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# The St. John's Review

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 A Glance, a Look, a Stare  
Jerry L. Thompson

In 1968 or 1969 a friend asked me to the first session of a workshop given in New York City by the photographer Harold Feinstein. Feinstein was an experienced teacher, and he began by talking to the assembled group of 20 or so about his approach to picture-taking. He said that each of us, the moment we stepped into his studio, had an immediate impression, a notion, an idea of his place. That impression, gained at first glance, was, he said, what photography was all about. A snapshot—a view recognized and seized in a fraction of a second—was the photographer's view of the world.

Certainly many of the best-known photographs made during the twenty years before my visit to Feinstein's studio could be connected to this understanding of how photography worked. Two of the books of photographs most admired by young ambitious photographers at that time were *The Decisive Moment*, a book that presented large reproductions of minimally-captioned photographs by Henri Cartier-Bresson without any text other than appreciation of the pictures, and Robert Frank's *The Americans*, another book whose main content was pictorial. Though very different in form, in attitude, and in meaning, the two books contained pictures that looked like quick glimpses of the worlds they showed, views recognized and seized at first glance. I was a beginning photographer, but I had experimented with several cameras, and I knew that with a small camera a picture could be made in daylight at 1/500th of a second. At that shutter speed, the operator did not even have to hold the camera

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perfectly still in order to get a clear picture. With a wide-angle lens pre-focused (that is, set at the “hyperfocal” distance setting, the setting which would allow everything off to the horizon and most of what was as close as 3 or 4 feet from the lens to be in focus when the aperture was constricted for a daylight exposure), the photographer could rush the camera to his eye to snap anything he saw within a fraction of a second of his first awareness of the scene’s potential to become a picture.

In discussing Feinstein’s approach after the class my friend and I agreed that *spontaneity* was at its center. The idea was to act—to respond to a strong impression—before conscious deliberation or prolonged analysis could weigh in. Feinstein was proposing, we decided, a theory of visual truth. Directness and honesty of vision are most possible when the photographer, or artist, acts spontaneously and seizes the moment before he or she has a chance to ponder other considerations: should I be a little farther off? Should I make an exposure that will allow for detail in all the dark areas, or one that will record only dramatic highlights in a sea of darkness? Should I wait for a more amiable expression to appear on that person’s face? Should I shoot a vertical so that it can be considered for the cover of *Life* magazine? Each such deliberation, the thinking goes, chips away at the picture’s “purity,” compromises the artist’s perception, and takes the result further away from the “unmediated” truth of an instant response. Such thinking found many receptive auditors in 1968 and 1969.

The rise in prominence of the so-called “Abstract-Expressionist” painters had helped prepare the way. These “New York School” painters did not usually make preliminary sketches, let alone use perspective studies or scaled palettes. They rejected every device attached to European (mostly French) *Beaux Arts* training. For them that training was anathema; it reeked of the academy, flattery of princes, dishonesty, decoration, and corruption. Immediacy and

authenticity, not perspective, drawing, harmony, and a pleasing likeness were important to them. Their ambition, as a group, was not to copy nature but to create it.

Photographers were more hesitant to substitute their own productions for the subjects they depicted. Most photographers then (if not now) still thought the pictures they took (or made, to use the word many artist-photographers have insisted using) at least referred to, but more likely clarified or even understood, the world those pictures showed. Photojournalism was a model for many, especially those who worked with small hand-held cameras, and photojournalism was generally thought able to present a kind of truth about what was going on in the world. Photographers in 1969 were more likely to single out Eddie Adams’s pictures of the summary execution of a suspected Viet Cong than they were to speculate about how many times Douglas McArthur had to wade ashore on the Philippines until the photographer got the picture the war effort needed.

Though they might not follow the painters all the way to proclaiming their pictures a second, new nature, one that could stand on its own without reference to a “subject,” many ambitious young photographers in 1969 would have agreed that (a) photography is art; that (b) authenticity and immediacy in art are good things; and that (c) authenticity and immediacy are most available to an artist when working spontaneously. Hovering in the background of this thinking is the notion that there is something natural about this way of working. When the photographer Nick Nixon (who began photographing seriously in the late 1960s) was asked about his way of working by a group of students in 1975 he said his role was like that of a plant, a tree whose business it is to bear fruit (I paraphrase his remarks from memory). His job, he explained, was to produce the fruit. Discussing and analyzing the fruit was somebody else’s job. He also said he rarely used the camera’s controls for adjusting the drawing of the image projected on the ground-glass viewing screen of the large

view camera he used. If the picture wasn't there (that is, if he didn't see it whole and ready to frame), he didn't try to fiddle with the camera's adjustments in order to coax a reluctant picture to appear. John Keats would have understood all of this, at least at the moment in February, 1818, when he wrote to John Taylor that "In Poetry I have a few Axioms," including this one:

That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves  
to a tree it had better not come at all.

Keats's remark rightly suggests that the line of thinking I have been discussing did not begin with Harold Feinstein, or with the New York School painters. M. H. Abrams includes what he calls "vegetable genius" among the theories of unconscious genius and organic growth he finds widespread, particularly in England and Germany, as early as the eighteenth century (*The Mirror and the Lamp*, Oxford, 203). These theories have several features in common: they hold that the artist is not directly responsible for what he makes; that he may not understand, in an analytical sense, what he is doing; and that the mechanism by which he works is like that of a plant.

Johann Georg Sulzer, author of a four-volume dictionary of aesthetic terms published between 1771 and 1774, wrote that

It is a remarkable thing, belonging among other mysteries of psychology, that at times certain thoughts will not develop or let themselves be clearly grasped when we devote our full attention to them, yet long afterwards will present themselves in the greatest clarity of their own accord, when we are not in search of them, so that it seems as though in the interim they had grown unnoticed, like a plant, and now stood before us in their full development and bloom. (Abrams, 203)

In 1793 Immanuel Kant went further to declare that the productive faculty of the fine arts was properly called *genius*, which he defined as "the innate mental aptitude through which nature gives the rule to art." This faculty of genius

cannot indicate scientifically how it brings about its product, but rather gives the rule as nature. Hence, where an author owes a product to his genius, he does not know himself how the *ideas* for it have entered his head, nor has he it in his power to invent the like at pleasure, or methodically, and communicate the same to others in such precepts as would put them in a position to produce similar products. (*Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, ¶146; also cited by Abrams, 207)

These theories were not confined to the visual arts. The passages quoted above speak of authors and ideas. And the theories do not appear as the aphoristic musings of practitioners; they are not the haphazard reflections of artists puzzling about what they do, but systematic treatments by serious philosophical writers. These theories are presented in the very form—discursive writing—that the activity the theories discuss, the activity of spontaneous invention, would seem to shy away from. Writing is, after all, the setting down of reasonable speech—argument, what Keats called "consequitive reasoning," and what philosophers at the time of Plato and Aristotle meant by *logos*: a logical train of thought. Discursive writing involves connecting and setting down an articulated succession of ideas.

Sometime between 1942 and 1945 Erich Auerbach wrote one such articulated succession of ideas, a long and detailed one, about a descriptive passage in Balzac (The essay appeared in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*). In that essay, he stresses the harmony and stylistic unity of a passage near the beginning of *Le Père Goriot* (1834), which describes the first appearance of the

*pension*-mistress Madame Vauquer. Every detail given by Balzac contributes to “an intense impression of cheerless poverty, shabbiness, and dilapidation,” and along with the physical description, “the moral atmosphere is suggested.” Auerbach’s discussion builds to the following observation:

The entire description, so far as we have yet considered it, is directed to the mimetic imagination of the reader, to his memory-pictures of similar persons and similar milieux which he may have seen; the thesis of the “stylistic unity” of the milieu, which included the people in it, is not established rationally but is presented as a striking and immediate state of things, purely suggestively, without any proof.

By “not established rationally” and “without any proof,” Auerbach means that Balzac does not present an extended argument or logical train of thought to demonstrate that all the details he names and observations he makes are in fact related, bound in some chain of causality. According to Auerbach, what Balzac presents is a striking and immediate state of things, something we take in all at once, uncritically, as if at a glance. In fact we encounter the components of this impression one at a time, as we read, but they accumulate to affect us as a growing ensemble, as a complete whole already existent and gradually revealed—not as a logical proposition or arithmetic calculation which must be worked through to the end before we can see and accept what is meant.

“What confronts us, then, is the unity of a particular milieu, felt as a total concept of a demonic-organic nature and presented entirely by suggestive and sensory means,” Auerbach concludes (416). Balzac accomplishes the remarkable feat of presenting, in words that must be read and understood in sequence, the kind of impression we would have had if we had been there to look at the actual room. What he tells us over the course of sixteen sentences, most of them quite

long, we could have taken in had we been there, at a glance, in a single glimpse, like the view we were invited to take from the threshold of Feinsein’s studio. This is so because the sentences do not reason with us or attempt to demonstrate—they offer, as Auerbach says, no proof. Rather, these sentences overwhelm us with detail and observation mixed together, an imaginative description in which odors have moral overtones and misfortune oozes from worn furniture.

When we know a thing at a glance, we do not consider evidence and weigh opinions as a jury might during a prolonged deliberation. We see the thing and know it at once for what it is, as we recognize a face that suddenly comes into sight without thinking, *that nose, those eyes, brown hair parted on the right: it’s John Doe!* Rather than reason our way to an identification, we somehow consult a memory-bank and call up, all at once, the one we recognize. Recognizing this feature of human understanding, Balzac could reasonably expect his reader to reach into his or her memory-bank of “pictures of similar persons” to “recognize” the intertwined physical and moral dilapidation of Madame Vauquer and her milieu. He doesn’t attempt to argue that this thing is connected to that, or that the one is a cause of the other: he presents not a thesis to argue, but a milieu to recognize; we see it, recognize it, and take it in as a whole.

This taking in at a glance depends, as Auerbach notes, on “memory-pictures of similar people which [the reader] may have seen”: if I have never seen John Doe before I will not recognize him when his face suddenly appears. If I have the opportunity to look at him a little while, I may note a certain kind of nose, details of grooming, hair color and texture, etc., and conclude that he is a certain kind of person, but I will not “recognize” him if I don’t know him. In this instance knowing at a glance would not be available to me, but another approach, an approach involving sustained reasoning, demonstration, the kind of thinking involved in a “proof”—such an approach might lead me somewhere. Such

prolonged consideration would hardly have time to come into play during a glance, but it might during a stare. But rather than start down this path, which will lead in a different direction, let me take the line of thinking we have been considering—that some operations of the soul are spontaneous—a little farther back in time.

The careful reader will have noted a new word in the last sentence. In the quotations I cited, Kant refers to mental aptitudes and to things going on the author's head. Kant speaks of the operations he discusses as taking place in the mind because he saw human experience as split between two worlds. The phenomenal world is the physical world, the world of space and time. Everything here is completely explained by the laws of physics. Our bodies are in this world. This world is nature, and it is available to us through the understanding. The other world—the noumenal world—is a thing apart. This is a suprasensory world in which the reason operates; it is in this world that moral judgment and the will exist. This is the world we can know only with the mind, which, as he notes, is in the head.

But in the last sentence of the paragraph before last I used the word soul instead of mind. I did so in preparation for following the line of thinking we are considering farther back in time. Where we are headed—the thinking of Plato and Aristotle—there is no sharp cleavage between two worlds. There is an ordered cosmos, and there are many independent things in that cosmos, and some of those things have souls. Whether the soul is a thing that survives the death of the body it inhabits is, in this world, an open question. Plato's Socrates likes to speculate about this from time to time, but he freely admits that in doing so he is indulging himself, not demonstrating, and that he does so for pleasure and comfort (as in the *Phaedo*, the conversation that takes place on the afternoon before his execution). Aristotle is not prone to mythological speculation.

But whatever its ultimate fate, the soul, in the world we are now considering, is intimately connected with the body and the cosmos it inhabits. One kind of thinking available to this soul is perception, and the soul perceives by using its bodily organs of sense. This soul has motions that may take the form of movements, either of small particles within the body or of large things outside us through use of the limbs. Choice and moral judgment operate not in spite of nature, but through nature, in cooperation with it. This is so because nature, choice, moral judgment, and everything else are parts of an ordered cosmos. Men tend to know and seek the good, and avoid the bad in the same way that light things tend to rise and heavy ones fall, and for the same reason: because the cosmos is ordered.

Not only is the cosmos ordered, but it is ordered in a way that men can know, at least up to a point. Reasonable speech, offered in good faith, can be answered in good faith so that two earnest speakers working together can come to know what neither of them could have come upon on his own. This is one example of dialectic, and its application leads upward from commonplace observations everyone agrees on to ideas about these observations, from there to groupings and classifications, and on to an awareness of causes. Specific causes have more general causes, and the discovery of proximal sources leads to those that are more remote, more fundamental, more unifying. All this is available to those who use reason in good faith.

“In good faith” means with the intention of discovering the truth. This world is no Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, no Pollyannaish rich boys' club where only the privileged few are taken into account, where everyone is just, noble, and good because he (and only *hes* need apply) can afford it. The texts that give us this world are full of instances of what appears to be reasonable speech used for base ends: flatterers, tyrants, sophists, eristics, and practitioners of all the vices are present in these texts. The highest and best that these texts point to

can hardly be called “Greek thought,” or “the Greek way.” These best possibilities were defined—let alone practiced—by only a handful of thinkers, some of whom were at odds with the culture they lived in (Socrates was executed; Aristotle died in exile).

But the possibility of knowing and playing a healthy part in an ordered cosmos lives in these texts, and this broad vision—this vision of wholeness—underlies the earliest appearance of the spontaneous operations of the soul we have been considering. According to translator Joe Sachs, Aristotle’s *On the Soul* uses twenty-four different words to mean thinking. The broadest of these, *noein*, can be thought of as meaning “to think” in a general sense: the activity of the soul that includes everything from sense perception to the highest kind of reason. But one word in the cluster, *theorein*, refers to just the kind of taking-in-all-as-a-whole we have been considering: the view of Madame Vauquer’s pension, and the glimpse of Einstein’s studio. This verb is translated by Sachs as to “contemplate.”

Contemplation gets a lot of attention from Aristotle. He begins with simple examples such as recognizing a figure, say a triangle, at first glance: we do not have to count the angles to know it as a triangle; we see it all at once. In a similar way we recognize a face we know, as in the example I used earlier. On this level, contemplation is almost like simple perception, only a bit more complex since it involves recognizing a pattern and not just a single sensation.

But elsewhere Aristotle’s examples of contemplation are of things more complex; in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he speaks of the exercise of this ability not in the realm of perception, but in moral judgment: he speaks of recognizing instantly, without calculation, the right thing to do in a particular situation. Contemplation is available for all our actions, from the lowest to the highest. Sachs has given the best exposition I know of this feature of Aristotle’s thinking; here is a part of it:

Like our highest knowing, our perceiving takes in something organized and intelligible all at once and whole. That is why we can contemplate a scene or sight before us as well as something purely thinkable. In neither case is the thing grasped our product, and that is why Aristotle calls both perception and contemplative thinking passive (*pathêtikos*), but this receptiveness to being acted upon should not be confused with inertness. It is rather an effortful holding of oneself in readiness. Attentive seeing or concentration in thinking requires work to keep oneself from distraction; it is a potent passivity (*dunamis*) that becomes activity in the presence of those things that feed it. Nutrition is the active transformation of things in the world into the living body; contemplation is the effortful openness of the soul to a merging into the intelligible foundation of the world. Reading and listening are always hard work, and hardest of all when one lets the meaning of the speaker or author develop within oneself. Contemplation, as Aristotle intends it, is the same sort of act without the building up of interpretation; it is rather what he calls affirming something not by thinking any proposition about it but by touching it...Aristotle believes that the activity of knowing is always at work in us and available to us...potentially guiding everything we do in the same way the blind grub worm is led to its food and a plant is turned to the light. (Sachs, *On the Soul*, 37)

In order to understand what this contemplation is, it is necessary to distinguish between what we do in contemplation and what we do in deliberation, which is also thinking, but thinking of a different kind. Deliberation involves paying attention and thinking things through. We apply it when we

are faced with things that could be one way or another. As a photographer in the street I notice a small detail—the chipped polish on a fingernail, say—and I start to wonder about what this detail tells me. Does it mean the person is careless of her appearance, therefore unselfconscious and possibly willing to agree to be photographed by a stranger on a public street? Or was the chipping an unfortunate accident, and is the stranger sufficiently concerned about this small mishap to be worried about how she looks, and therefore reluctant to agree have her picture taken here and now? Things could stand either one way or the other, and deliberation comes into play to weigh the alternatives.

When we deliberate we are in the realm of practical judgment. We are using our ability to think to figure out what is best for us to do. Such thinking is an important part of living in society, but it is not contemplation. Contemplation does not, like deliberation, lead us to consider things that can be one way or another; rather, it leads us to the awareness of what cannot be otherwise—what Sachs, after Aristotle, calls “the intelligible foundation of the world.” And, as he carefully says, in contemplation we are led not just to see this “intelligible foundation,” but to merge into it, to participate in and become a part of it.

What can this mean for a skeptical, secular, subjective, egoistic modern? One of the attractions of Aristotle’s thinking is that it offers a way to think about the self in the world that is neither subjective nor egoistic. What he proposes is that the cosmos is ordered, and that things happen, for the most part, for reasons. He calls those reasons causes, and he consistently finds that causes usually have other causes; those that are farther in the background are more general causes, which he refers to as sources. Following this line of thought does not involve rejecting modern science, but rather taking what modern technological science tells us and thinking about it in the context of what we know. To do so involves remaining skeptical that scientific explana-

tion—especially when it can be expressed only in mathematical formulations incapable of being rendered in speech that is not either non-sensical or hopelessly equivocal—is the whole story, the version that eliminates any possibility it cannot presently account for. In support of this sensible attitude, I might cite the wisdom of a thinker who began as a physical scientist, Immanuel Kant:

The understanding which is occupied merely with empirical exercise, and does not reflect on the sources of its own cognition, may exercise its functions very well and very successfully, but it is quite unable to do one thing, and that of very great importance, to determine, mainly, the bounds that limit its employment, and to know the laws that lie within or without its own sphere. (*Critique of Pure Reason*, “Of the Ground of the Division of all Objects into Phenomena and Noumena”)

If we follow Aristotle in accepting the principle of an ordered universe as a model for our thinking—and in this it claims no more of our absolute, final, and unquestioning belief than any proposal of modern science should—then we can think about thinking in ways that are denied us if we accept the world as mostly dark, silent space where particles collide at random, a realm where some accident of chemical connection has made it possible for “us” to “think” about those random collisions. To follow Aristotle’s lead we do not have to believe in anything, except in the possibility that thinking can actually lead us to things not completely determined by what we are and what we already happen to know. As Aristotle himself says in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, after observing that “the intellect is something divine as compared with a human being”:

But one should not follow those who advise us to think human thoughts, since we are human, and mortal thoughts, since we are mortal, but as far as

possible one ought to be immortal and to do all things with a view toward living in accord with the most powerful thing in oneself, for even if it is small in bulk, it rises much more above everything else in power and worth. (10.7)

Taking what Aristotle says seriously requires accepting the possibility of an ordered universe, and the possibility that the intellect can perceive something of this order.

As we go through our daily lives we do notice that, for the most part, things do seem to be connected in a causal way. If we follow Aristotle's thinking we start with commonplace observations that many things seem to make a kind of sense; if we subject these observations to reason, clarify them and try to find some order in them, we are doing what Aristotle did. Reading his thinking can help clarify our own, and disclose possibilities we find attractive but might not—as “educated” post-Enlightenment moderns—have known about without his help.

If we can entertain his notion that our world—the world we can discover and know—has some kind of order, then we can approach that order in contemplation. Think of that order as what we call in everyday speech “the big picture.” Someone who can't get past petty details doesn't get the big picture: that person can't see the forest for the trees. If we notice that chipped fingernail (to return to the example I used earlier), we are paying attention to details involved in what Aristotle calls an ultimate particular. If we use that bit of the world as a guide to whether we should act or not—in this example, ask permission to take a picture—we are in the realm of practical judgment. We are deliberating. But if we happen to be in such a state—a state of open receptivity, of “potent passivity,” as Sachs calls it—that when we see the chipped nail we also see something about the single human life whose whole history up until that moment includes that nail and the events that led first to its painting and later to its chipping, then we are moving beyond deliberation. If we see

not only the nail and the history that led to it, but also something fundamental about what human life on earth actually is, in its briefness, in its vulnerability to shocks and surprises, mishaps great and small, in its reliance on vanity and attempts to please, and on things taken up only to be discarded in distraction a few moments later—if we see at the same time we see the chipped nail a whole concatenated bundle of small ambitions and great disappointments, then we are on the point of merging into the intellectual foundation of the world. We are in a state where ultimate particulars and universals both are present and connected, in a state where we can be aware of a thing itself and of its place in a larger order at the same time. In contemplation we see neither without the other.

“An example is in fact a source of something universal” is how Aristotle puts it (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 6.3). In contemplation we see what we can know of the world's order unfolding before us—not from us: it is not our product, though we are included in it, but before us. We see what is there to be seen. How do we know for sure that what we see is before us, rather than merely from us, the fevered product of an active imagination? We don't. It may be only that. But it also may not be only that, and years of disciplined attempts to make it be not only that may help bring about the richer possibility, a world disclosed to us rather than a world imagined by us. The whole of the *Nicomachean Ethics* makes clear that contemplation is the highest, most difficult use of our ability to think, and that it is not available to everyone. Only those who are able to hold themselves so that they are not distracted by passions, needs, local interests—all the possible missteps Aristotle calls vices—can achieve the state of undistracted calm from which it is possible to see what is there rather than the opportunities for profit, reminders of desire, occasions to use a favorite skill, and so forth—the buzzing static of everyday life familiar to every normal citizen of the everyday world. In contemplation, we use the will to suppress

distraction rather than to initiate aggressive action. This explains why photographers who are extraordinarily talented, clever, and skillful can produce work that, though it may hold our attention for a time, never achieves greatness or profundity. *Look at how clever I am, look what I can do*, the pictures say. If a photographer has a marketing campaign in the back of the thinking part of his soul as he works, the needs and possibilities of that campaign will find their ways into the picture, and a careful, thoughtful viewer's attempt to penetrate that picture will be blocked somewhere in the realm of deliberation—where strategies are hatched—before it can arrive at contemplation. What the photographer needed to see, and not what was there, is what the picture will be about, what that picture will show.

This distinction may be difficult for some readers to accept, but it is real. Recall that effort is necessary, that will must be exerted to acquire and maintain the “potent passivity” we are discussing; steady practice of this discipline over a long time makes attaining the sought goal increasingly possible. It is a prospect worth pursuing. Imagine a diligent photographer who looks at the same or similar subjects for thirty or forty years. The showing off and cleverness, the willful self-full-ness get used up, sown like so many wild oats during the first few years. Eventually he or she might settle down, so to speak—in Aristotle's model, come to terms with and tame the disorganized, distracted state of uncontrolled passions normal to childhood—and begin to see what's really there. A genius (in the modern sense of being extraordinarily quick-witted, not in Kant's more neutral descriptive sense) might come to the same point in two or three tries, and then go off in some other direction.

I have strayed so far from the example I began with—standing on the threshold of Feinsein's studio—that I have taken this discussion back to the time of Alexander the Great, and almost brought it full circle. Read what Sachs has written about Aristotle not from the point of view of a student of

ancient thought, but from the point of view of a photographer:

We can contemplate a scene or sight before us as well as something purely thinkable...in neither case is the thing grasped our product...receptiveness to being acted on...a potent passivity that becomes activity in the presence of things that feed it...the effortful openness of the soul to a merging into the intelligible foundation of the world... when one lets the meaning [of another] develop within oneself...affirming something not by thinking any proposition about it but by touching it. (*On the Soul*, Sachs, 37)

These could be tenets of an aesthetic of photography that would come into play on the doorstep of Feinsein's studio, at the window of Madame Vauquer's *pension*, on a violent Vietnamese street, any place or time since the invention of the camera. This suggested aesthetic, if scrupulously followed, would produce pictures not based on the principles of good design, nor in accordance with the wishes of an audience or market. These pictures would not speak first and most loudly about what the photographer knows, would not be deliberately expressive of anything urgent about that photographer's own self or needs, nor would they present a poetic construction intended to distract a viewer's attention from the everyday world he walks and breathes in. The pictures stemming from such an aesthetic would be quiet and true, diligently observant of the things in front of them, and alert to orders of order ranging far beyond ideas about s-curves and The Rule of Thirds.

What might a work of photographic art called into being according to the principles gleaned from Aristotle be like? It might be something like a work of another kind of art discussed by Auerbach a little later in the same essay I referred to earlier. This work is also a work of fiction, and

Auerbach's commentary concerns the author's manner of telling the reader about his characters' world:

We hear the writer speak; but he expresses no opinion and makes no comment. His role is limited to selecting the events and translating them into language; and this is done in the conviction that every event, if one is able to express it purely and completely, interprets itself and the persons involved in it far better and more completely than any opinion or judgment appended to it could do.

This description picks up the new note introduced by Aristotle into what we are considering. In referring to Balzac, Auerbach noted that that author depended on his reader's "mimetic imagination," on "his [the reader's] memory-pictures of similar persons and similar milieux he may have seen." To the extent that this is true, Balzac expects his reader to match the description he reads with what he already knows. Aristotle goes further. The thing grasped is not our product; it is achieved through "an effortful holding of oneself in readiness," the "effortful openness of the soul to the structure of the intelligible world." This is not matching selections from our memory-banks with the stimuli that present themselves. Relying on memory-banks is mediation; full openness to *what is* is *im*-mediate.

Balzac appeals to what the reader already thinks and even tells the reader what he, Balzac, thinks about the world he describes. But the later 19th century French writer Auerbach turns to promises to go farther in the direction Sachs indicates:

There occur in his letters...many highly informative statements on the subject of his aim in art. They lead to a theory—mystical in the last analysis, but in practice, like all true mysticism, based upon reason, experience, and discipline—of a self-forgetful absorption in the subjects of reality

which transforms them (*par une chimie merveilleuse*) and permits them to develop to mature expression. In this fashion subjects completely fill the writer; he forgets himself; his heart no longer serves him save to feel the hearts of others, and when, by fanatical patience, this condition is achieved, the perfect expression, which at once entirely comprehends the momentary subject and impartially judges it, comes of itself; subjects are seen as God sees them, in their true essence. (*On the Soul*, 37)

The writer referred to is, of course, Gustave Flaubert, and the letters mentioned were written while he was at work on *Madame Bovary*. His practice, and the theory of it deduced from his letters by Auerbach, take us to the threshold of an exciting prospect—the prospect of coming to know something that is truly foreign to us. In ordinary life this is a prospect that presents increasing difficulties for most of us, especially after the first dozen or twenty years of life. This prospect is also the central challenge of photography as a mature art.

\* \* \* \* \*

Photography is not primarily a studio art. The discussion so far has been directed towards photographs that come into being when a photographer looks at something new to him, something strange, something beyond the range of his familiar daily experience. Some photographers have made discoveries while rearranging the stuff on their desks or kitchen counters, of course, and such a familiar happening as the play of sunlight on a window curtain can appear miraculous to a certain kind of person in a receptive mood. But for many photographers encountering something new involves travel, or at least walking out of the house. The specific pictures I have mentioned so far were taken in a battle zone

in southeast Asia and in the Philippines; the hypothetical ones I have speculated about would have been made in the entryway of a strangers studio and in the corner (or at the window) of a French *pension*. Travel or walking around is easiest for the young and unattached. They have more physical stamina, and more time. So it is hardly surprising that photographers often do more work when young than later on.

Walker Evans continued to work with a camera until very near the end of his life, when a fall broke his collarbone, making it difficult for him to hold even the small camera he was using at the time. Even before this fall, his work, though daily or nearly so, can hardly be compared in volume and intensity to the work he did in 1935 and 1936, when he exposed hundreds of 8x10 negatives and dozens of rolls of 35mm (and other sizes) film on a series of auto trips that took him through parts of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama. As an older man his work was less strenuous, conducted at a more leisurely pace, and less adventurous than the work he had done in his mid-30s.

He took a job with *Fortune* magazine, and after retiring from that, a job teaching at Yale University. As his work became known to a new generation interested in the kind of photography he did, he was asked to speak to school and museum audiences from time to time. He gave a few prepared talks, but mostly he preferred taking questions from the audience. If a session went well, he might appraise its success by saying, "They got a good talk out of me."

As he aged, Evans grew more reflective, and he talked about his own work and photography in general. Some of his reflections were recorded on audio tapes by the institutions that asked him to speak. Anyone who considers these talks as a body might well come to the conclusion that Evans was shaping an image of himself, presenting the story of his development and work as he wanted it to be understood.

Some things he mentions again and again: he liked to talk about going to Paris as a young man, about seeing James Joyce once in Sylvia Beach's bookstore but being afraid to approach him. He liked to talk about spending time with Hemingway in Cuba, and he frequently talked about other writers he had read but not known: D.H. Lawrence and Henry James, for example. He once began a question-and-answer session at a summer art program for college students by reading a long sentence from James's *The American Scene*. That was his idea of getting the ball rolling with a roomful of art students in 1972. A recently-published portfolio of his photographs, most taken during the 1930s, was displayed on the wall behind him, and the students' questions were about those pictures and not the passage Evans read.

Evans's literary interests were more than a snobbish pretension (though they were that as well). One observation that comes up more than once in these late taped conversations (Evans died in 1975) was his debt to two French writers, one of them Gustave Flaubert. I don't think Evans ever cited a specific passage in Flaubert, and I'm sure he never read much (if any) critical writing on Flaubert. He had a low opinion of criticism in general: he considered critical writing to be a good deal below what is now called "creative" writing. For Evans, writing fiction was art, and writing criticism was not. He looked down on the English Department at Yale for being concerned mostly with criticism instead of artistic production.

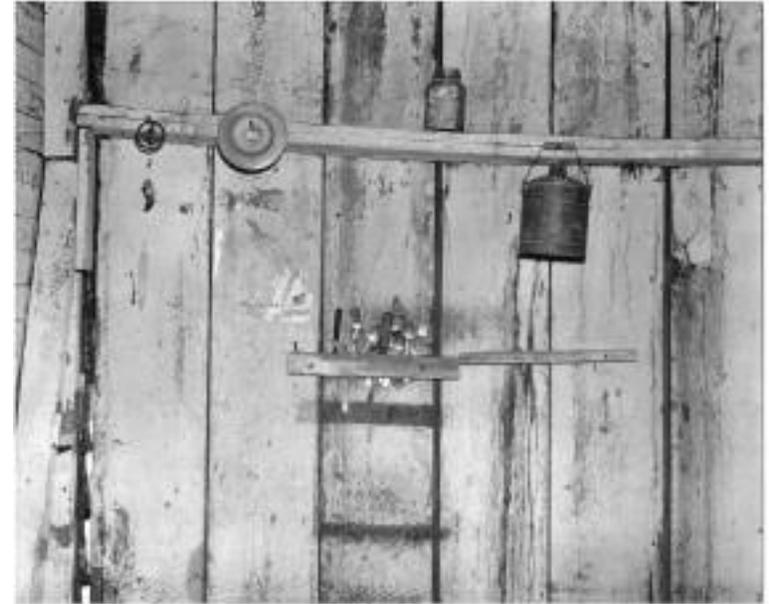
But somehow, despite his disdain for critical analysis, Evans managed to intuit that there was something in the work of Flaubert—a writer of fiction—that he could learn from and use in his work as a photographer. He was able to intuit this, and to acquire what he needed not by making propositions about it—not by analyzing what Flaubert had done, and then constructing from that analysis a program to direct his own approach to picture-taking. Rather, he absorbed it directly, as if by osmosis, relying I think on some-

thing like the procedure described by Immanuel Kant in the passage quoted earlier. You might even say that Evans, in looking at Flaubert as an artist, saw something whole and formed—saw at a glance, if you like—something he recognized and understood, not by analysis and calculation, but recognized in the way we recognize a triangle without counting the angles, or the face of our friend John without making an inventory of his features.

If the connection between Flaubert and Evans is a real one, and I believe it is, then it may be worthwhile to try and work out just how something of Flaubert can be seen in a picture made by Evans. We might ask what it was that Evans absorbed, if not from page 213 of *Madame Bovary* then at least from the spirit in which Flaubert worked—a spirit which, as we saw from the brief passage of commentary by Auerbach and that passage's parallels with Sachs's distillation of a current in Aristotle's thinking, has special ambitions and connections with other approaches to the world and earlier bodies of thinking.

Let me take as a starting point the print that sits propped up on the desk where I write. It is of a well-known Evans picture, the flashlit view he made of kitchen utensils on the wall of a frame house in Hale County, Alabama, in the summer of 1936. The picture presents a small rectangle, mostly light gray in tone. Some of the tiny spaces between the vertical boards that form the room's wall have been plugged, and are quite dark gray, almost black. Others are cracks that let in the daylight, and are white. Shadows of things on the wall are dark, and some reflections of the flash (from a bulb, probably) are as bright as the daylight showing through the cracks. For the most part, then, the field we see in this picture is gray, but the variations make a pattern—a pattern that is sufficiently arresting, in a graphic sense, to be noticeable at first glance. The material shown is unfamiliar to most of us (or at least it was, until this picture became so famous), but

the pattern of its display might cause anyone interested in looking to pause, ask, *What's that?* and take a closer look.



Kitchen Wall, Alabama Farmstead, 1936

Even after this preliminary, superficial examination comments suggest themselves. This odd pattern—odd because it is unexpected, yet graphically sure, odd because we recognize the pattern before we identify the real-world stuff that forms the pattern—attracts us, and causes us to linger. Our attention has been attracted to the look of the picture.

The look of the picture may be understood as its distinctive overall form, that look that makes it different from other pictures in the way that my face makes me different from other faces. Just as we linger at the sight of certain faces more than at the sight of others, so too we are more apt to linger at the sight of certain pictures. This feature is important to

Kant, who attempted to establish that some arrangements are “naturally” appealing to “all men in all countries.” I am not the one to judge how far he succeeded in this effort, but his concern with significant form underscores its hold on our attention.

When we are at the stage of being attracted by the look of the picture, we are in the position we were in on the threshold of Feinsein’s studio. We are taking in the picture as a whole, at a glance, and we may be open to an experience of contemplation—the experience, the reader will remember, of letting the truth of what is seen unfold within us, directly, as something not our product. Faced with this picture, what would that mean?

It might mean, for a start, exerting effort to avoid distraction, freeing our attention of irrelevant demands from some personal agenda of wants of our own. An obvious example might be to avoid thinking about the provenance of this particular print. How old is it? Who printed it? From what collector or dealer did it come? What cryptic and possibly value-enhancing notations in pencil are on the back? How much will it bring at auction?

Each of these concerns is legitimate, in its appropriate context, but none of them has anything at all to do with looking at the picture contemplatively, that is, in such a way as to let *what is seen* unfold within us.

In a sense, what I am describing is trying to calm down the static so that we can approach something like the ideal “purity” that was the justification of the spontaneous first glance recommended by Feinsein at the first session of his work shop. It is important to understand, however, that we are not after a state of child-like innocence, some kind of willful ignorance. We live in the world, and if we take this picture seriously we will soon enough have to work very hard at bringing as much of that world’s experience as we can to bear on it, but only after the picture begins to tell us what we need to bring. Before that can commence, we need to shed

and focus, exert the effort it takes to avoid distraction and attain quiet.

As the pattern continues to exert its hold on our attention, we may begin to survey the terrain that, at first glance, seemed so inviting. What things do these modulated grays disclose to our attention? The photographer’s wish to show small details is evident, but not obsessive: the flat light of the head-on flash illumination has minimized surface detail which would leap to the eye if seen in hard cross-light.

The manner of rendering this humble scene hardly calls attention to itself at all, at first glance. We have noted a certain uneasy tension among the various things visible—the “elements” of the “composition.” The two horizontal strips of lath nailed across the vertical planks seem to the viewing eye to float, in spite of the clearly-visible heads of the nails securing them, and their echo in the darker, fuzzy marks in the picture’s center comes into play in this connection: they seem almost to recede in space, denying the obvious flat wall that ends the picture’s depth. The tilt of the cross member near the picture’s top—so flimsy a timber can scarcely be called a beam—adds to the sense of disorder, and the objects it supports cooperate in this impression as well. The glass jar is cockeyed (with reference to the board edge next to it, but who would expect a plank in this structure to keep to a *true* vertical?); the metal can looks off-kilter too—unless it is hanging true and the planks are off. The mysterious bit of crud suspended on a tiny line from the leftmost nail confirms the true vertical. A plate with a centered hole, odd patches of adhering paper—one a ripped commercially-printed notice retaining only the word fragment “AM”, in bold capitals, and “It’s [undecipherable] ized” in small, faint, linked script—and a single nail near the can complete the decorations on the “ground” of this “figure-ground composition.”

Viewers familiar with other pictures by this photographer will recognize this tense, slightly-unnering kind of arrangement of forgettable or cast-off objects. Both the objects shown, and their manner of framing and organization, as well

as the seemingly unemphatic use of light and tone are characteristic of his work. These “stylistic elements” offer interests of their own, which can be expanded upon by those who believe the chief interest of pictures to lie in their relation to the history of style. Or perhaps such a line of analysis is another distraction leading away from what this picture has to show its viewers. Indeed, the tensely-organized visual field sets off a central focus, a “subject,” which lies at almost the exact center of the picture, where its diagonals cross. Its subject is the family silver chest.

The objects forming the “ground” are so nondescript, so arrestingly organized (or disorganized), that it is easy to see them only—that is to say, to note their visual weights and positions without thinking too much about what they might be, or be used for. What viewer has an experiential reference for a topless Mason jar, or a plate with a hole in the center? We look at the tonalities, the textures, the odd spacing, and our experience is visual, “aesthetic.” Perhaps the can with its quaint wooden handle and the plate, certainly the textual fragment AM (a fragment freighted with ambiguous possible meanings), register as knowable, if disparate, objects. Any “kick” this recognition adds to our experience of the picture might be related to Surrealism (the picture was made in 1936), and also “aesthetic.” It would have to do with beauty.

But at the picture’s center the rules change. The objects shown so clearly there, and highlighted by the reflection of the flash from their shiny surfaces, present a great load of specific information, and of recognizable illusion. These are utensils we know well; we feel them in our hands. We recognize the shell-like edges of one fork’s handle and note the different pattern of the next handle over, and the lack of ornament at all on the handle of a nearby spoon. In between is a knife with a wooden handle (like the handle of the leftmost utensil), a handle whose halves are held together by wire.

No narrator or even caption is needed with material as familiar, as everyday as this. Any viewer likely to see this picture would recognize—and understand—the distinctions in play among patterned, plain, wooden, broken, tarnished, matched, and odd—as quickly as he or she might almost feel the utensil in right or left hand, familiar from lifelong practice. These small images, so recognizable and familiar, send out “kindred mutations” to the minds of any viewers who bother even to identify what the picture shows. A lingering look—the arresting organization of the picture encourages it—raises the question of how this familiar material in the center—the “figure”—relates to the strange unsettling “ground” surrounding it. At this point, the picture begins to weigh in with its full largeness of meaning, the full force of its allusive reference.

Once the silver-chest is seen to exist in such strange form, and understood to reside in so hostile and unsettled an environment, the imagination of an engaged viewer begins to work. He enlists his memory-bank, allowing what he knows to appear according to directions coming from the unfolding representation in the picture. That imaginative work might begin perhaps with the hands that hold, and wash, and polish, and put away those prized salvaged utensils—might those hands resemble the ruined members Hesiod dreamed of preserving as new in the Golden Age? Then there might be the odd attenuated daily chores that utilize the strange objects on the wall, now understood as utensils also, saved and arranged also. What sort of use might that suspended bit of crud have? How could anyone value such a thing so much as to hang it on the wall? Who could have such a need?

Lear has an answer: “Oh, reason not the need. Our basest beggars/Are in the poorest thing superfluous.” This answer is only a short space from the extreme of sympathetic identification, an extreme whose full limit finds voice in this howl:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe’er you are,  
That bide the pelting of this hideous storm,

How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,  
 Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you  
 From seasons such as these? O! I have ta'en  
 Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;  
 Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
 That thou may'st shake the super flux to them,  
 And show the heavens more just.

This speech of Lear is offered as part of the front matter of the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, in which this picture first appeared.

We have now gone outside the picture. To have done so at the beginning of our look at the picture—to have started our look with a consideration of the book in which the picture was published and its front matter might have been a distraction. But at this point, well into an experience of the picture, we want to know more: a question has been raised—who could have such a need?—and anything we recall or can learn about the picture's first use and the circumstances of its making can properly be called in to help answer that question. Our unfolding awareness of the picture—and of the things in the picture—directs our thinking. In order to be in us, the things in the picture tell us what they need. Our memories and imaginations respond to the call and give the picture what it needs to develop within us. When puzzles or conflicts arise, they must be settled by thinking, and the thinking appropriate to contemplation—*theorein*—is supplemented by another of Aristotle's twenty-four kinds of thinking—*dianoein*. This is the thinking that thinks things through, as in propositions and demonstrations. This thinking allows the viewer to sort out what he senses in that first look, when he or she takes things all at once, as a whole. But this problem-solving thinking, the thinking that looks at details, identifies them, and connects them to other things we recall from past experience—*dianoein*—operates in the service and at the direction of *theorein*. A vision of the whole

comes first, and as it develops it looms over and directs the step-by-step thinking it requires in order to unfold completely.

Evans made the pictures and determined their arrangement in the book, and their placement apart from the text. James Agee was responsible for all the text. His huge sensibility may have worked its massy gravity on his collaborator. Agee's text suggests moral urgency, as if he desperately needs to help the hardness and deprivation he observes, or at least immolate himself to make up for it. For his part Evans is moved so far as to wonder at what he sees—his "*momentary subject*," to use Auerbach's phrase, and the qualification is appropriate: Evans was not a humanitarian aid worker, but an artist. He was in Alabama for three weeks, with the tenant farmers for less time than that, and he stood in front of no individual subject, including the human ones, for more than a few minutes. But during that brief time he had available to him the special attitude toward his "subject-matter" that had been developing within him, and he paid close attention to details. Close attention indeed: he, like Flaubert, gave his momentary subject "self-forgetful absorption" so that the subject "completely filled" him to the extent that "his heart serves him only to feel the hearts of others"—others meaning milieux as well as individual people. It is this "fanatical" (Auerbach's word used in connection with Flaubert; Evans reported to Lincoln Kirstein that he was so stimulated by the possibilities of photography that he sometimes thought himself "completely crazy") concentration that allows him to come up with an approach, discover the approach that allows his chosen momentary subjects to speak for themselves in "mature expression."

He has framed (and lighted) this picture in a characteristic way, but this characteristic way does not overwhelm the subject-things with his "artistry." He has made a picture in which the things shown can begin to work on the viewer, a picture in which the world of the picture, the milieu it shows,

can emerge as more noticeable, more important, and more worthy of attention than the artistic milieu that set the stage for its production.

This is what Evans found in Flaubert. According to Auerbach, Flaubert completely dispenses with the “separation of styles”—the notion, prevalent in Western literature prior to the nineteenth century that only elevated figures (kings, princes, and heroes, for example) were worthy of the serious attention of tragedy. Humbler sorts appeared in comedy and in satire, but were not taken as seriously as the figures in a tragedy are. They did not come in for the serious treatment, the close attention reserved for figures of high standing. Here is Auerbach in an earlier essay (on Petronius):

Everything commonly realistic, everything pertaining to everyday life, must not be treated on any level except the comic, which permits no problematic probing. As a result the boundaries of realism are narrow. And if we take that word realism a little more strictly, we are forced to conclude that there could be no serious literary treatment of everyday occupations and social classes...in short of the people and its life. Linked with this is the fact that the realists of antiquity do not make clear the social forces underlying the facts and conditions which they present. This could only be done in the realm of the serio-problematic. (Auerbach, 270)

In Flaubert, however, he finds that

There are no high and low subjects; the universe is a work of art produced without any taking of sides, the realistic artist must imitate the procedures of Creation, and every subject in its essence contains, before God's eyes, both the serious and the comic, both dignity and vulgarity....There is no need for a general theory of levels, in which

subjects are arranged according to their dignity, or for any analyses by the writer commenting upon the subject, after its presentation, with a view to better comprehension and more accurate classification; *all this must result from the presentation of the subject itself.* (Auerbach, 429-430) [italics added]

The artist works for “a self-forgetful absorption in the subjects of reality which transforms them (*par une chimie merveilleuse*) and permits them to develop to mature expression.”

Flaubert wrote as a part of nature. In accordance with the procedure outlined by Kant, Auerbach interpreted the rule of nature given through Flaubert. Evans neither analyzed Flaubert's nature nor read the rules formulated by Auerbach or anyone else. But he liked the look of the *chimie merveilleuse*, the “self-forgetful absorption in the subjects of reality which transforms them and permits them to develop to mature expression”; through some trick of temperament, talent, instinct, and sleight-of-hand he came up with his own version of it. Flaubert found tragedy in the life of a provincial wife, and Evans found matter for high seriousness in a poor tenant-farmer's makeshift kitchen. As the photographer Lee Friedlander put it: after Walker we could take a picture of anything.

It is hard to think of Evans' pictures as glances. Many of the best-known ones resemble nothing so much as direct stares. This is so because the attention they give has a relentless quality: they are so clear, so unagitated—that is, not dominated by a sense of urgency, a sense that something must be done about state of affairs the camera shows. They avoid extreme contrasts of black and white, presenting for the most part a lucid field of modulated grays. They are composed not only in the sense of being unruffled emotionally, but also in the sense that they present their subjects in a way that might be called appropriately elegant. This dignified presentation of

humble objects represents the artist's rejection of the "separation of styles." Like Van Gogh, Evans made a worn pair of boots the subject of a picture.

In their stillness, his pictures are also like stares. Many of Evans's pictures from the mid-1930s were made with a view camera, a large apparatus that must be used atop a tripod. The view to be taken is framed in the camera's ground glass screen, which can be seen only when a black cloth covers both the photographer's head and the viewing screen of the camera. The film must be inserted and the lens closed from its viewing mode and reset before the film can be exposed and the picture made. All this takes time, several seconds at least, maybe a minute or two, and during this time the subject must not change in any important way if the photographer is to get on film the picture he saw on the viewing screen. And his exposure times were not instantaneous. Exposure times of one-half second and one full second, even in sunlight, were recorded on the negatives storage envelopes. The pictures look still because the subjects are still.

The subjects may have been chosen in part for their stillness, but the photographer's concentration gives them an extra measure of stillness. His attention to detail results in an organization that includes even tiny features of the scene, recording them with great fidelity while at the same time preserving a masterly control of the whole picture, the overall look of the scene that attracted his attention in the first place. Utility poles and their shadows, the raking light on clapboards, the small figure of an onlooker with his head cocked a certain way, even the clouds in the sky seems to settle into their proper places like so many elements of an ordered cosmos. The pictures seem still because they look inevitable.

Also, many of Evans's best-known pictures were made from a distance—from across the street or down the block. He frequently used a lens of long focal length—a "telephoto," which yields a picture with flattened perspective. This tool allows the photographer to stand far off and yet

keep the objects he looks at large within his picture's frame. The world is examined closely, yet held at arm's length.

The unruffled stillness of these photographs and what we know about the procedure of their making suggest that photography's glance can be extended in time so that it becomes a stare. On the threshold of Feinsein's studio we were invited to take in what we saw in the blink of an eye, before the corrupting influence of second thoughts could come into play. Under Evans's dark cloth, time slows down; there is time for the appearance of second and even third-thoughts. But under the discipline taught by Flaubert these do not appear as corruptions or distractions: instead of listening to distraction, the soul of the photographer exerts a willful effort to *avoid* distraction so that the things in front of the camera's lens can fill it completely, obliterating (for the moment) *I want, I need, I hate, and even I know*.

This extension of time from the glance to the stare prepares the way for a further extension. The time of the photographer's stare at the subject, however long it lasts, will still be brief. Life in the phenomenal world of space, time, and traffic demands it. The "momentary" subject will pass from view, and the photographer's contemplative experience of it will end. But the photograph lasts, and the picture can, at any future time, become the subject of some viewer's own, later, separate contemplation. Flaubert's discipline—and all the possibilities available in contemplation—apply to picture-viewers as well as picture-takers.

Let me end this essay by stating the obvious: what a photographer does when photographing, and what a viewer does when he looking at a picture are similar, but are not the same thing. Both photographer and viewer can look in contemplation at what they see—I write "can look" because contemplation is not available to all people, nor at all times. But the attention each of the two, photographer and viewer, gives is of a different order.

The viewer has a long time to look, a whole lifetime if the picture's hold on him is strong. The viewer has the possibility

of endless revisiting, re-thinking, exploring various leads, various directions of thought that may arise, from time to time, during moments of contemplation that are each different, possibly increasingly comprehensive as the experience of the picture (and the viewer herself) mature during the viewer's prolonged intermittent stare.

The picture that occasions this viewing experience has to be made during a relatively short time. How does a photographer "capture" profound order in a brief instant, at a glance? How, at a glance, does a photographer take in the ordered "look" of a meaningful scene and sense its connection to the ordered "intelligible foundation of the world?" The only honest answer is, I don't know how.

Discipline and experience help prepare the ground: a prepared, receptive photographer who is also knowledgeable about his art and experienced in its practice is receptive in a way that is different, more potent, from the passive receptivity of a neophyte. Not everyone standing at the threshold of Feinsein's studio would see something worthy of much attention or thought. An experienced architectural photographer might hit at once on the right place to put the camera in order to make a picture suitable for the pages of *Architectural Digest*. But another photographer—or that same photographer, if he managed to shed his professional ambition, even for the moment needed to contemplate this "momentary" subject—might find a view that would see in the ultimate particulars on view there some universals truly worth thinking about. How that happens, how genius operates in that brief instant of time, is a mystery. Somehow, inside and outside connect—merge, and an order *that is* corresponds to an order *we can know*, perhaps an order great enough to attract the attention and stimulate the thinking of viewers for a long, long while. In that brief instant—during the photographer's glance that discloses the look that prompts the viewer's stare—the photographer resembles Stevens's connoisseur of chaos, the pensive man:

The pensive man . . . he sees that eagle float  
For which the intricate Alps are a single nest.



## *Muthos and Logos*

### David Stephenson

What is a story? What is a *good* story? And how does a story differ from other constructions of language either written or spoken? From a lecture or essay, for example, a history, philosophical treatise or mathematical proof?

If you ever try to write a story, or even tell a tale without writing it down, you know how difficult it is to define exactly what you are doing—stringing words and sentences together, yes, but to what end? A speech or a proof has a much more obvious goal, viz. to praise or blame or persuade in the first case and to demonstrate truth in the second. Stories teach too, perhaps, but to say what or how they teach requires insight into a very obscure part of the human soul, obscure because logic does not operate in exactly the same way in stories as in demonstration, nor can there be a simple truth to illuminate or an action to promote. In fact, didactic stories are universally condemned, because a concluding moral or an explicit insight detract from the virtue of a story as such, and, conversely, precisely those details that delight us in a story will in general complicate any conclusion we might want to draw from it.

Nevertheless, a story is always about *something*. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* tell you right at the beginning that they have a subject: Achilles' rage or Odysseus' manhood. But if the author does not tell you, it is usually a real chore to formulate in just a sentence or two exactly what a story is about. Authors themselves confess to the difficulty or even disparage the effort. Try formulating the subject of *Oedipus* or *War and*

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David Stephenson is a tutor on the Annapolis campus of St. John's College. This lecture was presented on June 15, 2005. Mr. Stephenson's story, "The Glass Eye," won first prize in the short story contest sponsored by *Bards and Sages* and will be published this winter as part of their annual anthology.

*Peace* or *Waiting for Godot* and you will see how elusive is the task.

So I'm ready to listen to analysis and advice from anybody who offers tell me what makes a story, even Aristotle.

### Story and Plot

Before I turn to the ancients, let me consider some modern advisors. You can find shelves in any library or bookstore loaded with books that will teach you how to write. So they claim. Usually half of any such book is advice on how to sell what you have written, and the other half encourages you to keep writing at all costs, despite rejection, ignoring family and friends, eking minutes out of hours and hours out of days so that you can devote every spare bit of time to the elusive pursuit of a writing career. No, that's not fair; they also give advice to the wordworn: tricks of the trade; rules of the thumb; inspiration to the perspiring. "Avoid adverbs and adjectives," they say; "use short sentences"; "eliminate clichés"; "maintain tension"; "flesh out your characters"; "show, don't tell"; "write what you know." Much of this is stylistic advice. Once upon a time, you could find both readers and authors reveling in the clever peregrinations of a long sentence. No longer. The modern publisher presumes that the modern reader has a modern impatience. But if all this advice has to be taken with a grain of salt (there's a cliché that somehow has not lost its savor), it also contains some useful maxims.<sup>1</sup> A parade of adverbs and adjectives do often weaken rather than strengthen a description, because they imply an attribute without exhibiting it, without making you see or feel it. That is, "wily Odysseus" cannot charm or dismay you with his wiles until you actually see him in disguise or hear him telling clever lies. Nor can "swift-footed Achilles" frighten you with the ferocity of his pursuit until you watch him outrunning a river or hectoring Hector beneath the walls of Troy.

So where the modern advisors give hints about how to catch and hold the attention of a reader or an editor, they rarely stop to examine the nature of the activity of writing, or of its object: the story itself. You have to go back a little ways to find someone, like E. M. Forster, willing to tackle that question. "The king died and then the queen died": that is story, he says. "The king died and then the queen died of a broken heart": that is plot. Here we have a serious attempt to characterize the storyteller's art: he must connect events as cause and effect, and the principal causes must lie within the characters.<sup>2</sup>

Now E. M. Forster wrote some brilliant novels—*Howard's End*, *Passage to India*, *A Room with a View*—nevertheless, I have to modify his terminology. The first version of "the king died, etc." is hardly even a story, in my opinion, though it does reflect the ancestry of the word, "story," which is offspring of the word, "history." That is, in Forster's first example, a "story" is a mere reporting of events, which can pass for a primitive kind of history even though these events occurred only in the writer's imagination.<sup>3</sup> Forster amplifies this dry version of his little tale into a more interesting one by making connections, but even the second version hardly presents all the rudiments of a true story. As it stands it can hardly suffice to identify anything. We need at least another sentence or two to put us in mind of a specific tragedy. From the point of view of the modern writer the connection between characters and events may be all you need, but Aristotle insists that these connections belong to the context of the individual work, they function within its identity.

Of course, we do need to distinguish this naked version from the one clothed with all the linguistic and imaginative elaborations of published literature. A plot is only the barest skeleton of what we ordinarily call a "story," whereas print or performance fix it in its fullness. We can agree with Forster's designation of such an outline as "plot" only as long as we reserve the word "story" for a higher kind of being than the

unconnected sequence of deaths out of which he forms his first example. By “higher kind of being” I do not mean a so-called “short story.” In “story” we must find the essence of a work of literature, its “soul,” as Aristotle says.

The distinction between story in its full and its synoptic form is easy for Aristotle, since he can call any complete work of literature (including plays) a “poem” (something *made*, *poiêma*). For the “essential story” he has other words, words like *muthos* and *logos*. How well do these Greek words correspond to “story” and “plot?”

### *Muthos vs. Logos*

The clearest distinction between *muthos* and *logos* is made by Plato rather than Aristotle. In the *Phaedo* (61B), Socrates says that the god told him in his dream to make *music*. His attempt to comply turns him to meter and rhythm, and to story as well. To be a true poet, he says, he must make *muthos*, not *logos*. However, Socrates protests that he is not *muthologikos* enough to make up a story from scratch. So he cheats. He borrows one of Aesop’s fables and adapts it to meter. Now this bit of dialogue is interesting not only because it separates *muthos* radically from *logos*, but because after dividing them it recombines the terms into a single adjective, *muthologikos*. *Muthologikos* is hard to translate: we need to coin a noun that tells us Socrates’ flaw: he is no mythologue, no teller of tales, no mythologist.<sup>4</sup> Here, as so often, Socrates pretends to a modesty he really lacks. He has no qualms about making up a story and even calling it *muthos* when he needs one in this and other dialogues.<sup>5</sup> But the significance of this passage for us lies in the way Socrates’ understanding of poetry forces him to keep *muthos* and *logos* apart, which he may have forgotten to do elsewhere.

At first these terms seem almost interchangeable in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, and some scholars (e.g. Fyfe) translate them indifferently as either “plot” or “story.”<sup>6</sup> For example,

at the end of chapter 17 Aristotle uses the word *logos* where one might think *muthos* more appropriate. Here is his complete description of the “*logos*” of the *Odyssey*:

A man is for many years away from home and his footsteps are dogged by Poseidon and he is all alone. Moreover, affairs at home are in such a state that his estate is being wasted by suitors and a plot laid against his son, but after being storm-tossed he arrives himself, reveals who he is, and attacks them, with the result that he is saved and destroys his enemies. That is the essence (*to idion*), the rest is episodes. (Fyfe, trans.)

Whether one calls this synopsis “plot” or “story” hardly matters: the point is that even such a brief account allows us to identify the whole work and distinguish it from any other. It is an only slightly more extended distillation of story than Forster’s simple “plot.” Note that Aristotle does not *name* the man or his home or son. This summary is enough to fix the game even without naming players. It is just enough to identify the book by its events alone. Names should come later in the construction of a story, according to Aristotle, names that indicate character by their meaning or names drawn from the legendary list of characters that traditionally embody the necessary traits. First sketch the story in general (*katholou*), he says, then fill it in with episodes and choose names.

Perhaps it might help to see how Aristotle defines *logos* in general (*Poetics* 20.11): “*logos* is a composite meaningful utterance of which some parts mean something in themselves.” To this Aristotle adds that *logos* can be one either the way a sentence is, or the way the whole *Iliad* is. That any sentence is itself a *logos* should be clear. A word is an atom of meaning. Out of words the sentence forms a compound that is not just a mixture or average or blend: it is a unity that generates new meaning out of these components. But the

entire *Iliad* too is a *logos*, one whose parts are *logoi*— viz., sentences. From this point of view, what causes wholeness in either a story or a sentence is clearly *meaning*, and the same could perhaps be said of any *logos*, whether that word signifies ratio or reason or speech.

But this is different for *muthos*. *Muthos* too is unified, but it is unified around *action*, (*praxis*), rather than meaning. Aristotle defines *muthos* as “a representation (*mimêsis*) of an action. For I say,” he says, “that *muthos* is the synthesis of deeds (*pragmata*).”

Consider Oedipus. He has performed a series of deeds, many outside of the play: he leaves Corinth; he kills an arrogant old man at the crossroads; he solves the riddle of the Sphinx; he marries the king’s widow and rules Thebes; he hunts down the criminal responsible for the plague; he consults oracles; he examines witnesses; he ignores the warnings of Tiresias and Jocasta; he looks for his true parents; he finds out who they are; he blinds himself. The play binds all these deeds into a single action: the action of self-discovery. In the end, and only in the end, does he know who he is. Thus, in a story, deeds culminate in action, and action is the result of choice—hence the peculiarly human quality of stories that the word *logos* does not capture. An epic or a drama has a *soul*, and that soul is its *muthos*.

It is within Aristotle’s metaphor of life that one might best seek the source of beauty in a poem, which, he says, “must be constructed...round a single piece of action, whole and complete in itself, with a beginning, middle and end, so that like a single living organism it may produce its own peculiar form of pleasure.” Beauty, he says, belongs to “a living creature or any organism composed of parts.” The very unity of life, the unity that nature preserves in growth and reproduction, must evoke aesthetic pleasure in the scientific or philosophical observer; so also the imitation of that life in a poem should inspire a similar wonder and delight in everyone, all the more when it develops a story which—as *story*—always

involves *human* life moved by choice and will and character as well as desire. The analogy with nature in general is not far to seek: *praxis* is to *kinêsis* as humanity is to nature. For *praxis*—political, moral, deliberate action—is a motion proper only to humans, and this is what moves a play or an epic forward. A rock falls from its nature as a rock and a seed sprouts out of its nature too; a story imitates the activity that defines a human being as a political and social animal.

I think we must decide for ourselves whether the beauty of a story is the cause or the result of that unity that a human being provides through the cooperation of his own character, means and ends, that is to say, whether beauty resides in the *representation* or in the action itself. If the natural organization of a living creature, and of man in particular, is reason for delight; so also is the construction of a poem. A poem about human beings, therefore, a play or an epic, can bear us a double beauty.

We might try to capture the distinction between *muthos* and *logos* by equating them to “story” and “plot,” respectively. But if we turn to elementary plots, such as the one Aristotle offers for the *Odyssey*, we find their differences eroding. The sense of these words start to shift and overlap. Does Aristotle’s description reflect the *meaning* of the epic or its *action* or something else? If by “meaning” we mean what just suffices to identify it in words, then, yes, this plot is its meaning. But the single action, the *praxis* that subsumes all the deeds of the Odysseus to his story, his *muthos*, is harder to find within this description. Perhaps it lies in the homecoming itself, of which the trials and triumphs are only details. Or maybe at the most fundamental level plot and story are the same thing, or different aspects of the same thing, plot emphasizing the logical sequence and progression of events and story emphasizing their subsumption under the larger dramatic whole of human endeavor.

An epic like the *Odyssey* contains many stories: it is polymythic, one might say. There is the story of the Cyclops,

and the story of Nausicaa, the tale of Telemachus's trip to Sparta and the story of the suitors' slaughter. Similarly the *Iliad* contains the "Diomediad," Hector's farewell, Priam's suit, Achilles' scream on the wall, any one of which could form the basis of a separate play. Each of these sequences forms its own story. You remember Diomedes? Athena loves him. With her help, he kills more heroes than Agamemnon and Menelaus together, and even wounds the gods, Aphrodite and Ares. Could not some author focus on him alone? Or on Hector: the Trojan hero's conquests in battle, his sense of duty, the tender love of his wife and his son, his willingness to sacrifice himself to protect Troy. There, too, is a story worth isolating and presenting by itself. Each part of the *Iliad* is its own story, and the whole epic is a story composed of stories. So a story can be a higher unity in two ways, a *muthos muthôn*—a story of stories, an action of actions—or a *logos logôn*—a plot of plots, a meaning of meanings. In this respect tragedies and epics differ: a tragedy can contain only one story, one *muthos*, though it always contains many *logoi*.

Aristotle limits the number of distinct poetic elements to six. *Muthos* comes first, because he believes story to be the aim and end of a poem. He ignores lyric poetry in this treatise, although he must know of Anacreon and Sappho and Pindar. Why? The answer may be political: "the play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king." Or perhaps a poem with fewer elements is simply less of a poem.<sup>7</sup>

The remaining five poetic elements, listed in order of importance, are: character (*êthos*); thought or reason (literally "thinking through": *dianoia*); language, delivery or diction (*lexis*, a word deriving obviously from *legô*); song (*melapoiia*); spectacle (*opsis*). All of these, with the exception of spectacle, figure in epic as well as tragedy. Character plays an obvious role in any story. Thought, as understood here, is the kind of thought that speech can exhibit, what displays character and motive, but insofar as it dictates what is appro-

priate to a speaker and a situation, it could influence the poet in a more general way. Aristotle refers the reader to his *Rhetoric* for a full discussion of this topic. *Lexis* may be his own coinage: at least, according to the *Rhetoric* (3.1), it is a neglected art, however important to the public speaker—to the poet as well, since this is what governs the choice of words. *Lexis* or *lexis en logô* "is the interpretation by means of words, which has the same power in prose and verse." As to the last two elements of a poem, *melapoiia* and *opsis*, Aristotle says only that song is the more important.

So he has his own favorite list of features and advice to the poet about how to improve many of them. The story must progress from a "tightening" to a "loosening," for example, the first part building to a climax that turns happiness on its head, after which the drama unravels to its natural end. For a truly tragic effect, the hero of a story must be better than ordinary, but must be brought low by a single failing, and his fall must evoke pity and fear. The greatest of all writing skills is the proper use of metaphor. This cannot be grasped from anyone else. It is the sign of genius in a poet, since to construct a good metaphor is to contemplate similarity. Metaphor produces in miniature much of the pleasure of poetry, for, Aristotle claims, we *learn* from metaphor the way we learn from anything that raises our sights from species to genus. And learning is the greatest pleasure. And so on.

Thus, the *Poetics* is full of such practical pointers for writers. So is the *Rhetoric*. Although that treatise deals with *speeches* rather than *stories* (the word *muthos*, therefore never appears) it is worth reading for its general advice. Aristotle could be a modern writing instructor after all. He gives many writing tips that still work.

Other kinds of poetry might alter the order of importance in his list. Some will disagree with Aristotle's preferences even in the drama or epic. Beautiful, well-crafted language, for example: isn't that what we love most in Shakespeare? Wordsworth? Virginia Woolf? Should language always be

subordinated to story-line? What about character? Nowadays, writers often aim for “character-driven” rather than “plot-driven” stories, that is, they spend their energy on the development and delineation of characters, and then pretend to sit back and let the characters lead where they will. But this brings us back to story. Perhaps the truth is that such works too are “story-driven,” if not plot-driven. Even those who disregard Aristotle’s recommendation to begin with plot must end up with some kind of unity. Can dialogue and narrative come to life without something like a soul?

### History of *Muthos* and *Logos*

Homer did not like the word, *logos*, or at least did not appreciate its philosophical or poetic implications. It appears only twice in his epics: once in the *Iliad* and once in the *Odyssey*. With only these two examples available, it is hard to discern any peculiarities the word might entail for Homer, but it must have been a rare or strange term to him. Patroklos takes pleasure in *logos* when applying his medical knowhow to tend Eurypylos’s wounds (Book 15). What could the word mean here? “Chat?” “Banter?” “The anecdotes of heroes?” The context gives us even less help with meaning in the *Odyssey*, where *logoi* figure only among Calypso’s charms.

Maybe the word simply had not yet acquired the power that philosophy or mathematics or even the law courts were to give it in later times. It obviously derives from the verb *legô*, whose oldest sense referred more to gathering and selecting than to speaking, and that is how it is used in the *Iliad*: in Book 23 Achilles commands his companions to gather up (*legômen*) Patroklos’s bones for the funeral pyre. From this primitive sense gradually evolved the mode of speech signified by *legô* in Attic Greek.<sup>8</sup> That is, to speak well requires the collection and ordering of perceptions and ideas, and this is the province of *logos*. Perhaps, therefore, the best rendering of the verb in English is “recount”—one can

recount an experience or an adventure for the pleasure of the audience. As to its corresponding noun, “account,” that too can lend authority to the telling of a tale as well as reckon up cost. Both English words express the ordering (and even enumerating) function of discourse. In this way one can see how after Homer the mathematical sense of the word developed naturally alongside its reference to speech.

Homer has no such hesitation about *muthos*. That word laces many pages of his epics. Agamemnon sends away the priest Chryses with a harsh word (*muthos*), for example, and Nestor is accused of loving words too much (again *muthos*). Sometimes, as if to emphasize Agamemnon’s despotism, its meaning verges on “command,” but in most places, wherever a later Greek author might use the word *logos*, Homer is comfortable with *muthos*. In the second example one might find a trace of its later connection to the specifics of story-telling—long-winded Nestor loves to tell tales of his past heroism and revels in the words that recall it. But nowhere can you discover any allusion to myth or fable or falsehood. You accuse Nestor of exaggeration at your own peril.

Even in Plato’s dialogues the suggestion that *muthos* signifies a flight of fancy would be a mistake. The “myth of Er” in the *Republic*, the charioteer in the *Phaedrus*, Persephone’s provisions for the rebirth of souls in the *Meno*: these all have distinctive places in the dialogues, but none of them can be dismissed as mere entertainment. Even the cave depicted in Book 6 of the *Republic* is more than allegory. All of these *muthoi* are more than myth. That is, *muthos* and *logos* do not part company until much later, when truth and fiction become the touchstones of modern discourse. They have a long way to go before they spawn *myth* and *logic* in the English language. Truth can adopt a mythological as well as a dialectical or scientific form. Perhaps our modern tendency to sunder fact from fiction absolutely makes us exclude some mysterious region where they cooperate or

overlap, a region Socrates saw how to exploit. Lying may be a way to tell the truth better.

Aristotle expresses this succinctly in the *Poetics*: “Homer has also taught others how best to lie,” he says (24.18), and in constructing stories one should “choose the plausible impossible rather than the unpersuasive possible.” Poetic effect justifies exaggeration and distortion, he claims, as in the case of Hector’s flight from Achilles. For Hector to outrun swift-footed Achilles so long while the rest of the army stands idly by strains credibility. But it also vividly exhibits Hector’s desperation and emphasizes the imminence of Achilles’ own demise, which will seize him soon after Hector’s death. In answer to critics who object to a story on the grounds that it is untrue, Aristotle suggests the reply, “But perhaps it should be.” One can paint people as better than they are—“for the paradigm exalts,” he says. So also other elaborations or idealizations may prove more fruitful in poetry than technical accuracy.<sup>9</sup>

Nowhere is Aristotle’s appreciation of the value of poetry more apparent than when he measures it against history. This is another version of his preference of the possible to the actual. The historian “tells what happened,” he says, “the [poet] what might happen. On account of this, poetry is more serious (*spoudaioteron*) and philosophic than history. For poetry says things in general, but history in particular.”

### History Itself

In his *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*, Thucydides admits that some readers will dislike his work because it lacks *muthôdes* character, which one scholar translates as “romance.” Literally, of course, the adjective means “story-like”—*muthos* + *eidōs*.<sup>10</sup> Whether that criticism is justified or not, I leave you to determine. But if *muthos* neither denies nor requires reality for its foundation, and implies only the unity of human action, it is possible to find much that is story-

like in Thucydides’ book. For Thucydides does not confine himself to the mere reporting of facts; he is interested in causes as a story writer is, and, if he has to seek them in the mere inference of document and speech and event, and, unlike the poet, has no more than speculative access to minds of his characters, so much the better if he succeeds in finding the plausible and persuasive in his speculations.

Indeed, there is no one character to focus on throughout the *Peloponnesian Wars* except Thucydides himself, and he appears in the flesh only once in the course of his narrative. However, Aristotle insists (*Poetics*, 8.1) the unity of a poem should not derive from the unity of the hero, but rather from the unity of his action. If, therefore, the war between Athens and Sparta is not just an unconnected series of advances and retreats, debates and battles, then perhaps it has an identity that can give it the wholeness approximating that of a story, of a *muthos*. After all, what above all makes a deed one is its purpose, and what arranges deeds into a story is the progression of a series of deeds to a higher goal that reaches beyond and above the separate and unrelated determinations of an individual. Consider Oedipus, who discovers his identity at the end of a criminal investigation aimed at anyone but himself, the procession of witnesses whose independently innocent responses spiral slowly inward of their own accord. Or Achilles, whose bloody triumph on the battlefield of Troy is forced upon him by his repeated refusals to fight. It is the oneness of action that unifies the deeds of one man, and not the reverse, and this is the very unity celebrated in tragedy and epic. Perhaps a better name for that kind of grand unity is “fate,” not because the gods force it upon the heroes of these stories, but because their lives and their deeds acquire meaning and power and beauty precisely in our understanding of this unity.

We have to take Aristotle’s demotion of character seriously. A story does not derive its unity from the singleness of its protagonist, but from the wholeness of its action. This is

hard to swallow. Can an action be one if it arises out of the deeds of more than one person? This is a question crucial to our inquiry into the action of history. But Thucydides would not be the only author to think about cities as analogous to men, and thereby to suggest that they have character like men and might even act on the world's stage like the actors in a play.

So, if we can find the story in the *Peloponnesian Wars*, perhaps we can discover a purpose to the great concatenation of human events that compose that conflict and that history, one that would justify Thucydides' claim to have written his book "not as an essay which is to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time."

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle has his recommendations, too, and many of them are quite as helpful as those of modern writers on writing. *The Poetics* is full of advice to the budding poet; so is his *Rhetoric*: I recommend Book three of the latter to anyone planning an essay.

<sup>2</sup> I am assuming that the queen's heart was broken because the king died, otherwise the second version, which Forster offers as "plot," remains very incomplete and misleading.

<sup>3</sup> That history might better include some speculation as to causes is an objection incidental to the present distinction, though we can return to it later.

<sup>4</sup> It would be a mistake to settle on "mythologist" as the proper translation here.

<sup>5</sup> Aesop's "fables," by the way, are *muthoi* for Plato, as you might expect, but Aristotle uses the word *logos* when he refers to them (*Rhetoric*, 2.20, *passim*).

<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that Latin retains or even extends the breadth of meaning of the word *logos* in cognates, like "lex" and "lego," but to my knowledge has no cognate or equivalent of *muthos*.

<sup>7</sup> Later, Aristotle declares epic poetry inferior to tragedy in part because it lacks the elements of music and spectacle.

<sup>8</sup> So also in English, the "tale" of one's woes could begin with enumeration, continue with anecdote, and only after much retelling finally expand into story

<sup>9</sup> There is either irony or venom in Aristotle's comment, however, for he knows Socrates attacked the poets (in the *Republic* and in *Ion*) for lacking the technical knowledge that their subject matter requires. Aristotle seems much more forgiving or even encouraging to the liar.

<sup>10</sup> Could there be a pun here? *muthos* + *ôdê* rather than *eidōs*? That is, an allusion to the lack of melody in his history?



## Meaning and Truth in Klein's Philosophico-Mathematical Writings

Burt C. Hopkins

I want to begin my remarks with an apology for their imposing title, which is the product of my profession, for I am a professional philosopher. I am therefore manifestly not a Tutor but a Professor, and, as such, a significant portion of what I am required to spend my time doing is called—on my view mistakenly—“research.” One of the expectations my profession brings with it is that my research be “specialized,” and to this end I have spent the better part of the last twenty-five years focusing my research on the phenomenological philosophies of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger—the two German giants of European philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century. Jacob Klein also spent a significant amount of time studying these phenomenological philosophies. Moreover, he attributed great things to both philosophers: Heidegger, in Klein’s own words, was “the first man who made me understand something written by another man, namely Aristotle”;<sup>1</sup> and Husserl, again in Klein’s words, “pointed to . . . a character of speech to which the ancients apparently did pay only scant attention,”<sup>2</sup> a character that Husserl, and Klein following Husserl, called “sedimentation.” From my own studies of Husserl and Heidegger, I know that—when viewed within the context of their own thought—both of these characteristics singled out by Klein

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are the result of each thinker's thematic engagement with the concepts of meaning and truth. This consideration, therefore, brings me back to the apology for my imposing title, because Klein never treats either of these concepts in a thematic manner in his writings, and I think, given the apposition of Heidegger's and Husserl's philosophies to his own thought, it is legitimate to wonder and then investigate why this is. I should add that not only scholarly curiosity leads me to wonder about this, but also the nature of the interrelationship between the most fundamental problems posed by Klein's writings, namely, how to understand properly the radically different conceptualities that determine the meaning and truth of the most basic concepts that belong, respectively, to ancient Greek and modern European science, and how best to overcome what Klein once spoke of as the "symbolic unreality"<sup>3</sup> that is characteristic of "the modern idea of knowledge and science."<sup>4</sup>

To say that meaning and truth are not thematically treated as concepts in Klein's writings, then, is not to say that one cannot find in his writings discussions that take up the meaning of things or the concept of their truth. After all, Klein, more than any other thinker in the twentieth century, wrote about the meaning of the ancient Greek concept of number, and, indeed, he compared and contrasted this concept's meaning with the meaning of the modern concept of number. In addition, Klein, more than any other twentieth century thinker, wrote about the fundamental change in the relation of science to truth that occurred when, in a process he identified as beginning in the sixteenth century,<sup>5</sup> the ancient meaning of the concept of number was transformed into the modern meaning. But it is to say that Klein neither writes about meaning and truth as concepts—about what contemporary professional philosophers would call "the concepts of meaning and truth,"—nor ever discusses which concepts of meaning and truth presumably validate or otherwise justify the philosophical claims that he makes about the

different conceptualities of ancient Greek and modern European science.

There is, perhaps, a ready explanation for this, namely, that Klein had no use for what he called "Modern 'philosophical' jargon,"<sup>6</sup> and that he therefore sought to avoid it as much as possible. Talk of the concepts of meaning and truth, even by thinkers of the stature of Husserl and Heidegger, would have to count for Klein as such jargon, because it is the very thesis of his magnum opus, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra*,<sup>7</sup> that the philosophical preoccupation with concepts per se is a distinctly modern preoccupation. Moreover, if not in this work, then certainly in his subsequent lectures and essays, such a preoccupation is viewed as a philosophical mistake. Thus, in a lecture given in 1939, Klein says, "it is doubtful whether philosophy exists today,"<sup>8</sup> and he clearly suggests that the reason for this is that "all our life and thoughts are molded by" the existence of a science that is not doubtful, namely, "mathematical physics." And because, in Klein's words, "the medium of mathematical physics, or rather its very nerve, is symbolic mathematics," and because, moreover, this nerve (according to his *Math Book*) is only made possible by concepts that refer solely to other concepts and not to the individual objects to which they, as concepts, should properly and rightfully refer, on his view contemporary "philosophy's" near total preoccupation with such concepts per se is not worthy of philosophy's good name.

According to this explanation, the attempt to investigate the concepts of meaning and truth in Klein's writings, especially in his philosophico-mathematical writings, that is to say, his writings on the history of the philosophy of mathematics as well as the history of mathematics itself, would be misguided if this inquiry were oriented by the very concepts of meaning and truth that these writings demonstrate are a philosophically derivative byproduct of the modern "'scientific' consciousness."<sup>9</sup> According to Klein, these concepts are

“abstractions of abstractions...which at the same time we interpret as being in direct contact with the world.”<sup>10</sup> They are hardly suitable for taking the measure of any thinker’s thought, let alone Klein’s, of all thinkers. Klein pointed out something that even Husserl and Heidegger did not see, namely, that the meaning of concepts as well as the meaning of truth underwent a radical and irrevocable transformation of their ancient and classical “meanings” in modern thought. Therefore to properly investigate meaning and truth in Klein’s writings on the philosophy of mathematics, one would have to—at least according to this line of thought—begin by comparing the status of meaning and truth in Klein’s writings with its status in Husserl’s and Heidegger’s.

Even though Klein mentions Heidegger by name just one time in his writings that I know of,<sup>11</sup> and refers to him once more without mentioning his name,<sup>12</sup> it is still not much of an exaggeration to say that in a certain sense Klein’s entire thinking is informed by a fundamental criticism of a fundamental aspect of Heidegger’s philosophy. Specifically, Klein criticizes Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato and the role that this interpretation plays in Heidegger’s criticism of Aristotle and then, growing out of this criticism, Heidegger’s account of the continuity of metaphysical thinking from ancient Greek to contemporary twentieth-century philosophers. Heidegger maintains that Plato’s philosophy is guided by an unexamined presupposition about the meaning of the Being of beings, namely, that this meaning is determined by the static cognition of *what* they are, and that this cognition conceals within itself the likewise unexamined presupposition that, inseparable from *how* they are, is their constant availability in terms of their “looks” (*eidos*) to the *logos* of any soul that bothers to *look* at them.

With only two references to Heidegger in all of his writings (neither one of which, by the way, directly engages Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato), my claim about the critical relationship of Klein’s thought to Heidegger’s may

appear to some as tenuous. However, the following considerations should remove any doubt about this matter. In 1925, Heidegger gave a lecture course on Plato’s *Sophist*, which was published after his death in a volume based on his and his students’ notes. According to Leo Strauss, in 1925 Klein attended Heidegger’s classes regularly.<sup>13</sup> Toward the end of the course, Heidegger has this to say about 253d5-e2 of the *Sophist*: “I confess that I do not genuinely understand anything of this passage and that the individual statements have in no way become clear to me, even after long study.”<sup>14</sup> Heidegger then goes on to single out precisely what he does not understand:

(1.) *Mian idean dia pollôn... diaisthanetai* (d5ff.), the dialectician “sees one idea throughout many,” one determinateness of beings in its presence in many, of which *henos ekastou keimenou chôris* (d6), “each lies there detached from the others,” such that this idea, which is seen throughout all the others, *pantê diatetamenên* (d6), is extended and ordered from all sides.

(2.) . . . *kai pollas heteras allêlôn* (d7), the dialectician sees many ideas, which are different from one another in substantive content—this is partly understandable—but then Plato adds: *hupo mias exôthen periechomenas* (d7f.), “they are encompassed by one idea from the outside.”

(3.) *kai mian au di’holôn pollôn en heni sunêm-mênên* (d8f.), the dialectician sees “that the *one* idea is again gathered together into *one* throughout many wholes.”

(4.) *kai pollas chôris pantê diôrismenas* (d9), the dialectician sees “that many ideas are completely detached from one another.”<sup>15</sup>

Heidegger mentions and rejects the traditional interpretation, which “has been eased by the introduction of a distinction between *genos* and *eidos*, genus and species,”<sup>16</sup> because it is based on an “unjustifiable procedure, since Plato precisely does not make that distinction.” Heidegger therefore concludes, “so in fact it remains completely obscure what is meant by this *mian di’ holôn pollôn en henî sunêmmenên* [one idea is again gathered together into one throughout many wholes], and furthermore by the *hupo mias exôthen periechesthai* [they are encompassed by one idea from the outside] and above all by the *keimenou chôris* [lies there detached] within the unity of one idea.”<sup>17</sup>

The fact that Klein most likely was in attendance when Heidegger articulated these words (or, at the very least, was made aware of them by others who heard them), decides, of course, nothing about the relationship of his thought to Heidegger’s. However, the fact that the apex of the first half of Klein’s *Math Book*, Chapter 7C, presents a detailed understanding of precisely what Heidegger confessed was “completely obscure” in the *Sophist*, does indeed decide something about this relationship. In that chapter, Klein presents an understanding of the Stranger’s and Theaetetus’s dialogue in the *Sophist* about the division of intelligibles that takes aim at the following: Heidegger’s philosophy of the continuity belonging to the putative unquestioned meaning of the Being of beings in the metaphysical tradition, a continuity that, beginning with Plato, is supposed, unquestioningly, to think that Being is the being present to the *logos*—in cognition—of beings. Indeed, there can be no mistake about this: the heart of Klein’s chapter in the *Math Book* offers an understanding of the second directive in the *Sophist* regarding the division of intelligibles, that is, the directive concerning different ideas being encompassed by one idea from the outside, which shows that “Being” is *not* thought here as something present to the *logos* in the cognition of beings. Moreover, Klein’s *Math Book* as a whole shows that,

rather than continuity, there is a *radical* discontinuity between the way “Being” is understood by Plato and Aristotle and the way it is understood in modern philosophy.

Klein’s *Math Book* establishes its understanding of the Stranger’s directives about division by taking into account Aristotle’s references to the Platonic theory of “eidetic numbers” (*arithmoi eidetikoî*), specifically, his report that Plato attributed a numerical mode of being to the *eidê* which, in one important respect, is distinct from the mode of being of mathematical numbers. While others before Klein had taken up the issue of the relationship between Greek mathematics and Greek philosophy that is so important for the formation of both mathematical and philosophical concepts, both generally and in the particular case of Plato’s philosophy (most notably Julius Stenzel, J. Cook Wilson, and Oskar Becker), Jacob Klein was the first—and remains to this day the only<sup>18</sup>—thinker to make “an attempt”<sup>19</sup> to do so from, in his words, “within the structure of the *arithmos* concept itself.”<sup>20</sup> Attempts before and after Klein’s to interpret Aristotle’s reports about Plato’s “unwritten teaching,” namely, that the *eidê* are in some sense numbers, approach talk about numbers *from the conceptual level of modern mathematics, that is to say, from the modern symbolic concept of number*. Klein’s attempt, therefore, stands alone in its endeavor to approach both Greek mathematics and Greek ontology from a conceptual level that does not presuppose the basic concepts of modern mathematics.

What Klein modestly refers to in his *Math Book* as his “attempt” to think the relationship between Greek mathematics and Greek ontology from “within the structure of *arithmos* concept itself,” is actually a veritable philosophical, mathematical, and historical tour de force that ranges over ancient texts on the one hand—neo-Platonic and neo-Pythagorean mathematics, and Pythagorean, Platonic, and Aristotelian philosophy—and, on the other hand, early modern mathematics and early modern philosophy, while

linking them all together in the modern's interpretation of the arithmetical work of Diophantus. Three themes orient Klein's historical investigations of the mathematics involved here together with its philosophy: (1) the shift that the meaning of the concept of number underwent in the transition from ancient Greek to modern mathematics; (2) what makes this shift possible; and (3) the attendant shift in the very *conceptuality* of the "objects" of science and knowledge generally—in the very meaning of science and scientific truth, from the ancient to the modern meaning.

These themes, in turn, are tied together by Klein's account of the similarity between (1) the Platonic attempt to grasp the proportional relationships between numbers in mathematics and the analogical relationships between *eidê* in ontology in terms of the isomorphism of their relationships with the very structure of the *arithmos* concept itself; and (2) the modern interpretation of symbolic calculation as the complete realization of the ancient general theory of proportions. Both the Platonic attempt and the modern interpretation, in Klein's words, "*exceeded the bounds set for the logos*,"<sup>21</sup> precisely insofar as each assigns to *eidê*, to "concepts," a *numerical* characteristic. And this means nothing more and nothing less than that for ancient Greek philosophy, as for contemporary philosophy (insofar, that is, as "philosophy" can still be said to exist), there is an insuperable limit to that which the *logos*—speech—can make intelligible, and this limit is reached when numerical characteristics are attributed to what the Greeks called "*eidê*" or "ideas" and the moderns (both the early ones, the so-called fathers of modernity, and us, their contemporary progeny) call "general concepts" or "general objects."

The reason for this, according to Klein, is, for all its complexity, relatively straightforward, namely: numbers properly refer to individual objects, that is, to more than one of them; numbers, therefore, refer to a "multitude" of objects, and, moreover, to exactly "how many" of them there

are, while number concepts (*eidê*) properly refer to the characteristics of numbers that are responsible for the exact delimitation of the "how many" inseparable from each number. Numbers are therefore many, and number concepts are one, albeit *not* one in the sense of *each* one of the many ones that are assembled together by every number, but "one" in the very *different* sense of "unity." Moreover, even though there are many number concepts responsible for the exact delimitation of each number, for instance, the two most important concepts of the "odd" and the "even," each of these concepts is not itself many but one (in the sense of a unity). Hence, to ascribe to any number concept a "numerical" characteristic, specifically, the characteristic of its being many, cannot make sense, because while numbers are intrinsically multitudinous, number concepts are not. Moreover, not just number concepts, but *any* concept that is related to their being "many" of something—many horses, many philosophers, many emotions, and so on—is one in the sense of being a unity. Hence Klein's conclusion, that Plato's theory of eidetic numbers, of concepts whose unity is in some sense "numerical," cannot, *strictly* speaking, make sense to the *logos*, to speech. Likewise, because of this fundamental difference between what a number is and what a concept is, Klein also concludes that the modern mathematical general *concept* (or, what amounts to the same thing, general *object*) *cannot*, again strictly speaking, be said to be "numerical" in a manner that makes any sense.

Of course, the question how Klein knows that there is a fundamental difference between numbers and number concepts, not to mention how he can know that there is a radical shift in the meaning of the ancient Greek concept of number and the modern one, returns us to the topic announced in my title. This is the case because what Klein knows about these matters is presumably something that he (and those who follow him on this) thinks is true. This means that Klein must know that it is true (1) that numbers and

number concepts, despite their relationship, are fundamentally different; (2) that the Greek and the modern concepts of number and number concepts have different meanings; and (3) that because of (2), the Greek and the modern meanings of philosophical and scientific truth are different. In other words, for Klein to know what he thinks he knows, he must know the truth of something that *cannot* be true for either “the Greeks” or “the moderns,” namely, that the true meaning of their concepts of number and truth are radically different. In the case of the Greeks, they did not, among other things, live long enough to discover this truth; in the case of the moderns, they were prevented from discovering this because they believed (and continue to believe) that the superiority of their concepts and truth over the ancient Greek ones is a superiority that is based in their completion and perfection of the Greek concepts and their truth.

But I am getting ahead of myself here. Before considering the question of meaning and truth in Klein’s writings, we need to return to the critical challenge that Klein’s *Math Book* presents to Heidegger’s understanding of both Plato and the continuity of the putative metaphysical meaning of the Being of beings in the history of philosophy. As we have intimated, this challenge takes issue with the distinctly modern preoccupation with concepts per se that informs Heidegger’s approach to Plato’s philosophy, and therefore may have an important bearing on the topic of meaning and truth in Klein’s writings. Heidegger’s approach to Plato’s philosophy supposes that the *meaning* of Being is not interrogated by this philosophy but is already understood—uncritically—as the *eidōs*, the “look” of something that is present to cognition and therefore available to the *logos*, to speech. Moreover, he supposes that something “remains completely obscure” in the Stranger’s dialectical directive regarding *ideas* that are different from one another being perceived as encompassed by *one* idea from the outside. Contrary to this last supposition, Klein’s *Math Book* endeavors to show that there is in the

*Sophist*, albeit in a veiled way, an articulation of how ideas that are different can nevertheless be encompassed from the outside by one idea. Because of the nature of the problem addressed in the *Sophist*, what Klein refers to as the problem belonging to the ontological participation of the ideas with one another, the account offered there cannot, on Klein’s view, be expected to be “completely clear.” Nevertheless, Klein shows, contra Heidegger, not only that it is *not* “completely obscure,” but also that the question of Being is not “one” but “twofold.” This has the following consequences: (1) Being for Plato has an intelligible structure; (2) Being’s intelligible structure can be articulated into its parts, although it cannot be, strictly speaking, known, because the *logos* is unable to give an account of these parts that is not paradoxical; and (3), because of the truth of (2), it is manifestly false to think, as Heidegger does, that Being in Plato is something that has or is “meaning.” And, once the latter is recognized to be the case, the resultant alienation from Plato’s philosophy of the meaning of Being that Heidegger ascribes to it, as well as that of this putative meaning’s alienation from the history of philosophy, becomes apparent.

Klein illuminates the veiled manner in which Being’s intelligible structure is manifest in the *Sophist* by using Aristotle’s account of Plato’s unwritten doctrine in a way that takes seriously what they report while bypassing their polemic against the report’s contents. Moreover, Klein places the account of numbers from both Aristotle’s texts and Plato’s dialogues within the context of his “reconstruction” of the phenomenon of number, *arithmos*, which he maintains provides the basis for the theoretical considerations about the proper mode of being belonging to numbers that is found in ancient Greek mathematics and philosophy. Finally, the *sine qua non* of Klein’s reconstruction of the ancient Greek *arithmos* is that its mode of being is *non-symbolic*; that is, it is not symbolic in the sense that both the number concept and the numbers themselves that belong to modern mathematical

analysis—that is, to modern algebra—must be characterized as symbolic.

Klein discerns the intelligible structure of Being in the *Sophist* on the basis of what he refers to as its “arithmological”<sup>22</sup> structure, a structure that is related to, but not identical with, the basic structure proper to the Greek *arithmos*. The latter, in Klein’s words, is “grounded in the phenomenon of counting,”<sup>23</sup> and according to him its basic structure precedes “all the possible differences of opinion” regarding the mode of being of number in Greek mathematics and philosophy. Klein characterizes this basic structure as a “definite amount of definite things,” and singles out two intrinsic peculiarities that belong to it. Both peculiarities, it is important to note, assume a fundamental significance for Klein’s understanding of the different “conceptualities” characteristic of Greek and modern science. The first peculiarity concerns the reference to more than one thing—that is, to a multitude that is inseparable from each *arithmos*. The second concerns the exactitude of this reference: each *arithmos* delimits precisely so many things.

These characteristics belonging to the structure of *arithmos* are basic to and therefore underlie the different ancient views of its mode of being, because, despite their differences, all of these views share the common assumption that each *arithmos* is *both* one and many: it is “many,” insofar as it refers to more than one thing; it is “one,” insofar as each *arithmos* is exactly the “unity” of the amount in question. Accounting for how this mode of being belonging to numbers comes about—how not only the unity of each number is able to refer to an exactly delimited multitude, but also how each *different* number is able to delimit a different amount of things—was the business of ancient Greek theoretical arithmetic and logistic according to Klein. Significantly, for him, neither of these Greek sciences had as their subject matter numbers, but rather the *eidê* of numbers, above all the “odd” and the “even.” Klein explains that the reason for this is

rooted in the basic structure of the numbers themselves: theoretical mathematicians appealed to these *eidê* in the attempt to account for both the one-over-many structure of number in general, and the different amounts that characterize the unity of each different number.

Plato, on Klein’s view, did not think that the mathematics of his day, or, indeed, the mathematics of all time, succeeded or could ever succeed in explaining either the basic one-over-many structure of numbers or the differentiations—in accordance with the different numbers—of the unities proper to the being one of each different number. Plato’s reason for this is simple: it cannot ever make sense to the discerning logos to say that something is both one and many—that the many is one and the one is many. Thoughtfulness about numbers, therefore, in contrast to counting or calculating with them, *exceeds the bounds set by the logos, by speech that is intelligible*, for “accounting for” what it is that is thought. Notwithstanding this, the combined thoughtfulness of the mathematician and the philosopher, *both together*, is able to recognize in the two kinds of unity characteristic of the mode of being of numbers (*viz.*, the one-over-many unity in general and the different unity of the different amounts characteristic of each different number) the following: the mode of being of a unity that unites separate things in a manner allowing them to belong together even though their unity, as a whole, is “outside” or “external” to them. And it is precisely the “common thing” (*koinon*) of this unity that can be recognized as being responsible for the belonging together, the “community” (*koinonia*) of mathematical things whose mode of being is otherwise separate from one another—or of ontological things whose mode of being, likewise, is otherwise separate from one another. In other words, it is the structure of this unity, which Klein refers to as “arithmological,” that holds the key to understanding the dialectical directive in the *Sophist* and thus the key to legitimating my claim that Klein’s entire thought can be properly understood to be informed by

a fundamental critique of Heidegger's disputing that this directive can be understood.

What is it that can only be recognized by the philosopher and the theoretical mathematician, both together? The theoretical mathematician recognizes the peculiar one-over-many mode of being of numbers, wherein each number is composed of many things, each of which is counted not as the thing that it is but as "one": anything at all can be counted only because the items really counted are understood to be identical ones that are many, indivisible, and, therefore, intelligible. The philosopher recognizes that the two unities involved in the mode of being of numbers *cannot* be accounted for, with precision, by the *eidê* of numbers appealed to by the theoretical mathematician, namely, by the "odd" and the "even." The philosopher realizes this because the mode of being of the unity of each of these "concepts" is *also* one over many, albeit in a different manner than that of numbers. Each concept, the "odd," the "even," is both a unity—as what can or cannot be divided evenly—and a multitude, because what can or cannot be evenly divided is precisely not one but many. Thus the philosopher's thoughtfulness recognizes that the thought of the theoretical mathematician mixes together that which, if our *logos*—our speech—is to make sense, cannot be combined: the one and the many. Both together, however, the philosopher and the mathematician can recognize what neither one of them alone can recognize: the unity of each number is something that is "outside" of the many things, and the many ones that it unifies as just this determinate amount. The unity of the Stranger and Theaetetus, as two interlocutors, is, as a whole, outside of each one of them: neither the Stranger nor Theaetetus is "two,"—as each is rather precisely not two but one—nevertheless, both together are exactly "two."

This joint recognition of the common thing that is responsible for the belonging together or community of identical ones or monads in an *arithmos*, however, addresses neither the problem of accounting for the *many* different

numbers, that is, for what makes one number, say "two," different from another, say "three," nor the Stranger's directive about the dialectician seeing one idea encompassing from "outside" many different ideas. It does not address the first, "mathematical" problem, because each of the wholes that are outside of the ones or monads, and that as such compose the common thing that is responsible for the belonging together of the mathematical monads, must comprise a *different* "common thing" in the instance of each different number—if the fact that there are many different numbers is to be addressed. It does not address the second, "philosophical" problem, because the very terms of the Stranger's directive stipulate that the many ideas that are encompassed by one idea are different ideas, whereas the many monads encompassed by one number are the same.

What does address these mathematical and philosophical problems, is the Stranger's and Theaetetus' failed attempt to count the first "three" of the "five" greatest ideas, namely, Rest, Change, and Being. Even though Rest and Change are opposites and therefore manifestly different ideas, they are both encompassed from the "outside" by the idea of Being. Both together have to be recognized as Being, since neither Rest nor Change, by themselves, can be recognized as Being. (If either Rest or Change were thought to be Being, impossible things would happen: for Rest to be, it would have to change: for Change to be, it would have to rest.) The idea of Being, however, cannot be recognized as something different from Rest and Change, because then neither Rest nor Change would be at all. Hence, the only possibility left is to recognize that, just as neither the Stranger nor Theaetetus alone is "two," but only both taken together are "two," likewise, neither Rest nor Change is Being, but only both taken together are Being. According to Klein, the *Sophist* instantiates an aspect of what Aristotle reported about Plato's unwritten doctrine, namely, that the ideas are in some sense numbers, and that in addition to mathematical numbers there are eidetic numbers. Moreover, the dialogue also exhibits the

difference between mathematical and eidetic numbers reported by Aristotle: that the monads of the former are many and alike, while those of the latter are many but not alike and are therefore not comparable. Thus the idea belonging to Being, as a whole, is like the whole belonging to a mathematical number: it encompasses from the “outside” the many monads that it, as a whole, brings together; however, it and what it brings together are also *unlike* a mathematical number, because the intelligible monads that the mathematical number brings together in the unity of one number are identical—while the intelligible monads that the eidetic number brings together are different. This is illustrated in the *Sophist*: The ideas belonging to Rest and Change are different; nevertheless, the *idea* belonging to Being, like the whole belonging to number, exhibits an “arithmological” structure, although, just as in the case of the mode of being of the mathematical *arithmos*, the mode of being of the eidetic *arithmos* exceeds the limits set by the *logos*. In the former instance, as we have seen, this is the case for Klein because the mode of being of both mathematical numbers and their concepts mixes the one and the many; in the latter instance, this is the case because the attempt to give an account of the “parts” of Being, namely, the ideas Rest and Change separately as well as the idea of both together, counts “three” of them—Rest “one,” Change “two,” and both together “three,”—when, in truth, there are only “two”: the ideas of Rest and Change. The eidetic number of the idea of Being, then, is “Two,” not “three.”

Contra Heidegger, therefore, Klein’s *Math Book* shows that Being is *not* characterized by Plato as the idea of something that is present to cognition and therefore available to the *logos*, and, in the process of showing this, he shows that the Stranger’s second dialectical directive is not completely obscure. Only the “arithmological” structure of the community of ideas, that is, the one idea encompassing many ideas from “outside,” can provide the “paradigm” for the structure

of the one over many mode of being of mathematical numbers, and not vice versa. Moreover, only the *taxis*, the order of eidetic numbers beginning with the eidetic “Two,” the idea of Being, can account for the many discrete mathematical numbers, for the differences in the one over many unity of each *arithmos* as exactly so many. In addition, only the “arithmological” structure of the community of ideas can account for the many *genê* and *eidê* of that which has Being, and for the *analogia*, the proportion, by means of which both certain mathematical problems and the Being of certain things can be understood. In other words, the “foundation” of the Being of both quantitative and qualitative beings, of the beings counted and calculated with by mathematical thinking, and the beings collected and divided by dialectical thinking, are the *arithmoi eidetikoî*.

As I have already suggested, because of the numerical character that is ascribed to this foundation, specifically, to the ascription of a number-like being to its eidetic “concepts,” Klein maintains that the “solution” to the problem of the one and the many that is provided by the theory of eidetic numbers, is in his words, “bought . . . at the price of the transgression of the limits which are set for the *logos*.”<sup>24</sup> For not only is the “ordinary mode of predication, such as: ‘the horse is an animal’, ‘the dog is an animal’, etc., no longer understandable,” but the “natural” meaning of number, as the exact amount of a multitude of things, “is now lost.” (The former is the case, because the “arithmological” unity is precisely something that cannot be predicated of that which it unifies: neither the mathematical monads in an arithmetical number, nor the eidetic monads in an eidetic number can be said to be the number in question, as a horse or a dog can both be said to be an animal. The latter is the case because the monads in an eidetic number cannot be counted and therefore do not have an exact amount.) If Klein is right about Plato’s philosophy, this much is clear: Being is neither a concept nor something that can be known and articulated “with complete clarity” by the *logos*; what can be articulated about it is its

inseparability from its opposite, and the “common thing”—Being—shared by each term of the opposition characteristic of it is manifestly something that does not have or express what the moderns would call “meaning.”

Klein’s reason for this last point is also presented in his *Math Book*, and can be succinctly stated as follows: the modern preoccupation with “meaning” is, in fact, a preoccupation with “concepts” that have as their primary referents other concepts, and, therefore, not the individual objects to which all concepts originally refer.<sup>25</sup> The concepts that provide the foundation of modern, symbolic mathematics are paradigmatic of concepts whose fundamental mode of being is their relationship with other concepts, all of which, in turn, are derivative of or otherwise dependent upon the symbolic concept of number in general for their “meaning”—a term which must be kept sharply distinct from “intelligibility.” Individual beings are “intelligible” as changing or resting, indeed, as changing in one respect while simultaneously resting in another. The “invisible looks” (*eidê*) of Rest and Change, too, are “intelligible,” though *not* as individual things that are resting or changing, but rather as that which all resting and changing individual things have “in common.” Their commonality is likewise “intelligible,” although, again, it is not intelligible as individual things are. As we have seen, because Being is not one but twofold for Plato, the “intelligibility” either of things or their “invisible looks” can never be complete. In comparison with this incomplete “intelligibility,” the “meaning” of the modern symbolic concept of number in general is completely “unintelligible.” This concept refers neither to individual beings nor to what they share in common, their “invisible looks”; rather, the symbolic concept of number in general does not, properly speaking, refer to any *thing*, but is itself something that is referred to as if it were some thing, namely, as if it were an individual thing just like the individual beings that, for the ancient Greeks, are intelligible as resting and moving. But it is not a being like those beings. It is not a being at all, but a cipher, a sense-

perceptible mark (or marks) that is not only treated like some individual thing, but, in a fundamental ontological sense, also replaces all the individual things, individual beings, in the world with “concepts” that cannot refer to things or beings because the mode of being of the latter is now self-evidently taken to be “conceptual.”

Klein’s *Math Book* traces the symbolic number concept’s remarkable power both to replace individual beings with concepts, and to do so without “detection,” to the literally twofold mode of being “unintelligible” proper to the mathematical symbol. On the one hand, it combines a completely indeterminate and non-perceptible concept—quantity in general—with a completely determinate sense-perceptible “mark.” Because this mark is indistinguishable from that with which it is combined, viz., from the non-perceptible concept or quantity in general, it is patently not a sign, if by “sign” we mean a part of language that indicates something other than itself in a manner distinguishable from the significance of what it indicates; rather than signifying something other than itself, the mark presents itself as what it symbolizes. For instance, “2” does not signify something other than itself, for example, the exact amount of some kind of object; instead, it presents itself as the “concept of two,” which means, “the general concept of twoness in general”<sup>26</sup>—and it does so in a manner that involves absolutely no immediate reference to any individual things. Therefore, to call “2” a “number sign,” or “a” a “letter sign,” is a misnomer, since in both cases what is meant is the “symbolic relation between the sign and what it designates.”<sup>27</sup> In the case of “2,” what is meant is “the general number-character of this one number,” while in the case of “a” what is meant is “the general numerical character of each and every number.” On the other hand, the completely indeterminate and non-perceptible concept from which the sense-perceptible mark is indistinguishable assumes the status of something whose mode of being is itself indistinguishable from other sense-perceptible individual things,

and, as such, it assumes the status of something that can be “treated” just like these other sense-perceptible things, including being counted. Most significantly, the completely indeterminate quantitative mode of being of the concept that is inseparable from the mathematical symbol becomes determinate precisely insofar as the sense-perceptible mark that is inseparable from it is treated like other sense-perceptible things, for instance, rocks, tables, copies of Klein’s *Math Book*, and so on. Thus, in the case of the symbol “2,” Klein says, “The concept of twoness is at the same time understood as referring to two entities.”<sup>28</sup>

Both of these characteristics belonging to the mathematical symbol reveal their complete “unintelligibility” only in comparison to the incomplete “intelligibility” of the Greek *arithmos*. The Greek number’s incomplete “intelligibility” involves the mixture of (1) the “intelligibility” to mathematical “thinking” (*dianoia*) of the exact determination belonging to the amount of a definite multitude of sensible or thinkable (and, in this latter sense, “intelligible”) beings and (2) the “unintelligibility” to philosophical “thoughtfulness” (*phronêsis*) of its one over many mode of being. In comparison and contrast, the mathematical symbol’s complete “unintelligibility” concerns (1) its absolute lack of an immediate reference to any definite things and (2) the thing-like determinateness of its sense-perceptible mark, which presents the “concept” of an indeterminate quantity in the manner of a determinate object, and therefore, presents a mark that neither signifies anything nor shares an “invisible looks” with any other thing, as something that is nevertheless “intelligible.” In other words, Klein says that the “symbolic unreality” of the mathematical symbol is located in the fact that it presents something intrinsically and completely “unintelligible” as something that is “intelligible.”

The mathematical symbol’s complete “unintelligibility,” however, is not for Klein tantamount to a putative meaninglessness. On the contrary, it is precisely the character of its mode of being as “unintelligible” that necessitates its involve-

ment with “meaning,” namely, with the meaning that accrues to it on the basis of the “stipulation” of rules for manipulating otherwise “unintelligible” sense-perceptible marks, rules whose “syntax” is derived, originally, from the rules of operation with non-symbolic numbers. Mathematical symbols are therefore only meaningful insofar as their “pure” conceptual mode of being is accorded a numerical significance that is akin—somehow—to non-symbolical numbers, to amounts of things that can be, “in principle,” counted.

Klein’s *Math Book*, and his lectures prior to 1940, employs what he characterizes as “the” language of the Schools or Scholastic language’s talk of first intentions and second intentions, or, as he himself sometimes notes,<sup>29</sup> the more properly articulated distinction between the objects of first intentions and the objects of second intentions, to “express” the state of affairs involved here. He uses this language to (1) describe both the shift from the ancient “meaning” to the modern “meaning” of numbers and (2) delineate the corresponding shift in the paradigm of the ancient “meaning” and the modern “meaning” of what it is to be a concept, the latter shift being characterized (likewise prior to 1940) by Klein as *the* transformation of the ancient concept’s “conceptuality.” (The scare quotes around the word “meaning” here call attention to the fact that, strictly speaking, for Klein, the term “meaning,” being commensurate solely with the modern concept, is therefore a misleading, if not falsifying, basis upon which to compare and contrast the statuses of ancient Greek and modern concepts.) First intentions concern the existence and quiddity of an object, its being in its own right; second intentions concern an the object insofar as it has being in being known, in apprehension. Hence, the state of being of an object in cognition is *second*, while the state of being of an object in itself is *first*. Because the Greek *arithmos* is inseparable from the direct reference to a multitude of definite things, the status of its referents lends itself to being designated as first intentional.

Because the concept of “indeterminate or general quantity” concerns an object insofar as it is known, the status of its referent lends itself to being designated as second intentional. Moreover, the sense-perceptible mark that belongs to the modern symbolic number is, like any other sense-perceptible thing, the object of a first intention, and because of this, Klein maintains that the “conceptuality” characteristic of the mode of being belonging to the modern concept of number is tantamount to the apprehension of the object of a second intention as having the being of the object of a first intention. Moreover, he maintains that the modern “conceptuality” of number is only manifest in its contrast with the ancient Greek “conceptuality,” which is characterized by the first intentional status of the objects to which it refers and is therefore related.

Klein also appeals to the distinction between first and second intentions to clarify Descartes’s attempt to understand the origin of the novel mode of being that belongs to the symbolic number concept, an attempt that Klein maintains was the first, as well as the last such, in the philosophical tradition. Descartes’s attempt appealed to the power of the imagination to assist the pure intellect in making visible to it (the pure intellect), as a “symbol,” the indeterminate object that it has already abstracted from its own power of knowing determinate numbers. Abstraction in Aristotle presupposes definite beings that are intelligible in terms of common qualities, the latter being “lifted off” the former in accordance with a process that is more logical than psychological; abstraction in Descartes presupposes definite beings but not their intelligibility, in the case at hand their “intelligibility” as so many beings. Rather, Descartes’s abstraction works upon the mind’s act of knowing a multitude of units, separating out the mind’s own conceiving of that multitude, which it immediately makes objective. The mind turns and reflects on its own knowing when it is directed to the idea of number as a multitude of units, and, in so doing, it no longer apprehends the multitude of units directly, in the “performed act” (*actus*

*exercitus*) and thus as object of its first intention, but rather indirectly, in the “signified act” (*actus signatus*), as object of its second intention. Thus, notwithstanding the fact that what is being conceived by the intellect is a multitude of units, the intellect’s immediate apprehension of its own conceiving as something, as one and therefore as a being, has the effect of transforming the multitude belonging to the number into a seemingly independent being, albeit a being that is only a “rational being” (*ens rationis*). To repeat: this “rational being” is the result of the intellect, which, secondarily (in reflection) intends a thing already conceived before, and intends it insofar as it has been conceived. When the rational being is then “grasped *with the aid of the imagination* in such a way that the intellect can, in turn, take it up as an object in the mode of a ‘first intention’, we are dealing with a *symbol*.”<sup>30</sup>

Abstraction for Descartes is therefore characterized by Klein as “symbolic,” because the “concept” (*Begriff*) that it yields is manifestly not something that is lifted off the intelligible qualities of things, but rather, is something whose very mode of being is inseparable from the following: (1) the intellect’s pure—by “pure” is meant completely separate from the things it apprehends—grasping of its own power to apprehend these qualities themselves, and (2) this power itself being apprehended as an object whose mode of being is nevertheless akin to the very things that its mode of being separates itself from. Klein stresses that the “kinship” between the power of apprehension proper to the “pure” intellect and that which is effectively foreign to it (i.e., the things possessing the intelligible qualities that are apprehended by the “pure” intellect’s power) is established by making this power “visible.” The algebraic letter “signs” of Viète or the “geometric” figures of Descartes are what accomplish this. They are what—in the language of the Schools—allow the object of a second intention to be apprehended as the object of a first intention, and are therefore “symbols.”

The indeterminate or general object yielded in “symbolic abstraction” is neither purely a concept nor purely a “sign,” but precisely the unimaginable and unintelligible identification of the object of a second intention with the object of a first. This identification is “unimaginable” because “images” properly—both for the ancient Greeks and for Descartes—refer to either particular objects of first intentions or to their particular “common qualities.”<sup>31</sup> The identification between second and first intentional objects is “unintelligible” because for “natural” predication, to say that a concept is both general and particular “at the same time” is nonsensical.

Nowhere that I know of does Klein write that this identification, which makes possible the symbolic “language” of algebra and therefore, mathematical physics, is a mathematical mistake. Likewise, nowhere that I know of does Klein write that the science that symbolic mathematics makes possible is a philosophical mistake. Moreover, so far as I can tell, Klein never even hints in his writings that the identification of the objects of first and second intentions means that first and second intentions have been “confused” by modern science, as some have suggested. What Klein does explicitly characterize as a mistake is the view of the symbolic language of algebra as “a purely technical or instrumental matter.”<sup>32</sup> He writes, “it is a common mistake to believe that we can translate the theorems of mathematical physics into ordinary language, as if the mathematical apparatus used by the physicists were only a tool employed in expressing their theorems more easily.”<sup>33</sup> He also writes that the early modern “natural philosophers,” in their self-interpretation of their new science, the “true” physics, understood it to be the perfection and the completion of the science of the ancients. And clearly, Klein’s *Math Book* is an “argument” whose goal is to refute the veracity of this self-interpretation, and to do so primarily on the basis of the different “conceptualities” that are characteristic of the incomplete intelligibility of the ancient number concept and the complete unintelligibility belonging

to the meaning of the modern symbolic number concept. That said, on my view it does not follow that the argument extends also to the new science itself, that is, to the claim that the symbolic cognition made possible by the “conception” proper to the symbolic number concept is something that is somehow false or less true, in comparison with the ancient number concept and ancient “science” generally. Modern science, mathematical physics, and the symbolic cognition that is its main nerve, is therefore not a mistake on Klein’s view.

What for Klein *is* a mistake, however, is the *interpretation* of the “true” object (singular) of this science as the objects (plural) of the first intentions that were and indeed remain the “true” objects of ancient Greek science. The nature of this mistake is neither “mathematical” nor, strictly speaking, “scientific,” but philosophical. It is a mistake that was made by the early modern inventors of mathematical physics, and it is a mistake still made today by their innumerable progeny, philosophers and non-philosophers alike. It is a mistake made by Husserl, who, despite himself and the attempt present in his last writings to restore the integrity of knowledge threatened by the all pervading tendency of “sedimentation,” of the forgetfulness of the original meanings of our words and concepts, nevertheless could not let go of his earliest belief in the “mere” instrumentality of the symbolic calculus. Husserl likened the putative “technicity” of symbolical calculation to the “rules of the game” that govern it mechanically, rules that originally spring from the categories and objects that are “given” in the experience that makes our language and “traditional” Aristotelian logic both possible and intelligible.

Klein had to know about Husserl’s mistake, which is no doubt why, among other reasons, Husserl’s name is not mentioned once in the original version of his *Math Book*, and why the concept of “intentionality” to which Klein appeals in that book and in his writings and lectures before 1940 is that of the Schools, not of Husserl. The reason for this can found

in Klein's account of the symbolic character of the indeterminateness or generality of the modern concept of number. While Husserl was also aware of this indeterminateness—indeed, besides Klein was perhaps more aware of it than any other twentieth-century thinker, calling it the concept of the “anything whatever” (*Etwas überhaupt*) and assigning to its investigation a new science, which he called “formal ontology”—Husserl nevertheless thought that its “intentionality” could be distinguished from the sense-perceptible marks that manifest the mathematic symbol. This, as we have seen, is for Klein simply not possible, because, absent such marks, the pure concepts of modern mathematics would, quite literally, be invisible and therefore inaccessible to the “pure intellect” that calculates with them in symbolic cognition. Moreover, such an intentional distinction between the symbolic “signs” and the indeterminate objects to which they are related *symbolically* (and therefore not “significatively”), occludes the most important characteristic of the general object that this symbolic relationship makes possible, namely, the utter impossibility of its conceptual “meaning” ever referring directly to the individual things or objects in the world. Husserl, of course, spent most of his life trying to show both that and how the meaning of the “concept” of “something in general” is “objective,” and is such in the precise sense that the origin of its unity (as well as the origin of all its possible modes of being and relations) is rooted ultimately in the “phenomena” of individual objects and the “evidence” of their individuality that is presented in the perceptual experience of them. Klein, likewise, spent most of his life trying to show that it is a philosophical mistake to think that the meaning of a “concept in general” could ever be traced to an origin in individual objects and their perceptual experience.

Klein's “reason” for trying to show this impossibility can be found in his account of the “symbolic abstraction” in Descartes' articulation of the genesis proper to the mind's representation to itself of its pure concepts—to what makes

such concepts “concepts,” which Klein refers to as their *modern* “conceptuality.” As we have seen, Klein characterizes the modern “conceptuality” in terms of the, comparatively speaking, complete “unintelligibility” of the meaning proper to the general concepts that it makes possible, an unintelligibility that emerges when this “meaning” is compared to the incomplete intelligibility of the “conceptuality” of ancient Greek concepts. In a word, on Klein's view, the “conceptuality” responsible for Descartes' articulation of what a “concept” (*Begriff*) is, is not only paradigmatic for all modern concepts, but it is also the source of the late modern problem of providing cognition with a “foundation,” in the sense of both establishing and providing an account of the connection between general concepts and their “objects.” Because, however, this connection is second intentional in the instance of the concept of an object in general, Husserl's attempt to provide the sought-after foundation by appealing to “intuition,” namely, to the intuition of the relation between the object of a second intention to the object of a first intention, is in principle doomed to fail. It is so for the simple reason that the status of the relation between second intentional objects, which manifestly are not first intentional objects—withstanding their philosophical misinterpretation as such—and first intentional objects themselves, is not perceptual but symbolic.

Klein's reason for distancing himself from Husserl's phenomenological account of “meaning” is therefore at once philosophical and historical; or, rather, it presupposes a mode of awareness that is neither one nor the other, but “both together.” Indeed, only the presupposition of such a mode of awareness can justify the radical distinction he makes between the respective “meanings” of ancient and modern “conceptuality,” which distinction, strictly speaking, annuls the omni-temporality—or, what is the same thing, the omni-historicity—of the very concept of “meaning” and assigns an historical locus to the concept of truth—a locus that is

relative accordingly as it is proximate to the ancient Greek or the modern “conceptuality.” Moreover, it is only the presupposition of such a mode of awareness that can account for the status of the vantage from which Klein makes the comparison between ancient science and philosophy and modern science and philosophy, a vantage whose sights are indeed set on the *things themselves* that are *in* comparison.

I, for one, do not presume to be in the position, philosophically, mathematically, historically, or otherwise speaking, to judge that the mode of awareness presupposed by Klein’s account of these matters is unwarranted. Indeed, unlike Hans-Georg Gadamer, who complained that Klein together with Leo Strauss, “employ a style in their work that is too much a commentary, so that finally their voices are lost,”<sup>34</sup> I find the hermeneutical “transparency” of Klein’s writings thought-provoking in a manner that renders trivial the claims of “philosophical hermeneutics” regarding the historically conditioned character of all our understanding. For me, Klein’s writings show not only what remains, even now, some three quarters of a century after the publication of his *Math Book*, as perhaps the most significant specimens of our “historically conditioned” understanding “in” history, but also, that the “history” that they are in is none other than the *historia* that Plato’s Socrates’ spoke about in the *Phaedo*. “*Historia*” in that sense is a problem, concerned neither with a contingent sequence of events or philosophical theories nor with the “concept” or “meaning” of “history” as such, but rather, with the problem of inquiry itself. The mode of awareness presupposed by the philosophical-mathematical-historical distinctions that Klein’s writings make regarding meaning and truth points, on my view, to the author’s encounter with “inquiry” (*historia*) as something that comes forward as a problem whenever the question arises of the origin of whatever it is that is under discussion. To the question of whether the inquiries in Klein’s *Math Book* and other writings are “true,” I believe that the best answer would have to be some-

thing like this: Klein has said what he thinks is true of the matters addressed by his inquiries. The question of whether what he has said is “correct” is one that has to be posed not to their author and the putative concepts and meanings that govern his “philosophy,” but to these inquiries themselves. If Klein has not spoken correctly, it is our “task to take up the argument and refute it.”<sup>35</sup>

That said, I would like to close with a suggestion and a question. The suggestion: Klein’s well-known reticence to discuss, in any detail, the presuppositions of his own thought, may be rooted in his polite refusal of Leibniz’s invitation to “follow him [Leibniz]—to the audience-chamber of God,” and to join him, along with the other immortal philosophers, “on a little stool at God’s feet.” The question: does the shift from the ancient Greek to the modern conceptuality of numbers, which Klein has shown applies to the cardinality of numbers, extend to their ordinality as well? Specifically, is there an historical locus proper to the truth of the “firstness” of the first intentional objects and the “secondness” of the second intentional objects by which Klein expresses the decisive shift from the ancient to the modern consciousness?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jacob Klein and Leo Strauss, “A Giving of Accounts: Jacob Klein and Leo Strauss,” *The College* (April 1970): 1-5, here 1. Hereafter, cited as “Accounts.”

<sup>2</sup> Jacob Klein, “Speech, Its Strength and Its Weaknesses,” in *Lectures and Essays*, eds. Robert B. Williamson and Elliot Zuckerman (Annapolis: St. John’s College Press, 1985): 361-374, here 370-371. Hereafter cited as “Speech,” while the volume itself will be cited as “*Essays*.”

<sup>3</sup> Jacob Klein, “Modern Rationalism,” in *Essays*, 53-64, here 64. Hereafter cited as “Rationalism.”

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Although sometimes he identifies it as occurring earlier, for instance, when he stated in 1970 that it occurred “about 500 years ago” (“Accounts,” 1).

<sup>6</sup> Jacob Klein, *Plato's Trilogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 2. Hereafter, cited as *Trilogy*.

<sup>7</sup> Jacob Klein, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra*, trans. Eva Brann (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1969; reprint: New York: Dover, 1992). This work was originally published in German as “Die griechische Logistik und die Entstehung der Algebra” in *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Mathematik, Astronomie und Physik*, Abteilung B: *Studien*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Berlin, 1934), pp. 18–105 (Part I); no. 2 (1936), pp. 122–235 (Part II). Hereinafter, cited as “*Math Book*.”

<sup>8</sup> Jacob Klein, “The Concept of Number is Greek Mathematics and Philosophy,” in *Essays*, 43-52, here 43. Hereafter cited as “Concept of Number.”

<sup>9</sup> Jacob Klein, *Math Book*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Jacob Klein, “Modern Rationalism,” 63.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob Klein, “Speech,” 374. He also mentions him by name in “Accounts,” which, however, is a transcript of a tape recording.

<sup>12</sup> Jacob Klein, “Aristotle, an Introduction,” *Essays*, 171-195, here 171.

<sup>13</sup> “Accounts,” 3.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 365.

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

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 366.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Works by Konrad Gaiser, J.N. Findlay, and H.J. Krämer on Plato's “unwritten doctrine,” for all their diversity, share the following characteristics: 1) they fail to acknowledge the priority of Klein's work on their topic, and 2) they (perhaps, consequently) approach Plato's “mathematics” and “eidetic numbers” from an alien conceptual level. See, respectively: *Platos Ungeschriebene Lehre* (Stuttgart: E. Klett, 1968); *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974); and *Plato and the Foundations of Metaphysics*, trans. John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990). Mitchell Miller's work is an exception to 2); see “Unwritten Teachings” in the *Parmenides*,” *Review of Metaphysics* 48 (March 1995): 591-633; “Dialectical Education and Unwritten Teachings in Plato's *Statesman*,” in

*Plato and Platonism*, ed. Johannes M. Van Ophuijsen (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 1999), 218-239; “Figure, Ratio, Form” *Plato's Five Mathematical Studies*,” *Aperion* XXXII, 4 (1999): 73-88.

<sup>19</sup> Klein, *Math Book*, 62 (my italics).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Jacob Klein, *Math Book*, 184.

<sup>22</sup> Jacob Klein, “*Concept of Numbers*,” 51.

<sup>23</sup> Jacob Klein, *Math Book*, 54.

<sup>24</sup> Jacob Klein, *Math Book*, 99.

<sup>25</sup> There may be one possible exception to this, namely “the so-called *general theory of proportions*” (Jacob Klein, “The World of Physics and the ‘Natural’ World,” in *Essays*, 1-34, here 27; hereinafter, cited as “World of Physics”) of Euclid, although Klein does not appear to be altogether of one mind about whether this “theory” really represents a case where ancient concepts refer originally to other concepts and not to individual objects. In 1932, he wrote, “The fifth book of Euclid, in fact, contains a ‘geometrical algebra’” (*Ibid.*), which he characterized as not treating “the ratios of particular magnitudes, geometrical forms for instance, or numbers or bodily masses or time segments, but ratios ‘in themselves’, the wholly undetermined bearers of which are *symbolized* [*symbolisch . . . versinnbildlicht*] by straight lines” (*Ibid.*). In other words, he seems to characterize here an indeterminate or general object as corresponding to the general procedure of Euclid, and therewith, a non-individual object as the “referent” of this procedure's “concepts.” However, in his *Math Book*, which I assume was written later (it was published 1934-1936), precisely this possibility is ruled out by Klein, when he writes, “For ancient science, the existence of a ‘general object’ is by no means a simple consequence of a ‘general theory’” (*Math Book*, 161), and he goes on to quote Aristotle's view on this matter (in *Metaphysics* M 3, 1077 b 17-20) as definitive: “‘The general propositions of mathematics [namely the ‘axioms’, i.e., the ‘common notions’, but also all theorems of the Eudoxian theory of proportions] *are not about separate things* which exist *outside of and alongside of* the [geometric] magnitudes and numbers, but are just about these; not, however, insofar as they are such as to have a magnitude or to be divisible [into discrete units]” (*Ibid.*). It is therefore upon the basis of this, apparently, later view of Klein's that I refer to the “*all*” here.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Jacob Klein, *Math Book*, 306, n. 324.

<sup>30</sup> Jacob Klein, *Math Book*, 208.

<sup>31</sup> Indeed, it is for this reason that Descartes, on Klein's view, stresses the "power" of imagination, and not the imagination's "images," to assist the pure intellect in grasping the completely indeterminate concepts that it has separated from the ideas that the imagination offers it, because these ideas are precisely "determinate images"—and therefore, intrinsically unsuitable for representing to the intellect its indeterminate concepts. The imagination's power, however, being indeterminate insofar as it is not limited to any particular one of its images, is able to use its own indeterminateness to enter into the "service" of the pure intellect and make visible a "symbolic representation" of what is otherwise invisible to it, by facilitating, as it were, the identification of the objects of first and second intentions in the symbol's peculiar mode of being. The imagination's facilitation involves, as it were, its according its "power" of visibility to the concept's invisibility.

<sup>32</sup> Jacob Klein, "Modern Rationalism," 61.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1997), 236.

<sup>35</sup> Plato, *Meno*, 75C-D.

## Addendum

The following images correspond to pages 68 and 69 of *The St. John's Review*, volume 47, number 1 ("What Tree Is This: In Praise of Europe's Renaissance Printers, Publishers, and Philologists," by Chaninah Maschler). Omitted originally because of print quality, they appear now at the request of the author.

