

# The St. John's Review

Volume XLIII, number three (1996)

Editor

*Pamela Kraus*

Editorial Board

*Eva T. H. Brann*

*James Carey*

*Beate Ruhm Von Oppen*

*Joe Sachs*

*John Van Doren*

*Robert B. Williamson*

*Elliott Zuckerman*

Subscriptions and Editorial Assistant

*Gjergji Bojaxhi*

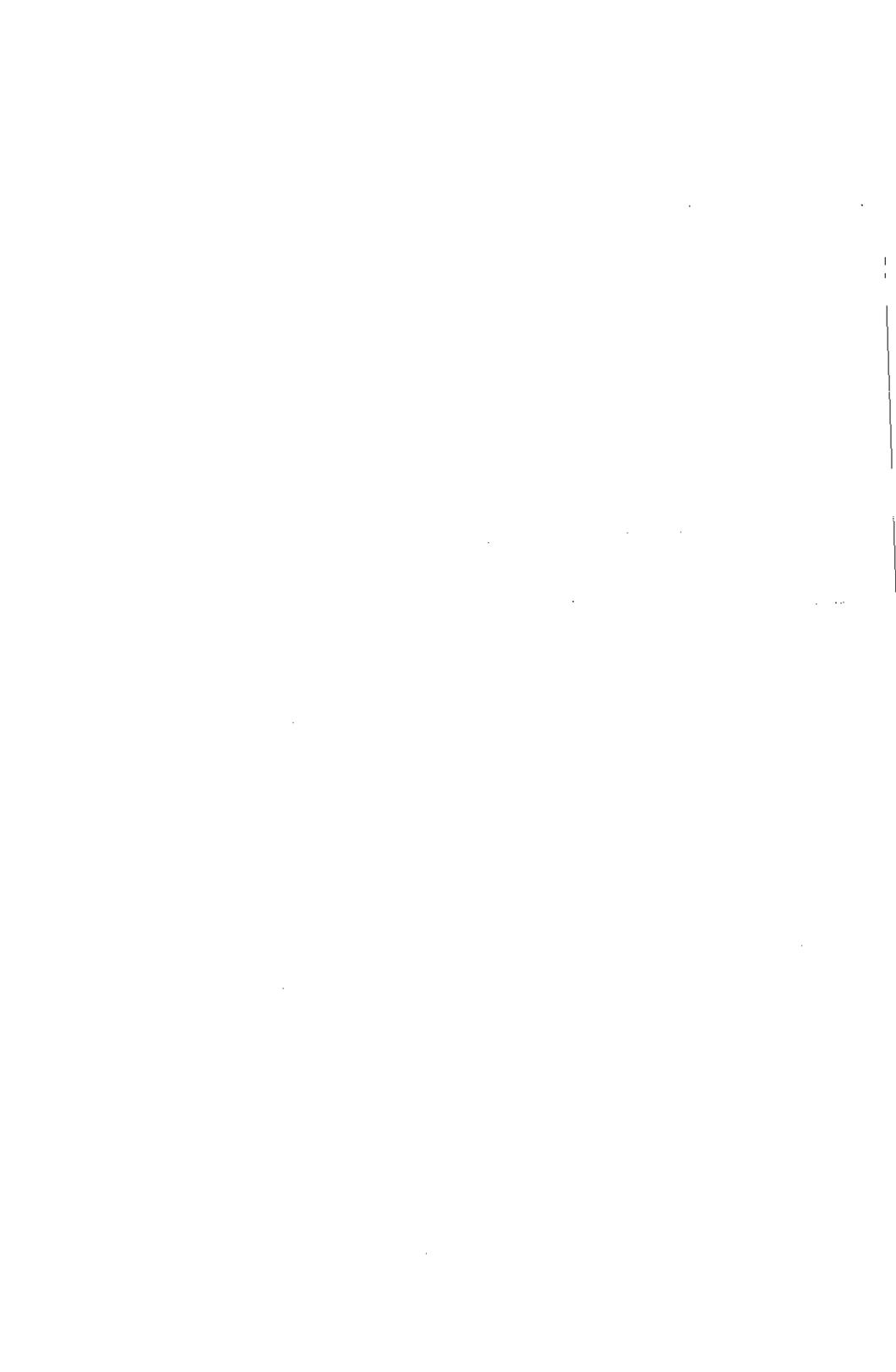
The St. John's Review is published by the Office of the Dean, St. John's College, Annapolis: Christopher B. Nelson, President; Eva T. H. Brann, Dean. For those not on the distribution list, subscriptions are \$15.00 for three issues, even though the magazine may sometimes appear semi-annually rather than three times a year. Unsolicited essays, stories, poems, and reasoned letters are welcome. Address correspondence to the *Review*, St. John's College, P.O. Box 2800, Annapolis, MD 21404-2800. Back issues are available, at \$5.00 per issue, from the St. John's College Bookstore.

©1996 St. John's College. All rights reserved; reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.

ISSN 0277-4720

Desktop Publishing and Printing

*Marcia Baldwin and The St. John's College Print Shop*



# Contents

Forewords . . . . .	1
Occasional Speech	
Dedicatory Toast: . . . . .	3
The Opening of the Greenfield Library <i>Elliott Zuckerman</i>	
Essays and Lectures	
Meno's Paradox and the Zetetic Circle . . . . .	7
<i>Jon Lenkowski</i>	
Sun and Cave . . . . .	29
<i>Eric Salem</i>	
On Some Texts of Bacon and Descartes. . . . .	51
<i>André Lalande</i> <i>Translated by Pamela Kraus</i>	
Poetry	
Four Poems . . . . .	73
<i>Andrew Krivak</i>	
Reviews	
Recollection and Composure . . . . .	81
Douglas Allanbrook's <i>See Naples</i> <i>Eva T. H. Brann</i>	
Reason's Parochiality . . . . .	89
Carl Page's <i>Philosophical Historicism and the     Betrayal of First Philosophy</i> <i>Richard Velkley</i>	
To See the World Profoundly: . . . . .	101
The Films of Robert Bresson <i>Shmuel Ben-Gad</i>	



## Forewords

St. John's College inaugurated its 300th anniversary year this past May at the dedication of the Greenfield Library on the Annapolis campus. To mark our anniversary, this issue of *The St. John's Review* includes Elliott Zuckerman's dedicatory toast on that occasion. Mr. Zuckerman's toast praises the library as a residence for the spirit of the College—the spirit of books.

The spirit of books, in which and by which we learn, is given us through their authors, and so it is appropriate to note another anniversary this year, the 400th birthday of René Descartes. Descartes is often referred to as a “founder” of modern thought. Here we reprint, in translation, André Lalande's 1911 essay comparing excerpts from the *Discourse on Method* to passages from earlier writings of Francis Bacon, Descartes's near contemporary. Striking similarities between them suggest that Descartes learned and benefitted from the books of Bacon.



3 Dedicatory Toast:  
The Opening of the Greenfield Library  
Elliott Zuckerman

It is an honor to represent the Faculty with a dedicatory toast to the Greenfield Library. By doing so I serve as successor to our late colleague Hugh McGrath, who spoke at a similar consecration in 1969. Between the two events there is an obscure verbal connection of the sort that I can't resist reporting. Many of us here, when we think of Hugh McGrath, will also think of Falstaff, a role that Hugh famously played in the early seventies. And when we think of Falstaff we might remember one of the most beautiful details that Shakespeare tells us about him. It is that at the end of his life "he babbled of *green fields*."

The obese corrupter of the young may have ended his days with pious thoughts about lying down in the green pastures of the twenty-third psalm. A further detail about Falstaff's death leads us back not to the Bible but to another of our great bibliographical beginnings. He seems to have left this world gradually, from the bottom up: first his feet turned cold, and then his knees, and so on upward—like Socrates. I wonder whether Shakespeare wanted us to look for further similarities between the two great teachers. And as I do that wondering, I realize that I am asking a question about a fictional character who was based on a real person, a real person who was probably fictionalized, and a playwright about whom we know practically nothing and yet everything that is worth knowing.

This speech may not have begun so far out in left field as it may seem. For a few years after the performance of Shakespeare and the rededication of Woodward Hall, in another part of the campus, the Admissions Office came up with a new way of enticing prospective students to St. John's College. They announced that "the following teachers will be returning to St. John's next year," and by the teachers they meant, of course, an array of great authors. One of the versions of the announcement is still being sent to prospectives. It appears at the top of a large page, usable as a poster, that shows an attractive collage of pictures of those returning teachers—poets, philosophers,

and scientists. There are forty of them—I counted them myself. Most of the pictures are reproductions of formal portraits or contemporary drawings or etchings; but the ancient sages appear in the traditional likenesses of sculpted busts, and, at the other extreme, there are a few who are recent enough to have faced the camera.

As I looked at those faces, I began to think of what such a school might be like. Think of having a teacher as amusing as Chaucer or as articulate as Jane Austen or as clear and complete as Saint Thomas. Think of being able to report to your friends what Montaigne had to say this morning in Tutorial. Think of trusting the lab experiments to Faraday himself, with or without a lab assistant. Imagine a paper conference with the author of *Middlemarch*. Picture being badgered to perplexity not by some neophyte imitating the Socratic Method, but by the Silenus himself.

On the other hand, what if Immanuel Kant himself were the only source of enlightenment about the Transcendental Unity of Apperception? What would it be like to find oneself in a Seminar whose leaders were Nietzsche and Wagner? What if Baudelaire were to take an interest in what goes on in the dormitories. And would anyone ever be able to recover from a Don-Rag Committee that included, say, Calvin and Sigmund Freud?

Yes, we are fond of making lists of our ideal faculty. I remember one such list of teachers which, because of an inadvertence, began with the name "Job." I saw it for the first time, significantly enough, on a T-shirt. Such a slip could only have occurred in a place where we claim as our faculty not only the authors of books but the books themselves. When I used to be asked what I teach, I would often avoid a hard answer by saying that "the Books are the Teachers." The very brochure that contains the pictures of all the teachers begins with the assertion, in large letters, that "Great Books Make Great Teachers"—and the writers of the Admissions Information are to be commended, for nowhere can I find a numbering of the Books. Although for purposes of quick characterization we probably have to identify St. John's as the Great Books School, we should, I think, refuse to refer to the Hundred Great Books. For once we number the books we are only one step away from Numbering the Ideas.

Now "Job" is not only the name of a book but the name of its chief character. And that suggests another group that has a claim to faculty status, the very characters, fictional or semi-fictional, whose actions sustain our interest and teach us what we ourselves might very well be like. So now we have three sets of teachers: the authors, the books, and the characters, and often enough—as we saw in the instance of Falstaff and Socrates and Shakespeare and the Psalms—there is a rich interrelationship among them. When we talk about Dante, do we mean the Italian poet, or do we mean the Pilgrim who takes the journey, or are we referring to the Comedy that got to be called Divine? The players in Part II of *Don Quixote* have read Part I and are aficionados of the adventurer. The Platonic dialogues bear names just as young men bear names. And think of those characters who have separated themselves from the books they first appeared in, to become perpetually available for purposes of example or comparison and even gossip. Penelope and Natasha as wives. Cleopatra in a barge and Huck Finn on a raft. Dimitri, Ivan, and Alyosha. Mister Moneybags and the Man with the Large Soul.

There are certain practical advantages in having as one's teachers books, and their authors and characters. They do not have to be fed, and the only new clothing required is an occasional rebinding. We usually remove their jackets. Only when they get very old or very decrepit or very precious do we have to place them in the glass cases of a retirement home. Otherwise, no salaries, no health insurance, no social security.

They do, however, need a place to stay—and now, two thirds before the end of this little talk, you see where it has been heading. For almost a century Woodward Hall housed our teachers well. Through all the renovations, and repaintings, and extensions, and deepening, we had learned to love that abode. We had gotten to know where everyone lives. Often enough, the catalogue could be skipped, and we could go straight to a dwelling in the shelves.

Right now I can imagine myself standing at the entry of the King William Room and knowing exactly what line I should follow in order to get to Homer, or Sophocles, or Sappho. We all have known where we could find Vico, or Pico, or Tycho. We will never forget the cluster of shelves that provided us with Hegel and Schlegel and

Schiller and Schilling and Schopenhauer and Schleiermacher. We liked the search for art books where they dwelt, according to size, in two tiers of apartments. We knew the order of music books from Allanbrook to Zuckerkandl. Sometimes we took out a book so persistently that its habitual home became a shelf in our study at home. But thanks to Call-in they periodically had to visit their proper place, however briefly, like expatriots renewing their passports.

We knew where to hide for uninterrupted reading, and where to read for the purpose of being seen. There were straight chairs and armchairs and upholstered chairs that we could sink into, sometimes unto threatening depth. There were desks and tables and carrels. There were shelves of new books, and books newly acquired, and there was access to an inner sanctum of books whose virginity was reserved for a particular reader. There were places to talk and places where talking was forbidden. Nowhere was there background music. Above all, there were nooks and corners and alcoves and berths and cubbyholes.

I have been praising the old in order to express our hope for the new. For at last the time came to Move House. Our teachers were transferred in sacks across the expanse of lawn, and it is fitting that the day of the moving turned out to be a celebration of our sense of community. For along with those sacks, and along with the friendly spirit that transported them, I hope all the strengths and delights of the old library were transferred too.

I do not know the new building yet, but it seems to be happily provided with surprising vistas and interesting alcoves. There will be places to work and places to study and places to read. What is most important will not change. We'll still be learning from the books and the characters, and the great teachers will keep on returning to St. John's College in a form that we can take out and take home, well into the next century—or, as we can say at this privileged time, into the next millennium.

Now at last you can raise your imaginary glasses. The Tutors and their colleagues toast the Teachers and their entourage, at the Green Fields of their new Place of Meeting .

# 3 Meno's Paradox and the Zetetic Circle

Jon Lenkowski

## Author's Prefatory Note

This essay has undergone a number of metamorphoses over the years. It first saw the light of day in the mid-seventies as a small part of a chapter of a dissertation which, alas, never got finished. It was initially excerpted and presented as a lecture to the philosophy club at Rutgers University, where I was teaching at the time, and it was subsequently presented a couple of times in Annapolis as a summer lecture both before and after I came to teach at the College in 1979. In 1980, I completely reworked the lecture and rewrote it in German to present at a philosophy colloquium at the University of Konstanz, Germany. The present text is based on the German version and was presented as a formal lecture in Santa Fe in 1988 and in Annapolis in 1989. I am particularly indebted to my colleagues, Lawrence Berns, Robert Druecker, and Stewart Umphrey, for reading the German version and offering discerning comments. Despite revisions great and small, the fundamental ideas of the essay have remained unchanged for over twenty years. Since in recent years "revision" has meant little more than changing a word here and there, it seems time to let go of it.

## Introduction

The following is intended to be a contribution to the theory of science, widely construed, and to be, more particularly, a contribution to the theory of inquiry.

When one speaks of science, one should keep in mind that, despite the peculiar technologization of contemporary science (by which I mean the natural sciences and all those disciplines which have sought to copy them) the very notion of science is itself ancient; in fact it cuts across the division between antiquity and modernity. From this perspective, a theory of science would mean a θεωρεῖν ἐπιστήμης

—a looking at or inspection of science—which entails the finding of a position from which science can best be observed and questioned. In our time particularly, there seem to be a number of competing claims to have found just *the* appropriate point of view. Accordingly, I would ask whether each and every *theory* of science is a *philosophy* of science. All such attempts at a theory of science, however diverse, are rightly called “metatheoretical.” But perhaps not every metatheoretical examination of science is a *philosophy* of science. Under metatheory generally, I would distinguish at least the four following orientations: First, the positive clarification of the presuppositions, the methods, and the objectives of the sciences; here I would also include any positive logic of science. Secondly, an examination of the sciences from the viewpoint of what is called the “history of ideas.” Such an examination focuses on historical presuppositions for scientific development, historical reasons why science developed—rightly or wrongly—in this or that direction, etc. Here the clarification is far more historical than critical. Thirdly, when it is undertaken from various political standpoints or postures, metatheory becomes a critique of ideology. Here, although critical, the criticism is focused much less on the question of truth, than on the supposed political presuppositions which serve as the context within which the particular content of science has been devised. Fourthly, what I would call in the most precise sense a *philosophy* of science—by which I understand an investigation which opens up problems of a most fundamental kind. Here, in modern times, I take Johann Gottlieb Fichte as the paradigm. In a writing which appeared in 1794 entitled *Über der Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre*<sup>1</sup> (“On the Concept of the Theory of Science”), in which he was still occupied with the question of whether a theory of science was even possible, he posed to himself four absolutely fundamental problems which blocked the path to a theory of science that would be secure. Fichte well understood (as had Aristotle most unmistakably in ancient times, in *Metaphysics*, Book B) what the very first step toward the establishment of science must be, namely, the uncovering, the opening up, and the laying to rest of absolutely fundamental problems which would otherwise remain hidden and, as such, would establish science in name only. This very first step I would call a *philosophy*

of science, which I understand, following Fichte, to be a prolegomenon to a theory of science proper. It is in this spirit that I present the following essay.

### Meno's Paradox and the Zetetic Circle

At 80d5 Meno responds to Socrates' invitation to join with him at last in the search for the τι' ἐστί—the “what is”—of virtue or human excellence (ἀρετή):

καί τίνα τρόπον ζητήσεις, ὦ Σώκρατες, τοῦτο ὃ μὴ οἴσθα τὸ παράπαν ὅτι ἐστίν; ποῖον γάρ ὦν οὐκ οἴσθα προθέμενος ζητήσεις; ἢ εἰ καὶ ὅτι μάλιστα ἐντύχοις αὐτῷ, πῶς εἴση ὅτι τοῦτό ἐστίν ὃ σὺ οὐκ ἤδησθα;

But in what direction will you inquire, Socrates, about that ὃ of which you do not know at all what it is? For what sort of thing, of all those you do not know, will you put forth and search after? Or, even if you did happen upon it, how would you know that *this* was the very thing you did not know?

Trying to put an end to the inquiry, Meno unknowingly puts his finger on the very thing without which inquiry would not be at all possible. How *could* one inquire, except by being in some way already “in touch with”—“in contact with” (the word is *θιγγάνω*, *θιγγεῖν*)<sup>2</sup> the object of inquiry?

Every inquiry necessarily proceeds within a horizon of familiarity. The peculiarity of the “what is” question in particular (as here in the *Meno*) is highlighted by the fact that each interlocutor, when asked, seems to, or presumes to already know the answer to the question, and is quite baffled to discover he really doesn't. It is only on the basis of what I will call this “prethematic familiarity” with something that it ever becomes possible to thematize it and make it the object of inquiry. At *Republic* VII, 524c, Socrates says:

Sight too saw large and small...although not separated but mixed together...In order to unmix them, intellect ( νόησις ) is also compelled to see (ιδεῖν) large and small, although not mixed together but separated and distinguished—just the opposite of what sight did... Isn't it therefore from this

that it first occurs to us to ask: *what are the large and the small?* [*italics mine*]

The context comprising prethematic familiarity, on the one hand, and inquiry, on the other hand, is a peculiar context, for it puts us in relation to the object in two contrary ways at once. More particularly, the possibility of inquiry presupposes our both knowing and not knowing something at the same time. To reply to this simply by saying that in one sense we know and in another sense we don't, does not solve the difficulty; it rather emphasizes it. For now we want to know: How is it possible to know in one sense and not know in another sense the same thing at the same time? This circle of inquiry presents to reflective understanding a genuine difficulty which cannot be removed simply by pointing to Meno's obviously eristic argument.

As the dialogues present it, the "what is" question is the paradigm of inquiry. An understanding of the "what is" question would therefore seem to demand an understanding of this seeming paradox.

Whatever else it might mean, this prethematic familiarity implies a relation between thinking or understanding and the object thought or understood; and insofar as this prethematic familiarity is to serve as the ground of inquiry, it must be understood as a relation in which the object is already there for us in a very peculiar way. It would have to be there under two aspects at once, for we must both "have" the object already and yet see the necessity of searching after it. But doesn't this present a problem? After all, if one has this prethematic familiarity with something, why should the question ever have to be raised about it? Why should an inquiry into it ever become necessary? Why should there ever be a "question" at all? To understand how this can happen, we must first understand the peculiar way in which the object is there for us in that primary horizon of familiarity. To say that the object would have to be there under two aspects at once is to say that it would have to present itself as both incomplete and complete, as both that which is anticipated *and* the fulfillment thereof. But wouldn't that mean that the object has to be at once two objects? And if the fulfilled object were given at all, how could the inquiry into it ever begin, since the zetetic goal would be there

beforehand? And yet, if it were not given in this double way, no inquiry could ever begin.

On the other hand, if the burden of difficulty were thought to lie on the side of thinking, i.e., if inquiry were to be understood as our "moving closer" to the object, the same problem arises, for why would there be a desire to close the distance, unless both the starting point and the goal were presented at once? The object would have to present itself as at once both "far away" (else the inquiry would have nothing to overcome) and "close" (for the inquiry could not begin unless it presupposed its goal). But then the goal must be given already. And then, again, why should the inquiry ever begin?

The further we think in this direction, the more does the phenomenon of inquiry take on the aspect of a circle. An integral and essential part of that circle is the horizon of familiarity, which presents to us a puzzle which we must work through in order to come to an understanding of what inquiry is, what it involves, and how it can be at all possible.

In modern times it is above all Heidegger who has squarely faced the problem posed by the circle of inquiry—the zetetic circle—and who has acknowledged the essential role that the horizon of familiarity plays in it. Let me, accordingly, turn to an examination of his account of it.

In the Introduction to *Sein und Zeit*, there occurs a section entitled "The Formal Structure of the Question of Being" (*S.Z.* pp. 5-8). Heidegger begins here by saying that in order to see the distinctive character of the question of being, it is first necessary to briefly explain what belongs to any question whatsoever. In other words, this section about the structure of a question is offered as a preliminary to his investigation of the question of being, the question of what being is, or what "being" means. It seems to me—and I hope to show this in what follows—that all of what Heidegger says here about questioning in general, is preeminently true of the Socratic "what is" question in particular, and that what he says in this section about being in particular is equally true of all those eidetic wholes (τὰ εἶδη) taken up by the "what is" question in the Platonic dialogues.

Heidegger then goes on to distinguish four essential moments;

1. The guiding factor, contributed beforehand by what is sought (die vorgängige Leitung vom Gesuchten her)
2. What is asked about (das Gefragte)
3. What is interrogated (das Befragte)
4. What is to be discovered or found out (das Erfragte)

I shall now consider these four moments in a somewhat different order and, in so doing, I shall go somewhat beyond Heidegger's own presentation of them.

First, every question has what is asked about (das Gefragte)—its theme or topic, the object which is a problem for it, and which must therefore be questioned. It is this which in fact evokes (or, perhaps, "forms") the question in the first place. The very questioning posture arises out of one's comportment to this object.

Secondly, every question has what is to be discovered (das Erfragte)—its anticipated answer, its goal. The very posing of a question is at once the anticipation of its answer. Were there no cognizance beforehand of this goal, no question would ever get formulated. The very formulation of the question derives from the kind of answer which is anticipated, derives from a precognition of what the answer would have to be like; and this in turn derives from a precognition of the problem-character of the object. If the object is an unclarity, the kind of answer sought will be a clarification, and the question will be formulated accordingly. If the object is a puzzle, the kind of answer sought will be an unravelling, and the question will be formulated accordingly—so inseparable are what is asked about and what is to be discovered by the asking. This means that in the very formulation of the question, the direction is already anticipated from which the answer will come. In other words, there is already anticipated what would count in each case as cognitive adequacy. The formulation of a question carries with it certain expectations.

Thirdly, every question has what is interrogated (das Befragte)—that to which the question is posed, that which is asked concerning what the question asks about. This is that to which the questioner turns in pursuit of the question. This moment is necessary in order that the question begin to move; and the choice of this

element is not at all arbitrary, but is determined by one's precognition both of the object and of the anticipated answer. Where one first turns is never merely by chance, but is dictated by an understanding of the problem and the goal.

Fourthly and lastly, every question is guided beforehand by what is sought. It is this fourth moment of the structure of the question which is most puzzling, and yet it is this which unifies the three other moments. In fact, it supplies the question as such with its integral wholeness, for it is only under the condition that there is this pre-given guidance that the following become at all possible: First, that the object questioned about and what is to be discovered are related as they are—and as they must be in order for there to be a question at all. This fourth moment is not the same as that second moment (*viz.* what is to be discovered), though it could be confused with it, since both moments seem to imply a teleological structure to the question; rather, it is in a sense the *relation* between the first and the second moments, between what is asked about and what is to be discovered. That is, it is not itself the goal, yet it relates the goal to the beginning of the quest.

This pre-given guidance makes possible, secondly, that there is any sense of where to turn to pursue the question. How could one know to what to pose the question, were this not dictated and guided by an understanding of the relation between the object and the goal?

And, thirdly, it makes possible that the question itself ever gets posed in the first place. The very posing of the question is at once the awareness of the problem-character of the object; but this awareness is possible only in light of an awareness, however dim, of that object as complete or without the defect. Thus the posing of the question is at once the recognition of the relation between the object and the goal, which relation guides the formulation of the question, as well as the direction the question is to take.

Let us listen to what Heidegger himself has to say about this fourth moment, keeping in mind that, although his own interest is in the question of being, what he has to say may be of a more general significance:

Questioning, as a seeking, must be guided beforehand by what is sought. The meaning of being must therefore be in some way already available to us. As already suggested, we already move within an understanding of being. Out of this understanding grows the explicit question about the meaning of being, as well as the movement toward its concept. We do not *know* what “being” indicates. But already, when we ask, ‘What is being?’, we are within an understanding of the “is”—without, however, being able to fix conceptually what the “is” means. We do not even know the horizon within which we ought to grasp and fix that meaning. This vague, everyday understanding of being is nevertheless a fact.

Even if this understanding of being may vacillate and come and go, and even border on the merely verbal, the very indefiniteness of this familiarity with being is itself a positive phenomenon, which demands clarification. (S.Z. pp. 5-6)

I would argue that all of what Heidegger says in this passage about being is fully applicable to virtue as it is presented in the *Meno*, as well as to those other eidetic wholes taken up by the “what is” question in the other dialogues. Let me repeat just a part of this passage:

Questioning...must be guided beforehand by what is sought. The meaning...must therefore be in some way already available to us...we already move within an understanding...

I have already tried to indicate the necessity of what I’ve called the “horizon of familiarity” within which alone any question can be posed. There must already be a prethematic understanding of what will become the object of the question, else the question could never come to have an object—which is to say that the question would never come to form itself. The entire posing of the question, arising as the explicit expression of the problem-character of the object, takes its bearings from this prethematic understanding. This prethematic understanding may long remain inaccessible and thus inexplicit; and the recognition of its problem-character depends on one’s *first*

*finding access to it.* The transition from this initial access to the recognition of its problem-character—or, to use the language of the Cave in the *Republic*, the transition from the shadows taken naively, as *independent*, to the recognition of their mere shadow-character, their *dependence*—though never simply automatic, never guaranteed, can occur only within the context of the Socratic conversation. But none of this would be possible, failing that ever-present horizon of familiarity. May I remind you that, for his conversation with the slave boy, Socrates stipulates only two conditions: (1) that he has not learned geometry, but (2) that he knows and speaks Greek. This second condition is of supreme importance, because it means that the boy has with Socrates a common world of experience (at least on the pre-philosophical, human level) and it guarantees that the boy is already familiar with squares and sides, though he may never in his life have given a moment's thought to them.

Heidegger says:

We do not know what "being" indicates, but already when we ask, "what is being?" we are within an understanding of the "is"—without, however, being able to fix conceptually what the "is" means.

Can we fail to be reminded here of Meno's own response to his torpor? He says: "Indeed, I have so often given so very many speeches about virtue...however I am now absolutely unable to say what it is" (80b2-5). Meno, "numb and speechless," continues to talk about virtue—not, of course, that he continues to give "official" opinions about it (he is now bereft of these); but he still moves within that everyday horizon of familiarity with virtue. His official opinions can be taken from him, but this prethematic understanding of virtue, which is quite different from those opinions and is yet their ground, is something of which he can never be dispossessed. An extension of the image of the midwife in the *Theaetetus* should make this clear.

Theaetetus must be "delivered" of his opinions, which suggests that he is to be understood as a mere "carrier" or "bearer." In the preliminary conversation with Theodorus, Socrates shows a much keener interest in Theaetetus's father (144b8), than in Theaetetus himself. This signals what is to be his main interest in the midwife

passage: Theaetetus, the "bearer," has been "impregnated" by Theodorus and others. In order to gain access to these "fathers," Theaetetus (the "mother" who has nurtured these opinions) must be made to give them up. He has been impregnated with opinions about knowledge; they have been implanted in his "psychic womb," if I may extend the figure. This "psychic womb" is his prethematic understanding of what knowledge is. This is the only medium in which those opinions could possibly take root; and this remains, however many opinions he might be delivered of. This, like the womb, is essentially his; it cannot be taken from him. Like the womb, this prethematic understanding is "covered over" by the opinions (or "offspring") which take root in it, covered over in such a way, however, that the prethematic understanding becomes hidden from himself, that the two become indistinguishable, that he naively takes his own opinion to be the essential "what is." It is this very prethematic understanding, then, that guides the formation of opinion which becomes superimposed upon it. In the same way that the shape of the developing foetus is in some way guided by the shape of the womb, so is the shape of whatever opinion is formed or implanted, guided by the "shape" of that prethematic understanding. Thus it is that, no matter how extreme, or peculiar, or wrong one's opinion about the "whatness" of something might be, it has always *recognizably* something to do with that whatness—it is never *absolutely* wrong; no matter how violently we might disagree with a Thrasy-machus or a Callicles, we recognize clearly that his opinion arises out of the same context of understanding as ours, that we are both talking about what is essentially the same thing. It is this prethematic understanding, this horizon of familiarity, which is the same for everyone—for thought or intellect as such—that accounts for this. The "therapeutic" function of Socrates' midwifery, then, is to remove these opinions and thus lay bare that prethematic understanding, to give one access to it for the first time, and that's the same as to say that its function is to give one the opportunity to see for the first time the merely doxic character of one's opinions, i.e., the difference between the essential "what is" of something and one's opinion of it.

But what exactly is it that one then has access to when one has access to this prethematic understanding? Or, to formulate the

problem from a slightly different point of view: Where does this abandoning of one's prior opinion leave one? Ideally, not with another opinion to replace the first one. Ideally, it leaves one with *nothing*—but with a “nothing” that is a “*determinate* nothing.” It leaves one not with a void, but with the determinate absence of opinion. Thus I would argue that it is not Socrates' sting, but Meno's own emptiness that is his torpor. And it is just this absence of opinion that is at once the raising of the “what is” question. Socrates' insistence that he and Meno now (i.e., once Meno has confessed his emptiness) inquire jointly into what virtue is—that this joint inquiry is now finally possible—shows just how closely connected are this emptiness and the asking of the “what is” question. And this remains true even if Meno's own confession of emptiness can finally be taken seriously only on the most superficial level.

Accordingly, one can translate the image of the Cave in the following way: Strictly speaking, the transition is not from shadows to things which would then replace those shadows; rather, it is from shadows unrecognized as such, to shadows taken *as shadows*; more literally, it is from a dependent reality unrecognized as such, to the recognition of its dependence-character—i.e., to the recognition that it depends on something else, whatever that something else may be. In any case, it would be “the real,” if only for its privileged independence. But can it be determined any more concretely than that? Can we answer the question: What is it?

We can better appreciate the difficulty this latter question presents by recognizing that the independent is not given in the same way as what depends on it is given. If it is only the dependent (even once recognized as such) that one actually has before oneself, then how, in what manner, is that on which it depends “given” (as it must be, in order to be at all aware of the dependent character of the dependent)? Or, to ask the question differently: If the overcoming of opinion is tantamount to the recognition of the essential difference between knowledge and opinion, what is the character of one's relation to that knowledge which one is now “aware of”? How is one now aware of that knowledge, since one surely does not yet “have” it? To answer this, we must see that a complete translation of the image of the Cave necessitates an inversion of the relation between

the eikastic image and the presently beheld “reality”—i.e., a reversal of our understanding of the direction in which εἰκασία, image-making, the lowest section of the divided line, operates.

But first, a slight digression. In his commentary on the *Meno*<sup>4</sup>, Jacob Klein coins the very happy expression, “dianoetic.εἰκασία” to designate a specific, higher function of εἰκασία. Εἰκασία itself names not merely our ability to see shadows and other such images, but rather our ability to see images *as images*, to construe images to be images, to construe them, therefore, as dependent. Διάνοια, discursive thinking—the third part of the Divided Line (*Republic* VI)—in reflecting on the visible and patently “real” things of the world, may at some time begin to give up the trust (πίστις) which it ordinarily invests in them. When this happens, διάνοια has already put εἰκασία to work on its behalf, turning all the visibles into “images” of something more real, i.e., into that kind of being that is dependent on something else.

I will now go on to use this expression, “dianoetic εἰκασία” in a slightly different way, which extends or at least varies Klein’s use of it.

Dianoetic εἰκασία reaches not backward or downward, but “forward” or “upward,” and “brings together” the present opinion, now suspended, and that on which this opinion depends. Or, we could say, it brings that on which this opinion depends down to bear upon this opinion. *Republic*, Book VI, 510b sq., makes this clear: The recognition of a ὑπόθεσις, a supposition, as a ὑπόθεσις is the recognition of its dependence on a beginning (ἀρχή) which is really a beginning, a “beginning free from hypotheses.” These ἀρχαί are identified at 511c6 as the νοητά, the thinkables or intelligibles.

Now, the Divided Line is presented to us in such a way that we are naturally led to see its uppermost part, called “intellection” (νόησις Bk. VI, 511d8 sq.) or, later on, “knowledge” (ἐπιστήμη Bk. VII, 533e8) as the last stage in one’s ascent, indeed, as a way of thinking and, correlatively, as a realm of objects (the νοητά), which is quite remote and difficult to gain access to. This must, of course, be an accurate portrayal of philosophic or reflective thinking, insofar as it traverses what the *Republic* calls the “upward way” to a genuine ἀρχή and then descends again “through εἶδη, ending in εἶδη.” But surely this can’t be the whole story, for what about everyday thinking?

In terms of the Divided Line, everyday thinking is still thinking, and would therefore have to be at least dianoetic. But it can't be only that. All thinking, of whatever sort, embodies and is guided by the *πρώται ἀρχαί* (first principles), expressible technically as laws of identity, non-contradiction, excluded middle, etc. But more particularly, all thinking embodies and is guided by ever so many abstract concepts, whether these are general concepts (such as "man," "dog," "color," "spatial form," etc.) or purely formal concepts (such as "thing," "property," "object," "relation," "whole," "part," etc.). Thinking can't occur without these concepts, though their role and function is for the most part inexplicit, nonthematic, much like the slave boy's understanding of squares and sides. This is, then, what I meant by saying that the image of the Divided Line must be reversed. Mental activity as such, always and from the beginning, is not only dianoetic, but noetic as well, at least to the extent that dianoia must have noetic underpinnings. This may be suggested by Plato himself when, later on in Bk. VII (534a2), he extends *νόησις* to designate the entire upper half of the Divided Line. Aristotle also seems to suggest this at the end of the *Posterior Analytics*, Ch. 19: He shows that knowledge of first principles comes, not through definition or demonstration, but only, and in an ordinary way, through intellection (*νοῦς*). The reason, of course, is that both demonstration and definition have to start somewhere. Otherwise stated: all discursive, dianoetic activity of thought presupposes and rests on *νοῦς*, on an original *νόησις*, since all thinking discourses *from* something and *about* something.

Thus, in revealing opinion as mere *δόξα*, dianoetic *εἰκασία* performs another, important, correlative function: It brings to us, to our awareness, the *νοητόν*, i.e., that itself on which the dependent depends. A passage in the *Phaedo* (72e) is helpful here: In perceiving a likeness of Simmias (e.g., in a picture), one is led automatically to Simmias himself on whom the likeness depends. Thought brings Simmias himself (*ἀντοῦ Συμμίτου*) to mind, brings Simmias himself to bear on the likeness of Simmias, and it is just this that makes us see the dependent character of the likeness.

But does dianoetic *εἰκασία* thereby bring to us this *νοητόν* fully clarified, transparent, articulated and therefore understood? No.

What it brings to us is rather a refiguration, or, better, an adumbration of the νοητόν. I hesitate to call this adumbration, which is, after all, something noetic, by the misleading term “image,” though it is based on this function of εἰκασία; let me instead call it a “noetic *schema*.” In choosing this language I am trying to be very cautious about the way in which I think εἰκασία is at work here; but the language might also suggest something along the lines of Kant’s *Schematism*, especially if we consider his own example of the dog. You will recall that in the *Critique of Pure Reason* the schematism is introduced to solve a very particular problem, viz., how empirical intuitions (i.e., experiences of concrete objects) can be referrable to concepts, since intelligible concepts and sensible appearances are utterly alien to one another.<sup>5</sup> It is the schema, as a special function of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) that allows me to say that this four-footed animal in front of me *looks like* the *concept* “dog.” The schema is not an image; it is rather the rule of the imagination which tells me how to construct the image.

Perhaps this is also true in the example of Simmias. Perhaps the picture of Simmias leads thought to form an image or schema of Simmias himself, which mediates the picture and Simmias himself—a schema derived from Simmias himself and containing schematically those features of Simmias himself not adequated by the picture. So understood, the schema or image would contain schematically the requirements of adequation tailored to the particular defects of the picture.

This noetic schema is the schema of the requirements of the truth. It seems to be in this way that that on which the dependent depends is given.

Let me return now to the other formulation of our question: If the overcoming of opinion is tantamount to the recognition of the difference between knowledge and opinion, how—in what manner—is one now aware of that knowledge, since one surely does not yet “have” it? One now has that knowledge only adumbrationally or schematically, i.e., in becoming aware of the defect of one’s opinion, one is at once becoming aware of what the requirements of the truth *would* be. In becoming aware of the disparity between knowledge and opinion, one is necessarily becoming aware of the knowledge-

character of knowledge. And that means that one has fallen into the following paradox: One's knowledge that one doesn't have knowledge entails knowledge of what that knowledge is. This is the paradox of knowledge of ignorance, or: Socratic ignorance which is identical with Socratic wisdom. This paradox is the true perplexity and is thus the beginning of philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

It is the noetic schema, and not the fully articulated νοητόν that dianoetic εἰκασία brings to bear; and it is as noetic schema that the νοητόν receives its most rudimentary and primary thematization. But the noetic schema is itself only an adumbration, a mere "outline" (τύπος). One *has* it, but what exactly is it that one *has*? To ponder this is the "what is" question; and one will continue to pose it to oneself as long as this aporetic attitude is sustained. It is only within this "outline" that the "what is" question can genuinely arise.

Thus, one's prior opinion is replaced, but not by another opinion; it is replaced by the noetic schema, which is at once a demand. The bare recognition that there is such a "thing itself" (viz., the νοητόν) on which the dependent depends, immediately raises the question, What is it? More precisely stated: this question raises itself, forms itself.

The "what is" question is *the* philosophical question par excellence, for it is the questing after the "real itself" on which the dependent depends. Thus it is significant that Aristotle in *Metaphysics Z*, 1030a18-27, identifies the "what is" question as a *question* (τὸ τί ἔστι) with οὐσία.

Let me now return to my earlier question: What exactly is it that one has access to when one has access to one's prethematic understanding? It is what I have now referred to as a noetic schema. This is the *demand* for inquiry, for it is the posing of the "what is" question. I have characterized the noetic schema as an adumbration, a mere "outline." If it is to be identified with this prethematic understanding, then it is that "outline" or "horizon" within which we move and think. It is from this that our thinking takes its bearings; we can never move beyond the boundaries of this horizon.

Earlier I claimed that in order for our prethematic familiarity to serve as the ground of inquiry, the object must present itself to us initially in a paradoxical way, i.e., it would have to be understood as

double in character, since it would have to be there for us at once as both anticipation (else the inquiry would have no beginning) and fulfillment (else there would be no motivation for the inquiry). This necessarily double character of the object seemed to be both the condition for inquiry as well as that which would make the inquiry impossible, hence the paradox. But I now notice that a “noetic schema” is a “pointing,” and a pointing which is at once both ends of the arrow, the “from which” and the “to which”; and that means: not a single moment, but rather a “context” or “span,” in which the two essential moments of the *anticipating* and the *anticipated* are at once present. To put this into Socratic language: the recognition of the dependent as dependent is tantamount to a real change in the object, such that the object is now no longer a mere unitary moment, but is itself now opened up into a context or span in which the two essential moments of dependent and ground are at once present. The picture of Simmias, taken as a picture, seems to exemplify such a span. This context or “span” or horizon would therefore be the noetic schema, which is the same as the horizon of familiarity.

The object understood in this way as double—not that there are two objects, but that the object itself has a “structure” or is a “span” with two essential moments—can now help us to understand how the inquiry can be guided beforehand by what is sought. For if it is the object understood in this way that one has access to, when one has access to that prethematic understanding, then I think I begin to see how that prethematic understanding not only makes it possible to begin an inquiry, but also makes it necessary. We can now understand the way in which that prethematic “contact” (θίξις, θιγεῖν) functions as a demand, such that it not only provides the zetetic object, but also provides the necessity of, or motivation for, the zetesis. If νόησις is understood as that “contact” (θίξις) which mind (νοῦς) always has with the νοητόν, and if that very “contact” is understood as this demand, then διάνοια, of which zetesis is a precise expression, is the acceding to the demand posed by νόησις, understood as this “contact.” It is, incidentally, tempting in this context to ask of διάνοια: To what does the διὰ refer? Does *Republic* VI, 511c1-3 help us with this? The text reads: “...but by means of εἶδη, it (viz., the upward way, now moving downward)

goes *through* εἶδη, *to* εἶδη, also *ending in* εἶδη” Does the διά of διάνοια then refer to the εἶδη? If so, it means that mind relates to the very same thing (viz., the νοητόν) in two quite different ways—as νόησις (viz., as that unthematic contact, which is a demand) and as διάνοια (viz., as the acceding to that demand).

Thus would this prethematic understanding account for how the inquiry could, as it must, be guided beforehand by what is sought. That this would be necessarily true not only of that paradigm of inquiry that Socrates constantly recommends to us, i.e., that which would begin once all the opinions have been cleared away, but also of the more negative, and, in the dialogues, certainly more usual, elenctic inquiry, should seem clear from the fact that the recognition of the error of a given answer has to take its bearings *from something*.

There is, however, a further problem: Even if this prethematic understanding is the horizon within which the inquiry occurs, and even if this accounts for how the inquiry could be guided beforehand by what is sought—if our access to that prethematic understanding is itself the posing of the “what is” question, then the problem arises: How can the inquiry ever begin? *In what direction* could you move?

To ask this question, “In what direction could you move?”, refers us back to the remaining moment, to what is to be interrogated (das Befragte). I will say in passing, though I will not dwell on it, that Heidegger himself, in addressing this moment of the question’s structure, breaks out of the zetetic circle and in so doing destroys it. This he does by not identifying this moment absolutely with the other three. I.e. with this moment he turns away from *Sein* (Being) to *Dasein* (human being), from the theme of the question to the *one* who *poses* the question in the first place. This move is, of course, connected in *Being and Time* with Heidegger’s own particular brand of transcendental philosophy. I.e. the transcendental move here is from the question-as-posed, to the structure of *Dasein* as the condition for the posing of the question. Yet from the point of view of my own particular interest in the structure of inquiry, I view this move as one which leads us away from an understanding of the zetetic circle. I will try to provide something of an argument for this claim in what follows.

To see that the zetetic circle is a necessary circle is to really understand what the horizon of familiarity implies. I therefore understand all four moments to be absolutely and uncompromisingly identical. In the case of virtue, e.g., what is asked about is virtue itself; and what is to be discovered is what virtue is, i.e., virtue itself. In identifying absolutely these two moments, *das Gefragte* and *das Erfragte*, I am, of course, denying any difference in itself between virtue itself and what virtue itself is, i.e., its meaning or sense. As far as I can see, the *eidos* "virtue itself" is nothing but a meaning or sense.

What guides the whole inquiry from the outset, what gives the whole inquiry its bearings, its sense of direction, is virtue itself. And finally, what is interrogated is necessarily virtue itself. Why? Because it is only virtue itself that could possibly tell us what it is. It is important to see that, while it is Meno who is put on the spot, Meno is not the one interrogated. Hence Socrates' invitation to Meno to join with him in interrogating virtue *together*, an invitation which I believe to be genuine, despite Socrates' divination of the utter intransigence of Meno's soul.

It is this uncompromising identity of all four moments that keeps the circle absolutely closed, and which therefore raises again the question, How can one inquire? It essentially raises this question because, if the question consists of only four structural moments, and if these four moments are identical, then the question would seem always to remain motionless, for there does not seem to be any possibility of going anywhere. There is a passage in the *Meno* (79b-e) which makes this problem utterly clear: Socrates chides Meno for always responding in terms of the parts of virtue, when what is asked for is virtue as a whole. He asks: "But do you think someone could know what is a part of virtue, without knowing virtue itself?" (79c8). Meno does not think so. Socrates then says: "Well, then, oh best of men, you must not think that while still inquiring into the 'what is' of virtue as a whole, that you will be revealing it to anyone by answering in terms of its parts, or in terms of anything else of that sort—for it will be necessary to return again to the same question: What do you say this virtue, which you are talking about, is?—or do I seem to you to be saying nothing?" (79d5-e3). Meno answers: "You seem to me to speak rightly."

From the point of view of the whole-part relation, then, the problem is the following: The “what is” question asks about something as a whole. And in light of what I have said about the structure of the question, we are, and must be, already in possession of that whole. How, already having that whole, could we begin to pursue it? The only other possible way of inquiring into the whole seems to be by way of an examination of its parts or exemplifications. But a knowledge of the parts or exemplifications as parts or exemplifications presupposes a knowledge of precisely that whole of which they are parts or exemplifications, and the turn to them can therefore be made only in light of a prior understanding of the whole, which means that an inquiry into the whole, by way of the parts, is inadmissible. And yet this seems to be the only possible way, unless we address ourselves directly to the whole itself. But how, if we already have the whole, could we ever begin to pursue it? If this circle is a completely closed one (and, after all, there is no such thing as an open circle), then one implication or consequence of this is that, in just the same way that one cannot escape it or get out of it, so also there is not, and cannot be, any access to it from the outside: Insofar as one already has a world and, correlatively, a mental life, one must always be already within this circle.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the phenomenon of the circle bespeaks a contact (θίξις) which exists from the very outset.

Can we ever overcome this apparent immobility which the zetetic circle seems to entail without destroying in the process its necessary circularity? Socrates’ own answer to this question in the *Meno* is that all learning is really something called “recollection” (ἀνάμνησις). He says: “...as all nature is akin...there is no difficulty...learning out of a single recollection all the rest, if one is manly and doesn’t get tired of searching” (81d1-5). This seems to mean that, insofar as our thinking is led to turn inward toward its own proper objects (the νοητά), which objects are always at our disposal, always there for us, it is also led to the possibility of paying attention to, and following up on, the ways in which these νοητά point to other such νοητά, and ultimately to *all* other such νοητά, all of which are already really at our disposal, really there for us. Through an effortful turning inward, an effortful focussing of attention, our prethematic contact (θίξις) with the proper objects of our thinking can be made thematic. We

are always "open" to these objects, and we are always open to the "pointings" that they have to one another. In pointing to one another they show themselves to be interrelated systematically and to constitute a whole, a noetic or eidetic realm, and this too is something we are always open to. In other words, in our turning inward, our dianoetic posture, guided by νόησις, is always one of openness to the whole. This is what the zetetic circle leads us to see.

It is the Socratic paradox of knowledge of ignorance which reveals that inquiry is a necessary circle; for this self-aware knowledge of ignorance exhibits a "contact" with the νοητόν, a contact which is always there and can never be broken. And it is, in turn, the zetetic circle, precisely because it is completely closed, that leads us to characterize all learning as recollection, and thus reveals to us our openness to the whole.

## Notes

1. Johann Gottlieb Fichte. *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre* in *Fichte's Werke*, Bd. 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971) 55sq.
2. Although it never once occurs in Plato, Aristotle does occasionally (cf. *Meta.* 1051b24, 25; 1072b21) use this happy word to designate the relation between intellection and the intelligible. It has the advantage over such words as λαμβάνειν, which Aristotle also occasionally uses to designate this relation (e.g. *Anal. Post.* B, 93b15), that it is neutral with respect to the direction of the activity involved. Whereas λαμβάνειν (literally, "to grasp") seems to suggest that intellect is "active" upon its "passive" objects, a θίξις indicates merely "contact" or "being in touch with."
3. Martin Heidegger. *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1963).
4. Jacob Klein. *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1965) 112 sq.

5. Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason* Trans. by N. Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1963) 180-187.
6. This is something I attempted to work out in detail in an essay published earlier in this journal. See my "The Origin of Philosophy," *St. John's Review*, xxxvii, no. 2&3, Spring, 1986, pp. 81-92.
7. Just how one comes to "have" a "world" at all is a problem that goes well beyond the scope of this present inquiry. It is a concern central to the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl, and no one interested in the problem can afford to ignore him. While all of his writings touch on this theme in one way or another, it is most prominent in the following works: 1) *Erfahrung und Urteil* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1972); English translation *Experience and Judgment*, Trans. J. Churchill and K. Ameriks (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973); 2) *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution* (Haag: Nijhoff, 1952); 3) *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis* (Haag: Nijhoff, 1966).



# Sun and Cave

Eric Salem

For Charlie

## Introduction

Near the end of book five of the *Republic*, and at the very center of the dialogue as a whole, Socrates makes his famous—or infamous—claim: “Unless the philosophers rule as kings or those now called kings and chiefs genuinely and adequately philosophize...there will be no rest from ills for the cities, my dear Glaucon, nor I think for human kind, nor will the regime we have now described in speech ever come forth from nature, insofar as possible, and see the light of the sun” (473d).

Fortunately for us, Glaucon and Adeimantus have the courage to call Socrates’ bluff. They demand that Socrates justify this claim and he does, over the course of more than two books. In the middle of his justification, between his account of the nature of the philosopher and his account of the education proper to him, Socrates sets out three strange and strangely haunting images. In the image of the good, he posits a sun-like source that somehow yokes together knower and known, and calls this source the good or the idea of the good. In the image of the cave, he describes our nature and condition in light of that source. In the image of the divided line, Socrates characterizes the ascent to the good and the human powers required for that ascent.

I want to think about—or rather to think *through*—these images, by first raising and then attempting to answer the questions about them that I suppose any serious reader of the *Republic* would raise.

---

Eric Salem is a tutor at St. John’s College, Annapolis. This essay is a slightly revised version of a lecture delivered at Annapolis and at the Thomas More Institute in Nashua, N.H. Quotations are from the translation by Allan Bloom, Basic Books, 1968.

Now doing this, confronting Socrates' images on their own terms, will require me to abstract, for the most part, from the context I have just sketched out. However, I want to urge you to keep this context in mind. In particular, I urge you to keep asking yourselves what light Socrates' images might shed on his central claim that the philosopher is the solution to the problem of human community. I myself will turn to this question at the end of my essay. There I hope to show you that Socrates' strange and apparently apolitical images form the true center of the *Republic*. That is, I hope to show you that Socrates' images are the key to understanding why and in what sense the philosopher should rule.

## I. Questions

Socrates introduces his image of the good in book six with the claim that the good is the chief and universal object of human desire, that it is "what every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does everything" (505d). Very near the end of book seven, while describing the final stages of the philosophers' education, Socrates further claims that the good, once known, can serve as a pattern or paradigm for the life of a man or a city: "Lifting up the brilliant beams of their souls, they must be compelled to look toward that which provides light for everything. Once they see the good itself, they must be compelled, each in his turn, to use it as a pattern for ordering city, private men, and themselves for the rest of their lives" (540a-b).

I find neither of these claims about the good particularly problematic. The claim that everyone somehow desires the good is at any rate a familiar Socratic dictum, and one that seems to be amply borne out by the drama of the *Republic*. Glaucon's longing to see the conversation continue, Cephalus's willingness to absent himself from it, even Thrasymachus's angry wish to put a stop to it—all seem to be rooted in a desire to secure the good for oneself. The drama of the *Republic* also seems to support the claim that the good could serve as a pattern for human action. For instance, viewed in retrospect, Glaucon's desire to know whether justice is good can be seen as a desire to know the good so that he might shape his life in accordance with it.

What I find puzzling, then, is not these claims themselves, but the relation of the good as Socrates describes it to them. It would be one thing if the good were, say, pleasure or knowledge. (These, by the way, are the alternatives that Socrates explicitly rejects just before he begins his own description.) I can easily convince myself that pleasure is what everyone desires most, and on some days I can almost convince myself that the same is true of knowledge. I can also see how thinking that either pleasure or knowledge were the chief good would shape and inform a life. But what of the good as Socrates describes it? What would it mean to take what yokes together knower and known as a pattern for the life of a city or a man? And even if someone could do this, what sense could it make to say that it is the chief object of desire for anyone “much less everyone”?

In different ways these questions both concern the applicability of Socrates' image of the good to ordinary human concerns. Both questions arise because Socrates' image confounds our ordinary sense of what should count as an answer to the question, “What is the good?” My next question is of a different sort. It concerns the very existence of the good as Socrates describes it. As you may remember, that description draws heavily on an analogy with sight. Seeing and being seen, Socrates observes, differ from, say, hearing and being heard in a decisive respect. Hearing, the capacity to hear, depends only on the presence of something to be heard for its completion, and vice versa. Put someone who can hear in the presence of a sound; he will hear and the sound will be heard. But put someone with good eyes in a darkened room full of the most brilliant colors and nothing will happen. Seeing and being seen depend on a third thing or rather on two things: light and a source of light. So, too, Socrates claims, in the case of knowing and being known. The capacity to know and the capacity to be known depend on an external source for their completion; this source, this yoke, as Socrates calls it, is the good or the idea of the good.

Yet why, we might ask, should we suppose that knowing is sight-like rather than hearing-like? After all, as Socrates himself admits, seeing is the exception and hearing is the rule. That is, in nearly all cases—and I suppose he is thinking particularly of smelling, touching and tasting—no third thing seems to be required for the

completion of a capacity to do something and the corresponding capacity to suffer. Why, then, does Socrates insist on putting knowing in the class defined uniquely by sight rather than in the common class—the economy class—characterized by hearing? Is there some feature of our experience which would allow us to infer that there must be some mediating principle between knower and known? If there is, Socrates does not mention it. Do we perhaps encounter this principle directly in the ordinary course of our learning and knowing? Again, if we do, Socrates does not say so—and in any case, if we did, it is difficult to see why he would resort to an image to bring that principle into view.

Socrates' silence about this most basic matter is baffling, and our bafflement can only increase as we enter further into the details of his image. For Socrates does more than merely posit a principle that mediates between knower and known. He likens the ability to see to an overflow dispensed to us by the sun, and draws the corresponding consequence for our ability to know: the good is not only a necessary condition for our knowing, but the very source of our capacity to know. He then goes on to make parallel claims about the objects of our knowledge. He likens the truth to light, and makes it somehow a feature of those objects: "[T]herefore say that what provides truth to the things known and gives the power to the one who knows is the idea of the good" (508e). And then, as a final step, he claims that the good is responsible for the very existence of the things we know: "[T]herefore say that not only being known is present in these things as a consequence of the good, but also existence and being are in them besides as a result of it" (509b).

It seems to me that each of these additional features of Socrates' image is worthy of question. I, at any rate, would have liked to hear some reason given for each of them, some reason that is not dependent on the initial (and questionable) analogy with sight. However, once again, this is just what Socrates does not provide. Yet suppose we were to accept, in principle, every detail of Socrates' image of the good. Suppose, that is, that we were to admit, as genuine, the possibility that knower and known are yoked together by some external source, that the knowable things are always aglow, lit up by that source, and that we as knowers are somehow akin to these things

by virtue of our common heritage. It seems to me that just here we encounter a difficulty at least as great as any I've described. We need only reflect on our own experience as learners and knowers.

On balance it seems to me that we know—really know—very little and that what little we do know we know only as the result of great and unremitting labor. The things most worth knowing are not luminous, not to us at least. Perplexity with respect to them is for most of us the most we can manage, and in truth most of us prefer the dull comfort of well-worn opinion to knowing that we don't know. Is there room in this world of ours for the good as Socrates imagines it? Is there room in Socrates' sun-drenched world for the darkness of our own experience as knowers? It would hardly seem so. And yet, the picture I have just drawn of our condition as learners and knowers is largely in accord with another picture put forward by Socrates, his image of the cave. The human-all-too-human preference for opinion over perplexity, the painfulness of that perplexity, the arduousness of any ascent to true knowledge—these are all features of Socrates' own image. To say that Socrates' image of the good is not in accord with our experience is to say that it is not in accord with his own image of the cave; it is perhaps to say that Socrates is not in accord with himself. Are we willing to say this? Is there some way to reconcile the two images with one another?

Here is a possible solution. Someone might argue that Socrates' image of the good is meant only to characterize us and the world as it is for us *as knowers*. But we are not simply knowers. And our capacity to know is continually distracted, continually drawn away from its proper objects by other parts of the soul, by what we like to call our passions. As a consequence, we find ourselves bound in darkness, our knowing part forced to content itself with shadows rather than substance, with mere images of things rather than the things themselves. Thus, according to this argument, there is no important sense in which the image of the good is at odds with the image of the cave. The one simply describes our initial—and for most people, normal—condition; the other, the condition to which we should aspire.

There is, I think something to be said for this argument. Socrates himself seems to say that distraction is at the root of our ignorance

in these lines from his description of the cave: “[B]ut the present argument indicates that this power [to know] is in the soul of each, and that the instrument with which each learns—just as an eye is not able to turn toward the light from the dark without the whole body—must be turned around from that which is coming into being together *with the whole soul* until it is able to endure looking at being and the brightest part of being. And we affirm that this is the good, don’t we?” (528d) Still, the very way in which Socrates makes his point, his spatial metaphor, points to the inadequacy of the solution I have just sketched out. If coming to know is a matter of turning around, if it somehow involves directing our vision aright, then there must be parts of the world which are dark, dark beyond any human making, and these dark regions must be somehow populated by shadows, again not of our making. In short, although our ignorance, the human condition, has something to do with the condition of the soul, it also has to do with the condition, indeed the very structure, of the world.

This is what I mean when I say that the image of the cave and the image of the good are at least apparently at odds with one another. The ordinary sun is sometimes present, sometimes absent. It rises and sets. Here we have a perfectly satisfactory explanation of ordinary darkness. But the sun as good never sets; the lights are always on in the world disclosed by Socrates’ image of the good. How, then, are we to explain the presence within it of the shadow-filled darkness of the cave? Once again we must ask: Is there some way to bring the images of the sun and cave together, a way that will also point us toward answers to the other questions we have raised? Let us see.

## II. Image and Original

Let us reflect, for a moment, on one obvious feature of Socrates’ image of the cave. The shapes which the inhabitants of the cave delight in observing are shadows. What difference does this make? What is a shadow? In the image of the divided line, Socrates puts shadows first in his list of natural images; he thus suggests that shadows constitute the lowest order of images. This seems reasonable. The shadow of a face reveals far less about a face than, say, its

reflection in still water or in a mirror. The shadow of a thing reveals only the boundary of a thing. The interior of the thing, its texture, its depth—all these are absent from the shadow. The darkness which forms the interior of a shadow itself seems to be an image of its lack of revealing power. And yet a shadow is an image. To know the boundary or limit of a thing is to know something of that thing. The inhabitants of the cave thus encounter the things that truly are in a peculiar fashion. They dwell—we dwell—among the shades of things.

Here is something else that might seem to distinguish shadows from other types of images. A shadow can only exist if at least three other things are present. There must be a thing to be shadowed. There must be light. And the light must be directed light: It must stem from a source or at least a finite number of sources. Otherwise the light will not be blocked and no shadow will be produced.

How peculiar are these conditions to the kind of images we call shadows? (I am speaking here of natural images, the sort that Socrates associates with the first level of the divided line, and by natural images I mean not images of natural things, but images that do or can arise without human intervention.) Clearly *all* images presuppose originals: an image is always an image *of* something. And clearly all visual images presuppose light. By this I do not mean that there must be light for them to be seen, though this is of course true. I mean that light produces—or at least co-produces—say, the reflection of a tree in water. Now it is less clear in such cases than in the case of shadows that all visual images are also dependent on a source. On a cloudy day, when light is diffuse, there are no shadows, but one can still see reflections in water. Still, without a source of light to be diffused, no reflection can exist.

What, then, of images which are neither visual nor manmade? Do they also depend for their existence on the equivalent of light and sources of light? Let me answer by turning the question around: Are there such images? We can be deceived—or deceive ourselves—about the things we touch and hear and taste: we can mistake the voice of an enemy for the voice of a friend; a bitter medicine can be disguised by the taste of honey. But it is one thing to say this and another altogether to say that there are natural images *in* the world of smells, tastes and so on. My sense is that there are none or none

worth mentioning, and my guess is that Plato and Socrates would agree with me. (I might mention here that in the *Sophist*, the only dialogue I know of in which an explicit distinction is made between natural and manmade images, the only examples given of the first class are visual [*Sophist* 266b-c]. Likewise in the divided line image.)

On the other hand, the world is full of visual images that are not of human making. In fact, it is precisely *when* the conditions for seeing *things* are most fully satisfied—when the sun is at its brightest and things seem to be aglow of themselves—that the world is most full of such images. Where there is sun, there is shade. And the converse is also true—where there are natural images, where there are shadows and reflections, there must be sun or at least some source of light. Perhaps we can now see another reason why Socrates puts shadows first on his list of natural images: They may reveal least about the things they image, but they are exemplary in the way they display the dependence of such images on a source of light.

No doubt you have already seen where I mean to go with this argument. The more we think about images—natural images—and the conditions for their existence, the less strange at least two of Socrates' claims sound. We wondered earlier why Socrates chooses to liken knowing and being known to seeing and being seen and why, in particular, he insists that knowing and being known depend upon some external source, namely, the good. In a somewhat different context, we found ourselves wondering how Socrates can *both* claim that such a source exists *and* claim that most men spend their lives absorbed in the play of shadows not of their own making. But if *within* what we ordinarily call the world, if *within* the world of visible, tangible, audible things, all natural images depend for their being on some third thing, *beyond* their originals and *beyond* those who perceive them, and if, in addition, things in what we ordinarily call the world are themselves images of purely intelligible objects, then it makes sense for Socrates to suppose that there must be an external source of *these* images as well, a source other than those who perceive them and other than their intelligible originals. Moreover, if *within* what we ordinarily call the world, images arise only in those contexts where the perception of the original also depends on an external source (as in the case of sight), and if, furthermore, in these contexts

the source of the image is always *also* the source of the perceiving and being perceived of the original, then it makes sense to say that knowing and being known, intellection and intelligibility, depend on a source external to themselves *and* it makes sense to say that this source is the same as the source of the images we take to be things. In short, the relation of seeing and being seen *does* make sense as a paradigm for the relation of knowing and being known. It makes sense to suppose that knowing and being known depend on an external source—that is to say, it makes sense to suppose that the good exists—and it *also* makes sense to suppose that *this* source is the very source of what we ordinarily call the world. The cave is the offshoot, the inevitable byplay, of the illuminating activity of the good. The shadow-play that surrounds us, the unintelligibility that suffuses the lives of most of us most of the time, is simply the price—high, but non-negotiable—that must be paid for supreme intelligibility.

Clearly there are a number of “ifs” in this argument that require further examination. What’s more, there is at least one crucial condition for the production of shadows that I have glossed over entirely, a condition that strongly suggests that life in the cave is the offspring of more than one parent: no shadow can exist in the absence of a *surface* upon which it is cast. I haven’t mentioned this condition until now—and won’t mention it again—because to consider it adequately would take us too far afield: at the very least we’d have to think about the correspondence between the wall of the cave and what’s called the Other in the *Sophist* and variously called Mother, Nurse, Receptacle and Place in the *Timaios*. Rather than take upon myself this limitless task, I propose to spend much of my remaining time looking closely at two of the assumptions I have made.

### III. Poetry and Mathematics

The first supposition I want to look at is the claim that the things around us, which most of us take to be freestanding, are themselves images of intelligible originals (*noēta*), that is, ideas or forms (*eidē*). Now since Socrates so frequently and so freely employs this supposition in the *Republic* and elsewhere, and since in certain dialogues, notably the *Parmenides*, the supposition appears to lead to great, if not

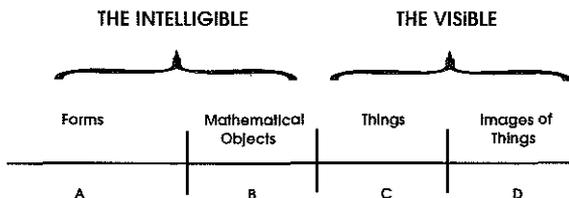
insuperable difficulties, we might expect to find a proof of it somewhere in the dialogues. But to my knowledge no proof of the supposition is to be found, if by a proof is meant an attempt to reason one's way to it from grounds that are prior to and clearer than it. I can think of two reasons why this might be so.

First, it is at least suggested in certain dialogues that, however problematic the supposition of intelligible originals may be, that supposition is what first makes reasoning (and hence proving) possible. Or, as Parmenides puts it to the young Socrates, just after subjecting the ideas to a devastating critique, anyone who denies the ideas "...will have nowhere to turn his thought," for that denial will "...utterly destroy the power of conversation" and hence philosophy (135b-c). In other words, the ideas or forms are the always problematic, yet ever indispensable condition for the possibility of serious inquiry. About them the philosopher could say: Can't think with them, can't think without them.

A second reason for the avoidance of any attempt at proof emerges from Socrates' own image of the cave. Life in the cave is so absorbing—our devotion to shadows is so complete—that the effects of the cave linger long after an initial turning around. Witness the desire of the man who's been turned around to flee back to his state of bondage and witness his tendency to regard what he's seen as less true, less revealing, than the shadows he loves. Given this state of affairs, it is difficult to see how a general proof, however certain, would do any or at least much good. What seems to be needed instead are illuminating experiences, paths by which the potential learner might gradually find his way from the shadows he finds so absorbing—that is, from his everyday experience of the world—to the intelligible originals upon which they depend.

What experiences are likely to provide this much-needed illumination? Socrates points to one answer through his image of the divided line. Let me remind you of some of the details of that image. Socrates has Glaucon cut a line unequally. He then has him cut each of its parts in the same ratio as the whole was cut. (Thus  $A+B:C+D :: A:B :: C:D$ ) Socrates goes on to assign certain kinds of beings and certain powers of the soul to each of the produced segments. The larger segments produced by the first cut (that is,  $A+B$  and  $C+D$ )

correspond respectively to what is intelligible and what is visible. Of the four segments produced by the second set of cuts, D corresponds to the natural images we spoke of earlier, C to the things of which these images are images, B somehow to mathematical objects, and A to the forms themselves.



Now perhaps the first thing we should glean from this image is the following: To say that  $C+D:A+B :: D:C$  is to say that the visible world has to the intelligible world the same relation that ordinary images within the visible world have to their visible counterparts. This is, of course, just the claim we are examining, the claim that the things around us are somehow images. The second thing we should notice is that B has to A, mathematical objects have to the forms or *eidē*, just this same relation. They are, in other words, the intellectual equivalent of reflections or, perhaps better, shadows. Socrates partly unpacks and partly amplifies this thought in his discussion of the divided line.

Mathematicians and their objects have a curious relation to objects in the visible world. As Socrates says, “Don’t you know that [the mathematicians] use visible forms and make their arguments about them, not thinking about them but about those others that they are *like*? They make arguments for the sake of the square itself and the diagonal itself, not for the sake of the diagonal they draw and likewise with the rest. These things that they mold and draw, of which there are shadows and images in water, *they now use as images*, seeking to know those things themselves, that one can see in no other way than with thought” (510d-e).

Mathematical objects thus occupy an intermediate position between the *eidē* or forms and things in the world. Like the *eidē* they are accessible only to thought. And yet the mathematician is constantly forced to see things in the world *as images* of them in order to

make the mathematical objects accessible to himself. They may be mere images or shadows of the things that truly are. Still, shadowy though they may be—or perhaps precisely because they *are* shadowy—they seem perfectly suited to introduce the learner to the intelligible realm. It is for this reason that Socrates goes on, in book seven, to make the first education of the philosopher kings a mathematical education. For it is precisely through the study of mathematics that we first come to see the shadowy, the image-like character of the things about us.

Or at any rate, mathematics is one way. I think that Socrates' account of mathematical experience is right on the mark. One cannot study mathematics seriously without at least wondering from time to time whether the objects we draw and count—and by extension all things insofar as they possess shape and number—are not images of objects accessible only to thought. And yet my sense is that there are other ways of arriving at this thought, and that Socrates knows it. I will have occasion to speak about these alternatives later. But first I need to address at some length a second sticking point in the argument I sketched out earlier.

Someone might be willing to agree with Socrates' claim that the things about us are somehow images. He might also be willing to admit that the things about us can only be images if there exists some source external to the originals of those images, an image-casting source. But this someone might deny that the source is the good as Socrates describes it and might also deny that the originals of the images we see are the forms or *eide*—on the grounds that Socrates himself does! For Socrates makes the shadows on the wall of the cave images of artificial things carried about by human beings and *he* has them projected on the wall, not by the good itself, but by a fire *within* the cave.

What are we to make of these peculiar features of Socrates' image? What are the artificial things here? What is the fire? And who are the human beings? I think it is very hard to say. At one point Socrates himself interprets his image as follows: "Well, then, my dear Glaucon, this image as a whole must be connected with what was said before. Liken the domain revealed by sight to the prison home, and the light of the fire in it to the sun's power" (517a-b). Yet this interpretation is very strange. How can Socrates suggest that we see

only shadows or images of the things illuminated by the ordinary sun? Whatever the status of the visible things turns out to be, we see those things directly, don't we?

Another interpretation of this peculiar middle realm comes to mind when we begin thinking, for instance, of Socrates' criticism of Homer and other poets in books two and three of the *Republic*. There are certain human beings—we might call them image makers or opinion makers—who so dominate our thinking, our imagining and our lives that we might almost be said to inhabit worlds of their making. We can certainly be said to live in their shadows. What we cherish and revile, what we weep about and laugh at—all are governed by the images they put before us. Might such men, poets of the first rank and perhaps founders and great statesmen as well, not be the human beings who occupy this middle realm? Indeed, couldn't this be why Socrates himself suggests that we see only shadows or images of the visible things—that we never see even such things directly? The extraordinary influence of, say, Homer on our thinking about moral and political affairs seems clear enough: I, for one, can never think about courage and honor without being haunted by the figure of Achilles. But in a certain sense that influence seems to be equally present in our viewing of natural things: Who, having read Homer, can look at the Mediterranean and not see wine or look at the sunrise and not see rosy fingers?

If everything we see we see through the eyes of such image makers, if the world is image for us in *this* sense, then much of what I've been saying thus far would seem to be simply false. There might be a good which somehow yokes together knower and known, but it would not also be responsible for the images we take to be true things. The casting of shadows would be a merely human affair. Moreover, the very existence of the good would seem to be called into question by this reading. At any rate, my attempt to argue from the image-like character of the world about us to the existence of the good would seem to have been misguided. Must we draw these consequences? Or is there some way to incorporate what I am calling the middle realm of Socrates' image into those earlier arguments about the good?

I think there is such a way, and I think that Socrates himself points to it several times in the course of book seven. The first hint comes

at the very beginning of the book. Here Socrates notes, as if in passing, that the entrance to the cave is both large and “open to the light across the whole width of the cave” (514a). I take this curious remark—echoed in myth of the *Phaedo*, where the *many* hollows or caves are said to be more or less open to the surface of the true earth—to mean something like the following. The light of the good may not make its way into the cave; it may not be *directly* responsible for the shadows we see or for our ability to discern them. And yet the cave is not altogether closed to the light, not a self-enclosed, self-contained whole. It is somehow open to the light, and open to it at every point. Perhaps it would not be going too far to say that the light of the good is potentially present throughout the cave, in this sense: Every image, every shadow, is potentially an occasion for the ascent from cave to sun. Less metaphorically, every opinion or image put before us by the opinion or image makers, once seen *as* an opinion or image, can be an occasion for the ascent to true knowledge.

Why this should be the case Socrates hints at elsewhere in book seven. First, he suggests that the objects carried before the fire should not simply be regarded as originals of the shadows that most men see. They are themselves images. Indeed, at least some of the words that Socrates uses to describe them—*andrias*, *zōon* (man-image, animal-image) and later *agalma* (image of divine being)—seem to underscore just this, to emphasize that each object carried before the fire points beyond itself, to some further original, presumably to some intelligible object (514c-515a; 517d-e). Moreover, Socrates suggests that what holds for the objects carried before the fire holds for the fire as well. For instance, in the very passage in which he identifies the light of the fire with the sun’s power, he claims that anyone who sees the idea of the good must conclude that “this is in fact the cause of all that is just and beautiful in everything—in the visible it gave birth to the light and its sovereign, in the intelligible, itself sovereign, it provided truth and intelligence” (517c). Again, in the passage I have already cited from the end of book seven, Socrates seems to claim that all seeing, all discerning—even the discerning of shadows that takes place in the cave—ultimately depends on the light of the good: the good is “that which provides light for *everything*” (540a).

If the originals of the shadows in the cave are themselves images of the *eidē*, and if the fire, the shadow-casting and shadow-discerning source, is itself derived from and an image of the good, then it makes sense to say that an ascent from cave to sun can begin anywhere. What's more, it becomes possible to return to a modified version of our initial conclusion that sun and cave form an elemental pair, with each implying the existence of the other.

The modification consists, in effect, in the admission that the good is not *directly* responsible for the shadows that surround us. The good is present in the cave by proxy, as it were; it is present—somehow—in the image-casting activity of image makers. Does this suggestion make sense? Let me be clear, first, about what I do not mean to say. I do not mean to say that the shadow casters portrayed by Socrates knowingly imitate the good. Nor do I mean to say that the quasi-originals with which they cast shadows are known by them to be images of the truly knowable things. On the contrary, I think we are meant to see that most image makers are unwitting mediators between the sun and the cave. A sign of this is the fact that the human beings in Socrates' picture—I mean the ones who carry objects before the fire—neither look at nor tend the fire. Instead they scurry about, shifting their image-producing images from place to place. The very condition of their activity—which is also the condition of the activity of the prisoners in the cave—is as unknown to them as it is to their prisoners.

If the image makers portrayed by Socrates are not knowing mediators, in what sense can they be said to mediate? Perhaps this question can best be addressed by way of another image, that of the mathematicians of the divided line. As we saw earlier, Socrates suggests through his image of the divided line that mathematical objects must be regarded as shadows or images of the *eidē*. Let me now add to this that Socrates emphasizes in his discussion of the divided line that the mathematicians, like the image makers, tend not to be aware of this: They treat images of the *eidē* as originals. Strange as it may sound, this would seem to mean that when the mathematician inquires, say, into the relations between figures or between numbers, he is in fact engaged unawares in a purely formal study of the possible relations among the forms. In other words, something

like the possible structures of the eidetic realm are made visible *in shadow form* in the more or less accessible speech of the mathematicians. Now, might something similar be said of those we've called image makers? To found a regime or to craft a great poem is to fashion a comprehensive vision of what is just and unjust, beautiful and base, good and bad. But to do this, I am suggesting, is to figure in speech a possible configuration of the eidetic realm; it is to make visible the boundaries or limits, the shadowy outlines, of the just, the beautiful, the good.

Perhaps you find disturbing my suggestion that poetry and mathematics are closely related. I find it a little disturbing myself. Still, my sense is that Socrates means us to see their kinship with one another. In fact my sense is that he means us to see that the third section of the divided line and what I have been calling the middle realm of the cave are images of the same *place*, the proper home of mathematicians and poets alike. If I am right about this, the occupational disease—or rather, temptation—of those who dwell within this region would seem to be the temptation to regard their activity and their objects as freestanding, as originals, rather than as the images they are.

Let me explain why I speak here of an occupational temptation rather than a disease. In part it is because Socrates himself seems to envision the possibility of a mathematics that knowingly points beyond itself, that invites its students to reflect on its formal foundations even as it moves them forward. That is, the harshness of his critique of mathematicians at the end of book six seems to be offset by his suggestion in book seven that mathematics is a necessary preparation for the study of dialectic and the ascent to the good. But in the end it is the *figure* of Socrates rather than his description of a quasi-dialectical mathematics that inclines me to use the language of temptation rather than disease.

What I mean is this: My sense is that if the Socrates of the dialogues belongs anywhere on the divided line, it is on the third level, with the mathematicians and the image makers. We rarely, if ever, see him engaged in the pure dialectic he associates with the highest level of the divided line. And we certainly see him producing a great number of images. Consider the evidence of the *Republic* alone. The bulk of the dialogue is an elaborate image of a city, which

we are meant to see at the same time as an image of the soul. It ends—after a harsh criticism of image making—with another elaborate image of the soul and its choices. And right at the center of the dialogue Socrates sets out the very images we have been considering. It is these images, above all, which display the possibility of a knowing mediation between sun and cave. For here we see Socrates making and conveying images—two of them “poetic,” one, mathematical—which are intended precisely to point Glaucon and us beyond the realm of images and human image making. The images of Socrates announce themselves *as* images; they are transparent in the highest degree. Such images could only be the work of a man aware, supremely aware, that his image-making activity was itself an image of a more fundamental, more original activity.

I will have more to say about Socrates a bit later. In particular, I will want to bring the figure of Socrates to bear as we circle back to the first set of questions I raised about the good, namely, how the good as Socrates describes it could be the good for us and could furnish a paradigm for human action. But before we can treat this first set of questions, we must return to Socrates' own characterization of the good.

#### IV. Weaving Together

We would do well to remind ourselves at the outset that the feature of the good we have been focusing on for some time, its image-casting power, is not at the heart of Socrates' description here. It is certainly mentioned: the Sun, the image by which we are to glimpse the good, is called “the child” as well as “most like” the good it images (506e). But as I said, image-casting is not at the *center* of Socrates' description.

What is? The good yokes; it gathers; it brings things together—this seems to be its primary feature. Now thus far we have been supposing that the gathering of the good is limited, that knower and known are the only things it brings together. But Socrates says nothing here to make us think that he means to restrict the gathering power of the good to this relation alone. And indeed, later on, as he attempts to describe what it would mean for someone to dwell outside the cave, he insists that the good is not only “in a certain way the cause of all

those things that the man and his companions had been seeing,” that is, somehow the source of shadows in the cave, but also “the source of seasons and of years [outside it],” that is, the overarching source of order among the intelligible objects (516b). The good, we must now understand, is responsible for all collectedness, all being together, within the intelligible realm. It brings together knower and known; but it also makes the known, the realm of intelligible objects, a realm, an articulated whole rather than a heap of objects

What does the word “whole” mean here? The word “yoke,” used by Socrates in various forms three times in the course of his image, might seem to imply the violent imposition of order, subjugation. But this is clearly not Socrates’ meaning (or, at any rate, not his primary meaning). The good is a ruling source, an *archē*, but its rule is not arbitrary. Rather, as the example of knower and known makes manifest, the good brings together, not indifferent elements, but things that *belong* together. In other words, the collections it produces are *well-ordered* collections, and the good is a source of wholeness in at least this sense.

There is, however, another and perhaps more fundamental sense in which the good is a source of wholeness. Once again, it is the relation of knower and known that points the way. It is not the case that the power to know is, as it were, somewhat better off for being conjoined with a knowable object. On the contrary, the power to know *is*, is wholly itself, only in the presence of what is knowable. Or, as Socrates himself observes, the power to see is barely distinguishable from blindness in the absence of illuminated objects. In other words, the very identity of the power to know would seem to depend on its being joined with a knowable object—and the same might be said of the knowable object. Perhaps this is why Socrates insists that the good is in some way responsible for the very existence of knowable objects: In bringing knower and known together, in making a pair of them, it makes each one just the one that it is. The good, in this sense, might also be called the same, the source of all identity—and indeed this may be just the name that is given to it in the *Sophist*, in a discussion where the community and integrity of the *eidē* is at issue.

Let me close this section by pointing out a final sense in which the good is a source of identity. I have just suggested that the good is such a source insofar as it brings together things that can be fully themselves only in being together. But Socrates' image suggests that the good is also the source of the very power of such things to come together, and that it acts as a source by granting those things a share of its own being. This is made particularly clear in the case of the knower; through the analogy with sun and sight, Socrates characterizes the power to know as an overflow and gift of the good. That a strict parallel to this is intended in the case of the objects of knowledge becomes clear when we see that light—that is, truth—is not here a medium *through* which we see. Instead the good “provides truth to the things known” (508e). The *eidē* do not simply *reflect* the light of truth; they are radiant. They shine forth with a light that is somehow their own. In the end, the yoking together with which we began may amount to this: Out of the fullness of its being, the good renders each being in the intelligible realm fit for the activity and community which complete it.

Where are we in this picture? In what sense can *this* good be said to be *our* good? And what would it mean to take *this* good as a pattern for our lives or the life of our city?

Let me venture a first answer to the first of these questions. Suppose we were all, at bottom, lovers of wisdom. Suppose the longing at the bottom of all the great variety of human longing were a longing to dwell, somehow, among the most knowable objects. Then it seems to me that there might be two senses in which the good would be our good. It would be the very condition for the activity we prized most. For it would be that which fits us for the activity of knowing and makes our objects fit to be known. That is, the good would be the most beneficial or most needful thing, *the good for us* in this sense. But *as* the source of the knowability, the truth, the radiance, of the knowable things, the good would itself be the most knowable, most radiant, hence most alluring of the knowable things. It would be the chief object of human desire, *the good for us* in this sense.

It would be, that is, if we were all at bottom lovers of wisdom. But are we? Would Socrates say that we are? His image of the cave would

seem to suggest that we are not. It is true that the inhabitants of the cave take a certain delight in discerning and distinguishing the shadows before them. Indeed, this activity of discerning and distinguishing seems to be in some sense at the center of their lives. And yet, the violence with which they resist being turned around toward the truly discernible and distinguishable things suggests that something else, some other desire, is at the core of their being.

Not all human beings, then, are lovers of wisdom, and yet I still think it can be said that the good is somehow the good for us. First I must tell you what I think *does* lie at the core of human desire: I think it is the desire to be complete, either by being a whole on one's own or by participating in a larger whole. It seems to me that this desire for completion is, for instance, the thread that binds together the two great speeches about love by Socrates and Aristophanes in the *Symposium*: The philosopher and the poet disagree about what constitutes and makes possible human completeness; they do not disagree about the depth of the desire for it. It also seems to me that this desire is at the root of the resistance of the inhabitants of the cave to being turned around: the cave is a dwelling, an *oikēsis*; to give up the cave is to give up a kind of home; it is to give up a kind of being at home in the world (514a). Finally, it seems to me that this desire is just what the image makers in the cave are serving and satisfying through their images. The image makers are at bottom homemakers. The visions embedded in their poems and law, the visions of what is good and evil, noble and base, right and wrong—these visions give order to the lives of men. They make a common life possible. They make human being a being together; it is no accident that the word *nomos*, usually translated as law, also means song and at bottom means distribution and order.

Do we not see just here at least one sense in which the good is somehow our good, and at the same time glimpse an answer to our other question, namely, how the good could serve as a pattern for human and political action? The image makers are unwitting images of the good in a double sense. As makers of images they imitate the image-casting power of the good, and *in this very activity* they imitate its community-making power. But in so doing, in making dwelling places for men, they make possible—or at least aim to make possi-

ble—the satisfaction of what I am suggesting is the deepest human desire, the desire to be whole or complete. The good, and such men as imitators of the good, are good for us in just this sense.

But of course most human communities fall short. Most men may find them homey enough to resist the ascent to the good. But they fail to find in them the full satisfaction of their desire for completeness. Thrasymachus's violent rejection of the claim that justice is good, that being just is to one's advantage, is one sign of this lack of satisfaction. The terrifying tale of political strife and disorder that forms the backdrop for the *Republic*—a tale narrated in part by Thucydides—is another: Just think of what happens in Corcyra. As Socrates himself says in the passage with which I began this essay, “there is no rest for ills for the cities, my dear Glaucon, nor I think for human kind...”

Of course, Socrates goes on to complete this sentence by suggesting that the ills of cities and mankind could be put to rest if only the philosophers were to rule. We are now in a position to see what this would mean. The philosopher, taking as the model for his activity as king the very thing that makes possible his activity as a lover of wisdom, would order the citizens of his city in accordance with their natures. He would yoke them together both by casting before them the right images and by rendering each of them fit for the activity proper to his nature. In so doing he would bring to fruition the definition of justice arrived at in book four: Each citizen would mind his own business—literally, do his own things—and in doing them achieve the satisfaction of being one with himself in being one with the city

Now I say “would” here because by the end of book nine Socrates and Glaucon seem to have abandoned the possibility that such a city could ever be founded “in deed.” The pattern for it, Socrates says, is laid up in heaven. Perhaps a man who looked to it could “found a city within himself on the basis of what he sees” (592b). But the city he spent nearly six books of the *Republic* talking about is just this, a city in speech. In other words, the true city, the true community, is the heavenly community presided over by the good; It is the community of the *eidē* or perhaps the community of the *eidē* in communion with the one who knows them. Such a knower might be able to shape his own life and his own soul in the image of that city. But the

possibility that a human community might arise that was more than the merest shadow of the true city—this possibility has been abandoned.

At any rate this is how things look if we focus only on the argument of the *Republic*. If we look to its drama—and above all if we look to the figure of Socrates himself—we see something quite different. For in the *Republic* we see Socrates founding not one but two cities in speech. There is the city he talks about with Glaucon and others. But there is also the city—or at least the community—that arises in the course of the talk about it. Here, as elsewhere in the dialogues and like the dialogues themselves, Socrates is at work as the visible image of the good, uniting within his own person, the person of the philosopher, the powers of weaving together and image making delimited in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. He gathers up and distinguishes the young men around him, taming Thrasymachus, spurring Glaucon and Adeimantus on, helping each to find his proper place and work within their city in speech. He does this in part by collecting and distinguishing in speech the forms of things, by practicing the art of dialectic. But Socrates' casting forth of wondrous images lies at the center of his gathering, and at the center of these images stand his images of sun and cave. Here his intellect, itself the overflow from the sun's treasury, becomes the fire that illuminates the cave. Here he lets the young men sitting around him see, if only for a moment, what it would mean to stand up, turn around, and make their ascent from the cave. If, then, we turn the words of Socrates' central claim into a question, if we ask whether the "regime traversed now in speech" can ever "blossom forth and see the light of the sun," we can say "Yes"—it can, it *has*, because the philosopher, for a time, has become king.

# On Some Texts of Bacon and of Descartes

André Lalande

It is common knowledge that Francis Bacon coined numerous philosophical aphorisms, such as the adage, "Knowledge is power," or the saying admired so by Leibniz: "A little science removes us from God; much science brings us back to Him." It is less known that we find in his writings, "Man is a god to man"<sup>1</sup> before finding it in Spinoza, and that Danton owed to him the celebrated saying, "Boldness, again boldness, boldness always."<sup>2</sup> I presume that an attentive reading of Descartes, of Pascal, of Malebranche, of Leibniz, would show them to be even more nourished by his works than is generally supposed. Without a doubt, Cartesianism handles the edifice of the sciences in a way contrary to Bacon (at least to begin with, because Descartes recognizes that very quickly it is necessary to proceed toward causes from effects; and Bacon, on the other hand, makes all the rest of the sciences depend on physics); but in the critique of previous philosophy, in the epistemological idea of the relation of the mind to things, in the very plan of this edifice of the sciences which they traverse differently, the resemblances remain close and numerous. The aim of this note is to select from the *Discourse on Method* alone (and without doubt incompletely) the passages which appear to show either a certain familiarity or a curious conjunction with the works of Bacon. It seemed to me that it would be useful to collect these comparisons, because they are not indicated in any of the annotated editions of the *Discourse* that I have had in my hands;<sup>3</sup> nor in the preface which M. Fowler has put at the beginning of his great edition of the *New Organon*—a preface heavily documented, in which a whole chapter concerns the Baconian influence, and where he has brought forth much evidence—he cites but two small passages of

Descartes relative to "Verulamius," taken from letters to Mersenne of 1631 and 1632.

For greater convenience I arrange these extracts in two columns. Words from the context necessary for understanding the text are added in square brackets.

1. Good sense is the best distributed thing in the world...the diversity of our opinions does not arise because some of us are more reasonable than others but solely because we direct our thoughts along different paths and do not attend to the same things....The greatest souls are capable of the greatest vices as well as the greatest virtues; and those who proceed but very slowly can make much greater progress, if they always follow the right path, than those who hurry and stray from it. (I, 1)

1. For my method of discovering knowledge places men's natural talents almost on a level, and does not leave much to their individual excellence, since it performs everything by the surest rules and demonstrations.<sup>4</sup> (*Novum Organum*, I, 122)

But of these three, prudence and soundness of direction,—that is, the pointing out and setting forth of the straight and ready way to the thing which is to be done,—must be placed first. For the cripple in the right way (as the saying is) outstrips the runner in the wrong. (*De Augmentis*, ESH IV, p. 284)<sup>5</sup> {ESH II, 2, p. 486}

In fact, as is clear, the more active and faster a man is, the further astray will he go when he is running on the wrong road.<sup>6</sup> *Nov. Org.* I, 61).

2. I knew that...memorable deeds told in histories...help to shape one's judgment...that poetry has quite ravishing delicacy and sweetness; that mathematics contains some very subtle devices which serve as much to satisfy the curious as to further all the arts and lessen man's labours; that writings on morals contain many very useful teachings and exhortations to virtue; that philosophy gives us the means of speaking plausibly about any subject and of winning the admiration of the less learned; that jurisprudence, medicine, and other sciences bring honours and riches to those who cultivate them. (I,7)

3. [O]ne who is too curious about the practices of past ages usually remains quite ignorant about those of the present. ...those who regulate their conduct by examples drawn from these works are liable to fall into the excesses of the knights-errant in our tales of chivalry, and conceive plans beyond their powers. (I, 8)

2. Histories make men wise; poets, witty; the mathematics, subtle; natural philosophy, deep; moral, grave; logic and rhetoric, able to contend.<sup>7</sup>

For I have no wish to prevent those arts and sciences that now flourish from providing food for argument, adornment for conversation, employment for professors and from being a source of profit to those in business. (*Nov. Org.*, I, 128.)

3. [T]hat learning doth soften men's minds, ...in making them too curious and irresolute by variety of reading, ...or too immoderate and overweening by reason of the greatness of examples, or too incompatible and differing from the times by reason of the dissimilitude of examples; or at least that it doth divert men's travails from action and business.... ( *The Proficiency and Advancement of Learning*, I in *Francis Bacon: A Selection of His Works* ed. by Sidney Warhaft, Odyssey Press, 1965, pp. 205-6) {ESH III, p. 268}.

4. I compared the moral writings of the ancient pagans to very proud and magnificent palaces built only on sand and mud.<sup>8</sup> They extol the virtues, and make them appear more estimable than anything else in the world; but they do not adequately explain how to recognize a virtue, and often what they call by this fine name is nothing but a case of callousness, or vanity, or desperation, or parricide (I, 10).

4. So have these writers set forth good and fair copies, and accurate draughts and portraitures of good, virtue, duty, [and felicity, as] true objects [for the will and desires to aim at]. But though the marks themselves be excellent and well placed, how a man may best take aim at them; that is, by what method and course of education the mind may be trained and put in order for the attainment of them, they pass over altogether, or slightly or unprofitably (*De Aug.* VII, 1; ESH V, pp. 3-4) {I, p. 713}.

Notwithstanding (to return to the philosophers), if before they had come to the popular and received notions of virtue and vice, pleasure and pain, and the rest, they had stayed a little longer upon the inquiry concerning the roots of good and evil, and the strings of those roots; they had given in my opinion a great light to those questions which followed; and especially if they had consulted with the nature of things, as well as moral axioms, they had made their doctrines less prolix, and more profound; (*De Aug.* VII; ESH V, p.6) {I, p. 716}.

5. And it was always my most earnest desire to learn to distinguish the true from the false in order to see clearly into my own actions and proceed with confidence in this life. (I, 14)

Cf. [I] had acquired some general notions in physics...I believed that I could not keep them secret without sinning gravely against the law which obliges us to do all in our power to secure the general welfare of mankind. (VI, 2)

6. [T]here is not usually so much perfection in works composed of several parts and produced by various different craftsmen [masters] as in the works of one man. And ...since the sciences contained in books...is compounded and amassed little by little from the opinions of many different persons, it never comes so close to the truth as the simple reasoning which a man of good sense naturally makes concerning whatever he comes across. So, too, I reflected that we were all children before being men...it is virtually impossible that our judgements should be as unclouded and firm as they would have been if we had had the full use of our reason from the moment of our birth... (II, 1)

5. For my part at least, constrained as I always am by the desire for truth, I have committed myself to the uncertainties, difficulties and loneliness of the ways...to the end that I may provide, at last, more trustworthy and safe guidelines for present and future generations. (*Nov. Org.*, Preface to *Magna Instaurationis*, p. 13) {I, p. 130}

6. The variety of errors and the unity of truth compete. (*Masculine Origin of Time*). {III, p. 535}

No one has yet been found of such steady and strict purpose as to decree and compel himself to sweep away common notions and speculations, and to apply his understanding, swept clear and level, to a fresh study of particulars. Thus it is that human reason, as we have it, is nothing but a medley, an unsorted collection, a mixture of chance and credulity, along with notions we imbibed as children.<sup>9</sup> (*Nov. Org.* I, 97)

7. But regarding the opinions to which I had hitherto given credence, I thought that I could not do better than undertake to get rid of them, all at one go, in order, to replace them afterwards with better ones, or with the same ones once I had squared them with the standards of reason. I firmly believed that in this way I would succeed in conducting my life much better than if I built only upon old foundations... (II, 2)

Cf. below: ...to avoid precipitate conclusions and preconceptions. (II,7)

8. [I]t would be unreasonable for an individual to plan to reform a state by changing it from the foundations up and overturning it in order to set it up again;...

These large bodies are too difficult to raise up once overthrown, or even to hold up once they begin to totter, and their fall cannot but be a hard one. (II, 2) Cf. VI, 2.

7. There was thus but one course left, namely to try the whole matter afresh with better means of support, and to bring about a great Instauration of the arts and sciences and all the learning of mankind, raised upon the proper foundations. (*Nov. Org.* "Francis of Verulam,..." prefacing *The Great Instauration*, p.3 {I, p. 121})

Another error is an impatience of doubt and haste to assertion without due and mature suspension of judgment....if a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts, but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties<sup>10</sup> (*The Proficience*, I, Warhaft, p. 233-34) {ESH I, p. 461-2}

8. In affairs of state, change, even if for the better, is suspect because of the disturbance it brings, since civil affairs rest on authority, consensus, reputation and opinion, not on demonstration; whereas arts and sciences ought to be like mines, loud on every hand with the sounds of new operations and further progress. (*Nov. Org.*, I, 90<sup>11</sup>) See also, *Essays*, XXIV.

9. [A] majority vote is worthless as a proof of truths that are at all difficult to discover; for a single man is much more likely to hit upon them than a group of people. (II, 4)

10. But in examining further [the arts or sciences which seemed ought to contribute something to my plan] I observed with regard to logic that syllogisms and most of its other techniques are of less use for learning things than for explaining to others the things one already knows or even, as in the art of Lully, for speaking without judgement about matters of which one is ignorant. And although logic does contain many excellent and true precepts, these are mixed up with so many others which are harmful or superfluous that it is almost as difficult to distinguish them as it is to carve a Diana or a Minerva from an unhewn block of marble. (II,6)

9. For in intellectual matters it is the worst omen of all that an idea commands general consent, except in sacred matters and in politics, where there is the right to vote. For, as I said earlier, nothing pleases the multitude, unless it strikes the imagination, or ties up the understanding in knots of common notions.<sup>12</sup> (*Nov. Org.*, I, 77).

10. And this art which I present...is a kind of logic, though the difference between it and ordinary logic is great, indeed immense. For the ordinary logic professes to devise and prepare means to help the understanding; and in this one respect they agree. (*The Great Instauration*, "Plan of the Work" *Nov. Org.* p. 19) {ESH 1, p.135}

For in the ordinary logic almost all the work is performed around the syllogism....For although no one can doubt that propositions that agree on a middle term agree also with each other (this being a mathematical certainty), nevertheless there is this underlying deception, that the syllogism consists of propositions, propositions of words, and words are tokens and symbols of notions. Therefore if the very notions of the mind...are defective...then everything collapses. (*Ibid.*, p. 19-20) {p.136}

11. In doing this I was not copying the skeptics, who doubt only for the sake of doubting and pretend to be always undecided; on the contrary, my whole aim was to reach certainty—to cast aside the loose earth and sand so as to come upon rock or clay. (III, 6)

Cf. above, citation 7: But regarding the opinions to which I had hitherto given credence...

11. It will be thought...that I support a kind of suspension of judgment, and reduce the matter to *Acatalepsy*. What in fact I have in mind and propose is *Eucatalepsy*; for I do not disparage the sense, but help it; I do not disdain the understanding, I govern it. (*Nov. Org.*, I, 126).

But no one should disapprove of such a suspension of judgment in a teaching that asserts, not that nothing can be known at all, but that knowledge is only possible by following a certain method and path; and yet halts for the time being at certain degrees of certainty for help and support until the mind may arrive at an explanation of causes on which it can stand.<sup>13</sup> (*Great Instauration* "Plan," p. 29) {ESH I, p. 144}

12. But the most remarkable of all these facts [the action of the heart on the blood] is the generation of the animal spirits: like a very fine wind, or rather a very pure and lively flame, they rise continuously in great abundance from the heart to the brain, passing from there through the nerves to the muscles and imparting movement to all the parts of the body. (V, 8)

12. The other difference between the spirits is, that the vital spirit has in it a degree of inflammation, and is like a breath compounded of flame and air... (*The History of Life and Death*, part 2; ESH V, p. 323) {ESH II p. 215}

But this spirit, whereof I am speaking, is not a virtue, nor an energy, nor an actuality, nor any such idle matter, but a body thin and invisible, and yet having place and dimension, and real.<sup>14</sup> (*Ibid.*, p. 321) {p. 213}

The spirits are the agents and workmen that produce all the effects in the body. (*Ibid.*, p. 268)

The pulse of the heart and arteries in animals is caused by an endless and alternate dilatation and contraction of the spirits.

The voluntary motion likewise in animals, which (in the more perfect) is performed by the nerves, seems to have its root first in the compression and then in the relaxation of the spirits. (*The History of Dense and Rare, Ibid.*, p. 358) {ESH II, p. 263}

13. This shows not merely that the beasts have less reason than men, but that they have no reason at all. (V, 11)

[I]t is nature which acts in them according to the disposition of their organs. In the same way a clock, consisting only of wheels and springs, can count the hours and measure time more accurately than we can with all our wisdom. (*Ibid.*)

13. For the sensible soul—the soul of brutes—must clearly be regarded as a corporeal substance, attenuated and made invisible by heat; a breath (I say) compounded of the natures of flame and air...clothed with the body, and in perfect animals residing chiefly in the head, running along the nerves, and refreshed and repaired by the spirituous blood of the arteries;<sup>15</sup> (*De Aug.*, IV, ch, 3; ESH, IV, p. 398) {I, p. 606}

For this soul is in brutes the principal soul, the body of the brute being its instrument; whereas in man it is itself only the instrument of the rational soul, and may be more fitly termed not soul, but spirit. (*Ibid.*)

14. After that I described the rational soul, and showed that, unlike the other things of which I had spoken, it cannot be derived in any way from the potentiality of matter, but must be specially created. And I showed how it is not sufficient for it to be lodged in the human body like a helmsman in his ship, except perhaps to move its limbs, but that it must be more closely joined and united with the body to have, besides this power of movement, feelings and appetites like ours and so constitute a real man. (V, last para.).

Cf. *Treatise on the Passions*, Part I.

14. Let us now proceed to the doctrine which concerns the Human Soul...The parts thereof are two; the one treats of the rational soul, which is divine; the other of the irrational, which is common with brutes. I mentioned a little before...the two different emanations of souls, which appear in the first creation thereof the one springing from the breath of god, the other from the wombs of the elements. (*Ibid*) {p. 606-7}

With regard to the doctrine concerning the League or Common Bond between the soul and body, it is distributed into two parts....[so the description of this league...consists..of two parts] namely, how these two (that is, the Soul and the Body) disclose the one the other, and how they work the one upon the other.

The latter branch of the doctrine of the league...considers either how and how far the humours and temperament of the body alter and work upon the mind; or again, how and how far the passions or apprehensions of the mind alter and work upon the body. (*Ibid* IV, 1; ESH p. 375; 377) {p. 583; 584}

For there are many and great excellencies of the human soul above the souls of brutes, manifest even to those who philosophise according to the sense. Now wherever the mark of so many and great excellencies is found, there also a specific difference ought to be constituted; (*Ibid.*, IV, 3; ESH p. 397) {p. 605}

15. Here I dwelt a little upon the subject of the soul, because it is of the greatest importance. For after the error of those who deny God...there is none that leads weak minds further from the straight path of virtue than that of imagining that the souls of the beasts are of the same nature as ours...But when we know how much the beasts differ from us, we understand much better the arguments which prove that our soul is of a nature entirely independent of the body, and consequently that it is not bound to die with it. And since we cannot see any other causes which destroy the soul, we are naturally led to conclude that it is immortal. (V, last para.).

15. Let there be therefore a more diligent inquiry concerning this doctrine; the rather because the imperfect understanding of this has bred opinions superstitious and corrupt and most injurious to the dignity of the human mind, touching metempsychosis, and the purifications of souls in periods of years, and indeed too near an affinity in all things between the human soul and the souls of brutes. (*Ibid.*, ESH, p. 398) {p. 606}

16. [I]n place of this speculative philosophy which is taught in the schools, one could find a practical one, through which, knowing the power and actions of fire, water, air, stars, the heavens and all the other bodies that surround us as distinctly as we know the different crafts of our artisans we could use this knowledge in the same way for all the purposes for which it is appropriate, and thus make ourselves, as it were, masters and possessors of nature. (VI,2)

16. Now of this philosophy Aristotle is by universal consent the chief, yet he left nature herself untouched and inviolate, and dissipated his energies in comparing, contrasting, and analysing popular notions about her. (*Cogitata et visa* translated as: *Thoughts and Conclusions*, in *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon*, ed. Benjamin Farrington. Chicago, 1964. p. 83) {ESH, III, p. 601}

Now the only true and proper goal of the sciences is to bring new discoveries and powers to human life. (*Nov. Org.* 81)

For the end I propose for my science is the discovery not of arguments but of arts; (*The Great Instauration*, "Plan," p. 19) {ESH I p. 135}

For man is only the servant and interpreter of Nature and he only does and understands so much as he shall have observed, in fact or in thought, of the course of Nature; more than this he neither knows nor can do....So it is that those two objects of mankind, *Knowledge and Power*, come in fact to the same thing, and the failure of works derives mostly from ignorance of causes. (*Ibid.* p. 29) {p. 144}

And for its value and utility it must be plainly avowed that that wisdom which we have derived principally from the Greeks is but like the boyhood of knowledge, and has the characteristic property of boys: it can talk, but it cannot generate, ...In the mechanical arts we do not find it so; they, on the contrary, as having in them some breath of life, are continually growing and becoming more perfect (*The Great Instauration*, "Preface" p. 8) {p. 125}

17. This is desirable not only for the invention of innumerable devices which would facilitate our enjoyment of the fruits of the earth and all the goods we find there, but also, and most importantly, for the maintenance of health, which is undoubtedly the chief good and the foundation of all the other goods in this life. For even the mind depends so much on the temperament and disposition of the bodily organs that if it is possible to find some means of making men wiser and more skilful than they have been up till now, I believe we must look for it in medicine. (VI,2)

17. [T]here is one thing still remaining, which is of more consequence than all the rest;—namely, a true and active Natural Philosophy for the science of medicine to be built upon (*De Aug.*, IV, 2; ESH IV, p. 390) {I, p. 598}

For the physicians prescribe drugs to heal mental diseases, as in the treatment of phrensy and melancholy; and pretend also to exhibit medicines to exhilarate the mind, to fortify the heart and thereby confirm the courage, to clarify the wits, to corroborate the memory, and the like...The root and life of all which prescripts<sup>16</sup>...consist in that of which we are speaking, namely the sympathy of the mind with the state and disposition of the body (*Ibid.* IV, 1; ESH, IV, p. 377) {p. 584}

And therefore the poets did well to conjoin music and medicine in Apollo; because the genius of both these arts is almost the same; for the office of the physician is but to know how to stretch and tune this harp of man's body that the harmony may be without all harshness and discord (*Ibid.* IV, 2; ESH, IV, p. 380) {p. 588}

18. It is true that medicine as currently practised does not contain much of any significant use; but without intending to disparage it, I am sure there is no one, even among its practitioners, who would not admit that all we know in medicine is almost nothing in comparison with what remains to be known, and that we might free ourselves from innumerable diseases, both of the body and of the mind, and perhaps even from the infirmity of old age, if we had sufficient knowledge of their causes and of all the remedies that nature has provided (*Ibid.*).

I will say only that I have resolved to devote the rest of my life to nothing other than trying to acquire some knowledge of nature from which we may derive rules in medicine which are more reliable than those we have had up till now (VI, 12).

19. Those who gradually discover the truth in the sciences are like people who become rich and find they have less trouble making large profits than they had in making much smaller ones when they were poorer. Or they may be compared with military commanders, whose forces tend to grow in proportion to their victories... (VI, 4).

18. Medicine therefore (as we have seen) is a science which has been hitherto more professed than laboured, and yet more laboured than advanced; the labours spent on it having been rather in a circle, than in progression (*De Aug.*, IV, 2; ESH IV, p. 383) {p. 590}

I will divide it into three parts, which I will term its three offices; the first whereof is the Preservation of Health, the second the Cure of Diseases, and the third the Prolongation of Life (*Ibid.*)

[This third part] ...is new, and deficient; the most noble of all. For if such a thing may be discovered, the business of medicine will no longer be confined to humble cures, nor will physicians be honoured only for necessity; but for a gift to men—of earthly gifts perhaps the greatest...<sup>17</sup> (*Ibid.*; ESH, IV, p. 390) {p. 598}

19. [O]n the contrary, I who consider the mind not only in its natural capacity but in its connection with things, cannot but believe that the art of discovery may grow with the number of new discoveries. (*Nov. Org.*, I 130).

20. I do not wonder at the absurdities attributed to all the ancient philosophers whose writings we do not possess; nor do I conclude from these attributions that their thoughts were highly unreasonable. As they were some of the best minds of their time, I conclude that their thoughts have been misrepresented (VI, 6)

20. And therefore the greatest minds in every age have doubtless felt their force; ...and as a result, any more exalted reflections that may have gleamed forth were straight-way buffeted and extinguished by the winds of popular opinion. The result has been that Time, like a river, has brought down to us the light and inflated, while it has sunk the weighty and solid. (*The Great Instauration*, Preface, p. 10) {ESH I, p. 127}

21. We see too that it has almost never happened that any of their followers has surpassed them; They are like the ivy, which never seeks to climb higher than the trees which support it, and often even grows downward after reaching the tree-tops (*Ibid.*).

21. [A]ll the tradition and succession of schools represent only the characters of master and pupil, not of inventors or those who bring any distinction to things already invented...In fact, they sometimes flourish most under their first authors, only to decline thereafter...For it is hardly possible at one and the same time to gaze with admiration upon authors and to excel them, knowledge being like water, which does not rise higher than the level from which it descended. (*Ibid.* p. 8-9; 11) {p.126; 128}

These sentence by sentence comparisons give a less clear idea of the relation between Bacon and Descartes than can a parallel reading of their works. Often a paragraph of the latter appears as a vigorous summary, with a development which is richer but more diffuse and less coherent than that of his predecessor. Such is the case, for example, with chapters of *De Augmentis*, IV, 2, on medicine, or VII, 1, on ancient morals. Likewise paragraphs 2 and 6 in the sixth part of the *Discourse on Method* are comparable taken as a whole to the

general "Preface" to the *Great Instauration*. I have limited myself, in the case of these similarities, to citing some characteristic sentences.

Similarly, because I did not find in the *Discourse on Method* a text of some few lines to which to oppose them, I had to leave aside the repeated declarations in which Bacon insists on the unity of science. It would have been necessary to transcribe extensively, in order to place in parallel columns, the whole plan of the sciences which occupies paragraphs 2-4 of the fifth part. But since nothing is more familiar than this idea, which some have even wanted to make a discovery proper to Descartes,<sup>18</sup> I will cite here only the Baconian texts which fit with it.

"And generally let this be a rule; that all divisions of knowledges be accepted and used rather for lines to mark or distinguish, than sections to divide and separate them; in order that solution of continuity in sciences may always be avoided. For the contrary hereof has made particular sciences to become barren, shallow, and erroneous; not being nourished and maintained and kept right by the common fountain and aliment."<sup>19</sup> (*De Aug.*, IV, 1; ESH, IV, p. 373) {I, p. 580}

\* \* \*

"And therefore the speculation was excellent in Parmenides and Plato (although in them it was but a bare speculation), 'that all things by a certain scale ascend to unity.' So then always that knowledge is worthiest which least burdens the intellect with multiplicity; and this appears to be Metaphysic, as that which considers chiefly the simple forms of things (which I have above termed *forms of the first class*<sup>20</sup>); since although few in number, yet in their commensurations and co-ordinations they make all this variety." (*Ibid.*, III, 4; ESH, IV, p. 362) {pp. 567-8}

\* \* \*

"However, let no one expect much progress in the sciences—especially in their practical aspects—unless natural philosophy is extended to particular sciences, and particular sciences in turn lead back

to natural philosophy. This is the reason why astronomy, optics, music, many of the mechanical arts, medicine itself and, more surprisingly, moral and political philosophy and the logical sciences all lack depth....Small wonder, then, that the sciences fail to grow, cut off as they are from their roots. (*Nov. Org.*I, 80)."

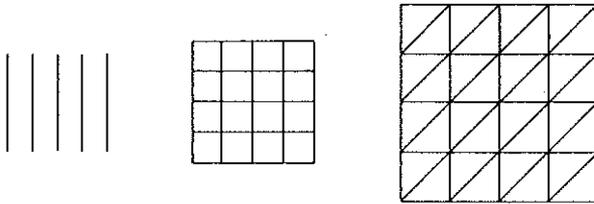
I believe that in works of Descartes other than the *Discourse on Method* one would find material for analogous comparison. The celebrated comparison of the system of the sciences to a tree is found in *De Augmentis*.<sup>21</sup> The notion of the *simple natures*, explained in the *Regulae*, in particular in Rule XII, recalls very nearly the use of this expression in the second book of the *Novum Organum*, and the theory which is connected with it. And I have already noted, in a previous work, a text from this very rule which reproduces almost word for word a passage from *Valerius Terminus*. The analogy is all the more curious as this passage is precisely the statement of the method of geometrically interpreting sensible phenomena, which holds such a great place in the Cartesian philosophy at the epoch of its full development. Is this a simple coincidence? Or can one allow that Descartes had knowledge, in manuscript form, of *Valerius Terminus*, which was only published in 1734 by Robert Stephen in *The Letters and Remains of Lord Chancellor Bacon*? Certain scientific works, at this epoch, circulated in more or less faithful copy, often fragmentary, before passing on to press. Or still yet, must one see in this method of geometric translation, an idea transmitted orally from the one to the other? When one remembers what discussions the concern with the experiment at Puy de Dome gave rise to, one feels less inclined to resolve the matter easily.

It will be noted on the other hand that the *Valerius Terminus* is not only a first sketch of the *New Organum*,<sup>22</sup> but also marks a time—unhappily indeterminate—when Bacon was attached to the idea of a universal mechanism in a much more radical way than he was in his later works; he even sees in it at that time a sort of philosophic secret which one should communicate only advisedly and under all sorts of reservations. It is not that he ever returned to "pure" philosophy, nor that he had put into doubt the value of his interpretation of

natural phenomena; quite the contrary, in the Latin text of *De Augmentis*, published in 1623, he introduced a sign of this attachment, which does not exist in the *Advancement of Learning* of 1605 (perhaps in virtue of the same esoteric principle) and which presents color as having "form," understood in the last analysis as a certain figured disposition of material elements. It is impossible, as I have tried to show elsewhere in detail, to be content with the classic prejudice, in great measure founded on misinterpretations and on a partial reading of his writings, which makes Bacon a continuer of scholasticism, a stranger to the great mechanistic idea which was then at the point of taking over the direction of the sciences. I will recall only the importance which at all times in his life he attributes to the progress of *mixed mathematics*. All that one can legitimately presume of him is that, as he advanced in age, he saw in the mechanical interpretation an ideal less near, less immediately realizable, than he had thought at the beginning. Perhaps also he feared imitating the defect with which he had reproached the ancients, that of formulating *ex cathedra* a definitive theory of nature. There is much, in his work, of that which will be called later a "positivist spirit," less attached to conclusions than to method. Descartes, a more absolute character, believed he could reveal the secret of the world in a categorical fashion; but it is precisely here that discredit came to his system, and almost to his name, in the very period which was the most inspired by his epistemology.

P.S. I reproduce here below, to spare readers whom this question may interest the research, the passage of the *Rules* and that of the *Valerius Terminus* to which I made allusion above:

"So what troublesome consequences could there be if—while avoiding the useless assumption and pointless invention of some new entity, and without denying what others have preferred to think on the subject—we simply make an abstraction, setting aside every feature of colour apart from its possessing the character of shape, and conceive of the difference between white, blue, red, etc., as being like the difference between the following figures or similar ones?



The same can be said about everything perceivable by the senses, since it is certain that the infinite multiplicity of figures is sufficient for the expression of all the differences in perceptible things.”<sup>23</sup>

“All bodies or parts of bodies which are unequal equally, that is in simple proportion, do represent whiteness...Absolutè equality produceth transparence; inequality in simple order or proportion produceth whiteness; inequality in compound or respective order or proportion produceth all other colours, and absolute or orderless inequality produceth blackness; *which diversity, if so gross a demonstration be needful, may be signified by four tables: a blank, a chequer, a fret, and a medley*; whereof the fret is evident to admit a great variety.”<sup>24</sup>

---

[M. Lalande’s article appeared in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* v. 19 (1911): 296-311. All translations of *The Discourse on Method* are from *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, v. 1, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987). Citations are by part and paragraph number. Translations from *Novum Organum* are from *Novum Organum With Other Parts of the Great Instauration*, trans. and ed. by Peter Urbach and John Gibson (Chicago: Open Court, 1994). Citation is by Part and Aphorism number. Other citations, unless otherwise indicated, refer to *The Works of Francis Bacon* ed. by James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (London, 1872), hereafter abbreviated ESH. References to the English in parenthesis by volume and page number; citations following, in braces, are to the

Latin, cited by Lalande. I wish to thank Mr. Chester Burke and Mrs. Irena Datchev for their help.—Trans.]

---

Notes:

- 1 “Tantum sane ut merito hominem homini Deum esse, non solum ex auxilio et beneficio, sed ex status comparatione dici possit.” *Cogitata et Visa*, ESH, III, p. 611. *Ex status comparatione*, as is clear from the context, is applied to that which man owes to humanity taken as a whole, that is to say, to the progress of civilization. [Since “the whole substance of the *Cogitata et Visa* is reproduced in the first book of the *Novum Organum*” (ESH, I, pp. 78-79), here follows the relevant passage in translation from that work: “...the difference [between the life of men in “the most civilized province of Europe, and in the most savage and barbarous part of New India”] is so great as truly to justify the saying ‘Man is a god to men,’ not only for the help and benefits he can bring, but also by comparing their conditions.”—*Trans.*]
- 2 After reminding us of Demosthenes’ saying that the first quality of the orator is action, the second, action, and the third, action, Bacon adds: “Wonderful like is the case of Boldness in civil business; what first? Boldness; what second and third? Boldness.” *Essays*, XII. [“Of Boldness.” The French cited by Lalande in the text is as follows: “De l’audace, encore de l’audace, toujours l’audace.”—*Trans.*]
- 3 Charpentier, Brochard, Landormy.
- 4 Cf. also, II, 12, [*Discourse on Method*—*Trans.*] the example of the child who, having calculated a sum, knows as much about it as anyone. “In short, the method which instructs us to follow the correct order, and to enumerate exactly all the relevant factors, contains everything that gives certainty to the rules of arithmetic.”

- 5 [The work referred to here is the 1623 *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum*. Lalande refers to the work as *De Dignitate*; I have used the more familiar designation, *De Augmentis*, i.e., *The Advancement of Learning*. This writing is a Latin translation and expansion of a work published in 1605, in English, usually referred to as *The Proficiency and Advancement of Learning—Trans.*]
- 6 The metaphor is found already in Seneca, *De vita beata*, 1. Many similarities between Bacon and Descartes must derive from common readings.
- 7 I cite the *Essays* according to the Latin text titled *Sermones fideles*, which is the final form Bacon gave them. But was this Latin text published separately before the edition of *Opera moralia et civilia*, produced by Rawley in 1638? This is doubtful. [Here follows the English text, cited above —*Trans.*] Baudoin, who made a French translation of the *Essays* in 1619 under their first form, published a second edition in 1626 conforming to the text of 1625, and a third edition in 1633.
- 8 Cf. “Francis of Verulam reasoning thus with himself...,” prefacing the *Great Instauration*: “[T]hat entire human reasoning that we apply in the investigation of Nature is poorly put together and constructed, but is like some magnificent great pile without any foundation.” *Novum Organum* p.3. {ESH I, p, 121}
- 9 Bacon opposes to this a few lines further the following: “But if a man of ripe years, unimpaired faculties, and a mind well purged should apply himself afresh to experience and particulars, from him we can expect better things.” See the last lines of part 2 of the *Discourse*: “I thought I ought not try accomplish it until I had reached a more mature age than twenty-three, as I then was, and until I had first spent a long time in preparing myself for it. I had to uproot from my mind all the wrong opinions I had previously accepted, amass a variety of experiences to serve as the subject-matter of my reasonings....”

- 10 It was already the opinion of Gassendi (*De logicae finae*, chap. vi) that the destructive part of philosophy is the same in Bacon and in Descartes.
- 11 It is necessary to note that in *Novum Organum* I, 127, Bacon declares that the method is applicable in principle to the moral sciences— Logic, Ethics, Politics, no less than to the sciences of nature. But this is not otherwise in Descartes: “[P]eoples who...have made their laws only in so far as they were forced to by the inconvenience of crimes and quarrels, could not be so well governed as those who from the beginning of their society have observed the basic laws laid down by some wise law-giver.” II, 1.
- 12 This is evidently in Bacon an echo of Seneca, *De vita beata*, 2: “Human affairs are not so happily ordered that the majority prefer the better things.” The psychological explanation of the matter is only added to it.
- 13 Cf. The whole *Scala intellectus* where Bacon explains in what respect his doubt resembles that of the sceptics, and in what it differs. (ESH, II, pp. 687-89).
- 14 There exists a first kind of *spiritus* in all chemical bodies (*spiritus mortualis*, or *spiritus crudus*); it plays a role analogous to that of *matière subtil* in Descartes; furthermore, there exists a second kind in living bodies (*spiritus vivus*, or *spiritus vitalis*). *Hist. vitae et mortis*, Canon IV, (ESH, II, p. 214) [English translation in ESH V, p. 322 —*Trans.*].
- 15 Bacon indicates further on that this doctrine is that of Telesius and of his disciple, Donius. It would be interesting to know if Descartes knew them directly. Elsewhere Ellis remarks that with regard to Donius, the affirmation is not at all exact, and that in reality, in a discrete manner, he rejected the rational soul altogether. (ESH I, p. 606, n. 1).

- 16 This phrase ends an enumeration of ritual prescriptions, ancient or Christian, which have the purpose, according to him, of acting on the dispositions of the soul through the medium of the body. The end of the paragraph is dedicated to showing that this dependance does not disprove immortality of the soul.
- 17 In the remaining part of this chapter, he develops at length "all the remedies with which nature has provided us." Cf. also *The History of Life and Death*.
- 18 "We can no longer deny, in an age when we aim at the constitution of a general physics, that Descartes, the great geometer who discovered the principle of the unity of mathematical methods, was also the great speculative physicist who, *the first* since the schools of antiquity, gave us a glimpse of the unity of the physical world and taught the meaning of a mechanical explanation of phenomena." Renouvier, "La physique de Descartes," *Critique philosophique*, 3e année, I, p.2
- 19 Natural philosophy or physics. Cf. Descartes: "Thus the whole of philosophy is like a tree. The roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches emerging from the trunk are all the other sciences, which may be reduced to three principal ones, namely medicine, mechanics and morals." *Principles*, Preface, para. 12. In the passage cited, Bacon intends medicine and the "knowledge of ourselves."
- 20 These "forms of the first class" are all the "schematisms" or "motions," as Bacon has just said in the previous paragraph; and he adds "... (like letters of the alphabet) are not many and yet make up and sustain the essences and forms of all substances." On the true meaning of form in Bacon, see *Quid de mathematica, vel naturali, vel rationali, senserit Bacon Verulamius*. Latin thesis, Paris, Alcan, 1889.

- 21 “But since the divisions of knowledge are not like several lines that meet in one angle; but are rather like branches of a tree that meet in one stem (which stem grows for some distance entire and continuous, before it divide itself into arms and boughs); therefore it is necessary before we enter into the branches of the former division, to erect and constitute one universal science, to be as the mother of the rest, and to be regarded in the progress of knowledge as portion of the main and common way, before we come where the ways part and divide themselves.” *De Aug.* III, 1; ESH, IV, p. 337 {ESH I, p. 540}. It is true that in this passage the common trunk is not physics but First philosophy, a kind of metaphysical logic of little interest.
- 22 The complete title is: “Valerius Terminus of the Interpretation of Nature, with the annotations of Hermes Stella.”
- 23 *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, XII
- 24 *Valerius Terminus*, XI, (ESH, III, p. 237) [In Lalande’s text there follows a French translation of this passage.—*Trans.*]

The first of these is the fact that the
 author has not only a deep knowledge of
 the subject, but also a deep knowledge of
 the human mind. This is evident from the
 way in which he deals with the various
 aspects of the problem. He does not
 merely state facts, but he explains them
 in a way that is both clear and
 convincing. His arguments are
 well-structured and easy to follow.
 This is a book that is worth reading
 for anyone who is interested in
 the subject.

The second of these is the fact that the
 author has not only a deep knowledge of
 the subject, but also a deep knowledge of
 the human mind. This is evident from the
 way in which he deals with the various
 aspects of the problem. He does not
 merely state facts, but he explains them
 in a way that is both clear and
 convincing. His arguments are
 well-structured and easy to follow.
 This is a book that is worth reading
 for anyone who is interested in
 the subject.

THE END OF THE MATTER

The third of these is the fact that the
 author has not only a deep knowledge of
 the subject, but also a deep knowledge of
 the human mind. This is evident from the
 way in which he deals with the various
 aspects of the problem. He does not
 merely state facts, but he explains them
 in a way that is both clear and
 convincing. His arguments are
 well-structured and easy to follow.
 This is a book that is worth reading
 for anyone who is interested in
 the subject.

*Pluck it, and the initial conditions result  
in a pattern on the string, moving back  
and forth in waves.*

Nor can I walk.  
I move back and forth in waves between  
the places I have charted and the seawall.

*Height, breadth, depth, length and frequency...*

The seawall. At the water's edge I saw  
what the symbols meant, shown how in nature  
the equation balanced first, long before  
the sciences forced their rule. I remembered,  
and I have taken for my creed that

*... the directions in which nature allows us movement  
can be described in mathematics like a name in stone.*

I believed I understood then. I understand now.

When we walk we measure our steps  
like a child with two cups strung  
window to window.

When we swim we know  
the waves that emanate from the face with their  
brief sections of order hold a power prophets  
have watched dwindle in exhausted ripples  
from *Beth-zatha* pool.

What nature has allowed  
is still etched in the stone of our mathematics.  
Conditions I once described in strides  
return unadulterated by my steps.  
So I am deriving the wave equation still,  
for my behaviour betrays suspicion  
of descriptions, solutions, and time.

## Approaching Inertia

Solstice, Christmas, Saint Sylvester,  
Epiphany—they're all behind us,  
and the days keep stretching longer  
by unreadable degrees.  
This is the lag time, the motionless  
long haul, the case of cabin fever,  
at one time meditative,  
conducive to work and sobering,  
but now gone on too long.  
The year begins to write itself  
into a thirteen line sonnet,  
five feet short of a final couplet  
and one lasting impression of loss.  
It is as quiet here as the streets  
on New Year's day, but not from any  
touch of mine. This end that feigns  
beginning is the worst culprit,  
tiring right from the start, like waking  
up with unresolved trouble  
on the mind, motes in one eye,  
boards in the other, indifference  
(the rule) stirring halfway between  
bed and the bath, where the honest  
mirror flicks back the truth that Newton  
failed to see, but the steam engine  
and a snowing paperweight  
proved centuries later: You can't  
get something for nothing. And what  
is given up falls short of every  
need. What makes the train budge?  
Who lifts the stone?  
The heat that rises from the log  
consumed to ashes now is gone,  
and nowhere is there more created  
to replace it. I don't dream  
of listless whiskey rocker porches,  
but I don't favor the cold. And I  
believe a man should be allowed to fear.

## Always After Shooting

Always after shooting we return  
by way of the barn that blazed the summer  
our cousin and his wife-to-be loved,  
smoked, and slept, and brought down everything  
around them in ashes. They got out,  
singed and frightened, but the animals—  
cows, chickens, rabbits and a goat—burned,  
and I can't say if our uncle ever thought  
his grandson was an even trade.  
The man broke away from the family  
like the stones on the wall along the drive.  
The fields grew head high, went to seed,  
spilled, and were left wild. Only Matthew  
and I ever step foot on this land anymore,  
and then only to empty shotgun shells  
into skeet and boxes propped against  
the rise above the pond.

Some years ago,  
in the fall, we unloaded our chambers  
into a flock of passing doves and brought  
down three (one we had to shoot again).  
The exhausted sky kept echoing the blasts,  
and the ground seemed to cringe each time  
we took a step toward our kill. We reached  
the carcasses that were strangled deep  
within the grass from the momentum of their  
fall, and with a barely audible "*christ*"  
from underneath our breaths we started kicking  
dirt and the remains into a hole  
we dug with our heels. Then we walked out.  
As we passed the charred foundation walls  
of the barn, I thought about the night  
of the fire, and the fragile balance  
of the living on this farm, tipped  
so easily with a dirty finger.  
It was a while before we went back,  
but we did. The fields and grass grew thick

enough in one month to cover up our  
old paths. Animals carried away the rest.



## Recollection and Composure

Eva T. H. Brann

Douglas Allanbrook came to St. John's, Annapolis in 1952, in his early thirties. It was here that his two sons were born, Timothy and John, to whom this memoir\* is dedicated. Here he has been teaching for four and a half decades, here he composed his musical oeuvre, and here too, seemingly out of the blue, he wrote an accomplished autobiographical book. In it he reflects on the difference between composing music and recollecting a life:

It is a consolation that in music there are no people, no facts, no places, nor is there, in any comprehensible way, any meaning, while in our own stories we are stuck with intractable memories which only the boldest fiction can unite into a whole. When a piece of music is composed, it is complete, all wrapped in a tight cocoon, awaiting its release into the sunlight of performance. For the listener it is a portable memory that can be run through again and again, a vicarious and safe experience, so utterly different from the course of a life, which seems hardly a whole, composed as it is of pathos and shameful bits, of brief joys played out against the backdrop of wars and politics (p. 41).

It was at this college, then, that the composition, the cocooning, not of his life but of a decade of his life, was accomplished and here that this one decade was fitted into the whole and made "a portable memory" for the reader.

This place, the college, is mentioned only twice in passing as an obscure little safe-harbor whose life, looked at from a distance, is bizarre and out of the way: "When work and marriages and children begin, the lights dim, the landscape becomes habitual" (p. 267). Such dimming is a phenomenon familiar to everyone whose life has been front-loaded by history. All that matters seriously, all day-by-day responsibilities and permanent attachments, extensive in time and local in place—the "long plateau" (p. 268) of human reality—are muted compared to the vivid flashings of retrospection into a more

---

Eva T. H. Brann is Dean at St. John's College, Annapolis.

\*See *Naples: A Memoir* by Douglas Allanbrook, A Peter Davison Book, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York and Boston, 1995, 269 pp.

intense and dangerous time. Yet it is in this relative safety of habitual reality that imagination and memory accomplish their joint work of fixing the throng of memories into this one memoir. Here experience is recollected if not in tranquility then at least in domesticity, the evidently transferable craft of composition is perfected, the private readings and the public studies that give memory a frame are pursued. The book acknowledges this ordinary and orderly ground of its genesis tacitly but to my sense powerfully.

The decade so emblazoned on the composer's memory is that of his twenties, his European years. He was a gifted, already well-trained and well-read, receptive and very young American, abroad in a frightful war and again in a post-war time that was especially golden for Americans. Whether he found himself in a hell or in an idyll, this musician, as soldier and veteran, allowed things to happen to him. Hence the surface texture of the book is thick-woven not only with incidents, involvements, and vignettes, but also with returns, resolutions, recursions, delightfully trivial and heartrendingly significant: On the troop transport to Africa, Private Allanbrook's cherished watch, his father's gift, is stolen, only to be miraculously retrieved by a protective buddy at a crap game inland from Oran. A repulsive fascist major provokes his own bullet-riddled death while in bed with his mistress, and his wife later turns up, the keeper of an open house for Allied officers, as the neighbor of the writer's Florentine friends. There are parallel river and bath idylls, classical in their nude disportings, in Texas and in Tuscany. There are the three cosmopolitan Fates that preside over the Fulbright Fellow's return, his Neapolitan landladies: the Vesuvius-hating Hungarian witch, the Polish snob, and the desparate and decent Swiss spinster, Erika of fond memory.

Then there are the deeply wished for resolutions and recursions. For eighteen years, back in Annapolis, the composer has carried a restless guilt for the abrupt dumping of Laura, his "Neapolitan Bette Davis," a high-strung and wilful girl, who was superseded by his wife-to-be, the placid nymph, Candida. Finally he sets forth to seek out Laura's solid and straight sister, who puts two decades of doubt to rest with the casual and candid words: "She had a bad character, you know. We were so afraid you would marry her!" (p. 42).

But above all, there is the ever-returning sight of Vesuvius erupting and the sound of Leonard calling.

Is this book a memoir or a fiction, then? It is a work of genuine memory, such as is possible for those to whom life is an occasion for art, for life always supplies amenable incidents to its receptive composers. Does the consummating imagination rectify or falsify? The question is pitched too low: The imagination actualizes the merely real; it makes a fact into an event.

Nonetheless, this book is a prodigious feat of detailed memory. No doubt this or that *aide memoire* was to hand: regimental records, maps, perhaps letters, but much of the work has the bright clang of exactly recalled fact.

Particularly notable is the musician's remembering ear for the ritualistic obscenity and pungent accuracy of G. I. speech. Here is a caution to stay out of the shipboard crap game, given to young Allanbrook by the protective Sergeant Kovacs: "... You'd be skunked and them punks would find some way to screw you once they seen your honest little puss (p. 91)." The reader will find said visage on the frontispiece and take the sergeant's point. It should be noted that the writer's own cadences can be eloquent and his turns mordantly witty: "Carnal knowledge of our own likely demise...became part of our soul's equipment" (p. 127).

The order of telling mimes the associations of memory, whose contiguities are not of time but of theme. One might say that the format is Proustian, were it not, for all its artfulness, far less contrived.

For example, one of the most memorable incidents is the officer's gazelle hunt in Africa before the Italian invasion, to which Private Allanbrook is detailed as liaison with the Arab guide. The officers blast away from jeeps with Browning automatic rifles (a weapon no good in true combat), and the telling of the slaughter immediately puts the writer in mind of a later gratuitous lethal sport, the gunning down of an escaping carabinieri sergeant running like a rabbit before some Partisan boys and Allanbrook's own fellow-soldiers.

But the memory does not only project the present onto the future. It also paints a backdrop of history for the current event. The hated Colonel Fry has established regimental headquarters at the Cistercian Abbey of Fossanova, where there is also a field hospital in which very

young soldiers lie dying, and that brings to mind a different death: Here Thomas Aquinas ended his life, having lived it.

For me the most moving overlay of remembered and present sights occurs one hazy morning, when the regiment, having stumbled (among the first to arrive) into Rome by night, sleeps by the Tiber, and the soldier wakes up to see across the river the sepia print of Castle Sant' Angelo that hangs in his parents' living room in Melrose. Everyone of a certain age knows that print and can envision that veduta, in which the Eternal City is seen through a mist of home and history class.

For all the artful interleaving of time, the central sequence of events largely occupies the middle six chapters of the book's ten: induction, training, passage, the Italian campaign, and its often bloody aftermath. The mood is stark and darkly comic, and this part of the account has more the air of factual truth. The reason is that here the memoir serves as memorial for the many dead fellow soldiers and for a few good officers.

Douglas Allanbrook was a real soldier, who earned the four stripes of a staff sergeant, was not above coveting the six of a master sergeant, and took a proper pride in his bronze star medal. His loyalty is with the men and his perspective that of a GI. It is the strong bond of the faithful and friendly "we" (p. 78), for Allanbrook the Intelligence and Reconnaissance platoon to which his able map reading assigned him. His soldier's honor is that of loyalty to his friends. The one circumstance that exhausts his always liberal sympathy is the German POW's ready and detailed betrayal of their comrades' positions. Their incomprehensible lack of honor taints all Germans for this soldier who has no independent conception of Nazism.

The account of the campaign, otherwise so grim, abounds in affectionate portraits of all his American fellow-soldiers, each a highly personal realization of a recognizable ethnic and local type. It is also suffused with a kind of abashed pleasure that this near-sighted, slight, musical, well-read youngster takes in the affectionate esteem of his buddies.

But then there are the "them,"—a rogues' gallery of stupid, bigoted, pathetic, posturing officers, not least among them the General Clark who got them to Rome first—at a terrible cost in casualties.

The redeeming figures are some fatherly, competent noncoms, and the anti-hero, the trusted and sidelined Major Melcher, “a prudent manager, not a ‘leader’; but all of us, in a pickle, would have chosen to follow him and not our fearless colonel” (p. 168); the colonel goes on to become a general, while the major is kept on, humiliated, after returning from a three-day breakdown. This is a passage that should be required reading in the services’ leadership courses.

Though the horror of the march through Italy does not abate, because the protective carapace of body and soul wears ever thinner and never thickens with time, there are redeeming moments of wild absurdity and comic relief. One is particularly close to my heart because I recognize it. A package reaches Allanbrook in a cold Christmas season on the Apennines, sent by his mother who is a teetotaler. It is a moldy fruit cake with a bottle of Scotch secreted within; no sooner was it sent than she grew anxious lest he get drunk and wander into enemy lines. My brother was also a foot soldier, who uncannily resembled Douglas in point of youth, slightness of build, near-sightedness, musicality, literariness, and in winning the affectionate regard of his buddies—and even as I write I hold in my hand the very same combat infantryman’s badge that Douglas is wearing on the frontispiece. I sent him—was he stationed in Panama or already fighting in Korea?—a similar camouflaged package (only it was gin) and then worried similarly about the effects.

Another saving grace was music, both as a respite from war and as a way to male friendship and female companionship. At the infamous gazelle hunt, the cultivated Arab guide discovers Allanbrook reading an inscribed Stravinsky score sent by his legendary teacher, Mlle. Boulanger, and a sudden friendship flares up. Wherever a piano is to be found, Bechstein or unstrung upright, the GI goes straight for it, carried out of the present by the music, but not entirely unaware of the *éclat* produced by a creditable rendition of the Waldstein played by one of the uniformed liberators better known for their high spirits than their cultivation.

For all the interludes, death is ever-present in this central section on war and therefore, unavoidably, present in the framing sections on peace. The book is not only a memorial to the many dead but also an exorcism, half a century later, of some particular ghosts. It appears

to have succeeded at least in dispersing a recurrent nightmare: like a Charon forever ferrying but never successfully landing the dead on the far side of the Styx, the dreamer sails back and forth to Naples on the Atlantic betwixt wake and sleep, war and peace, quick and dead; he feels himself to belong in some part of body and soul to the world of the dead.

The book has a noble dust jacket, maroon, black and gold, framing a painting of Vesuvius erupting some century and a half before the writer's first sight of it. That is how the book begins: Private Allanbrook and his friend whom he alone calls Leonard—given names are rare in the army—together on the deck of the troop transport, watching an obliging Vesuvius erupting and further illuminated by the brilliant crisscross of anti-aircraft fire. Leonard and Jack, the radio repairman's bosom buddy, are the first "definite killings" (p. 135) of the platoon, shot by a distinguishable enemy, dead early, got at from behind. Vesuvius flaring up and Leonard calling to Allanbrook to come in the night—these are the visual and auditory images that haunt the book. They are signals from the undercurrent of feeling on which all the incident is borne along. The feeling is regret, the regret of insufficient response. Rich as the book is in involvements and affairs, strong as its young protagonist was in event-eliciting receptivity, it is this sense of incomplete love that moved the writing of the memoir and tethered its memories: "Remorse was the fixative" (p. 103), but, the writer asks, for what? Was it all in the imagination? There is so powerful, so near-theological a sense of the sins of omission—moral sloth, apathy, narcissism, "communion...rejected" (p. 104)—not just toward this friend but toward other friends and lovers, men and women, that the question is rightly set aside. No baseless regrets for fancied young failures could have given the book its poignant gravity.

Although the dates are deliberately out of order, there is a clear temporal progress to the tale. It is to be found in the three successive completions of the title "See Naples." First: See Naples—and Die; that is in 1944 when Vesuvius is the gate to living hell and likely death. Second: See Naples—and Live; that is in 1952, when Vesuvius greets the Fulbright Fellow returning to the golden and event-laden time that post-war Europe could then offer a young American in Naples.

Third: See Naples—and Recollect; those are the ensuing four decades of revisiting in search of resolution and remembrance lasting until the final composition of the memoir and the achievement at least of resignation and lucidity: “I see Naples clearly now I am old” (p.268.)

Yet there is a hint of further consolation. In his forties, the revenant, on his way back from the settling of Laura’s ghost, made a pilgrimage to Elea, the city of Parmenides. And, by one of those felicitous coincidences of his life, he overhears on the beach what he is listening for, a message of Being. A teacher walks to and fro with his pupil, discoursing, it seems, ever more emphatically on “*essere*” (p. 44). This event is recalled at the close of the book:

What a solace it would be if some timeless essence, clear and lucid, were standing in back of our time-ridden lives, if all of our shifting loves were grounded in some apprehensible reality (p. 266).

The sentence is written, to be sure, in the conditional mood, but the book itself sounds a more affirmative music. For it intimates that some like solace may be found in artfully composing the passages of life into a “coherent and passionate whole” (p. 41).



# Reason's Parochiality: On Carl Page's Critique of Historicism

Richard Velkley

## I

That human reason is in some sense parochial cannot be seriously doubted. Carl Page's thoughtful and significant book, *Philosophical Historicism and the Betrayal of First Philosophy*\* takes on the task of defining that sense through a careful critique of one of the most prominent philosophical tendencies of the past century: the assertion of reason's radical parochiality as historical.

Before examining his argument, I note some of reason's parochialisms. The limiting qualifier "human" signifies that we know we are not divine reasoners, while the sort of reason we possess may or may not be akin to that of other beings as yet unknown to us. One of the great puzzles is how a power that has a grasp on universality manifests itself so locally in the universe. Why do only some beings possess it? Why these rather than others? And why as species with a plurality of members? Such questions relate to the problem of understanding the human being as a whole: How do this being's peculiar rational powers belong essentially (if they do) to its peculiar sentient, living, and bodily aspects? Neither ancient nor modern philosophy has answers to these questions. Aristotle tells us that we are wholes and yet the principle of this wholeness is very elusive: Are the ends of humans as living beings and the ends of thought the same?<sup>1</sup> The question "What is the *origin* of this peculiar human kind?" cannot even be asked on the basis of his metaphysics.

The "return to the ancients" is a siren song that may deafen us to the relevance of modern physical, biological and evolutionary inquiries to these questions. The relevance of such "empirical" investigations points to a certain importance of history for philosophy, as well. Since "nature loves to hide," the outcome of natural inquiries is unforeseeable. The uncovering of nature's secrets has been crucially

---

Richard Velkley is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Stonehill College.

\*The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995.

assisted by advances in techniques of widening human powers, the "technology" affording otherwise impossible access to Jupiter's moons, viruses, X-rays, quantum effects and black holes. No doubt the Baconian and Cartesian revolutions have in a fundamental way altered irreversibly our account of nature; but the alteration is not the result of philosophical thought alone. The unanticipated and indeterminate course of human discovery (which may at some point include the encounter with other intelligent forms of life) is a form of human history projected by modern principles. There has to be a certain rightness in the claim that Plato could not see some truths relevant to understanding our situation, and that time itself limits knowing. But perhaps "history" in the historicist sense of the context of moral and political beliefs dominant at a given time is not the most pertinent consideration. One suggestion, which may even be not un-Platonic in spirit: The fluctuating natural order of galactic expansion and contraction may be seen as a sort of instrument for extending human insight about nature, a *Technik der Natur*. If the natural order is not simply permanent and regular, can there be an absolute divide between nature and art? *Veritas filia temporis?*<sup>2</sup>

The Socratic turn to *logoi*, the phenomenological examination of the human lifeworld, the articulation of enduring features of human experience, will not solve the problem of the biological localization of reason, although such inquiries are necessary to prevent reductionist and narrow views of the *explanandum*, human reason. This points to another dimension of the parochiality of our reason (with which I end this preliminary meditation). Human reason pursues, and in a sense thus already possesses, certain kinds of wholeness that have no evident parallels in natural processes. This pursuit of wholeness (or *erōs*) is available to us only on the phenomenological level; the Socratic question is how that pursuit relates to "the whole" as such. Humans are fated to try to understand themselves and all beings in the light of wholes that exist only in speech or in the idea, thus in the light of what humans qua natural are *not*.<sup>3</sup> The turn to the *logoi* then is not merely provisional, since it is only through them that the never-to-be-realized character of human reason comes into view. When, how, and even whether the self-understanding of reason will become part of a complete account of nature is a Socratic question

still alive in contemporary debates about whether and how “objective” natural sciences can account for the “subjective” realm of consciousness. One must start with an acceptance of a *difference* (perhaps never to be bridged) between consciousness and other natural phenomena, for if the former had no ontological peculiarity there would be no puzzle needing a solution!

Both of these points (the investigation of nature as an indeterminate, open-ended history, and the problematic relation between human self-awareness and accounts of nature) bear a great deal on the theme of Page’s book, *Philosophical Historicism*. The progressive and “revolutionary” character of modern scientific inquiry has certainly promoted modern accounts of human reason as historical. But at the same time, the turn to history that is characteristic of thought called “historicist” is motivated in good part by a desire to protect the human experience of moral and political life from disruptive intrusions from that science. It has done so in accordance with doubts about the groundability of this experience in accounts of nature. I shall return to these considerations later in this review.

## II

The parochialism of reason stipulated by philosophical historicism (henceforth PH) is not a statement of *aporia* (such as the problems of the relation of reason to life and the body) but an attempt to resolve the question of the ends or purposes of human reason. Its solution however generates *newaporiai*. The stipulations are familiar: human reason is limited to the *hic et nun*, it cannot transcend the contingent temporal starting-points of inquiry, and thus it is “differentiated by history without remainder” (Page, 44). PH insists on reason’s inevitable temporal parochiality or historicity. Hence PH must regard the tradition of First Philosophy (henceforth FP) as in pursuit of chimeræ, for FP is based on “the conviction that the human intellect is in principle and by nature adequate to reality and its primary principles,” i.e. principles of a transtemporal order (3). Besides such primacy, FP upholds the noetic ideals of universality and Socratic self-knowledge. Yet PH is the heir of this tradition insofar as it offers

a comprehensive critique of reason's powers. Indeed it is the direct successor to the modern critique of reason which rejects the possibility of noetic adequacy to reality, but retains allegiance to FP's search for a universal self-accounting of reason. The critique of reason retains the ideal of reason's noetic adequacy to *itself*.

Unlike the pre-Hegelian critique of reason, PH temporalizes the categories of the understanding thus historicizing Kant's *squaestio juris* (59-60, 117); all the same it undertakes a comparable "justification" of reason (52-55). Page on a number of occasions employs the expression "the spirit of FP," as distinct from FP proper, to indicate points of contact between PH and FP (preeminently in the case of Heidegger; see 128, 143). Thus PH is not a mere break with FP, but an internal betrayal, claiming to provide a genuine renovation (not dismissal) of philosophy. Page puts his leading question as follows: "As an interpretation of the relationship between historicity and reason, the single most important question PH must face is that of its adequacy as an account of human reason's actuality" (6). Here is a difficulty: if PH should happen to have an adequate account of reason, would it not be genuine FP (indeed, the only true FP)? And if its account is inadequate, then why is it a "betrayal," rather than just an imperfect form of FP?

Page precedes his account and critique of PH proper with a review of other varieties of the "historicist gesture": Karl Popper's account of historicism as the "demonization of history," the conditioning of cultural knowledge by history in the classical historicisms of Friedrich Meinecke and Ernst Troeltsch, and Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge. None of these doctrines is genuine PH since their particularist or procedural approaches to history do not undertake to show (or in Popper's case, to criticize) the conditioning of all powers of reason by history. Page's aim in presenting them is to underline the self-conscious comprehensiveness of genuine PH, of which three recent representatives are closely scrutinized: Joseph Margolis, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Richard Rorty. A general critique of PH as self-refuting emerges from this examination. Yet behind these figures looms the great figure of Martin Heidegger; to him Page must turn for a "rehabilitation of historicism's motivating

insights" (128) of which Page intends to make a "determinate negation" preserving what is valid in PH (6, 128).

Still further behind Heidegger is Hegel, the second figure of the "rehabilitative" inquiry which closes the book; these two thinkers offer "the most powerful ontologies of historicity that have been elaborated to date" (132). Notably Page's review of genuine PH does not include discussions of Dilthey and Nietzsche, who surely belong in a complete account. This is because Page in fact does not seek to give a full genealogy; Page's purpose is strictly philosophical, and his choice of figures is made for the sake of his argument. The focus on Hegel and Heidegger is adequate, in his view, to disclose the motives of historicist ontology. But a study of Nietzsche can shed invaluable light on some basic motives; I shall say more on this later. And as a smaller cavil, I think some of the space accorded to the unphilosophical historicists (Meinecke, Troeltsch, Mannheim) might justly have been allotted to Dilthey, as the leading figure in the methodological debates about natural science and *Geisteswissenschaften*. For in his "typology of world-views," Dilthey clearly discloses the practical motivation for the turn to historical *Grundwissenschaft*: the failure of natural science to offer accounts of human purpose or visions of the ends of life.

Page adduces three recent figures (Margolis, Gadamer, Rorty) as evidence for the "emerging consensus" in Anglophone and Continental philosophy around "the conviction that what is now called practical rationality is the ruling form of all human understanding and that its virtues are the highest virtues of the intellect" (47). In the Anglo-American scene the primacy of practical rationality runs through anti-foundationalist accounts of knowledge (H. Putnam, C. Taylor), Neo-Aristotelian classical scholarship (M. Nussbaum), Kant scholarship (O. O'Neill, S. Neiman), and ethics (B. Williams, A. MacIntyre), although historicist approaches are not the rule in these areas. Kant, pragmatism, and (and only once mentioned by Page) the later Wittgenstein's view of language as the repository of cultural practices determinative of meaning, are pervasive sources, probably more than major historicist philosophers. Indeed it may be said that PH is a more radical version of a much broader tendency.

## III

With his three figures as his departure-point, Page develops subtle variations on the theme of PH's self-refutation. Contrary to the explicit conclusion of reason's inevitable parochiality, PH's mode of arguing is a comprehensive rational self-account, without which it cannot present a binding limitative thesis about knowledge. But if reason is necessarily constrained by contingency, it should be unable to make universal claims about such constraint. Or to use words of Emil Fackenheim cited by Page, "the reduction to historicity, were it total, could not come to consciousness" (108). The fact that PH has "no right to its universal idiom" (110) precipitates the freefall into nihilism so evident in Rorty's writing, where the only constraints on thought arise from the "vocabularies" we happen to use. If this is all we have, how can Rorty say others should alter their vocabularies to suit his? More moderate "conciliatory pragmatists" like Margolis wish to assure thought of a common "interim stability" without reduction to chaos, but lacking any grasp of the universal they cannot carry this off

Yet Page does not finish off PH as quickly as this suggests. Interestingly, he does not pursue the suggestion of Strauss that PH must implicitly, to avoid blatant self-refutation, assume a quasi-Hegelian absolute moment of comprehensive insight. But he attributes to PH a more subtle third possibility, a Kantian type of strategy which I believe is more to the point. PH need not, it seems, grant a special exemption giving knowledge-status to its own universal claim if that claim presumes only that the universal constraint on reason is intelligible, while not knowable. The universal claim is then a "regulative ideal" grounded not in theoretical insight but in alleged practical necessity. There is then no outright self-contradiction in PH if it makes a "distinction between the historicist scenario and human knowledge of the scenario" (93). Inevitable parochiality militates against universal knowledge-claims, but not against universal practical-regulative claims. Surely something like this has to be the ground for the striking fact that historicists have not been much disturbed by all of the talk since Husserl of their apparent self-refutation. But this does entail that ultimately PH is based on a "leap of faith" to its universal claim (96).

This “practical faith” at the basis of PH is a fatal weakness in Page’s eyes. His argument against it, at one point, is similar to Hegel’s argument against Kant’s claim that practical reason has primacy. In other words, Page is at times inclined to refute the claim that rational necessities are available to us through self-knowledge without noetic adequacy to reality. Indeed Page’s strong sympathy for Hegel is quite apparent. Hegel’s thought, of course, is not an instance of PH since he regards reason’s historical parochiality as only provisional. Hegel, unlike PH, has more right to the universal idiom that stipulates reason’s being conditioned by time and history; he has a metaphysics of time that can undergird such an idiom. Absolute knowing avoids the vitiating effects of inescapable contingency. As when Hegel criticizes Kant, Page argues against PH that its assertion of a limit to reason implies that it knows something beyond that limit. Or, limit-drawing implies a metaphysical stance (absolute knowledge of reason’s nature) that PH tries, at the same time, to disavow.

But perhaps the real point is this: One cannot allege the necessity of a universal practical-regulative idea without having *some* knowledge of reason as requiring it. This knowledge (contra Hegel) may imply only knowledge of some feature of human reason without any more comprehensive metaphysics, thus without absolute knowledge of human reason. But it is knowledge of a universal all the same, and to rely on it contradicts historicist claims of pervasive contingency. PH, it could be said, inconsequently grafts a universal Kantian regulative idea on unrestricted cultural relativism. Its alleged “leap of faith” is a practical ideal that makes sense only as a rational insight about reason’s nature, which PH should be unable to allow itself. On the other hand PH will not refute itself if it makes a true leap of faith with respect to something radically particular (insight about particular deities, say). But then it will also not be a philosophical doctrine about knowledge and reason.

#### IV

In my view the most interesting and effective part of Page’s account of PH is his challenge to it on the non-Hegelian ground (without any move toward FP as the claim of noetic adequacy to

reality) that it simply misrepresents human reason. The critique is grounded in self-knowledge. At these points Page indicates that the issue revolves around the practical imperative governing PH and distorting reason's potentiality. What is that imperative? Injunctions against trying "to escape history" come up most frequently (50, 66, 71). These are related to calls to "avoid fatuous abstractions of rationalistic and transcendental thinking" (84) and to proposals for "taming reason" in its drive for metaphysical knowledge (77). Gadamer states the broad theme with learning and eloquence when he counsels philosophical thinking to strive for "the sense of what is feasible, possible, correct, here and now," in connection with the Enlightenment's misguided critique of prejudice (63, 68).

Such pronouncements show that recent manifestations of PH continue the efforts of Vico, Hume, Burke and Herder to reconcile theory and practice by appeals to the primacy of custom, tradition, and folk-wisdom against the disruptive speculations of FP. In reality, those efforts were continuing the modern cause of Bacon and Descartes by other means: to bring philosophical speculation down to earth through harnessing theory to the relief of man's estate. The reaction in many eighteenth century authors against the new mathematical natural philosophy and attendant distortions of moral and political discourse was not, however, a rejection of the basic universalist and humanitarian telos governing modern philosophy. By attempting to make that project politically more prudent and "responsible," thinkers like Hume and Burke turned to "history" as the proper realm of action, the true "home," for human reason.

A further element in PH since Hegel, however, is the absorption of the Idealist notions of freedom originally inspired by Rousseau, with their claim to satisfy the deepest longings of FP. Absolute unity and totality of knowledge is, in Kant's formulation, attainable only through an account of reason as the spontaneous power of self-determination that projects ultimate ends. This emphasis on freedom as the only possible source of ends is what gives the post-Idealist tradition of PH its particular radicality and stringency, and what enables it to pose as the "renovation" of philosophy: practical reason is the true metaphysics. Hegel is the figure who brings this new account of freedom as the highest point of metaphysics into full

identity with history as the self-development of *Geist*. Thus in his account of political life as Objective Spirit or *Sittlichkeit*, Hegel reconciles the counterrevolutionary critique of “abstract thinking” in Burke and others with the revolutionary implications of autonomy in Rousseau, Kant, and Fichte.

To draw together these historical reflections, one could say that historicist thinking arises out of a twofold failure in the original modern effort to reconcile theory and practice, centering on its account of nature: The new account of nature failed as a basis for “phenomenological” accounts of human moral-political practice and discourse, and it failed as a source of “metaphysical” concepts of ultimate ends for reason. Both failures could be viewed as teleological deficiencies in the modern account of nature.

While Page does not explore this philosophical background to speculative Idealism, the reconciliation of theoretical reason with the requirements of practice is central to his reading of Hegel. This philosopher “seeks to reconcile reason’s moment of negativity, its infinite freedom from the given with the bounds...of the here and now”(155); Hegel confronts the “uncanny restlessness” of reason, “the immediate negativity of reflective, critical intelligence” that “produces a sense of homelessness” (161). By embedding critical reason in an historical context it cannot transcend, and arguing that spirit gradually evolves a context for complete self-knowing, Hegel’s doctrine produces a profound sense of reason being at home in the world. Unlike PH, which ties reason inescapably to contingency, the “noetic adequacy” of Hegel’s logic can consistently ground the coincidence of reason and history. Page all the same questions that claim to adequacy, or Hegel’s assertion of knowing that philosophy is necessarily concordant with the fate of the political community in which it arises (199-200).

This critique of Hegel brings to the fore the heart of Page’s argument with PH. This is not PH’s self-contradiction, or its failure to attain a noetically adequate account of reality. What PH shares with Hegel (who lacks PH’s metaphysical weakness) is the effort to domesticate the infinity of reason. On this issue even Hobbes has things better, for he grasps the character of human “rational imagination” distinguishing it from animal sensitive imagination: “the

ability to picture as yet unrealized possibilities" (110). Drawing the same lesson about reason from mathematics, Page argues that it is "incoherent to combine finitude as inevitable parochiality with the capacity to envision a totality of possibility" (111-112). But another aspect of infinity comes into focus, for which Plato, not Hobbes, is the authority, when Page asserts "there is no escape from the imperative toward illumination, toward seeing by the light of the Good" (123); simply to think the better "is to have an idea that creates an infinite distance, since *the* good thus becomes intelligible" (153; also 79). In sum, reason and speech institute a human distancing on the world which in principle has no limits. Such potential for distancing is never exhausted by the concrete actualizations of reason in history. The "betrayal of First Philosophy" is, it turns out, PH's evasion—for the most part—of this potential, not its rejection of metaphysics of first causes of being.

Indeed, if I understand Page correctly, this infinity of reason is incompatible with attaining the ideal of noetic adequacy to reality. The version of FP Page defends is hence not "Platonistic," but more truly Platonic (131, 154).<sup>5</sup> This enables Page to speak highly of claims in PH about "the hermeneutic character of human experience, the openness of inquiry and the nonalgorithmic character of progress, the value of discourse's nontheoretical ends, and the rationality tacit in tradition" (128). In the final analysis, Page is actually closer to Heidegger than to Hegel. Page thus credits Heidegger with having an acute sense of the negativity of reason or the radical freedom of philosophy, which places Heidegger poles apart from Gadamer's "good-natured optimism" about philosophy's accommodation with the present. Heidegger is more Socratic in avowing an element of irremovable homelessness in reason (150-155).

Yet Heidegger also is not true to his own insight when he insists on "fated" constraints over reason's openness, such that man as the site of Being's dual concealment-unconcealment loses any destiny of his own in Heidegger's later thought (152). Page expresses admiration for *Being and Time's* transcendental regress to the conditions of experience in the temporality of care, but questions the move already in this work toward regarding all objects of care as finite, temporal and mortal (147-149). Why must Heidegger suppress the

infinity of reason with the demand that every chosen fate be “local”? Heidegger encounters a clash of two imperatives: the infinite striving for the Good (the imperative to question the given), and the refusal to escape history (the imperative to affirm the given). His choice finally is for the second. What is the ground for that choice?

In my estimation the sentence that sheds most light on this matter is Page’s reflection (with reference to Plato’s *Phaedrus*) that Heidegger “reserves for philosophers the role of poet–prophet, following essentially in the footsteps of Nietzsche, who conceived the strategy of hiding philosophy’s negativity in art. *Amor fati* is the evident progenitor of *Gelassenheit*, though it serves a more vigorous sense of purpose” (152). This suggests that the deepest (hence less prevalent) level of PH is not the turn to practical reason that evades the infinity of reason, but the turn to art that would both transform and conceal, but not deny, infinity. Nietzsche and Heidegger suppose that only as poetic can philosophy be at home with homelessness, with philosophy’s radical freedom. The parochiality of poetic dwelling is then the necessary mask (but not the whole point) of philosophy; the philosopher sees through and past this mask in the very act of assuming it. Yet one may still inquire: is then the philosopher–poet’s insight not universal and in the spirit of First Philosophy?

---

#### Notes:

1. See S. Rosen, *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger* (New Haven, 1993), p. 37: “Strictly speaking, Aristotle’s doctrine of thinking casts no light on how individual human beings (‘substances’ in the earlier terminology) are able to cognize the forms that (in some sense or another) are universally enacted, not by their particular intellectual faculties, but by the propertyless or formless *nous*.”
2. See G. Gentile, *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento* (Florence, 1925), 224–248; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* I, 3; Bacon, *Novum Organum* I, 84; Kant, *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels*, III; compare with Plato, *Statesman* 268d–274e. From Fontenelle’s *Digression sur les anciens et les modernes* (1688) Gentile

quotes a passage that shows how such reflections may relate to later notions of history as self-actualizing *Weltgeist*: "Un bon esprit cultivé est, pour ainsi dire, composé de tous les esprits des siècles précédentes; ce n'est qu'un même esprit qui s'est cultivé pendant tout ce temps-là."

3. L. Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, 1953), pp. 145-46: "Human nature is one thing, virtue or the perfection of human nature is another. The definite character of the virtues and, in particular, of justice cannot be deduced from human nature. Human nature 'is' in a different manner than its perfection or virtue."
4. See among many T. Nagel, "Subjective and Objective," in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge UK, 1979); J. Searle, *Mind, Brains, and Science* (Cambridge MA, 1984). For recent entries in this debate, see H. Putnam's review of Galen Strawson, *Mental Reality*, in *London Review of Books*, 18/3 (8 February, 1996).
5. Also as regards the ideal of noetic self-adequacy, Page might acknowledge more difficulty in its attainment on non-historicist grounds. For some thoughts on this see P. Dews, "Modernity, Self-Consciousness and the Scope of Philosophy: Jürgen Habermas and Dieter Henrich in Debate," in *The Limits of Disenchantment: Essays on Contemporary European Philosophy* (London, 1995).

# To See The World Profoundly: The Films Of Robert Bresson

Shmuel Ben-Gad

Learning to *see*—habituating the eye to repose, to patience, to letting things come to it; learning to defer judgement, to investigate and comprehend the individual case in all its aspects. This is the *first* preliminary schooling in spirituality...

Friedrich Nietzsche

That a filmmaker can lift us to these levels of contemplation and speculation is proof of that filmmaker's greatness.

Andrew Sarris

Despite awards and high critical praise, the films of French minimalist Robert Bresson are screened much more rarely in the U.S. than those of many other directors of art films. However, there seems to be something of a Bresson boom of late. In 1994, *L'Argent* (1983), an adaptation of a Tolstoy short story, became available in subtitled video; that was followed by *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne* (1945), based upon a work by Diderot, and *Lancelot du Lac* (1974) in 1995; and in 1996 we have seen the similar release of *Une Femme Douce* (1969). He has made fourteen films in all, among which are two based upon works by Dostoevsky and two upon works by Georges Bernanos. He first attained his mature style in his fourth film, *Diary of a Country Priest* (1950), a style which he refined until it reached rarified heights in *L'Argent*.

What sets Bresson's work apart from that of virtually every other director is his insistence on filming only "real things." As he himself has written in his *Notes sur le Cinematographe* (1975), "To create is not to deform or invent persons and things. It is to tie new relationships between persons and things which are, and *as they are*." (Italics are

---

Shmuel Ben-Gad is a librarian at George Washington University and the author of "Robert Bresson: A Bibliography of Works By and About Him, 1981-1993," which appeared in the *Bulletin of Bibliography*.

in the original.) His minimalism is really a way of not “deforming” reality but of allowing us to concentrate on the real persons and things he presents to us. Indeed his films are a series of images of remarkable purity. Because he eschews mood music, as well as expressive camera angles and movements, and pares away inessential elements from his compositions and dialogue, he achieves what he calls “insignificant (non-significant) images.”

Wyndham Lewis can, I think, help us understand what this means. In his book *Men Without Art*, Lewis defends what he calls an “external” approach to art, in particular, to literature. He writes that if authors who relate their narratives internally—that is, by letting readers “into the minds of the characters” (like James Joyce or Henry James)—were painters, their works would consist of “plastic units...suffused with romantic coloration.” They would be overcharged with literary symbolism; their psyches would have got the better of their Gestalt—the result a sentiment, rather than an expressive form.” These imagined paintings by James and Joyce are the exact opposite of Bresson’s films. In Bresson’s minimalistic stylization—which is nothing if not rigorous form—there is an intense concentration on essential images but no symbolism, no romanticism, no spectacle. Instead, carefully chosen, spare images follow one upon the other and affect one another. It is precisely through this method that Bresson’s rigorous formalism is ultimately moving. He achieves emotional resonance not through expressive “coding” or rendering of images that provide the audience with cues both for interpreting and reacting to the images, but through a cool yet intense presentation of uncluttered compositions of images and natural sounds in a certain order.

Bresson also insists on realism in a less subtle way, namely, in his avoidance of acting. He does not use actors, and refers to the people who appear in his films as “models.” Through extremely precise direction of speech, movement, and gesture, and also much repetition before shooting scenes, he manages to have his models move and speak in an automatic way, that is to say, without attempting either to project or suppress emotion. While Bresson recognizes the legitimacy of acting in the theater, he does not approve of it in films, where he regards it as “inventing” or “deforming” persons. According

to him, it violates the particularity and purpose of the cinema—the most realistic of the arts—which is to show realities. Turning to his “Notes” once again, we read: “What our eyes and ears require is not the realistic persona but the real person.” And again, concerning models: “Movement from the exterior to the interior. (Actors: movement from the interior to the exterior.)” Acting is the projection of simulacra of emotions that the actor does not feel. It is a simulation meant to make visible and obvious what the character is supposedly thinking and feeling. There is a credibility to Bresson’s models: They are like people we meet in life, more or less opaque creatures who speak, move, and gesture. Bresson believes, and I concur, that the words he has his models utter and the movements and gestures he has them make in an automatic, non-intentional way, invariably, if subtly, evoke human depths because the models, after all, are human beings. Acting, on the other hand, no matter how naturalistic, actively deforms or invents by putting an overlay or filter over the person, presenting a simplification of a human being and not allowing the camera to capture the actor’s human depths. Thus what Bresson sees as the essence of filmic art, the achievement of the creative transformation involved in all art through the interplay of images of real things, is destroyed by the artifice of acting. For Bresson, then, acting is, like mood music and expressive camera work, just one more way of deforming reality or inventing that has to be avoided.

Bresson’s filmic universe is one of real, simply presented persons, objects, and sounds (no one uses the soundtrack more effectively than he), and each thing that is observed or heard is granted its own integrity; yet it is also wrapped up in the same mysterious realm as all the other items. It is a part of the genius of Bresson, through his composition of images and ordering of their presentation, that he discovers and captures the subtle strangeness of the mundane. His spare presentation of objects manages to reveal their essences and the mystery attached to them. As a whole, the universe he presents is a quiet, austere, mysterious one with the pervasive mysterious atmosphere evoked by the lack of acting and also of any other clues to, or explanations of, psychology and motivation, as well as by the remarkably unyielding concentration on bodies and objects. His universe seems cold and indifferent and also pregnant with possibilities, dominated by fate and with room for human freedom. It is, in fine, as ambiguous,

because as opaque, as the people in his films. In its ambiguity it is both frightening and awe-inspiring. Regarding story line, unlike Antonioni and the later Godard, Bresson's films have strong plots, although they are presented elliptically. Yet, ultimately, plot is in service of the minimalistic style, not vice versa.

While recognizing full well that Bresson's films are not at all didactic, it seems to me that in them Bresson provides us with a way of seeing, of relating to, the world. Bresson's filmic art, in fact, is a way of seeing. Whatever his personal belief concerning what may lie behind the images the world presents to us (and Bresson, a Christian, presumably believes in invisible realities as do, among others, more traditionally-minded Jews), in his films he has a profound respect for this "surface", if you will, of reality. That his austere, "external," and minimalistic style creates films of such passion (however restrained) and authentic interiority indicates, it seems to me, the only way for us to try to understand the world, to try to see it most profoundly. We do this not by avoiding or annihilating or even seeing through the images the world presents to us; we do it, on the contrary, by paying the closest attention to those images, by concentrating on seeing them with supreme clarity, and by doing so without any prior assumptions, which tend to cause us to discover only what we already think we know. (In an interview in which he discussed his deliberate decision not to explain, or even hint at, motivations and psychology of characters in his films, Bresson acutely remarked, "The psychologist discovers only what he can explain. I explain nothing.")

Bresson's art has often been called "spiritual," but I am inclined to think of it as highly materialist in that, as I have noted, it is most respectful of material reality. (What I mean may be illustrated by a notable instance in which his adaptation of the plot of his source material coincides with his materialist techniques. In the novel *Diary of a Country Priest* by Bernanos, the central character has a religious vision while walking alone. Shortly after that he faints and is assisted by a girl from his catechism class. In his film version, Bresson conflates the two incidents so that a vision never occurs. The priest faints and thinks he is having a supernatural visitation, but it turns out to be the girl kindly helping him in his need.) We know what we see. The more intensely and clearly we see, the more deeply

we know. What I call Bresson's materialist art, with its emphasis upon unadorned, undramatized images, is very far from a playful post-modern celebration of the superficial that provides striking images and spectacles in order to tease or overwhelm the visual sense. Rather, his precise, ordered presentation of carefully chosen and composed non-significant images invites the viewer to what Andrew Sarris calls "contemplation," though not a contemplation of vague, spiritual notions. It is rather, at least at first, of physical realities like faces and hands, doorways, and axes. If anything—"spiritual" or otherwise—exists beneath or behind material reality, if physical reality is in fact a surface, then the only possibility of knowing this other reality will be through a profound gaze at this surface. I want to be clear here that I am not claiming, or even trying to describe or explicate Bresson's own philosophy. It may be that he thinks the only way to indicate supernatural realities in filmic art is through an intensely materialist method, but believes some other ways of perceiving such realities exist in life. Yet I believe that a work of art does have a certain autonomy from its creator and thus I am trying here to understand and explicate what Bresson's films show us as films, not what Bresson the man may believe.

In Bresson's films (and the purer his art has become the more this is true) persons and objects are neither explained nor interpreted; nor is the universe which comprises them. We are presented tales whose meanings are left as unexplained as are the motives of the people in them. As Tom Milne, the fine English film critic, has said of one of Bresson's greatest films, *Une Femme Douce*, "By the end, in a sense, one is no wiser than before. Was it because he [the husband] loved her too much or too little, because he gave her too little money or too much, because he felt she was too good for him or not good enough? The extraordinary thing about the film is that any or all of these interpretations can be read into it..." (This first of his films in color is based upon a Dostoevsky tale which deals with the suicide of a young wife)

I have said that in my opinion Bresson's films provide us with a way of seeing, of relating to the world, and I have already discussed what I think that way of seeing is—namely, careful, contemplative attention to the essence of physical realities without prior assumptions. But relating to reality, as shown in Bresson's films, also involves, I think,

clearly recognizing the deeply enigmatic nature of what is real. To interpret is to impose meaning rather than to perceive it. I dare say that in Bresson's filmic universe there are no interpretations, only facts; in it, to perceive is to become aware how enigmatic is the universe and the human beings who dwell therein.

In addition to being considered a spiritual director, Bresson is also considered a dark, pessimistic one (and this is not, of course, a contradiction). The obvious reason for this is that conventional happy endings are rare in his films. Yet it seems to me that his rigorous minimalism and materialist method, which amazingly yield the most credible sense of mystery, are also causes. In an interview Bresson replied to the characterization of his films as pessimistic by saying, "The word 'pessimism' bothers me because it is often used instead of the word 'lucidity'." Many people are uncomfortable with lucidity. Many wish to interpret the sense of all-encompassing mystery in Bresson's films as intimations of an invisible reality behind the material universe and thus as offering hope. Yet I think it must be recognized even by such viewers that, if indeed there are such hints of the invisible in the films, both the hints and the realities are grand and awesome, not mawkish or easily comforting, and that the way to knowledge of them can be quite terrible. It is a widespread and natural phenomenon for people to seek some escape from materiality and its concomitant, death, and to look for hope in spiritual realities. But, in my opinion, to avoid materiality in this search is to fall into sentimentality at best and lunacy at worst. (It is interesting, at least for me, to recall that in the Jewish religious tradition speculations about redemption are quite varied but that one of them, and it is perhaps the oldest, portrays redemption in rather material terms: Jewish sovereignty over the entire Land of Israel and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.) Bresson's art, it seems to me, is rooted in the material and lucidly recognizes the importance of this "surface" of reality. It recognizes the resulting inescapably enigmatic nature of the universe to human beings. Bresson, an artist of the very highest order in my judgement, does not offer meanings, explanations, or answers but rather lucidity, reality, and profound mystery. Indeed I am bold to say that Bresson's films are not merely the most lucid made, they are, in essence, lucidity itself.