural world? How does it actually change events determined by natural laws? How do we as moral beings insert ourselves into, intervene in, nature? Further, where, in fact, are we in the world as phenomenal, perceiving subjects? In the *Critique of Pure Reason* there is matter, but no bodies, human or natural—nor in the second Critique, that of Practical Reason. The simultaneous actuality of moral deed and natural events is a mystery: How does the practical reason make our muscles do the right thing?

The fourth open question is this: How far is nature specified by the Critical grounds and their ensuing principles? Are the types of forces necessarily operating in nature

specifiable, and are their mathematical laws determinable *a priori*? How thoroughgoing are the grounds of possibility, or in Kant's terms: Can a complete metaphysical doctrine of nature be worked out such as will descend to and determine the actual laws of physics? But then, what of observation, what of contingency? Is anything not under our own rules? Is the world *nothing* but our mirror?

Thence arises the fifth question, truly a mystery. Whence comes the matter of sensation which fills our space with its quantities and qualities and reflects to us our time by being the permanent material background against which motions appear? Is the occasion for the appearance of this matter infused into us transcendently, from beyond, or are we its authors not only formally, formatively, but really, substantively? I would say that this is the most unregarded, the *totally* unregarded, question in Kant's writing—and in his thought as well: Are we, after all, buffeted by transcendent influxes? Or are we, when all has been worked out, shown to be our own authors in every respect—which would be brute solipsism, the philosophy of *solus ipse* “I alone, by myself”? But then what becomes of the ideal republic of mutually respectful moral beings and of the real political community of embodied human beings? What access do we then have to each other's subjectivity?

Finally, the sixth problem, not of doctrine but of argumentation: In the first Critique God is an ideal of reason, a required hypothesis or postulate if we are to act morally, an “as if” representation whose existence is to us a necessary thought though its actuality is provably unprovable. As Kant works on the *Opus Postumum* the thought of a necessary God is increasingly sharpened and the claim more pointed, as shown in III: There are reasons that drive us to think that God is necessary; thus God's existence must be first postulated and then acknowledged as real. He is actual for us: *Est Deus in nobis*, “There is a God—in us” (my dash and italics, *O.P.* 209, 248). And: “Everything that thinks has a God.” That is to say, thinking requires a divinity and what thinking

requires it must have—but only for the thinker. I simply cannot make out whether this God *really* exists or is after all what Kant himself would call a “subreption,” a surreptitious rustling of Being by a needy reason, or perhaps some third being I am too literal-minded to comprehend. To me it is marvelous how scintillatingly ambiguous the severely systematic Kant really is at great junctures.

Whether the above items are enigmas, questions, problems, puzzles, they each open up abysmal depth for the inquiry concerning human knowledge, action, and faith. Except for the spectacularly absent fifth question, concerning the origin of sensation and its stimulating matter, the *Opus Postumum* will show Kant grappling with these problems, sometimes only to focus them the more pressingly.

3. The early title of the *Opus Postumum* was “Transition from the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science to Physics.” The final title is “The Highest Standpoint of Transcendental Philosophy in the System of Ideas: God, the World, and Man in the World, Restricting Himself through Laws of Duty” (Förster xliii). The distance between the titles betokens Kant’s winding himself from system-driven, downward doctrinal specification into ascending, comprehensive speculation. An obvious question will be whether these speculations in the main confirm or undermine the Critical enterprise. I want to say here that either way it is a thrilling business. If the gaping holes in the architecture of the system can be stopped and the foundations reinforced, the edifice will surely be the more magnificent and rivaled only by Hegel’s system. (I omit Aristotle, not so much because his philosophizing historically preceded the notion of philosophic system-making, but because he would in any case have thought that first philosophy should be problem- rather than system-driven.) But if Kant is impelled to let his own system implode the outcome surely glows with the sober glory of thought outthinking itself. In the event, it seems to be a little of both.

The first question that has occupied students of the *Opus Postumum* concerns the project of the title. Why was a transition needed, where was there a gap? The *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* of 1786 seemed to provide a doctrinal transition from the general principles of the first Critique (which ground the laws of action and reaction, of causation in time and of the conservation of matter, “Analogies of Experience,” B 218 ff.) to the specific Newtonian Laws of Motion. That is to say, Kant has “constructed” these proto-laws, which means he has exhibited them in the intuition so as to display their necessary characteristics. Why, then, does this transition require another Transition?

Förster gives a thoroughly satisfying answer (59 ff.). As we saw, the spatial schematization of the categories is missing in the first Critique. The *Metaphysical Foundation* is in fact this missing schematism, the spatialization of the categories; I omit the details of Förster’s proof, but the argument is on the face of it convincing. At this point matter comes in: Kant must analyze empirical matter and its motion and then “construct” or “exhibit” the concept so obtained in space. (This is an epicycle in the so-called Critical circle: Kant analyzes the object, here matter, he intends to certify cognitively and then provides its transcendental conditions of possibility.)

But in order for matter not just to occupy and traverse space but to act dynamically (as it is empirically observed to do), to compact itself into bodies capable of moving each other, the forces of matter must be established. But forces are not to be observed as appearances (as Hume insisted) and are thus not constructable, that is, exhibitible as configurations in the intuition. The *Metaphysical Foundations* do not succeed in solving the problem of cohesive bodies (as opposed to shapeless matter) held dynamically within their boundaries and exercising attractive as well as repulsive force on each other. Thus this metaphysical transition cannot present physics with its basic concepts. A gap bars the way to the

categories' objective validity, that is, to their empirical applicability; the attempted schematism is incomplete.

So a large part of the early work on the *Opus Postumum* is devoted to the Tantalus-labor of finding, *a priori*, the kinds and ratios of forces that will underwrite our natural world of dynamically moving cohesive bodies. Clearly Kant now intends (or always did) for the Critical grounding to reach very far into empirical, supposedly adventitious (unpredictable) cognition. We may wonder what will survive that passage between the Scylla of complete systematicity and the Charybdis of empirical science.

Now come the ether proofs, a huge and weighty presence in the *Opus Postumum*. From a certain point on, Kant regards it as established that ether (or caloric), an "imponderable, incohesive, inexhaustible," medium that is "*universally distributed, all-penetrating, and all-moving*" (O.P. 98, 92) is the condition of possibility of all the mechanical forces of matter whose effects (if not they themselves) are apparent in the making and the motions of bodies. Förster has lucidly reconstructed the intricate essential proof from its many sites and disparate approaches in the text (89 ff.). It is worth attending to in spite of the negative Michelson-Morley ether experiment of 1881, not merely because it makes vivid the exigencies of the transcendental system (a system which someone—not myself—might indeed regard as having merely historical interest), but because it is the result of a deep meditation on the conditions of spatial experience.

To begin with, Förster points out that the *Opus Postumum* reverses the first Critique on the source of the unity of all appearances (84). In that Critique it was an ideal of reason to bring unity into our necessarily piecemeal perception. Then, in the third Critique, the *Critique of Judgment* (1719), a new source of unity comes on the scene: Nature herself is purposive and systematic. Under the influence of this reversal from reason ideally unifying nature to nature herself really unifying its forces into a system, a strange new situation arises. (The ultimate possibility of its

arising I would trace back, without having worked it out sufficiently, to the above-mentioned ambivalence of the term "unity" in the first Critique: Is unity a subjective function or a transcendent characteristic of beings?) This situation is that nature herself must now contain *a priori* principles of its objective possibility; no longer are all *a priori* conditions of experience in the subject.

Or are they? Förster is inclined to think that the ether, as a condition of possibility of a system of nature (and hence of its science, physics) is an ideal of our reason, hence subjective (91-92). But he does not deny that Kant himself wavered and sometimes speaks of the underlying medium as existing "outside the idea" (O.P. 82); this oscillating effect is not unlike that of Kant's treatment of God's existence (see below).

The chief elements of the existence proof for the ether are as follows. From the subjective side: Empty space is not perceptible; a single space filled with moving forces is the condition of the possibility of unified experience which is knowledge of connected perceptions; hence we must form the idea of an elementary material that is in space and time and has the characteristics listed above; thus we get a subjective principle of the synthetic unity of possible experience such as must underlie physics.

From the objective side: Nature is the complex of all things that can be the objects of our senses and hence of experience, and we do have experience of outer objects. But experience requires that its objects form, for our judgments, a system which has a necessary unity according to one principle. The ether, distributed through space yet forming a collective whole, is the one and only candidate for such a system. Therefore, as making the whole of experience possible, it is actual.

Thus the ether is a unique—and *very* peculiar—external object that really exists in the—to my mind—oscillating way of Kant's existence proofs, which argue from the enabling grounds of knowledge to the real existence of the object. As a ground of possibility it is not itself perceptible or

observable. Thus Kant might have replied to Michelson-Morley that, since the ether hypothesis was the condition of all experiments, it was itself not falsifiable by experiment. But they, as presumably positivist physicists, would have turned this reply around and said that what is not falsifiable is not positive knowledge. To me, too, the transcendental ether is, as I said, illuminating less as a real ground of science than as a reflection on the nature of our experience of space and its contents. For isn't it the case, after all, that the material ether having been eradicated from physics, other fillers of space had to be found, such as fields of force and geometric conformations of space itself?

In any case, Kant considers that the specific dynamic properties he assigns to his ether solve the problem of systematizing the mechanical forces, attraction, repulsion, cohesion, whose effects are mathematicized in the Newtonian manner. The—surely superseded—details of this grounding are obscure to me and I can summon interest in the argument about them only insofar as they realize that “transition,” announced in the early title of the *Opus Postumum*, from the metaphysical doctrine of perceptible matter in motion to bodies subject to an *a priori* determinable system of forces.

And now Kant realizes that a question looms that will have made a reader of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and of the ensuing *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* uneasy all along: However does a scientist get wind of this now systematically embodied nature? How does the subject come to *know* its now exhaustively knowable external object?

This realization brings on a pivotal moment in the later fascicles of the *Opus Postumum*, when the *Selbstsetzungslehre*, the “doctrine of self-positing,” comes to the fore. Again, Förster is a much-needed guide through the text (101-116).

The terms of the first Critique are, all in all, well-marshalled—systematic and precise—within the work; it is when we think beyond it that they become scintillatingly obscure. We might worry that we are undercutting Kant's explicit intention in thus thinking outside the box. The later

*Opus Postumum* shows us Kant doing it himself. One might go so far as to say that the older he got the more radically he thought (which, rightly considered, is the way it ought to be).

The late work reconsiders self-consciousness, at first in the spirit of the Critique, but then in increasingly more boldly enunciated ways. Everything begins with “I think,” the self-recognition of the subject. It is a piece of mere logical analysis (since no intuition is involved) by which I make myself into an object to myself (*O.P.* 182). So stated this first transcendental event makes me ask myself: Can so momentous a self-diremption, that of exercising my autonomy in making myself into my own object, occur by a *merely* logical act, the analysis of the meaning of “I think”? Doesn't it require some onto-logical activity? Kant answers this question, though along Critical rather than metaphysical lines. The first act can occur only *together* with a second one: This is an act of synthesis, meaning one in which thought grasps and unifies something given that goes beyond mere logic—to begin with, pure time and space. In space and time the subject posits itself, or better the subject posits itself as an “I.” This is the doctrine of self-positing.

To appreciate how astounding this doctrine is we must look at the notion of positing. For Kant, to posit is to *assign* existence, the one and only way to *realize* existence (an identification that goes way back to an essay on the proofs of God's existence of 1763). Thus in self-positing I bring myself into existence. It is an act of self-creation. This way of putting it tells me that existence is a subordinate condition depending on a somehow prior subject which is, however, itself not—or is not knowable as—a being that has an essence, an actuality, or, so far, personhood. The I-subject is a mystery into which Kant himself proscribes inquiry in his critique of dialectical reason.

So far, however, though I exist, I have not yet made it into the natural world. This is where the ether does its service. It makes space real to the senses, filled as it is with a universal proto-matter that is the condition of connected perceptions

wherever I find myself in it. Space is thus not only the subjective form of sensation but a real unified object outside me, unified by the ubiquitous presence of a weightless, unbulkable ether.

And yet I, in turn, am in it. For as space becomes perceptible because of the ceaseless dynamism of its system of ether-grounded forces, so I can perceive it since I myself am an organic body that is sensitive to forces because this body is itself a system of organized forces: To get sensation I must be sensitive, to get sensations from a dynamic system I must be such a system myself—I must be continuous with nature.

Here at last is the embodied subject *in* the world. Self-positing thus has a second phase. As I made myself exist within my pure cognitive constitution, so I posit myself as affected by forces that I have organized to enable me to experience nature: “Positing and perception, spontaneity and receptivity, the objective and subjective relations are simultaneous because they are identical as to time, as appearances of how the subject is *affected*—thus are given *a priori* in the same *actus*” (*O.P.* 132). Förster observes that the last phrase means that the same original transcendental act brings about the duality of empirical self and material world. Because in apprehending the undetermined material manifold I insert into it certain fundamental forces I can simultaneously represent myself as an affected body and as so affected by an external cause (107).

So it seems that the system finally has closed in on the human body from the inside out through the transcendental spatial intuition and from the outside in through the “hypostatized” forces of nature (meaning forces “supposed, but as real”): the elementary dynamical ether and the mechanical forces of physics known against its ethereal ground. Better late than never, though this body be merely a self-moving machine, which, incidentally, responds to impinging outside forces as would a system of rigid and moving parts. The subject has now called into existence not only itself but also its world and its body—has made itself aware of itself as a

certified knower and simultaneously as a participating inhabitant of perceptible space. Perceptibility, however, is just what existence means for Kant: existence is a by-product of the relation between a cognitive subject and the object it posits for itself, even outside itself. I would put the puzzle here thus: How real can such existence be, in the ordinary meaning of the word, that is, indefeasibly and self-assertively independent of me? Yet Kant would find, had found, such a question offensively obtuse since it voids the whole Critical enterprise and its compelling motives. Nonetheless, it does seem that in setting the limits of reason Kant has abolished the finitude of human autonomy, the finitude that implies something beyond me which I am not.

Förster interprets the doctrine of self-positing as a schema for (perceptible) outer space (114) since a schema brings together the spontaneous understanding with the receiving sensibility, in this case, matter- or sensation-filled space. This schema completes the conditions for a science of nature—though something else is missing.

There is as yet no personhood. But since persons are subjects to which deeds can be imputed, since they are moral, that is, free and responsible beings, and since one purpose of the whole enterprise was to ground human freedom and with it morality, Kant is driven to a second, a moral self-positing and, hard upon it, yet beyond, to a focusing of the idea of God. More precisely, from the start of this final part of Kant’s last work these two topics, human morality and God, are more intimately related than they ever were in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. For there God is merely a postulate of practical reason (2.2.5), a kind of by-thought, required because nature by herself offers no ground for assuring us of happiness commensurate with our deserts. So we must believe that there is a cause, working outside of nature, that will bring about such a reward. But the moral necessity of God is subjective, that is, it is a need, not an objective ground of duty or belief. In the *Opus Postumum* it is as if man,

having brought himself, his world, and himself-in-the-world into existence, was now ready to posit God as well.

But there are more serious, systematic reasons for Kant to turn to God in his last work. The said postulate of the second Critique calls upon God as a condition of making moral actions achievable for humans. Förster traces the various functions God is assigned (summarized on pp. 134-135). The last of these, stemming from Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793), is that of God as founder of an ethical commonwealth. But in the *Opus Postumum* Kant says repeatedly that the divine power cannot make a man morally good: "He must do it himself" (*O.P.* 249). So here opens what Kant himself calls an "abyss of a mystery"; Förster interprets this phrase as Kant's realization that human moral autonomy and God as founding father of an ethical commonwealth are in contradiction (133). Kant finds a way out, adumbrated in *Religion* and sharpened in the late *Opus Postumum*.

The self-positing so far described had been theoretical, cognitive. But now Kant introduces a second, moral-practical self-positing, analogous to the first in having its own *a priori* moving forces: the ideas of right that unite all persons, as expressed in the Categorical Imperative (which commands, unconditionally, the subjection of individual inclination to laws acknowledged as universal, *O.P.* 198); the difference is only that the first involves being affected by outer, spatial forces, the second consists of obedience to one's own rationality—self-forcing, one might say. Self-positing, recall, was bringing oneself into existence by becoming conscious at once of oneself as thinking and as being affected by objects determined by oneself. So too moral self-positing is self-consciousness together with the consciousness that I can subjugate my inclinations and can myself determine my will, that is, choose morally—which is what Kant calls freedom.

Kant now argues that the idea of human freedom, whose force is formulated in the Categorical Imperative, brings with it immediately, analytically, the concept of God. For the

imperative is a command, which, like the law of a civil commonwealth, unites all rational beings, and therefore it requires a law-giver and enforcer. Thus God must exist, and to do as we ought (that is, our duty) is a divine command.

But God's existence is not that of a being independent of human reason (Förster 142). Rather just as we postulated an ether to make a system of forces possible, so we postulate God as real to give the idea of duty a moving force. Thus the contradiction of human freedom and divine imposition certainly seems to be resolved.

There is one more step to be taken. God is now an ideal of practical reason, said, however, to exist—in some way. What is the divinity's relation to nature, particularly human nature? This is Kant's "abyss of a mystery," mentioned above: God and the world are heterogeneous ideas; as God cannot make men better, for that would abrogate their moral freedom, so he cannot interfere with nature, for that would abrogate its lawful determinateness. Kant reaches for the solution we would now expect: The unification of God and nature lies in the human subject. It is to be found in "Man in the World, Restricting Himself Through Laws of Duty," as the penultimate title page puts it (*O.P.* 244). He is an ideal, an archetype; the wise man, the philosopher, who knows God in himself *and* the laws of nature *and* the imperative of action. Kant has been, significantly it now turns out, in the habit of using the term *Weltweisheit*, "world-wisdom," for philosophy. With the human ideal Kant has reached "The Highest Standpoint of Transcendental Philosophy." Förster says he has therewith solved one of the oldest problems of philosophy, how to unify theoretical and practical reason (146). And so he has—if we can comprehend this solution.

From *Religion* on through the *Opus Postumum* Kant has been emphasizing the importance of a human ethical community, superintended by God to the realization of morality. In the latter work, it is this union of rational beings that makes the force of moral law analogous to the unifying ether of the natural system. Since now man has finally turned up in

the body, a major enigma of the *Critique of Practical Reason* appears to be resolved: How transcendental subjects, each, moreover, locked within its own self-constituted natural world, can ever appear and speak to each other.

I say the enigma *appears* to be solved because the subject is now embodied and has material appearance. But that doesn't really help: How does my appearing body enter your self-positing world—unless we hypostasize, very seriously, a true outside, a transcendent Beyond, through which I can come to you by infusing your intuition with a sensory manifold expressing my person in an appearance? But this is language so alien to Kant that I am almost abashed to use it. Nonetheless, the grounds of that intersubjective communication without which Kant cannot conceive an ethical community—a human one, at least—are missing from the Transcendental System. This enigma is clearly conjoined to that of another's body, because before we apprehend each other as rational beings we must appear to each other as material bodies. For we have no way (short of entering each other's minds) of conveying thought except in embodied form.

Nor is the God implied in our recognition of "human duties as divine commands" intelligible to me. This subjective God induces in me a desire to get down to brass tacks: Is a god who is "the inner vital spirit of man in the world" (*O.P.* 240) a God who exists in any ordinary sense, that is, a God who is a stand-alone substance, who is there, in his realm, whether I exist or not?

Kant refuted, more than once, Anselm's proof that God exists (e.g., in the *Critique Of Pure Reason* B 626) because it depends on regarding existence not as the subject's positing of an object but as a property of the object itself; thus Anselm argues that in conceiving God we must necessarily include his existence in his essence. Yet it seems to me that Kant has accepted a precondition of Anselm's proof, namely that when thought necessarily conceives of (and therefore conceives necessarily) the object as existing, then it must exist—only

where Anselm would say "beyond me," Kant says "in my thought." Is this an argument that gains anything as it goes? I think the final pages of his life's work, preoccupied though it is with God-positing, show no sign that this question oppressed Kant, that he felt an insufficiency in the thought that the unifier of all realms is the dutiful man who has God within but is otherwise left on his own, is "his own originator" (*O.P.* 209) and also the maker of Heaven and Earth—except that once he says this: "There is a certain sublime melancholy in the feelings which accompany the sublimity of the ideas of pure practical reason" (*O.P.* 212).

4. Here, to conclude, is a summary review of the perplexities that I found in the Critiques and of the bearing the *Opus Postumum* has on them.

First, the space puzzles. The *Opus Postumum* acknowledges what the transcendental Critiques had, *ipso facto*, no place for: that if the transcendental subject is to be affected by sensation through, or better, in its sensibility, it must be embodied. Kant now puts the subject's body in space so that through its own forces it may interact with the forces of nature. This somatic positing quite literally fleshes out the system, and it does so by fixing on one of the several meanings of "external" that "outer sense" seems to carry in the first Critique: As one would expect, Kant now sometimes speaks as if the ether-filled space, where my body meets nature's bodies, was in some real sense *outside of myself* as subject. That cannot be, however, since space never ceases to be what it was in the first Critique, the pure content (so to speak) of our receptive outer sense, the spatial intuition. But that fact results in this strangely involuted condition: The body, through which the world affects me, is *within* this Kantian sensorium, the intuition, the spatial sensibility; so we project a body within ourselves to receive sensations from an "outer" world we have ourselves created (Kant's own term, e.g., *O.P.* 235). I keep asking myself how Kant would have

responded to this construal of the post-Critical layout. Would we could raise the dead!

On the second, more general, question concerning the origin and fixing of the transcendental terms that stake out the system, the *Opus Postumum* is silent, though Kant asks himself over and over what transcendental philosophy is—his very last proposed title (at least in Förster's selection) is "Philosophy as a Doctrine of Science in a Complete System." The question I am asking could be put like that: Where does the philosopher stand when he establishes "The Highest Standpoint of Transcendental Philosophy"? If Kant considered this question he does not say—perhaps he would have thought it madness—much as Aristotle thinks it is ridiculous to try to show that there *is* nature (*Physics* 2.1).

The third question, "How is moral action actually inserted into a deterministic natural world?"—is in fact answered in the *Opus*: The rational subject exerts a moral force analogous to natural forces. But is it an answer? How exactly does the force of reason move bodies? Psychokinetically?

My fifth question, "Whence comes adventitious sensation and hence that contingency of nature which makes science empirical in detail?" is simply and spectacularly untouched in the *Opus Postumum*, as it was in the Critiques. Yet it is not an unreasonable problem to raise, because, though Kant likes to describe what it is that comes to us as a mere "manifold" (manyness simply), sensation is in fact the material of specific appearances; hence, as it seems to me, *some* sort of evidence for its origin must be forthcoming (for from antiquity on, appearance is appearance *of* something, that is to say, is evidence and screen at once of something beyond it).

One motive for drawing sensation more and more into the subject is precisely the principled specification of natural science: The more detail comes under the subject's control the more transcendently grounded physics becomes, that is, the more it can anticipate its findings and make laws by analogy. As it is, the ether theory goes pretty far in prescribing, *a priori*, the types of mechanical force whose effects are to be

noticed in bodies, even up to dictating some of their mathematical laws, for example the inverse square law of attraction: Kant explains that the following argument holds for any force that is diffused from the center of force through concentric spherical shells. Since the spherical surfaces vary as the square of their radii, the larger the sphere, that is the more distant from the center, the less will be the force distributed over each unit surface. Thus the effect of the force will vary inversely as the square of the distance or as  $1/r^2$  (*Met. Found.* ¶ 519).

Could it be that Kant might be driven to say that we ourselves are the creators of our sense material? In the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783) he distinguishes *bounds* that are positive in having an enfolding Beyond, from *limits* that are mere negations. In that work he says that metaphysics leads to bounds beyond which lie the "things in themselves," which are inaccessible to experience and cognition because they are beyond our cognitive faculties, but which it is nonetheless necessary to assume as sources, presumably, among other things, of sensation (¶ 57). In the *Opus Postumum* that Beyond seems to have receded; then must we ourselves be the generators of sensation? Might we be driven to suppose that the unknowable transcendent noumenal I is itself the source of the sensations that affect me? And if so, how is Kant's system in that respect different from Fichte's *Science of Knowledge*, in which the subject is completely self-positing, including its sensory affects, and of which Kant says that he regards it "as a totally indefensible system . . . for the attempt to cull a real object out of logic is a vain effort" (*O.P.* 264)? Call it absolute idealism or solipsism, in putting the world in man it leaves him *solus*, a subject alone without a confronting object, and Kant seems to find that insupportable in the Fichtean system. Recall from hints above that the first Critique itself was already vulnerable to the charge of solipsism. Sartre, for example, in the chapter "The Reef of Solipsism" in *Being and Nothingness* (3.1.2), raises it with respect to time, insofar as it is an inner

sense: How then can a Kantian “I” be synchronous with any “Other”?

I want to insert a reflection here. Philosophers pride themselves on following wherever honestly consequential thinking leads, even into the insufferable. There came generations after Kant who took a kind of unholy joy in their desperate conclusions. But Kant is the philosopher of “conditions of possibility,” of finding the terms that enable the satisfaction of rational humanity. So I imagine him to be open to the question: *Quo vadis?*, “Where are you going?” For that the love of wisdom should turn out to be totally self-love seems indeed to be insufferable.

Finally, the sixth perplexity, the proof, no, rather the positing of the existence of God: In the first Critique the *understanding*, our faculty for organizing given material into experience, sets the starting terms; the theoretical *reason* is considered mainly as a faculty for attempting, indefeasibly, to marshal judgments connecting these terms into inevitably illusory syllogistic conclusions. In the *Opus Postumum*, however, the practical reason is paramount, for its requirements come to be dominant. It leads the way in the positing of self, body, and finally God. This God-positing is no longer the “as-if” postulation of Kant’s moral works, which entitles us to act merely as if there were a God who sanctions and rewards. In the *Opus Postumum* reason is compelled to posit God as actual—though in me and not as a substance. Actual though not substantial, subjective but an object—I seem to lack the intellectual wherewithal for entertaining these conjunctions. Indeed, one of the benefits of entering into the ratiocinative preoccupations of a Kant, who explores and pushes his own concepts to their limits and who is moreover—as I think—incapable of mere invention or simple confusion, is that one is confronted in precise and compelling terms with the limits of intelligibility.

5. The Kant we study as a community is and will continue to be the Kant of the two Critiques of Pure and Practical

Reason, and so it will be, I think, for most students of philosophical works. Thus Kant’s influence on the thinking world (where attention to Kant is growing rather than waning, for example in cognitive science and in ethics) will be mostly Critical.

That Kant had a living post-Critical afterlife is in itself a source of fascination, which the review has tried to express. The *Opus Postumum*, however, though it may never, and probably should not, exert the direct influence of the Critiques, also contributes to Kant’s posthumous afterlife, not so much, as I said, in directly *influencing* the thinking of people now alive, as in *projecting* a drift that is being realized among us.

I am referring primarily to the topic of subjectivity. In many departments of life the outcome of a venture is an advance over the beginning—which is called progress. In philosophy, however, the working-out of the origin is often a shallownification, to coin a term. One reason is precisely that philosophy is treated as progressive, which entails either contracting the deep open questions of original inquiry into more effectively resolvable tight problems, or, on the contrary, loosening the precisely significant terms of a coherent philosophy to connote its bowdlerized, or at least more relaxed, possibilities. Kant’s terms are more liable to the latter fate.

For Kant expands, late in life, and late in the *Opus Postumum*, on what he had asserted earlier: “Philosophy is to be regarded either as the *habitus* of philosophizing or as a work: through which there arises, proceeding from it, a work as a system of absolute unity” (247; I can’t resist quoting a neighboring entry, which shows Kant in what he would call a “technical-practical” mode, that is, displaying mundane practicality—always an index of mental alertness: “N.B. The melon must be eaten today—with Prof. Gensichen—and, at this opportunity, [discuss] the income from the university.”) Consequently Kant’s terms are from the beginning well-defined and well-seated in a system, and thus apt to descend

to the public by acquiring more diffuse rather than narrower usages.

System-building is out of style at the present moment; the mood is anti-foundationalist. Particularly out of favor in philosophy are the two great Critical assumptions, the one so deep beneath Kant's thinking that there is no overt reflection on it in the Critiques, the other perhaps the central preoccupation of the *Opus Postumum*. The former is representationalism, the apprehension of thinking as the activity of putting objects before the cognitive faculties; the German for "representation" is *Vorstellung*, literally "setting [something] before [oneself]." (I should mention that representationalism at least is alive and well in the cognitive *sciences*, as opposed to philosophy.) The latter assumption is the one expressed in the quotation above, that the work of philosophy is "architectonic," the building of a well-grounded, completely unified, and thoroughly detailed edifice representing the activities and aspects of the rational subject, the "I." (To be sure, Kant's system is only the penultimate great Continental system; in the ultimate one, however, that of Hegel, the dialectic of concepts supersedes representational thinking, and the system is not constructed architectonically but develops organically.)

Three hugely influential shapes that the "I" as an object of reflection has taken are: the Cartesian *Ego*, a thing that knows of its existence as it thinks and can apply itself to mathematicizable spatial extension; the Rousseauian *Self*, a pure interiority that knows and revels in its mere sense of existence; and a Kantian *Subject*, an I that knows itself in two capacities, as theoretical (the subject of formal thinking and of a formative sensibility which together give laws to external nature), and as practical (an autonomous person that gives the law to itself as a moral actor).

All three, Cartesian quantification, Rousseauian self-concern and Kantian personhood, have been absorbed and naturalized into contemporary thinking. The subject of the Critiques, however, being the most complex and comprehen-

sive of these ideas, has also been most liable to second-hand connotations. For example, the word "subjective" evidently got into general philosophical and hence into common use through the Critiques, though when we say something is "purely subjective" we tend to mean it in a denigrating sense: lacking hard, public objectivity.

But the expanded terms of the *Opus Postumum* are not, as far as my reading goes, known to our contemporaries—the work has, after all, been available for barely a decade—neither to the proponents of human self- and world-construction nor to the post-Nietzschean value-relativists who hold some version of the idea that man himself is the creator of values, or the religious thinkers who regard God as a self-granted response to human need. Yet all these notions are in a more disciplined, systematic form adumbrated in the *Opus Postumum*: in the self-positing of the subject and its world-construction, in the autonomy of its moral life, and in the required postulation of its God.

But in what mode, to return to a question asked in the beginning, has Kant thus become the occulted projector of our modernity? Did he succumb—Förster thinks this implausible (76)—to the then-current craze of "posito-mania" (*Setzkrankheit*)? Is he spinning out the deep implications of the Critical enterprise, perhaps into originally unintended consequences and to his own uneasy amazement? Or has he, in adventurous old age, leapt beyond the Critiques into the stormy oceans that he once said surrounded the land of the pure understanding, an island of truth enclosed by the unchangeable bounds of nature (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B 294)?

These questions I am in principle unable to answer for myself, because I am not sure whether there can be a philosophical system with joins so tightly fitted that its inherent necessities are unambiguously fixed, and in particular, because the transcendental system of the *Opus Postumum* offers surprises (the ether), superadded requirements (the specification of empirical physics), shortfalls of closure (the

source of sensation). Nor am I certain in general whether, when a philosopher takes a structure of thought to a new level either by fine-tuning its technicalities or by driving it to its ultimate conclusions, he is doing the work of interpretation or of deconstruction. Instead I want to express this, my sense of Kant's late unfinished work: If "awe" signifies a mixture of admiration and unease, here is the occasion to recall a good word to its proper use, and to say that the *Opus Postumum* is indeed awesome.



## Odysseus's World of the Imagination

Paul Ludwig

Eva Brann's *Homeric Moments* teaches where and how to find hidden delights in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. The book aims to be a companion to Homer that can modestly step out of the way after pointing out "moments," those episodes or imaginative visions within episodes that achieve vibrant stasis and are therefore at once stations and peaks in the narrative flow—an idea based on Aristotle's distinction between episodes and bare plot. The slow or static parts such as long similes and apparent digressions, which many readers wish to skip over in order to get on with the story, *Homeric Moments* regards as affording the intellectual pleasure peculiar to reading epic. Brann's interpretative assumptions are provokingly face up on the table, and her conclusions are surprising and radical: there is no archaic "mentality" by which heroes think differently from us or which enables them to see a world full of gods rather than natural causes. A world populated by gods is superior to most of our own modern accounts of the world: Odysseus's tales of his adventures, like Homer's gods, are imaginary but true, factually false but better than a recounting of material facts because they are spun from Odysseus's imagination, an imagination that practically requires that he lose or destroy his men.

### Epithets, Similes, and Gods

Homeric "moments" are primarily visual snapshots, including word-paintings such as Hephaestus's shield and many Homeric similes as well. Their meanings, like the meanings of paintings, are not simply told to the reader. At issue is the

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Paul Ludwig is a tutor on the Annapolis campus of St. John's College.

place of surmise—including, for Brann, wild surmise like that of Cortez's men—in literary interpretation. What sorts of surmises Brann makes about moments can be seen from her treatment of an actual painting, Ajax's suicide as depicted on a sixth-century amphora. The vase painter's huge but delicate Ajax squats over his task of fixing into the ground the hilt of the sword he will fall upon. A few choice words explain the difference between black-figure and red-figure techniques of vase painting: in the earlier genre, figures appeared as black silhouettes on red clay backgrounds, but in the later genre figure and ground were reversed. "Rather than black bulks blocking the light, [figures] will appear as sunlit openings in the lustrous black glaze" (*Moments* 73). For Brann, the black-figure genre "seems made to depict a Hades-bound soul, a prospective shade," for example Ajax leaving the light. Few classicists in their right minds would venture such a claim. Since the painter is thought to have died around the time red-figure was invented, to give him a choice flirts with anachronism. The lack of clear historical evidence that the black-figure artist ever worked in red-figure dictates that his genre left him no recourse but to paint Ajax black. Since it is safer to posit only one cause per event (shades of Occam's razor), and this generic explanation is sufficient, scholars discipline themselves to refrain from speculating further. Brann by contrast "surmises" that the black-figure artist intended to exploit that unique resource of his genre (blackness of figures) that made it peculiarly appropriate for *this* depiction (a soul in shadow). The crucial thing about interpretative surmises is that they can never be conclusive. Here, the generic cause screens or hides the existence of another cause, the artist's intention. Doubt, in the historical or critical methods Brann opposes, takes on a life of its own, and lack of a proof effectually becomes proof of a lack. Unconfirmed means untrue. As with vase painting, so it is with Homer's epithets and the issue of their significance: Brann freely admits that some epithets are scarcely significant and are governed by metrical convenience, but that admission does

not stop her from investigating each epithet or cause her to doubt the appropriateness, irony, or other significance she finds in many of them (28-9). Of course it remains obvious that an epithet can both fill the meter and signify (i.e., fulfill two purposes at once, thus having two "causes") since even the weakest epithet performs better than any random word would have done. It would seem to follow that epithets may sometimes have further significance; the issue is whether it is more sophisticated to ignore these or to point them out.

Vision becomes double in Homer's similes. First the reader is presented with a visual background ("like a poppy"), against which the vision of the thing or event described ("he let his head droop") can be seen afresh. The insight that similes usually work better when the background comes first can be substantiated simply by trying out some Homeric similes backwards (139). The real situation quickly entrenches itself and the comparison becomes mere embellishment ("he let his head droop like a poppy"). Such natural occurrences are often the likeness made for manslaughter in the *Iliad*; Brann concludes that the function of the simile is to mitigate the horror of war. The *Odyssey*, with less gruesomeness to mitigate, specializes in uglier similes and tends to magnify rather than mitigate. If, however, the horror is worsened and Nature seems all the more peaceful when the two are juxtaposed, the sharpness of the contrast might work against alleviating the pain in the *Iliad*. Homer's observing the horrific together in one vision with peaceful nature is a "dry truth" akin to when economic considerations obtrude on Diomedes' and Glaucus's exchange of armor, a truthfulness which Schiller thought "naive" and said often gave an impression of insensitivity (*Moments* 122). The modern taste prefers to concentrate on one side of life at a time: sweeping the other temporarily under the rug becomes sensitivity.

Gods do the same work as similes and therefore they, too, can make Homeric moments: they transfigure human life. "Faith" is a term misapplied to the Homeric deities because, unlike the invisible one God of the Abrahamic faiths, no one

believes or disbelieves in them; rather, everyone senses their presence unless or until the gods themselves choose to withdraw (36). Brann thus overcomes a misleading dichotomy of the gods as either superseded objects of a naive faith or background machinery created by the sophisticated agnostic Homer. A third alternative not considered might be Herodotus's claim that Hesiod and Homer essentially gave the Greek gods their birth, honors, arts, and shapes (*Histories* 2.53). If Homer is telling a story of a fictional past time when belief was not necessary because the gods were accessible, this would not eliminate the possibility that belief might become necessary in "latter" days, e.g., for Homer's audience. Every so often a Greek did opine that the Olympians were fabrications: Xenophanes said that if horses could draw, they would draw gods shaped like horses.

It is here that Brann proudly declares her radicalism: Homer's gods are both imaginary and true, or at least truer than many a world without them. Their manifestation to us through the faculty of our imagination says nothing about whether they originate in the imagination alone; rather, the denigration of that faculty would seem to be the only motive for dismissing the gods on the grounds that they manifest themselves through our imagination. Because the gods transfigure the human, we are better off with them than without them. Brann uses Athena's visual transfigurations of Odysseus to make this clear. Whenever the goddess is upon him, Odysseus is most himself. His beautiful moments are bestowed by the goddess yet are totally his own. Homer observes something natural and calls it a divine gift. "Nothing happens to [Odysseus] that does not happen to us all; we too glow and crumble and have our alternating moments. What is wonderful about that? *Or rather when is it ever less than a wonder?*" (49-50; emphasis added). Thus the gods are a mode of access to the all-important appreciation of the wonder in everyday life. We are measured by our ability to see gods, but what we mainly see them doing is watching us. Nothing would change in result if the gods ceased to look on, but

everything would change in significance (43): we would no longer be dignified by the respect—literally "regard"—of being watched, and we would no longer be blessed, or cursed since it still dignifies life to have a Poseidon who curses us). There could be none of that magnification and beautification that Thucydides warned against (1.20). In a contrasting way, the gods also bring gravity to mortal life by their own lightness of being. Because they do not die, nothing is serious for them, and as a result, they lack seriousness. The gods, for whom the living is easy, achieve a vulgarity in their bickering, favoritism and one-upmanship that only the wealthiest and most independent mortals can dream of, and they lead parodies of lives. This amounts to magnification, too, because the "ability to lose one's life is magnified by the divine inability" (41). The gods represent the pinnacle of ordinary human desire, and while for some Greeks the gods simultaneously act as their own *reductio ad absurdum* to show why no one should desire immortality, in Homer the grace and elegance with which the gods carry through their vulgarity make it possible for mankind to take a "proud delight" in them (42). Like black-figure painting, their lightness and brightness form a backdrop against which the dark shapes of mortals act. If one grants that the gods, as products of the imagination, are more true or genuine than the brute or material facts of the world, one still feels cornered into a false choice between materialism and imagination. Could the gods be propaedeutic to wonder at the cosmos and man's place in it, a wonder also devoted to the use of the imagination, as in geometry or philosophy?

### Mentality

The question of whether the gods cause events or merely observe them involves an interpretative surmise governing much of Homeric scholarship, namely, that Homer or his heroes have a "mentality" different from our own. For Brann, the issue comes down to exhibiting a passage in which Homer or his heroes "think in an alien mode" rather than merely

thinking about different things than we do (27). Some previous scholars have seen the alien mentality at work when the gods cause events which nature also causes. Two causes then exist for the same effect, and Occam's razor says that should not be. A Homeric event is "overdetermined" if it has two or more causes. The simplest physical occurrences such as a spear's ceasing to quiver in the ground can be attributed to the gods ("Ares took away its impulse"; *Iliad* 13.442-4 with 6.611-13). Brann is nuanced on the issue. In the seaside meeting with Nausikaa, "[n]othing happens that does not happen to us all; balls get tossed wide and land in the drink; people are woken up by shouts. Yet nothing happens that is not under Athena's aegis—*both* at once" (221). "Both at once" sounds like overdetermination, but Brann provides an avenue of escape from mentality, which she regards as a trap. Homer and his characters see the wonder in everyday occurrences and accordingly ascribe to divine interference what would have happened anyway. Hence no miracles occur in the strict sense of events running contrary to nature. Nothing unnatural occurs, even at surprising moments, such as when Eurycleia recognizes the scar and drops Odysseus's foot in the bathwater. Though he seizes her by the throat to keep her silent, the old woman seeks out Penelope with her eyes trying to tell her the stranger is Odysseus. Penelope, however, "is unable to meet her glance or to pay it any mind, for Athena had turned her mind away" (280). Brann interprets: on the merely mundane or unimaginative level, Penelope is exercising tight self-control; she refrains from even glancing in the direction of the husband she knows is sitting disguised in her house. Brann's Athena represents—or is—the evocation of our wonder at Penelope's control, her mindfulness, Athena's specific province. Thus Athena does not cause the event in any way that would compete with natural causes. A reading that allowed for miracles might assume that Penelope has not recognized Odysseus yet. The occurrence which, in the ordinary course of events, would have been the occasion of her recognizing him is

miraculously taken away by Athena's interference. The goddess intervenes causally; she prevents nature from taking its course. This miraculous reading, too, can avoid overdetermination, since there are many ways of being a cause, with the proximate efficient cause being the least of these. The hand which threw the spear could be one kind of cause, while Ares' will is another (and Zeus's plan a third). To find a Homeric mentality in causal overdetermination would entail meeting a higher bar of evidence, showing two causes of the same type simultaneously causing the same event in the same way. For Brann, modern critics have thought their way into a mentality: the only people with a mentality are those who think they have one.

But Brann's rejection of Homeric mentality goes further and seems to entail rejecting the weaker, epistemologically less radical assumption of ethical alienness. For many years, an anthropological approach has been looking for "difference" in Homeric society. Brann asks students to see the similarity between the heroes' hunger for beautiful gifts and their own patronage of department-store gift counters; she uses the students' own suppressed longings for recognition to help them understand the glory-seeking of the heroes (26-7, 179-80). Here one wonders whether the vastness of the difference in degree does not cover over ethical differences that could be historical or social developments. Few of Brann's students would enter the Cyclops's cave to see if he would give them gifts. Brann's objection that societies as wholes do not think and that only individual humans can do the thinking seems answered by the lemming or herd instinct. Societies do tend to produce recognizable types; notwithstanding that many individuals remain free to think their way out of their society's prejudices, a majority could be left (perhaps including or composing the sovereign) who thoughtlessly imitate one another. Ethical alienness could then be responsible for protagonists' behaving in ways that modern readers do not instinctively find admirable.

The ethically alien preoccupation with fame is at issue in Brann's controversial interpretation of Penelope (see also below). When, if ever, does Penelope consider remarriage, and what constitutes faithfulness toward the husband she has every reason to believe is dead? Penelope like the male heroes—with the possible exception of Odysseus himself—appears to be motivated primarily by a desire for fame. Brann acknowledges this glory-seeking when she quotes the line with which Penelope explains her motivations to the suitors: “If Odysseus were to come home and be handmaid to my life, my glory would be greater and finer that way” (*Odyssey* 18.254-5). But the primacy of fame over fidelity has broad implications for Penelope's intention to remarry. For Brann, Penelope's sudden announcement that Odysseus told her to remarry once Telemachus had his beard is Penelope's way of signaling to the husband she knows is in the room that she is mindful of his instructions. But what is alleged to be Odysseus's instruction could also be Penelope's own newly-minted invention, designed not only to save what is left of the throne for Telemachus (she says she will “leave the house” to make clear that marrying the queen does not bring the kingship with it; 273), but also to recoup or secure such fame as remains possible for a famous widow. This widow says privately that the Olympians ruined her magnificence or splendor the day Odysseus went away (18.180-1). That splendor depends on her beauty and cosmetics (18.178-9; 192-6). So too in their speeches to her, the suitors exhibit what they think she wants to hear: “You excel women in looks and stature and the balanced mind inside you” (18. 248-9; cf. 19.124-6, 108). Her rejoinder scarcely denies that what she wants is to excel other women, although she subtly changes the bill of goods by starting with *aretê*: “my prowess and looks and figure the immortals destroyed, when the Argives embarked for Ilion and with them went my husband Odysseus” (18.251-3). A husband like Odysseus is required for feminine magnificence or splendor. Penelope has a conventionally acceptable motivation, then, for setting up

the Bow contest: her fame has been diminished by Odysseus's delay or demise. Her fame can be partially recouped by remarriage, but she needs a husband who approaches the stature of Odysseus (one who can string his bow) so that her fame will not be diminished further than necessary. In the event, Odysseus's successful return takes her fame to new heights, but that is irrelevant to her motivations now. If these motives were not sufficient, the suitors also appear capable of forcing Penelope into marriage: since she has no protector to prevent strong-arm tactics so long as the suitors feign obedience to the convention, she herself breaks the convention by extending the courtship indefinitely. Brann admits that Penelope may at times have seriously considered the unthinkable (262-3). If sometimes, why not now, with Odysseus unrecognized in the room?

The difficulty with imputing this “alien” social ethic to Penelope is that it makes her into a woman unlike any we could admire under modern assumptions (though the still, small voice of assumptions like ours is also present in Ithacan assumptions: 23.149-51). Brann in another context rebuts Coleridge's “willing suspension of disbelief,” perceiving the futility of the attempt studiously to “cancel” our instincts (36). Intellectual honesty at its best would assume the fault lies with us: our current prejudice prevents us from seeing the good in Penelope's acceptance of a remarriage that is “hateful” to her. The ascription of alienness, like the ascription of mentality, renders interpretation at once easy (they were different, that is all) and difficult since we implicitly assume that our receiving equipment has a flaw. Artificially canceling and correcting for our alleged flaws can produce monstrous chimerical interpretations that say more about ourselves than about Homer. For Brann, the fame-talk is mainly a screen, a likely story Penelope tells about what another woman in her circumstances might want, behind which she hides her true intentions. But the likely story proves the rule for Homeric woman generally. We tolerate Achilles' desire for fame in the *Iliad*, why not Penelope's in the *Odyssey*? Brann thus

rehabilitates fame-seeking but hesitates to ascribe it wholeheartedly to Penelope. Does she perhaps surmise a Penelopean analogue of the conclusion Odysseus himself arrives at—that fame is empty?

### Penelope

Penelope penetrates Odysseus's disguise the moment she sees him. *Moments* supports this surmise with a host of small details. Odysseus himself understands her beguiling the suitors into a more standard gift-giving courtship to be a sneaky Odyssean way of getting material wealth out of men not long for this world (18.281-3; 273). The Bow contest itself is all her own genius, a perfect way of getting a weapon into the hands of the disguised Odysseus. Brann shows that, in the foot-washing scene, Penelope's thought pattern stumbles over both caesura and diaeresis, as she catches herself so as not to betray her knowledge to Eurycleia. "Wash your lord's—agemate; and perhaps Odysseus/ By now has such feet and such hands" (19.358-9; 279-80). The dash is the caesura, the semi-colon the diaeresis. Penelope was about to say "Wash your lord's *feet*," but caught herself, hesitated only an instant and hastily substituted "agemate." Then during the diaeresis she thought up how to cover her faux pas with speculations about how Odysseus's feet—and hands—must have aged. This is beautifully observed.

Yet the thesis that Penelope helps orchestrate Odysseus's retaking of the palace would have to explain away a soliloquy (hence without guile) in which Penelope imagines Odysseus far away or in Hades, wishes to join him there, and states that the oblivion of sleep will help her to endure pleasing an inferior husband (20.79-83). Brann's thesis would also have to explain away a good deal of weeping. During her interview with the disguised Odysseus, the word used for her "weeping" is that used for the lamentation made for the dead (19.210). Homer says explicitly that Odysseus hid his own tears of sympathy with a trick (19.212). Why not construe this small deception as a part of a successful overall

deception? Perhaps Penelope's tears at recognizing the "sure signs" that the stranger met Odysseus long ago might be explained as tears of relief that Odysseus is home rather than as tears of renewed loss (19.249-50). But why go to bed and weep for Odysseus until Athena throws sweet sleep upon her eyelids if she has just met him (19.602-4)? Likewise she weeps as she retrieves the Bow from its closet, and weeps for Odysseus when sent away from the Bow-contest she herself devised (21.55-7, 356-8). Is it tension about the long odds against his successfully killing all the suitors with it? Or is it grief over a cherished marriage that is finally coming to an end?

Which is artistically more satisfying: to show that Odysseus can fool even his nearest and dearest, or to show that Penelope's deviousness is the equal of, and hence a match for, his own? Brann finds a number of telling ironies in the dialogue between Penelope and the disguised Odysseus. Would we rather hear innuendo in such lines as "Odysseus will never again come home" (sc. "because you're already here now"; 276) or is it more poignant to make such lines examples of her talking against her own hope? Brann points out that he calls himself *polystonos* [much-groaning], intending that she hear *odyssamenos* [hated], directly after signaling his name with *odynaon* [feeling pain] (244, 278); he is transmitting, but is she receiving? Irony there is for sure, but whose irony is it: Homer's or one of the two protagonists', that is to say, is the irony dramatic or verbal? If the ironies in her own speech remain dramatic, Penelope could remain ignorant that she is speaking to Odysseus in disguise, and Homer would be teasing us with how close their conversation comes to admitting his presence without her knowing it. It would elevate Odysseus's deviousness to read this teasing as analogous to his later teasing of Laertes.

Here as in a host of other ways *Moments* shares assumptions with Seth Benardete's *The Bow and the Lyre* even while arriving at different conclusions. Both authors see in Queen Arete of the Phaeacians what a female ruler can be and that

her co-ruler husband can defer to her (*Moments* 223). Benardete accepts that Odysseus deceives Penelope and deprecates his shutting her out of the power struggle to retake Ithaca. Brann refuses to accept what she too would deprecate and pushes on with a thesis of equality: Penelope cannot be a match for Odysseus if her cleverness is only a diminutive version of his. For her worth to rest elsewhere and not be defined by his, is not fully entertained (258-60), probably because Penelope is in fact clever, self-possessed, and steadfast—all virtues Odysseus has too. Brann finds it more satisfying intellectually if the Bed-test shows recognition in a fuller sense than mere factual identity; this fuller recognition can only be premised on Penelope's already knowing Odysseus is Odysseus. The "mutuality of their memory" is at stake: has Odysseus changed, or is he the same person he was before (283-4, 287)? Perhaps a "return of Martin Guerre" situation, in which suspicions about imposture could exist in tandem with worries about forgetfulness, would be too confusing. The crucial passage occurs where Penelope tricks Odysseus into an anger that betrays his selfsameness. Odysseus feels betrayed by Penelope, but in what way precisely? He may think Penelope herself has forgotten the rootedness of the bed, but more likely it is a "How could you think I thought" situation: he blows up at the injustice of her gambit. "How could you think I would forget and fall for a trick like that!" Penelope's trick would then be two-pronged, with her test of (or pretense about) his imposture also being exactly the right instrument to test mutuality of memory.

### Odysseus

Brann finds for Odysseus a motive to destroy his men still more shocking than Benardete's motive of prideful anger at their opening the bag of winds (*The Bow and the Lyre* 83). For Odysseus to be what he is—the soul of imagination—he must rid himself of their unimaginative minds (*Moments* 175). Odysseus's separate goals for his men and for himself (striving for their homecoming but for his own soul, in the

fifth line of the poem) prove to be incompatible aims (116). Where many readers would say Odysseus indulges a reckless curiosity, Brann stresses his imagination. The emphasis on imagination makes better sense of how he transforms his experiences into the concrete and tangible. If he is curious to view the towns of mortal men and to know their mind, his imagination transforms this mental intercourse with mortal men in towns into carnal knowledge of immortal women who live in isolation (249). To his men, the captain must seem to be plunging ever deeper into a world of his own, losing his grip on "reality." Ordinary concerns such as security and profit fade for him as he pushes them into greater and greater dangers for smaller and smaller hopes of plunder. Companions are required for the early experiences, for example, six to serve the Scylla. But as he retreats ever deeper into his imagination, the issues become utterly private. The choice Calypso offers between mortality and immortality is a choice offered to a solitary (171). A self-referential narrative opens up, in which the men are extras in a plot which has decreasing need for them and so Homer must invent ways to kill them off (175). But Brann insists that Odysseus is culpable of nothing worse than neglect leading to mutiny—he lets them die, opportunistically passive (for example, asleep) at the right times.

Striving for his soul means externalizing his own soul through the exercise of his imagination. For Brann, the fictional Wanderings are the progress of his mind (31, 177); they unfold Odysseus's true self or identity. By contrast, Benardete's Odysseus must cease to be himself and become the anonymous universality of mind, living up to the pun on one of the pronouns of negation in the Cyclops episode: *mêtis* means "no one" but also "mind." By struggling to maintain his identity as king of Ithaca and husband of Penelope, Odysseus succumbs to the temptation of pride and self-glorification, and fails to sustain the peak of humanity he achieved on Circe's isle: knowledge of nature rather than desire for fame. For Benardete, learning means becoming no one in

particular. For Brann, learning entails being an "I" who learns (51); Odysseus's flexibility is all about using tricks to endure or be steadfast, that is, to stay himself. Brann's idea of learning saves Odysseus's desire to return home from being overwhelmed by the wanderlust that overwhelms Dante's and Tennyson's Odysseus. But it may be significant that domestic bliss remains a promissory note at the end because of the prophesied final journey. Brann admits that Odysseus prays (like Augustine): help me return home, but not yet (116).

The encounters with Scylla and Charybdis never happened; nor did any of the tall tales Odysseus tells, such as the Cyclops, Circe and the rest. What Odysseus was really doing during the decade he says he was having these adventures can be gleaned from the lies he tells upon his return in disguise to Ithaca. The mundane events that actually made up his journeys consisted of piracy and marauding, trading, and the giving and receiving of gifts, all on known sea-routes and in known countries such as Crete, Cyprus, and Egypt (182, 242, 247). Nymphs like Calypso are fairyland versions of the prostitutes whom sailors dream about and find in port (192-3). The lies Odysseus tells in the persona of a Cretan are "lies like the truth" (19.203). They may not have happened, but they are the kind of things that do happen. By contrast, the adventure tales are lies of a different order: they are like nothing that ever happens. The truth about Scylla and Charybdis is that they are a fanastically-rendered image of a universal human dilemma: the Choice of Dangers, when neither alternative is good (211). Odysseus may have experienced several mundane versions of this choice, but none could have captured the essence of the Choice like the fantastic story he eventually relates. Therefore, the tall tales are true, while the underlying trip is merely real (183-4). The reader may consult his or her own experience: Scylla and Charybdis are as proverbial today as the devil and the deep or the rock and the hard place. And if that is what Scylla and Charybdis are now, why not also for Homer's first audience and ever since? Brann dares to read our modern experience

back onto the poem. Lotus-eating is equally proverbial, as is the sirens' song. Meeting a man with one eye? Readers will have to savor this brief foray into postcolonial theory for themselves.

### Homer

It is especially daring to disbelieve the factualness of Odysseus's tales (while accepting their essential truth) in a poem where Homer himself recounts equally mythical occurrences such as conversations in Hades, as well as vouches for Calypso's magical island (169). Distinguishing between fairyland adventures (made up by Odysseus) and "real" places like Hades (known to all Greeks) introduces an odd literalism into Brann's interpretations. To declare, on behalf of the Greek people, that Hades is "as real a place as there ever was" comes close to attributing a mentality to the Greeks. Hades is real until some Greek finds out differently. But Brann means to draw a distinction between what Homer appropriates from (or for) the tradition, and what he adds. Even if Homer is making it all up, he presents some of it as made up by Odysseus and pretends the rest is real. Brann's Homer subtly makes concrete to the imagination the way his epic brings Greek mythology to the Greeks: Odysseus's return from Hades (the treasure house of memory) represents the poet bringing the tales of great women and men back with him (17, 200, 204-7). The mundane reality is that we remember the dead, but the imagined truth is that the dead remember. The poet tells us that none of the people in Hades are fictions; they live down there and he heard of them through the Muses. Brann is at pains to take Homer at his word: she thus avoids rationalizing away her chance to engage with his claim. But this feels odd because Brann permits no looking behind that claim. Her refusal to know Homer better than Homer knows himself could lead her into the trap of conflating Homer's poetic persona with the real Homer. "The Author" is a character in his own right in novels like *Tom Jones* or *Don Quixote*, which are episodic and picaresque

(and therefore comparable to the *Odyssey* although still generically different). It would be a mistake to identify “The Author” with the author of such a novel, or the intentions of “The Author” with those of the author, who wishes us to penetrate his persona in order to have access to yet greater delights. The humor or absurdism in these modern novels vitiates the comparison because the self-referentiality of an authorial persona also generates humor. But it is unclear in principle why, in a poem with the complexity Brann attributes to it, Homer might not have employed a similar subtlety, giving glimpses of himself that are equally important but equally contrived. Surely the road to understanding Homer’s intention runs through Brann’s careful distinctions, but she does not base many surmises on those distinctions.

A related literalism is Brann’s insistence that Odysseus’s tales were never meant for publication (notwithstanding the fact that she has published a book about them). Observing that the tales’ first audience, the Phaeacians, is cut off from the world (though if Odysseus did not anticipate the enclosure of their land, he might have expected these seafarers to carry his fame to all lands; 226), and their second audience is Penelope in the privacy of home, Brann preserves the possibility that Odysseus is exceptional among heroes: he truly seeks something other than fame. Odysseus cannot know that the Muses will find out about his private tale and tell Homer, who will publicize it. The fact that Odysseus prefaces his account to the Phaeacians by saying his fame reaches heaven does not imply a hero’s desire for more glory but rather that he rests secure in the fame he already has (180). Odysseus learned his lesson when he shouted his name to the Cyclops, from which deed he earned the undying enmity of Poseidon (189). Brann sums up: Odysseus’s adventures “will never become a myth among public myths” (300; cf. 205). And yet they did. Odysseus’s exceptionality may be indicated by the fact that Homer in the *Odyssey* never calls him a hero; only Circe does, after his return from Hades (180, 196). Odysseus hears from Achilles that it is not better to reign in

Hell than serve on earth. The discovery that fame is empty may help Odysseus to transcend heroism. Yet Odysseus ends up with a poem of comparable (though shorter) length to the one Achilles gets, a poem which furthermore has acquired a title which names it securely after Odysseus, an honor Achilles is denied. Odysseus is very lucky to have won maximum fame after ceasing to seek it. His alleged eschewal of fame is rewarded with fame. Virtue rewarded always entails the problem of whether the virtue was sought for its own sake or only for the reward. But Brann would never let such skepticism essentially eliminate the possibility of true virtue rewarded; to allow that would be to fall into a mentality. As we saw, Brann’s Penelope also chooses what could be called the path of least fame—to remain in widowhood—but thereby gains the greatest fame possible. If Odysseus learns to demote fame, then Homer portrays a character who thinks his way out of a central tenet of his society’s ethics, thereby giving the lie to the inevitability of mentality.

*Moments* opens up many more windows on Homer than can be discussed here. Not the least of these are the myriad quotations of modern lyric poets—from Keats to H. D.—who interpret Homer. Each of these, too, provides a moment in which readers can lose themselves. Not to be missed are the Helen chapter and the chapters laying out the structures of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. Brann is particularly wonderful with time, and many delightful intricacies come into focus when she juxtaposes the order of occurrences with the order in which they are narrated. The simple device of generous cross-referencing, so lacking in most books, enables the ripples to spread. The accomplishment of *Homeric Moments* is to progress from the visual to the invisible, but observation remains its greatest virtue.



## The City: Intersection of *Erôs* and *Thumos*?

Michael Dink

Ludwig takes us on a tour of sex and politics in Greek political theory, focusing largely, but not exclusively, on the political effects of the practice of homoerotic pederasty as understood by certain Greek thinkers, using as his principal texts Plato's *Symposium* (primarily Aristophanes' speech), Aristophanes' plays, and a few selected passages from Thucydides. The ultimate goal seems to be to investigate how these thinkers understood the political relevance of *erôs* in its various forms. Not surprisingly, Ludwig finds that, at least in its political manifestations, *erôs* is always mixed up with *thumos*.

The path taken by the exposition can seem labyrinthine, as Ludwig moves back and forth among different texts, and takes up in sequence various loci of the intersection of *erôs* and politics, while at the same time trying to develop an account of what *erôs* is, what different forms it takes, how it is related to *thumos* and its forms, and which aspects of it are natural and which are conventional or "socially constructed." For a reader like myself, primarily interested in the intertwining of *erôs* and *thumos*, it is helpful to have a clear, even if initially oversimplified, statement of the distinction between *erôs* and *thumos* as a thread with which to negotiate the labyrinth. Since Ludwig himself does not provide this thread, I have spun my own, which I will share with you.

Let us define *erôs* as the striving to fulfill a perceived lack in oneself and *thumos* as the striving to assert something present in oneself, perceived as good. In *erôs*, one feels an

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Michael Dink is a tutor on the Annapolis campus of St. John's College.

emptiness of self in need of fulfillment; in *thumos*, one feels a fullness of self in need of expression.

The striving of *erôs* tends to seek possession of some object outside of the self, in the expectation that this will fill its lack. The object sought is usually regarded as being high, exalted, or beautiful; the lack is considered to be grave and its fulfillment of the greatest importance because tantamount to finding happiness, and thus the striving is accompanied with great intensity of feeling.

The striving of *thumos* tends to be in opposition or antagonism to some object other than the self, either one that threatens the self or one that is in some way in opposition to the goodness that the self strives to assert. The sense in which goodness is perceived in the self and the sense in which it is asserted may vary widely: as existence asserted in self-defense; as, excellence asserted in the striving for recognition; as rule over others asserted in the pursuit of conquest.

Ludwig begins with Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium*, in which he finds two manifestations of *erôs*. The one which Aristophanes explicitly calls *erôs* and makes the object of his praise is the desire of each split half of the original circle people to rejoin with its former other half in order to recover its (their?) original wholeness. The other impulse which Ludwig identifies as a form of *erôs* is whatever motive caused these original circle people to ascend into the heavens and seek to displace the gods, thus provoking the splitting that brought into being the first kind of *erôs*. Aristophanes himself does not even name this second impulse, much less call it *erôs*, and he does not give any explicit characterization of its object. Ludwig names it 'Ur-erôs' and characterizes it in a number of different ways. He argues that it is more original and natural than the *erôs* of the split halves and that the latter is the result of efforts to restrain 'Ur-erôs' in most people, an effort originally made by a tyrant in the service of better fulfilling his own 'Ur-erôs.'

While Ludwig has not yet introduced the distinction between *erôs* and *thumos* at this point, it seems to me that the

*erôs* of the halves does fit the definition of *erôs*, insofar as it strives to fill a perceived lack, even if there is lack of clarity about what constitutes this lack and its fulfillment. Ludwig, however, treats this aspect of Aristophanes' account as a romantic dressing up of a less attractive reality: a desire for what is like oneself, which uses the self as the criterion of likeness. Ludwig calls this "horizontal *erôs*," twisting it in a direction that strikes me as more thumotic: he makes it into a kind of assertion of the goodness of the self, as if what it seeks is only more of the same.

The other form of *erôs*, which Ludwig calls 'Ur-erôs' or 'vertical *erôs*,' is an impulse implied in Aristophanes' very brief statement that the original circle people made an ascent into the heavens and launched an attack upon the gods. I find both thumotic and erotic aspects in this impulse. The antagonistic and assertive aspect of *thumos* is manifest in the attempt to overthrow or displace the gods by a violent struggle, as if they were a hindrance to be overcome. Nevertheless, the erotic component emerges insofar as the circle people are attempting to gain something high and exalted that they lack. Ludwig does not initially thematize this duality or relate it to *thumos*, but later adumbrates it in the phrase "violent admiration." He gives a wide range of characterizations of the goal sought by the circle people without an explicit attempt either to unify these or to choose among them: tyrannical domination of others; equality with or superiority to an admired object; becoming a more grandiose version of oneself; higher status; self-aggrandizement; self-apotheosis; an inhuman wholeness and perfection. In many of these phrases, I find the peculiar implication that the one who seeks to fulfill a lack nonetheless manages to suppress his recognition of this lack, by somehow believing that what he does not yet possess is rightfully his own or is the fitting external expression of what he really already is.

Ludwig reads Aristophanes' speech as covertly acknowledging the natural character of this "Ur-erôs" while recognizing that it is dangerous and needs to be restrained, both by

laws and by civil religion. The other kind of *erôs* is derivative from the restraining effects of convention, but is safer. Aristophanes tries to make it more attractive by playing up the romantic and idealistic side of it and covering up its dark and selfish side.

Ludwig, however, identifies a particular problem in Aristophanes' strategy. He has included male homosexual love as one of the forms of the convention-tamed *erôs*. Yet in noting that the political men come from lovers of this kind, he recognizes that Ur-*erôs* is less tamed in them, and that they represent a tendency to reconstitute the original whole at the political level, rather than at the private level. As a consequence, they tend toward the dangers of internal tyranny and external imperialism.

This question of the political effects of the Greek practice of homosexual pederasty forms one of the main strands of the book's analysis. The practice combines erotic neediness on the individual level with ambition to rule and conquer on the political level. Ludwig identifies a basic internal contradiction in the practice as one of the principles of its dynamism. While the relationship of older lover to younger beloved was in part understood as a path to political power for the beloved, the acceptance of the passive sexual role by one male in relation to another was regarded as shameful and as a disqualification from the exercise of citizen rights (technically only if in exchange for money). Hence the threat of such hubris on the part of the lover was guarded against by a convention that encouraged the pursuit of young males by older ones, while at the same time discouraging sexual consummation. Ludwig argues that this convention fostered the sublimation of sexual desire into a kind of love that expressed itself largely in an attempt to educate the beloved so as to win the favor of his recognition. But Ludwig points to a number of elements in this education that strike me as thumotic: the lover first seeks to cultivate and display his own excellence in rivalry with other lovers, and then to impress the stamp of his own excellence on the beloved. Insofar as this excellence has a political

character, and insofar as erotic energy is directed away from heterosexual love and the private household and is denied sexual satisfaction, it tends to spill over into ambitious political activity. Insofar as this pederastic relationship was an aristocratic or oligarchic practice, the political activity tended to be oligarchic, and to be viewed as a threat by the democrats.

In his plays Aristophanes often satirizes the pederastic proclivities of Athenian politicians, and suggests that heterosexual desire is more compatible with contentment with private life and avoidance of dangerous political ambition and the wars brought on by imperialism. Yet Ludwig finds evidence in the plays that Aristophanes is aware that heterosexual desire and the pleasures of private life may have their own admixture of *thumos*, in a kind of belligerently possessive and even randomly cantankerous behavior.

In connection with the practice he calls "civic nudity," in which Greek males exercised and engaged in athletic competition in the nude, Ludwig explores politico-erotic phenomena along a different axis, stretching from shame-induced covering of the body to its shame-free (but not shameless) uncovering. He seems to want to argue, on the one hand, that some degree of covering up out of shame or modesty is a necessary condition of the emergence of love as distinct from sexual desire, but on the other hand, that an obsession with covering up is an over reaction that generates a vicious cycle of "modesty—sensitization—predation—modesty." Ludwig argues that Thucydides, at least, regarded Greek civic nudity as a sign of civic trust and a display of "conspicuous moderation," in contrast to what is reported of modern nudist colonies, that universal nudity of itself suppresses sexual desire. In treating this as a single axis, he may not give sufficient attention to the distinction between the shame or modesty involved in covering and uncovering the body and that involved in the desire for privacy for sexual intimacy.

In a bold extrapolation, he claims that a "structural feature of *erôs*" emerges from this dialectic of covering and

uncovering. What *erôs* really desires is not the consummation of sexual desire, much less the naked body, but rather the transgressive motion from one degree of covering to the next lower degree, ad infinitum, albeit per impossible. He even suggests that beauty itself may somehow have a structure that lures us on to such transgressive unveiling. If his claim is that this is a structural feature of all *erôs*, he has not substantiated it by showing how it is present in all the cases he has examined. Although he does not make this explicit, the transgressive character that he finds in this kind of voyeuristic *erôs* bears traces of the aggressive and antagonistic features of *thumos*.

In his final chapter, Ludwig both introduces new political manifestations of *erôs* and tries to sort out some of the possibilities he has surveyed. The augmented range of possibilities includes the narrow attachment to and preference for one's own because it is one's own; the attempt to extend this to the city as a whole in part by weakening it at the family level; homoerotic pederasty, as a practice which diverts erotic energy from love of one's own into a relationship with civic consequences both beneficial and dangerous; Periclean love of the city because of its grandeur or merit, along with a desire to be honored by it, shadowed by the ambition to possess it as sole tyrant and/or to leave one's stamp on it; love of seeing things exotic and alien, which undermines the effort to conquer them; and love of acquiring foreign things, which, when assimilated, undermine loyalty to and defense of one's own.

Ludwig tries to marshal this motley crew into a single orderly column or spectrum, with the narrow, possessive love of one's own on one end, and the selfless love of beauty on the other end. He further suggests that Sparta and Athens each marched gloriously over the cliff at one end of the spectrum, Sparta staying too close to the narrow love of one's own, although transferred from family to city, and Athens flirting dangerously with love of the beautiful as detached from one's own.

Ludwig's book does much valuable work in uncovering and exploring many aspects of *erôs* in Greek political phenomena and theory. His tone is always judicious and non-polemical, and his mastery of a wide range of material, primary and secondary, ancient and modern, philological, sociological, and philosophical, is impressive. From the point of view of explicating the intertwining of *erôs* and *thumos*, however, the organization of the book presents a significant structural impediment. His discussion of the two kinds of *erôs* in Aristophanes' speech in the early chapters precedes his introduction of the distinction between *erôs* and *thumos*. When he introduces *thumos* in chapter 4, his discussion focuses almost exclusively on ways in which it shows up in combination with "horizontal *erôs*." His primary example is a character from the *Wasps*, Philocleon. An old man who loves to serve on juries, his attitude is one of punitive moralism, ostensibly in response to threats against the common good of the city. In contrast, Ludwig's discussion of Peisetairos, a character from the *Birds*, who resembles the circle people in making an ascent into the heavens that turns out to be tyrannical, is couched entirely in terms of *erôs*. In other words, despite a brief allusion to the connection of *thumos* to the ascent of the circle people, Ludwig never makes an explicit attempt to assess the thumotic elements in "vertical *erôs*." Thus we are left with the impression that verticality and violence belong together intrinsically, and that this togetherness is the most fundamental form of *erôs*.

In contrast, when he lines up the many manifestations of *erôs* along a spectrum in the final chapter, he seems to put the violence together with the selfish and the possessive on the horizontal end of the spectrum, which is therefore regarded as more thumotic than erotic, and to put self-forgetting in the presence of the beautiful at the other, vertical, end, which is therefore regarded as more erotic than thumotic. We can't help wondering where on this spectrum to fit vertical *erôs* as the aspiration to tyranny.

Perhaps this apparent inconsistency could be resolved if we said that the violence and assertiveness in the aspiration of the circle-people are due to an admixture of *thumos* with the erotic desire for a certain kind of perfection. This would still leave us with a number of questions. Are *erôs* and *thumos* halves of an original, natural whole, which are only split from one another by convention? Or are they intrinsically distinct principles, whose co-presence in any phenomenon is in need of explanation? If the latter is the case, is one more natural than the other? Is the impulse to ascend more fundamentally due to one rather than to the other? Is the desire to acquire a perfection that one finds lacking in oneself necessarily linked to an impulse to displace others who are seen as possessing this perfection? If *erôs* and *thumos* are mixed along both horizontal and vertical axes, what determines the difference between these axes?