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# The St. John's Review

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## Contents

### Memorial Pieces

Memorial for Beate Ruhm von Oppen.....	5
Introduction to “The Tuning Fork”.....	27
<i>David Stephenson</i>	
The Tuning Fork.....	28
<i>Beate Ruhm von Oppen</i>	
A Visit to Santayana.....	43
<i>Steve Benedict</i>	

### Essays and Lectures

Kant’s Philosophical Use of Mathematics: Negative Magnitudes.....	49
<i>Eva Brann</i>	

### Four Poems

Where the Poet Lives.....	73
Early Pupil	
She and the Tree	
Outlay	
<i>Elliott Zuckerman</i>	

### Review

Platonic Pedagogy? Eva Brann’s <i>The Music of the Republic:</i> <i>Essays on Socrates’ Conversations</i> <i>and Plato’s Writings</i> .....	79
<i>David Roochnik</i>	



## Memorial for Beate Ruhm von Oppen

### **Introduction: Elliott Zuckerman**

During her years at the College, Beate brought us her words and her music, and her concern about how words and music ought to fit together. Now we are devoting to her memory some of our words and our music.

In many of her writings and in her person, we were reminded of the history of the twentieth century. In a time of exaggeration, she insisted upon accuracy. And by reminding us of war, she enhanced our devotion to the activities of peace.

\* \* \*

### **Delia Walker**

I do not want to talk about Beate's intellectual brilliance, of which you are all aware, but I want to talk about her as my sister and about the time when we were young.

She was my big sister, my senior by several years. Because of the difference in our ages and circumstances, we lived apart more than we lived together, but I could always rely on her help and advice.

I must often have been a burden and a responsibility, not to say a nuisance, but she was always there for me, especially during the difficult war years. I know she worried about me, and she helped me and gave me courage in tricky situations.

She even tried her hand at matchmaking! I didn't always agree with her advice about things, but in this instance I did, wholeheartedly, and here I am, after fifty years of happy marriage. Thank you, Beate. I know she loved Harlan very much.

In spite of being by miles the brainier of us two, she always had unbounded confidence in my abilities and capabilities, and her belief in me was an enormous help to get me through periods of low self-esteem and depression. Indeed, if she had not been continually rooting for me, I might often have given up. So today I want to say a big “thank you” to her.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my family and Beate’s friends for the tremendous support they have given me in this sad time.

She was very enthusiastic about my playing – far more than I deserved – and so, though I really stopped playing seriously some years ago, I have blown the dust off my flute and together with her friend, Chester Burke, we will play some Telemann – a composer of whom she was very fond.

*[Delia Walker and Chester Burke then played the Flute Duet in G major by Georg Philipp Telemann.]*

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### **Peter E. Quint**

My first trip to St. John’s College was in the late spring of 1976. I returned from that visit with many vivid memories, but the most lively and impressive were of my conversations with a wonderful and, it seemed to me, exotic person: a German Englishwoman, of profound leaning and extraordinary charm, who—quite amazingly—lived right here in Maryland.

Beate Ruhm von Oppen was one of the last of a brilliant generation of scholars—historians, scientists, philosophers, lawyers—who, having escaped Nazi Germany, were obliged to resume their studies or careers in another, more welcoming land. This necessity of perhaps starting anew may have seemed like great misfortune at the outset, but it had the advantage—for them, and certainly for us—that they were perfectly at home in two languages and two cultures.

Yet as with many other victims or opponents of the Nazi regime, the experience left Beate with a certain, let us say, intellectual and emotional distance from her native land. Even in recent years, I believe that Beate thought long and hard before accepting a high honor for her distinguished life’s work from the German government.

Some years ago Beate, with her extraordinary linguistic skills and deep knowledge of history, was chosen to be the English translator of the memoirs of Konrad Adenauer, the venerable first Chancellor of post-war West Germany. For some days the English and the French translators actually worked in Adenauer’s house in order to receive his last minute changes on the German manuscript. Beate told me that the translators worked at Adenauer’s dining room table, and apparently because the sun was streaming in, they adjusted a window curtain in a way that made the work most comfortable for them. But Adenauer himself would come in and, seeing the curtain in an unfamiliar position, would firmly move it back to the spot that he approved.

A charming and slightly ludicrous tale—but would I be wrong in detecting, in Beate’s telling, a subtle note of disapproval that even in this trivial instance some residual authoritarian attitude survived in the avatar of the New Germany?

The work of Beate’s that will most certainly live is her extraordinary edition of the letters of Helmuth James von Moltke sent to his wife Freya, that “beautifully edited” work, in the words of the Stanford historian Gordon Craig. Moltke was a Prussian aristocrat who opposed Hitler and knew from the outset that the war would end in catastrophic shame and defeat for Germany. Moltke sought tirelessly to recruit like-minded Germans of the resistance, and in three meetings at Kreisau, his East Elbian estate, he organized the drafting of detailed principles for a new democratic Germany after Hitler’s defeat. At the same time, Moltke was making strenuous efforts to save whatever lives he could as a legal officer in the German intelligence service, which was, as Beate noted, “the focal point of much opposition to the regime.” The let-

ters reflect this ceaseless work, as well as deep concern for Freya and their two young children, who spent the war at Kreisau.

Moltke fell under particular suspicion shortly after the attempt on Hitler's life in July 1944, and following a trial before the notorious "People's Court," he was executed at Berlin-Plötzensee in early 1945. The American diplomat George Kennan, who knew Moltke personally, called him: "the greatest person morally, and the largest and most enlightened in his concepts that I met on either side of the battle lines of the Second World War."

Beate had been led to Moltke through her work on religion and the German resistance, lectures that were delivered at Princeton in 1971, and much of her academic life was focused on the issues and conundrums of resistance to a regime of repression so horrible that it would seem impossible to imagine if it had not actually occurred.

In the editions of Moltke's letters, Beate's indispensable introductions and notes reflect her remarkable knowledge and understanding of the German resistance, as well as the broader history of the period. Indeed the notes have a sad, elegiac quality of their own. As each new personality of the resistance enters the scene, there is a trenchant summary of his career which more often than not ends—as though a bell were tolling through out the volume—with the words: "executed in August 1944"; "executed 29 September 1944"; "executed," "executed." It is fitting and appropriate that the German edition was awarded the Scholl prize, which honors another circle of the German resistance, the Munich University students of the White Rose movement.

Beate's first German edition of Moltke's letters appeared in 1988, and in 1990 Alfred Knopf, Inc. published an edition in New York—wonderfully translated into English by Beate—which brought this moving document of the human spirit to American and British readers. The English introduction reflects the precision and trenchancy which Beate's friends

will immediately recall from her brilliant and learned conversation.

Moltke's mother was an English-speaking woman from South Africa, and the story of Beate's edition of her letters is also noteworthy. When these letters found no American or British publisher, Beate translated them into German for a German edition. So she translated Moltke's letters from German into English, and his mother's letters from English into German. Ordinarily one only translates into one's own native language, but Beate, as we know, had two native languages.

In my last telephone call with Beate earlier this summer, she recounted that she was deeply absorbed in choosing books to be given to the St. John's library. Despite many upheavals, Beate had much good fortune in her life: in getting out of Germany when she did; in finding a subject, Moltke, who was so congenial to her independent spirit; and in reaching a place, St. John's College, that suited her so well in its uncompromising quest for excellence in the life of the mind.

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### Steven Werlin

I want to make two separate speeches about Beate. Both will be short. The first begins with an anecdote. Sometime in the 1990s, when I lived in Annapolis, I had the pleasure of driving Beate either to or from the airport. It was a long drive—she preferred Dulles to BWI or National—and I always enjoyed the trip. I valued the chance to chat.

One time we were running a little bit late, and it started to rain. I was speeding around the Washington beltway—too quickly, it turned out—and my car went into a skid. Before I regained control, we had scraped the passenger side of the vehicle along the right-side barrier. I pulled to the side of the road in a panic.

I asked Beate whether she was all right. I apologized. I asked her whether she was sure was all right. I apologized

again. I asked her whether she was very sure she was all right and apologized a third time. So much I remember only approximately. I had let my car slide out of control with a passenger who was within a half-dozen years of my grandmother's age, and I was very upset.

Whatever I said, however many times I apologized, I must have gone too far. The following is the part of the story I remember very clearly: Beate finally turned to me and said, "Steven, my dear, I made it through the bombing of London."

I wanted to share this anecdote because I thought it would be important for us all to think about how very funny Beate was. I knew that others this afternoon would speak of her scholarship and her courage. I wanted to point out that she was a pleasure to be around.

I got to know Beate at two different dinner tables at 101 Market Street [the residence of the Klein's], where three different sorts of dinners were served. There were large formal occasions at which I was most often present as a waiter; there were large informal occasions, also in the dining room, where leftovers from formal dinners would be consumed by those whom the hostess lovingly called her "vacuum cleaners"; there were private dinners, for one or two friends, at the small table in the kitchen. Beate was mainstay at all three, because whenever she was around, conversations would be interesting and serious, but also fun.

Here's my second speech: I am now the Dean of Shimer College, a small Great Books school near Chicago. I mourn Beate's passing for my students' sake. I had been trying for a couple of years to convince her to give a talk at Shimer. Most recently I asked her to speak at commencement last spring. She refused, saying that she was too old and unwell for the trip.

When I heard she had passed away, I decided to try to share my sense of her with my students, and so I invited all who were interested to come to a Friday evening discussion of her essay on the White Rose. It's a lovely piece: serious and challenging, surprising in its conclusions and beautifully writ-

ten in that English which she enjoyed calling "Standard Mid-Atlantic."

Moved by some of her stronger claims, our conversation focused on the importance of taking language seriously, of paying close attention to the words that we and others use. Much of what was said was predictable: angry claims about the ways in which words like "terrorist" and "Nazi" and "homeland" can be used too lightly, and the damage that ensues when they are. But the conversation lacked depth of passion, just as Beate said such conversation among those of my generation and those who are younger generally do.

At a certain point, however, the conversation turned. In order to explain how it turned, I need to share one fact about Shimer College. At Shimer, teachers aren't called "tutors." It's not that we're called "professors," as we would be at most colleges. At Shimer, there is no clear tradition. Lots of words get used—teacher, instructor, facilitator, co-inquirer, and worse.

We started to talk about whether it did and whether it should matter to us what teachers are called. That question brought the issue close to all of our lives. Several of my colleagues were present, but there were many more students—first year, sophomore, junior, and senior—and they talked seriously about what various decisions about the consequences that their various decisions about what word to use in this particular instance might have. They were judging their language, taking control of it in a serious way.

I think Beate would have been delighted.

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### **Freya von Moltke**

*Read by Johannes Huessy*

During the twelve heavy years that we lived under Hitler's regime in Germany, my husband, Helmuth James von Moltke, wrote hundreds of letters to me. These letters were not only a precious record of my husband's thought, but also

a commentary on the events in Germany seen through the eyes of a German and committed opponent of the Nazis. He was executed for his opposition. For many years I kept the letters with me as I first lived in South Africa, then back in Germany, and eventually in the United States. Gradually I came to realize that these letters were of historical importance and should be published. I did not believe, however, that I was the right person to edit the letters. In Vermont, Beate, so committed to German resistance, came into my life. I came to love and admire her, and I entrusted the letters to her. Over many years she edited and translated them, and they were published in both German and English.

With Beate our letters were in very good hands. In her work with them lively Beate invested most generously the treasures of her gifts: her character, her mind, and mostly her heart. And I came to cherish her friendship.

Later she began work on another collection of letters from our family, the letters my mother-in-law, Dorothy von Moltke, née Rose Innes, sent to her father, the Chief Justice of South Africa from 1905 to 1935. These letters record her life as a British-born wife and mother through World War I and into the Nazi period, again a comment on Germany's troubled history of the first half of the twentieth century. Beate translated this correspondence from English into German, and part of the letters was published in 1999 in that language.

So today, as you are all gathered to celebrate Beate's life, I want to add my voice to express my profound gratitude and my sadness at her passing. How fortunate for her that she died without having to leave St. John's College.

Since I am not able to be with you in person I am very grateful to have my words conveyed to you by one of your students, Johannes Huessy, class of 2005, a friend of ours, and belonging to the young generation, whom to teach had become so central to Beate's life.

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### **Brother Robert Smith, F.S.C.**

Beate was and is so many things to so many people that an occasion like the present one is precious. It requires us to sort out diverse strands in our own deeply felt but unsorted allegiances. This clarification has not been needed until now; she was always there and ready to charm, and that was enough. Now one needs to become explicit about what drew us to her so strongly and for so long. That process will take a while, and it begins for most of us now. We cannot judge ourselves unless we fathom our enthusiasms.

Beate had an impact on people in public ways and also privately. No generalizations can convey this, and so I rejoice that so many people are here and have and soon will have spoken.

I want to begin with an odd bit or two of evaluations others have made of her, principally because at least one such view originally surprised me, but when I thought of it, it seemed true and important. Robert Bart said something that awakened my attention to an aspect of her I had not explicitly noted. Bart was a considerable influence in the College for many years. He was often quite perceptive and articulated his opinions clearly in his own idiosyncratic way. He said he found Beate's opinions on the work of students and her judgment of their characters to be very deep and accurate. This judgment bears on a central matter in the life of this College. We arrive at grades for Seminar—the central part of our work here—by discussion and consensus between the two leaders who share responsibility for it. We also decide in a similar way on whether a student should be allowed to continue in the College or not, and on whether he or she will be graduated. To show how important a judgment Bart thought he was making about Beate, one has to realize how seriously Bart took the matter of student evaluations. One anecdote will suffice to show this. After an enabling meeting that started at 7 p.m. and did not end until 2 a.m., Bart was heard to say with satisfaction to an exhausted colleague: "I think we really did talk things out tonight." That very careful man alerted me

to the real power of judging character Beate undoubtedly possessed.

I talked about this someone else who expressed himself as surprised by Bart's opinion—he imagined Beate would probably have remained rather quiet on such occasions. This shows how many sides there were to her. She was like the man described by Pascal: when the talk turned on poetry, he had lots to say, otherwise one would never have known he had any views on the subject.

She was also impressive in other public ways. For many years an important part of college life centered on dinners given regularly by Jacob Klein and his wife. Klein was in the opinion of most a great man and the dean whose thoughts still influence us. People invited to give the Friday night lecture attended by all members of the Community came to those dinners. Faculty members in turn were also invited and, more frequently than most, Beate. It was agreed that when she was present, her wit and general sprightliness helped make the occasion a delight. That was certainly the opinion of the Klein and his wife, both distinguished conversationalists themselves.

I want to bring up two more subjects. One of them is unusual, and I think no one else is likely to have considered it or thought it important. The other is a nostalgic look at reasons for a disappointment I have and will continue to feel now that she is no longer reachable by telephone.

Let me turn to the first of the two topics. It will surprise most of you.

She never attended family reunions because some Oppens had insufficiently kept their distance from Hitler, and she was unwilling to risk having to speak to them. She was proud of one relative, a "parson," to use her expression, who behaved quite honorably.

Later, she did think of going to a family gathering, but finally never did. She wrote an account of herself and her father for a family publication, and she was immensely pleased when some stranger, a man of some distinction, asked

her if she was indeed related to the man who was her father. When she said yes, he told her of his admiration for him and about the memorabilia on him and his career as an actor he had collected.

Why am I speaking of this matter? There are, I think, good reasons for doing so.

This aspect of her life shows both Beate's seriousness and her complexity. She paid respect to whatever she thought deserved it, and this trait was balanced by her carefulness in talking to people only about topics she thought appropriate to a given audience. Beate never, or at least very rarely, mentioned the matters I have just spoken about. More importantly, in this very matter she did something else that goes to the heart of who she was. In all the years she was at St. John's, in the annual directory published by the College, if you look at the entry "von Oppen, Beate" you will find the words "See Ruhm von Oppen, Beate." She said, "My father gave me life, but my mother's second husband gave me nourishment and a chance for a long life." She always spoke of him—and she was not sparing him in doing so—with affection and respect.

Consideration for her forbearers went along with a sense of what is important over history. In fact some families were the military bulwark that guaranteed continuity in a country, and they made possible whatever degree of civilization existed there. Beate's respect for those who embody these claims is of a piece with another worthwhile fact about her.

She never became an American citizen, despite her high regard for this country and what it did for the world in two great wars. She remembered, though, that England had helped preserve her life and gave her an opportunity to serve in the second great war. She said, "I swore allegiance to the Queen and Charlie, too." This last was her translation of "to the Queen and her heirs."

My second reason for talking about her origins is the common sense and respect for herself that she showed in keeping silent about them. Americans in one of their founding documents distanced themselves from titles, and in this

country mentioning a claim to one seems ridiculous to most. Beate was as far removed from such a taint as possible. She had the respect of all who knew her. She deserved it for her personal and professional qualities. She needed no peacock feather even if their borrowed attractiveness were valued here.

Let me now conclude by saying how much one will miss her. For many years I have called her whenever I heard or read something new on any of the topics that interested the two of us. I always wanted to hear her opinion and thereby evaluate my own. One example: I recently read about a musical called, I think, "Quickening" composed for this year's Edinburgh Festival. It was on a religious subject. I immediately thought of Beate and the fact that she knew by heart every work of every one of Bach's cantatas. When I read about this piece, I did not quite take the phone down and call her about it, but I automatically thought of doing so.

Let that stand for many thoughts about the past and the future that will preemptively summon my attention and stir my gratitude toward someone so recently gone.

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### Ben Walker

I'd like to say a few words about my aunt Biti on behalf of myself, my siblings, Becca and Philip, and also our partners and children. We all called her Biti rather than Beate, so I'll continue to call her that throughout this talk.

Although Biti lived 4,000 miles away from us, she was a constant presence throughout our childhoods and adult lives. She never felt like "the aunt who lived on another continent," but a close and trusted friend and confidante.

She would come to visit us in England as often as she could, normally twice a year. As we each grew up and left home, her visits started to include trips to our homes in Bristol, London, and Oxford, where she would come and stay with us. She always took a very keen interest in what we were

doing in our lives and greatly enjoyed seeing where and how we lived, at first hand. It was a great pleasure to have her to stay, and you knew there would be no shortage of conversation while she was with you.

When she was back in America, we would all enjoy correspondence by letter with Biti. She was the only person with whom I had regular correspondence by mail, and these letters were always much more than just a quick summary of recent events. Her letters to us would be questioning and insightful, full of enthusiasm for whatever she was currently involved with, full of personality and wit. Sometimes she wrote as if she had discovered something or someone that had been a huge secret, like Paul Scott or E.M. Forster, and she had to share the good news with everyone.

But her handwriting was terrible; sometimes it would take ages to decipher what she had written. She would complain about mine, and particularly Becca's, but hers was appalling!

Often letters would start in the normal way, but after she had filled the sheet she was writing on, her words would spill out onto the margins, and then on to the margins of newspaper cuttings she was sending us, as if she could never quite tell us everything that she wanted to say.

For someone who surrounded herself with books and even referred to her books as her friends, she was an amazingly social person. She had the ability to make friends with people from all walks of life, young and old. She loved to talk and was an entertaining and fascinating raconteur. Discussions with Biti could sometimes be frustrating, as her train of thought would often lead her seemingly miles away from the topic being discussed, only to return twenty minutes later via a very circuitous route; however, these conversations were always fascinating as she would tell us about aspects of her life that we did not know, and also stories about our own childhoods that we had forgotten.

Her memory was quite amazing. She had the ability to recall the most minute detail of events in her life that took

place decades earlier, even to the most mundane detail of doctor's appointments and dinner menus. Although at times she would do the majority of the talking, conversations with Biti were never "one way." She took an active interest in all of our lives, our partners and families, our work and hobbies, our passions and thoughts.

She could drive you mad with her continual talking at times. So it was easy to forget that Biti was a great listener. She never felt it necessary to give advice, but she drank in all information and would remember it. Months later she would refer to details of a conversation that had taken place on her last visit, and it was very reassuring. I always enjoyed talking to her, she was wise and understanding and I felt terribly close to her.

She also had a great sense of humour – laconic and under-spoken, but never cruel. She could take you completely by surprise with her turns of phrase, but sometimes you could only tell that she knew how witty she was being from a twinkle in her eye. I'll never forget her laugh, or her smile.

She really helped to form the person I am today – what great passions she had – music and literature, history and philosophy. Such clear views about politics and religion. Good influences for an adolescent to have in the family.

I have a copy of an autobiographical short story that she wrote, called "The Tuning Fork," [*reprinted below*] in which she describes waiting to cross the border between Germany and Holland in 1936. In it, she describes how, although she was practically penniless, she spent a portion of her last 10 marks on a tuning fork. "It was a modest tuning fork, and cheap," she wrote, "but it depleted my minimal resources. I probably realised this, yet probably felt, too, that there was not only practical but also symbolical value in a gadget that gave you true pitch." At the end of the story, she writes, "I still have it. Tuning forks don't take up much space."

And it was those small things of symbolic significance that meant the most to her. She wanted little, and she asked for less. Dark chocolate and some photos seemed about it. She

was generous, thoughtful, and unselfish. But the small things were important to her – the correspondence, above all, providing treasured insight into our lives, a strong link back to her family in England, and a true measure of our love for her. I've been struck, whilst going through her papers over the last few days, quite how many letters there were from all of us to her: it makes me realise how important a figure she was to the whole family. But there were also letters from so many other people—she had so many friends—people who she maintained contact with for decades and across continents.

For the last few years of her life, as many of you will know, Biti was faced with an agonizing decision. She knew that the time had come to move from her lovely home on Wagner Street, and she needed to decide where to go. Should she stay in America, or move back to the United Kingdom after 45 years? She found this decision incredibly difficult to make, and every time she spoke to someone else about it, her feelings would veer from one option to another. When she finally decided to move to a retirement community just a few miles outside of Annapolis, we were all selfishly disappointed. We knew that this meant we would see less and less of Biti as she was finding continental travel more and more difficult. Becca felt it particularly keenly. With two young children, she knew that the opportunities to visit Biti in America would be few.

But we all secretly knew that this was the right decision for her to make. We knew what a unique place she had found to live, what an amazing community, providing not only the intellectual stimulation she thrived on, but also the social and emotional support she needed. It was already clear to us before she died, but has become even more so since then, what a special place she had found in the heart of this community, how many very close friends she had, how she had touched the lives of so many people around her. She was every bit as loved and valued by her friends and colleagues in Annapolis as she was by her family, and that's why the decision was so hard for her to make.

Thank you to all of you here in Annapolis for making this such a happy home to her for the last forty years, so far away from her family in England. And thank you, Aunt Biti, for all the love that you shared with us. We'll always remember you for the wonderful woman that you were.

\* \* \*

### **Eva Brann**

We knew each other for nearly forty-five years and for almost twenty we lived next to each other, with only a thin dry wall between us. We spent a lot of time in each other's company, eating, talking and, in the earlier years, walking.

Beate had a brisk, sometimes even brusque English exterior, a fund of stories ranging from historical happenings to personal mishaps, a far-flung American and transatlantic acquaintance, and a sprightly, occasionally acerbic wit. People, among them the Graduate Institute students she liked so much to teach, were charmed and fascinated. So was I. She was good company, and she seemed well seated in life.

But it wasn't quite that way. If fate had been kinder, she would actually have been – or so I often imagined – a decisive Englishwoman, living in a small village in one of the prettier shires, minding the vicar's theology and singing in his choir – not herself a housekeeper but well-served by someone who had become attached to her.

It wasn't that way. She wasn't really English but was born in Switzerland and then, in the starving years after the First World War, had a German childhood; she herself attributed her small stature and some other effects to her undernourishment as an infant. She was rightly proud that because of the complexities of her early years she grew up preternaturally sensitive to the political climate. In the first year of the Nazi takeover, when my own parents' thoughts were still far from emigration, she, a mere teenager, removed herself to Holland, where, incidentally, she had an unlikely but often remembered experience with a famous Indian guru. She

aided her family in their immigration to England, where life was far harder for refugees than it was for those of us who luckily landed in the States. Her university studies were oppressed and curtailed by lack of money. There was a brief and deeply buried expectation of happiness which ended when the young man died in Africa under Montgomery, a general whose cavalier strategies she despised.

Around her, complexity and anomaly accumulated. Though she lived most of her life here, she never became an American citizen but remained a British subject, a resident alien who had endless troubles with the INS over her ever-lost green cards. She was never a full-time, regular tutor, for she had truly no mind for mathematics. I recall hours in her first apartment on Church Circle trying to persuade her that a geometric diagram could display a truth expressible in words. Nevertheless, the college was her one true home, for her appointments, though made from year to year, were soon made quite routinely, and she served the college well in her own way, not least as long-time editor of *St. John's Review*. She had contracted once to write a history of twentieth-century Germany, but had to give it up, laboring, as I thought, under too great an accumulation of detailed knowledge and too overwhelming a sense of the responsibility for telling the inner truth close to her political conscience. She was, one might say, the ultimate historian, with no disposition for universals but a great urge to make the particulars express the moral significance whose burden she so acutely felt. On the other hand she was a good part journalist, with a reporter's bold inquisitiveness and a jaunty, even daring style, the style of moral exposé. Her completed work was eminently readable and vividly opinionated.

At home nowhere and everywhere, she was up to her last trip to see her family this summer – she died four days after her return – an intrepid if overloaded traveler. Something in her life left her a kind of pack-rat, with a propensity for accumulation. We used to go to yard sales together, where I'd come away with a candlestick and she would acquire the

largest object around, preferably non-functional; computers which she couldn't use anyway, typewriters of which she had five. I recall that we were walking once in the woods (they were then still to be found around Annapolis), when we came on an overgrown wreck of a truck; seeing her appraisingly eye the seat in the cabin I shouted out a forfending "Absolutely not!"

Her religious convictions were in suspension, oddly compacted of adherence and distance. She declared herself an agnostic but had faith only in the faithful. Baptized a Zwinglian, she was Jewish on her mother's side, and therefore technically Jewish. Yet she had no relation to Judaism and a great distaste for that emotional and academic exploitation of Jewish history which she mordantly called the "Holocaust industry." In fact every sort of unthinking proprietary position offended her and roused acerbic epithets. For example, she used to call feckless pacifists "peace-mongers." Yet she herself occupied her special historical territory whose invasion by uncomprehending academic forces troubled her unceasingly.

Though she admired the Lutheran theologian and resisting martyr to the Nazis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (with whose complicated abstractions she could hardly deal), her real sympathy was with the Catholics because of the moral clarity to be derived from the doctrine of works; she had the deepest suspicion of the moral consequences of elevating subjective faith over political deeds.

Perhaps the defining emblem of her semi-deliberate convolutions was her very name. She originally had the surname Ruhm from her much beloved adoptive father Ernst Ruhm, the natural father of her sister Delia. Just when a German surname would be least helpful in England she added her own natural father's name, von Oppen. He was an actor, a minor matinee idol, whom she insisted on visiting when she learned about him in her teens – a meeting at once gratifying and wrenching. She was clearly anxious to carry with her all her connections – all we've learned to call "roots" in America.

But the attendant results were confusion: Mail went ever astray, being sent indifferently to all her initials, R, v. or O.

The territory she made her own, with the most detailed mastery and avid reading, brought up to date to the very last days, was, I think, deep down another exercise in preserving and exonerating her origins and connections. She was, after all, German, and German was her first language. She was, incidentally, able to translate not only German into English, her language of daily use (which most of us refugees can do), but English into German as well; she was symmetrically bilingual, an unusual phenomenon. Her deep, absolutely persistent interest was in the German resistance to the Nazis. She knew these "residential" figures (as she called them) minutely; they were her kin, and she worried over them and their reputation (just as, Delia has told me, she worried about her as the little sister). She found her hero particularly in Helmuth von Moltke, who was hanged by the Nazis and to whose surviving family, his wife Freya and their sons, she was close. In publishing his correspondence with Freya in German and in English she did his memory a great service.

As all else in her life, this was not so much an ebulliently ardent passion as a held in, tenacious adherence. This mode was, I think, the defining feeling of her life.

I have asked myself: What made us life-long companions? I think above all Bach and Language. When we met in 1960 I already owned records of most of the cantatas and instrumental music. She introduced me to the motets. But above all she sensitized me to something utterly new to me and infinitely valuable in listening to sacred music: the relation of the music to the words – music as an exegesis, a gloss, an incarnation of the sacred text. This was a preoccupation which was perhaps even more ingrained, more central, than the Resistance, at once a deflection from and a focusing of feeling. She also taught me, incidentally, that it is therefore barbarous to listen to such music as a background to other occupations – a lesson that left me at least with the grace of qualms about doing it.

I learned a lot too from her resistential studies. She had an absolutely horrendous writer's block, stemming, I think, from the plethora of her information, her aversion to generalization, and the oppressive sense of the importance of this work. So I got to work through each prospective publication with her with, I sometimes think, more profit to me than to her – one benefit being that I was able to think somewhat better of the country of my birth. And I learned to admire her for her admirations, for to have true heroes is to me a sign of an underlying soundness of soul.

Some part of our frequent dinners together was spent in our common pleasure in language, her British English (to the end a schedule remained a "shedule" for her) and my adoptive American. We rejoiced in the sayings of our German childhood and put them into hilarious English. We tried to find exact renderings of idioms in the other language and rejoiced in silly literalisms. In short we disported ourselves bilingually. Sometimes she would decode for me the affectionate scrawls of alumni letters, for she, who had an almost undecipherable handwriting, was especially good at reading that of others. This handwriting of hers, furiously determinate yet unreadable, always seemed to me to signify something. She was an extremely sociable, communicative being, charming, witty, intriguing, a teller and re-teller of stories, ranging, as I said, from historical circumstance to personal complications. Yet her favorite medium was epistolary: contact through distance. She carried on a far-flung and persistent correspondence, letters whose typed parts were vivacious but which were wreathed about with her hopeless supplementary scribbles. Her niece Rebecca described them lovingly at the funeral in August. I should say here that her niece and nephews, Rebecca, Philip, and Ben, were the human beings she was most straightforwardly fond of, and they returned her affection.

Here is a chief, perhaps central trait of Beate's being that was totally at odds with her incessant, self-circling anxiety – a wonderful phenomenon. When real trouble struck – breast

cancer, heart disease, colitis – she became absolutely serene, reasonable, patient. It was the gallantry of disaster confirmed, and a sign of the strength beneath all the agitation.

For the rest, she was completely without pretensions (though rightfully wanting recognition for her righteous labors), quite without malice (except when oppressed by too powerfully impending an opposition), generally without falsehood (though inhibited to the point of furtiveness about her feelings), and, all in all, as devoid of intentional harm as a human being can well be.

In the last few years I took to listening through our thin party wall for worrisome thumps that brought me to the phone, for the TV that grew louder as she grew deafer but was a sign of life, and for the ominous silences, the last of which brought me over to find what I had feared. I might say that the silence next door is sounding pretty loud these days.

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Beate Ruhm von Oppenis was a tutor on the Annapolis Campus of St. John's College.

Elliott Zuckerman is tutor emeritus on the Annapolis Campus of St. John's College.

Delia Walker is the sister of Beate Ruhm von Oppen.

Peter Quint is Jacob A. France Professor of Constitutional Law at The University of Maryland.

Steven Werlin is a graduate of St. John's College and dean of Shimer College.

Johannes Huessy is a student on the Annapolis campus of St. John's College.

Freya von Moltke is widow of Helmuth James von Moltke.

Brother Robert Smith is tutor emeritus on the Annapolis Campus of St. John's College.

Ben Walker is the nephew of Beate Ruhm von Oppen.

Eva Brann is former dean and tutor on the Annapolis Campus of St. John's College.



## The Tuning Fork

### Beate Ruhm von Oppen

#### *Introduction by David Stephenson*

*At the memorial service for Beate Ruhm von Oppen, I discovered a literary side to her I had not suspected. On that occasion her nephew mentioned a memoir, "The Tuning Fork," which recalls Beate's flight as a teenage girl from Germany, a precarious exodus even in the early days of Nazi domination. Her family gave me a copy on request, and I immediately saw how much it deserves publication in full in The St. John's Review.*

*The story rings as true as only experience can, neither exaggerating nor belittling the fears or desires of a young student brought up in a time when freedom and truth were dying only bit by bit. It is the personal character of her account that tells me most what I want to know: why were so many Germans persuaded by Hitler's obvious lies and so few moved to challenge them? Beate juxtaposes her school's playful complicity in the new racial games against her own ambivalent reaction to the bloody movies and songs that could move even unsympathetic youth to tears. Her family's reluctance to send their child away requires no explanation; the gradual evolution of her own determination to leave "the fatherland" can best be glimpsed in her own words.*

*Why purchase a tuning fork with money she might need to live in exile? She explains her desire for "a gadget that gave you the true pitch" in a world grown cacophonous, an instrument that she later justifies on the ground that it doesn't "take up much space." But her love of music also shines through this act of hope and daring. And that was also something she could take with her wherever she went.*

*My own acquaintance with Beate grew primarily out of her musical interests. After she came to St. John's College, she attended every musical performance and always discovered the most appropriate compliment for every group. She was particularly encouraging to the College's fledgling orchestra. Yet her comments about professional musicians could be sharply critical. For example, though herself the source of several widely admired translations from German to English and from English to German, she often expressed her disapproval of translation when it pertained to music. She believed that linguistic sonority had to play a significant part of a composition to any text: translation into English inevitably distorted or corrupted its effect.*

*And her sensitivity to the nuance of verbal expression extended well beyond music and poetry: at least some of the power of political propaganda in general she attributed to clever distortions of language. Hitler's depredation of his native language in Mein Kampf as well as in his speeches did not deceive her more-than-musical ear. She never stopped worrying about the effects of political rhetoric in every language, even our own.*

### The Tuning Fork

I was born in Switzerland at the end of the First World War and grew up, or started to grow up, in Germany. I cannot think back to a time when politics was not in the air. I remember the evidence of food shortages in my kindergarten and elementary school days. I remember the feeling of insecurity communicated by all around me when the currency collapsed, and when inflation galloped away in geometric or exponential progression, so that, for instance, a lawyer's or doctor's earnings of one day might not be enough to buy a loaf of bread the next day.

Some years ago you could see, in the window of an antique shop in our Main Street in Annapolis, an old German 50,000 Mark note, said to have been "used in Hitler's Germany." Perhaps it was used as wallpaper. It might be more

accurate to say that it was used—as money—in pre-Hitler Germany, though I'd hate to refer to the Weimar Republic as just that. It was a specimen of the kind of money that helped to bring about Hitler's Germany. Fifty thousand Marks now would be worth about \$13,000. In "normal" times four Marks were a dollar. The date of issue on that 50,000 Mark note was November 19, 1922. The very fact that such a note was printed and put into circulation was, of course, a sign that inflation had got out of hand. In the summer of 1922 the dollar was worth not four Marks, but over 400. The next summer it was over 4 million. And by November 15, 1923 it was 4 trillion (4,000,000,000,000). If my reckoning is right—but you'd better check it—that 50,000 Mark note issued in November 1922 was worth one-eighty-millionth of a dollar, a year later one eight hundred thousandth of a cent. That was very cheap wallpaper, but expensive too. What it all meant, among other things, was the pauperization and demoralization of the social fabric.

It was in that month, November 1923, that Hitler, the leader of a tiny party, staged his abortive putsch or *coup d'état* in Munich, when he tried for the first time, and failed, to seize power. That year had also seen communist attempts to seize power in central Germany; they too were foiled. Hitler was sent to a comfortable prison for a while and used his leisure to write his book, *Mein Kampf*. When he got out again, he adopted a policy of legality and with that he eventually prevailed.

By the time I had entered elementary school, in 1924, a new currency had been established and money once more was money, though scarce. But I noticed my teachers were not enthusiastic about the political system, though we dutifully and decorously celebrated the 80th birthday of our President. His name was Hindenburg and he had been a famous field marshal in the First World War, halting the Russian advance in East Prussia. Being, as it were, a personal link between the old, pre-war empire and the new, post-war republic, and loyal to the new constitution, he was a national figure acceptable to

the moderate right and moderate left and lasted a decade as head of state, while chancellors, or heads of government, succeeded each other at a breathtaking rate. The country had many political parties and an election system based on proportional representation, so that votes were distributed across a wide spectrum and a large number of parties, and governments had to be formed out of coalitions of several of them. They were correspondingly shaky and short-lived. I remember many elections during my school days and reports of violent rhetoric from left to right, as well as physical violence, street fights, murders, assassinations.

Then, after the Wall Street crash of 1929 with its worldwide repercussions, there was another economic crisis a mere six years after the beginning of the recovery from the earlier one, with a growing, and intolerable, rate of unemployment. It grew from 1.3 million in September 1929 to 3 million a year later, to over 6 million in 1931. With a total population of about 65 million, this meant that one in every two families was hit. It was not only working class families that were so affected. There was for instance, much unemployment among academics too. The extremist parties, the Communists and the Nazis, made great gains and finally occupied more than half the seats in the national parliament, where they were now able to paralyze the democratic process. They joined, for instance, in a strike to paralyze the transport system in Berlin. Otherwise they could fight each other to death, and did, with casualties on both sides, despite the general strategy of the Communists at that time to treat the social Democrats—whom they called “social fascists” for the purpose—as their number one enemy and to flirt with the possibility of a Nazi victory as a promising prelude to a communist takeover. All this impinged, of course, on a Berlin school child—the transport strike, the posters, the polarization, the combination of both extremes against the middle, and the weakness and apparent helplessness of the middle.

When President Heisenburg appointed Hitler Reich Chancellor on January 30, 1933, he was acting in accordance

with the letter and perhaps even the spirit of the constitution. Hitler's party, the Nationalist Socialist German Workers' (or “Nazis” for short, to distinguish them from the “Sozis” or Social Democrats), was by then the strongest party in the country, with about one-third of the vote; the Social Democrats had only one-fifth; the communists one-sixth; the Catholic Centre Party, together with its Bavarian affiliate, about the same. And there were many others, but all of them had less than 10 percent of the vote, the largest of them the Nationalists, with 8.8 percent; Hitler became the head of a coalition government. I still remember seeing the faces of these gentlemen in an evening paper that carried the announcement.

No one knew what it meant. I was somewhat scared, for I had read Hitler's book. I had had to do it secretly, at night with a flashlight under the bedclothes, for my parents, like many other respectable people, regarded it as pornographic—which indeed in a manner of speaking it was. Also it was very long, and that was probably why very few people read it, though once its author had become ruler of the land, it was widely and compulsorily distributed, for instance, as a present to newlyweds, bound like a bible. But that did not, of course, ensure its perusal.

Before saying anything about what I had found in that book, let me, quickly, give you an account of the rest of my Berlin schooldays, to show how life at school changed in the seventeen months before I left. There was much talk of national solidarity and the Community of the People. There were changes in personnel and in the curriculum. And there was a dramatic rate of attrition. My own class was reduced by more than half—probably because girls (it was a girls' school I went to) or their parents thought that since the new regime had set its face against too much academic education for women (who were not to exceed ten percent of university enrollment), it was hardly worth struggling through more Latin and trigonometry and the rest, up to the rather stiff school-leaving exam, which was normally taken at [age] 18.

The teaching personnel changed in two ways: there were a few dismissals, of Jews—we had very few Jews at my school; and our English teacher, who was a Jew, was at first said not be subject to dismissal because he had not only served in the war but had even been shot in the head. But eventually he left all the same and the next English teacher was less good; and that one was in due course replaced by an even worse one, a teacher trainee. The other change among the teachers was a change in tone and color. A very few revealed themselves as Nazis which, they said, they had been all along but could only now, at last, openly avow to be. (On the whole the school had been vaguely nationalistic, but hardly Nazi.) Others toed the new line as best they could and exhibited varying degrees of cravenness or caution and dignity, enthusiasm or moderation or reserve. Many new things were required: the Hitler statue at the beginning of classes, attendance at new celebrations that proliferated and at which you had, of course, to stand at attention (with upraised arm) when the new national anthem was played and sung. This was the old marching song of the Nazi movement, with text by Horst Wessel, saying: “Raise the flag, close the ranks, we storm-troopers march in firm and steady tread. Comrades shot by the Reds and Reactionaries are marching on with us.” It was the battle song of the new revolution.

So there was all that. And there were changes in such subjects as history and science. Let me take biology, for that is where I had my brief hour of glory. I had not done well with the dissection of tulips and the like. But I shone once biology was converted into race biology. Not only was there Mendel’s law, about which my father had told me before (only that its implication and application were now rather different from what I had gathered from him), but—and this is where the real fun came in—we now learnt about the German races, “Aryan,” of course, all of them.

There were six, if I remember correctly, ranging in excellence from the Nordic to the East Baltic. Nordic was best because Nordic man had created almost all the culture there

was, and he had qualities of leadership. The Mediterranean race was also quite good (for, after all, there had been ancient Greeks and Romans and there were modern Italians, good fascists, full of leadership). The Mediterranean race could most easily be memorized as a smaller, lightweight, and darker version of the Nordic: what they had in common were the proportions of their skulls and faces (long, narrow skull, long face) and the characteristic ways of standing on one leg, with no weight on the other, one standing and one play leg, as a literal translation of the German names for them would have it. Such legs could be seen in Greek statues, and such were the legs of Nordic man. Now the Falic race was next best. It shared many of the sterling qualities of the Nordic—high-mindedness and the rest—but could be distinguished from it by the fact that it stood squarely on two legs. No play-leg there. Also its face was a bit broader. That race lacked, somewhat, the fire of Nordic man, or let us say the *thumos*, but made up for it by solidity and staying power. The color scheme was fairly Nordic, blonde hair, blue eyes. So was that of the East Baltic race whose virtues were less marked than those of the Nordic and the Falic and whose features were less distinguished, including a broader skull and a broadish nose. I could not quite make out the use of this race, unless it was, perhaps, territorial, to keep the Slavs out. The Slavs were not a German race. Then there was German race that looked, we might have said, a bit Jewish or perhaps Armenian, but it was neither. It was Dinaric and seemed to be much the same as what earlier classifications had called Alpine. Indeed, this race dwelt in the mountains. It looked sturdy enough, but not as prepossessing as the Nordic; and its head had awkward measurements: Dinaric man had a prominent nose and not much back to his head. But he had a redeeming feature: he was musical.

Now all this, of course, seemed good clean fun, and easy to visualize and memorize. Indeed there were visual aids: pictures of well know personages to help recognition and memorization: Hindenburg for the Falic race, somebody like

Haydn for the Dinaric, Caesar for the Mediterranean. Then there was a picture of Martin Luther, the great German Reformer, and I forget now what race he was said to represent. To me he looked Slavic. But that, of course, could not be. I suppose he was declared a darker type of East Baltic or Falic. All this was child's play, and this child played it with zest and success.

History was harder. You could not inwardly laugh that off and outwardly play it as a parlor game. You had to learn, or appear to learn, appear to make your own—to some extent, in some way, at least—and you had to read, say, and write the things that had been neglected or “falsified” in the Weimar Republic of evil memory, under “the System” (“in der Systemzeit” as the Nazis referred to it). So we were all given a short brochure on contemporary history, the recent and most “relevant” period of German and European and world history. It started with the German surrender at the end of the world war, a surrender brought about by trickery abroad and treason at home, by President Wilson's 14 Point peace proposal, and the stab in the back of the undefeated German army, a piece of treachery committed by Jews, Marxists, and Catholics—feckless folk with international ties. These traitors then set up their system of abject surrender abroad and iniquity and immorality at home. They accepted the shameful peace treaty of Versailles, which not only saddled Germany with sole responsibility for the war (in Article 231, which Germans called the “war guilt clause” or “war guilt lie”), but also provided for the payment—virtually in perpetuity—of crippling reparations. Germany was unilaterally disarmed (whereas Wilson had envisaged universal disarmament) and was first blockaded by the British—after the cessations of hostilities—to enforce submission, and then, in 1923, invaded by the French, who marched into the Ruhr valley to seize German coal and steel production as reparation payments were in arrears. It was reparations that caused the economic misery during the republic's fourteen years of shame. Attempts to revise the reparations schedule to make it more

tolerable were fruitless and fraudulent. The last revision provided for the spreading of payments until 1988, and the country was dying in the attempt to do the victors' bidding. The nation would have to stand together and rally 'round the Führer—or the “People's Chancellor,” as he was then still called—to throw off the shackles of Versailles. The cover of this brochure had a muscular worker on it, stripped to the waist and bursting his chains.

We also learned about the parts of Germany that had been taken away by the Treaty of Versailles, which dictated peace, and about the Germans who languished under foreign domination. We learnt that German defenselessness was further aggravated by the geographic position of the country: it was surrounded by hostile powers. Thus a bombing plane could take off from France and fly right across Germany and land in Czechoslovakia, without refueling. The lesson was brought home by air-raid exercises. They were not very realistic, but they were educative. I still remember leading my little troop of classmates to their several homes, staying close to the houses, as instructed, to avoid exposure to imagined falling shrapnel and flying glass. That was in the first year or so of Hitler's power, five or six years before his war. It was useless, of course, as an exercise in air-raid precautions, but it was useful for fomenting fear and a spirit of national defense. It also showed that the Czechoslovak Republic, even if militarily it amounted to no more than an aircraft base, was the power that enabled France—or planes based in France—to bomb the whole of Germany. And in addition—but this point was not given too much prominence until four years later, in the crisis leading up to the Munich settlement that dismembered the Czechoslovak Republic—the country was a political entity in which six-and-a-half million Czechs held over 3 million Germans in subjection, as second-class citizens. Clearly the Sudeten region had to be united with Germany.

So much for what was taught in class and done in extramural exercises under the responsibility of the school. But there was one other thing I should mention. Schools were

obliged to take their pupils to certain films, propaganda films that were being shown commercially. So, obediently, our class went to see the movie *Hitlerjunge Quex*, the story of a Hitler Youth of the working class whose father was a communist and whose mother was long-suffering and tried to cope with conditions and her husband, but in the end attempted suicide, by gas, from misery and despair. Quex (who was a very idealized version of an actual Hitler Youth who had been killed) first belonged to a communist youth group, as was natural in view of his home background. But on one occasion, one excursion, he was so revolted by their beastly ways that he ran away through the woods, and came upon the camp of a Nazi youth group which instantly and deeply impressed him as his own and the country's salvation. (It was a sunrise scene, to make sure we all got the point.) Here were shining faces, clean limbs, real comradeship, purpose, discipline, dedication, and hope. So he joined the Hitler Youth and was active, devotedly active in the distribution of leaflets and all that. He continued, of course, to live with his parents in the working class district of Berlin. And one day, at dawn, the communists took their revenge, and his particular personal enemy, a brute of a man, pursued him through the deserted streets—also through the maze of an amusement park, a very effective, macabre, cinematic touch that, and long before *The Third Man*—and finally caught up with him and knifed him. But Quex died for the cause, and when his friends found him, on the point of death, and propped him up, he raised his right arm in salute to the German future and the camera swung up to the clouds and the sound track into the marching song of Hitler Youth, with the lines, “The flag leads us into eternity, the flag is more than death.”

The trouble was twofold: that the film was most effective and affecting (however corny it may sound as I now tell it) and it was made with terrific competence and with the participation of some very good actors; and, secondly, that the school was under an obligation not only to take us to see it, but also to discuss it with us. So we had our class discussion.

I do not remember much about it except for the fact that I decided to play the part of aesthetic and dramatic critic, arguing that, powerful though the movie was, it could have been even better if it had been less black and white (metaphorically speaking), if it had had more nuances, more human diversity and verisimilitude. Why did I take that line? In order not to embarrass or endanger our teacher who was leading the discussion, who, I had reason to believe, was very unhappy about the Nazis, and who was a widow with two children for whom she had to provide.

Then there was a film about Joan of Arc, replete with horrors of the Hundred Years' War. It exposed the sadism of the British and the brutality of the Catholic clergy. On that occasion I objected to the screening of atrocities; and that was about as far as one could go and get away with it.

On the Saturday when it was announced that the country had left the League of Nations in protest against the continuing discrimination of Germany in the disarmament negotiations, our class of fifteen-year-old girls went off to learn how the peasantry lived, to make us a proper part of the People's Community. We were to spend two days roughing it with a farmer in Brandenburg. The regime wanted us Berliners to experience the hard life of the rural part of the population. We took a train to the nearest station, then walked the rest of the way to the rather grey and bleak village, to be received by a distinctly unfriendly farmer. We sang to cheer our progress on the country road. Suddenly one of the girls started singing that song about Jewish blood spurting from the knife in a better future. About two other girls joined in. I could hardly believe my ears.

The farmer was surly. I spent a restless night with the others, who seemed undisturbed, in the hay in his barn. What with that song and the severing of the connection with the League—and everything else that had happened and was happening—I began to think it might be better to be elsewhere. But my parents and my little sister were in Berlin, our home,

with no prospect of getting out. I could see no way of leaving the country and leaving them.

A way did offer itself some months later. The Quakers were starting an international boarding school in Holland and announced a summer course there. After another disturbing weekend at the end of June 1934, which saw the bloody liquidation of the rebellious S.A. leaders and other enemies and suspects, and when rumors were flying about that men were being shot in the nearby cadet school at Lichterfelde, a little group of children assembled on a platform of the Zoo Station in Berlin, to take the train to Holland. I had just turned sixteen and may have been the oldest.

The summer school was a wild success. A bigger group of children came from Hamburg, and many stayed on or came back later. They were mostly Jewish or part Jewish. I was overcome by the feeling of freedom and by meeting grownups you could really talk to freely. And they were devoted to the task in hand, to making us more comfortable and teaching us English. The English lessons were so good that, having been bottom of my class in Berlin—English was our third foreign language after French and Latin, and my classmates had all had some kind of head start—I found that I had overtaken not only them, but also the teacher trainee in charge of them when I returned for a visit.

My mother had insisted on my coming back for a secretarial course. She did not think it wise to emigrate without a marketable skill. Then, in January 1935, my parents allowed me to go back to Holland. The months until the beginning of the academic year in October were bridged at the school in Holland by my being maid of all work, baby-sitting and tutoring, even taking a class in music when the music master was ill. Before that I spent Christmas with the family in Berlin and visited my grandmother in Frankfurt. That was the last time I saw her. In December four of us in the top class passed the English university entrance exam. Two, oddly enough, went back to Germany for good—one of them the son of the

Friends' Yearly Meeting, who could easily have stayed abroad. But two went back to England. I was one of them.

It was spring 1936. They took me off the train after it had crossed the border from Germany. They asked me for my religion, for while they wanted to protect the Dutch unemployed from the competition of foreigners, they also wanted to protect the virtue of young women. I was seventeen. They accused me of coming to work in Holland. I denied it, though they were right. They had no proof; but I had the burden of proof. The fact was that I had in the previous December passed the examination given by Oxford for entrance to British universities. Being penniless and not wanting to be a burden on the American uncle who had paid my school fees for the year it had taken me to prepare for that exam at the International Quaker School in Holland, I had gladly accepted the school's invitation to stay on as unpaid general dog's body until it was time to go to England to study, the following October. So I was earning my keep as matron's assistant, occasional coach or tutor, baby-sitter, and so on. But these services, however unpaid and unperformable by natives, were work prohibited by law or regulations of the land that was, like most European countries, struggling with an economic crisis at the very time when the Hitler regime created large numbers of refugees or would-be refugees, trying to keep such aliens out.

To admit my status as a worker, albeit unpaid, would have meant being sent back to the fatherland, with the additional black mark of having tried to flee it. So I denied it. The denial was an automatic reflex. Unfortunately, my response to the question about my religion was equally automatic. I said "Protestant," having been baptized at birth according to the Zwinglian rite and having attended Protestant religious instruction at my German schools, with even a spell of Lutheran Sunday school thrown in for good measure. It was a mistake. I did have the presence of mind and necessary minutes and pennies to send a cheery postcard about my "good trip" to my Jewish grandmother in Frankfurt from the Dutch

side. I wanted to reassure; she had a heart ailment, of which she died before the year was out.

Now I was put on the next train back to Emmerich, where I was received, not to say taken in to custody, by the *Evangelische Bahnhofsmision*. (Readers of Günter Grass may remember his remarks about that institution in his *Dog Years*.) It felt like a half-way house on the way to more serious, more purely political confinement. They were stern and forbidding and had nothing evangelical about them. There was even a touch of Nazism. As I was sitting, somewhat disconsolately, in a dark reception room, a boy of about eight came in and sang one of those Nazi songs—I don't know why; perhaps it was just youthful exuberance. It grated enough to make me decide to accept no food from this establishment or run the risk of having to sit at the table with these professional Protestants. My grandmother had given me enough provender for the day.

What I did not have was money, beyond the ten Marks one was allowed to take out of the country. Yet, when the woman in charge of this Internal Mission house allowed me to go for a short walk in town, I could not resist buying a tuning fork at the window of a small music shop. I went in and bought it. My instrument at the time was the violin, which I played as badly as I had played the piano and would later play the oboe. I may have justified the rash purchase to myself as useful: a violin has to be tuned and there isn't always a piano or other instrument present to give the pitch. It was a modest tuning fork and cheap; but it depleted my minimal resources. I probably realized this, yet probably felt, too, that there was not only practical but symbolic value in a gadget that gave you the true pitch.

Before I went for the walk in the strange town I had telephoned my school and told my friends there what had befallen me. They said they would certify me as a bona fide pupil—I was taking lessons with the music master—and get the local police to put an official endorsement on the document that would impress the Dutch border officials. The doc-

ument duly arrived by Express mail the next day, but also a message that the police station had closed by the time my friends got there and that they had made their statement sound as persuasive as possible without the police backup. They advised me not to try the same border crossing again, from Emmerich to Zevenaar, where I was now known, but to take another, from Cleve to Nijmegen, where I wasn't.

This meant crossing the Rhine. I boarded the ferry, paid my last Pfennige to the nice conductor, and asked him how far from the landing place on the other side the railway was. It was a fair step, especially with the luggage. He found me a free ride to the station. This turned out to be a local butcher, who gave me the seat beside him in his van, with the carcasses behind us. He wasn't an anti-Nazi. He sounded like a Nazi or at least a loyal citizen of the Third Reich. In the absence of money I gave him my last German postage stamps and signed a document acknowledging my debt to him for the additional small amount it cost to connect my old rail ticket with the new stretch from Cleve to Nijmegen.

So off I went, crossed the frontier without further incident, and reached the school safely. The tuning fork came in handy when we played Haydn quartets. I still have it. Tuning forks don't take up much space.



## A Visit To Santayana

Steve Benedict

Three years after graduating from St. John's, I spent some time in Europe traveling and studying languages and music. In the summer of 1950, while in Rome, I persuaded a friend, Tilghman B. Koons, to accompany me up the steep incline of the Via San Stefano Rotondo to the Convent of the Blue Nuns, where I knew George Santayana was living out his final years. I had read a magazine piece a year or so earlier by Gore Vidal reporting on an unannounced visit he had paid Santayana two years earlier, and I brashly decided to see if we, too, could pay our respects. Several hours after the visit, which turned out to be more than brief, I made detailed notes, which languished in my files for nearly 52 years. Last July, I finally sat down to reconstruct the visit. While many of Santayana's philosophical observations doubtless appear in his writings and interviews in more extended and coherent form, I thought St. John's readers might enjoy these late-in-the-day fragments that seemed to tumble out of him with little prompting. Not exactly a conversation, it was more like listening in to a monologue of memories and observations, in no particular sequence, that happened to surface at the moment. Readers more familiar with Santayana's work than I will doubtless be able to flesh out gaps and identify certain allusions that remain obscure in my transcription of this long-ago encounter.

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Upon arriving at the Convent on the afternoon of September 19, 1950, we were received by a nun who told us that

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Steve Benedict is a 1947 graduate of St. John's College. He retired in 2000 and is living in Spencertown, New York. His career was spent in government, philanthropy, and education, with a primary emphasis on arts funding and administration.

Santayana had not been well for some time and was seeing very few visitors. Even so, she agreed to tell him that two American students hoped to be able to greet him. She returned in a few minutes and told us Mr. Santayana would see us briefly, but cautioned us not to tax his energy. She led us into the Convent and down a long hallway on the ground floor. Santayana was already standing at the end of the corridor in a long robe, which only partially covered his striped pajamas. He greeted us with a handshake, looked at us with large glistening eyes I have never forgotten, and led us into his apartment. It was a modest space, sparsely furnished, with a cot-like bed partially screened off. He issued a firm instruction to sit down, motioning to two straight-backed chairs—"you here, you there." With no introductory chit-chat or questions about who we were, he began speaking. He told us he had recently been reading Terence for the first time and found him very amusing and much indebted to his predecessors. He remarked that he had re-read Virgil and that Lucretius, along with Virgil, had been important for him. He spoke of them quite casually, as though they were contemporaries. In fact, he brought this quality of immediacy to all of the philosophers he mentioned.

Santayana spoke of writing an article for an English book entitled *Why I Believe in What I Believe*. He hadn't intended to contribute to it, but an Englishman pestered him with three letters and had agreed to hold off publication for a year if necessary in order to include his contribution. That was very flattering, he commented. "After all," he added, "I might be dead in a year." Preoccupation with the article was probably a good part of the explanation for the torrent of remarks and opinions that followed.

Mr. Santayana had been reading a book by an Englishman, O.F. Clarke, entitled *Introduction to Berdyaev*, and added that he did not agree with Berdyaev: "Everything is creative. There is no room [in Berdyaev] for imagination, for reason, for spirit." He said the article he was writing discusses what scientists call "energy," using the figure of wind,

which seemed better to him than other terms and images for matter. "Wind is invisible. It can't be touched. It 'acts,' causes things to happen." He mentioned that he has often used a quotation on wind from Genesis: "'The spirit of God moved across the waters.' Or, as the Cockney would say, 'a devil of a wind'—but I won't use that in the article."

Santayana insisted that his ideas about matter had not changed. His only objection to his earlier books was that he wished he had written them differently and waited until later to write *The Life of Reason*. Nonetheless he thought he had remained logically consistent. He now felt he had nothing more to say—he had finished his work and would not write any more books, only articles.

We asked Mr. Santayana how America looked to him after 40 years. He replied, "I don't want to go back. There is too much going on there and I am kept busy enough here. No, I don't want to go back." Friends had sent him *Time* and *Life* magazines. He was amused by the advertisements—"slick, well-groomed people coming out of their houses, buying new cars." But he enjoyed the pictures. This led him to reminisce about Harvard, where he had studied for four years and then taught: "I am completely a Harvard man," he said. "I have been accused of making too many rich friends. But I didn't seek them. They just happened to be rich." He told us that his best friends had big houses in the country and were able to invite people for weekends. His most intimate friend married a rich Washington widow. He went to dinner with them once and found his friend at the head of the table, his friend's mother-in-law at the other end, his wife buried at the side between two daughters. He was asked to stay on at the house but declined after this experience.

"I never intended to go into philosophy and teaching. It was all an accident," he went on. This led him to muse on the accidents of his life: If he had gone to England, he would have done much more Plato, if to Germany, more German philosophy. With a chuckle, he added that he did not have much kinship with Goethe.

Mr. Santayana then remarked that had just re-read T.S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* and didn't understand why it is successful in performance. He thought the conversion of the girl unconvincing. The play was too much of a tract. He thought "Four Quartets" and the essays were much better, in his opinion. He recalled Eliot as a student of his at Harvard in his course, "Three Philosophical Poets." Eliot wrote an essay for him, he said, and it was "very good—that's an understatement."

Then came an abrupt switch. "It is interesting that the two most intelligent men in the history of the Western mind, Plato and Leibniz—were dishonest. If you abstract Plato from his *mise-en-scène*, which is so attractive, you don't know what he is saying. Plato has never been a favorite of mine, but of course I owe him something. *The Symposium*, for instance, I find very attractive. But I owe more to Aristotle and Lucretius and others."

Leibniz, he elaborated, tried to manipulate ideas as well as people. He tried to bring the church together—"very difficult"—and to make peace between states, and he had a certain amount of success. The dishonesty revolves around his assertions on matter (calculus, by implication, is dishonest) and the rearrangement of the elements (energy, mind, matter, potentiality, etc.) into forms by imposing a new idea from without. The Leibnizian calculus asserts that an infinite number of points—which are only positions—in a line reduces and expands them as if they were material. Leibniz tried to manipulate people and institutions in the same way; however, Santayana concluded, he had the right idea about spirit as developing action, as did Hegel. The action or energy is not internal, but occurs with respect to its history and experience—its relations with other forms and ideas. Hegel, he said, knew this clearly.

Mr. Santayana said he had been praised by the English critic, Collingwood, an Hegelian, for having held up the idea as a crystal, examining all of its faces. In believing that the spirit does not change but only moves on from experience to

experience, Santayana concluded that the highest theoretical and practical ideal is therefore passivity—the reception and assimilation of experience, the "digesting" of action. I brought up Gandhi and without hesitation Santayana said that Western Buddhism and some of the *Upanishads* especially are very much akin to his beliefs. He added that he did not mean to include Oriental Buddhism, which is different: "I believe in the existence of an absolute truth," not that man can achieve it necessarily, but that human opinion strives toward absolute truth. Others, he said, put it in different terms: "God is truth," or "The truth is everywhere." I had been smitten by Plotinus in my sophomore year at St. John's and was emboldened to ask if this wasn't a form of pantheism akin to that of Plotinus. He replied, "I should think not. All creation has a direct causal relation with respect to God or the truth, but creation is different in Plotinus." This led him to criticize a French translation of Plotinus, which he called "verbally accurate," but added that the translator did not really understand ideas. "He compares important passages with the Greek, but never learned Greek properly, despite three years at Boston Latin School."

No more books after this, Santayana said. As for his autobiography, he hoped it could be published after his death in one volume. Marginal notes were impossible to include during the wartime printing shortage, but he hoped they could be restored, as in his earlier books. He commented that he'd had to dispose of many of his books because of space. He said the room next door is crammed with books, but the nuns also use it. "Now I never read Shakespeare. The room was always full of nuns. And now the new Mother General is doing the whole place over. Anyway, I probably only have a year or two more to live."

As he was saying this, a nun glowered at us in the doorway. We rose to depart, shook hands and asked if we could come see him next time we were in Rome. Looking straight at us with those penetrating eyes, he said, "Yes, please do."

He paused for a moment and added, "Come and see..." and his voice trailed off.

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George Santayana died at the Convent two years later, on September 26, 1952, at the age of 89.



## Kant's Philosophical Use of Mathematics: Negative Magnitudes

Eva Brann

I hope that this consideration of a peculiar little work of great interest will appeal to readers who want a taste of Kant's early work as well as to those who like to ruminate on the meaning of the simplest mathematical notions. My text is an essay called "An Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy (*Weltweisheit*)."<sup>1</sup> Its date is 1763.

Its appeal to me has these three aspects: First there is the tentative mode expressed in the title; here we hear Kant's pre-critical voice—not yet the magisterially conclusive notes of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) but a tone at once spiritedly daring and gropingly uncertain. A second and more specific aspect is the inchoate appearance of major elements of the first *Critique*; not only can we see its elements come into being, but we can watch at their incipency topics that Kant will return to all his life. The third appealing aspect of the essay is its pedagogic suggestiveness; for a teacher seeking to help students reflect on mathematical formalisms, it is a useful source.

The piece on negative magnitudes has been eclipsed by its much longer contemporary, "The Only Possible Basis of Proof for a Demonstration of God's Existence (*Dasein*)," dated 1763. This essay was subjected to an extensive and deep analysis by Heidegger in his lecture course of 1927 (*The Problems of Phenomenology*, translated and edited by Albert Hofstadter, Indiana University Press, 1982, ¶18); his elucidation of Kant's use of the term "reality" is particularly relevant to the essay on negative magnitudes.

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Eva Brann is a tutor and former dean at St. John's College, Annapolis.

What evidently drew Heidegger's attention to this particular essay, however, was its brisk definition of *Dasein*—his central word—as “absolute position.” When the verb “is” is used not as a copula to relate a subject to its predicate as in “God is omnipotent” but is asserted abruptly, *absolutely*, as in “God is” or “God exists,” it signifies, Kant claims, a mere *positing* of an object. By this, in Heidegger's interpretation, Kant means that the object is affirmed by a *knowing subject* as available to *perception*. (I observe, incidentally, that in order to express the character of existence as non-attributive absolute position more adequately, Kant proposes language that anticipates the existential quantifier of propositional logic: We should say not “A narwhal is an animal” but “There exists an animal, the narwhal, which has unicorn-attributes.”) In other words, existence is not a predicate and adds no objective attribute to God's essence. Since it is the crux of what Kant first called the “ontological argument” (whose best known proponent is Anselm), that existence is a necessary attribute of God's essence, Kant's understanding of existence as a non-predicate seems to be a rejection of that proof.

Kant's own demonstration calls on the concept of a “real-ground” (*Realgrund*), a concept that emerges in the essay on negative magnitudes, to be discussed below. This concept in turn involves the postulate that essence is prior to existence and actuality to possibility. Since Heidegger's thinking is dominated by the reverse claim, he is a severe if respectful critic of Kant's understanding. He regards Kant's exposition of existence as a half-way house, situated between the notion of existence as one predicate among others and his, Heidegger's, own understanding of *Dasein* as “extantness,” i.e., “being-at-hand,” with respect to things and “being in the world” with respect to human beings.

There is yet another contemporary essay that has bearing on the essay about negative magnitudes, the “Enquiry Concerning the Evidence of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality, in Answer to a Question Posed by the Royal Academy of the Sciences at Berlin for 1763.” The aim

of this essay (which did not win the prize) was to establish what evidence and certainty natural theology is capable of; it is thus a discourse on method. It begins with an investigation of the difference between mathematics and metaphysics (a difference that plays a major role especially in Kant's last work, the *Opus Postumum*).

Thus both pieces, the one on God's existence and the other on theological certainty, illuminate the essay on negative magnitudes, the former through its concept of an ultimate reality and the latter through its restrictions on the use of mathematics in first philosophy. I will draw on them in my exploration.

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Anyone who has stepped out for a moment from the routine familiarity of operations with signed numbers will have wondered just how, say, 5, +5, |5| and -5 differ from each other, and, furthermore, whether +5 and -5 are operations on or qualifications of the number 5. Although his essay concerns numerable magnitudes, especially those discovered in nature, questions of that sort seem to have been going through Kant's mind, as he considered the illuminations that the actual quantification of experience might offer to philosophy.

In the essay on natural theology Kant sets out four definitive reasons why the mathematical *method* is inapplicable to philosophy and is not the way to certainty in metaphysics (§1-4):

1. Mathematical definitions are “synthetic,” in the sense that the mathematician does not analyze a given concept, but first synthesizes or constructs it, i.e., puts it together at will. (In the first *Critique* synthesis will have acquired a deeper meaning; it will no longer mean arbitrary construction but an act of the understanding expressing in the imagination the formative givens of the intuition.) In philosophy or, as Kant says interchangeably, *Weltweisheit*, “world-wisdom” (as distinguished from the scholastic philosophy of mere, unapplied concepts, see *Logic*, Intro. 3), on the other hand, definitions

are analytic, in the sense that concepts are given to, not made by, the philosopher, and he then endeavors to analyze them into their implicit elements. (In the *Critique* a way will be found for the philosopher too to form pure synthetic judgments.)

2. Mathematics is always concrete, in that the arithmetician symbolizes his numbers and operations perceptibly, and the geometer visibly draws his figures. (In the *Critique* these inscriptions will be within the field of the imaginative intuition.) Philosophers, on the other hand, use words exclusively, and these signify, in Kant's understanding, abstractly, non-pictorially. (In the *Critique* this rift between word and picture is closed.)

3. The mathematician tries to employ a minimum of unproved propositions (i.e., axioms and postulates), while the philosopher makes indefinitely many assumptions, as needed. (In the *Critique* the principles of experience will be systematically restricted.)

4. The objects of mathematics are easy and simple (!), those of philosophy difficult and involved.

In the *Preface* of "The Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy" Kant accordingly eschews the introduction of mathematical *method* into philosophy, but censures the neglect of the application of mathematical *matter* to the objects of philosophy. The really useful mathematical doctrines are, however, only those that are applicable to natural science. (This restriction prefigures the use of mathematics in the *Critique*, where its role is the constitution and understanding of the system of nature, i.e., of matter in quantitative and qualitative change.) As a preliminary example, Kant gives the continuity of space, which is, if inexplicitly, postulated in the Euclidean geometry he assumes. The concept of continuity will give insight, he thinks (but explains no further), into the ultimate ground of the possibility of space. (The claim does prefigure the arguments for the establishment of a spatial intuition in the *Critique*.) The main example in this piece will, of course, be the concept of nega-

tive magnitudes, which Kant now proceeds to clarify and apply. I shall follow his arguments through the three sections of the essay.

### *First Section*

There are two types of opposition: *logical*, through contradiction and *real*, without contradiction. If contradictories are logically connected, the result is a "negative nothing, an unthinkable" (*nihil negativum irrepresentabile*; now as later in the *Critique*, *representabile* = *cogitabile*, i.e., to think is to represent in the cognitive faculty). Thus a body in motion is a "something" (which is in the *Critique* the highest objective concept, i.e., that of an object in general); so is a body at rest. But a body at the same time in motion and at rest is an unthinkable nothing. It is not so much a non-object incapable of being as a less-than-nothing incapable of being thought.

Real-opposition (*Realentgegensetzung*), on the other hand, involves no contradiction and thus no unthinkability. For this opposition does not cancel the being of the object thus qualified; it remains a something and thinkable (*cogitabile*). Suppose a body impelled in one direction and also driven by a counterforce in the other. The resulting motion may be none = 0, but the body so affected is not a no-thing. Kant calls this result *nihil privativum representabile*, where *privativum* has a dynamic sense, as of an achieved condition. This nothing is to be termed zero = 0. (The distinction of "logical" and "real" underlies the Critical difference between merely analytic and synthetic, i.e., ampliative, judgments.)

Kant also refers to real-opposition as real-repugnance (*Realrepugnanz*) because two precisely antagonistic predicates of an object cancel each other, though they do not annihilate the object they qualify. Moreover, it is somewhat arbitrary (or rather, determined by extraneous human interests) which pole is called negative. For example, "dark" may seem to us intrinsically negative, but it is cancelled by its own negation "not-dark" (which might, of course, actually be light). Thus

one may say that in real-repugnance both opposing predicates are affirmative.

Kant gives, among others, the following example. Suppose a person owes 100 dollars and is, at the same time, owed this sum. This debtor-lender is worth 0 dollars, since the two conditions cancel each other, but this fact does not cancel *him*, the bearer of these modifications.

Kant then offers an example (slightly adjusted by me) that expands the concept of real-opposition. Suppose a vessel going from Portugal to Brazil is carried due west by an east wind with an impelling force that would cause it to run 12 miles on a certain day, and is also subject to a countervailing current retarding it by 5 miles; the boat's total progress is seven miles a day. Here the result is not = 0. It is clear that Kant regards real-opposition as taking place along a scaled spectrum of quantifiable qualities at whose center there might be (though there is not always) a neutral fulcrum, 0.

If there *is* an "origin," then on one side there are the positive quantities, on the other those that can be regarded either as the relative negatives of the former, or as opposed positives in their own right. Thus the opening question, what is really meant by +5, -5 and |5|, *might* be answered by Kant like this: The plus or minus sign is neither an implicit operation nor a qualification of the number as itself inherently positive or negative, for the number is, like its "absolute" expression |5|, always positive. The plus and minus signs signify rather the *relation of numbers to each other*: -5 is the negative of +5; it is negative only in relation to a positive five. To be sure, since Kant is not speaking of bare numbers but of magnitudes symbolizing quantified properties such as are representable along one dimension, magnitudes in real-opposition, the application to pure numbers is conjectural.

Objects in real-opposition have, of course, many negations besides those directly opposing a positive: a ship sailing westward is also not sailing southward, but its course is in real-opposition only to the eastern direction. Moreover, there are cases, say of lack of motion, which are not the result of

real opposing forces but of a total absence of impelling force. Negation that is the result of real-opposition Kant calls *privatio*, that which has no positive ground is called *defectus* or *absentia*. His example of an absent or null result is what we would call potential energy (not to be confused with "potential-opposition," see below): "Thus the thunder that art discovered for the sake of destruction lies stored up for a future war in the threatening silence of an arsenal of a prince, until, when a treacherous tinder touches it, it blows up like lightning and devastates everything around it." Aside from Kant's pacifistic poetry, this example shows that Kant is considering only the magnitudes of *actualized* forces.

It is pretty clear that what Kant is struggling to do is to present a conceptual underpinning for what we call directed magnitudes as they occur in the world, including signed numbers insofar as they represent natural qualities, whose plus or minus tells us whether we are to move respectively to the right or the left along the line-spectrum (conceived as a straight line, where left is negative by convention). Not that Kant is thinking of our mathematical number line—he does not even mention an origin (=0), and his opposition-spectra are evidently not necessarily infinite in either direction. While he does insist on the relative directionality of negative numbers, insofar as they countermand their positives, he also reiterates that the negatively directed magnitudes are *not* negative numbers insofar as these are regarded as being less than 0.

For the use of directed magnitudes in philosophy it will in fact be essential that the opposed quantities are indeed inherently positive, as will be shown in Section Three. Hence a debt can be called negative capital, falling negative rising, and so on, where it is our perspective that gives a negative emotional tint to one of the terms. Kant sums his view up in a basic law and its converse: 1. Real-repugnance takes place between two positives, power against power, which cannot be contradictories but must be of the same kind (while the complement class in a contradiction, e.g., "non-dark objects," is

not necessarily of the “same kind” as “dark objects”; they might be invisible objects). 2. Where a positive opposes its proper positive, a real cancellation will occur.

Furthermore certain rules of operation follow. For example, if the opposites are quantitatively equal, their sum will = 0, or  $A - A = 0$ , which shows, Kant explains, that both A's are positive (since  $A = A$ ). Also  $A + 0 = A$  and  $A - 0 = A$ , since no oppositions are involved. But  $0 - A$  is philosophically impossible since positives cannot be subtracted from nothing: There are no inherently negative qualities and so, as was said, no directed *magnitudes* inherently less than 0 (!). This odd-sounding but unavoidable consequence will have important metaphysical implications.

Real-repugnance, strange though its label be, has an Aristotelian antecedent. It is, I want to argue, a dynamic version of the logical opposition Aristotle calls *contrariety* (*Metaphysics* 10.4). Kant himself says as much in his *Anthropology* of 1798; he there contrasts contradiction or logical opposition (*Gegenteil*) with *contrariety* or real-opposition (*Widerspiel*, ¶160).

As a formal logical opposition contrariety occurs in the Square of Opposition, which is a tabulation of the Aristotelian doctrine on the subject: If the basic proposition is “Every S is P,” its contradictory is “Some S is not P” and its contrary is “No S is P.” Contradictories cannot both be true nor can they both be false, but contraries, though they cannot both be true, can both be false; for if not every S be P, yet might it be false that no S is P. Contrary propositions bear a certain formal relation to contrary *terms*, for these cannot both at once belong to an object but they might both fail to belong to it. Thus an object could not be at once pitch black and pure white, but it need not be either, which is untrue of contradictories, such as black and not-black.

The above paragraph is really a digression to show that it is not contrary propositions but contrary terms denoting qualities that are related to Kant's real-opposition. Contraries are qualities that are not simply in abrupt polar opposition

(though their extremes delimit a maximum difference) but are connected through a spectrum of gradations. Aristotle makes privation a particular case of contrariety, and for Kant negation, interpreted as *privatio*, in German *Beraubung*, meaning “deprivation,” introduces into some of the ranges of opposition a kind of null point or zero through which the quality goes by degrees into a negative or oppositional mode. (As was noted, not all the spectra have such a center; for example when bodies are brought to rest = 0 by countervailing forces this 0 is not an origin in the spectrum of forces but is a net effect in the bodies' position, measured in spatial extension rather than as qualitative intensity.) Some of Kant's examples will be given below.

What turns contrariety into real-repugnance is the dynamic view Kant takes of this opposition: It means not just being supinely, matter-of-factly opposed; it means being antagonistically, aggressively opposed. Moreover, this striving in many different dimensions of quality is quantifiable in degrees of intensity, as Kant's examples will show.

### *Second Section*

Kant now calls for examples from 1. physics, 2. psychology, 3. morality.

1. In physics his prime example is impenetrability, which is a positive force, a true repulsion that might thus also be called “negative attraction.” For attraction is a cause, contrarily directed, by which a body compels others to push into its own space.

2. From psychology (*Seelenlehre*) come Kant's most pungent examples of real-opposition. He raises the question whether aversion could be called “negative pleasure.” The fact that in German aversion, *Unlust*, looks like a direct contradictory of pleasure, *Lust*, gives him pause, but he observes that in “real-understanding” (*Realverstand*), meaning in actual psychic perception, aversion is not just a negation of desire or even its diminution, but a real-repugnance, a positive perception. Then, to illustrate, comes an almost comical

quantification: A Spartan mother hears of her son's heroism; a high degree of pleasure ensues, say of 4 degrees. Then comes the news of his death. If the resulting *Unlust* were a mere negation, a mere negation of the *Lust*, it would equal 0. But  $4 + 0 = 4$ , as if the death made no difference to her delight. Kant concedes however (some notion of a mother's feeling!) that the positive *Unlust* of his death, the real-repugnance, will diminish the mother's *Lust* at her son's bravery by one degree; it will therefore = 3.

In the same vein, disgust is negative desire, hate negative love, ugliness negative beauty, error negative truth, and so on. Kant warns against regarding this terminology as mere word mongering: It is a philosophical pitfall to regard the evils of positive privation as mere defects. Thus Kant is denying, surely quite incidentally, the theological doctrine (found in Plotinus, Augustine, Thomas) of evil as privation of good (*privatio boni*), for in Kant's view in this essay evil, though a relative negation, is yet a positive force.

3. Kant naturally regards his concept of real-opposition as having important uses in philosophy insofar as it is "practical prudence" (*Weltweisheit*), that is, applied morality. Non-virtue (*Untugend*) is, in human beings, not a mere denial of virtue (*Tugend*), but a positively negative virtue, vice. This is the case because humans, unlike animals that are morally unendowed, have an "inner moral feeling" that drives them to good actions. For instance they harbor a law of neighborly love. To do bad deeds, human beings have to overcome this natural inclination to good. (A quarter century later, in the second *Critique*, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, 1788, Kant will, on the contrary, see the test of true morality in the overcoming of natural inclinations.)

Thus certain people must make a noticeable effort to engage even in sins of omission (such as neglecting to offer neighborly help), which differ from sins of commission (hurting one's neighbor) only in degree; hence the slide from the one to the other is all too smooth, though the beginning is effortful.

Kant apologizes for what may seem to enlightened readers the prolixity of his exposition. He is writing for a "indocile breed of judges, which, because they spend their lives with a single book, understand nothing but what is contained therein." The book is, I imagine, the Bible.

In an appended Remark, Kant forestalls the notion that the world conceived in such a dynamic balance is capable neither of augmentation nor perfection. He points out (1) that in potential oppositions (to be explained below) though the total quantity of effect may = 0, yet there may be an increase in apparent change, as when bodies widen the distance between them; (2) that it is the very antagonism of natural forces that keeps the world in its perfectly regular courses; and (3) that though desire and aversion do balance each other considered as positive quantities oppositely signed, who would claim that aversion is to be called a perfection? Moreover, though the net quantity of moral action in two people may be the same, yet the quality of the one who acted from the better intention is to be more greatly valued. Kant adds that these calculi do not apply to the godhead, which is blessed not through an external good but through itself.

### *Third Section*

Kant introduces this section, which contains his startling application of the concept of real-opposition to metaphysics, by insisting once more that it is a mere attempt, very imperfect though promising: It is better to put before the public uncertain essays than dogmatically decked-out pretenses of profundity. This section is accordingly called "Containing Some Reflections Which Can Be Preparatory for the Application of the Concept Here Thought Out to the Objects of Philosophy." I dwell on this language because it is not a tone familiar to those of us who have spent time with the three *Critiques*.

1. Everyone easily understands how it is that something is *not*—the positive ground for its being is absent; there is no reason for it to be. But how does something *cease* to be? The

question arises because we must understand every passing-away as a negative becoming. As such it requires a real or positive ground.

In the first two sections Kant had spoken of real-opposition or real-repugnance, by which were meant normally apprehensible contrarities. Now, in the third section, he introduces real-grounds (*Realgründe*). As far as I can make out from the examples, real-grounds are natural, including psychic, causes: forces, powers, and acts exercised by material or psychic agents. "Real" here is used not as in real-opposition, which is opposed to logical contradiction, but it seems to mean "affecting perceptible existence." Real-grounds seem to be a first-level, underlying causal reality, apprehended through its effects. Thus Kant uses "reality"—and, as we shall see, "existence," "being" (*Wesen*), as well as "actuality" (*Wirklichkeit*)—quite loosely in these exploratory essays; Heidegger shows that Kant's later systematic meaning of reality is the "whatness" of a thing, all its possible predicates, its essence, while existence is perceptibility.

Kant's examples are mainly from the soul. It costs real effort to refrain from laughing, to dissipate grief, even to abstract from a manifold representation for the sake of clarity; thus abstraction is negative attention. Even the apparently random succession of thoughts has real grounds, which are "hidden in the depths of the mind (*Geist*)," i.e., in what we call the subconscious. Whether the change is in the condition of matter and thus through external causes, or of the mind and thus through inner causes, the necessity for a causal real-opposition remains the same.

Kant is focusing here, it seems to me, on a partial converse to, and a kind of complement of, a question, evidently not asked by the ancients, which is to become a modern pre-occupation: "Why does something exist rather than nothing?" It was first raised as a metaphysical problem with a theological answer by Leibniz (*The Principles of Nature and Grace, Founded on Reason*, 1714), and was repeatedly taken up by Heidegger (especially in the end of *What is*

*Metaphysics*, 1949), who treated it as "the basic question of metaphysics," though to be resolved without recourse to theology.

Leibniz asks for a reason, sufficient and ultimate, to account for the existence of a universe of things in progress and finds it in God. Kant, on the other hand, asks for an adequate reason why a present condition in the world should go out of existence and finds real-opposition as the cause. It is, however, an *unexplained* cause, which, Kant says at the end of the essay, he has been and will be thinking about and will in the future write about. This appears to be a harbinger of Critical works not to appear for almost two decades. Meanwhile the metaphysical consequences are exceedingly strange: *The sum total of all real grounds equals zero*, and "the whole of the world is in itself Nothing." More of this below.

2. Kant says that the theses to be here proposed seem to him "of the most extreme importance." First, however, he distinguishes real-opposition, or as he now calls it, "actual" opposition, from "possible" or "potential" opposition. The latter type of opposites are also each other's negatives, real to be sure, but not, as it happens, in conflict. Thus two forces, each other's opposites, may be driving two different bodies in opposite directions: They have the potential to cancel each other's motion but do not actually do so in the given situation. So also one person's desire may be the other's aversion, yet their ability to stymie each other is only a possibility.

Kant then offers the following first general thesis:

In all natural changes of the world their positive sum, insofar as it is estimated by the addition of agreeing (not opposed) positions and the subtraction from one another of those in real-opposition, is neither increased nor diminished.

Recall Newton's Third Law of Motion (*Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, 1687):

To every action there is opposed an equal reaction:  
or, the mutual actions of two bodies upon each  
other are always equal, and directed to contrary  
parts.

It is pretty evident that Kant is struggling to ground in metaphysics and apply to the human world the most dynamic of Newton's Laws of Motion or perhaps the Law of the Conservation of Momentum, which is implied in (or, some argue, implies) the law of equal action and reaction; it states that when the forces acting on bodies in the same and in contrary directions are summed (over time) the quantity of motion (i.e., the mass compounded with velocity =  $mv$ ) is not changed. Kant says without proof that although this rule of mechanics is not usually deduced from the metaphysical ground from which his first thesis is derived, yet it could be. (The first *Critique* will be partly devoted to giving the transcendental grounds of the laws of motion and conservation.)

Not only bodies in motion but souls in emotion obey the law of conservation, and so do humans in action. Astoundingly, Kant really means this: For every "world-change," i.e., every "natural" change (which includes the psychic realm) there is an equal and opposed change, so that the sum of measured final positions, i.e., states of existence taken globally, is equal to what it was before the change, or the total effect = 0.

Every becoming, then, induces an actual or potential counter-becoming or cessation. It can now be seen why Kant introduced potential real-opposition: Kant's forces not only act in opposed pairs but they may act on *different* objects, i.e., the real-opposition may not be actualized in one body or one soul or even in the same mode in one soul. Nevertheless these potential oppositions enter into the summed effects of the world-total.

Kant then goes on to give more concrete non-mechanical examples—though these are not non-natural, because (as will still be true in the *Critiques*) the soul, excepting in its practi-

cal-moral employment of reason, is subject to natural dynamic forces. The examples of this third section differ from the ones in the previous section exactly as the course of the exposition requires: They are cases not of actual but of potential real-opposition. Thus if one person's pleasure and displeasure arise not from the same object, but the same ground that caused pleasure in one object is also the true ground for feeling displeasure in *another*, then in analogy to two bodies moving in contrary directions by repulsion, there is one potential real-ground and cause for the positive and the negative feeling. These feelings oppose but also bypass each other; they may cancel each other but need not do so. This is why the Stoic sage had to eradicate all pleasurable drives—because they always engender an associated but diverse displeasure that affects the final value of the pleasure, though perhaps not the actual pleasure itself. Even in the use of the understanding, we find that to the degree that one idea is clarified, the others may be obscured, though surely not by the clarification. Kant adds that in the most perfect Being the zero sum result does not hold, as will be shown.

Now comes the second thesis, which is simply the translation of the first thesis into its causative grounds:

All real-grounds of the universe, if one sums those similarly directed and subtracts those opposed to one another, yield a result which is equal to zero.

Kant immediately states: "The whole of the world is in itself nothing, except insofar as it is something through the will of someone other." Regarded by itself, the sum of all existing reality = 0; the world is an almost Heraclitean system of balanced oppositions, of mutually negating positivities. In relation to the divine will the sum of all possible reality, of the world's existence, is, however, positive. But it itself is not therefore in real-opposition to the divine will; it is not the godhead's relative negation. Consequently existence, i.e., whatever is perceptibly there in the world, is through its *internal* relations nothing, but in relation to the grounding

will of the divinity it is something; it is positive. For there can be no real-opposition of the world to the divine will. (This thought is still to be found in the *Opus Postumum*; there too the real-opposition of forces is metaphysically exploited.)

The nullity of the physical and psychical world in its summed effects, the nothingness of the underlying universe of summed causes, and the positivity of creation only in relation to God—Kant presents these results without any discernible pathos, without acknowledgment that this cancellation of the world-whole of effect and cause might bear a religious or moral interpretation beyond the intellectual proof of God's existence. Nor can I discover that he ever reverted to this nullifying construal of the laws of conservation. Perhaps it is to be regarded as a passing notion that served as a spur to further inquiry into the world's relation to its ground. (Kant does hold on to the "law of the antagonism in all community of matter by means of motion"; any divergence from its reciprocity would, he now argues, move the very center of gravity of the universe, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* of 1786, ¶1563. In this essay too the notion of real-opposition is put to work in the specific antagonism of repulsion and attraction, forces which between them are responsible for the way matter, i.e., "the movable," fills space. However, the explanation of these forces in their specificity remains an unsolved problem for Kant into the *Opus Postumum*.)

So Kant concludes by making *explicit* the heretofore tacitly assumed converse of the proposition that the real-grounds are responsible for the null-ity of existence: Because the internal sum of existence is zero, it follows that the "real-grounds," i.e., the forces and powers producing effects in the world, must be in a corresponding opposition: The realm of existing and possible reality is in itself shot through with grounding polarities that cancel existence, though in respect to the divine will (Kant does not speak of "God" in this context) it has positive being (*Wesen*). This overt conclusion of the last section is surprising since it follows close on the asser-

tion that the zero sum of all existence flows necessarily from the grounding being (*Wesen*) of the world; it is hard to tell whether we are to infer from the zero sum of effects to the underlying real-opposition of causes or whether these causes are posited first. I hesitate to detect Kant in unwittingly circular reasoning here. (He is, to be sure, the master of intentional circularity in the *Critique*, where the grounds of the possibility of experience are inferred from experience while experience is certified by the grounds. Perhaps the apparent circle in the above paragraph is a precursor of critical thinking.)

The metaphysical intention is however quite clear: (1) The world exists as a complex of quantifiably opposed effects; negative magnitudes express such relative opposition; when summed with their positives they yield zero. (2) Underlying these existences, there is a realm of grounds; these are forces, powers and actions; they are also in mutually cancelling opposition, and, like their effects, they are so only relative to each other. (3) In respect to an ultimate ground they are positive, but since no real-opposition to it is possible their positivity is not a relation of opposition to the divinity. Kant himself knows that he has not yet sufficiently clarified the character of *real-grounds*, nor their relation to the divine will.

His first definition of a real-ground actually occurs in a *General Remark* appended to the third, final section of the essay. A logical ground is one whose consequence can be clearly seen through the law of identity; for example composition is a ground of divisibility, i.e., it is identical with part of the meaning of the concept and can be deduced from it analytically. A real-ground, by contrast, has a relation to its effect which, although quite truly expressed as a concept, yet allows no judgment, no true understanding, of the real-ground's mode of action. In other words, the relation of a real cause to its effect is not apprehensible by mere logical analysis. (Here, of course, is formulated the problem that Kant will solve in the *Critique* by means of the "synthetic judgment *a priori*"—

the cognition in which real connections are made—not, of course, by the logical law of identity but through our cognitive constitution.)

In this essay, this understanding of a real-ground raises—for the first time for Kant—the fundamental question of causation: “How should I understand it THAT, BECAUSE THERE IS SOMETHING, THERE IS SOMETHING ELSE?” The will of God is something. The existing world is something else altogether. Yet the will of God is the ultimate real-ground of the world’s existence. Kant says that no talk of cause, effect, power and act will help: God and world are totally each other’s other and yet through one of them the other is posited. And the same holds on a lower level for the natural causes in the world, be they of an event or its cancellation. Kant promises an explication in the future, but for now he remarks only that the relation of real-ground to what is posited or cancelled through it cannot be expressed in a judgment, i.e., a mental “representation of the unity of a consciousness of different representations,” but is in fact only a mere, non-analyzable concept, that is, a general representation or a thought (*Logic* ¶1, 17). Kant is saying that the relation of an effect to its cause cannot be articulated as an affirmed attribution of a predicate to a subject. It is his way of expressing Hume’s rejection of empirically grounded causation. (In the *Critique* the attempt to make God’s causal relation to the world comprehensible to reason will be shown to be hopeless, but causality within the world will be grounded in the very constitution of the spatial intuition.)

So ends the essay in which the reflection on negative magnitudes has led, through the concept of real-opposition, directly to the problem of causal connection and indirectly to God as ultimate cause. I have not done justice to the exploratory tone of the essay, to Kant’s witty derision of those who get stuck in premature dogmatism, and to his sense of having made a mere, even insufficiently explicated, beginning, but a beginning of something very important: the inquiry into causation.

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An elucidation of some of the matters left unclear in the essay on negative magnitudes occurs in the essay on “The Only Possible Grounds of Proof for a Demonstration of God’s Existence” of the same year (1763), and it seems to me so daring that I cannot resist carrying this exposition a little further. The reflections I shall refer to are not those that most interested Heidegger, the ones concerning existence as position, but those dwelling on the relation of possibility to actuality (or as Kant says, to existence) and on an absolutely necessary “existent” (*Dasein*; First Part, Second and Third Reflections).

Possibility, Kant says, depends entirely on the law of contradiction: That is a possible something the thought of which accords with what is thought in it. This “comparison” of a subject with its predicates through the law of contradiction is to be called *logical* or formal possibility; a triangle cannot have other than three angles, for that would contradict its definition. But it also has something additional, a given character as a triangle in general or in particular, say a right-angled triangle; these are the data of its *material* or *real* possibility.

Therewith possibility without prior existence is abolished. For a thing is not impossible—a “no-thing”—only when contradictory predications are made of it, when it is formally impossible, but also when it offers no real material, no data, to thinking. For then all thinking ceases, for everything possible must be something thinkable, must offer stuff for thought. It follows that for Kant possibility is conditioned on actuality.

There is, to be sure, no formal inner contradiction in the brute negation of all existence, since nothing has been posited to begin with. But that there be a possibility and that nonetheless nothing actual exist—that *is* contradictory. For if nothing exists, nothing material is given to be thought about. Therefore to say that nothing exists is, according to the previous analysis of existence (*Dasein*) as a positing act of

thought, to think and say that there is absolutely nothing. And then to add that something is possible is clearly self-contradictory, for no material for thinking at all is given. Thinking involves material givens; without them it contradicts its own character. Thus the cancellation of the material data of possibility also cancels possibility. *It is absolutely impossible that nothing should exist.* I understand Kant to mean that one can—logically—deny all existence, but having denied it one cannot then retrieve its possibility.

The only really elucidating example of a necessary existence is, Kant says, that of the unique Subject (i.e., God), to be touched on below. Meanwhile, if we ask, for example, how existence precedes possibility in respect to “body,” we may grant that the concept body contains no logical impossibility, yet to call on its predicates of extension, impenetrability, force, to be the data of possibility (either assumed or experienced) in the absence of actually existing, given bodies, is quite unwarranted. Without such data the concept “body” is empty. (We see here the forerunner of the dictum in the first *Critique* that the mere functions of the understanding are empty without the givens of intuition.)

Then Kant explains the concept of an absolutely necessary existence. To say that it is that whose contradictory is in itself impossible is a merely nominal explanation. Since existence is no predicate, its denial can never conflict with other predicates. However to deny the positing of the thing itself is not a denial of predicates but of something else, and hence is not contradictory. Kant is looking not for logical but “real-necessity” (*Realnotwendigkeit*), for what cannot be denied in any “real-explanation” (*Realerklärung*). This is it: “What I am to regard as absolutely nothing and impossible must be that which eradicates all thinking.” Now total nonexistence in fact cancels all the material and data of thought, and hence it is impossible.

It follows that there is an absolutely necessary being. For all possibility assumes something actual, whose cancellation would itself cancel all inner possibility, i.e., the real coherence

of predicates. That part of existence, on the other hand, which *does not* provide the material for all that is thinkable, but without which there would still be matter for thought—and thus possibility—that part is, although in a real sense possible, yet in the same sense conditionally possible, i.e., contingent; not *all* existence is necessary. (In his *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770 Kant will say that all worldly substances are in fact contingent since they maintain reciprocal relations, while necessary beings are independent, ¶19; an earlier version of this existence proof is to be found in Kant’s *Nova dilucidatio* of 1755.)

Kant now goes on to show that the *one* necessary, non-contingent existence is God, a being that is one, simple, unchangeable, eternal, and a spirit. But its philosophically most important attribute is that it is (in scholastic terms) the *ens realissimum*, the most real being, that which contains the highest reality. For it contains all the givens, the *data*, of possibility either as directly determining other existences or as being the real-ground of which they are the consequences. (In the *Critique*, the *ens realissimum* will be relegated to the status of an ideal of reason, a regulative idea that marshals our thoughts of the world; in the *Opus Postumum* God is once more the most real existence, though one reason necessarily posits *for itself*.)

Does the attribution to God of the most and the highest reality mean that *all* realities, i.e., all real attributes, must be assigned to God? Here the concepts of the essay on negative magnitudes come into their own: It is common doctrine that one reality can never contradict another reality, since both are truly affirmed. But this assertion leaves out of account the notion of real-repugnance, i.e., of real-opposition. Realities may, indeed must, oppose each other without one of them being in itself negative. That was the essay’s main finding. In God, however, even real-opposition cannot take place, because that would result in privation or defect and would contradict God’s maximal reality. Thus God contains no realities in opposition to his positive predicates; for example, the

real-oppositions attributable to bodies, such as being subject to contrary forces, cannot without contradiction belong to a being that has intellect and will; hence the *ens realissimum* has clear positive determinations.

It is, it seems to me, implicit in these pre-Critical essays that neither existence (*Dasein*) nor actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) is as yet convertible with subjective perceptibility, though both will indeed be so later, as Heidegger observes. Instead these terms mean objective givenness, thereness, be it sensorily received or essentially apprehended. The road to the first *Critique* will be the development of this conversion from the object of experience as given *to* the subject to its being constituted *in* the subject. The roots, however, of the primacy of the subject are already present in one respect, now to be shown.

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There is, then, necessarily a God, a being comprehending not all, but all the highest positive reality. He is a real-ground of the world; the world, in turn, amounts quantitatively to a self-cancelled nothing, though it may well be qualitatively positive. One way to get hold of this—by Kant's own frequent confession—still inchoate complex is to ask just how daring a departure from tradition it is.

Kant, who without naming Anselm is attempting to rebut his argument for the existence of God, calls his own proof "ontological" (later in the *Critique* that is what he will call Anselm-type proofs). Anselm argues (*Proslogium* 2, 4) that God is a maximal being whose essence is to be thought as largely and inclusively as possible; thus it must include the predicate existence. This—that existence is a predicate—is what Kant denies, but he accepts something that seems to me even deeper in, or rather behind, Anselm's argument: that when *I must think* that God exists, he exists. But this is thinking of the type Kant himself engages in when he makes God's existence follow from the existential necessities of thinking: What is required for thinking to be possible must necessarily exist. (This type of proof becomes explicit in the *Opus*

*Postumum*.) Here Anselm and Kant are brothers under the skin. I can think of counterarguments to their assumption (though without being quite persuaded by them): Is it utterly impossible that a being that *must* exist in thought fails to exist in fact—is it so totally unthinkable? Is it not possible to think that thinking can do utterly without the material, the data grounded either in a highest reality, as in the essay on God's existence, or in some sensory influx from a transcendent outside, as in the first *Critique*? Is it unthinkable that possibilities do not disappear when actualities fail, but that there is spontaneous, autonomous, self-generated, worldless thinking? Kant has, it seems, levered the Cartesian-type certification for personal existence; *Cogito, ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am," into a proof of God's existence: *Cogito ergo Deus est*, "I think therefore there is a God." But what if "I think" entails instead: "I make the world," if I myself give myself the data?

Such misgivings and intimations aside (they will become Kant's own in the *Opus Postumum*), he has found an approach to a question that seems never to have occupied the ancients and was, as was mentioned, first formulated by Leibniz (*Principles of Nature and Grace*, 7): "Why does something exist rather than nothing?, especially since 'nothing' is simpler and easier than 'something.'" Leibniz finds the answer in the ultimate sufficient reason called God. Kant argues the other way around: Nothing is *harder* than something, indeed impossible for thought, and God becomes necessary not as a sufficient reason inferred from the world's existence but as a necessary being implied by human thinking.

In 1763, having proved in one essay the necessary existence of the highest and most real ground and so (for the time being) answered Leibniz's question, Kant is left with the unanswered next question of the essay on negative magnitudes quoted above, which he prints in block letters: "How can I understand THAT BECAUSE SOMETHING IS, SOMETHING ELSE MIGHT BE?" In other words, having proved God's existence, how can I understand him, or his agents in

the world, as causal *grounds*? (This very same question will, as was said, be presented in the *Critique* as unanswerable by logical thinking alone, but solved with the aid of the a priori relations given in the intuition.)

By 1781, the year of the first edition of the first *Critique*, Kant will have given up not only his own so circumstantially prepared ontological proof, the only possible one, as he had once thought, but also in principle any expectation of a theoretical demonstration of God's existence—and so, it seems, any rational explanation of the first question, why there is existence at all.

The second question, on the other hand, is just what the *Critique* addresses. Kant distinguishes cosmological freedom, the power to make an absolute beginning, from causality according to natural law, which is rule-governed consequence acting within what already exists. An insight into the first, into absolute causation, i.e., creation, Kant shows, is in principle impossible for us, for it is beyond the limits of human reason. The second causality, that of lawful succession, of cause and effect in natural events, is grounded in the synthesizing character of our cognitive constitution. The essays here considered show Kant—and for my part I find this intellectually moving—casting about for disparate clues to the concepts and claims which would one day come to cohere in his master edifice.



## Four Poems

### Elliott Zuckerman

#### Where the Poet Lives

I saw the poet once  
in furnished rooms above the estaminet.

There were others in his train, and I  
just tagged along.  
Foremost were my sidekick feelings.

If only earlier in the evening  
I'd found the man alone  
at his table in the whitewashed space,  
the waiters not quite in position yet,  
and memorably our eyes had met.

### Early Pupil

She saw that her piano and only hers  
 was missing black notes here and there  
 and deemed that this deficiency was due  
 somehow to my neglect, a lack  
 of thoroughness. But never  
 did she carp for long, clever  
 enough at twelve to know  
 that parents don't pay cash for caviling.  
 Have it *your* way, she'd imply.  
 Go ahead and  
 have it *your* way, for all you teachers  
 insist on throwing bowling-balls overhand.

To the narrow living room of the detached  
 brick building in the borough's heart  
 I brought her Haydn. It was  
 a hurdle that the piece, her first, was titled 'Air,'  
 suggesting emptiness to her, and breathing.  
 I told her something about sonatas,  
 and life chez Esterhaz,  
 then asked the girl to name the head  
 bewigged in the oval insert on the page.  
 'That is George Washington,' she said.

Among the portraits later in the book,  
 she stopped at Purcell in a flowing wig.  
 I played the left hand ostinato,  
 and told her how a Trojan prig  
 abandoned the passionate empress Dido  
 to fiery death, while we can hear  
 the drooping half-steps of imperial despair.

Pointing to Purcell's hair,  
 'At last,' she said, 'a lady composer.'

### She and the Tree

On that flat terrain is there a tree?  
Given at least one tree, she likes to arrange her limbs  
in imitation of the branches, seeking  
a quiet contraposto.

Her earlier attempts will be ignored,  
for rearrangements are encouraged.  
But when at last she settles on a pose,  
they'll give that pose her name.

They emphasize the silence of the landscape,  
she and the tree.

### Outlay

We place ourselves on stools, shoes at the rungs,  
the ales in steins on the expanse between us,  
midway in bowls the usual cashews,  
and new pistachios.

Though hands can reach across to hands,  
no actual touch dare fluster the display:  
all my intent and all your puzzlement  
diffused in what we say.

I wonder whether anything that hangs  
high in the air among the pleasantries  
could close those almond eyes.



## Platonic Pedagogy?

David Roochnik

No Platonic dialogue depicts a conversation between two equally mature philosophers. There is neither a friendly collaboration, nor a serious battle, between peers. Instead, the dialogues are consistently asymmetrical. Two familiar kinds of conversations are those between an older Socrates and a younger man (Glaucou, for example) who is, at best, a potential philosopher, and between Socrates and a non-philosopher (such as Protagoras, Laches, or Agathon). What is conspicuously missing is a dialogue between Socrates and a thinker offering a well-developed theoretical position, such as the Eleatic Stranger or Timaeus, neither of whom receives as much as a question from a present but silent Socrates.

One explanation of this absence is that the dialogues are thoroughly pedagogical works. Their function, on this account, is not to present a positive or systematic theory, which is why they do not depict a symmetrical exchange between two theorists (who either agree or disagree), but an encounter whose asymmetry is designed to invite the reader to participate. As Eva Brann puts it, Plato “wants us as soon as possible to *join* [the dialogue], to be converted from passive perusal to active participation, to be drawn in among the other silent interlocutors” (p. 88).

One version of this “pedagogical thesis” would maintain that by entering the conversation the reader, guided by the dialogue’s clues, can, and so should, attempt to reconstruct the teaching or theory (or *logos*) it implicitly contains. A second version would argue that the dialogue contains no positive theory at all. On this account, Socrates’ attempt to drive

his interlocutors into thinking—and Plato's attempt to achieve the same with his readers—is the teaching. This may sound odd, because pedagogy seems to be a means to an end. The teacher teaches the student who, upon completion of the instruction, is no longer a student, but instead is one who knows. Perhaps, however, the dialogues are asymmetrical because they are *essentially* pedagogical. In other words, perhaps Plato eschewed the sort of symmetrical dialogue that would communicate a positive theory—not to mention the fact that he never wrote a monological treatise—because he believed there was no positive or independent theory that could be detached from the attempt to teach it. (Brann's own definition of a "theory" is "a conceptual construction designed in principle to yield satisfying explanations for every problem brought to it" [p. 322].) Perhaps pedagogy, the leading of the younger by the older, is an end in itself. Or, to put it somewhat strangely, perhaps pedagogy itself is the truth. Such a view comes close to a form of skepticism, although not of the Pyrrhonian or Academic varieties described by Sextus Empiricus. (See *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.1 and 1.4.)

I think Eva Brann might accept some of these remarks, but I am not sure which of the two versions of the pedagogical thesis (if either) she would favor. Certainly, hers is a book written by a teacher for students. Included in this collection of essays are three "introductions": to the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Sophist*. One essay, "Socrates' Legacy: Plato's *Phaedo*," was written for a student journal, and another is titled, "Teaching Plato' to Undergraduates." It and three others—"Why Justice? The Answer of the *Republic*," "The Tyrant's Temperance: Charmides," and "Imitative Poetry: Book X of the *Republic*"—were delivered as lectures at undergraduate colleges.

"Socrates' Legacy: Plato's *Phaedo*," which Brann describes as a "view, very sketchily stated, of Plato's *Phaedo*, which might help a serious student in reading the dialogue" (p. 36), lays out twenty-one questions that she thinks Plato "insinuates into the purported demonstrations of the soul's

immortality" (p. 37). These are followed by a paragraph containing fourteen sentences, the first two of which are declarative, the following twelve of which are interrogative. She concludes the essay by imagining Socrates joining a conversation about them today. "He would not care so much about devising well-formulated breakthroughs for received issues as for staying with the inquiry at its origin in wonder...he is...asking [the young men who participate in this conversation] to keep his perplexities alive. For that is what philosophizing means to him" (p. 41).

These remarks suggest that Brann would favor the second of the two versions of the pedagogical thesis described above. So too would her description of "Plato's Theory of Ideas." Despite using this well-worn academic phrase as the title of one of her own essays, she asserts that "the Ideas are not a theory" (p. 322) at all, and so she recommends that we "convert the falsely familiar title 'Plato's Theory of Ideas' to 'Socrates' Hypotheses of the *Eide*'" (p. 324). In a similar fashion, her description of "recollection" as a "myth" (p. 332) rather than a theory, and her declaration that in the *Timaeus* "the Timaeian story of the origin and nature of time is not the Socratic, and therefore not a central Platonic, theory" (p. 275), but instead may even "supply the reason why Plato has offered none" (p. 272), also seems to imply that beyond teaching lies no positive theory at all. Brann seems to believe that, at the end of the day, the philosopher must "go back to the beginning" (*palin ex archês*), and ask her questions, provoke her students, yet again. Teaching, in this sense, is an end in itself.

There are philosophical explanations of why this would be the case. One is famously suggested in the *Seventh Letter* and is quoted by Brann (on p. 320):

There is no treatise of mine about these things, nor ever will be; for it is not sayable like other kinds of learning, but out of much communion which has taken place around this business, and

from living together, suddenly, like a light kindled from a leaping fire, it gets into the soul, and from there on nourishes itself.

If Plato believes that “these things” are not sayable, then there can be no positive theory of them, and thus neither a monological treatise nor a symmetrical dialogue would be an appropriate form of philosophical expression.

Another possibility, which I can here only state, is that the dialogues resist symmetry, resist theory, because they are attempts to do justice to “the constitution of the soul...its topography” (p. 251), and this “topography” is itself asymmetrical. Perhaps Plato wrote the sort of dialogues he did, in which the partners are invariably unequal, because the soul is somehow unequal to itself.

The eponymous, and far the longest, essay of this book, “The Music of Plato’s *Republic*,” seems to challenge the notion that the dialogues are essentially pedagogical, and instead to favor the first of the two versions of the pedagogical thesis mentioned above, namely, that the *Republic* is meant to teach the reader how to reconstruct the theoretical doctrine to which it *only* points. Consider the following comments that Eva Brann makes about the images of the sun, the divided-line, and the cave: “The *logos* behind these images is absent in the *Republic*, but its terms may be recovered from Plato’s oral ‘Unwritten Teachings,’ particularly the lecture—or several colloquia—*Concerning the Good*...In these terms...the Image of the Good represents *the One* and the Image of the Cave *the Indefinite Dyad*” (p. 156). Later in the essay, employing a diagram of great complexity (p. 195), Brann begins to articulate such a *logos*, such a doctrine:

This scheme shows the Good as presiding over and bonding a kind of pervasive duplication: The Good as the cause of knowledge is responsible for the unifying confrontation of knower and known...and thus originates the soul...The Good is as well the direct source of beingness...Finally,

as generating source, the Good puts forth the sun, a sensible secondary source that reduplicates the whole structure of Being on the lower level of sense and Becoming (p. 195-6).

Brann draws on both the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist* to articulate the details of such a theory, a project that occupies a major portion of this essay.

This attempt to “recover” the positive *logos* of the *Republic* is consonant with the assertive tone that pervades “The Music of the *Republic*.” The essay begins, for example, with this statement: “The *Republic* is composed of concentric rings encompassing a center” (p. 108). Books 1 and 9-10, on Brann’s reading, comprise the outermost circle, and set the mythic context of the entire work. Books 2-4 and then 8-9 are “the broad inner ring” consisting “of the construction and destruction of the successive forms of a pattern city in ‘speech’” (p. 116). Books 5-7 “presents the actual founding of a city ‘in deed’” (p. 116). This structure is diagrammed on page 117, which is one of thirteen such diagrams found in the essay.

This structural account of the form of the dialogue—an account that seems of a piece with the attempt to recover its complexly structured content—can be challenged. Consider the following alternative: Book 1, as Socrates himself states in Book 2, “is only a prelude” (*prooimion*: 357a2). In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle discusses this term. It is, he says, “the beginning of a speech” (3.14.1) whose “necessary and specific function...is to make clear what is the end (*telos*) for which the speech is being given” (3.14.5). Brann’s arguments that Book 1 establishes a mythic context are not without philological basis. Still, the bulk of Book 1 is a series not of mythic allusions, but of refutations, almost all of which operate on the basis of the “*techne* analogy.” So, for example, Socrates refutes Polemarchus’ assertion that it is “just to give to everyone what is fitting” (332c2) by smuggling in the assumption that justice is an art, a form of expertise, a *techne*. As medi-

cine gives what is fitting—drugs, food and drinks—to bodies, and cooking gives what is fitting—seasonings—to meats, so too (if the analogy holds) must justice give what is fitting to the determinate object of its expertise. (See 332c-d.) Because no such object can be identified, the definition is rejected.

Socrates, then, begins the refutations of Book 1 with an assumption, justice is a *techne*, which he neither makes explicit nor defends. The refutations succeed because the *techne* model of justice proves to be inadequate. Nonetheless, it remains the case that justice, even if it is not a *techne*, must still be regarded as a form of knowledge. Book 1 is a *prooimion* suggesting the *telos* of the Republic because it sets out a task: to give an account of justice as a non-technical form of knowledge.

What follows Book 1 are not concentric rings but, to borrow Socrates' own metaphor, three successive "waves" of argumentation that become progressively more difficult to "swim through." Books 2-4 construct an "arithmetical" or technical conception of both city and soul that ultimately proves to be deficient. Books 5-7 are a response to this deficiency, but suffer from limitations of their own. As a result, they are followed by Books 8-10, which, despite the scant attention they receive from commentators, are rich with insight (especially psychological insight) and so actually culminate the dialogue rather than serve as merely a descent and completion of the ring structure.

This little sketch (elaborated and defended in detail in my *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's Republic*) is mentioned only to raise a question. Is the purpose of the essay "The Music of Plato's *Republic*" to uncover a positive teaching of the dialogue, one communicated by means of the ring structure Brann attributes to it, and then conceptually elaborated in a "recovered" *logos* about the Good? If so, does this essay stand at odds with the otherwise interrogative and aporetic stance seemingly taken by so many of the other essays in this book?

Perhaps "The Music of the *Republic*" is not quite what it seems to be. Even though it includes a significant number of diagrams, some of them (such as the one on p. 220) quite elegant, and contains numerically adumbrated outlines of the arguments, and even though it seems to offer first steps towards a coherent account of the whole (i.e., a theory), perhaps this is but the mathematical "sheen" of the essay and does not fully reflect its author's understanding of the full content of the dialogue. In other words, a meta-mathematical doctrine may not lie at the heart of the *Republic*. Perhaps Brann's diagrams and outlines, and her putative recovery of the *logos*, perform a function more like that Socrates attributes in Book 7 to arithmetic, that "lowly business of distinguishing the one, the two and the three" (522c): "to draw the soul from becoming to being" (521d). In other words, while mathematics is without doubt of significant value, it is not the model of a genuinely philosophical *logos*. Instead, arithmetic and its kindred mathematical *technai* are conceived by Plato to have instrumental value. As such, they are pedagogical in nature. They are meant to inspire and provoke, to turn the reader towards the project of philosophy. They are meant, in short, to be questioned. The goal of Brann's longest and most "mathematical" of essays, then, is not to offer the last word on the *Republic*, but to convert the reader "from passive perusal to active participation."

To sum up: is the apparent assertiveness, the "theoretical optimism," of "The Music of the *Republic*" compatible with a thoroughly interrogative essay like "Socrates' Legacy: Plato's *Phaedo*?" I believe it is. If I am right, then one of the many virtues of this beautiful book is that it effectively imitates the Platonic dialogues themselves.

