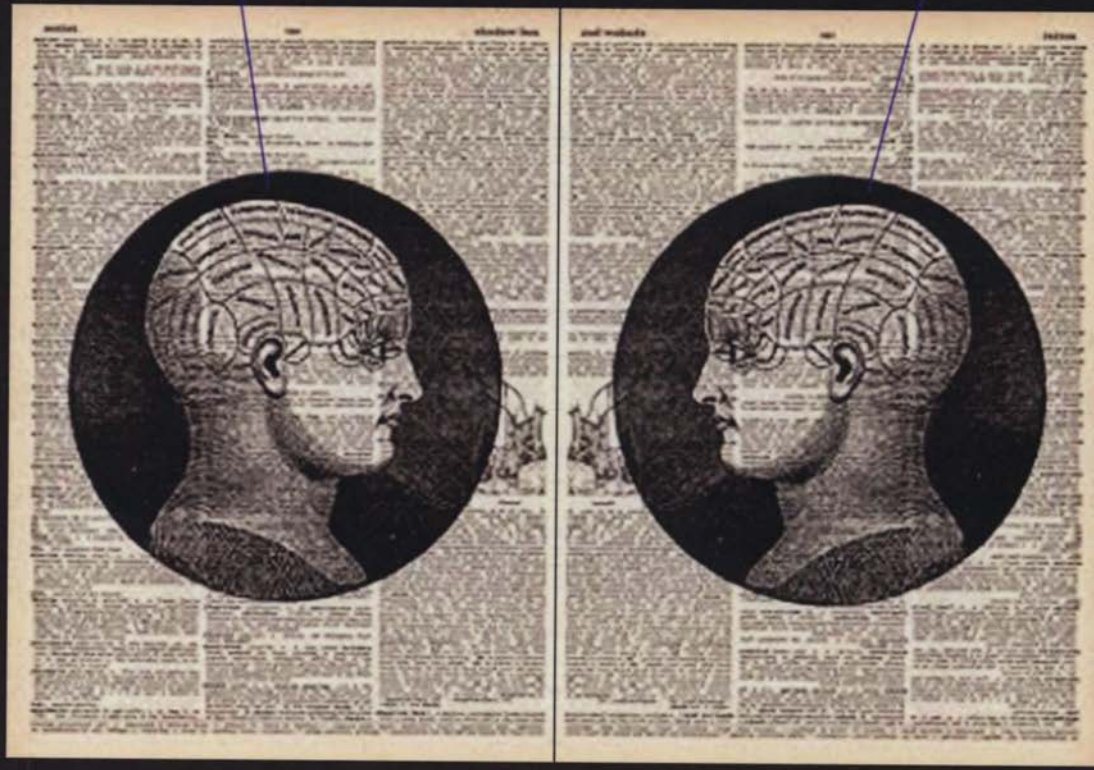
EARLY WRITINGS

AN ACADEMIC JOURNAL



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Early Writings:
An Academic Journal

St. John's College Graduate Institute
Santa Fe, New Mexico
2012

ST JOHN'S
College

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This project is dedicated to Mary Versace,
without whom we would be lost in a haunted wood,
children afraid of the night,
who have never been happy or good.

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A Note About Our Project

Early Writings: An Academic Journal 2012 marks the second edition of our project in the Graduate Institute at St. John's College, Santa Fe. This publication is a collection of essays composed by graduate students in both the Eastern Classics and Liberal Arts program.

One of the crowning practices of those studying the Great Books is that of inquiry. We find that the passage through any text is both byzantine and yet necessarily careful. Each step is precise, specific, and each is directed by the kind of questions we ask. In our experience studying these texts, we have learned not only to ask careful and precise questions, but also to ask the most demanding and largest questions we could. This collection of essays is compelling proof that students are taking up these questions outside of the classrooms that initially inspired them. Further, students are developing, investigating, and truly grappling with the inquiries that emerged in communion.

Consider the questions in this compilation alone: What is the precise meaning of recollection for Socrates? How can language be used to organize the psychic realm? Can we acquire moral judgments through sensory experience alone? How can one find refuge through poetry given the seemingly irreconcilable logo-centric notions of "idea" and "experience"? What kind of man is Aristotle's "high-minded man" and is his magnanimity at the expense of his kindness? How can Hegel's notion of Spirit be understood through geography? How does the Mahabharata explain what it means to be a "good" king? And what must a ruler endure to become one? How does Pushkin re-interpret the Christian tale of man's fall in Eden? What role do passion and desire play in human happiness?

Each of these inquiries addresses a "how" or a "why" question. Not only do these inquiries investigate deeper philosophical issues, but they seek to explain the details and inner workings of the ideas at hand. One does not ask, "What makes a good king in the Mahabharata?" but, "How is he good and what psychic and spiritual experiences have made him that way?" One does not ask if geography plays a part in Hegel's notion of Spirit but "How does a geographically-based culture affect

Hegel's very meaning of Spirit?" These very investigations are the mark of eager minds and their earnest quest toward knowledge.

This edition of the Journal was created in the same manner as its pilot edition. Anonymous copies of student submissions were carefully reviewed by a selection committee comprised of members of the Graduate Institute. It is due to their hard work and dedication that this diverse collection exists for you to read today. Editors who submitted to the journal surrendered their voting rights during review of their essay and the occasion of their submission remained confidential. Upon selection, a small team of editors reviewed the works for minor changes and corrections, including grammar and syntax. Next, an even smaller team of publishers designed and formatted the content for publication. Thank you to all those in the student body who have worked so hard to put this project together and to our Graduate Director, Mr. Davis, who continually supports us through all of our endeavors.

Your Publishers and Executive Editors,

Mary Creighton
Casey Carr
Jesse Wilhite

Synergy and the Possibility of Knowledge in Plato's *Meno*

Jeremy Boor

Ἐκ μὲν τοίνυν τούτου τοῦ λογισμοῦ, ὦ Μένων, θεία μοίρᾳ ἡμῖν φαίνεται παραγιγνομένη ἡ ἀρετὴ οἷς ἂν παραγίγνηται· τὸ δὲ σαφὲς περὶ αὐτοῦ εἰσόμεθα τότε, ὅταν πρὶν ᾧτινι τρόπῳ τοῖς ἀνθρωποις παραγίγνεται ἀρετή , πρότερον ἐπιχειρήσωμεν αὐτὸ ζητεῖν τί ποτ' ἔστιν ἀρετή. νῦν δ' ἐμοὶ μὲν ὥρα ποι ἰέναι, σὺ δὲ ταὐτὰ ταῦτα ἅπερ αὐτὸς πέπεισαι πεῖθε καὶ τὸν ξένον τόνδε Ἄνυτον, ἵνα πραότερος ᾖ· ὡς ἐὰν πείσῃς τοῦτον, ἔστιν ὅτι καὶ Ἀθηναίους ὀνήσεις.

According to this thinking, O Meno, it appears to us that it is by divine dispensation that virtue comes to be with those men to whomsoever it may come. And we will be more certain about this when we apply ourselves first to seeking what virtue is in itself, before asking in what manner it comes to be with men. But now it is time for me to go. But do convince your guest-friend Anytus here about these things concerning which you yourself are convinced, so that he may be more gentle. For if you should convince him, you will also truly benefit the Athenians.

(*Meno*, Plato 100:b2-c2)*

Increasing Virtue by Declaring it Un-teachable

Socrates, that old stingray, is befuddling us again. He appears to be couching some immortal intuition (some *ὀρθὴ δόξα*, darkly retained from his hypo-/hyper-cosmic psychic sojourns between lives) between an ostensibly sound conclusion on one hand, and a hopeful bit of moral advice on the other. In so doing, and quite to the point, he utterly contradicts himself.

There is a bold, if somewhat hidden, disagreement between the dialogue's resolution— that virtue is un-teachable, extra-natural, and unaccompanied by knowledge— and Socrates' opinion that Anytus will become meeker if only Meno should convince him of this very thing. It will be odd, if upon conclusion, we see that one can lead a man to virtue by teaching him that virtue cannot be taught. We should certainly investigate what this might mean.

We might try to escape this confusion by saying that Socrates is not thinking of virtue at all when he asks Meno to help improve Anytus through argument. Perhaps the meekness that Socrates hopes will come to Anytus is not a part of virtue, or perhaps it does not require the kind of

virtue that is unattainable by natural or didactic means.

But the change in character that Socrates predicts does in fact agree with the more definite descriptions of virtue that have appeared in the dialogue. A constant relationship between virtue and good statesmanship has been maintained throughout. The virtuous man is always beneficent; if he is a statesman he will be a good one, valued by the polis. To be virtuous is to be good, to be good is to be beneficent, and the beneficent man guides us rightly in our affairs.[1] He is therefore good for the polis.

Socrates re-invokes this relationship immediately before his parting advice to Meno: " . . . [virtue] comes to those who possess it as a gift from the gods which is not accompanied by understanding, unless there is someone among our statesmen who can make another into a statesman."[2] Socrates believes that Anytus shall be a better statesman, by way of increased meekness, if he learns to see virtue as a divine gift, one beyond man's power to attain through learning.[3]

But does Socrates give Meno this last advice in earnest? Are we to read him as sincerely believing that Anytus can and will become meeker and more beneficent if Meno can only convince him to stop thinking of virtue as a kind of knowledge that one man obtains from another, and to begin thinking of it as a gift from the gods? Perhaps he is being coy, or Plato is being sarcastic. Given the historical records of both Meno and Anytus, we might be meant to read only tragic irony in Socrates' parting words. The reader is assumed to know that Anytus is going to accuse Socrates before the Athenian court in the irascible way in which he accused the Sophists earlier in the dialogue, showing himself thereby to be anything but *πράος*.

Whether Meno tried to persuade him or not, Anytus did not become better. He continued in his ways to the lasting detriment of Athens (and perhaps of Socrates, depending on your point of view). Remembering the stiffness of Anytus' neck, we are to lament the naiveté of Socrates, who did not see the vanity of his own counsel. Such counsel Plato only puts in his mouth as a final, historical, and dramatic demonstration of the insurmountable incommunicability of virtue.[4]

On the other hand, Socrates' choice of words implies that he does not merely hope that Anytus will become better if Meno should convince him. He is certain that an improvement will result: "For if you should convince this one, it is the case that you are going to benefit the Athenians"* (*ὡς ἐὰν πείσῃς τοῦτον, **ἔστιν ὅτι** καὶ Ἀθηναίους **ὀνήσεις**).* "Convincing" and "being meeker" are stated in the subjunctive, but the result of benefit to the polis (which depends on the former) is stated in

the indicative. Anytus may be a difficult case, and Meno might fail to persuade him. But if he does persuade, the results are certain and the increase in virtue implicit. Socrates believes that understanding virtue as a divine gift is morally beneficial, at least as far as Anytus is concerned. The conclusion of the dialogue thus stands: Virtue cannot be taught. But if you manage to teach a bad man this fact, he will get better.

To make matters worse, it is difficult to be sure that Socrates is thoroughly persuaded of the truth of his and Meno's resolution concerning the provenance of virtue. He speaks of the conclusion guardedly, making it contingent on the correctness of the initial conditions of inquiry. However, he has accepted these conditions only as a concession to Meno: "... but if we were right in the way we investigated this whole discussion . . . ,"[5] "According to this reasoning (*Ἐκ μὲν τοίνυν τούτου τοῦ λογισμοῦ*), it appears to us that virtue comes . . . according to divine fate . . . "[6]

There is still more to learn about this matter, and a greater degree of certainty to be attained. This certainty can only be approached by abandoning the conditions on which the resolution was reached. This Socrates accepted when he conceded to Meno's insistence on seeking how virtue is attained without first having decided what virtue is:

> *τὸ δὲ σαφὲς περὶ αὐτοῦ εἰσόμεθα τότε, ὅταν πρὶν ὧτινι τρόπῳ τοῖς ἀνθρωποις παραγίγνεται ἀρετή, πρότερον ἐπιχειρήσωμεν αὐτὸ ζητεῖν τί ποτ' ἔστιν ἀρετή.*

The conclusion, while morally beneficial for Anytus, is as valid as its premises, which are in doubt. This is not the first time that Socrates has indicated that some convictions can make us better even if the dialectic that leads to them is questionable. Immediately after the slave-boy experiment, he says:

> I do not insist that my argument is right in all other respects, but I would contend at all costs both in word and deed as far as I could that we will be better men, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it.
>
> (86:b7-c2)

Socrates is not as concerned with the veracity of his account of learning-as-recollection as he is firmly attached to its result; namely, that we can and should learn what we do not know. One must be convinced that we

should seek knowledge because this conviction will make us better. We might be justified in thinking that he has a similar attitude regarding the conclusion that virtue comes to man in no other way but by mysterious divine dispensation (which itself appears simply as an incomprehensible alternative to the more easily conceivable "teaching" and "nature"). Removing the acquisition of virtue from the grasp of teaching and nature produces, in Socrates's eyes, a morally effective teaching that is well suited to the characters of both Meno and Anytus, regardless of the solidity of the dialectical foundations of the same teaching.

None of this is meant to say that Socrates thinks that his and Meno's conclusion regarding virtue and its acquisition is simply false. *Σαφής*, when it refers to assertions or facts, means "sure," "certain." When it refers to persons, as in this case, it means "unerring." If we continue the attempt to seek what virtue itself is before asking how it is attained, we will be more sure about the means of attaining it. If this certainty still includes a statement that virtue cannot be taught but is a divine gift, then we will understand such a statement better, having a better idea of what virtue in fact is. But for now we know only that the outcome of our discussion of its attainment is true insofar as the hypothetical discussion (beginning with Socrates' agreement to seek the origin of virtue on Meno's terms) is valid.

But two very different attitudes toward teaching and knowledge have been demonstrated during the dialogue. If there will be a difference in the way we see the conclusion once we have investigated what virtue is, it will likely have to do with the difference between the view of knowledge that Socrates espouses before his concession to Meno, and the one that he adopts in order to bring the discussion to a firm conclusion, as Meno wishes. We shall examine the difference between these two views more thoroughly hereafter.

The Concession

Since we will be referring not infrequently to what I have called Socrates' concession to Meno, it would be good to establish that such a concession did occur, and to point out just what was conceded. After being convinced by Socrates that learning is really recollection, and that we will always be better men if we believe that we can find out what we do not know, Meno is almost ready to take up the quest for virtue again, but not quite:

> *Meno*: But Socrates, I should be most pleased to hear your answer to my original question, whether we should try [to discover

virtue] on the assumption that virtue is something teachable, or is a natural gift, or in whatever way it comes to men.

Socrates: If I were in control, Meno, not only of myself but also of you, we would not have investigated whether virtue is teachable or not before we had investigated what virtue itself is. But because you do not even attempt to rule yourself, in order that you may be free, but you try to rule me and do so, I will agree with you— for what can I do?

(86:c8-d9)*

Here Socrates quite grudgingly agrees to go on with the discussion in the way Meno wants to proceed. He portrays himself as being forced to do so by Meno's overbearing will and his lack of self-control. Here Meno is not ruling himself, but rather is trying to rule Socrates. This is symptomatic of a state of soul Socrates associates with Meno's lack of freedom.

In a single turn of phrase, Socrates and Meno have gone from being of the same mind (*ὁμονοοῦμεν*)[7] and taking-in-hand to seek in common (*κοινῇ ζητεῖν*)[8] the nature of virtue, to being portrayed as adversaries divided by Meno's perceived insistence on ruling others but not himself. If Socrates sees Meno's failure to rule himself— his failure to be the principle of himself (*σὺ σαυτοῦ οὐδ᾽ ἐπιχειρεῖς ἄρχειν, ἵνα δή ἐλεύθερος ἦς*)[9]— to be a failure of freedom, then Socrates has implied that he himself is in fact free, since he does rule himself, but not Meno: *"Ἀλλ᾽ εἰ μὲν ἐγὼ ἤρχον, ὦ Μένων, μὴ μόνον ἐμαυτοῦ ἀλλὰ καὶ σοῦ . . . ."* [10]

And so Socrates, preserving his internal freedom in submitting to Meno's lack thereof, gives up what has been his main contention for the preceding bulk of the dialogue: that, since he does not know what virtue itself is, he is unable to seek out whether or not it is teachable.

Not only has he conceded this point, but he goes on to rescind the outcome that had seemed an important demonstration about the nature of learning. "First, if [virtue] is another sort than knowledge, is it teachable or not, as we were just saying recollectable? Let it make no difference to us which term we use: is it teachable? Or is it plain to everyone that men cannot be taught anything but knowledge?"[11]

Perhaps there is nothing dangerous about this equation. "Recollection" was, after all, the Socratic picture of what men normally call "learning."[12] But during the demonstration Socrates did not insist that knowledge was not learned, since learning can be another name for recollection. He wanted to show that it was not taught, where teaching is understood as the transmission of quantities of information from a knowing subject to an ignorant one. This is what Socrates strives to show

that he is not doing with the slave-boy. Recollection consists of the soul's gradual elucidation to itself of facts and principles that somehow lie hidden within it, even though the process may be aided by the questioning of an experienced interlocutor. But now, capitulating to Meno's desire to discover how virtue is obtained, Socrates also accepts a view of knowledge that makes it coextensive with teaching. The latter is conceived precisely as Meno always tends to see it: as the transmission of a quantity of information, which can then be easily transmitted to others, perhaps for a fee, or at least for a good reputation. The examples of "teaching" that are given in the post-concession dialogue conform to this view.

The conclusion that virtue is not knowledge, and is therefore neither teachable not learnable, is based on premises that Socrates accepts only hypothetically, in order to finally be able to maintain a discussion with Meno that is capable of coming to some sort of conclusion. Socrates speaks of these conclusions guardedly, making them contingent on the correctness of the initial hypotheses: " . . . but if we were right in the way we investigated this whole discussion . . . ,"[13] "According to this reasoning of the moment *(Ἐκ μὲν τοίνυν τούτου τοῦ λογισμοῦ)*, it appears to us that virtue comes . . . according to divine fate . . . ."[14]

The main difference between the pre-concession and post-concession portions of the dialogue seems to lie in the attitude taken toward knowledge and teaching. Socrates strives to bring Meno to his own view of knowledge within the context of a discussion about virtue, while Meno unflaggingly clings to his old attitude, summed up in his repeated requests to have Socrates simply tell him about virtue. Having finally failed to bring Meno around, Socrates accepts Meno's attitude hypothetically, and the two of them begin to come to conclusions rather rapidly. Simple equations at last begin to be made: Knowledge is what is taught.[15] Virtue as a whole or in part is wisdom.[16] Revising this view, knowledge is solidification through reasoning of right opinion.[17]

Thinking along with Socrates that a Meno or an Anytus can be morally improved by thinking of virtue as having little to do with their ideas of knowledge, teaching, or nature, we must ask whether there are different ideas of these to be had. And if there are, we should see if this tells us anything about virtue. If we are very lucky, we might have some idea of how to acquire it, which idea may or may not include some more thoroughly explained notion of virtue as a divine gift.

The Language of Knowledge in *Meno*

For those of us who would like to gain a clearer understanding of the intelligible world by attaching ever more precise descriptions of rather elusive concepts to an ever increasing number of old Greek words, the *Meno* is a frustrating work. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachaean Ethics*, is kind enough to precisely delineate *σωφία, επιστήμη, νοῦς*, and *φρονήσις* as "dianoetic virtues." Aristotle's waters are never muddied (except in translation) by classing these under such a nebulous and unwieldy term as "knowledge" or "wisdom." But the Socrates of the *Meno* has little interest in such niceties.

Prior to the slave-boy episode, Socrates uses mostly verbs and adverbial phrases to speak of knowledge, and almost always in the negative: (*οὐδὲ αὐτὸ ὅτι ποτ' ἐστὶ τὸ παράπαν ἀρετὴ τυγχάνω εἰδῶς*). At the conclusion of the slave-boy episode, *ἐπιστήμη* becomes the favored nominal form for knowledge, being the thing that the slave-boy has discovered within his own soul. Likewise, in the concluding discussion of the relation of knowledge and true opinion, *ἐπιστήμη* is what *ὀρθὴ δόξα* may become when clarified and stabilized by causal reasoning. But, in between and throughout, Socrates uses *φρονήσις, επιστήμη*, and *νοῦς* interchangeably. These names refer to a single thing, and we know only that, when present, knowledge makes everything in the soul act well. Later, we learn that there is an assistant in this duty, which seems to do most of the work while real knowledge is away.

It would seem that the distinction between knowledge and true opinion is the only one Socrates is interested in making. If we are to get at his attitude toward knowledge in order to ask how it differs from Meno's, and subsequently to inquire what this difference might say about the moral efficacy of the dialogue's conclusion, then we must look to the distinction between knowledge and true opinion. This distinction is, after all, one of the only things that Socrates would claim to know, if ever he were to make such a claim.[18]

Knowledge and Right Opinion

Ορθὴ δόξα makes two distinct appearances in the dialogue. Its second entry, right before the conclusion, is the more conspicuous, since it is here that right opinion is plainly contrasted with knowledge, and their relationship elucidated. The explanation of the difference between the two allows us to see how virtue, although it is beneficial, can be something other than knowledge, how it is not necessarily "accompanied by understanding."[19]

But right opinion also has a significant role to play in the slave-boy discussion, and its distinction from knowledge there is not as clear:

> *Socrates*: How does it seem to you, Meno? Has he answered with some opinion that was not of his own?
>
> *Meno*: No, but it was his own.
>
> *Socrates*: And wasn't he ignorant, as we said a short time ago?
>
> *Meno*: You speak the truth.
>
> *Socrates*: So were these opinions inside of him, or not?
>
> *Meno*: Yes.
>
> *Socrates*: So a man who does not know has within himself true seemings [opinions] about the things that he does not know?"
>
> *Meno*: It appears so.
>
> *Socrates*: And now these opinions have been put back into motion within him, like a dream. And if someone were to ask him many such things and often, you know that finally he will know about these things as accurately as anyone.
>
> (85:b8-d1)*

The true opinions that exist in the slave-boy's soul are the basis of his newly recollected knowledge. They are also evidence of the previous existence of knowledge in his soul. The opinions which existed before Socrates' questioning show that he had knowledge already. The opinions that are the content of his conclusions are part of knowledge, rather than merely a sort of pre-knowledge. The attainment of knowledge requires true opinion as condition, while the process of attaining knowledge produces more true opinions, weeding out false ones.

Socrates says that the slave-boy has "had and learned" these opinions or seemings "at some other time."[20] Knowledge and true opinion do not seem to be separate within the "time" of the extra-human life of the soul. Socrates wants to show that the soul has previously known all things, before being darkened by the ignorance that somehow dogs human intellectual vision. He has no problem calling the things that are

attained independently of this state of affairs "opinions" or "seemings." The strict distinction between knowledge and true seeming that obtains at the dialogue's end has no bearing in the realm of extra-human learning; for, that kind of learning, which precedes and enables human learning, involves no processes of recollection, nor perhaps any "tying-down" through causal reasoning.

If the process of recollection which we call learning is a progress from one true opinion to more true opinions, destroying false ones as we go, and if this process is evidence of the pre-subsistence of knowledge within the soul, then the otherworldly attainment of the knowledge (or seeming) that is the basis and precondition of learning within human life cannot be another process of recollection, nor can it be a transfer of information from the knowledgeable to the ignorant. In that case, Socrates' account would result in an infinite regress. The learning that took place during "the time when he was not a human being"[21] must rather have been a sort of "*beholding all things*, both here and in Hades."[22] It is called "learning" not in the sense of recollection, but in the sense of direct experience of the things that now need to be recollected.

Synergic Learning and the Theory of Recollection

We have already pointed out that Socrates believes more firmly in that which the recollection account intends to demonstrate than he believes in the literal truth of the account.[23] The conclusion that knowledge is possible precisely because it is somehow hidden in the immortal soul is one of only two absolute convictions which Socrates espouses in the *Meno*. The other is the difference between knowledge and right opinion. Given the hypothetical and illustrative value of the recollection account, it will not be surprising if we note that Socrates is not strictly faithful to Pindar as a mystagogue or religious authority. A Pindarian fundamentalist he is not.

The poetic-mythological quotation from Pindar, while it provides a starting point for Socrates' reflections, is not taken seriously as an account of the goings-on in the underworld. The poem says only that some souls are allowed to return in the ninth year, and that these become great men, but Socrates infers that all souls are in fact travelling all over the place all the time, that all are continuously reborn, giving them plenty of time to learn everything and forget it again. This means also that all souls are capable of gaining knowledge (and, perhaps, greatness).

Beginning with a pious belief in a religious myth, Socrates proceeds to a generalized belief about the soul and its potential for knowledge, and finally to the categorical assertion that, "the truth about

things that are is always in our soul, so that the soul should be immortal, so that we should always boldly take up the task of seeking calling to mind again what we do not happen to know at the moment, that is what we do not remember."[24] Then he declares that we should cleave to the notion of the possibility of knowledge for its morally edifying effects, even if his argument for it is not entirely correct.

Ultimately, the notion of transmigration of souls is no more essential or defining to his final conclusion about the soul's immortality than the poem is to his statements about the rebirth of all souls. The important thing is not that souls fly around learning things in order to recollect them during various lifetimes, but that the presence in the soul of true opinions and the ability to reason about them is logically inseparable from the conviction that the soul is immortal and is connected to a world that transcends and (at least logically) pre-exists the state of ignorance in which the soul now finds itself.

In fact, if we were to press the notion of recollection "from another time" as if Socrates meant the soul had learned everything simply by being around for so long, we would find that we must indeed mean something more fundamental than this. If, instead of saying that the potential for knowledge about geometry inheres in the slave-boy's soul because of its connection to an immortal world, we say that he knows it simply because he learned it in a previous life, then a soul that has not had a geometry lesson either in Hades or in some earthly location will not be able to "recollect" the Pythagorean theorem. Only those who have been good shoemakers previously will become good ones now, etc.

But the immortality of the soul that is indicated by its potential for recollection is more than its existence throughout an indefinite expanse of time. The slave-boy learned geometry "when he was not a human being," that is, during a time when his experience of his own nature was not subject to death or ignorance. The "truth about beings" did not come to the soul at a certain previous point, but is always [*αεὶ*] in the soul. This seems indeed to mean that it was never absent from the soul but belongs to it simply according to its immortality, as a participant in a meaningful, ordered, and beautiful cosmos. It is the potential of the soul to proceed further and further into a truth that is inherent in it, the recognition of which is inseparable from the fact of the soul's immortality. The right opinions of the slave-boy "subsist inside" (*ἔεισιν*) him, regardless of his state of ignorance or forgetfulness.

If we are right about this, then it is also the case that the knowledge (or right opinion) which the slave-boy latently possesses has never been given to him from without, at least not by another "human

being," at least not while he was a human being. The potential for knowledge is evidence of a divine aspect of the soul, or of the soul's divine origin.

When Socrates says that he would not maintain that his argument is correct in all respects, he may even mean that all of it can go (even the reincarnation and the extra-human "time"), so long as we maintain that the clear notions we find in our souls, even while we are unable to "tie them down" by causal reasoning, are evidence of an immortal aspect to the soul that must be believed in and cultivated. All souls, even the souls of slave-boys, can participate in this process of discovery, of recollecting, what rightly pertains to them. Knowledge, that which clarifies and establishes right seeming, is the soul's attainment of what properly belongs to it by nature, regardless of how far it may have strayed from participation in its own immortality. The soul that recognizes its ignorance and begins to know does not become what it was not, but what it always was.

"If, then, the truth about the things that are is always with us in our soul, the soul would then be immortal . . . ."[25] This conclusion, which Socrates believes can make us "better, braver, and less idle," [26] is the only thing essential to the recollection argument. The soul that recollects is recollecting not only knowledge, but also its proper nature as an immortal being. The process of recollection and the tying-down by causal reasoning that it entails, are themselves means of re-obtaining the simplicity of vision that belongs to the knowing soul according to its immortality.

Teaching

If knowledge inheres in and belongs to the immortal soul in spite of any ignorance it might now be experiencing, then it must belong in the same way to every soul, regardless of each soul's present level of recollection or even its personal aptitude for the process. The true opinions that are in a soul but have not yet been "put back in motion" are in every soul, even if they are not active, and they can all be recollected and made active. Thus, Socrates takes pains first of all to employ a slave-boy for his demonstration, and secondly to point out that if the slave-boy keeps being asked questions he will know geometry as well as anyone. This means that knowledge does not properly belong to anyone in an exclusive sense, even if one happens to have a piece of it now while another does not. Knowledge is not something like a possession which one man can give to another. Everyone somehow has it, even the ignorant, and the teacher must not presume himself to be giving

something to the student. He is only showing him what he already possesses.

Thus Socrates insists that he is not "teaching" the slave-boy, since for Socrates "teaching" means the transfer of an opinion, the giving of a piece of information that was not previously present in the learner. This meaning for *διδασκαλία* is kept quite consistently by Socrates, which makes it a bit suspicious when he conflates "teachable" and "recollectable" during his concession to Meno. If we want to call what Socrates does with the slave-boy "didactic," we must concede that we mean something different by the word than Socrates does here.

The act of the learner and his questioner is a cooperative one, a single act of elucidation in which both participate, and which assumes a common divinely oriented nature. While we might object that Socrates asks the slave-boy "leading questions," and therefore does in fact give him information, Socrates would not consider this a point against his conviction about learning. Since the slave-boy is able to answer every query according to his own understanding, according to whatever true and indubitable seemings are present to him in his soul, Socrates sees the new information as coming as much from the slave-boy as from himself. And, more importantly, from the immortal nature of the soul, as well as from nature as a whole, which is "all akin." The questioner and the learner share a single nature, one that somehow contains within it the "truth about the things that are" at all times, even when it is not aware of this truth and cannot explain it. Moreover, if the slave-boy were to accept the hidden information suggested by Socrates without relating it to the notions already clear to him, he would be neither knowing nor recollecting it, but only opining it (and that in a way inferior to what he already opined according to the true opinions that his soul has retained on its own). Such opinions, according to the later account of knowledge and true opinion, would not stay long in the slave-boy's soul.

According to Socrates' account of the soul, real learning, which does not come from "teaching," can only be a synergic process. Any notion of teaching as the mere transfer of information violates the basis for belief in the possibility of knowledge, namely, that it is inherent in the soul, even while we are ignorant. Learning can be the self-elucidation of a single soul or a co-operation between two souls sharing a single natural condition and goal. But it can never be a transaction after the manner of a sale, one man giving to another what he did not already possess, that which Socrates calls "teaching." It is under terms of sale, transfer, and acquisition that Socrates persistently speaks of both teaching and learning after his concession to Meno.

In his interactions with Meno, Socrates emphasizes the synergic nature of the search for knowledge, contrasting it with eristic, unfriendly and divisive attitudes towards philosophic inquiry:

> [I]f the one asking me were one of the wise, eristic and competitive, then I would say to him "I have answered. And if I don't speak rightly, then you must take up the argument and refute me." But if some friends, like you and I are now, should want to have a discussion with one another, then they must answer more meekly [*πρᾳότερον*][27] and dialectically.
>
> (75:c8-d2)*

Where "teaching" means the transfer of information or knowledge (as a sort of commodity or possession) between men, both virtue and knowledge are entirely un-teachable. "Knowledge" in this case is something one has, wields, and might even sell. But, on the other hand, if knowledge is something mysteriously inherent in the soul, which the soul somehow has within itself without having yet comprehended it, then we might hope that the same is true of virtue.

This would not make virtue any less a divine gift, since knowledge (absent of its dependence on a transactional account of teaching) is also something of a gift to the soul. The first attainment of knowledge somehow preceded the soul's human experience. The pre-existence of knowledge is the possibility of knowledge.

A man who sees knowledge (or virtue) along the lines of a possession to be attained cannot be helped except by beginning to think of it as unattainable by human means. These efforts are, after all, based on a state of need and self-defensiveness that cannot allow one to make the declaration of ignorance, to submit to the "numbedness" that is the beginning of real knowledge.

The same constraints of acquisition (or, rather, participation) apply to both virtue and knowledge. One can neither have it nor teach it for oneself, but only for all, and only as a matter of participation in a nature common to all men, a nature that is both prior to and perfecting of the common human experience, benighted as it finds itself by the mixture of true and false impressions and seemings.

* indicates author's own translation.

Endnotes

1. Viz. 98:27-10
2. 99:e6-100:a2
3. Plato thus places Socrates (and, at least potentially, Meno) in the running for virtue-teacher and statesmen-maker, even as Socrates declares that no such teacher exists.
4. (heavy sigh)
5. 99:e2*
6. 100:b2*
7. 86:c4
8. Ibid.
9. 86:d6
10. 86:d2
11. 87:b9-c3
12. Viz. 83:d2
13. 99:e2
14. 100:b2*
15. 87:c2
16. 89:a3
17. 98:a8
18. 98:b2-5
19. 99:e9
20. Viz. 85:e7 and 86:a1
21. 86:a3*
22. 81:c6*
23. Viz. 86:b5
24. 86:b1-4
25. 86:b1
26. 86:b8
27. Unlike Anytus, who lacks *πραότητος*.

Primary Text

Plato. *Meno*. Trans. G.M.A Grube. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002.

Reductionist Language, Expansionist Soma

Jeffrey Ondocsin

An oral tradition, disseminated by clans of priests, The *Rig Veda* is a text that relies on the efficacy of the spoken word for the success of any ritual action. Passed down orally from guru to student for centuries, it is highly likely that hymns propagated by myriad and diverse families of the priestly class were compiled and reorganized into their present orientation. This has allowed for a bevy of contradictions to spring up in the text, lending it an air of richness and mystery that has fueled enduring interest. In a tradition defined by oral retention and the sacred nature of speech uttered during sacrificial rites, it comes as no surprise that there are numerous iterations of the power of speech, even going so far as to deify it.

Speech, or more simply, language, is seen as an empowering, creative force that provides a framework of meaning for the Vedic world. Out of this framework come the various depictions of the creation of the universe, the genesis of the gods, and their effect on the world, as well as the role of the priestly class in undertaking sacrifices on behalf of their community. To a large extent, it would seem that the nature of language is to define, to delineate and to create the world as it is experienced and understood by humans. However, some of the hymns, particularly those that expound upon the ritualized consumption of soma, seem to contradict other ideas of speech as seminal in the creation of the experienced world. In these rituals the user moves beyond the conventions of language and society, and experiences the world directly without the reducing valve of speech ingrained by society.

Hymn 10.125 is a logical jumping off point for exploring the idea of speech as the architect of the experienced world. Consider verse seven, for example. Verse seven reads, "I gave birth to the father on the head of this world. My womb is in the waters, within the ocean. From there I spread out over all creatures and touch the very sky with the crown of my head."[1] Verse eight continues, "I am the one who blows like the wind, embracing all creatures. Beyond the sky, beyond this earth, so much have I become in my greatness."[2] All that exists in the world of humans must be defined by speech in order for it to be known. Even those things that exist beyond the experienced world come to be understood by language. This is the very cornerstone of how Vedic humans understood and interacted with their world. Language, both as it is utilized in ritual as well as in the experiences of daily life, has a tremendous impact on the

ways that people can understand the world around them. Indeed, as verse four states, "the one who eats food, who truly sees, who breathes, who hears what is said, does so through me . . . Listen, you whom they have heard: what I tell you should be heeded."[3] Experience cannot be talked about, let alone experience, without the focus and commonality provided by the power of language to delineate its boundaries. If I were to make the argument that my word for "sun" is different from your word for "sun," then it would be possible that through our different notions of what a "sun" is, we would have a different experience of the fundamental nature of reality. However, our different experience of what we call "sun" is shattered by this notion of a commonly held and expressed image of "sun." The attempts of the individual to assert himself in a way that differs that differs from the norm established by society are broken once people can come to talk about an idea in shared terms.

This is the nature of speech, it would seem, in the *Rig Veda*. Speech is granted the power of creation by virtue of the power that naming a thing has over given conceptions of that thing. Thus, one could argue that speech functions as a reducing valve for the burgeoning realm of existence, delineating the boundaries of things through the power of naming. But speech was created by the sages and disseminated among the people simultaneously. Hymn 10.71 develops this seemingly contradictory idea of speech as both created and creating. In the first verse the poet states, "when they set in motion the first beginning of speech, giving names, their most pure and perfectly guarded secret was revealed through love."[4] It can be understood from this verse that when the sages gave names in the beginning, they were residing in a position of superior understanding about the nature of things and through naming were able to extend their knowledge throughout society. Their love for their fellow humans manifested itself in the creation of commonly held notions for the experienced world, allowing people to share together in this world through the power of ritual language. This is further expressed in the second verse, where the poet says, "when the wise ones fashioned speech with their thought, sifting it as grain is sifted through a sieve, then friends recognized their friendships. A good sign was placed on their speech."[5] Here, the image of grain sifted through a sieve is particularly demonstrative of the assertion that the power of speech lies in its limiting function. Language has power through its ability to define the boundaries around difficult concepts—in a sense "creating" them. The wise ones were aware of this power and were consequently careful in their use of language to describe the experienced world. This can perhaps explain the seeming inability of characters in the *Mahabharata* to take back their own

speech and vows, even when appropriating that speech would negatively impact their lives. However, despite the power accorded to language, it is in the soma ritual in particular that the practitioner moves past the realm of what can be understood and described by language.

Despite the use of speech by humans, there exists much in the world that cannot be effectively described through language— things so ineffable that they defy the categorization and certainty that language seeks to impose on them. Hence, verse seven of hymn 10.129: "[W]hence this creation has arisen— perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not— the one who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only he knows— or perhaps he does not know."[6] But as can be seen from many of the soma hymns, consumption of this substance results in the user denying, or perhaps defying, the power of language to delimit ideas. The poet of hymn 8.48 starts out by saying, "I have tasted the sweet drink of life, knowing that it inspires good thoughts and joyous expansiveness to the extreme,"[7] qualities that the reducing valve of speech does not seem to possess. Soma allows the individual an opportunity to break through the limitations of speech and experience "joyous expansiveness to the extreme," a state perhaps encountered in no other way. Further on the poet says, "when you penetrate inside, you will know no limits . . . We have drunk the Soma; we have become immortal; we have gone to the light; we have found the gods."[8] Soma allows for an experience of that which is ineffable, that which language fails to describe or, by its very nature, is incapable of expressing. Soma seems to be something akin to a wilderness state, easily as capable of delivering a transcendent experience for individuals as of leaving them in a terrifying domain where the foundation of all their civilized knowledge and experience is meaningless. The soma experience is in its nature complimentary to an understanding of the universe solely through the medium of speech and could be considered a perfect antithesis to the structured, logical nature provided by a linguistically organized understanding of the world.

Both the ritual power accorded to speech and the transcendent power of the soma experience, if considered complementary in a Vedic religious experience, play roles in the creation of the experienced world of the Vedic individual. Boundaries of expression are necessary, or else the individual would never be able to relate to or understand the others around him. Equally as requisite as language for society, however, is the experience that allows the individual to recreate his world unconstrained by speech. Without soma, or some other transcendent experience, the individual cannot help but be ruled by the linguistic and other conventions of his time. Again, however, one must consider the

importance of speech as a creation. Hymn 10.136 advances the notion that speech is created through transcendent experience. "Long-hair holds fire, holds the drug, holds sky and earth. Long-hair reveals everything, so that everyone can see the sun. Long-hair declares the light."[9] The figure of "Long-hair" possesses an understanding of all that is present in the experienced world and through the medium of the transcendent drug experience. He "creates" the world around him. Long-hair knows the reality of the experienced world, but must turn to the power of speech to disseminate the understanding he has of his universe. Speech could then be said to emerge from the understanding of the experienced world gained through a transcendent drug experience. Indeed, the poet says, "Long-hair *declares* the light" (emphasis added), thus stating that just as Long-Hair's experiential knowledge of light is a necessary requirement for the existence of light, there could be no thing called light without the faculty of speech.

While at first glance the transcendent properties of the soma experience seem to be independent of structured speech, I believe that the two are fundamentally linked. They are fundamentally linked through the equal desire of the individual to use both methods of experiencing the world to create understanding among humans. It is an experience that allows the individual to transcend the normal reality he inhabits and return with new insight, enriching the fabric of his society. The boundaries of language can then be extended to encompass the new experience and insight, granting speech the power of new ideas and preventing its stagnation. Speech determines what individuals can understand about their world, but soma imbues speech with new life, ensuring that new and dynamic understanding is continually disseminated throughout society.

Endnotes

1. Doniger, trans. pp. 63
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 61
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 25-26
7. Ibid.,134
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.,137

Primary Text

Doniger, Wendy. Trans. *The Rig Veda*. London: Penguin Books, 1981.

Because It Feels Wrong: Hume's Account of Moral Judgment

Joshua Falconer

Is it possible to distinguish between moral good and evil through reason alone, or must there be some other principle necessary to make this distinction? In support of the latter possibility, David Hume argues that "since vice and virtue are not discoverable merely by reason, or the comparison of ideas, it must be by means of some impression or sentiment they occasion, that we are able to mark the difference betwixt them."[1] From the other side of the debate, Thomas Reid contends, "In the approbation of a good action, therefore, there is feeling indeed, but there is also esteem of the agent; and both the feeling and the esteem depend upon the judgment we form of his conduct."[2] This paper will set out the significance and meaning of Hume's claim, followed by a careful interpretation of the dialectic. I will then frame Reid's objections, respond on Hume's behalf, and in the end argue that although Reid's criticisms ultimately fail to sink Hume's argument, they posit a starting point for further criticism.

Hume's ethical system springs from the nomenclature and method of the British empiricist tradition. As Bertrand Russell notes, "he developed to its logical conclusion the empirical philosophy of Locke and Berkeley, and by making it self-consistent made it incredible."[3] As Reid observes,[4] the epistemological claims of Descartes and Locke led to the belief that secondary qualities of a body, such as heat or color or taste, are mere impressions of the mind, not in the object itself. Berkeley further applied this notion to primary qualities as well, such as extension and motion. The epistemological claims were carried over to notions of taste, then beauty, and then naturally to morality. This debate over whether moral judgment derives from reason or sentiment was unprecedented, as both Hume and Reid observe.[5]

What is at stake here? According to Reid, the following consequence issues from Hume's theory: If what we call *moral judgment* be no real judgment, but merely a feeling, it follows, that the principle of morals which we have been taught to consider an immutable law for all intelligent beings, have no other foundation but an arbitrary structure and fabric in the constitution of the human mind. Thus by a change in our structure, what is immoral might become moral, virtue might be turned into vice, and vice into virtue.[6] If Hume is correct in his claim that no moral judgment can result without an antecedent impression, then the common way of referring to morally good or evil actions as reasonable or

unreasonable is an illusion. This notion is contrary to the ordinary sense of morality in all tongues and at all times, as Reid might put it.

What are moral judgments according to Hume? To call any action or character praiseworthy or blameworthy, virtuous or vicious, good or bad— these are all examples of pronouncing moral approbation or disapprobation, respectively. When we attribute any such judgment to an action or character, do we mean to say that they are matters of fact existing in the object itself— a real relation that exists with respect to the objects in consideration? If so, then they may be properly be called objects of reason or of the ideas. Otherwise, they are called objects of impression or sentiment. This distinction between ideas and impressions involves the two kinds of perceptions of the mind. From this basic distinction, Hume draws the conclusion that it is not by means of our ideas, but rather of our impressions, that we form moral approbation or disapprobation.

Hume's theory of moral judgment posits the following interpretations of forming moral judgment: (I) *the non-propositional interpretation*, (II) *the personal point of view*, and (III) *the common point of view*. By interpreting these three methods of forming moral judgment, I intend to inform a critical discussion thereof.

(I) *The non-propositional interpretation*: Hume is well known for the claim that it is impossible to derive "ought" statements from "is" statements. This means that moral judgments cannot be derived from non-moral facts. In vain would one attempt to deduce a "right" or "wrong" from the propositional facts tied to any event that would elicit moral judgment. If one were to steal a painting from a museum, for instance, one may list as many true or false propositions about the event, such as the circumstances of the thief, what his motives were, or how he did it, as one liked, but such facts in themselves would never obtain something called a "vice." "The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object," says Hume. "You never can find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action."[7] That is, the action itself may cause or provoke certain feelings in oneself which vary according to force. We sense these feelings in a way that is analogous to the other senses. Impressions of the visual field are effected by the sense of sight, just as impressions of morality are effected by the moral sense, or the conscience. To call something "beautiful" is merely to say that it is pleasing to the eye; likewise to call an action virtuous is merely to say that it is agreeable to the moral sense, according to Hume.

(II) *The personal point of view*: It may be a true proposition to say, "I

feel disapproval about the theft." But Hume thinks that to call the statement, "The thief should not have stolen," a true or false proposition is to use words in a vulgar way. For the statement suggests that the subject "the thief" has the real property that he "should not have stolen." But how could the thief have such a property in a true and meaningful way? When you really break down this sort of moral judgment, Hume argues, all you really mean is that you are expressing your own feeling of disapproval that the action: "So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it."[8]

In order to more thoroughly understand Hume's concept of moral judgment, we must also grasp his sense of moral motivation, for what we know about morality is directly informed by the moral sense, and the feelings of the moral sense involve moral motivation. Hume thinks that reason is incapable of either motivating action or of opposing the passions. The role of reason, then, is merely to inform us as to the best way to achieve the ends our passions set for us. One way it accomplishes this is by associating causes and effects. If a past action has caused us pain, then the memory of that pain informs our passion such that we are motivated not to repeat the same action. This is an example of how feelings of the moral sense accompany moral motivation. These feelings of unease or disapproval are that which we refer to when we pronounce moral disapprobation. Likewise, those objects we associate with pleasure will produce in us a judgment of moral approbation. In this sense Hume follows the Hobbesian notion of forming judgments from self-interest alone, but as will be discussed later, his system includes a concept unaccounted for in Hobbes' theory.

(III) *The common point of view*: In certain cases, there is a way to acquire a better judgment of a given action than would be possible if restricted to the first-person perspective. By means of a hypothetical outside point of view, we may imagine how one would react if she were immediately affected by a given action or character. This is especially useful when personal bias gets in the way of forming a clear judgment. For instance, Harriet sees that Rodney has just helped an old woman cross the street. Harriet holds a grudge against Rodney, so that she views this action with bitter disapproval— "What is he trying to prove?" But suppose Harriet, for whatever reason, wishes to form a better judgment. She cannot do this herself, so she must imagine how an observer untainted by her paradigm would react to the event. In this way, she may attain a theoretical knowledge even as her feelings may run counter to it.

This is what Hume meant when he said, "The good qualities of an enemy are hurtful to us; but may still command our esteem and respect. 'Tis only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil."[9]

To restate, Hume thinks that moral judgments (I) refer to matters of fact, not about the characters or actions in consideration, but rather about the sentiment of the one pronouncing the moral judgment; (II) are produced merely by feelings that accompany the moral sense with reference to self-interest; and (III) in some cases require an outside hypothetical perspective for a clearer judgment.

Having interpreted these three methods of forming moral judgment, let us now consider some of Thomas Reid's criticisms, which apply directly to (I) and (II), and indirectly to (III). To frame the objections, recall the claim in question: "When you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it."[10]

Reid agrees that a feeling of blame accompanies one's moral judgment of an action or character. But this feeling is entirely dependent upon one's judgment that the character in consideration acted contrary to reason. There is here an unreduced notion of "real" judgment that is both ontologically and logically prior to the notion of feeling. Therefore, it is not the case that all claims of moral judgment mean nothing, but that one has a sentiment of approval or disapproval from the contemplation of it. To clarify this point, Reid posits two propositions referring to a case known by both the speaker and the listener:[11]

> (a) "Such a man did well and worthily, his conduct is highly approvable."
> (b) "The man's conduct gave me a very agreeable feeling."

Reid interprets Hume's claim above to infer that (a) does not contain any property that is not contained in (b). Reid denies this for two reasons:[12]

> (1) "The *first* expresses plainly an opinion or judgment of the conduct of the man, but says nothing of the speaker. The *second* only testifies a fact concerning the speaker, to wit, that he had such a feeling."
> (2) " . . . the first may be contradicted without any ground of offence,

such contradiction being only a difference of opinion, which, to a reasonable man, gives no offence. But the second speech cannot be contradicted without an affront; for, as every man must know his own feelings, to deny that a man had a feeling which he affirms he had, is to charge him with a falsehood."

Reid summarizes his objection as follows: "This doctrine, therefore, that moral approbation is merely a feeling without judgment, necessarily carries along with it this consequence, that a form of speech, upon one of the most common topics of discourse, which either has no meaning, or a meaning irreconcilable to all rules of grammar or rhetoric, is found to be common and familiar in all languages and in all ages of the world, while every man knows how to express the meaning, if it have any, in plain and proper language."[13]

How would Hume respond to such criticism? Would he think that Reid gave a correct interpretation of his theory? If that were granted, would the objection sink his argument? Perhaps the argument could be saved given that Hume never claimed to commit to ordinary usage. He was committed rather to the abstruse, philosophical, or precise meaning of terms in order to codify a nomenclature unclouded by the vagaries of common usage.

Otherwise, Reid's interpretation approximates the effect that "moral approbation is merely a feeling without judgment."[14] That said, is there a real difference between (a) and (b) about which Hume is silent? Let us consider (1) and (2), beginning with the latter. Is (2) true? Not obviously. It does not take much reflection to realize how easy it is to obtain examples in which a judgment statement (a) may have more or less grounds of offense as a feeling statement (b). So let us reject (2). Is (1) true? Again, we run into the ordinary usage problem. Hume could bite the bullet and affirm that his abstruse use of terms does go against the common sense usage, and thereby represents a completely original yet accurate means of describing human psychology.

There is a stronger sense to (1) that Reid himself does not develop; however, it serves as an excellent starting point for further criticism. It is that (a) refers to a judgment of the conduct of the man in terms of virtue. Rather than reducing moral adjudication to terms of sense, why not consider it in terms of excellence? We know, as a matter of fact, who is the fastest man in the world, given that "the fastest man in the world" refers to the one who currently holds the world record for the 100-meter sprint, namely, Jamaica's Usain Bolt. In like manner, why can we not say who is honest, given that "an honest person" is one who habitually acts in ways

that are honest and trustworthy? The same might be said for the other virtues and vices. Moral judgment then becomes a useful measurement of human conduct given certain parameters. Of course, Hume takes a similar notion of virtues into account, but it remains to be seen whether Hume considered virtuous qualities to be properties that truly belong to the person in question. In this sense, then, could not moral judgment be a way of describing a true or false proposition regarding another person's virtue or vice? To push the analogy, when we say that the thief acted wrongly, we could take this to mean that the thief acted poorly in terms of a certain kind of social performance. If we follow this line of thinking, however, the question becomes "What kind of social performance?" One could steal or kill very effectively. If the objection holds, then there must be another, deeper source for substantiating the content of moral judgment, if indeed such a thing exists.

Endnotes

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2. Reid, Thomas. *Essays on the Active Power of Man.* Reprinted in Raphael, D.D. ed., *British Moralists*: 1650- 1800. London: Oxford University Press: 1969. pp. 917.
3. Russell, Bertrand. *The History of Philosophy.* New York: Simon & Shuster, 1972. pp. 659.
4. Reid, 908
5. Hume, 907; Reid, 907
6. Reid, 944
7. Hume, 503
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Reid, 919
12. Ibid., 920
13. Ibid., 924
14. Ibid.

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Surrender to Poetry: The Unsolved Duel Between Idea and Experience

Bethany McGee

Throughout *Goethe's Botanical Writings*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe struggles to understand the seemingly irreconcilable divide between experience and idea. He attempts to delineate both realms against common notions and in relation to the Kantian philosophical tradition of transcendent concepts. Scientific endeavor strives to unite the two, but the effort is continually frustrated. In his essay "Indecision and Surrender,"[1] Goethe claims that in order to navigate this division, "we justifiably take flight into poetry" and then proceeds to close the piece with a short poem. How are we to understand this particular poem as a reply to the essay and the "surrender" to poetry as a "justifiable" response to "indecision" in general?

A "definite chasm appears to be fixed," claims Goethe, "between idea and experience." The nature of this division is illuminated by understanding the necessary limitations of human experience. We are bound to face episodic sensory impressions of our surroundings, determined not only by the passage of time but also by our state-of-mind and subjective standpoint. Through experience we come to understand individual parts of our world, yet these flashes of comprehension remain isolated and it is left to the imagination to connect them in a meaningful manner.

"An idea," on the other hand, "is independent of time and place." It is with his notion of ideas that Goethe feels he is misunderstood by his contemporaries, and especially by Schiller. He is taken aback when Schiller claims that the theory of The Metamorphosis of Plants[2] "is not an empiric experience, it is an idea." "How could any experience," Schiller continues ("in the manner of a trained Kantian"), "ever be gauged by an idea, for the characteristic thing about an idea is that it can never be congruous with an experience." The issue seems to be that Goethe firmly believes his ideas are rooted in years of collecting empiric observations, rather than transcendent a priori concepts. The "[bond sealed] through the great duel between the objective and the subjective"[3] with Schiller, however, seems to have affected Goethe's conception of ideas. He concedes that "the philosopher [presumably Kant] might probably be right who asserts that no idea can completely coincide with experience."

Goethe's understanding of the term "idea," and its relationship to the Kantian conception, remains somewhat obscure. It is clear that the "idea" must provide a means through which man can grasp at comprehending the whole. "In an idea," he explains, "the simultaneous and the successive are intimately bound up together, whereas in an experience they are always separated." Here we see the importance of ideas and the indispensable role they must play not only in scientific pursuits, but in day-to-day existence. Without ideas to organize and make sense of the multitude of perceptions we receive at every moment, life would be chaotic. We need ideas to connect isolated events, understand causes, make predictions and even to fuse snapshots in time into associations of continuous being. In plant studies, for example, we take careful observation of a flower. Each day it changes slightly, eventually passing from seed to stem with leaves and bloom, then ultimately to producing fruit and again seed. We need ideas not only to understand the nature of this change, but also in order even to conceive of it as the same plant from one day to the next.

Yet, while both "idea" and "experience" are required for scientific research, "the difficulty of uniting [them] appears to be a great obstacle." The two realms, though they at first glance appear entirely distinct, must in fact relate to each other in some meaningful way if their interplay is to be man's means to knowledge. "We strive eternally to overcome this hiatus," Goethe explains, "with reason, intellect, imagination, faith, emotion, illusion, or— if we are capable of nothing better— with folly." However, "our efforts to bridge the chasm are forever in vain." We cannot grasp the whole of a single organism, let alone the expanse of the universe when our sole access to the world is through our sensory perception. The effort to conceive of Nature as "both simultaneous and successive . . . seems to drive us to the verge of insanity." How is mortal man to comprehend eternity and existence outside of time? How can a thing always be, yet continually come into being? We are doomed to frustration, for "the intellect cannot picture united what the senses present to it separately, and thus the duel between the perceived and the ideated remains forever unsolved."

"For this reason," Goethe responds, "we justifiably take flight into poetry." Poetry must stand outside both idea and experience, occupying a distinct space. It is either the bridge man seeks between experience and idea, or it is a resignation to the paradox. It would be odd if poetry were this bridge, inhabiting as it were a sort of middle ground between two disparate modes of being. It would have to partake of both worlds and yet belong to neither. Though arguably, poetry is about experience and

expressive of an idea, it does not serve to reconcile the two any more than science does. If scientific study cannot bridge idea and experience, neither can we expect poetry to do so.

So are we to view the "flight into poetry" simply as surrender, and thus concede defeat in the face of the incommensurability of the two domains? Or, by acknowledging our limitations and abandoning ourselves to the mystery of the paradox, do we gain something more profound? If poetry is distinct from both experience and idea, does it provide a unique vantage point allowing a new way of seeing— both with the physical and the mind's eye? Goethe provides a key to the quandary within the essay: "that idea and experience are analogous, indeed must be so." What is the nature of this analogy and how might understanding the relationship as "analogous hope" help solve the eternal duel? To claim simply that one is like the other does little to clarify the conundrum. To term a relationship "analogous," implies that the two subjects under comparison must bear a relationship to one another and that the juxtaposition of one to the other should significantly illuminate each. Goethe has provided his reader with an example of such an analogy in his essay — he has given us a poem. Does this poem seek to express the analogous relationship, or are the lines of the poem themselves analogous to the ideas in the essay they follow? Is the understanding available through the analogy of this poem unique, or is it ultimately the aim of all poetry to reconcile this seemingly eternal divide?

Goethe closes "Indecision and Surrender" with a poem, "Antepirrhema," calling it "a new form to an old song."[4] We turn now to the "Antepirrhema" in the hope that a deeper comprehension of its meaning will lead to a greater mastery of Goethe's thought and a fuller understanding of the nature of the analogous relation between idea and experience.

Regard with silent wonder
The Eternal Weaver's masterpiece.
A single movement sends the shuttle
Over, under, till the myriad threads
Meet and interlace, creating
Countless unions at one stroke!
The warp, not mounted thread by thread,
But laid down in the timeless past
Awaits the casting of the weft,
Forever waits the Master's will.

-English rendering by Aldyth Morris

Thus view with unassuming eyes
The Weaver Woman's masterpiece:
One pedal shifts a thousand strands,
The shuttles back and forward flying,
Each fluent strand with each complying,
One stroke a thousand links commands;
No patchwork, this, of rag and tatter,
Since time began She plots the matter,
So may the Master, very deft,
Insert with confidence the weft.

-C. Middleton, trans.

The poem, like its namesake, demands to be read as a response to what has preceded it. Here, we should expect the author to provide his audience with an answer to the "[unsolved] duel between the perceived and the ideated." Perhaps in understanding how "Antepirrhema" illuminates, complicates, or resolves the questions put forward by the essay, the reader can hope to glimpse the larger sense of how poetry can answer to the mysteries in the chasm between idea and experience.

The central conceit of the poem is the Weaver's creation of her masterpiece, yet the symbolic meaning is enigmatic. What do these two focal images intend to represent? "In observing the cosmic structure from its broadest expanse down to its minutest parts," Goethe opens his essay, "we cannot escape the impression that underlying the whole is the idea that God is operative in Nature and Nature in God, from eternity to eternity." Upon first look, it would seem that the Weaver is meant to be God and the masterpiece, Nature itself. Yet, the claim is not simply that "God is operative in Nature," but that there exists a reciprocal relationship in which Nature is operative in God. In the poetic metaphor, it is conceivable that both the Weaver and the masterpiece each represent an eternity. Here, the Weaver clearly has an effect on her masterpiece, but how can we understand the masterpiece equally affecting its maker? Can an artist be so moved by his own work that we can say it is operating upon him? Though a piece of art can be inspirational to all those who view it, it seems that Goethe wants to apply more agency to Nature than that of an incidental influence on its maker.

Perhaps we do disservice to the metaphor by falling back again into a cultural understanding of God as creator, as God as Weaver. Goethe seems to think it is more complex. The masterpiece is all of existence. It is "the cosmic structure from its broadest expanse down to its minutest parts." It is "the whole." Here, the metaphor of the woven work reinforces the notion that all things are connected. Cut one of the "myriad threads," and it would unravel. In the Weaver's work, the strands "meet and interlace, creating / Countless unions." This is the intricate majesty of the interconnectedness of life. Each intersection of the strands is an individual, a part we can come to know by experience. Yet these "interlacings" are meaningless and non-existent without the whole. These parts, while enabled, organized, and given significance by the whole, are necessary for the very existence of it. The analogy here lives up to the demand of making comprehensible what formally was obscure— the

necessity of the reciprocal nature of the relationship of the whole to its parts.

We cannot let ourselves be deceived by the simple lucidity of this analogy of the whole to the part. The woven masterpiece of the poem is like none we have experienced. For "the warp" was not "mounted thread by thread" after the manner of man, "but laid down in the timeless past." In two lines, Goethe has communicated man's maddening predicament in trying to imagine "an operation of Nature as both simultaneous and successive." For experience tells us that a warp must be set one thread at a time, but Goethe's warp has been laid down all at once. Moreover it has always been as it is now, as it was created in "the timeless past." The attempt to conceive of a thing as having always been capable of undergoing change, "drive[s] us to the verge of insanity."

Not only is it impossible for the human mind to grasp the creation of a warp as both simultaneous and successive, but also now the poet asks us to grapple with eternity and the existence of a "timeless past." If there were existence before time, how can it make sense to speak of "past" and "was"? The description of the warp harkens back to "those primordial beginnings" of which Goethe speaks in the opening of his essay. This mention goes unexplained, as if the meaning of these beginnings, and even the fact of their existence at all, were intuitive to the reader. Are the "primordial beginnings" God and Nature, or is this warp representative of the "stuff" of our universe— of the material of all plants, animals and men?

Having explored the masterpiece, we turn again to its maker. If the warp is passive, "Await[ing] the casting of the weft / Forever wait[ing] the Master's will," then the Master, the Weaver, must be the active agent. A "single movement" from her has the power of "creating / Countless unions at one stroke!" In an instant she "sends the shuttle" and "cast[s] the weft." The creative power of this Weaver is unfathomable and her will unknowable. Is this the same force ascribed to Nature in the Metamorphosis of Plants? Could this Nature— who has a "goal," "prescribes fate," "ceaselessly carries on her eternal work" and "exercises her right"— be the Weaver of our poem?[5]

If the "Master's will" is Nature's creative force, then what of God? Perhaps we can envision God and Nature united in the figure of the Weaver. Yet this conception seems contradictory to the claim that they operate upon one another. Is it more accurate to consider them as the ultimate cases of the tension in Goethe's use of "Gestalt" and "Bildung"?[6] While Gestalt is something fixed in its character, Bildung is in ceaseless flux. It is the complex relationship between Being and Becoming. Being

always is and always has been. Becoming constantly evolves, but will never have "existence" in an absolute sense. Yet, how can a thing have reached that state without ever becoming, and how can a thing Become without having any Being? It appears to describe the same enigma as does the correspondence between idea and experience. If Nature is seen as Becoming and God as essential Being, then we have reversed the conventional role, making Nature the creator and God the material of her work.

Whether one can definitively interpret the symbolic images within the lines of the poem, the reflection inspired by them is not to be overlooked. If we take the title literally, we should consider the poem in light of an answer from a classical Greek theatrical chorus. An antepirrhema is a chanted response to the action that has preceded it—in our case the essay "Indecision and Surrender". As the Greek chorus often expressed information, a character's inner emotions, or an ideal response to the drama or insight for the characters themselves, so the poem resounds as a chorus for the reader. Here, the poem tells the audience, and perhaps the author himself, "Regard with silent wonder / The Eternal Weaver's masterpiece." It is the same imperative given to Job as he ponders the unknown divine: "Stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God."[7] The message to the reader and the author is that despite man's desire and his eternal quest for knowledge, the "Eternal Weaver's masterpiece" will forever remain a mystery. Man should position himself toward these marvels understanding that he will never fully know them, but nevertheless eternally considering them and allowing himself to be overcome by awe.

It is this exactly this sense of wonder that is lost in prose and scientific experimentation. Through the apprehension of an isolated part, man shortsightedly believes that has understood something about the whole. However, the whole to be considered— "the cosmic structure"—is forever unavailable to him precisely because he is one of its parts. "Intuition, observation, and contemplation lead us closer to these mysteries," Goethe explains, "We are presumptuous and venture ideas of our own; turning more modest, we merely form concepts that might be analogous to those primordial beginnings." Poetry is Goethe's modest attempt. If the essay ventures to put forth presumptuous ideas of its own, then the poem itself is a "concept that might be analogous to these primordial beginnings."

Goethe needs the poem to capture the spirit of his thought. In his scientific prose he is bound either to express specific parts only, thereby missing the whole, or to grasp at the threads of an abstract idea of the

whole, inevitably falling short of the impossible task. The analogy available in poetry allows him to express the inexpressible— to put into words something that cannot be named. He abandons the presumptuous idea that he can capture the whole with an idea, and instead humbly puts forth a concept that he claims might be analogous to it. In this mood, I too am resigned to accept the limitations of prose and its inability to convey ideas that lie beyond human comprehension. With my decision to surrender to analogous concepts, I humbly justify my own flight into poetry:

> Stand in awe before the amaranthine stage,
> Surrender to disinterested passion!
> Displace one note and the chord collapses,
> Yet the solitary tone moves no listener to tears.
> Harmony, dissonance, discord
> Orchestrated by the maestro's baton.
> Notes pass into phrases and escape
> Forever into the unreachable past.
> We are moved by the symphony of sound,
> Hearing but one beat in time.
>
> McGee: Epode

Endnotes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations taken from Bertha Mueller, trans. "Indecision and Surrender." *Goethe's Botanical Writings.* Woodbridge, Connecticut: Ox Bow Press, 1952. pp. 219-220. All quotations within the essay are referenced in the Primary Texts list.
2. Bertha Mueller, trans. "The Metamorphosis of Plants." *Goethe's Botanical Writings.* Woodbridge, Connecticut: Ox Bow Press, 1952. p. 30-78.
3. Bertha Mueller, trans. "Propitious Encounter." *Goethe's Botanical Writings.* Woodbridge, Connecticut: Ox Bow Press, 1952. p. 215-219.
4. Translation from Morris taken from "Indecision and Surrender." p. 220. Middleton translation from: Christopher Middleton, ed. "Antepirrhema." *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe Selected Poems.* Boston: Suhrkamp/Insel Publishers, 1983. p. 163.
5. "The Metamorphosis of Plants." P. 40, 44, 48, 61, 70, etc.
6. Bertha Mueller, trans. "Our Objective Is Stated." *Goethe's Botanical Writings.* Woodbridge, Connecticut: Ox Bow Press, 1952. p. 22-26.
7. Job 37:16.

Primary Texts

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. "Indecision and Surrender." *Goethe's Botanical Writings*. Trans. Bertha Mueller. Woodbridge, Connecticut: Ox Bow Press, 1952. p. 219-220.

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Kindness in Aristotle's High-Minded Man

Daphne Leveriza

In Book IV of his *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle develops his vision for the perfect human being. He calls this person the high-minded or magnanimous man. As with all the other virtues that he enumerates throughout the *Ethics*, Aristotle explains the deficiency on one end and the extreme on the other end of the mean, the virtue in the perfectly balanced middle.

In the case of the high-minded man the deficiency is, naturally, the small-minded man, who looks like something of a coward in comparison with himself. The small-minded man underestimates his self-worth and may even be guilty of false humility, as translator Martin Ostwald points out in a footnote. Whether it is due to a lack of self-understanding or a reluctance to point out his own merits to others, the small-minded man ultimately fails to claim what he actually deserves. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the extreme of the high-minded man is the vain man, perhaps a more familiar personality in our world today. The vain man thinks too highly of himself, puts too much effort into making others see him in the same glowing light, and makes the mistake of believing that he deserves things that he does not actually deserve. Aristotle even goes so far as to call this man a fool, in order to emphasize that "no man, insofar as he is virtuous, is either foolish or senseless" (1123b.5).

As the epitome of all that Aristotle sees as virtuous, this high-minded man is anything but foolish; in fact, he cannot even be mistaken for foolish because his foremost concern is honor. Ultimately, what defines the high-minded man is magnanimity, which "is the crown, as it were, of the virtues: it magnifies them and it cannot exist without them" (1124a.5). In order for someone to be high-minded, then, he must possess all the virtues; once he occupies this state, he will be magnanimous. This culmination of the complete set of virtues will magnify them all and emphasize how truly virtuous he is.

What is puzzling about this vision of the perfect man is the fact that while Aristotle goes so far as to describe how the high-minded man walks and talks, we know much more about *how* the he thinks than what he actually *does.* Aristotle's portrayal of the high-minded man focuses on what this man values and how he looks at others; yet, in many of these situations, we must come to our own conclusions about what sort of action he takes. Furthermore, imagining the high-minded man's course of action in some of these situations actually calls into question how

complete his virtues are, specifically those which Martin Ostwald labels "gentleness" and "friendliness." In short, a close consideration of certain aspects of Aristotle's magnanimous man raises the question: is the high-minded man a *kind* man?

There are two particular instances in the description of the high-minded man wherein it seems that his attitude or thoughts would lead to unkind action. Take, for instance, his primary concern with maintaining honor and avoiding dishonor. Aristotle defines honors as the greatest of external goods (1123b.20), so it makes sense that this would be the main concern of a man who possesses ultimate and total virtue. However, there is a problem with honor; namely, there is no honor that is actually good enough to be bestowed upon a person of perfect virtue. As such, the high-minded man actually despises the praise and honor shown to him by people who are lesser than him, for he deserves enormously better than the accolades of small-minded or vain people. It is as if the greatest of all athletes simply could not be excited by the ogling praise of an amateur who is beneath his level of talent. The troubling concept is that the high-minded man, the man who serves as the embodiment of virtue in its most complete and excellent state, would actually *despise* anything that someone gives to him, even if it were given not out of spite or malice, but out of simple admiration.

Regarding this scenario of praise conferred upon the high-minded man, Aristotle comes close to depicting what sort of action he would take, but only insofar as he explains how the magnanimous man reacts when people of *equal* standing honor him:

> From great honors and those that good men confer upon him he will derive a moderate amount of pleasure, convinced that he is only getting what is properly his or even less . . . yet he will accept it, because they have no greater tribute to pay him.
>
> (1124a.5-10)

From this description, we must assume that the high-minded man *does not* accept honors given to him by less virtuous people. Yet, is there a contradiction in the fact that he will not take these so-called honors from lesser men because they are not worthy of him, but he *will* accept honors from fellow good men even when they are less than what he deserves?

The high-minded man's disdain of admiration, praise, or (what he considers) false honors from lesser men is further developed in Aristotle's later assertion that any attitude of condescension that the magnanimous man has towards those of less virtue is in fact warranted.

Indeed, the magnanimous man has the correct opinion of these lesser men, while most people make the mistake of looking down upon others without legitimate reason for doing so. The vain man in particular must be guilty of this misjudgment of others and himself. Yet if the high-minded man *is* justified in looking down upon others, does this mean that he is permitted to act upon this correct opinion and thus engage in unkindness? If the magnanimous man knows that he is superior to others and if it is a foremost concern of his to maintain his honor and superiority, how does he treat those who are beneath him? How does his justifiably superior attitude manifest itself in his behavior toward others? If he sees a dissolute man stumbling drunk on the streets, does he ignore him? Spit upon him in just anger and disgust? Offer to take him in even though the dissolute man is not worthy to offer petty tokens of admiration to him?

Shortly after the assertion that the high-minded man has every right to look down upon others, Aristotle offers an even more confounding insight into the mind of this man:

> The high-minded also seem to remember the good turns they have done, but not those they have received. For the recipient is inferior to the benefactor, whereas a high-minded man wishes to be superior. They listen with pleasure to what good they have done, but with displeasure to what good they have received.
>
> (1124b.10-15)

In addition to the possibility of being seen as unkind, the high-minded man is perhaps also ungrateful. He is indifferent to the kindness of others due to the fact that he is preoccupied with his own good deeds rather than those of others. Furthermore, any instance in which he the recipient rather than the benefactor does not meet his standards of superiority. He rarely asks for favors but he is always ready to be of aid to others; this may look like an apt description of generosity, but the high-minded man takes this position so that he can more often occupy the position of superiority (the benefactor). It seems, then, that the only thing more out of character for the high-minded man than asking for help is thanking someone for those few favors that he rarely and reluctantly seeks. This would require remembering those favors, an act that he always carries out with displeasure.

Ultimately, this question of whether or not the high-minded man acts kindly is a difficult one: Nowhere in the *Ethics* does Aristotle describe

a virtue named kindness. It is only in the discussion of gentleness and friendliness that he discusses something that could be akin to kindness. In keeping with the fact that the high-minded man possesses all the virtues (his magnanimity is, after all, the crown of all virtues), we must consider how the virtues of gentleness and friendliness would manifest themselves in his behavior. In discussing gentleness, Aristotle first establishes the deficiency and extreme of this virtue, which are apathy and a short temper, respectively. The gentle man is particularly good at controlling his emotions; he does not let them control him. When he *is* angry, it is only under appropriate circumstances and for a reasonable amount of time. What is interesting about gentleness is that Aristotle states that it is actually a mean that is more akin to its deficiency, apathy, than it is to its extreme, short-temperedness. Certainly, the gentle man does not go so far as to allow others to dishonor him or his loved ones, but he does tend to be forgiving more often than he is vindictive.

This virtue of gentleness, then, has a great deal to do with relating to others in a "correct" way at a "correct" time; and, when it comes to anger, keeping one's emotions even and reasonable. In the case of the high-minded man receiving praise and honor from those lower than him, it seems that if he were to maintain his virtue of gentleness, he simply might not react at all, thus, erring on the side of what appears to be apathy. On the other hand, he might show a tempered reaction, reluctantly accepting honors, while in his mind forgiving those who foolishly offer him meaningless praise. At any rate, he makes sure not to compromise his magnanimous character by accepting such gifts. Nor does he lash out in undue anger towards lesser people who may not know any better. Both of these reactions would be a departure from the mean of gentleness.

In the same way that Aristotle arranges his discussion of gentleness around anger, he also reduces the virtue of friendliness to a social virtue. The excess of this virtue is obsequiousness, a vice of which people-pleasing flatterers are guilty. The deficiency is grouchiness, which causes people to "object to everything without caring in the least whether they give pain" (1126b.15). The friendly man occupies the mean between these two extremes. As with gentleness, friendliness causes its possessor to put up with things in the appropriate way and at the right time. Though the friendly man is primarily concerned with social relations, he is concerned in such a way that he aims for what is honorable for himself and beneficial for others. As such, friendliness seems to be a virtue that has much to do with manners, for the friendly man behaves differently towards different types of people. He adjusts his behavior based on

whether or not he knows someone or their social standing, making sure to please where it is appropriate to please, and to avoid causing pain. Thus, the friendly man would not treat a stranger with the same affection that he would treat his own mother, for that would be offering too much pleasure to the stranger. Nor would he scorn a stranger the same way that he would scorn a deserving enemy, for that would not be giving enough pain to the enemy.

In the case of the high-minded man and the dissolute drunkard, then, it seems that Aristotle would require more context to determine how the magnanimous man would treat such an inferior. If the man were asking for money with the admitted intent to purchase more wine, the high-minded man would refuse, perhaps causing pain because it would not be honorable to acquiesce to this particular pleasure, which is ultimately harmful to the dissolute man. And, perhaps, if the drunkard were behaving loudly and in a belligerent manner, disturbing the peace, the high-minded man would silence him with the appropriate amount of anger, thus being gentle, and with the right treatment, thus being friendly, so as to force the dissolute man himself into correct social relations.

Although it is a bit clearer now how the high-minded man behaves in terms of kindness, the matter is still complicated by the fact that Aristotle does not give the title "kindness" to any of his virtues. Nor, however, does he assign the terms gentleness and friendliness to the virtues explain above. As stated earlier, these are labels created by Martin Ostwald in his translation of the *Ethics*. In fact, in the sections on gentleness and friendliness, Aristotle explicitly states that he himself lacks the words to describe these means. Though he does use the world gentleness, he asserts that there is not actually a proper term for the person who exhibits the mean between apathy and a short temper. In regard to friendliness, he is even more uncertain, going so far as to say that the two extremes of obsequiousness and grouchiness "appear to be only opposed to one another, because there is no name for the middle" (1127a.10). In considering the actions of the high-minded man, Aristotle's lack of precision in naming some of his virtues actually makes sense. He addresses the difficulty of acting well when discussing gentleness, asserting that discerning the line between correct moral action and incorrect moral action is not as simple as it may seem. Finding this line is dependent upon the particulars of the circumstance as well as the keenness of our own individual moral sense. Proper moral action, then, is about striking a balance, just as achieving virtue is always a matter of finding the mean between two extremes. Perhaps this is why Aristotle makes it a point to say that the high-minded man is, in fact, a man who

acts rarely and takes his time in considering how to act when he does decide to act. This is why the few actions of the magnanimous man— the man who is the paragon of virtue at its most complete and most excellent, the man who always knows the mean and how to act upon it— are always great and distinguished (1124b.25).

Primary Text

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics.* Translated by Martin Ostwald. Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 1999.

A Work in Progress: The Natural Connection in the Land of the Future in Hegel's "Geographical Basis of History"

Jeffrey Allen

Georg F.W. Hegel offers three methods of history in the Introduction to his *Philosophy of History*: Original History, Reflective History, and Philosophical History. The first is the purview of a Herodotus or a Thucydides, those who were witness to the events that they chronicled and "whose spirit they shared."[1] In the second, history transcends the present and the historian attempts to form a picture of the whole (e.g. Livy). The third method is the focal point of the Introduction and the work as a whole (hence the title), as Hegel traces the history of thought and the role of the eternally present Spirit within its World-Historical development. The final section of his Introduction, "Geographical Basis of History," examines what he calls the "natural connection that helps to produce the Spirit of a People."[2]

Within his discussion of Philosophical History, Hegel makes an important distinction between an "abstract form" and a "concrete development."[3] The former is the place where Spirit, Reason, Freedom, and Consciousness are found, the latter is the historical location of these ideas in time and space, and it is the role of the former that takes precedence in tracing the philosophy of history. In the first paragraph of "Geographical Basis," Hegel returns to this idea, focusing here on the Spirit's "embodiment as a series of external forms."[4] He notes that while this "appears an extrinsic element . . . we must regard it as the ground on which that Spirit plays its part . . . an *essential* and *necessary* basis."[5] If history is the development of Spirit in Time, as he says, this section addresses how that Spirit is understood in relationship to the natural world.

How does the natural connection help to produce the Spirit of a People? What does it look like for the Spirit to operate within the natural world?

Hegel notes that the Spirit of a people is found in their activity: "[I]t is a Spirit having strictly defined characteristics, which erects itself into an objective world, that exists and persists in a particular religious form of worship, customs, constitution, and political laws."[6] He goes on to summarize these features by saying, "That is what this particular Nation *is*. Nations are what their deeds are."[7]

According to Hegel, the scene of world history has its foci in Africa, Asia, and Europe. It is here that men are free to act, whereas such activity is prohibited by climatic or geographical considerations elsewhere. The northern hemisphere offers landmass and biological commonality, whereas the southern hemisphere is largely divided and contrasted.[8] In addition to these north-south distinctions, there are divisions between the Old and New Worlds as well. The New World constitutes true world history for Hegel, a "concern . . . with that which has been and that which is."[9] It is the history of a world that has wrestled with ideas of Reason, Consciousness, and Freedom. He considers the New World— America and Australia— to have operated outside the sphere of world history, as is the case with places like sub-Saharan Africa. However, unlike the former, the latter is considered "the land of the future."[10] It is this consideration of America as the place "where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself,"[11] that drives us to ask about her natural connections that form the ground for the Spirit of a People and about the relationship of these natural connections with this "land of the future."

The phrase "land of the future" raises a couple of questions. If, as Hegel claims, Asia is the beginning of history and Europe is its "absolute end,"[12] in what way is America the "land of the future"? Is America able to take part in history because of its inhabitation by European emigrants[13] and its continuation of Europe as the end of history? Or does its status as a future-oriented nation remove it completely from the realm of history?

The New World, according to Hegel, "is only an echo of the Old World— the expression of a foreign life."[14] This speaks to the idea that the American character is heavily conditioned by its European ancestry, and that if it is to become something beyond historical, it must redefine itself within its North American context. Hegel makes a very interesting statement at this point. In moving from his discussion of America back to the Old World, he writes, "It is for America to abandon the ground on which hitherto the History of the World has developed itself."[15] The ground upon which the History of the World has developed, if it is to be understood as the same ground to which Hegel refers in reference to the development of the Spirit of a People, is the natural connection, the geographical basis of history. In citing a statement by Napoleon, "*Cette vieille Europe m'ennuie*"[16] ("This old Europe bores me"), Hegel captures the necessity of moving out of the Old World and into the New. This quotation seems to be the place where the European spirit becomes reinvigorated by the immense American continent. It is the vastness of this undiscovered country, the mystery of the frontier, which appears to

form a natural connection between the Spirit of the European people and the potential of the New World.

The aforementioned features of national character (a particular form of religious worship, customs, constitution, and political laws) are here identified in their American iteration, signifying the cooperation of the natural world with the disposition of individuals. Religious and political principles are recast in this new land: What was once industry for the sake of Protestant religious activity and the good of the community became "acquisition, commercial profit, and gain; the preponderance of private interest." [17] The community becomes simply an "aggregation of individuals as atomic constituents,"[18] and the state "merely something external for the protection of property."[19] It is as if these principles have been turned back against themselves. Industry and economics were previously informed by religious and political principles. Now it is the religious and political principles that are acted upon by industry and economy.

The sheer volume of land circumvents the necessity of civil and political discord by offering a natural "outlet of colonization," one that Hegel notes is "constantly and widely open, and multitudes are continually streaming into the plains of the Mississippi."[20] The only limit to America's historical potential seems to be the frontiers themselves. Hegel says that "only after the immeasurable space which that country presents to its inhabitants shall have been occupied, and the members of the political body shall have begun to be pressed back on each other"[21] will America have to address the questions that confront Europe. The words "immeasurable space" and "pressed back" connote this natural connection. It is because of the immeasurable space that the North American continent affords that the political character of the people is formed. Pressing back evokes a vivid sense of both physical proximity and political tension. America is both physically and psychically acting upon the principles that were exported to its shores, which is to say that the physical geography of the North American continent and the opportunity it affords are found to be acting upon the economic, political, and religious forms of national character that made their way over the pond.

The place where people live, eat, breathe, labour, and die is not accidental to the character of a people. It is not as though the natural world is the sole determining factor for the activities and character of nations and peoples; however, Hegel recognizes its significance in forming their Spirit. A fine vintage of grapes that is produced by the dirt, the sun, the water, the wind, and the invisible hand of the winemaker is

not simply the sum of its parts. But it is not a fine vintage of grapes without *terrior*, which influences the character of the grape to such an extent that it would not be the grape it is without such features. The North American continent seems to offer fertile soil for the cultivation of the Spirit's development, a place where the Consciousness and Freedom of the Old World are manifest through the natural connection of a New World. Thus, the end of history is not a terminus,[22] but a *telos*, where the progress of the Spirit meets the land of the future.

Endnotes

1. Hegel, Georg F.W. *The Philosophy of History*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1991, pp. 1.
2. Ibid., 79.
3. Ibid., 12.
4. Ibid., 79.
5. Ibid., Italics his.
6. Ibid., 74.
7. Ibid. Italics his. One hears echoes of Herder's national genius (J.G. von Herder, Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind).
8. Ibid., 80.
9. Ibid., 87. Italics his. Brackets mine.
10. Ibid., 86.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 103.
13. Cf. 81-82
14. Ibid. One might offer a sort of counter-Hegelian argument with regard to the presence of Europeans in the Americas. This event has a dramatic effect on the character of the existing structures (political, economic, etc. It is not difficult to imagine that those operating outside a Hegelian view of history would see these events as deeply problematic (ethnocentrism, colonization, conquest, and economic oppression might be possible counter-narratives).
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 85. Italics his. One cannot help but hear Tocqueville here (cf. *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1, Ch.2, Pt. 6, et al).
18. Ibid., 84.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., 86.
21. Ibid.
22. Nietzsche suggests that Hegel might have called his time the terminus of history and that what remained was "only a musical coda of the world-historical rondo." Since he did not, Nietzsche believes that it has placed modern man at the mercy of "the power of history"— simply as a yes man to progress and success. This could well lead to a quite robust discussion on the

potential of the individual within the progression of history (Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980, 47).

Primary Text

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The Path of the Good King: A Journey from Loss to Renewal and Return in the *Mahābhārata*

Turner Resor

On the verge of battle at Lankā, after Rāvana had fortified the walls of his city and Rāma, along with Hanumān and his monkey army, has bivouacked in the surrounding forest, Angada is sent by Rāma to deliver a message to Rāvana and his ministers. Standing amidst a multitude of enemy Rāksasas, Angada tells of the fate of cities whose rulers are of unmade souls:

> Countries and cities that incur a king of unmade soul who is bent on bad policy are themselves the victims of such a policy, and destroyed. It is you alone who have committed a crime by abducting Sītā forcibly. But this will lead to the slaughter of others who are innocent.[1]
>
> (Van Buitenen, J.A.B., 268.10)

The foretold annihilation of Lankā is a powerful reminder of how tenuous the glories are for an "unmade" king and his kingdom. Rāvana's pride, anger, and desire for vengeance make him blind to *dharma* and lead to the downfall of his city, people, family, and himself. His character serves as a counter-example or anti-hero included as part of Rāma's heroic journey towards reunion with the self, as symbolized by Sītā, and the proper attainment of kingship. It is a story within a story, just as Rāma's recovery of Sītā is being related to Yudhisthira by Mārkandeya as a story that is meant to show the significance of the Pāndava ruler's own period of confusion, loss, and peril in exile. These circumstances reach their height following the incident of Draupadī's abduction by Jayadratha.

By looking at the stories of Yudhisthira and Rāma when they, on their path to kingship, are exiled to the forest, as well as the example of Duhsanta, the founding dynast of the Kurus, who also gets drawn into the forest before finding Śakuntalā, a pattern begins to emerge that frames the cycle of the heroic individual in the phases of departure, disorientation, reconnection, and return to the throne. Mainly, these stories are meant to explain the essential makings of good leadership and to show that there is an individual responsibility that must be fulfilled before one becomes king. It is a responsibility that runs deeper and is far

more personal than the superficial kingly qualifications that are more commonly understood.

It is a responsibility to an inward exploration, seemingly involuntary but more likely fated, that can be experienced but not taught; it presents a challenge, no less consequential than the outcome of war; and it threatens the leader's individual existence by removing the shelter of artificial rank and social position, testing the mettle of their virtue alone. In short, "the king must conquer first himself."[2] On the successful completion of this journey, which seeks a reunion with the source and culminates at a point either of self-discovery or self-affirmation, hinges the order and prosperity of the kingdom. Having reached the source, the king gives himself back to the people as a link between the two worlds, the one he has obtained and the one where he will rule.

Subsequent to this larger heroic framework there are several recurrent archetypes at play. There is the idea of the "other" that lies beyond the city walls, a land of wild animals, demons, and Brahmins, identified in these stories by the forest. There is a "loss of identity" by the heroes that travel into these lands, and along with that a "disorientation" that shows the heroes' vulnerability and tests their individual prowess. This loss of control often results in the abduction of their women by "anti-hero" characters who misuse their powers to fulfill *adharmic* desires deluded by jealousy, anger, or greed. And finally, there is the "return" to the kingdom, a stage no less difficult than the others, requiring that the king ultimately give himself to his people.

Maybe the most important archetype in each of these stories is the hero's wife. The hero's wife stands as the counterpart to the hero's soul. Separated from his wife, the hero cannot live fully. She is the anthropomorphized "reunion with the source;" she is the destined "self" that takes an otherwise restless masculine drive and tempers its powers of destruction with the powers of creation; "a husband enters his wife and is reborn from her."[3] It is through the feminine that the important connection with the other is maintained after the hero has returned, thus allowing for the nurturing of the kingdom and the conception of an heir.

Each archetype arises organically and serves as the person or point in time in which he must act and prove his legitimacy. The hero will consistently strive to respond to these ideals *dharmically*, while the anti-hero will be driven by attachment, the acquisition of power for power's sake, and other base desires. To understand the nature of the hero's journey it is helpful to identify the archetypes that are at work within the various stages of the cycle.

The first stage is marked by a departure from the kingdom into a largely unknown and uncontrolled realm, generally represented as the "other." Along with departure comes a loss of kingly identity. With Yudisthira and Rāma this is seen in their exiles to the forest. Duhsanta leaves his kingdom by choice to go hunting with his army, also in the forest. The forest is a liminal domain. In an age of high *dharma*, Brahmins who have renounced city living in pursuit of *moksa*, or final release, are the forest's main human occupants. As *dharma* declines it also attracts other marginal characters, some ascetics and deviants, who are driven by unchecked human emotion and materialism and who understand that the land is a place where they can attain to higher powers.

Yudhisthira's exile into the forest and loss of kingdom during the gambling match with Śakuni is the most dramatic example from the three stories. After Dhrtarāstra returns the possessions of Pāndu's sons, which were lost in the first gambling match and amounted to their entire kingdom including themselves and Draupadī, "Duryodhana, Karna, and Śakuni . . . plotted together in their pride against the Pāndavas"[4] and invited the Pāndavas back to gamble a second time. Yudhisthira, adhering to his Ksatriya *dharma* and understanding that it is fate that is in control, cannot refuse the offer. This time the wager is that the losers must go into exile in the forest for twelve years, while in the meantime the winners are given the losers' portion of the kingdom. Śakuni predictably wins again and "Kuntī's sons, defeated, turned their minds towards exile in the forest; one after another, they took antelope-skins for their upper garments."[5] At this Duhśāsana gloats: "'They are stripped of their happiness and of their kingdom; they are lost for endless years! . . . Stripped of their wealth . . . they are going to the forest!'"[6] It is worth noting that in the second gambling match the Pāndavas retain their selves.

The account of Rāma's exile is similar. Jealous of Rāma, Kaikeyī, the mother of Rāma's brother Bharata, tricks King Daśaratha into giving Bharata the kingdom that was intended for Rāma, and further, exiling Rāma to the woods. In both cases it is deceit and greed for the riches of others, and the adherence to *dharma* by Yudhisthira and Rāma, that sends the heroes into the woods. This establishes the tension between the sacred and profane is established.

It may seem as though these two kings are exiled against their wishes, but it can also be said that they choose the path of *dharma*, and the desire for *dharma* is preeminent amongst the wise. Evidence for this is seen when Draupadī questions Yudhisthira's adherence to *dharma* following their exile. He responds by reminding her that "he adheres to

dharma not in hope of gain but because it is right . . . Proclaimed by wise seers . . . The rewards for practicing *dharma* may be invisible to mortals, but they are assuredly real."[7] To believe this requires faith that *dharma* is capable of yielding something greater than "the opulent life they themselves used to live,"[8] an idea seemingly absurd to Duryodhana and his cohorts.

Duhsanta's journey into the depths of the woods is at first intended and later incidental as he is led deeper and deeper in search for deer. In a way his journey is also logical. He is already thought of as a great king living in a time of high *dharma*. Supposing, as this paper does, that this journey is naturally occurring and prerequisite to a successful rule, following his *dharma* as a good king would inevitably lead him onto this path, thus further establishing him as more than a good king but also the founder of the Kuru dynasty.

Leaving the defined boundaries of the relatively mundane and the more obvious delineations of *dharma*, descending further into distant lands, these three kings carry onward. Thresholds are overcome and markings of past identities are shed. Yudhisthira and his brothers are forced to dress in antelope-skins, while Rāma and his brother Laksmana put on "the scant adornment of ascetics."[9] The separation from subjects and friends is also seen when the people of the city attempt to follow the Pāndavas into exile but are told to go back since the brothers will no longer be able to support them.[10] These heroes who are renouncing their old garments, comforts, and company are symbolically metamorphosing from Ksatriyas into Brahmins, and it is the Brahmin's land of hermitages, *dharmic* subtleties, and spiritual attainment in which they now find themselves.

The hero's sloughing-off of identity as he wanders into more distant lands is well illustrated in the tale of Duhsanta who travels through four different realms before finding his future wife Śakuntalā in the hut of her father, the renowned seer, Kanva. Upon leaving his city for the hunt, Duhsanta first leaves the womenfolk who watch his departure from their balconies, after which the "town and country folk followed him a long way, until the king finally dismissed them and they returned."[11] Duhsanta and his army now go into the first woods where they utterly destroy all the big game. The slaughter represents another important archetypal element in which renewal or a return to the origins is preceded by violence, upheaval, and destruction.

Leaving the main army behind Duhsanta continues, "supremely strong, though hungry and thirsty, [to] penetrate by himself into the depths of the forest,"[12] until passing three more thresholds at which point

he "halted his escort of chariots with footmen at the gate of the wood" instructing them to "remain here until my return."[13] He continues now with only his closest personal and spiritual advisors:

> And upon entering that wood, like another paradise of Indra, the lord of men shed his hunger and thirst, and became overjoyed. Discarding his regalia and accompanied only by councilor and priest, he walked to the grand hermitage . . .

At last, reaching Kaśyapa's sanctum, Duhsanta dismisses his councilors and priest. From here he can only continue on alone. At the threshold of each realm he leaves behind another part of his identity, eventually finding himself alone at the hermitage at which point he shouts, "Who is here?" because he is encountering his unaffected self for the first time.

Duhsanta's progress is constantly moving from the material to the spiritual, from the particular to the universal, and from the lower classes to the higher classes. The Vaiśya and Śūdra castes are left behind at the city. He moves onward with his Ksatriya warriors. The description of the animal slaughter has a visceral weariness and weight to it that poetically captures a kind of separation anxiety which continues to bind these men to the material and to isolate them from the spiritual. They are referred to as "starving tiger men" who eat meat raw and attack elephants that in a panic are "dropping dung and urine and streaming with blood."[14] A baseness and desperation are vividly depicted when these two worlds collide. Simultaneously, the warriors are compared to the beasts of the forests and put at odds with them. Unable to understand their profound sympathy to these beasts, the Ksatriya warriors in fear resort to an instinctual masculine domination. Unable to go on, they are left behind as Duhsanta goes further and thus the weight of his own embodiment is gradually alleviated. Traveling onward, the king loses his hunger and thirst.

The meta-geography of this journey can be imagined as the king passing through the ringed layers of a concentric circle, moving always towards the center. With each move inward the surroundings become more and more harmonious, the forest increasingly fertile and interlaced with the channels of holy rivers. The sweet songs of the Vedas share the air with the "pollen of flowers . . . [that] accosts the trees as though to make love to them."[15] As the king melds into his surroundings and drops the clothes that separate him, he sees "beasts of prey and deer peaceably together" and is "filled with the purest joy."[16] In the last stage of his reconnaissance, Duhsanta reaches the center:

> Thereupon the illustrious warrior drew nigh to the hermitage that most enchanting everywhere, was the image of the world of the Gods. He saw the river that embraced the hermitage with her holy water spreading out like the mother of all creatures . . . The sound of holy Vedic lessons wafted over the river; sandbanks strung pearls upon her . . . When he saw the hermitage and the river that enclosed it, the king set his mind upon entering.
>
> (64.18-23)

When Duhsanta crosses over the channel of water between himself and the hermitage he does so alone. No counsel, secular or religious, can take him further; it is only his individual courage and lack of attachment that can. And it is not an easy last step, for as he leaves the last of his bonds to the old world on the outer bank, he is stepping entirely into the unknown. It is a living suicide, the razor's edge that can be crossed over only with faith that what is on the other side is divine. It is a symbolic death and rebirth in which he is giving "up the earth for the sake of [his self]."[17]

On the other side of the river lies the center of all the realms he has passed through, the origin of all beings, the center of the Turning of the Wheel, and Śakuntalā, his wife to be. He has connected with the source, and now he has seen what he needed to see before going back and becoming a true king. The whole reason for the hero's journey into the forest is to discover this source, which is the same as the individual and universal self. The importance of the source is demonstrated allegorically at the beginning of the Pāndava's exile. Yudhisthira asks his priest Dhaumya "how he may provide for the Brahmins; Dhaumya advises him to turn to the Sun, source of all nourishment."[18] It is also seen in the symbolic importance of the forest as a place where the Brahmin caste goes in isolation to study the Vedas, which would be considered the source of knowledge.

After Duhsanta shouts "Who is here?" he sees Śakuntalā and falls in love. Śakuntalā is the personification of this reunion with the source and the powers of creativity that it establishes. "The wife is half the man, a wife is better than his best friend, a wife is the root of law, Profit, and Love."[19] Śakuntalā also represents a piece of the origin that Duhsanta will eventually bring back to the kingdom with him once they are secretly married. As his wife, she will be a source of stability and a balance to his masculinity, and as a woman, someone able to create new life, ensuring the continuation and prosperity of the entire kingdom.

The heroic cycles of the Rāma and Pāndavas are not as clearly demarcated as that of Duhsanta, but the same principles are at work and the wife remains an important figure. Rather than finding Sītā for the first time, Rāma's exile becomes the quest to recover Sītā, who was already his wife, and "whom the Maker himself had destined to be Rāma's beloved queen."[20] Sītā is abducted by Rāvana, who comes to her posing as a Brahmin after Rāma and Laksmana go in pursuit of Rāvana's accomplice, Mārīca, who has disguised himself as a splendid deer.

It is implied more than once in this tale that Rāma will not be able to return from exile, regain the throne, or even continue to live unless he is able to recover Sītā. Looking for help from the apes to find Sītā, Rāma pleads:

> Will you bring me back to life? . . . Shall I once more rule the kingdom of Ayodhyā, after slaying the enemies in battle and recovering Janaka's daughter? I cannot bear to live without freeing and killing foes in war, bereft of my wife and exiled!

To get Sītā back, Rāma must first overcome many obstacles that will test his prowess. He must save Laksmana from the hideous Raksasa Kabandha; he must help Sugrīva usurp the throne from the lord of the apes, Vālin; with Hanumān and the monkey army, he must cross a great Ocean; finally he must defeat Rāvana at Lankā. So again in the story of Rāma, as with Duhsanta, the hero in exile is faced with challenges and passes through many phases that culminate in the reunion with his wife, at which point he is ready to return to the throne.

The story of how the Pāndavas lose Draupadī is nearly identical. The brothers are out hunting when King Jayadratha passes by the hermitage and sees Draupadī. He tries to persuade Draupadī to abandon her husbands and to go with him. When she refuses, Jayadratha "drags her into his chariot."[21] The brothers "may have recovered her by killing the Saindhava army, but [they] did have [their] own wife abducted absent-mindedly."[22] This last lamentation reflects the necessarily disorientating nature of the forest. Vulnerable outside the walls of their kingdom, where *dharma* is more easily understood, even the Pāndavas are susceptible to the loss of their wife.

As seen above in Duhsanta's story, the wife is analogous to the hero's soul. In one passage of this story this association is almost directly stated. Speaking to King Duhsanta, who has now returned to his kingdom, Śakuntalā states that, "A man who despises his soul and dissembles will find the Gods of no avail and his soul of no benefit," and in the very next

line adds,[23] "Do not despise me." Supposing that this connection holds constant for the other stories, it is interesting to consider how Rāma and the Pāndavas become disoriented in the forest and consequently lose their wives for a time. For the heroes, this loss is the definitive and most trying crisis of their exile. Without their wives they will remain lost and unable to regain their kingdoms. Once they find their wives again, they are tried and true.

In all three stories there are anti-heroes, powerful Raksasas, misguided ascetics, or lustful kings who are contrasted against the purposes of the heroes. For the Pāndavas there is Jayadratha. In the story of Rāma there is Rāvana, and in the story of Duhsanta there is a sub-story that portrays Viśvāmitra, "who was born a baron and by brute force became a Brahmin."[24] Their deviance is usually ambiguous. What they have achieved through austerities is often quite impressive, but they are betrayed by their lawless intentions that eventually reveal themselves, leading to the anti-heroes' fall. Rather than strictly following *dharma* these characters remain attached to their actions, and are ambitious for the powers, riches, and pleasures that can be gained from dissembling. This evil-mindedness is spoken of in The Colloquy of the Brahmin and the Hunter:

> . . . Man is ruled by greed and battered by love and hatred; his spirit is not pointed to the Law, but he pretends to observe the Law. He pretends to follow the Law, but, in his dissembling, enjoys Unlaw. His spirit delights in the riches to which he succeeded while he dissembled, good Brahmin, and then turns to evil . . . Under the influence of the vice of his passion, his lawlessness flourishes triply: he thinks evil, speaks evil, does evil.[25]

These evildoers and law-abusers illustrate the dangers of the journey and display the range of human desires and emotions that threaten the single-minded purpose of the heroes. Their lot is a cursed one. Since they cannot create, they must consume and can never be fulfilled because their own behavior offends themselves, whereas to follow *dharma* is to nurture oneself. The anti-heroes are often found desperately pursuing satisfaction where it cannot be attained, i.e. in the conquest of another man's wife, which again and again is said to be impossible. They are tragically lost souls, but are never far away from the hero, a point that emphasizes the tremendous perils that the hero risks. They, like Rāvana, cannot be good rulers since they only consume and do not create. They are prevalent in

the realm of the "other" since there they are free from law and able, through austerities, to gain power, which they will misuse.

If the heroes can avoid the trappings of these *adharmic* characters and complete their quest, the return to the throne is all that remains. This is often much more difficult than it would seem. Up to this point the heroes might have imagined that they would return to their kingdom at last satisfied, but after all the obstacles, all the years of exile, and all the battles, much has changed. Yudhisthira, Rāma, and Duhsanta all struggle to reintegrate or return to the way things were before.

After Rāma destroys Lankā and Rāvana's army he is hesitant to accept Sītā again as his wife. He feels that he has fulfilled his *dharmic* responsibility by freeing her from captivity, but is wary that her being has been compromised during her imprisonment. He tells her:

> Go, Vaidehi, you are free. I have done what I had to do. Once you found me as a husband, good woman, you were not to grow old in a Rāksasa's house— that is why I killed the Night Stalker. For how would a man like me, who knows the decision of the Law, maintain even for an instant a woman who had been in another man's hands? Whether you are innocent or guilty, Maithilī, I can no more enjoy you, no more than an oblation that has been licked by a dog.
>
> (275.11-14)

There is a contradiction in Rāma's logic. It was the king's adherence to *dharma* and his decision to go into exile that led to Sītā's abduction. It was *dharma* that informed Rāma to rescue Sītā from Rāvana. But now it is also *dharma* that tells Rāma he can free Sītā, but not reunite with her. It appears as though by necessity Sītā must be trusted since it was fate that created her captivity, but Rāma cannot accept that fact. His stringent guidelines resemble the more practical interpretation of Ksatriya *dharma* even though in many ways he has been living in and advanced to a realm of Brahmin *dharma*. Only after four Gods tell Rāma that Sītā is worthy of his love does he hesitantly take her back. The dilemma illustrates how the Ksatriya king is now confronted with a paradox between the higher *dharma* he has attained and the *dharma* that is appropriate to his caste. Duhsanta, apparently, also must find a balance between his secret marriage in the forest and the *dharma* of the city people.[26]

Yudhisthira appears to be caught in a similar situation. After the battle is over and he and his brothers are finally able to return to their

kingdom he appears to have doubts. To the objection of all of those close to him he declares that he will now go perform austerities in the forest like a Brahmin to prepare for final release. He is told that this is contrary to his *dharma*, that "the *dharma* of kings is different from that of Brahmins."[27] In a sense, Yudhisthira is being told that nothing he has done was done for himself. It is at this point that he begins to understand what true renunciation means. Yudhisthira must return because all of the other classes are dependent upon the Ksatriya king:

> The Vedas state that the *dharmas* of the non-ksatriya classes all depend upon the *dharma* of the king; without the king's rod of force the Vedas would perish and so would all *dharmas* and the stages of life themselves . . . Ksatriya *dharma* was Visnu's first creation; all other *dharmas* followed. Without the Ksatriya *dharma* there would be no Brahmins, no *dharmas*, no classes of society, no stages of life.[28]

Ksatriya *dharma* is valued because it creates a politics for peace amongst the other classes. The problem for the hero who must return to the throne is that he has come to know the weaknesses of being human from experience; he knows the depravities of man better than anyone else because he has overcome them; and he no longer wishes to be associated with this reality. As an individual he has transcended the profanities to which the Ksatriya class is inextricably linked yet he must remain adherent to his class *dharma*. Reconciling these two kinds of *dharma* appears to be extremely difficult and unpleasant.

It is the hesitancy to rule that makes this person a great king. He is now whole and has now surpassed the weaknesses that rule the human body, thus he becomes "a great deity in the form of a man, taking on different divine aspects as he performs his different duties."[29] Only a person like this hero can be trusted not to rule the kingdom for his own benefit, for "a king exists to foster *dharma* not to pursue his own interests."[30] So the adherent to *dharma* will not know his fate until the very end and it may not be what was expected or longed for. The Ksatriya hero who seeks final relief or final release will seek it in vain for it is his *dharma* to postpone this last departure. His only consolation is in the belief that the good king will eventually attain the heaven of Indra.

In understanding the cyclical journey that leads to the proper attainment of the throne, which various heroes undergo during this eastern epic, a light is shone throughout the *Mahābhārata* as a whole. As an extracted framework the hero's quest is given a body and obtains an

almost living quality capable of breathing life into the other paradigms of the story with which it is intertwined. Once the pattern of language that rests below the superficial variances of the individual story is revealed, new insights can be made into the nature of the elements that are subsumed. The importance of the discovery and reconnection to the feminine is essential to the journey itself, but is also telling of the nature of pure love. The shedding of one's material possessions must come before the hero departs for the forest, illustrating the bonds that separate the mundane and the spiritual. And the King's difficulty in reconciling the Ksatriya and Brahmin *dharmas* provides an interesting look into the nature of politics and the sacrifices made by a rightful leader. The King's path is one of many frameworks in the *Mahābhārata*, but like the others it holds to an underlying truth in a way that charges the embedded motifs with meaning. The truth is what holds fast, and by familiarizing oneself with the constant, one nears a better understanding of the *dharma*.

Endnotes

1. Van Buitenen, J.A.B. *The Mahābhārata.* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago) 1981. The Abduction of Draupadī: Rāma, pp. 268.10.
2. Smith, John D. *The Mahābhārata.* (Penguin Classics: London) 2009, pp. 609.
3. Van Buitenen, J.A.B. *The Mahābhārata.* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago) 1981.The Origins: Śakuntalā, 68.35.
4. Smith, John D. *The Mahābhārata.* The Hall, pp. 156.
5. *The Mahābhārata.* The Hall, pp. 159.
6. *The Mahābhārata.* The Hall, pp. 160.
7. Smith, John D. *The Mahābhārata.* The Forest, pp. 168.
8. *The Mahābhārata.* The Forest, pp. 168.
9. The Abduction of Draupadī: Rāma, pp. 261.37.
10. *The Mahābhārata.* The Forest, pp. 164.
11. The Origins: Śakuntalā, pp. 63.10.
12. Ibid., 64.1.
13. Ibid., 64.25.
14. Ibid., 63.20.
15. Ibid., 64.10.
16. Ibid., 64.15.
17. Smith, John D. *The Mahābhārata.* The Hall, pp. 135.
18. *The Mahābhārata.* The Forest, pp. 164.
19. The Origins: Śakuntalā, pp. 68.40.
20. The Abduction of Draupadī: Rāma, pp. 258.10.
21. Smith, John D. *The Mahābhārata.* The Forest, pp. 210.

22. The Abduction of Draupadī: Rāma, pp. 257.5.
23. The Origins: Śakuntalā, pp. 68.30.
24. Ibid., 65.25. Menaka's seduction of Visvamitra is another example of how the feminine force can quell the destructive powers of masculinity.
25. The Session with Mārkandeya: The Colloquy of the Brahmin and the Hunter 201.5
26. Duhsanta's case may be intentionally ambiguous, making it seem on the one hand that he is now attempting to forget the truth he knows in his heart, and on the other hand as though he is orchestrating a performance so as not to incur the blame of his people.
27. Smith, John D. *The Mahābhārata.* Tranquility, pp. 599.
28. *The Mahābhārata.* Tranquility, pp. 608.
29. Smith, John D. *The Mahābhārata.* Tranquility, pp. 609.
30. *The Mahābhārata.* Tranquility, pp. 609.

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That Fair Passion: Dejection and Desire in Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*

Mary Creighton

In magnis et voluisse sat est.

To once have wanted is enough in great deeds.

-Propertius

In *Eugene Onegin*, Alexander Pushkin invites his readers into the world of the title character, an emotionally disintegrating nineteenth-century Russian dandy. Years after Onegin's marriage refusal of the tenderfooted and callow young Tatyana, their reunion marks a grand departure in Onegin's character. We find that this departure in character is not merely an aberration in the behavior of the Onegin readers had come to recognize, but rather a spiritual renaissance. Contrary to the familiar romantic indifference of Onegin, we see an obsessive and energetic man. It is at this crowning moment in the narrative that Pushkin turns his pen to the quandary of humanity at large. Pushkin writes,

> Meanwhile, Eugene was vainly thrusting
> Tatyana's image from his mind:
> Not of poor shy Tatyana-trusting,
> In love, obscure, unrefined,
> But of the princess who serenely,
> Like sheltered godhead, ruled the queenly
> The lush imperial Nevá.
> Ah, men! The curse of Eve, our far
> Progenetrix is still enduring:
> The proffered palls, half-concealed,
> The tree, the serpent ever wield
> Their immemorial mystic luring.
> Forbidden fruit we still implore,
> Or Eden Eden is no more.
>
> (VIII.27)

The fact that we, as readers, are grouped in the address "Ah men" (Arndt, 208) and "Oh humans! All of you resemble ancestress Eve" (Nabokov,

VIII.27.8), indicates that we too share the insatiable and dissatisfied nature that Pushkin relates. Here, we find ourselves forced into a more sympathetic attitude toward our hero, Onegin. After all, he is the very epitome of this insatiable nature. As we recall, nothing profoundly satisfies his soul. What we, as readers, once passed off as mere ennui, we share with our protagonist in this passage. In casting ourselves in the role of the insatiable Onegin, we recognize that we too suffer from "our far progenetrix" and an "immemorial mystic luring" (Arndt, 208). We are thus forced to either re-evaluate our protagonist, or admit that we are in no way superior to the man we once considered a gilded youth, cold and self-indulgent. In either case, we find that somehow we have had a change of heart. Suddenly, we sympathize with Onegin.

Both the "immemorial" quality of this luring, and the fact that we are forced to acknowledge ourselves as victims, introduces this spiritual malaise as a universal and timeless experience. What is Pushkin telling us in this passage? Are we to assume he means that spiritual satisfaction is incompatible with human life? If so, is it attributed to our natures or a misguided mind? Pushkin writes,

> Forbidden fruit we still implore,
> Or Eden Eden is no more.
>
> (VIII.27.13-14)

There are two possible ways to interpret this passage. In both cases we find that our desire for the forbidden fruit is the very prerequisite for Eden's existence. First, let us consider the simpler interpretation. The forbidden fruit, our desire, is the prerequisite so that Eden may exist. Rather, it is only with the satisfaction of our desires that life becomes paradise to us. This explains why in Nabokov's translation we see written, tersely, "you *must* be given the forbidden fruit, / for Eden otherwise is not Eden to you" (VIII.27.13-14). However, let us consider another possibility. If we return to Arndt's translation we read, "forbidden fruit we still implore, / Or Eden Eden is no more." In this rendering we see a darker, potentially more hopeless reflection of humankind. With this interpretation, it may not in fact be the receipt of our desires that marks paradise, but perhaps it is the very human act of wanting, desire itself, that distinguishes it. Read this way, it is the imploring that causes Eden to exist. What is so paradisical about desire? How can we justify this claim if it means that in an unsatisfied state, we are actually in paradise? To explore this idea, one must first consider Onegin's dissatisfaction and his later heartbreak.

Onegin's Two States of Being

If Onegin is in some way consistently unfulfilled throughout the entire novel, what marks the difference between his earlier sate of ennui and his latter torment at Tatyana's rejection? Upon reflection, we find that there are two kinds of dissatisfaction that we see in Onegin. Put simply, there is one state in which he experiences mere ennui and another in which he is consumed by desire. The latter is powerful, rich, active, and full of soul and yearning. Essentially, it is a lively human experience. In contrast, the former is a static experience. His dissatisfaction resembles a desire-less misery rather than a noble asceticism. The time that Onegin is filled most with desire is in the end of the novel, when his unrequited love for "queenly" Tatyana causes him to ache and desperately reach out to her indifferent heart. Yet, it is no surprise to recognize that it is in this moment that we feel most sympathetic for Onegin. We want Tatyana and Onegin to embrace. Further, we want him to be satisfied. We want them reconciled. The moment we wish most for Onegin's happiness is the moment when he appears most human to us. He is not simply apathetic and motionless in a state of malaise or ennui. Rather, he is passionate and full of life. How is one then to reconcile Onegin's grave torment with idyllic paradise? The answer is found in Onegin's passion, not his torment. Torment here has an object, a direction. In Onegin's prior episodes, we see that his torment is stagnant and merely internal.

Onegin's Early Ennui

From birth, Onegin is described as "likeable, yet wild" (I.3.8). This wild nature and beginning is a far cry from his young adult life. "Likeable, yet wild" suggests that the two qualities are at odds with one another. However, once Onegin joins society, he learns the part of "London's dandy fashion" (I.4.6). His "likeable" and "wild" sides cease to be at odds. Rather, the latter gives way to the former until no "wild"-ness is detectable in his character. "Society's verdict ran," he is now merely "a bright and very nice young man" (V.4.14). From the time of his early entrance into fashionable society, Onegin slips into a careless depression.

The narrator tells us that Onegin was "To hold life cheap for Sound" and "took forever/ Iambic for trochaic verse" (1.7.1-4):

What early meant in equal measure
His toil, his torment, and his pleasure,
What occupied at every phase
The leisured languor of his days,
Was the pursuit of that Fair Passion
Which Ovid sang, and for its sake
Was doomed to drain, in mutinous ache,
His glittering life's remaining ration.

(I.8.5-12)

In this stanza Pushkin informs his readers that Eugene was, in his early youth, occupied with "the pursuit of that Fair Passion." Onegin longs not only for passion but the "Passion" of which Ovid sang. It is interesting to consider that the kind of passion that most resounds within Onegin was that expressed so eloquently by Ovid, a prolific writer best known for his elegiac love poetry. It is this very passion, we are told in an ominous moment of foreshadowing, that will later "drain" the remainder of his life. Like the wild nature of his youth, Onegin's love for poetry dissipates upon his entrance into fashionable society. This Ovidian passion is lost in the "leisured languor" that we are told marks his young adult days from here on out. We see that this passion is revived upon reunion with Tatyana, but lies lifeless and dormant before that fateful reunion. We learn in the very next stanza that his passion had turned to contrivance. Furthermore, any earnestness is overcast by a philanderer's contrivance: "How soon he learnt to feign emotion" (I.10.1). In the following two stanzas we are told that his romantic exchanges are both active and insincere. He "act[ed]," "seem[ed]," "scared," "[a]mazed," "[s]eized," "lure[d]," "implore[d]," and even "ambush[ed]" his "prey" (1.10.2,4;1.11.2,3,5,8-10,14). In stanza 19 of Chapter One, the narrator first introduces the banal and tiresome repetition of St. Petersburg social life and the theatre that serves as its epicenter. Here, the stage becomes reminiscent of Eugene's fashionable life itself. Speaking of the cast, the narrator laments,

Are you the same? Have others banished
And barred, yet not replaced you all?
...
Or will the listless eye not see
On tedious stage familiar faces,
Scan with distraught binoculars
An alien world bereft of stars;
...

Shall I be yawning at the cast
And mutely hanker for the past?

(I.19.3-14)

Here, both Saint Petersburg's fashionable society and the theatrical cast are "tedious faces" whose platitudinous and dizzying repetition induces merely a yawn from its audience. St. Petersburg, in all its fashion, "makes for cultured whimsy / Of novelties polite and flimsy" (I.23.5-6). This world is not reminiscent in any way of Onegin's "wild" youth and Ovidian passion, but is "an alien world bereft of stars." The theater, like his very life, inspires little more than a "hanker[ing] for the past," when life still appeared before him in all its glitter and possibility. Although he is unaware, our hero is reminiscing about his childhood, before life was reduced to a mere bromide, eliciting a "listless" spirit and a yawn-inspiring ennui. Eugene has only "an absent gaze at the ballet / then with a yawn he turn[s] away" (I.21.10-11). Our languishing protagonist has "seen it all," claiming that "on me ballets have lost their hold / Diderot himself now leaves me cold" (I.21.6, 13-14).

In Nabokov's translation we see a more sentimental response to the theater. The characters that were once "full of soul" in Nabokov's translation are met with a "mournful gaze" rather than a "listless eye." The actors are referred to as "goddesses," an image more akin to muses that entertain and inspire. These fallen goddesses are met with a cry, "Hark my sad voice"! But the muses do not listen; one is left merely "disenchanted" and rendered mute in a sea of voices that comprise the tepid indifference of a madding crowd.

Onegin's life at this point is "ceaseless play," an expression of "youth's bloom, free of prohibition" (I.36.9). However, the freedom and bloom hold no genuine pleasure for the hero. "Each day a feat, his life a game," we are told (I.36.10). In the midst of this reflection our narrator pauses to ask his readers, "Was he content with his condition? / Or was he hearty and inane / Amid carousals— but in vain?" (I.36.11-14). It is not hard to conceive that the answer for both the readers and the narrator is emphatically, "Yes" (I.37.1). The narrator continues, "Feeling early cooled within him; / He came to loathe that worldly grind; / Proud beauties could no longer win him / And uncontested rule his mind" (I.37.1-4). The "constant inconstancy turns dreary" and of "friends and friendship [Eugene] grew weary" (I.37.5-6). He becomes "overfed" with social life (I.37.13).

Onegin becomes "strange," "embittered," "wry" and "gloomy" because "Life had numbed all vest," extinguishing "the glow" within "his

breast" (I.38.9; I.45.10-11). We are told that he becomes "infected" with a "disease" colloquially referred to as "the Blues" (I.38.4-5). He "ceased to notice anything" other than the dull ache within his impassive chest (I.38.14). The narrator expounds,

> Eugene has had his measure.
> Apostate from the whirl of pleasure,
> He has withdrawn into his den
> And, yawning, reached for ink and pen.
> He tried to write— from such tenacious
> Endeavor, though, his mind recoiled;
> And so the paper stayed unsoiled.
>
> (I.43.5-14)

Pushkin makes it clear that his torment is less an emotional enterprise than one born from boredom. This is seen in the very fact that Pushkin continually accompanies Onegin's distress with the act of yawning rather than a strictly emotional response. By stanza 43 of Chapter One, Onegin has yawned four times, yet never once wept or otherwise complained. His distress is a stagnant malaise, devoid of living grief or impassioned fervor. Described as an "apostate," Onegin appears before us clad with pen and paper as a strange kind of psychological turncoat. He has not only left his previous life behind but has deserted the pleasures that once amused him. He remains to us now as a mere derelict, longing for the catharsis of the pen, but finding instead only a vacant mind and "unsoiled" paper. His mind "recoils" because he cannot yet transfer outward to paper the distress he experiences within. His distress is locked within himself, motionless. He is forced, therefore, to remain in a greater solitude than the mere physical kind. This image stands in stark contrast to that of his companion, Lensky, who "Across his mind the world still drew / Its web of glitter and Ado" (II.7.7-8). Similarly, Lensky only illuminates his compatriot's mute expression. Lensky, in contrast, "never put the exalted Muse to shame: / From his proud harp there never came / Aught but exalted feelings" (II.9.10-14). Our narrator, who admits his intimacy with Onegin in "that season" of his life, tells us that Onegin acquired an "acid derogation" and a "humor, half shot-through with gall" reminiscent of "Grim epigrams' malicious drawl" (I.46. 12-14). This character type, if we may call it that, is not unfamiliar to readers who can immediately recognize this kind of "frigidly dissecting mind" (I.45.7). Onegin is a perfect portrait of the sardonic intellectual whose acerbic wit both charms us and forewarns us of erudition's toll.

While staying at his uncle's country house, Onegin genuinely attempts to explore the world around him in hopes of finding solace in the pastoral estate. We are told, "Two days the solitary meadows / Retained for him their novel look, / The leafy groves with cooling shadows / And sedately murmuring brook" (I.54.1-4). However, his rural sensibility lasts only the two days and "Next day he did not take the trouble / To glance at coppice, hill, and stubble"; rather, they "brought on a sleepy mood" (I.54.4-6). The narrator continues to divulge that melancholy spares no victims and affects souls of every background and sort: "Spleen does not spar the landed gentry, / It needs no palaces or streets, / No cards or balls or rhymed conceits. / Spleen hovered near him like a sentry / And haunted all his waking life / Like a shadow, or a faithful wife" (I.54.12-14). Pushkin here claims that depression, or "spleen," preys on all of humankind, reiterating the notion that a life of privilege, and even Eden itself, may silence but will not satisfy the human soul.

Tatyana's quixotic enthusiasm for life and love stands in contrast to Onegin's early ennui. Though the introduction of Tatyana is somewhat of a jocular affair, we find her to be such a lively character because of her impassioned spirit. In the hyperbolic emotional state of adolescence, her "young imagination, / Enflamed in tender, languored mood, / Had yearned for the celestial food, / Long had a throbbing agitation / In vain sought in her bosom room" (III.7.9-13). For Tatyana, "Creative fancy's vivid creatures / Lend their imaginary features" (III.9.5-6). All of life seems mysterious and fantastical because of her "fancy-fed imagination" (III.10.1). "Her heart is full to overflowing," it is said (III.16.5). The notion of her overflowing heart reflects a rather different mood than that of Onegin's continual open-mouthed yawning. Also, unlike Onegin, Tatyana cannot help but express her feelings in a tumultuous outpour of emotion. However, when confiding in her nanny, Tatyana finds little comfort. Her nanny, who is described as "dim-witted," is the most bereft of passion of nearly all of the characters. She can offer nothing but simple advice and, in "prayerful awe" at Tatyana's words, "Crossed Tatyana with her wasted claw" (III.19.13-14). It should be no surprise to us that this character, bereft of passionate inclinations, is described as having a "claw." This conjures the image of something akin to a creature, subhuman. The image of Nanny's claw serves not only as a comical device depicting a desiccate old woman but serves doubly as a frightful image. Her very soul is what makes her animalistic and incapable of sympathy. She is therefore unable to reach out with a tender hand. She instead confides in the heavenly spirit to guide over her young mistress.

It is this very idea that we must consider in our investigation of Tatyana's frightful dream after Onegin refuses her. In his refusal, Onegin is indifferent; his minimal affection appears avuncular at best. He offers her something akin to a "sermon" (IV.17.1), presenting "simple nobility of heart" in contrast to her "quailing" (IV.18.4). After the affair with Tatyana, Onegin returns to a "state of pensive sloth" (IV.44.2). Her interpretation of Onegin as unsympathetic and devoid of passion is what makes him so frightful and alien to her "overflowing" spirit. Thus, he appears both in life and in dream to be bestial and daunting. In her dream, Onegin's "mighty paw with razor talons" is reminiscent of the Nanny's clawed hands (V.12.9). In the very same dream, Tatyana is chased by a bear whose sudden disappearance offers Eugene's figure in its stead (V.16). Even when Onegin's figure does appear, he is the company of "nothing human," but only "freaks" and "horrors" (V.17.1). This subconscious expression only reiterates Tatyana's prior suspicion regarding his unsympathetic and unimpassioned nature. These qualities are merely symptoms, however, of a far more grave internal state of malaise.

Even when Onegin returns from his long years of travels we find him accompanied by a morose stanza. This stanza, punctuating and pausing the plot, stands as an ode to life lost, not gained. Pushkin laments,

> But sad to feel, when youth has left us,
> That it was given us in vain,
> That its unnoticed flight bereft us
> And brought no harvest in its train:
> That our most fondly nursed ambitions,
> Our fancy's freshest apparitions,
> Have swiftly wilted one by one,
> Like leaves by autumn blasts undone;
> To see no prospect but an endless
> Array of meals in solemn row,
> To watch life like a puppet show,
> Do as the Romans do, yet friendless,
> And sharing with that titled crew
> No single passion, taste, or view.
>
> (VIII.11)

We must observe that this ode lacks any hard punctuation to separate its statements. Rather, it is intended to flow as a single thought, mawkish and lachrymose. This passage fits our hero's character well as we find

him still peevish and morose after years abroad. We are told that in his absence, he sought "solitude wherein a shadow" (VIII.13. 5). It is this and only this shadow that he brings home with him.

Tatyana's and Onegin's Reunion: Eugene's Transformation

It is only upon Onegin and Tatyana's reunion that this spell breaks. Upon meeting the wedded Tatyana, who offers little more than disinterested amiability, Onegin is stirred within. His feelings become only more intense upon realizing that he is met with a woman content, indifferent, and seemingly disinterested in him. He is suddenly "confused and fretful," with "dreams now alluring, now regretful" (VIII.21.1,3). These dreams "pursue" him and he finds himself in a "strange trance" that has "upset his torpid self-possession; thus, he wonders to himself if it is love he feels once again" (VIII.21.10). Pushkin writes,

> The days flew; winter had retreated
> . . .
> And here he was— still undefeated
> By verse, lunacy or death.
> And spring restored some animation:
> He breaks hearthside hibernation
> . . .
> Goes driving through the morning brightness
> Down the embankment in a sleigh:
> All gold and blue, the sunbeams play
> On brittle floes; the fareway's whiteness
> Is thawing into muddy slush,
> And through it, whither does he rush
>
> (VIII.39)

In this stanza we see that despite Tatyana's painful rejection, the winter months have not been enough to break his spirit. Something resilient, strong and life-like has awakened within him. He "breaks hearthside hibernation," and for the first time in years, wakes up early enough to confront the "morning brightness." Even the "gold and blue" sunbeams are at "play." During our protagonist's stay at his uncle's estate, we remember that his rural sensibility lasted only the two days and "Next day he did not take the trouble / To glance at coppice, hill, and stubble."

We find the Eugene of old to be incompatible with the man who now rushes outside and "goes driving through the morning brightness / Down the embankment in a sleigh." His "rushing" and "driving" reflects an eagerness for life and an appetite for what it may present him. This appetite is an ambition, a recognition that life does have more to offer, and reminds us of the appetite conjured by the forbidden fruit. In the cases of both Eve and Onegin, implicit in their desire is the recognition that one's lot may improve: that one can in fact be happier, better off. To think otherwise is to denounce life as a static enterprise unworthy of our celebration. Line fourteen, where the narrator asks, "whither does he rush," is strongly reminiscent of earlier passages describing him rushing to the balls and social gatherings. We recall the narrator's jocular yet rhetorical inquiry, "Whither does our prankster scurry?" (I.15.6). We recall the hasty manner with which he "drives out and joins the promenading" (I.15.13). Yet, it was this life of promenading and glitter that Onegin quickly came to resent. What makes this scene remarkably different is that despite Tatyana's adamant refusals of him, he does not grow weary of his love for her. The social gatherings of the past were mere entertainment. They lacked the passion and character of lively rejuvenation.

The narrator describes "his pupil" as "well-nigh inspired" (VIII.38.6). Eugene "dogs her footsteps like a waif" (VIII.30.8). He "perseveres, won't cease from trying, / Is ever hoping, ever vying; / With feeble hand, but greater pluck / Than he had shown in health or luck" (VIII.32.5-8). He writes his love an "impassioned message" (VIII.32.9). In his letter, Onegin is said to "expose [his] soul" in a manner unfitting to his prior self (VIII.33.6). Tatyana confronts Eugene's passionate outpour with little more than "cold wrath" (VII.33.14). She "ignores his swoons" (VIII.32.4), and we are told "she fails to notice or— to care" (VIII. 31. 10). Though in "mortal anguish," he is "with love's wild fevered curse" (VIII.32. 60). His "flesh is parched with thirst" (VIII.32.62) and he "longs to clutch [her] knees, and sobbing, in supplication bent" (VIII.32.63).

After Tatyana's painful rejection, our narrator again laments, "[I]n his heart, what stormy ocean / Of feelings seething in revolt!" (VIII.48.3-4). Even in this torment, Onegin's "heart" is full of "seething" feelings. As a stormy ocean confronts us with the fear of death, we feel all the more alive with passion in the presence of our mortality. It is in this very way that Eugene, despite his circumstances, is confronted with the fresh reproach of mortal life with all its pain and suffering.

Additionally, we see him for the first time turning to advice, rather than offering it unwarranted, as demonstrated by his newfound

obsession with "journals anxious to instruct" (VIII.35.10). We are told, "Desires, dreams, and regrets were jumbled / In dense profusion in his soul" (VIII.36.3-4). This dense profusion consists of a longing for Tatyana's love and a regret for his prior mistreatment of her. Further, Pushkin recalls, "And while drowsy stupor muffles / All thought and feeling unawares, / Imagination deals and shuffles / Its rapid motley solitaires" (VIII.37.1-4). It is a morose, insular life that causes a "drowsy stupor." This stupor "muffles" and causes one to be "unaware" of thought and feeling. However, in his state of longing, with its "rapid motley solitaires," Eugene's "imagination" is provoked. He begins to come alive in both heart and mind.

Pushkin's Eden: Reflection on the Two States

A purely insular life of stagnant dejection is the mark of death and a morbid soul. When one's torment is stifled, it becomes drowsy, an unimpassioned, wan mood. But once turned outward toward the world, one is in communion with something external to and greater than one's self. In the same manner that "a pond without an outlet is stagnant, so his grief, without refreshment, is moribund."[2] If we are fallen beings in a post-Edenic world, then it only makes sense that the further outward we reach, the greater communion we experience with the divine. For, although there may be divine qualities within us, they lay motionless under the oppression of solipsistic malaise. This goes rather against Christian theology, which tells us that man must look inward to commune with the divine. Perhaps the terrifying prospect that Eugene Onegin faces is that were he to look inward, he would in fact find nothing at all. Left to his own devices, he lacks the ability to write poetry, to enjoy travel and leisure— he lacks even a reason to live. This also means that we must interpret, through Pushkin's eyes, a new notion of Eden. Perhaps our great progenetrix, Eve herself, because of her yearning and reaching for the forbidden fruit, made Eden a paradise. She turned her life in Eden from static, lifeless acceptance— of God's supreme power— to a dynamic, fluid, and living experience. Thus, it was at the very moment that she desired (and reached for) the forbidden fruit that she and Adam both created paradise and simultaneously thrust all of humankind from it. Eve is still enduring, is still a progenetrix, still intimately kin to us, because we as humans, in our more energetic yearnings, commune with her and the desire she embodies. She lives in us as we live. However, we only live when we want. Thus, Pushkin's words ring far truer to us than we could

ever imagine. "Ah men! The curse of Eve is still enduring . . . The tree, the serpent ever wield / Their immemorial mystic luring. / Forbidden fruit we still implore, / Or Eden Eden is no more." We are in paradise, so long as we feel desire. It is only once this fades to mere dejection that paradise no longer exists for us. For it is then that we cease to truly live.

It is important to consider that both Eve an Onegin experienced a longing for things much greater than themselves. Eve extended her hand toward supreme knowledge, where Onegin toward loving companionship. It is by Eve's act that man has traded in his immortality. But what kind of exchange was it? What did she trade immortality for? Is it not odd that Pushkin would suggest Eve's epic gesture cost man his communion with the divine, only to replace it with the chance for communion with fellow humankind? If so, what is it that human companionship offers that divine communion could not? In the case of Onegin, it is the opportunity to know himself through another. If Onegin is plagued with the empty, lachrymose soul that Pushkin has described him as possessing, then it is only through a reciprocal other that he comes to recognize himself as a living being. Could it be that he must reach outward for any sense of wholeness? The reason we sympathize more with Onegin at the end of the novel is because his dissatisfaction turns to passion. It is his very wanting that makes him lively, mortal— in summation, human and familiar to us as readers. We recognize ourselves in Onegin similarly. If it is in fact this state of human longing that makes life paradise, are we to believe that an impassioned spirit is joy itself? Is this very human experience the closest to paradise that we will ever be? Pushkin seems, in fact, to be telling us so. Whether in jubilance or despair, it is an imperfect life that offers us joy. It is this life, ultimately, that offers us the chance to know ourselves, imperfectly human as we are.

Endnotes

* All citations are taken from translation by Walter Arndt unless otherwise noted.

I. 38.12; I.21.11; I.19.13; I.1.13.

2. Cartmell, Nathan. *Intimations of Re-Creation From Recollections of Dejection and Joy.*

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