The St. John's Review

Volume 57.1 (Fall 2015)

The St. John's Review is published by the Office of the Dean, St. John's College, Annapolis: Christopher B. Nelson, President; Pamela Kraus, Dean. All manuscripts are subject to blind review. Address correspondence to *The St. John's Review*, St. John's College, 60 College Avenue, Annapolis, MD 21401-1687.

ISSN 0277-4720

Desktop Publishing
The St. John's Communications Office

Current and back issues of *The St. John's Review* are available online at http://www.sjc.edu/blog/st-johns-review

Contents

Essays & Lectures

Poem

Reviews

World Without Time

Eva Brann

Here is a theory of time. It is neither new to me nor new in the world. I formulated it for publication in 1999* and had it formulated for me, so I could make it my own, sixteen hundred years ago by Augustine in 399 C.E. and some three quarters of a millennium before that by Aristotle, post-335 B.C.E. There is a certain advantage in revisiting old thoughts, although they have become second-nature and have lost the footloose feel of thinking that is yet on the path to discovery: these long-held notions have also sloughed off some of their complexity and are more amenable to summary.

The theory is, first, that time is not a being, a thing, or a *substance* in the world, nor does it *operate* as a power, a force, or a destiny in our life. It has no external existence, and all speech attributing reality to it is unwittingly metonymic, meaning that the word "time" is used by a sort of obtuse poetry for processes that have better names of their own.

The theory has a second element, namely that it would be a better world, and we would be better off, if more people thought that time was unreal and spoke accordingly.

Before closing in on the gist of this theory, I want to acknowledge an intelligent resistance that a listener might feel arising within. If you have a notion proposed to you as true and are immediately told that it is also beneficial, shouldn't you rear up and resist as a matter of principle? Don't we keep ourselves honest by tinting our glasses grey? Isn't a truth that comes

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*Eva Brann, *What Then Is Time?* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999.

embellished with utility very suspect? Of course it is, because it might be nothing but a Pollyannaish optimism, a self-pleasing thoughtless this-is-the-best-of-all-possible-worlds" optimism. What I'll be proposing has behind it a sense that demands more reflection. I call it "ontological optimism." Ontology is the account of being. The very notion of Being requires a complement: Appearance. The true Being of which true philosophers strive to give an account comes to our attention as opposed to what only appears or is merely incidental. The two greatest philosophers of classical antiquity, Plato and Aristotle, were ontological optimists. They do not in the least think that everything *within* this world is always for the best, but they do think that its sources, be they at work from *beyond* or *within*, are wonderfully good and therefore attractive to our knowledge-hungry souls.

I've briefly set out a reason for not foreclosing on a proposed truth because it is beneficial to believe it – although in the later history of inquiry into the nature of things there will be those who make pessimism – a sense that things are as bad as possible – the test of truthfulness, because the way things are is in truth ugly. To deal with this split in the human sense of the world requires a lifetime's conversation. For now, I'll posit a guarded optimism.

There is a second misgiving that a canny listener might have: Does every truth want announcing? Shouldn't prudent people suppress some parts of what they feel compelled to believe? I'll give an example with major consequences. Our Declaration of Independence claims that "all men are created equal" in respect to "certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Just read Lincoln's speech on the Dred Scott Decision (1857) for his sense – a true believer's sense – of the vulnerability of the document's basic assertions, assumptions that have by now become even more questionable for us. For the Declaration grounds our equality in a common divine Creation, and that is no longer a faith to be taken for granted. Is the questionableness of the ultimate equality of human beings, then, a proper subject for public inquiry? Not on your life – not in principle and surely even less in fact. Some topics have to be left

alone if we're to live together. When you hear some of my claims about time you might wonder if time isn't such a topic.

Of course, I'm speaking tongue-in-cheek, precisely because I think that a public reflection on the reality of time might lead to a revision of some current mantras which seem to me humanly deleterious, whereas the doctrine of equality seems to me humanly beneficial. And also, in all candor, because the kind of ontological reflection I mean to put before you is in fact very unlikely to be of major consequence to the world – though I share with all speakers at academic symposia a secret desire to be dangerous.

So I'll barge on, telling first what time is not, and then what it is insofar as it is anything, and finally why an affirmation of its unreality, of a world without time, is advantageous to life.

First, *What time is not*: Look into the world and try to detect time. Our environment is full of time-telling, but the thing told is never in evidence. David Hume's consequence-laden observation was that we never actually see a cause, only a constant conjunction of events. So also with time: We never observe it, only changes in space. Time is told either by location in space or by counting in . . . what? Wouldn't the natural completion of that phrase be "counting in time?" That's circular, to be sure, though in fundamental thinking circularities are often revealing, because they display ultimate involvements. In this case *how we catch* something bears on *what it is*.

Second, then, *What time is:* Basically time-instruments are in the analogue mode. Timaeus, in the Platonic dialogue named after him, says that what we call time is "a certain movable image of eternity . . . an eternal image going according to number" (37d ff.). Time is an "image of," or is analogous to, eternity because it is everlasting and has neither beginning nor end. It is a mere image because it appears as change, and so it doesn't achieve the undifferentiated nowness of eternity; it is movable as traversing circular distances. Its generating *and* telling instruments are the visible heavenly bodies. In other words, the heavens both are and tell the time of the world; they are both cosmic time that goes on forever and a heavenly clock that needs no rewinding. The

watches most of us wear on our wrists are in turn made in the heavens' image; they are analogues of the circular motion of the sun (as it appears to us) or of the earth (as Copernican theory persuades us). Whether the time-piece is cosmic or miniscule, it tells time by an indicator, sometimes a heavenly body, sometimes "a hand" moving over a portion of a circle's circumference. So even a little ladies' watch is an analogue of the cosmos. There are also in our day digital time-pieces that involve counting and will open a can of worms. I will speak of them later. One difference between analogue and digital clocks comes across in a preference for the round watchface as expressed by a friend of mine who said: "I want to know what time it is, but I also like to see what time it isn't." Analogue watches tell time in terms of the everlasting revolutions of the heavens together with the conventional divisions of the human day.

Aristotle picks up on the "going" of the image "according to number" – or so it seems, when we read Book 4 (chaps. 10-14) of his *Physics* (which contains his account of time) in juxtaposition with the *Timaeus*. Probably he clued it out himself. In any case, he puts motion together with number to spectacular effect – the first instance I know of in any writing of time being effectively undone as a *something.* He doesn't say: "I'm first; this is a conceptual revolution." He would much rather make his thinking persuasive by presenting it as a tweaking of thoughtful predecessors. Yet, in brief, he has discovered that time is incidental to change. And since he thinks that all change is at bottom locomotion (chap. 7.7), this means that time is attendant on motion from place to place. Moreover, this motion is numerable. For although it is continuous, it is divisible into even measures at any of the points of the trajectory of a mobile object. Every motion, of course, implies a moving object which generates, one might say, a path, whose diagram is an open or closed orbital trajectory. Then time is the counted collection of all the measured linear units: 12 (EST), for example, is the counted number of dial-measures in which the sun reaches high noon, the zenith of its orbit, from a fixed starting point opposite. Or 13 (years) is the number of the sun's yearly circuits on the

ecliptic, the day after which a young Jew is said to be a man. For motion to be thus countable, it needs to have a recognizable "before and after": here before, here now, here thereafter. Thus Aristotle defines time in this way: "Time is the number of motion with respect to before and after."

Here, we might think, Aristotle has gotten himself into deep trouble. "Before and after" are, after all, primarily time-words: past and future divided by a non-time, a span-less, point-like "now." Thus rewritten, "Time is the number of motion counted according to the progress of time" doesn't sound very helpful. But Aristotle has a perfect defense: For him every motion that is not violently unnatural is a development of potentiality from implicitness to fulfillment. Therefore every motion – sublunar ones that begin and end and heavenly motions that never cease – every single motion has discernible phases even before time is brought in. So "before and after" can indeed be pre-temporal, as are the implicit stages of a development.

But there is a more serious stumbling block, and I will make a gift of my book on time to anyone who removes it for me in Aristotle's terms. He emphasizes that time is the *counted* number, not the *counting* number (4.2). So if I say "twelve o'clock high" I mean the twelve counted path-segments of the sun's motion, not my counting thereof. But Aristotle is also quite clear about the fact that there can be no counted number without a counting consciousness. (Aristotle, of course, says "soul," and so should I, though the word is at present proscribed, and "consciousness" is *de rigueur*, I think principally because it is from Latin and has three syllables and seems less naïve than "soul," which is from good Old English and has but one.)

So the counted motion, which *is* time, requires a counting soul. Here is the problem: The counting soul does not just beat with a steady pulse: one, one, one. . . . That's what the digital watch does, thereby electronically causing a prescribed series of numbers to appear on a spatially moving dial. The soul actually recalls the pulses accumulated. Its numbering is ordinal: first, second, third. It saves bygone pulses in their order and projects future ones, and it is present, here now, at each moment of

counting. But if it is counted motion that is time, then the counting soul is *pre-temporal*. What then is the substrate of its serially ordered activity? Aristotle, in making time external and incidental, something that is found in nature only as a mere measure, has also made human counting an enigma. What name shall we give the psychic development that directs ordered, ordinal, counting?

One reason why Aristotle has effectively reduced time to nothing in itself is that it is in its conceptual structure dramatically unlike its representational analogue, the linear path, the visualizable trace, of a mobile object. The time-line segment before the now, called "the past," is gone, erased; the future time path is not yet and invisible; the now is analogous to a point which has, as Euclid says, no parts and "in" which nothing can exist. If you cast yourself into time, you're done for; there is no time span in which to exist – though plenty of spatial extension in which to move.

Here's an interesting addendum to the Aristotelian difficulty. It is taken up and solved more than two millennia later in his own terms by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787) – not the enigma of existence, namely, what span time's "no-longer" and "not-yet" leave for us to *be* in – but time's particular relation to counting. Recall that Kant thinks that all our experiences, whatever appears to us in an eventually apprehensible way, already comes directly formatted temporally and spatially. But this forming frame is, so to speak, amorphous and beneath awareness. It needs to be brought together (in Greek, "synthesized") with thinking, with the understanding. Kant assigns to the imagination the mysterious work of joining intuition and understanding, distinctionless time and a determinating concept. Kant thinks that this latter is the concept of quantity, and that when intuited time is made determinate by quantity, counting is the result. The way I put it to myself is this: Time makes its appearance in consciousness by a kind of pulsing that is a now-counting: now_1, now_2, now_3 . . . , or one, two, three. . . . This analysis seems to me true to experience. Sheer temporal awareness seems to be a kind of pure enumeration of beats – it may actually be our heart-beat felt as a pulse, the

throbbing of our arteries following the pumping of the heart. What makes a *span* of time, time lived through, is having laid up that cardinal count in memory, where it becomes ordinal: first beat, second beat, third beat. Thus the mere beating turns into a first, second, third moment of remembered past.

So Kant solves the problem by bringing time totally within the consciousness of a "subject," that is, a thinking I. Time is not soul-numbered motion entering into the world from outside, but number itself arises as a conceptualizing of intuitional time within the subject. But then, so does everything within the reach of our comprehension arise within me, the subject; this elucidation of time is bought at the price of near-total subjectivity. Moreover, the deep origin of time as a form of our sensibility, though *in us* as subjects, is *not for us* as knower: The grounds of the possibility of our experiential knowledge are not within our experience. Thus one might say that for Kant, too, aboriginal time is a non-being, not a knowable something – that inferred ghost which he calls a *noumenon*.

Third, *What time is insofar as it is anything*: So I'll leap back through the ages to Augustine, who seems to me the greatest phenomenologist of time, that is, the finest observer of the internal experience we have of it, and the first analyst of its elements.

That is not just my opinion. The most comprehensive and acute work on time in modernity that I know of, Husserl's *On the Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* (1893-1917), is essentially an acknowledged elaboration of Augustine's own answer in the *Confessions* to his famous phrasing of the enigma of time: "What, then, is time? If nobody asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to someone who asks, I don't know" (10.14).

Augustine allows that we all know time as an experience, sometimes an acutely and deliciously painful one: Here's Shakespeare, Augustine's rival in time-consciousness:

> Being your slave, what should I do but tend
> Upon the hours and times of your desire?
> I have no precious time at all to spend,
> Nor services to do till you require.

> Nor dare I chide the world-without-end hour
> Whilst I, my sovereign, watch the clock for you,
> Nor think the bitterness of absence sour
> When you have bid your servant once adieu. (Sonnet 57)

Who among us has not spent a world-without-end hour sitting by the telephone? Who is not acquainted with the swift "time's up" of dense experience, short in felt duration, long in remembrance, or the dragging "are we done yet?" of bored disengagement, endless as a happening but miniscule in memory? Or the brute standing still of time in pain? Or the relative pace of experienced time that Rosalind describes in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*:

> Time travels in divers paces with divers persons. I'll tell you who Time ambles withal, who Time trots withal, who Time gallops withal, and who he stands still withal. (3.2, 299-302).

That's the experience *described* – but now to the experience *explained*. How does it arise? Here is Augustine's answer, which I'll frame as a diagram for you to envision.

Imagine a horizontal line of indefinite length. It represents all the world's simultaneous motions, its goings-on, from the stars' revolutions to the mosquitos' dartings. For Augustine, the Christian, the line must have a beginning, Creation, and an end, Judgment Day. In God's omnisciently comprehensive sight it is all there at once. But human beings experience it as an extension. Imagine a second vertical line, best drawn orthogonal to the world line, and moving along with it. The moving point of crossing is an "origin." It represents our mind, existing now, in contact with the world and borne along by its motion. So it is not really a mathematical point but a living moment in a moving world. Later writers, beguiled by Aristotle's analogy of the temporal now to the spatial point of no extent, will see the need to call it the "*specious* present." But it is not a specious – that is, pretend – present, at all, but a real psychic event, albeit a mystery.

Where then in this diagram is past and future? The vertical line represents, as I said, the mind. And the mind has, as Augustine puts it, *distentio* – its lengthening, its existence, its longitude, we

might say. Diagrammatically, it extends above and below its origin, its moment of existence, its contact with the world. The part of the vertical below the moment of existence in the present world represents a build-up of memory-moments, deeper and deeper in the soul, lower and lower on the upright.

Next, all the moments of memory are connectible by parallel oblique lines to the world line that the mind has traversed. If we imagine the forward motion of world and human being progressing toward the right, then the world line to the left of the origin represents motions and events left behind in the past, and each of our true memories down on the "distention" of mind connects to, projects on, a receding point to the left part of the world's motion line. Of course, scrambled connections (crossed projections) and false memories (wandering projections) can occur. That is how we have a past; the past is a stack of nows *now* in our distended minds – and all one now in God's collected mind.

Likewise with the future: Think of it as all the plans and expectations, further and further away from the present, rising upward on the upper half of the mind's line and projectible by parallel-oblique lines onto the future motions of the world.

That there is in fact a past, though for us only partially and only indirectly recoverable and *real only in memory*, is common belief; whether there is in fact a real future and how our plans and expectations bear on it is a great theological problem – in fact, the problem of free will. But this much Augustine shows clearly and, I think, truly. He says that we must speak of "a present of bygones, a present of presences, a presence of future things" (11.2), and continues: "For some such there are in the soul, and I do not see them elsewhere. The present of things gone is memory, the present of things present is sight, the present of things future is expectation" (11.20, 28). In my words, time is entirely the effect of memory and expectation. Insofar as time is anything, it is a so-called epiphenomenon, an idle, ineffective affect supervening on the real operations of memory and expectation.

But no – "idle" is an inadequate word for our potent sense of

time, which is to be understood as our sense of our mind's longitude, its present lengthening into the before and after of the now of our existence – and of course that fact underwrites, overwrites, potently affects our life.

So now I can zero in on a sense of time that seems to me both spurious and deleterious. It is time not as an internal enlargement of existence but as an external being or force. *Continuous* time, thought of as being *in* the world, may be *conceived* as a *continuous* stream bearing things along, an absolutely primal, equable flow (of what? we may ask) that is unaffected by anything else in the world; this is Newton's absolute time (*Principia* [1686], First Scholium). You may even *hear* it, as Shakespeare (once again) makes Hamlet speak of one who "only got the tune of time," a hum conveying its "most fond and winnowed opinions" (5.2, 183). You may *figure* it as a linear, open-ended, unbounded mere going-on, or as a closed, ever-repetitive, bounded cycle. In these metaphors, the laws of motion apply indifferently whether time is run forwards or backwards. Or you may imagine the continuous temporal substrate as directed by a forward arrow, a principle of unidirectional change or development that prohibits reversal. This sort of time is not, one might say, "when-neutral"; you might call it change in the abstract, or the substrate of embodied change. In all these forms, some sort of quasi-event or pseudo-motion is imagined as *continuous*.

The other metaphor, the second figurative way of imagining time is, on the other hand, *continual*: The now, the present, continually divides the stream of time into gone-by and not-yet-arrived, into past and future. Thus time breaks into a lost past and a not-yet-gained future around a continually new-event-now. This new-now nullifies the past as living; it leaves the passed-away past, so to speak, set in stone. It is, quixotically, both hard-and-fast and intangible: You can't change it – or so they say. It is indeed, often literally, set in stone; for instance, epigraphy is the discipline of deciphering inscriptions, often found on marbles. Its watchword is *saxa loquuntur,* "the stones speak." But does that really mean you can't change it?

For consider that these testimonials are not past, not *in* the past. They are in the present, and we must make of them what we can – or will. This curious circumstance, that the past is real only in the present, might be thought of as the incarnation of the memory that Augustine calls "the present of things gone." You can see that a thoughtful consideration of the past opens a can of worms. What *is* memory, the storage house of time-expired presences? How invulnerable to change is the memorial past? What about that secondary, often public, memory that is built up from present testimonials of past events? What is *more* changeable than the past – perhaps even transformable into the present?

But this can of worms is replaced by a bucket of serpents when it comes to the future. For who would doubt that except for a God-inspired prophet, no one can have the future in mind? The future, by the very meaning we attach to it, cannot provide us with any testimonials; it hasn't happened. All we have are our hopeful or fearful expectations, dim intimations of blessings or harms to come, and uncertain conjectures, projections of our *past* experiences embellished with change-vectors, their rates and directions of change, and, above all, an impetenetrability made less or more pliable by our weak or resolute will. The will is the human force whose very name announces future-directedness, by means of which we take hold in our minds of the yet-to-be and try to bring it about in the world to our satisfaction. To be sure, we may make vivid pictures of the future, but closer examinations will show that they *are*, depending on our mood, imaginary recollections from a golden age, or over-the-top distortions of present trends. But they *are not* images of originals that reside over there in the future – for there's no there there.

Fourth, and finally: *World without time*: You can probably tell from my tone, that my desire to cancel time has much to do with the damage that can be done to us by the notion of a real future. Let me now enumerate three elements of a theory that presents time as unreal in the world, as not thing-like, not force-like – a theory by now surely exposed as part of a program of resistance to certain ways of life. Then I will complete my talk

by fleshing out briefly these refusals to cooperate with "time." So then, my three recalcitrances: (a) to the past as passed away, bygone; (b) to the present as mere passage, transition; (c) to the future as an imperative power.

(a) Insofar as the *past* is the span of time behind us, if time is something real, those spans are really dead, and their relics are mummies, either to be carefully prepared, with ointments of honey or baths of vinegar, to live the museum life of the embalmed departed, or to be discarded upon that notorious rubbish heap of history as no longer "relevant" to our time, the present. Thus, for those of a venerating temperament, the past becomes a silent tomb near which they sit rigidly in worship. For others, whose dispositions long for change, the past is a spent force, a deadweight on their innovative energy. To neither party is the past, if it is anything, the time-proof treasury that houses *all* our inheritance of thought and imagination, once human memory has reluctantly let go of what is too delicate, or cheerfully chucked out what is too trashy, for prolonged life. But how the past is properly present to us is a tricky and timely subject for another day. So much can be said in a sentence: Unless we want to cut ourselves out of humanity's will and remove ourselves as beneficiaries of its estate, we had better give up thinking of the past as having a date of expiration.

(b) Those who feel the past as a march of obsolescence are in fact consigning their personal *present* to mere transition. For the life-principle of obsolescence is innovation, and innovation is not the heart-stopping or mind-boggling perpetual newness of an imagination-arousing work or a truth-revealing theory or a potent device. *Newness* is ever-fresh and invulnerable to obsolescence, because it is not a mere time-marker, a mere date-stamp, on the work of art or on the discovery of an explanation, or on the invention of a contrivance. Newness is rather inherent to these wonders insofar as they break into the ordinary course of ongoing life and enhance or redirect it. Time cannot stale its infinite variety.

Innovation, on the other hand, is systematic, intentional novelty, willful newness. In the innovative mindset (this is a derogatory

term: fully alive people don't have mind-sets), small novel differences often trump great solid worth. People succumb to the persuasion that "we live in a time of change," giving to time an independent power, as if it were an accelerator that puts life in overdrive without the need of my foot on the figurative pedal – a vehicle racing through each present to the next, a car in need of a factory recall. Otherwise put: People accept that they live in "a time of . . ." and that it is prudent to "get with it," to clue out what this time-tyrant commands and to do it – in our case, to treat each moment of life as just a bridge to the next novelty. But there is no such time-potentate. There are only people willing to go along – not, to be sure, with the non-existent times, but with what each person thinks the others think, or whither his or her option-dissipated likes weakly tend. What a humanly actual present – I am tempted to say, a time-less present – might be, what, in short, it means actually to exist, is, once again, worth a long conversation.

(c) So then, finally, the *future*, the chief and least existent venue of real time. You all know the vocabulary of future-possessed people. Some say: "The future is here" – really absurd speech; if it's here it's too late. They might have meant: Be proactive! Clue out what is coming and preempt or prevent it. The original meaning of "prevent" was "go before," as in the Psalm 18, in which David is fearfully imagining: "The sorrows of death compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me." He means "came before me, confronted, me" (18, 5). In that sense, the anticipation of the future, in literally "foregoing" it, also "prevents" it; it forecloses the future. Human beings are surely entitled, even required, to prevent the future in the sense that by anticipating their version of it they'll bring it about or keep it from happening – as long as they understand that they are going towards something, an "it," that is not there to meet them. How we think about our plans makes a great difference: whether we justify our intentions as accepting, managing, and yes, *serving*, what is coming at us in the false, even craven, belief that there is a real future; or whether we, believing the Future (capital F) to be a false reification, a confusion between an

abstraction and a reality, make ourselves think now, in our present, about what is best and most desirable and also humanly possible – *and then do that.*

And, once again, there is endlessly more to say about the future. But instead of pursuing it, I will end with this observation: Being future-recalcitrant is the very opposite of being reactionary, for the non-existence of the future – or at least our ineradicable ignorance of it – is the very condition of our practical freedom.

Dwelling in the Land of the *Confessions*

Michael Brogan

It's surprising that a lover of wisdom should lavish as much attention on the particulars of his own life as Augustine does in the *Confessions*. While any number of philosophers before him had sought to live by the maxim inscribed in Apollo's temple at Delphi—*gnōthi seauton,* know thyself—none known to me had taken this as a directive to reflect on the contingencies of his own biography, let alone publish his thoughts on such intimate matters as a vexed relationship with his mother, a childish loathing of school, a troubled sexual history, or an enduring tendency to overindulge at the dinner table. In the *Phaedo*, Plato does have Socrates recount how he lost his youthful enthusiasm for the study of nature (96a-100a), but in their exclusive attention to the evolution of his philosophical orientation, these autobiographical remarks hardly compare with the astonishingly inclusive narrative of a sinner's wandering path to God that Augustine gives us in the *Confessions*. Socrates, his account of his "second sailing" notwithstanding, lives out the Delphic command not by brooding over his individual history or unique identity but by enlisting dialogue partners in a collaborative search for the truth of those experiences potentially shared by us all in virtue of our common humanity. To oversimplify a bit, he's interested not so much in *who* he is as in *what* he is, not in this individual man called Socrates but in what it means to be a human being in general.

Even more pronounced is the contrast between Augustine and Plotinus, the thinker who perhaps exercised a greater influence on him than any other pagan writer. The Neoplatonist's disregard for merely individual selfhood is memorably captured in the testimony of his disciple Porphyry, who writes that "Plotinus,

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This lecture was first delivered on November 22, 2013.

the philosopher our contemporary, seemed ashamed of being in the body. So deeply rooted was this feeling that he could never be induced to tell of his ancestry, his parentage, or his birthplace."[1] No mere quirk of temperament, this reticence is governed by Plotinus's overriding ambition to identify completely with the incorporeal intellect in its capacity for timeless contemplation of the divine One. It's this aspiration that motivates his refusal to share even the bare facts surrounding his origins as an embodied self.

For all that he owes to the self-effacing Platonic sage, however, Augustine himself has no qualms about directing his gaze and ours to the particular circumstances and events of his unique, unrepeatable, and still-unfolding life. Quite to the contrary, he writes in the confident hope, reiterated at several key points in the *Confessions*, that by reflecting on that life, seeking out the narrative threads that bind it into a unity, he and his readers might be drawn ever closer to the eternal, divine truth. But how does a lover of wisdom—one, moreover, as indebted to Neoplatonism as Augustine acknowledges himself to be—arrive at a hope like this one? How is it that he comes to see his embodied, time-bound existence as no mere image to be forgotten as quickly as possible in the ascent to its divine original but as something worthy of the most serious and sustained attention?

Now, one approach to the question immediately comes to mind. As an orthodox Christian believer, the author of the *Confessions* fully accepts the doctrine of the Word made flesh. God himself, on this account, took on all the characteristic features of human finitude: he was born of a particular woman at a particular time and place, spoke a particular language, practiced a particular religion, lived in relationship to particular human others—we could extend forever this list of "accidents" that individuate the incarnate beings that we ourselves are and that Christians believe God in Jesus became. While some of these properties and rela-

1. Porphyry, "On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of His Work," in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (New York: Penguin, 1991), cii.

tionships are undoubtedly less important than others, who are we to scorn the whole lot of them if God himself has deigned to take them on? Who are we to be "ashamed of being in the body" if the Creator of all things, of corporeal substances no less than of the spiritual, saw nothing shameful in becoming incarnate? If the humanity of Jesus Christ, indeed his very flesh and blood, is indispensable to our salvation, shouldn't we at least have second thoughts about renouncing our own humanity, or attempting to locate it exclusively in a disembodied intellect that manages to shed the burdens of finitude?

But of course these are very big "ifs"— *too* big, I think, for a community like ours whose conversation appeals to no higher authority than natural reason. While Augustine believes he can find in the writings of the Neoplatonists themselves the doctrine of the Word that was with God and that was God, not even he claims to apprehend the *incarnation* of that Word on any basis other than faith. My ambition tonight is to see how far we can go toward making sense of the intensely personal approach of the *Confessions* without appealing to postulates drawn from sacred doctrine. While I suspect that Augustine's unprecedented way of applying the Delphic maxim becomes fully intelligible only against the background of his specifically Christian commitments, we might nevertheless *begin* to understand the peculiar strategy he employs in the *Confessions* by considering the deficiencies that come to light there of a philosophy conducted in a wholly impersonal key. However dazzling a glimpse it may afford of the eternal truth, Neoplatonic introspection, we shall see, fails to open out onto what Augustine calls "the way that leads not only to beholding our blessed fatherland but also to dwelling therein" (7.20.26).[2]

PART I

Before examining their limitations, however, I want to begin by briefly considering why the "books of the Platonists" (7.9.13)

2. All Augustine quotations are from *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960).

were attractive to Augustine in the first place. His study of them comes directly on the heels of his disillusionment with the Manicheism he had been espousing for the better part of a decade. Disheartened by the moral and intellectual bankruptcy he has found even among the elite members of that sect, he has also come to reject their sharply dualistic vision of good and evil as coeternal principles locked in cosmic combat. Such a view, he concludes, is irreconcilable with his dawning certainty that God must be beyond all change, corruption, or violation. Nothing can harm a divinity worthy of the name, and this means that God could have no compelling reason to engage in battle with eternal forces of darkness. In fact, such forces are no more than the figments of an overheated mythic imagination: for together with being immutable, God is by nature infinite; it makes no sense, therefore, to posit a reality that would constrain in any way his power to implement his perfectly good will.

With his Manichean convictions thus in tatters, Augustine finds himself not so much freed as unmoored, drifting toward a radical skepticism that, for all its philosophical plausibility, can't possibly quiet the clamor of his restless heart. It is in this state that he becomes newly open to the possibility of reconciling with the Catholic Christianity in which his mother attempted to raise him, an orthodox faith which, largely due to Bishop Ambrose's brilliant preaching on the allegorical sense of the Old Testament, he has ceased to disdain as the bastion of simple-minded literalism. He realizes, for example, that our being in God's image need not entail that he be confined to a body like ours, as the Manichees had mocked the Catholics for allegedly believing. At this stage, however, Augustine finds he can do no better than replace such anthropomorphism with a less crude but no less materialist notion of God, now imagined as a subtle body extended throughout infinite space, permeating and exceeding a created world conceived on the analogy of a sponge submerged in a vast sea (7.5.7). To think in this way, he realizes, commits him to the absurd view that an elephant, for example, must contain more of the divine presence than a sparrow, yet he remains frustratingly unable to understand God or anything else in nonmaterial terms. He writes:

"Whatever was not extended over, or diffused throughout, or compacted into, or projected up to definite measures of space, or did not or could not receive something of this kind, I thought to be completely non-existent" (7.1.2).

It's this crucial error that the books of the Platonists enable him to overcome, not simply by introducing him to an impressive *theory* of incorporeal being but by showing him a path leading to nothing less than a direct *experience* of the purely spiritual, first within his own soul and ultimately in the divine being itself. Taught to shun the external and direct his gaze inward, he eventually catches sight of what he calls the "unchangeable light" above the mind. After ascending beyond bodies and the power to perceive them and onto the soul's rational faculty of judgment, he says that in realizing its own mutability, this reasoning power

> raised itself up to its own understanding. It removed its thought from the tyranny of habit, and withdrew itself from the throngs of contradictory phantasms. In this way it might find that light by which it was sprinkled, when it cried out, that beyond all doubt the immutable must be preferred to the mutable. Hence it might come to know this immutable being, for unless it could know it in some way, it could no wise have set it with certainty above the mutable. Thus in a flash of its trembling sight it came to that which is. Then indeed I clearly saw your "invisible things, understood by the things which are made" (7.17.23).

Many of you will no doubt recognize the final sentence here as a citation from Paul's Letter to the Romans (1:20). By quoting Scripture, however, Augustine does not mean to imply any essential difference between the experience he is recounting and the one described by Plotinus and his disciples. As in the writings of those philosophers, the inward turn of *Confessions* 7 corresponds to a movement away from absorbed attention to the particularities of the material world and toward the timeless, intellectual contemplation of the "unchangeable light" at the source of all finite things. That eternal light is one and the same for Plotinus as for Paul, for Augustine as for you or me. If our highest good is indeed to gaze upon it, it's understandable that a

thinker like Plotinus would regard attending to those things that differentiate us individuals, the temporal accidents of birth and biography, as at best a distraction from our true calling. In the famous treatise known as "On Beauty," Plotinus insists that what we ought to be doing is chipping away like sculptors at everything exterior to the eternal light within us. "Do you see yourself, abiding within yourself, in pure solitude?" he asks.

> Does nothing now remain to shatter that interior unity, nor anything external cling to your authentic self? Are you entirely that sole true light which is not contained by space, not confined to any circumscribed form . . . ? Do you see yourself in this state? Then you have become vision itself. Be of good heart. Remaining here you have ascended aloft. You need a guide no longer. Strain and see.[3]

But what if "straining" isn't enough? What if "remaining here" proves too difficult? For all the serene confidence that marks Plotinus's writings, even he and his disciples sometimes seem to acknowledge the impossibility of simply willing the soul to arrive at and persist in its transcendent vision. Porphyry, for instance, claims to have had the experience just once, in his sixty-eighth year,[4] and while Plotinus says that for him "it has happened often,"[5] he also characterizes it as something that comes "suddenly" (*exaiphnēs*)[6] upon a soul that is all too quickly sent back down into the comparative dullness of mere discursive reason.[7] Now, I suppose it's possible (thought personally I doubt it) that if Augustine had experienced nothing worse than this inevitable slide from *nous* to *dianoia*, from pure contemplating to the difficult labor of thinking things through, and if, moreover, he had found some way to reconcile the suddenness of the introspective vision with Plotinus's confidence in the sufficiency of

3. *Enneads* 1.6.9, in *The Essential Plotinus*, trans. Elmer O'Brien (Indianapolis: Hackett , 1964), 43-44.

4. Porphyry, "On the Life of Plotinus," cxxii.

5. *Enneads* 4.8.1.

6. *Enneads* 6.7.34.

7. *Enneads* 4.8.6.

effort ("straining") to bring it about, he just might have remained content with what the books of the Platonists were able teach him. But as he recounts in such compelling detail in the *Confessions*, his rapturous and reassuring vision of the unchangeable light is followed almost immediately by a plunge back into currents of temptation that prove to be just as irresistible as they had been before. No transformation of his life ensues, no conversion or reorientation of his misbegotten aims and ambitions follows upon the ecstatic experience that liberates his mind. "I was borne up to you by your beauty," he confesses, "but soon I was borne down from you by my own weight, and with groaning, I plunged into the midst of lower things" (7.17.23). In other words, the tyranny of habit reasserts itself immediately, and he succumbs to old patterns of feeling and acting despite seeing them more clearly than ever as obstacles in the way of his deepest desire. The good he approves unreservedly in his mind he fails to pursue with an undivided heart; unable to do what he wants, he does the very things he hates.

How depressing! Wouldn't we like to think that even a pale approximation of a vision like the one Augustine reports would have a profound effect on the way we live our lives? Wouldn't it be easy to love the truth and to do it if we were only certain what the truth was? But this is just the sort of comforting illusion that Augustine indulged in until his ecstatic vision deprived him of what he calls "that former excuse, in which I used to look upon myself as unable to despise the world and to serve you because knowledge of the truth was still uncertain to me" (8.5.11). Now, approaching thirty years of age, he has attained the certainty he's long been seeking, and yet he discovers that he is just as enthralled to his old, enervating habits as he ever was. Able to *see* the truth, he still cannot draw near enough to bask in its radiance.

If we are at all persuaded of the authenticity of his testimony—influenced, perhaps, by an uncomfortable awareness of our own failures to translate insight into action, to *do* the truth we know—we have reason to wonder whether any mere vision, however dazzling, can set us on the sure path to the good. Understanding alone is perhaps not enough to overturn long-settled

habits of self-indulgence, indolence, and despair, no matter how irrefutable the evidence becomes that these are precisely what keeps us from the happiness we seek. To use one of Augustine's favorite images, it's as if we can become *enchained* to ways of life we know to be toxic to our souls. He writes:

> For in truth lust is made out of a perverse will, and when lust is served, it becomes habit, and when habit is not resisted, it becomes necessity. By such links, joined one to another, as it were—for this reason I have called it a chain—a harsh bondage held me fast. A new will, which had begun within me, to wish freely to worship you and find joy in you, O God, the sole sure delight, was not yet able to overcome that prior will, grown strong with age (8.5.10).

Now, we call "habits" those dispositions to feeling and action that come to be in us as a result of repetition. What we do habitually we do not because nature compels us or reason convinces us but simply because we have done likewise in similar situations time and again in the past. Here's a trivial example. I'm in the habit of drinking a cup of coffee first thing every morning. I don't remember making a deliberate choice to start doing this, but if ever I did, it must have been a long time ago: at this point in my life, it's only a slight exaggeration to say that deliberate choice of any kind becomes possible for me only *after* I've had that first cup. I suppose if I were to summon my inner resources I could manage to break a chain now thousands of links long by choosing to have tea tomorrow instead. After all, it's not my *nature* that determines me to drink coffee, as it is, say, the stone's nature that causes it to fall or the fire's that makes it rise, but merely my long-settled habit—a practice become *second* nature, so to speak.

But might there be situations in which this is a distinction without any practical difference, occasions when second nature constrains no less than first and habit takes on the character of compulsion? For Augustine there were, and we need not have suffered from any of the conventionally recognized "addictions," I think, to identify with his experience of habit as an iron chain

holding him back from goods he has to come to perceive with incontestable clarity.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle observes that, unlike those powers that are in us by nature (e.g., sense perception), the potencies for which precede our exercise of them, the virtues of character are like physical or technical abilities in that they come to be in us only after we have been engaged in the activities associated with them (1103a25f). We become capable of courage, for example, only by repeatedly doing courageous things, meaning those things the already courageous person does, just as we become harpists by repeatedly practicing the harp under the tutelage of an accomplished player. As we grow more accustomed to being at work in them, these activities become easier for us, more pleasant, we could even say, more "natural" to us.

Unfortunately, though, this is at least as true, and probably more so, of bad actions as it is of good: as Augustine knew all too well, a past defined by repeated indulgence in any kind of excess or deficiency can make a future characterized by strength of will or self-control, let alone full-fledged virtue, appear entirely out of reach. How I conduct myself today seems largely determined by what I did yesterday, even when the memory of this recent past fills me with shame and regret over having acted otherwise than I *knew* I should.

I want to turn now to Augustine's analysis of time to see what light it might shed on this indebtedness or even enslavement of the present to the past, and also on the shape that a rehabilitated future might ultimately take. My hope is that doing this will bring us a step closer to our goal of understanding the significance of Augustine's autobiographical turn in the *Confessions*.

PART II

Though it would take all night (at least) to do justice to his fascinating and intricate meditation, the basic paradox of time Augustine identifies in Book 11 can be expressed in a few words. It seems, he observes, that the present is the only time that actually exists, since whatever the future is, it is not yet, and the past is no longer. Upon scrutiny, however, the present itself turns out to

look like nothing more than an extension-less boundary between those two nonentities, the past and the future. "It flies with such speed from the future into the past," Augustine says, "that it cannot be extended by even a trifling amount" (11.15.20). Hemmed in as it is on both sides by nonbeing, the reality of the duration-less present itself falls under serious suspicion. Here is Augustine again:

> [I]f the present were always present, and would not pass into the past, it would no longer be time, but eternity. Therefore, if the present, so as to be time, must be so constituted that it passes into the past, *how can we say that it is, since the cause of its being is the fact that it will cease to be*? (1.14.17, emphasis added.)

Thus it appears that neither the future, nor the past, nor even, now, the present has a sure hold on being: future and past are not, and the present is only in so far as it ceases to be. But Augustine is unwilling to conclude from this that time is mere illusion. Should we decide that it exists only in a secondary or derivative sense—a kind of moving image of eternity, as the *Timaeus* has it—it nevertheless remains too fundamental to our lived experience, and our ways of talking about that experience, simply to deny its reality altogether. The task is to try to *understand* what time is, if not in itself then at least as it is *for us*. What we can say for sure, Augustine thinks, is that the past and future depend for their being on the present; they "do not exist except as present things" (11.18.23), he says. It seems no less true, however, that the present itself cannot *be* apart from the past and the future, for what else could provide the present the "space" it needs to extend beyond the length-less and breadth-less instant that exists, if it exists at all, only by rushing headlong into non-being?

Characteristically, Augustine looks within himself for a way beyond the impasse. It's there, in the soul or the mind, that future and past things acquire a kind of presence (and therefore *being*), as correlates of the mind's acts of expectation and memory, respectively. It's also there that present things achieve stability by being held in attention, an act of the mind that articulates itself beyond the point-like instant by looking back to a beginning and

forward to an anticipated end. Whereas on initial reflection time had seemed to vanish into the nothingness of a not-yet-existent future, a no-longer-existent past, and a perpetually self-destructing present, its claim to at least relative being can now be redeemed so long as we're willing to pay the price of acknowledging its dependence on the mind's own activity. The three times, Augustine says, "are in the soul . . . the present of things past is in memory; the present of things present is in intuition; the present of things future is in expectation" (11.20.26). Taken as a whole, time can thus be described as a "distention of the mind" (*distentio animi*) (11.26.33), a stretching or swelling of present consciousness backward into a remembered past and forward into an anticipated future.

While it's certainly possible to distinguish memory, expectation, and intuition or attention as three separate acts of the mind, Augustine's analysis makes clear that to do this would be to engage in a kind of abstraction. For in our lived experience of things, memory, expectation, and attention form a single, continuous whole. The mind, he says, "looks forward, it considers, it remembers, so the reality to which it looks forward passes through what it considers into what it remembers" (11.28.37). To illustrate this dynamic, he reflects on the experience of reciting a psalm he knows by heart. Once he's formed the intention to recite and is about to carry it out, the psalm, or rather, his recitation of it, is one of the "things future," which is to say, it exists for the mind in the mode of expectation. The ray of consciousness is pointed forward, so to speak, casting its light over the whole psalm as something to be brought out into the open as an audible presence. As the recitation proceeds, the stock of expectation decreases in proportion to memory's increase, until, having reached his proposed end, the speaker falls silent and the psalm in its entirety exists by way of its resonance in the recollecting minds of its hearers.

What happens between the beginning and the end of this process, namely, the ongoing transferal of expectation's funds into the account of memory, corresponds to present time in its more expansive, non-instantaneous conception. The act of the

mind responsible for this making present Augustine variously calls "intuition" (*contuitus*), "attention" (*attentio*), and "intention" (*intentio*). Present consciousness, we come to understand, doesn't just passively register a now that arises only to perish (or, more accurately, arises only *by* perishing); on the contrary, the attending or, better, the *in*tending mind plays an active part in the unfolding of temporal events, as both Augustine's heavy reliance on words with *tendo*—stretch out—at their root, as well as his pregnant choice of the recitation example powerfully suggest. About that recitation, Augustine writes:

> The life of this action of mine is distended into memory by reason of the part I have spoken and into forethought (*expectatio*) by reason of the part I am about to speak. But attention (*attentio*) is actually present and that which was to be is *borne along* by it so as to become past (11.28.37, emphasis added).

It's worth hearing that again: what was to be is "borne along" by attention into the past. The Latin verb here is *traicitur*, a passive form of *traicio*, which could also be rendered as "transports" or "conveys." It combines the preposition *trans*—"across" or "along"—with the root verb *iacio*, meaning "throw," so we might think of attention as the act of throwing an expected future into a recalled past. The sense of this would be to emphasize how time for Augustine is not merely something that we suffer but is also, perhaps even primarily, something that we ourselves *do*. It's hard to know how to say this: the mind constitutes, enacts, unfolds, or perhaps *lives* time, in the transitive sense of an expression like "living one's life." But whatever verb we finally settle on, the crucial thing to grasp is that the soul itself makes an indispensable contribution to the experience or even the very being of time in shouldering an expected future and bearing it along into a recalled past.

If the full significance of this activity does not come entirely to light in Augustine's psalm example, what he says toward the end of Book 11 leaves no doubt about the ultimately moral horizon of his analysis. After describing the temporal process by which the action of reciting the psalm reaches completion, he as-

serts that "[t]he same thing holds for a man's entire life, the parts of which are all the man's actions" (11.28.38). (In fact, the scope can be widened even further to take in all of history, the "whole age of the sons of men," though I'll keep our focus for now on the life of the individual.) Just as I look ahead in expectation to the psalm I am about to recite, so too do I project a practical or moral future for myself, setting about in the present on the task of converting into a happy memory what is now only an aspiration to act in accordance with my conception of the good. In this way, "that which was to be is borne along" into the past.

Of course, there are many ways for our moral intentions to misfire. However completely he comes to rely on God's grace, Augustine remains sensitive to the constant vigilance, the intense daily effort required of him if he is to fulfill his divinely reordered aims. Readers of Book 10 of the *Confessions* know that his baptism did not render him immune to the temptation of taking it easy, of allowing himself to be swept up by the rushing current of the merely instantaneous now instead of rising to the challenge of actively *living* time, that is, of anticipating a virtuous future and then undertaking the arduous task of carrying it through the present and into the past. "I am a burden to myself" (10.28.39), he writes, vividly evoking his sense of this labor, the obligation imposed on us imperfect, temporal creatures not to while away the time but to strive, with God's help, to close the gap between what we are now and what we are called to be.

The difficulty of that task, as our discussion of habit has prepared us to see, seems to be directly proportional to the distance separating what we will to become from what we have already been. In other words, the more radically the future we project for ourselves departs from the past we recall, the harder it is to bear that future successfully into the present. In the hopes of deepening our understanding of this phenomenon, let's return once more to Augustine's recitation example. Forming the intention to say the whole psalm from beginning to end involves calling it up to the forefront of his mind from out of what in Book 10 he had called "the great cave of memory" (10.8.13). Only because he has already learned it by heart at some point in

the *past* can he now look forward to reciting it in the present. And this suggests, if the example is as paradigmatic of all temporal experience as I believe Augustine means it to be, that anticipation is itself grounded in recollection, in other words, that the projected future "borne along" by a present intention is first assembled by the soul from materials drawn from its past. Augustine makes the point more explicitly in Book 10. Within the memory, he says,

> I encounter myself and recall myself, and what, and when, and where I did some deed, and how I was affected when I did it. There are all those things which I remember either as experienced by me or as taken on trust from others. From that same abundant stock, also, I combine one and another of the likenesses of things, whether things actually known by experience or those believed in from those I have experienced, with things past, and *from them I meditate upon future actions, events, and hopes*, and all these again as though they were actually present. "I will do this or that," I say to myself within that vast recess of my mind, filled with images, so many and so great, *and this deed or that then follows* (10.8.14, emphasis added).

What this passage allows us to see, I think, is that temporal life, or the activity of *living* time, is marked by a kind of circularity. In proposing a course of action to myself, I cannot but rely upon the "abundant stock" of past experiences, either my own or those attested by others and found credible to the extent that they are consistent with my own. In other words, before the anticipated future can be borne along into the remembered past, the past must first be launched forward into the future as the indispensable material out of which the soul shapes its expectation. Now, this is not to say that in acting in the world we only ever repeat ourselves, or that the wheel of lived time rotates around a fixed point. Augustine mentions here that as he deliberates he "combine[s] . . . the likenesses of things" drawn up from memory, thereby suggesting that the soul enjoys at least some degree of creative freedom in its activity of conceiving for

itself a future as something other than an exact replica of its past. But it's still no use pretending that a path of total novelty is ever open to us; the future is inescapably indebted to the past, expectation inevitably takes its stand on the ground of memory.

It's not hard to grasp that this poses a grave threat to the possibility of the deep and abiding transformation the young Augustine came to recognize as his only hope for happiness. For if my memory teems with images of a life fundamentally inimical to the good; if the virtuous examples of others seem too remote from my experience to be plausible or even attractive models for me; and if the claims of the philosophers to offer an escape from time and all its woes have proved too good to be true, then my desire for the happy life, no matter how firmly rooted in a clear vision of its reality and goodness, seems fated to go unfulfilled. In their essentially timeless character, transcendent moments of insight, like those Augustine attains by way of Neoplatonic introspection, are essentially cut off from memory and expectation, mere interruptions of the circuit of lived temporality. As such, they remain no more than isolated points of light, like individual stars in a vast night sky—beautiful, to be sure, but virtually powerless to illuminate the ground beneath our feet as we stumble along in search of the way that leads not only to beholding but to dwelling in the land of our desire (7.20.26; 7.21.27).

Augustine opens a window onto the potentially ruinous dependence of expectation on memory in recounting a conversation he had with himself a few years before his final decision to seek baptism. Approaching the age of thirty, he looks back with chagrin at all the time that has passed since his teenage reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* first set him on fire with the love of wisdom. The bitter anxieties and disappointments of those dozen years have left him more convinced than ever of the futility of a life given over to worldly ambition. His disillusionment with the rationalist pretensions of the Manichees and his deepening admiration for the philosophically sophisticated preaching of Ambrose have inclined him, as he puts it, to "fix my feet on that step where my parents placed me as a child" (6.11.18). He's

going to do it, he really means it this time, he's going to put away what he calls his "vain and empty concerns" by committing himself fully once and for all to the Catholic Church. Just *not yet*. "[T]ime passed," he says,

> and still I delayed to be converted to the Lord . . . I loved the happy life, but I feared to find it in your abode, and I fled from it, even as I sought it. I thought that I would be too wretched, if I were kept from a woman's arms. I did not believe that the cure for this disease lay in your mercy, for I had had no experience with that cure. I believed that continence lay within a man's own powers, and such powers I was not conscious of within myself (6.11.20).

Notice what's holding him back. Though he has long suspected that the cares imposed by married life are for him incompatible with the spiritual freedom he desperately desires, he also knows himself well enough to realize that he lacks the strength to live without the comforts afforded by sexual intimacy. In the terms of his metaphor, he suffers from a "disease" whose symptoms he knows how to treat but whose cure, he has learned, lies completely outside his own power to effect. Whether or not we think it makes sense to diagnose as an illness his inability to commit to celibacy, with a little imagination most of us will be able relate to Augustine's predicament here. He knows exactly what it would take for him to be happy, but bitter experience has convinced him that he's just not up to the task. Nothing he finds in the spacious caverns of his memory allows him to envision for himself a life of genuine health, and without the means to palliate the symptoms of his disease, he fears that taking up residence in "God's abode" would serve only to increase his misery. Thus he shrinks back from the decisive step, without, however, being able to resign himself to a future as fatalistically determined by the past as his own seems certain to be.

Perhaps there is little we can reasonably say about the causes of Augustine's ultimate escape from this desperate situation, at least if we want to keep open the possibility that it was indeed

God's grace that finally set him free. I think we can conclude, though, that whatever it was that finally lifted the terrible burden from his soul in that Milan garden, the experience he describes as "a peaceful light streaming into my heart" (8.12.29) would have been every bit as isolated and ineffectual as his Plotinian visions of the eternal truth turned out to be had it not become possible for him to discern the underlying continuity of his past life of unhappy wandering with the baptized future he was finally empowered to project for himself. For as his analysis of time has shown us, to the extent that the present remains divorced from the past that precedes it, it cannot but have the character of the instant that *is* only by *ceasing to be*, the point-like now that suddenly—*exaiphnēs*—emerges out of nothingness only to vanish again just as suddenly. From such an instant, however charged with divine presence it might be, nothing of lasting, practical significance is likely to follow—nothing more consequential, at any rate, than the sort of wistful memory and infinite, impotent yearning that threatened to consume Augustine in the wake of his disappointing experiments in Neoplatonic ascent.

In concluding, then, I want to suggest that Augustine's passionately personal reflection on the events leading up to his final conversion is intended to recall and thereby reinforce the vital links between the future opened up to him on that momentous day in Milan and even the darkest periods of his youthful estrangement from himself and from his God. Though his conversion undoubtedly marks a new beginning, even a kind of rebirth, it succeeds in doing what impersonal introspection had failed to do because Augustine is enabled to see it as the culmination of a process that had begun in him long before. The call he finally answers in deciding to seek baptism is the very same call that had never ceased resounding in his heart, even when he was desperately trying to drown it out in the frantic pursuit of sensual pleasure, emotional and intellectual titillation, and worldly success. In looking back on his past, he comes to see that in the anxiety, disappointment, and doubt that marred his life of secular striving, God himself had been calling him home:

> You were always present to aid me, merciful in your anger, and charging with the greatest bitterness and disgust all my unlawful pleasures, so that I might seek after pleasure that was free from disgust, to the end that, when I could find it, it would be in none but you, Lord, in none but you. For you fashion sorrow into a lesson to us. You smite so that you may heal. You slay us, so that we may not die apart from you (2.2.4).

Augustine meditates on his past in the *Confessions* to learn again this lesson of sorrow, which is also, paradoxically, a lesson of great hope. From out of the caves of his memory he no longer draws up the despair-inducing confirmation of his own weakness that had paralyzed him as a young man, but the liberating assurance that God had always been with him, even in the depths of his sin. Recollections of events in which that divine presence now seems unmistakable nourish his expectations of future assistance, giving him the strength to stand firm against present temptation in the confidence that his conversion will turn out to have been the decisive event of his life, and not a mere prelude to another aborted attempt or humiliating failure to change his ways.

But as his unsparing assessment of his present condition vividly demonstrates, he knows that nothing is guaranteed. To be sure, conversion to the truth for him comes as a gift, but that gift—perhaps like all gifts—is profoundly difficult for a creature with a long history of proud self-assertion to receive. Ever present is the temptation to refuse or return it in the fatal conviction, born of pride and despair, that there is no genuine good beyond what we can obtain for ourselves. The books of the Platonists did nothing to disabuse Augustine of this error. "Strain and see," they told him, at once puffing him up by preaching the sufficiency of effort, and casting him down by showing him no more than the way to *behold* the blessed country when his heart's desire was to *dwell* therein. The way beyond beholding is a way of humility, and Augustine's searingly honest examination of his life is his attempt to walk it.

"In Want of a Wife"—or a Husband—in *Pride and Prejudice*

Susan Paalman

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." (5[1]) This witty opening sentence of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is justly well known. The high minded tone of "a truth universally acknowledged" at the beginning sets up the reader for the prosaic punchline "must be in want of a wife." The wit lies in the author's tacit acceptance of the universality of human self interest and the power of that interest to skew what people see to fit their own desires. People take an interest in another person's fortune, the implication seems to be, and in trying to get a piece of it for themselves, in this case through marriage. But rather than acknowledging openly this universal desire for wealth, the world seems determined to reinterpret its own greed as the fulfilling of the rich man's need. The single man of fortune thus becomes the putative prey for some unmarried woman and her family under the guise of supplying him with that which he lacks: a wife.

The general implications of the opening sentence are made particular in the rest of chapter one, which introduces us to Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. The business of Mrs. Bennet's life, we are told, is to get her five daughters married. (7) She is unrelentingly determined in this goal, in large part, as we later learn, because her daughters will inherit very little from their father, due to an entailed will. As the Bennets discuss Mr. Bingley, newly arrived in the neighborhood and the "single man" in question, it becomes clear that Mrs. Bennet cares little for whether Mr. Bingley feels

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1. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations and page numbers are taken from Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).

he lacks a wife, and cares much about securing him and his fortune for one of her daughters. She is not the only mother to partake in this type of self interested plotting. We are told that she and the other mothers in the neighborhood consider Bingley the "rightful property of some one or other of their daughters." (5) Bingley, single and possessing a fortune, is seen as someone else's property himself, as the means to the end of worldly prosperity for some daughter or other. Bingley's money is to be in large part the source of happiness for the prospective wife.

Witty as the first sentence of the novel is, there is another way to read it. "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." (5) If we take this sentence at face value, it says that everyone understands that the single man's life is incomplete, that once he has met his material needs, he must then be looking to meet some other kind of need, one that can only be filled by a wife. What sort of a need this might be is left unsaid. In fact, from one perspective, the rest of the novel is an exploration of what the individual lacks, and what each character is looking for in a mate. We are offered a parade of couples throughout the novel, each couple having a different basis for formation. They fare better or worse depending on the wisdom and affections of the people involved.

Both the witty and the direct reading of the opening sentence fit with the tone of the novel as a whole. On the one hand, Austen relishes exposing the small-minded follies that often underlie our lofty aspirations. The humor and economy of word that begin the novel reappear on every page, often highlighting the ways in which characters deceive themselves or try to pretend they are better than they are. On the other hand, Austen gives us some deeply moving scenes, from Elizabeth's horrified response to the knowledge that she has misjudged Darcy and Wickham both, to Mr. Bennet's heartfelt plea to Elizabeth not to repeat his own mistake in marrying without esteem, to Darcy's pure delight when Elizabeth finally accepts him. The wit and the seriousness succeed one another effortlessly. Perhaps, addressing the question

of what the individual lacks and what one may desire or need from a marriage requires both attitudes: both the skewering of the conceits and follies of human nature and the sincere acknowledgment of our best instincts and our need for one another.

In the main couple of the story, Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Bingley's friend, Fitzwilliam Darcy, Austen depicts characters who come to know their own weaknesses and find strength through each other. They endure misunderstanding, miscommunication, and doubt, before finally marrying at the end of the novel. We are meant to believe that their marriage will be one of lasting happiness; one in which the needs of each are met, and met well. Furthermore, we are meant to take joy and pleasure in the reading of Elizabeth's and Darcy's story. But before examining Elizabeth and Darcy any further, let's take a quick inventory of some of the other couples in the novel.

The Bennets

Our first view of marriage comes from the Bennets, parents to Elizabeth Bennet as well as four other girls, including Jane, Elizabeth's older sister and confidante. The Bennets came to be married, we are told, because of Mr. Bennet's love of Mrs. Bennet's beauty. His desire to live in the presence of physical beauty was of the first importance to him, and he made the error as a young man of assuming that her beauty came with a good nature and a good temper. He was sadly mistaken. Once he realized his mistake, "all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown." (198) He was left in a marriage with a foolish and irritable woman he could not respect, and she was left with a man who does not love her. Unlike many, Mr. Bennet is wise enough to avoid the many vices available to unhappy people, but takes pleasure in his books, in the countryside, and, as depicted in many scenes in the novel, by teasing his wife almost without mercy. The more amusement he derives from her gullibility and lack of understanding, the sillier she gets, until he eventually grows tired of the game and retreats to his study. The reader too is amused by their interactions; Austen writes their dialogue with

a fine ear for the drily comic. As the novel progresses, though, it becomes clear that there is something perverse about the pleasure Mr. Bennet takes in his wife's weakness of mind, and something frustrating about Mrs. Bennet's complete inability to understand him. As a couple, they bring out the worst in each other. Still, they have five daughters whom both seem to care for. The Bennets have at least found themselves in a stable home with a family, something neither could have produced alone.

The Collinses

The first new marriage in the novel comes after Elizabeth's closest friend, Charlotte Lucas, becomes engaged to Elizabeth's cousin, Mr. Collins, within three days of his having proposed marriage to, and been rejected by, Elizabeth herself. Elizabeth's shock when she learns of Charlotte's engagement is only exceeded by her dismay at the match. Mr. Collins is a man of the cloth with a vicarage that is supported by a weathy noble woman, Lady Catherine. In some ways, he would be considered a very eligible man. Elizabeth's rejection of him is based on his character, which is not vicious, but is marked by self serving foolishness. Mr. Collins is "not a sensible man," (60) we are told, but a "mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self importance and humility." (61) Austen plays up his character, detailing a number of long, pompous, and silly speeches he makes on various occasions, including during his unsuccessful proposal to Elizabeth. After suffering through and laughing at Mr. Collins and his speeches, the reader is tempted to agree with Elizabeth that for Charlotte to link herself to such a man is disgraceful. Elizabeth is convinced that Charlotte will not be happy in the marriage. (109) Charlotte, though, sees it differently. She desires "only a comfortable home," (108) she says to Elizabeth. Charlotte is older and less attractive than Elizabeth; her options for a decent life are limited, she believes. Marriage is the "only honorable provision for well educated women of small fortune," and Charlotte sees it as the "pleasantest preservation from want." (106) Mr. Collins, as painfully foolish as he is, will give her sustenance and power in the world, as a man of consequence.

For his part, Mr. Collins is responding mostly to duty. As a clergyman with a wealthy and aristocratic patroness, he wishes to set a good example for his flock, as well as find happiness in a mate. His rhapsodes on Lady Catherine's virtues leave no doubt, though, that his main motive in marrying is to please his patroness.

In the Collinses, we have a marriage made on social and worldly grounds: on Charlotte's side out of her desire for financial independence and on Collins' out of his duty to his provider. After their marriage, Elizabeth is forced to admit that both husband and wife are tolerably happy. Collins has married "one of the very few sensible women who would have accepted him, or have made him happy if they had," (152) she says. Charlotte is intelligent enough to blush at her husband's foolishness at times, but knows how to manage him. We are told, "[Charlotte's] home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry, and all their dependent concerns, had not yet lost their charms." (182) Those are ominous words, perhaps, leading the reader to imagine the time when the charms have worn off and she is left with such a husband. We can only hope Charlotte's children will favor her more than him, and that she will find whatever companionship she desires with them.

The Wickhams

The marriage of Mr. George Wickham and Elizabeth's youngest sister, Miss Lydia Bennet, comes towards the end of the novel, after a great deal of suspense. The two had run off together as an unmarried couple, and taken a lodging together in London. The crisis of the novel comes when their elopement is discovered and the Bennets are left to worry while others search out the couple and persuade them to marry. The persuasion comes in the form of money and a bought commission in the army for Wickham. Later, it is revealed that the bribe was financed by Mr. Darcy, out of several motives, including his own guilt in having covered up Wickham's nefarious past. It is interesting that nearly everyone involved in the matter assumes, on the one hand, that Wickham and Lydia, once they run off together, must marry; and on the

other hand, that the marriage will not be a happy one. It was socially unacceptable for a young woman to engage in sexual activity outside the bounds of marriage, and reprehensible for a young man to seduce such a woman. Once Lydia and Wickham are assumed to have so engaged, the only course that would retain their social standing is marriage.

Darcy and Elizabeth, separately, are the only ones to doubt the wisdom of having Lydia and Wickham marry. Darcy, in fact, first tries to persuade Lydia not to marry Wickham, and only works towards their marriage once Lydia convinces him that she will not leave Wickham. (268) Elizabeth, for her part, expresses grave misgivings about the match. It is clear to Elizabeth that a marriage founded upon undisciplined passion will not be a happy one. Later, the narrator confirms her misgivings by noting the disarray with which the Wickhams live their lives and the indifference to each other that soon pervades their marriage.

Each of these three marriages was formed with the intention of addressing some kind of human need or desire: The Bennets' marriage was formed out of the desire for beauty and fulfilled the need to procreate; the Collinses looked for financial stability and social standing and fulfilled social obligations; and the Wickhams married to further Lydia's desire for importance and to facilitate socially sanctioned sex. With these marriages in mind, let us turn now to the main drama and involving Mr. Darcy and Miss Elizabeth Bennet.

Part I: First Encounters and First Impressions

Elizabeth and Darcy do not start off as a likely couple. Their first encounter is at a neighborhood ball when Darcy, speaking to his friend Bingley within Elizabeth's hearing, rejects Elizabeth as a dance partner, with the stinging and memorable line, "She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me." (12) Elizabeth laughs at Darcy to her friends afterwards, repeating the story with gusto and resolving never to dance with him. Over the next few weeks, her umbrage at the insult hardens into a profound dislike based on his proud demeanor. The dislike later turns to something closer to disgust and hatred when she is told, by the charming

and attractive Mr. Wickham, that Darcy had denied Wickham his rightful inheritance from Darcy's father, out of the ignoble motive of jealousy.

Darcy, after a brief time of studying Elizabeth for the petty exercise of emphasizing her imperfections to his friends, soon begins to find her intriguing. He notices her intelligent expression, graceful and energetic figure, and playful manners. (21-22) Erotic desire has been ignited: he cannot keep his eyes off her without an effort. (63) Darcy is not a man to let his passions run away with him, though. He begins a systematic investigation into Elizabeth's character that goes on for several weeks. He starts by listening in on her conversations with others and continues with a series of conversations with Elizabeth herself on matters that range from love poetry, to the duties of friendship, to what it means for a woman to be accomplished. Darcy, we are told, "had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her." (46) Nonetheless, Darcy does not entertain seriously the thought of marrying Elizabeth at first, because of her relatively low family connections.

In the response of each to the other, we can discover something of their characters. In Elizabeth's laughter at Darcy's insult to her, we see the value she places on a person's character above his worldly status, since she is by no means overawed by Darcy's wealth and high social standing. We also, though, see her readiness to laugh at the ridiculous in people, a trait she shares with her father and one that leads her to have a sharp tongue and something of a sarcastic wit. In her concern for Wickham's claims against Darcy, we see her spirited allegiance to justice and kindness. On the other hand, her easy willingness to believe Wickham without evidence comes from her excessive pride in her ability to read people: her initial dislike of Darcy is confirmed by Wickham's accusations and Elizabeth never really doubts that they are true. We learn later, of course, that Wickham is a liar.

In Darcy, we first see his lack of natural amiability. His refusal to dance when attending a ball and his insulting speech about Elizabeth, made to Bingley, but clearly within her hearing and just after he had caught her eye, reveal both a clumsy shyness

and a prideful disdain for the opinions of others. In his investigation into Elizabeth's character, though, we see the importance he places on her substance. Her looks attract him only after he notices her intelligence and liveliness. The manner and content of her conversation are what bewitch him. He is very willing to revise his initial disdainful opinion of her upon further observation. We see Darcy's pride at work also in his refusal to consider the possibility of marrying Elizabeth because of her lack of high social connections. Darcy, as we find out later, was orphaned at the age of twenty three, and left in charge of fulfilling the Darcy family's duties, which are substantial indeed. He takes pride in his role as the provider of livelihoods, order, and moral example to the people of Derbyshire.

Darcy reveals his commitment to his family pride in a conversation with Elizabeth, early in the novel. When she comments, with tongue in cheek, that Darcy must be without any of the usual follies and nonsense that she is used to laughing at in others, Darcy responds:

> "Perhaps that is not possible for anyone. But it has been the study of my life to avoid those weaknesses which often expose a strong understanding to ridicule."
>
> [Elizabeth replied,] "Such as vanity and pride."
>
> "Yes, vanity is a weakness indeed. But pride – where there is real superiority of mind, pride will be always under good regulation."
>
> Elizabeth turned away to hide a smile. (50)

Darcy, as we see, has "made it the study of [his] life" to eradicate any weakness of character that would make him appear ridiculous in the eyes of others. His statement indicates the seriousness of his commitment to upholding the honor of the family name. It also reveals his focus on maintaining the appearance of strength in the eyes of the world. The difference between avoiding weakness of character for the sake of living a good life and avoiding it in order that one does not appear ridiculous might not sound substantial, but it is this same mistake in understanding that leads Darcy to deny that pride might be a weakness. Darcy, in pursuing strength of character for the sake of his pride, has

blinded himself to the potential pitfalls of that same pride. In his blindness, he has allowed his pride free rein, so that it has outgrown the bounds of a healthy regard for self and family and become excessive to the point that, as the narrator tells us, he "was continually giving offense," wherever he appeared. (16) Elizabeth, with her clear sight for the folly of others, immediately sees and smiles at Darcy's own self deception that has fostered his excessive pride.

Later in that same conversation, Darcy confesses that he tends to be resentful of the faults of others, saying, "My good opinion, once lost, is lost forever." Elizabeth agrees, with perhaps too much enthusiasm, that, "Implacable resentment *is* a shade in a character." Darcy responds:

> "There is, I believe, in every disposition a tendency to some particular evil, a natural defect, which not even the best education can overcome."
>
> "And *your* defect is a propensity to hate everyone."
>
> "And yours," he replied with a smile, "is willfully to misunderstand them." (51)

Here we have, in a nutshell, Elizabeth's and Darcy's analysis of each others' faults. Darcy's self described resentful temper grates against Elizabeth's amiability. Her severe irritation at his complacency about such a fault comes out in her hyperbole: he has a propensity to hate everyone, she says. Darcy then immediately identifies Elizabeth's own characteristic fault: that of willfully misunderstanding people.

Darcy and Elizabeth both are under the illusion that their understanding and intellect have led them to lives of rationality and virtue. Both are deceiving themselves. Darcy is committed to a path of upholding the family name, but foolishly allows his pride to bloat into a sense of superiority, telling himself that he has it under good "regulation". Elizabeth sees his mistake clearly, but doesn't see properly where his pride comes from. She trusts her ability to analyze people too completely, and comes to believe her own hyperbolic statement that Darcy is a hateful man, even while Darcy is falling in love with her. Darcy sees that Elizabeth

has misunderstood him, but completely misses the extent of her dislike for him. He seems incapable of seeing the effect his disdainful manners have on others. Their pride and their prejudice deceive both characters into forming partly true, partly false images of the other that are dependent on their partly true, partly false images of their own characters.

Neither Elizabeth nor Darcy has the perspective to see clearly the extent of his or her own faults and mistakes in judgment. Because their own faults are so tied to their image of each other, the key to knowledge of their defects of character thus lies in each seeing the truth about the other. But they will never see each other more clearly without a closer acquaintance than has yet been possible. Darcy's passion for Elizabeth provides the means for mutual revelation when he finally proposes marriage to Elizabeth.

Part II: The Proposal

By coincidence, on the day Darcy finally proposes, Elizabeth had just learned from Darcy's cousin that Darcy had been the primary force for separating his friend Mr. Bingley, the single man of good fortune mentioned in the first chapter of the novel, from Elizabeth's sister Jane, who loves Bingley. Elizabeth, who has been in some anguish over Jane's loss of her beau, is overcome with anger and distress that Darcy could have had the temerity to separate the couple, and the coldness of heart to brag about it to his cousin. Darcy picks this unhappy moment to visit her and at last tell her plainly what he thinks of her and propose marriage. In the struggle between his commitment to his family pride and his attraction to Elizabeth, attraction has won. Pride has not been completely defeated, though. He proposes with the clear expectation that Elizabeth will accept him, and amid his protestations of love, Darcy explains also his sense of the degradation it would be for him to marry someone with such poor connections as Elizabeth. His sense of his superiority is alive and well.

To Darcy's shock, Elizabeth rejects his proposal. In the following conversation, charged with the barely controlled anger of both parties, Elizabeth articulates her dislike of Darcy. She levels two charges at him, her reasons for rejecting his offer. First, he

has been the means of separating her beloved sister Jane from the man Jane loves, Mr. Bingley. Second, Elizabeth repeats the story she had heard from Mr. Wickham, that Darcy had mistreated Wickham by withholding from him the legacy of Darcy's father.

Finally, when Darcy continues to press the matter, Elizabeth articulates her feelings, and in doing so, levels her third charge at him: "from the first moment, I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain for the feelings of others, were such as to form that groundwork of disapprobation on which succeeding events have built so immoveable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed upon to marry." (164) Darcy, finally understanding fully her feelings towards him, can only retreat in haste.

Elizabeth cannot tolerate the sort of pride that would consider another human being degraded, simply because of that person's station in life. So far, Elizabeth has heard nothing to change her opinion that Mr. Darcy suffers from this, the "worst kind of pride." (159) She still believes that she is right in her characterization of him and so is ignorant of her own self deception until Mr. Darcy gives her a letter, the next morning, containing all the things he could not manage to say to Elizabeth in the moment of her rejection of him the day before. It provides a defense against the charges that he improperly separated Jane and Bingley and that he mistreated Wickham. (Darcy makes no mention of the third charge Elizabeth leveled at him, of his chronic disdain for others that laid the groundwork for her dislike of him.) As Elizabeth reads the sordid truth about Wickham's mistreatment of Darcy and his attempted seduction of Darcy's sister, she cannot at first believe it. Eventually, after weighing the evidence, she must admit that Wickham has lied to her. "Astonishment, apprehension, and even horror oppressed her," (173) we are told. The horror must be from learning how easily Wickham manipulated her, as well as how thoroughly she has misjudged Darcy. Her extreme reaction re-

veals just how wedded she is to living a virtuous life. "Till this moment I never knew myself," (176) she cries.

Though we don't hear from the narrator about Darcy's response to his encounter with Elizabeth and the disastrous proposal, the letter itself gives us a clue. It starts bitterly enough, but once he starts to write of Wickham, the love Darcy's father had for him, Wickham's profligacy, and his attempted seduction of Darcy's sister Georgiana, the writing changes tone to become more confiding and at times almost tender. Darcy has never revealed this story to anyone who was not involved in the mess already. He shows his bedrock trust of Elizabeth's character in giving her this explosive information, but he also shows his continuing care for her. "Here again I shall give you pain," he writes, "to what degree only you can tell. But whatever can be the sentiments which Mr. Wickham has created, a suspicion of their nature shall not prevent me from unfolding his real character. It adds even another motive." (169) Darcy believes that Wickham has won Elizabeth's heart, at least to some degree. Aside from any jealousy he may feel, he really does not want her to be taken in by Wickham, as his beloved sister was, almost to her ruin, and as his father was, until the day of his death. Towards the end of the letter, he justifies Elizabeth, writing that as she knew neither he nor Wickham before, and as she has a trusting nature, it is understandable that she would believe Wickham rather than himself. Finally, Darcy ends the letter with what Elizabeth later calls "charity itself" (307): "I will only add, God bless you." (172) Darcy, less than a day after being humiliated by Elizabeth, is already moving towards forgiveness of her for her unjust accusations. Whether he is moving towards better self-knowledge remains to be seen.

For Elizabeth, once she comes to terms with the contents of the letter, she too has changed in her analysis of Darcy. She still does not approve of Darcy; he has not at all answered her third charge of his selfish disdain for others. She thinks that he cannot answer this charge, that his coldness is ingrained in his temperament, and she cannot have any affection for such a man. Still, she can no longer hate him, and can feel the compliment he has given her in his love for her.

Thus, the proposal scene and the letter that follows contain a strange kind of antagonistic intimacy, as both characters reveal themselves to the other and experience the shock of encountering the truth about the other, and thus the truth about their own weaknesses and mistakes. In the context of the spectacular mismatch of their feelings for each other, they are presented with the choice of whether to hold on to their incorrect assumptions or to learn from the encounter.

Darcy, does not simply discount Elizabeth's rejection as a sign of her own smallness of mind (as another character, Mr. Collins, does earlier in the novel, when rejected by Elizabeth). Rather, he accepts it as the result of a rational woman's account of how his character appears to her. Elizabeth, rather than disbelieve Darcy's account of the Wickham affair in favor of continuing to believe in her judgment of Wickham and Darcy both, weighs the evidence rationally and comes to decide that Darcy must have told her the truth. Both Elizabeth and Darcy are at root honest people; the truth holds more power for them than their self-regard. Had this been the end of the novel, they would both have been better off in the increase of their own self-knowledge. In other words, the solution to the problem of how to see one's own faults clearly, while it may require another human being to interact with, does not seem to require marriage to that person. Only, in this case at least, a botched proposal.

One can imagine, under other circumstances perhaps, a philosophical friendship developing between Darcy and Elizabeth, in the way Socrates describes to Callicles in the *Gorgias*. As Socrates says, "the person who intends to put his soul to an adequate test, to see whether it lives rightly or not," must have "knowledge, good will, and frankness."[2] Socrates expresses the luck he feels in having found an interlocutor in Callicles who exhibits these three qualities, since he, Socrates, thinks Callicles will help him to discover when he has hit upon something true, specifically regarding the best way of life. Though it is not clear from the dialogue whether Callicles does, in fact,

2. Donald J. Zeyl, *Gorgias* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), 58.

have these attributes, it makes some sense that a couple who did exhibit knowledge, good will, and frankness towards each other in the pursuit of a better way of life would be in a position to help each other. As we have seen, both Elizabeth and Darcy have shown an interest in living rightly. Both have some knowledge and have proved themselves to be frank with each other. What would remain is for each to develop good will towards the other. Such a friendship could be very productive for them. It would not require marriage, but one could do worse than to marry such a friend. One could argue that the Bennets, Collinses, and Wickhams all made worse choices than this in their own marriages. Elizabeth and Darcy do not go this route, though. In fact, it is not clear at this point in the story whether it would be possible for them to have such a relationship of knowledge, good will, and frankness with each other. In the proposal scene, at least, their frankness was blunt enough to make good will towards each other difficult to maintain.

Section III: Pemberly

Both Darcy and Elizabeth leave Darcy's disastrous proposal assuming they will never see each other again. It is not too many weeks later, though, that Elizabeth finds herself vacationing with her aunt and uncle in Derbyshire, and touring Darcy's estate of Pemberly. As they tour the house, Elizabeth is surprised to hear the housekeeper's enthusiastic account of Darcy as sweet tempered and generous hearted since childhood. (206) Elizabeth's firmest opinion of Darcy as cold and disdainful is rocked. "Some people call him proud; but I am sure I never saw anything of it," says the servant. "To my fancy, it is only because he doesn't rattle away like other young men." (207)

Elizabeth finds Mr. Darcy's portrait in the gallery: "she stood before the canvas on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself." (208) This moment is a turning point for Elizabeth, as she puts herself under the regard of the painted Darcy with "earnest contemplation." As his image on the wall smiles down at her, a smile she remembers its owner to have bestowed on her more than once, the housekeeper tells her the painting was

done at the time when his father was still alive. Elizabeth thinks more clearly about Darcy's position as master of Pemberly. Rather than the wealth, beauty, and elegance, she thinks of the people. She realizes how much power Darcy has to give pleasure or pain to the many who are dependent upon him, and therefore how valuable the praise of one of those dependent people is. Elizabeth, with all of her spirited allegiance to justice and kindness, cannot help but admire someone who does so much good for those who depend upon him.

The reminder that he was orphaned and given full responsibility of the estate at such a young age, must also give her another way to account for his previous insulting behavior. Rather than a man lacking all feeling for others, he is transformed in her mind into a young man full of feeling, but who has been given all the weight of Pemberly and the responsibilities of the family name to bear. Such a man might well fall into the error of excessive family pride. But such an error can be forgiven, and Elizabeth finally does begin to forgive Darcy his insults to her: "she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression." (208)

Further surprises come as Elizabeth and her relatives happen upon Darcy himself, who has returned from town unexpectedly. Darcy now has his chance to respond, in action, to Elizabeth's third charge against him, the charge that he is full of disdain for others. He responds well, astonishing her again and again with his civil behavior, his kind attention to her aunt and uncle, some of the lowly relatives he spoke so insultingly of in his proposal to her, and most of all, his lack of pretension towards or grievance against her, after her unfair treatment of him and rejection of his offer.

Thus begins the renewal of Darcy's and Elizabeth's acquaintance, with friendly civility on his side, and astonishment on hers. Each character has transformed in attitude toward the other. Elizabeth's state of mind is easier to determine, since we have the benefit of her point of view in the narrative. She has gone from hating Darcy towards the beginning of the novel to a cold kind

of respect since receiving his letter after the proposal. His friendliness towards her at Pemberly leads to something new. "But above all, above respect and esteem, there was a motive within her of goodwill that could not be overlooked. It was gratitude. Gratitude not merely for once having loved her, but for loving her still well enough to forgive all the petulance and acrimony of her manner in rejecting him, and all the unjust accusations accompanying her rejection." (220)

Elizabeth's gratitude and esteem are the beginning of affection, as the narrator tells us. (231) This feeling is explicitly distinguished from the captivation she felt for Wickham at the beginning of the novel and is marked both by rational accounts to herself of how well she and Darcy suit each other and by irrational and confused feelings of repentance and jealousy. (259)

We are given less information about Darcy's state of mind at this point. Certainly he has lost his expectation that Elizabeth will return his feelings, and much of the pride that went along with that expectation. Whatever he feels for her at this point, it is no longer opposed to his family pride, but seems to be rooted, as Elizabeth's feelings for him are, in gratitude. Later in the novel, Darcy exclaims to Elizabeth, "What do I not owe you!" (308) referring to the lesson of humiliation she taught him by rejecting his initial marriage proposal to her. If nothing else, it seems that rather than looking down on Elizabeth and suffering the pain of his attraction to her, as he was at the beginning of the novel, he feels in her debt and is hoping for some return of his affection. This change in perspective must go along with some kind of change in how his desire for her is oriented.

Esteem, forgiveness, and gratitude are different qualities than they were starting to possess before their reacquaintance at Pemberly, when their knowledge of virtue and their frankness towards each other led me to speculate about philosophical friendship. At this point in the story, their self knowledge has greatly improved, as has their good will. Their frankness suffers, however: from the time Elizabeth leaves Pemberly after news of Lydia's scandalous elopement reaches her, until nearly the end of the novel, Elizabeth and Darcy think of each other and wonder about the other's feel-

ings, but they do not speak more than a few polite superficialities to each other. The transformation that leaves Elizabeth wanting Darcy and leaves Darcy hoping for Elizabeth somehow leaves them unable to speak to each other.

Section IV: Beyond Education

Let's go back to Darcy's comment on temperament from early in the novel. "There is, I believe, in every disposition a tendency to some particular evil, a natural defect, which not even the best education can overcome." (51) We see evidence of defects that are not overcome throughout the novel: Mr. Bennet's lack of moral energy, Mrs. Bennet's nervousness, Mr. Collins's servile pomposity, Mr. Wickham's deceitful smarminess, Lydia Bennet's imprudence. When Darcy and Elizabeth encountered the truth about their own misjudgments, it looked like an improvement for them. At least two of the characters just mentioned, however, seem to have a good level of self-knowledge. Mr. Bennet comments explicitly and with self conscious irony on his own ability to avoid facing his obligations, for instance, (249) and Mr. Wickham is portrayed as wondering how much Elizabeth has been told of his bad behavior. It looks like self-knowledge may not be sufficient to bring about self-improvement.

Darcy's and Elizabeth's typical faults, on the other hand, are nowhere to be seen in the latter part of the novel. Elizabeth, who suffered from a too quick judgment of others in the service of her pride and of her enjoyment of laughing at human folly, does attempt to judge whether Darcy still loves her or not after she leaves Pemberly. She cannot believe that Darcy, whatever his feelings, will overcome his scorn of Lydia and his resentment of Wickham enough to engage himself to Elizabeth and join such a family. She cannot quite stop hoping that her judgment is wrong, though, especially once she hears of his involvement in Lydia's marriage. (271-272) Her relationship (or lack of one) to Darcy has become her focus, rather than her ability to judge people. Her habits of quick decision in the service of her own pride recede in the face of her care for Darcy and her pride in him. (272)

It turns out that Elizabeth's judgment is wrong in this case. Mr. Darcy does overcome his admitted resentful nature to the point that he still wants to marry Elizabeth, though he will become in the process brother-in-law to Wickham, a man he despises. Wickham's outrageous behavior against Darcy and others is apparently no longer the central focus of Darcy's attention. Though his opinion of Wickham has not changed, his attention is rather on how to manage Wickham's vice in a way that will cause the least amount of trouble for Elizabeth and her family. Darcy's transformation is complete enough that he goes to much trouble, embarrassment, and expense to find Lydia and Wickham after they elope and persuade them to marry. In other words, Elizabeth's welfare becomes central to Darcy and his personal resentment of Wickham is beside the point.

If Darcy is correct, that "not even the best education" can overcome temperamental flaws, then something else is at work in these two characters, something beyond education and more effective than self-knowledge alone. Whatever is at work, it gives them a different perspective on what is important, changing their focus away from their own concerns and towards the welfare of each other. Though it is clear to the reader that both Elizabeth and Darcy are willing to commit to a life together after Elizabeth leaves Pemberly, they are unable or unwilling speak to each other until almost the very end of the novel. It appears that even when each character has identified the person who can help him or her to live a better life they still cannot come together.

Their silence towards each other regarding any issue of importance lasts for several weeks, through the drama of Lydia Bennet's elopement and engagement to Wickham and through several visits Darcy makes to Elizabeth's house once Lydia and Wickham are safely married and out of town. It is only broken after Darcy's aunt, Lady Catherine, interferes by trying to disrupt an engagement that she had mistakenly believed was about to be formed between them. In attempting to forbid the engagement, she unwittingly gives the two reason to hope that marriage might be possible. Once hope is kindled, communication and engagement to marry soon follow.

In one of the conversations they have after they are finally engaged to be married, Elizabeth asks Darcy directly why he did not speak to her when he visited her before their engagement. "Because you were grave and silent, and gave me no encouragement," he says. "But I was embarrassed," she replies. "And so was I." (318) At the beginning of the novel, each character suffered from pride to the point that each thought the other was lower in some way: Elizabeth thought Darcy was devoid of proper feeling for his fellow man, and Darcy focused on Elizabeth's socially lower and often foolish family relations. It is one thing to be playful, angry, or frank with someone who is beneath you in some way, but quite another to speak plainly to one who has humbled you, as each does to the other in the proposal scene and the following letter. The knowledge of their own faults that they gained from their angry interaction during Darcy's proposal, taught them both that they had misjudged and injured the other. Given the desire each has for the other's good opinion after their encounter at Pemberly, neither has the courage to risk the other's scorn by speaking openly of his or her feelings. Only once they have some rational evidence to support their hope for the other's regard, via Lady Catherine, do they drum up the courage to speak plainly to each other.

Once they do reveal their feelings for each other, after Darcy again asks Elizabeth to marry him and she agrees, their conversation takes an interesting turn. Each of them expresses gratitude towards the other, confesses having mistreated the other in some way, and receives forgiveness. Darcy, full of self-recrimination, declares that he cannot think of his behavior in his first proposal to Elizabeth "without abhorrence." "The recollection of . . . my manners, my expressions during the whole of it is now, and has been many months, inexpressibly painful to me." (306) Elizabeth assures him that she has "long been most heartily ashamed" of her former words to him. Later, it is Elizabeth's turn to admit guilt. "How you must have hated me after *that* evening?" (308), that is, after her rejection of his first proposal. The expression is grammatically worded as an exclamation, but ends with a question mark. Elizabeth is both expressing her conviction of Darcy's

justified hatred of her, however short lived, and at the same time is asking him to reassure her, which he does. In this mutual confession and forgiveness, each accepts the other fully and the past is oriented and explained in terms of their present relationship.

Once they become engaged to marry, we get a glimpse of how their relationship will continue to strengthen the virtue of each. In their final conversation of the novel, Elizabeth playfully tries to account for why it is that Darcy was ever attracted to her, and has decided that he loved her for her impertinence, her near rudeness, to him in their early acquaintance. She says, "Had you not been really amiable you would have hated me for [my impertinence]; but in spite of the pains you took to disguise yourself, your feelings were always noble and just." (317) He made plain to her in his previous discussions with her that his "abhorrence" of his own behavior towards Elizabeth weighs on him. In the turn of one phrase,—"in spite of the pains you took to disguise yourself"—Elizabeth has recast Darcy's pride and disdain as an attempt at camouflage, as if he were too modest to express his true noble and generous self. In contrast with this gentle, playful manner of helping him to reconcile himself to his own past, recall her angry frankness in referring, during his first proposal to her, to his "arrogance, . . . conceit, and . . . selfish disdain." (164) She and he both know that he was prideful to the point of offense, but now, because of their mutual acceptance, she can use her own playful manner to show him the way to forgive himself, through humor, as she has already forgiven him. Unlike her father, who teases Mrs. Bennet almost without mercy, Elizabeth is using her wit not to undercut Darcy, but to help him let go of his past mistakes.

In that same conversation, their talk turns to Darcy's aunt, Lady Catherine, who had so steadfastly opposed their marriage. "Shall you ever have the courage to announce to Lady Catherine what is to befall her?" asks Elizabeth. "I am more likely to want time than courage, Elizabeth. But it ought to be done, and if you will give me a sheet of paper, it shall be done directly," he replies. (318) In this exchange, Darcy gently refuses to laugh either at the prospect of Lady Catherine's dismay over the news of their

marriage or at the possibility of him lacking the courage to give her the news. He exhibits the kind of straightforward moral goodness that Elizabeth must have seen so little of in her own parents and he draws her in to help him by asking her to hand him the paper he needs to begin. Elizabeth, so used to being the amused observer of others' folly is now a partner in the exercise of virtue in the world. This exercise continues after their marriage, when, as we are told, they provide better society for Elizabeth's sister Kitty, relieve some of the habitual debt that Lydia and Wickham accrue, educate Darcy's sister in human relationships, and continue the work of improving the lot of those who depend on the residents of Pemberly. (321-323)

Like the marriages of the Bennets, Collinses, and Wickhams, Darcy and Elizabeth's marriage is formed with social and sexual union in mind. Unlike for the other marriages, though, Darcy and Elizabeth do not have a primary motivation, such as social standing or financial stability, for joining with each other. Rather, the Darcys are re-forming themselves to be better human beings through their marriage. The self-knowledge they gained after Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth has been joined by the gratitude and forgiveness felt by each and proclaimed to each other. Within this relationship of acknowledged acceptance and esteem, they are able to give each other a new view of how to live well.

What started off bearing some resemblance to a philosophical friendship has turned into something else. As Socrates knew well, for a relationship of knowledge, good will, and frankness to exist, each party must be devoted to finding the truth about the question at hand. As we see depicted in *Pride and Prejudice*, though, (and as Socrates doubtless also knew well) people are rarely if ever fully devoted to finding out the truth on the question of how to live rightly. Pride, passion, and worldly concerns all get in the way.

In the scene just described, in which Elizabeth playfully recasts Darcy's former disdainful nature and Darcy invites Elizabeth to help him write to Lady Catherine, each provides the perspective that the other needs. Rather than frankly declare what the other ought to be thinking or doing, they demonstrate to each

other a different way of looking at themselves and the world, simply by being who they are. At the same time, each tacitly invites the other to join in. In the process, each gains the perspective that will allow their character defects not to disappear, but to recede into the background. The gratitude each feels and the forgiveness each gives make this relationship possible because each values the perspective of the other more than his or her own pride. Austen gives us a picture of what marriage can lead to at its best: a transformation of the self into something more and better than what is possible alone, the result of what "not even the best education" can give. Elizabeth and Darcy have this sort of marriage.

The Bennets probably could not have reached this kind of intimacy and mutual acceptance, due to the degree of difference in their temperaments. They might have come closer to it, though, if Mr. Bennet had not given up on the marriage once he realized how mistaken he had been in his evaluation of Mrs. Bennet's character. The Collinses never desired this kind of relationship: Mr. Collins is too self important to ever admit anyone else fully into his thoughts, and Mrs. Collins, Charlotte, is satisfied with managing him, in return for her social standing as his wife. Their happiness lies in her ability to manage him without rancor, and will last as long as Charlotte can continue to tolerate his foolishness with grace. The Wickhams, with their mutual inability to control their passions, never had a chance at such mutual acceptance, though they were happy for a time with the physical version of intimacy.

I began this lecture by quoting the sentence that starts the novel, and considering two interpretations of it: one that rested on the witty acknowledgement of human greed and self deception and one that rested on a straightforward recognition of our need for each other, specifically with respect to marriage. Something like a synthesis of these two attitudes occurs in the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy. Elizabeth, having grown up with Mr. Bennet as her favorite parent, likes to laugh at human weakness, but has had little authoritative example in her life of straightforward moral goodness. Elizabeth benefits from her marriage in having a living example of steadfast and straightforward goodness in her life.

Darcy doesn't laugh at human folly: he shuns it. This became a problem for him when he himself, because of the folly of his overweening pride, treated the woman he loves with contempt, as he did in his initial proposal to Elizabeth. He cannot forgive himself for this behavior without Elizabeth's example of teaching him to "be laughed at." (p. 310) Wit comes in handy when a straightforward understanding of our own failings is overwhelming.

Pride and Prejudice is not a pure social critique, nor a romance, nor a morality tale. It has some resemblance to all of these genres, though. As we have seen, wit and playfulness, passion, folly, reason, love of virtue, gratitude and forgiveness are all deftly woven into the story of Elizabeth and Darcy. In the process, we are given a glimpse of how one might transcend the universal faults of self interest, greed, pride, and prejudice, not by banishing or losing them, which is surely impossible, but by allowing them to lose their hold over us through intimacy with another human being who suits us; one we can love, work with, laugh at and laugh with. It is no surprise that such a possibility, presented with Austen's consummate skill and grace, leaves the reader full of pleasure and joy.

"Please, Don't Eat the Swans": My Revolution in Romania

Louis Petrich

> Even from a simple realistic point of view, the countries we long for occupy a far larger place in our actual life, at any given moment, than the country in which we happen to be. . . . And besides, even from this point of view, of mere quantity, in our lives the days are not all equal.
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> —Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*

In late December of 1989, I attended my first Modern Language Conference in Washington, D.C. I was a graduate student at the University of Chicago, Committee on Social Thought, taking my time trying not to be impertinent in my dissertation on Shakespeare. If I had my doubts of becoming the sort of scholar that the members of the MLA would want to make an English professor, I had even more doubts that life could be any better than I knew it as a student. The authors occupying me in Chicago I thought contained the world. I went to the MLA Conference to meet the guardians of English letters and to settle my doubts about my place in their world one way or another.

I spent one free evening not with the literary scholars in the hosting hotel, but with my good friend, Mark, who possessed no knowledge of literature. As a journalist, however, he kept himself well-informed. At that time, the American invasion of Panama and the bloody revolution in Romania kept Mark busily flipping the channels of his television set to catch the latest world events. Meanwhile, during the days, I was performing a similar ritual at the conference, traversing from room to room to hear the latest

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scholarly developments in my field. That evening, to bring our two worlds of interest together, I ventured to compare the overthrow of dictatorships happening before his eyes in Panama and Romania to the overthrow of ethno-phallocentrism taking place before mine in the Grand Hyatt Hotel. Mark shook his head and replied that he much preferred to see images of Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife shot to death by firing squad than to hear my reports about the death of the white male author. Then he grew more serious: "Perhaps you should look for your colleagues and career where you won't have to make things like that up."

Six months later, in June of 1990, I picked up the phone to hear Mark's voice triumphantly announce, "You have just gotten a Fulbright Scholar Award." This struck me as very strange, since I had not applied for one. He, however, had just before called the United States Information Agency to ask if any "Fulbrights" were presently available for someone with my credentials. The USIA told him that all positions had been competitively filled months earlier from applications duly submitted a year in advance—except one, which remained defiantly empty: a lectureship in American literature at the Alexandru I. Cuza University in Iasi, Romania, supposed to start that autumn.

"But I don't do American literature," I protested, "I do Shakespeare. And where on earth is Iasi, anyway? Did you say 'Romania'"?

I shuddered to recall that only a week earlier the Romanian coal miners were reported by the *Chicago Tribune* to be storming the streets of Bucharest, chasing down students, journalists, opposition figures, and all those whose trimmed beards made them look intellectual, to club them into submission or death. Such images were very dreadful and nauseating to consider that summer as I turned my mind towards Romania and assembled my Fulbright application for quick processing. Quite unprepared for my destiny—for so this turn became—I would have to learn by trial and error whether American literature had any power to free Romanian students from the oppression of having lived their lives pinned under the weight of a rock, mined for that purpose, toppled only yesterday, but still hard and cruel in its slowly disintegrating

character. You can be pretty sure, reader, that I am not making these things up, which were quotidian for millions of people (who cares to remember them now?), and which, to all my present days have left a longing and a pattern.

I set foot in Romania one night in September 1990, at the Otopeni International Airport in Bucharest, where I was greeted by several fatigued soldiers below our aircraft, their assault rifles pointing hospitably down at the ground. These "most fierce descendants of Rome" (an epithet still to be heard) had one arm free to beg for western cigarettes as they conducted me into the dreary terminal. The first words I spoke in Romania, to the passport control officer, sitting in his compact wooden booth lit by the standard forty watt bulb, were to inform him that I had come to teach American literature at the University of Iasi. I recoiled slightly at my own words, realizing that if he knew I possessed no credentials to teach this subject, he could have me deported as an imposter. But the controller, not understanding a syllable of English, stamped my passport perfunctorily and slid it back to me silently. I had advisedly placed a carton of Kent cigarettes where it would be the first item encountered upon opening each piece of my luggage to the customs inspectors. They played their parts perfectly, and I went on, lightened in load, to award myself to that taxi driver whose face appeared the least unshaven and sooty. He dropped me at the stately residence of the American Cultural Affairs Officer, Agatha Kuperman, an attractive, red-haired woman of Hungarian descent, whom even the Romanians (long hostile to Hungarians) considered highly. She embraced me warmly on the black street, her little white poodle in constant danger of being trodden by my uncertain feet, and then she chided me for paying the driver four dollars: "That's a week's salary for most Romanians, my boy." I slept that night in the spare room of her diplomat's mansion, listening to the barking of wild dogs that roamed the dark streets of Bucharest.

Aggie briefed me the following morning at the consulate section of the U.S. Embassy, whose first floor looked like a nursery. Dozens of Romanian babies were here undergoing the lengthy process of adoption by their would-be American parents. Some,

darker skinned, probable offspring of gypsies (suspected of selling them), and others, physically handicapped or distressed by their own cries, were all on offer to be wrapped in American arms, carried away in love, and saved. Aggie, who had only two minutes to put me on guard against two especial dangers I would face, seized me by the arm to describe how the Chairman of the English Department once grabbed my predecessor to draw his ear close and whisper, "You know I can crush you, Sam, I can destroy you." He would not have the nerve to manhandle me, she explained, since he could no longer assume the backing of the Securitate (Romanian secret police). More likely, he would now try to engage me to his daughter. "I must warn you, particularly, to stay away from Romanian women." She sensed my hesitation, and added, "They are all become whores." Then she let me go, suitably impressed, to Iasi.

Horia Holban, an English professor from the Alexandru I. Cuza University, spotted my searching flashlight on the dark platform of the train station on that rainy September evening I arrived in Iasi, a city of 265,000 people within a goodly jogging distance of Gorbachev's Soviet Union, our better tailored, but still great enemy. Horia had been sent by the Chairman of the English Department to welcome me, just as he had welcomed my Fulbright predecessors since 1970, equipped for this purpose by being one of the ten percent of Romanians who owned a car. His windshield wipers came unhinged as he drove us to my apartment. "How can you see the road through all the murk and rain?" I asked, hoping he would pull over to fix the wipers. "I have driven this way many times before," he replied. I made a nervous reference to Bernard Shaw, whom I had heard from my informants was his specialty. "Yes, I am the Romanian expert on Shaw," he stated, as he continued to navigate the darkness. Then he asked me to contribute an article to a literary quarterly he had just founded, called *Ethos*. "This will help you to get recognition in America," he said, evidently made aware of my unpublished status by his informants. "Perhaps I can come up with something," I replied, conscious of the usefulness of his car. As it turned out, his quarterly went defunct after one issue because the price of printing quadrupled. His

car, however, he kept on running.

My apartment was located on the eighth floor in a block of flats that looked, like every other block, orphaned from the earth. Nothing had changed since Horia escorted the first American lecturer to this apartment twenty years earlier. The elevator still broke down two or three times a week. "Why repair something permanently when you can employ a man full-time to fix it regularly?" he commented, as we climbed eight flights of unlit stairs with luggage. "The people steal the bulbs," he said, "but you will memorize your steps everywhere, and then you, too, won't need a flashlight."

My apartment comprised two bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, bath, and like every apartment in the Workers' Utopia, a balcony, where the population retired to smoke and dream. "You can see for yourself that every article has been stamped and inventoried by the University," Horia announced, as he began the tour. The same rusty trash can, missing its lid, stood under the kitchen sink. The same two plates and cracked pot occupied a cabinet, and the same pair of cutlery lay in a drawer, to serve each generation of American lecturer. My bedroom—a room with a double bed—felt forbidden but to drafts. "Most of our lecturers brought along their wives, who helped them to make this more of a home," he said, "but I can ask the Chairman to provide you an extra blanket."

The water, he explained, as we entered the bathroom, was supposed to appear for a few hours in the mornings and evenings, hot only every other day. "But it may not always make it up to the eighth floor. They give us a bathtub so that we can always have water." Thus I kept my bathtub filled, with a bucket nearby for flushing the toilet, and I boiled water in pots for transfer to the sink. This gave me the ritual satisfaction of reliving an early triumph of civilization—keeping clean on the outskirts of the Roman Empire. In February, the hot water did not appear for three weeks. When it finally came back, like a shooting star, the people left whatever they were doing to take quick advantage. They seemed to accept chronic deprivations and momentary windfalls as among the mysteries of life, whereas I attributed human pur-

poses to them, and I talked to myself a lot in anger, pacing from room to room, hoping that the listening devices were still in operation for the Securitate to hear my accusations of evil.

"A woman named Luminitsa will clean your apartment once a week," Horia said, "paid by the university, but you can pay her more to do extra chores." Luminitsa was a sweet and sturdy old woman, who managed to locate an ancient washing machine, missing several pieces, which she employed to make my clothes clean, but increasingly misshapen. She proved especially helpful in obtaining milk, sold to lines of people as the sun rose. (I never could abide the practice of standing in lines as if mortality did not matter, and I would have paid her to stand forever, for me.) In the winter, Luminitsa stood before my open lit oven, preferring to hold, rather than to drink the hot tea I offered her. She happened to be present the morning that the bombing of Iraq began in January of 1991, and she kept making the sign of the cross three times and mumbling prayers as she went about her lifelong, inalienable work.

His tour finished, Horia handed me a roll of toilet paper, warning me that I would find this item missing from public places and only sporadically available in the shops. "So carry some around with you, eat lightly, and use the paper sparingly." With these words and a wan smile to indicate he would have liked to be joking, the Romanian expert on Shaw bid me goodnight. I sat at the table gone crooked on the concrete floor of the living room. I felt alone, ignorant, hungry, cold, and I was beginning to sense across the table the company of failure. I thought about supplicating God, Orthodox fashion, to help me survive in this dark, backstage world deprived of props, but the Romanians had been doing that for years. I felt tired, too, and so I let my body take precedence over the soul's fears and carry me clothed to bed, where I discovered, to my surprise, that I slid quickly into a good, long sleep.

Late next morning, after bread and tea, I took a taxi to the Alexandru I. Cuza University[1] to meet with the redoubtable

1. Founded in 1861, the University offered bachelor degrees and doctorates in the natural sciences, mathematics, history, philosophy, geography, economics, law, and philology. The schools of engineering, medicine,

Chairman of my department. He looked tussled in his grey suit and tie, not formidable, not brutish, as his grey eyes, on the lookout everywhere, probed intermittently into mine. He liked to finish my sentences in perfect British English, as if to show that he knew my thoughts and how to speak them properly. He conducted me to the American reading room, where I would teach five classes a week of American literature, lasting two hours each, to first or second-year students in groups of ten to twelve. I would also supervise the growing collection of books that the Americans and British had donated or loaned to the department over the years. "You must be sure to restrict the use of the reading room to students in our department and the English teachers of Iasi," he emphasized several times, as if this were the crux of my assignment. A cubicle adjacent to the reading room would become my little office. The Securitate used to keep equipment there to monitor the foreign teachers and students throughout the building. He gave me the key to a locked cabinet, where I would store the precious Norton Anthologies of American Literature, the television and video player, and some British and American movies on video tape. "I keep the majority of video tapes at home," he explained, "so that you will not be tempted to loan them to people who will copy them illegally to sell." I was often to discover that Romanian homes secretly contained little pieces of public property that made their possessors feel a little less poor, a little less equal.

The Chairman then invited me to his office, where he poured us some plum brandy and began to drink. He had a story to tell me, and it would take some time and some help. He spoke of his imprisonment in the 1950's for an anti-Soviet remark, and of the Romanian prejudice against him for being half-Hungarian. He overcame these adversities to master the English language by reading Dickens, whose linguistic varieties he knew as an expert, and Conrad, whose sociological studies of character helped him

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and agronomy had separate locations in the city. 20,000 students were enrolled overall, making Iasi one of the four centers of higher education in Romania, along with Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, and Timisoara.

to achieve his present position. He had a twenty-three year old daughter who studied medicine and loved to speak English. He felt joy when the revolution finally came, freeing him from the harassments of the Securitate and bringing hope to everyone for reconcilement with the West. He wanted me to know that he was a decent man, whose membership in the Romanian Communist Party had been a necessary concession to his persecutors, and whose true self, finding it safe to appear only recently, should be allowed broad margins of deformity. "The worst thing about communism," he confessed, "is that it brings out the evil in people." He poured me some more brandy, but it spilled over my full glass, for I had not learned to drink at midday with relish. I knew to be very firm with this man, so I declared my intent to open the American reading room to the public. The Chairman straightened his back, narrowed his grey eyes, and said, "If you do that you will become my enemy. Don't you know that even the quality of paper in there is enough to make the people steal the books!" "I would prefer not to become your enemy," I said, "but the books and videos and magazines will be recalled by the American Embassy if you insist." This was a bluff, but its tone of conviction succeeded, and he changed the subject by extending an invitation to dine with him and his wife and daughter some evening at his home. I accepted the invitation several months later, curious to find out if Aggie was right about him and his engaging daughter. She was, alas, right. Wisely, I was prepared to persuade them that my loneliness was not so dire as they interpreted.

The American reading room had the misfortune to overlook an athletic field. The steady thuds of soccer balls and the shouts of all-weathered players made the English of my students sound as timid as the communists might have wished from the mouths of their English enemy. Once in a while, the errant ball came crashing through a window, causing my students, almost all of them women, to duck and scream, though only for a second or two. I insisted that the windows be fixed to keep the temperature of the room above freezing. Nevertheless, during the winter I had to teach in my overcoat to students shivering in theirs. They smiled at my wishful handling of the radiators each morning, like

a witch doctor trying to summon up a ghost. At various times in the day, a crew of carpenters operated terrifically roaring power saws in their workshop directly beneath us, and the millions of powdery shavings that they generated got sucked up into air ducts that blew them right outside our apt-to-be-broken windows. Our classes then came to a halt, as a kind of reminder to everyone of the rights of real work to fill consciousness with its sound and fury. "All our priorities thus come to dust," I thought, indulging a poetic melancholy that seemed better than this grim reality.

The dimness of light in the reading room, to which I also objected, caused the students to marvel again at my notions of normalcy. "Fluorescent bulbs for the ceilings are not to be found anywhere in the country," they said, but still I made an official, stamped request. Two weeks later, someone knocked on the reading room door, timidly stuck her head in, and seeing the students beckon, approached my side and silently produced from her apron pocket an incandescent light bulb of the once maximum forty watts. "But this is not the type I ordered!" I exclaimed. The students laughed as the poor woman made her noiseless escape, and I stared at the economical bulb, ever more grateful for those windows that let in the light and all the world outside not made to order by man.

It surprised me to learn later that my remark to the cleaning woman was adopted by the students as a new motto. Henceforth, whenever life handed them another revolutionary dose of futility, they would laughingly say, "But this is not the type I ordered." I counted this my first success as a teacher of American values, or rather, my first achievement in an impossible environment of a common ground of enlightened foolishness.

I asked a student named Dana to act as my assistant in managing the reading room. Industrious, trustworthy, and book-loving, Dana put the shelves in order and maintained the old pretense of keeping up-to-date records. She was not good-looking, but I did not want beauty in a woman whose company I hoped would keep me from becoming lonely. To that end she possessed irrepressible good spirits, which had earned her the nicknames of "giggles" and "chatterbox." She somehow got me to join her in

frequently singing the refrain from a Bob Marley song: "Woman no cry—everything's gonna be all right." Her colleagues generously approved of our unmusical duet, perhaps thinking that a professor from a society one hundred years ahead must know whether everything was going to be all right or not.

Dana helped me to decorate the walls of the reading room with black and white photographs of British contributions to civilization and color pictures of American getaways suitable for a travel agency. The impression these created reinforced the common Romanian prejudice that the British have culture while the Americans have fun. The students all acquired a British accent, while convinced that the Americans were the ones who would acquire the world, once the Soviets were finished. Why else did the American flags that we hung on the door of the reading room keep disappearing? At first I thought that the Arab students tore them down in hatred (for this was during the first Gulf War), until several of my students shyly confessed: "We steal them for home display, to feel less lonely under the weight of liberty." And so I obtained more flags from the U.S. Embassy to present to my thieving learners of the Queen's English

Thus did I learn to permit some ridiculous activities to occur. One man, named Serban, visited the reading room every Thursday to inspect the magazines that the Embassy saw fit to send me: *Time, Newsweek, Cosmopolitan, and Vanity Fair.* He had a speech impediment and wore thick glasses that made him look oafish, yet he manifested the concentration of a surgeon as he turned the pages from cover to cover, pausing to copy the addresses he found for subscriptions, books, merchandise, and especially Caribbean travel destinations. Some students wanted me to inform Serban that these advertisements were not meant for someone without hard currency and a visa. But it struck me that these students were like this man in being poor and stranded. They, too, visited the American reading room and turned the pages of books not intended for them in order to find some hope and relief from the calamity of their birth. He dreamt alone over glossy and scented photo spreads, and they dreamt with me over the extravagances of poetry and plays. Besides, among the authors we read there

were debunkers enough and shipwrecked characters aplenty, but I shall come to our reading of them soon enough.

Another frequent visitor to the reading room, Nick, age forty, had somehow earned a black belt in karate in defiance of Ceausescu's prohibition of the martial arts. He sought books on antiquity. "Your presence here is a sign that Rome has returned to Romania at last, " he said, "for America is the one country today like Rome, the pacifier and lawgiver of nations." Nick named his son "Romulus" and chose his middle name to begin with "A," so that he would identify himself with the founder of Rome and the Egyptian sun god, "RA." By such means he sought to counteract the degrading forces that enslaved people from an early age by dictating: "You like flowers, don't you? So dig."

The American reading room, now supplied with posters of art and travel, songs and laughter, fragrant fashion magazines, and impossible dreams, did become an exceptional place. But I did not realize how original my students must have found it until I visited a typical Romanian high school, at the invitation of an English teacher named Nicoleta.

Her pupils rose in unison and saluted me in well-rehearsed English when I entered their classroom. Then they sat down on stools beside shared wooden desks whose lowness kept them hunched over all day, while the blank walls made looking to the right or left an impertinence. They questioned me about how I had spent my high school years. "Did you get paid for doing homework?" a boy asked. I paused at his sincerity, then replied that I did expect to get paid "in the long run." They looked at Nicoleta with satisfaction, as if to say, "We told you so." "Will jobs be available for us in America?" another boy asked. Again, I paused at this candid disclosure of their everyday despair, before answering that jobs of some kind were usually available, but getting to America would be the difficult part. They nodded their heads knowingly. They asked me for English books, and I invited them to the reading room, where they could borrow some. "Our books are still poisonous," they said. Nicoleta showed me a textbook of English which included quotations from Hobbes, Locke, Mill, Dickens, Shaw, and other greats, each followed by Ceaus-

escu's words of interpretation. "Same ink, same font, same paper, and therefore," she said, grimacing, "same genius." The frontispiece to the book showed Ceausescu's smiling portrait and his message to the pupil:

> To be a patriot means to spare nothing in order to carry out the policy of the Communist Party which fully corresponds to the vital interests of the whole nation. This is amply demonstrated by the economic and social development programme of the Romanian Communist Party, which derives from a philosophy governed by constant concern for the welfare of man.

His message went on and on in the same pitch—all lies possessing no interest or meaning whatsoever. A physical education instructor cut short my stupefaction by inviting me to a volleyball exhibition that she had organized on the spur of the moment to honor my presence in the school. (I felt like a rock star or movie actor, fawned upon for deeds of nothing.) She put her best boys on the court, while the rest of the pupils, mostly girls, lined the perimeter of the small gym to watch the match and my reactions to it. The boys pounded the ball so hard that it flew repeatedly into the girls, who had no choice but to duck and scream. I recognized, with a kind of dismay, that my students were once those girls. I clapped anyway and thanked everyone for a fine performance, at which they all cheered and looked elated.

As I was about to leave the high school, Nicoleta drew me aside to an empty room where she unburdened her soul of much worry:

> All my pupils know of life is that it gets worse, and all they have been told of death is that it brings no rewards or punishments. They will not work for future goods, since they believe there are none, or for the sake of work itself, since that would make them the dupes of communism. They want to be happy *now*, so they dream about going to America, where they believe happiness is possible. But to get to America they must have dollars, and the dollar is worth more than our Romanian lei every day. Where will all this end? Already some of them believe that they can buy their own souls.

I tried to recall some brave words that might allay her fears, yet I was afraid to sound hypocritical, with a pocket full of dollars, backed by God and the United States, in which to trust. I thought about that Bob Marley song, whose refrain has a distinguished pedigree that includes some lines by a grumpy poet who knew a lot about souls caught between hope and despair. So I recited them to this sorrowing teacher of English, offering no interpretation, just the citation:

> Sin is Behovely, but
> All shall be well, and
> All manner of thing shall be well.
>
> —T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," *Four Quartets*

For the present, however, my students had many reasons to duck and scream. They were not the children of glorious Rome, of whose ruins on the Black Sea they boasted, but of Nicolae Ceausescu, communist tyrant from before they were born. They attended thirty-six hours of class per week. (A gap in the schedule would teach them to skip classes and take to the streets, it was feared.) The margins had disappeared from their essays (paper was that precious) as surely as the breadth had gone from their daily lives. Five of them occupied a dormitory room that would have housed one or two in America. They put boards across their laps to serve there as desks. Bread was served them days old. They slept fitfully to the splattering of bottles tossed from dormitory windows by the disdainful foreign students, and to the fugitive laughter of Romanian girls who prostituted themselves to these students to obtain colorful African beads or Arabian scarves. No residence staff stood on call to help them; no professional counselors guided their development; no student organizations received funding to entertain them. Gypsy fortune tellers were always on hand for many dubious purposes, but their layers of colorful dress stank from going unwashed. Students marching for better conditions on the first anniversary of the revolution were jeered by envious workers for their "dissipation" and told to get back to classes. For it was considered a great honor to be accepted to the Alexandru I. Cuza University. Some students had

taken the entrance exam for English five years in a row before passing. They had worked in factories in the meantime.

What could I expect students, suffering these conditions, to achieve intellectually? When I asked them the meaning of a literary passage, a few whispered to each other in Romanian about the meaninglessness of so bare a question (devoid of the familiar theoretical cues that implied the correct theoretical answer), while most stared down in their laps. Who knows what spiritual changes gradually occur from looking down all the time? I encouraged them to leap over themselves in boldness of thought, but they had no practice overcoming themselves, only their conditions. Perhaps I could get them to look up, at least, with the help of America's most upward-looking authors, the ones who in fact had inspired me to study literature for a living.

Ralph Waldo Emerson would provide a logical starting point, I thought, for the reformation of the neck and spinal posture. But when I assigned them their first essay on the question, "Why trust yourself?" I received in writing an apology signed by the whole class:

> We are frightened because it is the first time when an American teacher hears words spoken by ourselves. This note is a kind of message we want to send to you, because it has been clearly revealed that we have different ideas about literature, America, the world, and life. We should want you to understand our low level of comprehension, concerning various aspects of these things. Please tell us again, if you don't mind, what you want us to write.

I decided at once to read Emerson aloud with them, to manifest the felt meanings of his words, before pressing them again to write what they felt. I modeled his inspiration vocally, and then I let them try to partake similarly of it. I heard in their voices, however, not the tone of empowerment, but alien sounds of discontinuity. These sounds were not, I had to admit, unrelated to Emerson's style. Contrary to the spirit of this aphoristic sage, I condescended to offer them a similar apology about my own low level of comprehension concerning all aspects of Romanian so-

ciety, which I found altogether different and a little frightening. Interpreting my apology in material terms, they offered me their assistance in performing the ordinary tasks of life, and I gratefully accepted the offer. Thereafter, I never lacked for help in meeting the necessities of the body. As for the soul, I made them promise never to accept in our classes the old pedagogical procedure, whereby students pretended to learn, professors pretended to teach, and neither side dared to expose the other as a fraud. "We shall dare to be true to each other," we pledged, "taking that as our way to seek truth." So once a week, in keeping with the promise, someone in class would summon the courage to ask me, "What do you think of us, honestly, Mr. Petrich?" And I would tell them, whatever struck me most at the time. I, in turn, would ask them what they thought of the American writers I offered them. And they, in turn, told me what struck them most about these writers, America, and me.

They told me that Walt Whitman, whom I had hoped would lengthen their spines with a feeling of democratic power more pleasingly articulated than Emerson's, reminded them of their former communist leaders, who loudly gesticulated on behalf of the people, listing their accomplishments in fields and factories, on and on and on.

"How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book," I quoted from Henry Thoreau. "I am one such man," I professed to them. Perhaps my students, in the aftermath of their revolution and by my example, would find in *Walden* additional incentives to loosen their ties to collective dejection. But the first chapter, "Economy," did not overwhelm the Romanians as it once did me. They did not know what to make of an American author who had solved the problem of life by reducing it to its lowest terms and living very simply, like a Spartan. "Isn't that how we live now, meanly and miserably?" They did, however, find much to admire in a man who lived alone and wrote such things as this: "Society is commonly too cheap. We live thick and are in each other's way, and stumble over one another, and I think that we thus lose some respect for one another." They expected the chapter called "Brute Neighbors" to develop this favorite,

anti-social theme, but were disappointed to discover that in it Thoreau lauds the heroic self-sacrifices of warring red and black ants. A writer who cultivates poverty and extols the most communistic of animals made them suspicious of his American credentials and economic wisdom.

Surely, I thought, Thoreau's great essay, "Civil Disobedience," would inspire their esteem for the power of a propertyless individual to take on the slaveholding and war-making collective. But they were not impressed with Thoreau's leonine showdown with the bullying American state. On the contrary, they were impressed by the limits of the American state in punishing him. For upon his release after one night in jail for not paying his tax, Thoreau went "giddily to pick huckleberries…and then the State was nowhere to be seen." A student named Alina, with silky blond hair and deep, dark eyes, pointed out that some Romanians had also spent a short time in prison for political reasons, but after their release they developed terminal cancer. I learned later that her brother was among those who thus died, and that only then was the state nowhere to be seen. "We believe they were irradiated there," she said. "That way Romania kept fewer political prisoners in the eyes of the world." Alina invited me to her home to meet her father, a poet, and mother, who operated a small bar. Their son also wrote poetry, which apparently had gotten him in trouble with the Party. The father read some of their poetry to me in Romanian and Alina translated, her moist eyes locked to mine for confirmation of her act of translation in me. They carried their heavy burden of love with the intoxicating help of verse and drink. On this occasion, they also had me to help, as I felt my life's course dip into their well. How many a man, unburdened of years or grief, an easy sleeper, has let himself fall into the watery eyes of disconsolate poetry, there to see and embrace an ancient, bitter truth about life. Tragedy, as I now saw it enacted before me, would have to be given its finest American say to Alina and her colleagues, in keeping of our promise to be true to each other.

Among the excerpts from approved American authors that my students had read in high school were bits of dialogue from

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman.* These excerpts were supposed to demonstrate, of course, the cruelties of capitalism. We read the whole play. The students were surprised to discover that the young Willy Loman could have escaped from his unnatural conditions by following his brother Ben to Alaska in search of diamonds. "People in America move and start over all the time," I told them. "So why doesn't Willy Loman move to Alaska and start over?" A serious silence ensued, followed by a few whispers. Then one of my quietest students from across the hated Soviet border, a Bessarabian boy of stout physique, deep intonation, and rudimentary English named Dragos, cited a song then popular in the Soviet Union. I later witnessed the patrons of a Leningrad restaurant dance triumphantly to its refrain: "Don't be foolish America! Return to us Alaska now!" "Russians believe Alaska belong to them," said Dragos, "because true Russians never sell Motherland." He asked his colleagues for help with English, who explained that Alaska cannot be part of the American dream because it is geographically and culturally part of Siberia—rich in oil and minerals, very beautiful, but awfully hard and far away. "That why Stalin put Gulag there," Dragos added. The better part of the class agreed with him: "Better to die like an American in an automobile [as Willy does] than like a Russian in the Gulag."

"So what claims of truth does tragedy have among a mobile and escapist people?" I asked. "Salesmen and their customers are mobile and escapist by definition." I had to explain this because they did not know what salesmen and customers were. Shopkeepers in Romania, working for the State, did not care whether they sold anything, and their "customers," having no choice, had no care over what to buy. True salesmen, I explained, offer their customers a steady supply of newer and finer objects and projects as the means to live always better than before. But death will not find it any more difficult than before to rip from the world people who secure themselves to more and more new things. So true peace and happiness are not to be found in the economic activities of the American nation—at least according to Arthur Miller and Eugene O'Neill (whose tragedy, *The Iceman Cometh,* that of a salesman, we also read)—only a kind of continual distraction

ending in death of the soul and body. “But do they let you do serious work in America, in the midst of all that buying and selling?” asked a handsome student named Constantine. “They hate people with brains or talents here. I don’t know how much longer we can hold out.” He, and others whose ambitions resembled his, had long been smugglers of their own interdicted souls. (The black market, as I came to understand, dealt not in cigarettes primarily.) “If only there were real salesmen in Romania,” said Constantine, “to distract us from wanting to jump off a cliff. For forty years we secretly depended on the West for our vision of the future. And now we are supposed to believe these playwrights that suicide is better than buying and selling?”

A student named Olivia, whose candid, harmonious face made me look her way many a time, asked me if I really believed in the truth of tragedy. I evaded the question, not the face, by saying that the text, whether tragic or comic, creates conviction in itself. She had long ceased to believe the rhetoric of a professor, and she knew the power of her face to compel confessions from a man, so she asked me another question: “Why did you come to Romania, or was it just a stroke of bad luck?” My grandparents, I told her and the rest, had come to America from Eastern Europe at the turn of the twentieth-century. They saw the Statue of Liberty upon arrival, whose picture faced us fixedly in the reading room. I did not have to explain why they had left their homelands. But as to why I had come back to live in their country, I said that the people of Bucharest, in the name of liberty, had recently toppled a seventy foot statue of Lenin, who still exists in storage, and I wanted to study him there, in safety, and to learn to blow his mass all to pieces.

The students begged me to suspend the lessons of fine American tragedy. While there was still time to learn from each other, they wanted me to show them how ordinary Americans, like my own middle class, mid-western family, experienced the culture of a proud, free country. Movies, television shows, pop music, and grocery store magazines would become, apropos of their request, subject to study and discussion in class. This approach felt like an abomination to a reader of the great books from the Uni-

versity of Chicago, but I owed it to them to give the most popular products of American culture a showing and hearing. They were part of the truth. So to this stage of our learning, I let enter our presence, comedy—not of the literary kind.

I showed to public audiences in the reading room John Belushi and Dan Ackroyd in *The Blues Brothers.* This movie contains the longest car chases on record through the streets of Chicago and the nine, acne-faced, marching Nazis of the Village of Skokie (where I grew up). The audience enjoyed the leaps of dance and musical soul-power, but wondered aloud whether evil could be laughed and sung away. My first real job, I explained, was with the traffic engineering department of the Village. It was my task to help devise a traffic plan that would allow those Nazis to march on certain public streets, according to their First Amendment right, while minimizing civic disruption and the pain to Skokie's many Jews and Holocaust survivors. "My own next-door neighbor bore a tattoo on his arm from Auschwitz," I mentioned. "Did you support their right to march?" they asked.[2] "Yes," I answered, simply. We began a discussion about the comedian's faith in the power of ridicule, for which exposure is required. "These young men were exposed as idiots by their very right to public access, and they quickly disappeared afterward," I said. "Does that mean that rights and comedy go together?" someone asked. I had not thought about rights in that way before, but with premature enthusiasm, I said, "Yes, they do." Then I added, more cautiously, "So long as the public audience has the clear-eyed intelligence to recognize the ridiculous and the strong hearts to laugh it all the way to scorn."

I showed the Romanians a "Dirty Harry" detective movie with introductory remarks by a former American cop. He was

2. Romania had been an enthusiastic ally of Hitler, at first. A serious pogrom occurred in Iasi in 1941, *without* German assistance. The Romanian Communist Party always insisted that the persecutions of the Jews were entirely the responsibility of the previous regime. So my students did not grow up with any kind of Holocaust study beyond the mere blaming of others.

then a Fulbright Scholar doing research on the fifteenth-century Wallachian Prince, Vlad II Dracul, heroic impaler of infidel Turks.[3] "Police in America are not like yours in Romania," he said, "because we go after the bad guys—like Prince Vlad II did." One woman asked me if I could hear the guns firing away in Chicago. I showed them *Dracula* in one of the modern film versions, because "this is all most Americans know about Romania." The women in the audience felt puzzled to find Count Dracula, a vampire, portrayed as preferable to the normal men in the film as a mate. (Their puzzlement was a clue to something that I should have paid more attention to, as we shall see shortly.) The movie *Reds* made the audience feel uneasy by its soft treatment of Bolshevism. Corinna, one of my most sarcastic students, asked: "So is that what intelligent and hearty Americans in 1920 did with their lives—they ran off to Russia to fight for communism?" *Rain Man,* however, gave them back the typical Hollywood version of their beloved American dream: sexy women, fast cars, easy money, and to make them feel warm inside, love for autistic savants.

The movie *Glory,* with its stirring depiction of the first black regiment to fight in the American Civil War, made a deep impression on the Romanians. One man thanked me in tears for showing it, saying, "You are a lucky country to win that war. The good side does not have to win, you know." A doctor in the audience found the movie flawed because the black soldiers were "on the other side already, too much like the white soldiers." I prodded her to say more on this subject. "The movie assumes what it is supposed to prove, that blacks and whites are equal," she said. "Maybe they are equal, but I would like more proof." Others in the audience agreed with her. "600,000 Americans died in the American Civil War over the question of equality," I replied. "President Lincoln seemed to think that the magnitude of carnage in our great civil war was proof—and penance—enough." I then summoned the courage to ask them something

3. "Dracul" means "Order of the Dragon." Vlad II has become known to us as the vampire, "Dracula."

that had been nagging me for a long time. "Why do you think that 1200 dead on behalf of your own liberation is too much? Maybe, to prove that you deserve freedom, it is not enough. What does it take for slaves, black or white, to get to the other side?" Someone replied that the death toll would have been higher in Romania had the revolution not been stolen by apparatchiks. "It is a pity," I said, "that the suspicion that adheres to former slaves requires extreme measures to be overcome." I marveled that they agreed without reluctance to this terrible conclusion.

The selections from current American television that my parents sent me appeared to my students like scenes from a distant galaxy. We watched Oprah Winfrey interview fat people who complained they were victims of size discrimination. My students memorized the patterns in *Cosmopolitan* and *Vanity Fair,* so they were very discriminating themselves, and having stood for hours in milk and egg lines, they were not sympathetic to "size oppression." I also showed them Joan Rivers interviewing the fourteen personalities of a schizophrenic, all sitting still in one chair, followed by a man who believed he was a woman but had not yet undergone the operation to make him one. "How do you feel when you look at yourself naked in the mirror?" asked Joan. "Very uneasy and distracted," said the man. Thus did my students glimpse what ordinary Americans, my own dear family, watched on TV or at the movies to fulfill their comic destinies.

Since my students wanted to know all about my native city, which I felt all too eager to show off, I decided to direct them in a comedy by David Mamet, a favorite Chicago playwright, called *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* (1974). I chose this play because, like most people in theatre, I felt tempted to challenge (what I perceived to be) the unsatisfactory *status quo* in Romanian society. Though Mamet's play is physically innocent (not even a kiss is exchanged), its language admirably fulfills the promise of the title. I hoped that the racy words, substituting for romantic and sexual action, would retain their original picturesqueness to a Romanian audience and teach them something about the powers of language. I wanted to expand for them the possibilities of their own becoming human under the new dispensation of freedom.

On such grounds as the above, suitably rendered in academic jargon, I defended the merits of the play before my up-to-date-mongering colleagues. "*Sexual Perversity in Chicago,*" I said, "is about the construction of society by self-referential language, the gender-determining parameters of language, and the circulation of diverse social energies through language." Thus I got the better portion of my colleagues to overlook the titular theme of the play, for a while.

One morning the Chairman of the English Department interrupted my class, escorted me into the hall (my students left staring), and began to address me. "Louis, our university is a place for free inquiry and discussion, and I would support your efforts to do anything to these purposes, but I read the play and, well, let me say that we expected something more elevating from a person as serious as yourself. I can't agree that this play is worth doing." I explained my serious intentions, but he continued to address me thus: "Between men like us bedroom relations are normal to discuss, but you have women to think about and your reputation among the students, who I'm afraid might misconstrue your purposes." I admitted that this was a concern of mine, but that the nature of theatre is self-exposure and risk, and I promised to conduct myself in a professional manner at all times. Still, he continued: "I expect that sometime in the future this play could be done here successfully, for we are not a puritanical people, but the sexual content is . . . well . . . we've only recently had a revolution, and we are not like Americans with sex, we prefer to keep it private." I said that my purpose was to show people a certain comic face of America, not to recommend imitation. The play discourages that. Nonetheless, he continued: "I will not stand in your way, as you are free to do as you please on your own time, but I expected you to consult with me as Chairman. Students are hesitant to offend you, but my position authorizes me to say that this play is not appropriate for Romania at this time. Have you thought of other worthy options?" I promised that I would distribute a program preparing the audience for the content. Then they would be free not to attend or to leave at any time during the performance—for I was determined to direct the play

unless my actors proved unable. With that declaration firmly understood, he left me, and I returned to my anxious students to test whether or not they were ready to undertake *Sexual Perversity in Chicago.*

I asked them first what they thought of the pornographic photos that had begun to appear on the front pages of their daily newspapers. Someone said that as a newly free society, Romania was obliged to include images of naked women in its newspapers. Others joked that this phenomena was not pornography, but a new style of photo-impressionism, since the quality of print was so poor that the female parts could be discerned only with a trained eye. The abolition of human distinctions and standards of taste under communism made me ask them next how the two sexes in Romania managed to pair off. What were the criteria of choice? They assured me that although it was very difficult to conduct a romance without the benefits of leisure and privacy, the job of mating did get done more romantically than not. The ugly uniformity of things made female beauty seem a heroic achievement, all the more alluring and satisfying to possess for oneself alone. Naturally, I asked them what they thought of the condoms appearing for the first time in stores. (Ceausescu had forbidden birth control and abortion, because it was claimed he wanted more workers.) They replied that a free people should have condoms available for purchase, but they did not think that they needed to use them as urgently as the generous donations from the West implied. Unless referring to gypsies, the students saw no reason to join the two concepts, "unwed" and "mother." Nor did they expect to practice cohabitation before marriage. There was simply no room for shacking up, and there were no Romanian role models to exhibit all the smiling ways to sexual liberation. How, then, would I audition these students to find four who possessed the colorful vocabularies and wild imaginations necessary to impersonate sexually liberated, sophisticated, urban Americans? The Fulbright Scholar who was formerly a cop and becoming an expert on Romania's infamous impaler, suggested that I show a pornographic film to my potential actors: whoever could provide a voice-over for the action belonged in the play.

My best female candidate, Sandina, who possessed the kind of looks appropriate for motorcycles, dropped into a ten second coma upon reading the title. So I took back the script and handed it to Carmen. Always a game girl in discussion, she read the first three short scenes and stated peremptorily: "There are three scenes I cannot do." "But there's no doing involved, just talking," I replied. "That's what I meant," she said. Roxana, whose tall boots and angularity made me offer her the part of a brittle feminist, bravely spit out the scripted words—"premature ejaculation"—as an example of the unspeakable. The play was like a gun filled with blanks to me, but to her the words were real bullets. These women seemed in tacit agreement with Plato's notion that the consent to hear or say vulgar words creates an aptitude to witness or perform vulgar deeds. I began to feel ashamed to tamper with modesty so deeply felt. I saw that against a background of officially sponsored animality, discrete romantic love seemed the only civilizing agent left in Romania. To abandon it, even in play, was to offer universal sway to barbarism, and these women knew *instinctively* not to do that. Their innocence appeared a precious achievement in that corrupt and filthy world. But their unequivocal rejection of the play bothered me all the same, for what cannot be said also would not be thought, and this seemed to me a formula for the disappearance of the life of the mind. To be the virtuous allies of intellectual dullness was to put themselves in league with my chief enemies.

What finally killed the production was the combination of the modesty of women with the politics of men. Mihai, my irreplaceable lead actor, withdrew from the play because his father, once an important figure in the Party, did not want him acting "decadent." So I decided to direct the students in scenes from *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* instead. Shakespeare's elevated poetry and aspiring thoughts made even the most prurient and immoral sentiments seem highly delectable to the students, the Chairman, my colleagues, and the public.

Of all the writers we studied, the students liked Tennessee Williams the best. Like Shakespeare, he is poetic with his perversities. Moreover, they easily recognized in him their own in-

herited sense of defeat, along with a perilous attraction to the victors. I gave them a brief account of Williams's life, which included the fact of his homosexuality. This caught their attention. "We were taught that homosexuals sprung up in the decadent West, like weeds, but that they did not exist in socialist Romania. Of course we don't believe much of anything we were taught." They were amazed to read Broadway plays written by Williams forty years earlier that were sympathetic to homosexuality, fetishism, masturbation, and rape, when only a year ago a Romanian author would have been put in prison for writing one such play.

We read *A Streetcar Named Desire* and watched the movie version starring Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski. Some women let themselves go in appreciation of Brando's naked, sweaty torso: "Would that someone with arms like his might carry us away, sickness and all, master of this thing called 'life.'" Most were disgusted by Stanley's crudeness, for in Romania men still greeted women with a bow and a kiss on the hand. "Why couldn't Stella have married both a true gentleman and a one-hundred percent American?" they asked. I tried to explain that these were incompatible categories to Williams. He believed in the predestined defeat in America of poetry, refinement, and old world breeding by the forces of prosaic realism, animal strength, and new world technology. On this belief his tragicomic vision depended.

Still, some of the women thought they had found their ideal man, a combination of old and new world types, in Jim O'Conner, the Gentleman Caller from *The Glass Menagerie.* He is the long awaited "something," says Williams, which defeated people must hope for to go on living. At the same time, and in contrast with his fantastical role, he is "an emissary from the world of reality" who brings news of modernity to Laura Wingfield, crippled and deeply secluded in her past. Let me remind the reader of what happens to Jim and Laura, for as my year in Romania drew to a close, and the students and I drew ever closer to each other, I saw in the relationship of these characters a true image of our own.

Jim approaches Laura carrying a lit candelabrum and wine, superficially romantic but quite unaware of being the "climax of her secret life." She has always loved her image of him, and now she faces the insupportable reality. Jim wonders what Laura has done over the years, not knowing the depth of forlorn hope that could keep her occupied waiting for him. Her problem, he concludes, is an "inferiority complex," and to effect her cure he offers himself as a model. This believer in self-improvement, determined to find some way to get everyone looking up and going somewhere up, prepares Laura for the future of capitalist democracy by teaching her to dance. In the process they topple and break her favorite ornament, a unicorn, but for the moment she accepts the loss as a "blessing in disguise," a sign of her return to normalcy. Then he kisses her on the lips to demonstrate that her attractive powers are real. This startles him. He realizes that to save Laura from her inferiority complex, he would have to husband her away from her present circumstances. (For the paranoia surrounding her nostalgic mother has sealed Laura inside herself.) Luckily, he is already engaged, so he escapes the love he evoked in her and the new life he promised. She gives him the hornless unicorn as a symbolic souvenir. It is the consequence of his clumsy efforts—like those of a tourist—to separate her unique attractions from her hobbling infirmity.

Several of my Romanian "Lauras," after a year of intense conversations about "literature, America, the world, and life," bravely took to telling me how exceptional a man I was to prefer their imperfect English to the pleading beauty of their perfectly painted eyes. I owed them a return for the love they kept for me all those years, and in final desperation they let me know how much.

Christiana, a woman of half-looks and whispers in class, invited me to a student party at her sister's apartment in May. I attended and danced with her and the other women, felt her cling to me, let myself enjoy their uplifted hearts differently, and smelt the residue of a thousand cigarettes in the proximity of their lips. The next day I discovered in a letter that I was Christiana's only hope of happiness:

> I feel more and more that I can't breathe. Anytime a "decree" can appear in order to destroy, to put off my life.

> Sometimes, when I free myself from this asphyxia, I understand that I have the right to live and to experience the mystery—the first source of superiority—that I can breathe stealthily a kind of hidden air. You breathed that air into me. A bird who flies smack into concrete whenever she tries to rise—that is me, I fear, when you leave. Others are just under vain illusions, for there's no laughter at the end of our slope, but stupid death, and there's no triumph and no understanding. All is weird, but also dull and senseless here. It is the season of Goths and lunatics, that's all. I ask you for help as I shout my love without fear or shame, my soul defeated and caressed.

I gave Christiana some of my books when I left for home that summer. She was supposed to become a teacher of English, but I do not know if that came to pass, or if she is doing well, yet. She has preferred only my books to keep the contact, I may suppose. A book, as we all should say of the good ones, is a fine thing to keep in the space between two people who are inclining to be engaged as one. A book makes it possible to cross that space and that time in which two people diverge along their courses of life. I always prefer to keep a good book between us.

Stopping in Vienna on my way back to America, I visited the Schönbrunn Palace, once the summer residence of the Hapsburg monarchs. While walking among the splendid gardens and fountains, I encountered a bold sign that read: "Please, Don't Eat the Swans." The words were in Romanian. I remembered the previous summer, as I prepared my Fulbright application while reading news reports about the Romanian miners sacking the capital. "Yes," I thought, "I did have to drag a cane behind me on the streets at night to puzzle the abandoned dogs who were forming packs again, learning to act like wolves." But that is not the main thing I felt as I beheld those swans and the sign. That year I spent in Iasi felt even then like an oasis in my mind, and I have often gone there since to refresh myself. There, in my mind's eye, I wonder long at how strangely happy I was to be teaching so awkwardly, freely, bravely even, with the wolves still close at heel and all my familiar props far distant, to students just learning to

fly, who let me see into the beauty of their fledgling souls, and who made me see into mine. My old friend, Mark, the newsman to whom, in a way, I owe my oasis, is trying to get me to go abroad again—this time without leaving America—to teach the poor masses by internet technology all at once, filling their empty heads with information, entertaining and useful items, and getting for my pains multitudinous fees. Something in me wants to erect for us a sign. For the sake of the wonder at living human faces, composed of the love of the infinite, the profound, beheld in those faces, I would raise a sign in bold English, the language of America and nearly all the world on the make, to say: "Please, Let Us Not Eat the Swans Again."

Dante's Beatrice: Between Idolatry and Iconoclasm

Gabriel Pihas

1. A Response to Two Objections to Beatrice[1]

Some readers have taken issue with Dante's bringing together *eros* and *agape* in the character of Beatrice. I will try to show how concern about the erotic element in his poetry is connected to other worries about iconoclasm that take shape in the centuries after Dante. I will first outline the connection between these issues, and then try to defend Dante on both points.

Famously, the protestant theologian Anders Nygren attacked Medieval Catholicism and formulated a deep separation between *eros* and Christian love.[2] His reservation about *eros* has to do with its self-interested character. That is, his separation of *eros* from *agape* is motivated by a desire to separate our self-love from *agape*, and our human nature from God's nature. According to Nygren, the new, unique love that Christ taught had nothing to do with any other love that lets human beings ascend to God; it had nothing to do, for example with Socrates's *eros* in the *Symposium*. For Nygren, the uniqueness of Christianity lies in the insight that we are not justified by the law and deserve nothing for

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1. I want to express my gratitude for what this article owes to an NEH study group on *agape* and *philia* in which I participated in 2009 at St. John's College, Annapolis. I am indebted both to the group's discussions and to the lecture *"Agape"* that Paul Ludwig delivered at Annapolis after leading that group, on 9 April 2010.

2. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros,* trans. Philip Watson (London: SPCK, 1953). The word *agape* is commonly translated as "charity" and I will use the words charity and *agape* interchangeably.

our own virtue.[3] We are wretched sinners infinitely distant from God, and no effort of our own can explain God's condescension to us. On our side there is only selfish *eros*, while *agape* is an incomprehensible miracle. For Nygren, this unmotivated condescension is the whole of Christian love.[4] Some have raised reasonable difficulties with this position. First, its excessive harshness makes election too irrational. It leaves an enormous gap between an unbelievably unmotivated *agape* and what we clearly and fundamentally are, namely, desiring beings seeking happiness.[5] His view makes it difficult to understand the many passages in the bible that seem to suggest our involvement in salvation, like "as many as received him, He gave them power" (John 1:12). And second, equally importantly, one might add that this doctrine leaves us swallowed up by God.[6] We clearly lose the dignity of our person at least in this condescension, and perhaps lose our person altogether.

I would like to draw a parallel to this separation of our *eros* and *agape* in what at first might seem a distant sphere, namely, iconoclasm, or the rejection of sacred art as idolatry. From the idolatry issue arises a second, and related, objection to Beatrice. Let me first explain what iconoclasm is, and then come back to drawing the parallel with *eros* and *agape*. Fundamentally, there are two very reasonable theological concerns behind iconoclasm.[7]

3. Nygren, 67-9.

4. Ibid., 75-6.

5. In *"Agape,"* Paul Ludwig argued that over-emphasis on the purely miraculous nature of *agape* is one of the major problems with post-Lutheran accounts of it. Through a reading of New Testament uses of *agape*, he argues that Nygren's claim of a radical divide between classical philosophical strands in medieval *caritas* and New Testament *agape* is exaggerated.

6. For some of these objections see D'Arcy, M.C. *The Mind and the Heart of Love* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 352-5.

7. There are, of course, also political motivations in iconoclasm. For example, destruction of religious art can express opposition to the political institution of the Church through the objects it claims to safeguard and which are understood to maintain its power and its special

First, it implies an intention to protect God from our theoretical misconstruals of his ineffable nature and his unity, and to enhance our inward respect for God by keeping him above anything down here that might represent him. Second, it implies a desire to defend popular religion from superstitious religious practice. Interest in images is often connected to popular belief in magic powers, even those latent in the very materials of the image, the wood, paint, and stone. So there is something very thoughtful and pious in iconoclasm. Also, there are certainly many scriptural authorities for iconoclasm, above all, the second commandment against graven images. But there is often also a risk of incoherence in iconoclasm. It suggests separating religion from any particular religious practice or institution. This is emphatically the case for Christian iconoclasm, which is what I want to focus on in this essay. For Christians, there is more latitude with images than in other forms of monotheism. The Incarnation itself—the idea that God became a particular human being in the womb of a particular human woman, that He suffered and died and is risen—almost naturally suggests making images of God. The continual retelling of Christ's story in pictures for the illiterate is fundamental to the possibility of transmitting the story. This, in fact, was part of the very earliest Christian defense of images.

But there is even more than such practical necessity to recommend images. The theology around the Incarnation suggests a terrestrial reality preserved in transcendence. In the Incarnation God became flesh, visible flesh. We can draw pictures of the God who became flesh even if we can't draw the invisible God. Part of what is at stake in Christian iconoclastic debates is a concern

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stature. The holiness of the icon is a kind of symbol for the holiness of the Church itself, hence doubts about the sacred nature of the one takes away political power from the other. This thesis was explored by David Freeberg in *Iconoclasts and their Motives* (Montclair, N.J.: A. Schram, 1985). Similar claims about the political significance of iconoclasm in ancient Israel were made by Joseph Guttman, "Deuteronomy: Religious Reformation or Iconoclastic Revolution?" in *The Image and the Word: Confrontations in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Scholars Press for the American Academy of Religion, 1977), 5-10.

about representing human nature in the image of God. A picture of Christ presents our humanity to us. It places God's uncircumscribed nature in the visible, circumscribed human image. Most importantly, the image is essential to Christianity because it is an image in the depths of God himself, since Christ is an image of God the Father.

Some Christians, like John of Damascus, who defended art during the Byzantine iconoclastic controversy of the eighth century, saw the artistic image as a sacramentally valuable, low-level emanation from God. He suggested a chain or ladder of images of God. On this ladder of emanations we find, at the top, Christ the image of the Father; then the image of Christ in the Virgin Mary, then in the saints, and then in man, who is made in the image of God. Finally, at the bottom are painted images.[8] He argued that we should revere the image of Christ as if it were Christ himself because we mean by the word "image" not the physical materials of which an art object is made, but rather the original that the image depicts and participates in—namely, in this case, Christ's humanity, something worthy of the highest kind of worship.[9] This argument was used many times the Middle Ages, as, for example, by Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica*.

Images were an important element in the early Christian debates about Christ's human nature. With the very first Christians, Christ was only ever represented symbolically (for example, as a fish or a lamb), and never in sculptures, but only in paintings. These early Christians had reservations about images, even though objects like the Eucharist and the relic already suggest

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8. John Damascene, *Apologia of St. John Damascene Against Those Who Decry Holy Images*, trans. Mary H. Allies (London: Thomas Baker, 1898). This ladder of images is described at length in the final chapter of the trestise, "How Many Kinds of Images There Are."

9. John compares the question about the image of God to the ordinary use of images of the king, and to the importance accorded a king's representatives. The representatives and the images get the same respect the king gets. This argument was frequently reused in later debates to defend the "iconodule," or anti-iconoclast, position.

Incarnational alternatives to the magic powers of pagan idols that pave the way for later defenses of Christian art.[10] I suggest that the initial reservations about images might derive from a hostile social context, and were not expressions of the mature faith: some of its reservations derived from inherited Jewish practices, some from a desire to distinguish Christianity from the pagan practice surrounding them in Rome. Many reservations about images of Christ derived merely from a need to maintain secrecy so as to avoid persecution.[11] Slightly later, when the persecution of Christians was no longer an issue, images of Christ most often appeared in group scenes telling stories from the New Testament for the illiterate. But images of Christ appearing by himself, and not symbolically, begin to become more common after paganism vanished in Rome in the middle of the fifth century. These images were often produced to affirm the doctrinal importance of the Incarnation against other heretical understandings of Christ's nature. At that time a number of heresies circulated, such as the claim that Christ's human nature was erased in his divine nature, or the opposed claim that Christ was merely a human instrument of God. According to such views, it would not make any sense to venerate the human image. In contrast, the act of veneration

10. I take this point from Marc Fumaroli, "The Christian Critique of Idolatry" in *Idol Anxiety*, ed. Josh Ellenbogen and Aaron Tugendhaft, trans. Benjamin Storey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 32-41. As he points out, in the Eucharist and the relic we find the real presence, not just reminders of God. These new objects will oppose the pagan demons previously thought to be present within statues and amulets.

11. My suggestion implies that the way the apostles worshipped was not always the best way. The iconoclastic Calvin took offense at such a suggestion (*Institutes* 1.2.13) . But we see such limitations attributed to the apostles explicitly in the gospels themselves, especially with regard to this issue of seeing the image of the invisible God. For example, when Phillip asks Christ to show him the Father (John 14:8), he is still in the mode of waiting for the fulfillment of the prophets, and unaware of what he has before him. (I owe this point to a private conversation with Marsaura Shukla.)

of the images of Christ as a man emphasizes that all of his divinity is present along with his visible humanity. Such veneration of images is thus a way of affirming both natures. This non-symbolic human image was thought to be so important that the symbolic presentation of Christ as a lamb was even expressly banned in the 600s, and the representation of Christ as a man became not a possibility but a requirement.[12] Opposition to the images was never simply about the limits of art, or even about religious practice. It involved much more fundamental questions about the nature of the divine. Hence iconoclasm in all of its historical appearances always involved opposition not merely to the depiction of Christ, but to the adoration of Mary and the saints, in or out of pictures. Just as Byzantine and Protestant iconoclasts were suspicious of images, they were also suspicious, for similar reasons, of the adoration of the saints and Mary. This broader context of communion with Mary and the saints is, as we shall see, directly relevant to Beatrice.

Now I can finally establish the parallel I want to draw with *eros* and *agape*. Unease about an *image* of Christ's humanity and Christ's humanity itself is similar to the unease felt by the separators of *eros* and *agape,* who don't want to find self-regard mixed up with *agape*. The fear of contaminating *agape* with *eros* is another form of the fear of contaminating the infinite God with our finite humanity in the images we make. The fear that our own ascent through *eros* diminishes God's condescension in *agape* is similar to the fear that any work of our hands diminishes the honor we give to God. Both fears are understandable, but are generally problematic attempts to eliminate our self-regard in finding our good. Both imply an idea of the supernatural

12. See Edward James Martin, *A History of the Iconoclast Controversy* (London: Church Historical Society, 1930; reprinted 1978), 20-21. The prohibition on the image of the lamb appears in the Quinsext Council, Canon #82. The claim in that canon is that the human image reminded us better than the lamb image of the "humiliation of the word of God" and "his conversation in the flesh, passion…death…and redemption." This document is from 692 A.D.

that wholly effaces our human nature. Both can verge on hatred of our humanity. Dante offers an alternative Christian view that does not eliminate self-regard, but attempts to include it, and that does not simply efface our human nature. According to Nygren's view, Dante is one of the most representative of all offenders in confusing *eros* and *agape*.[13] For Dante, the ascent of *eros* can complement the descent of *agape*. Both movements may even be united in the same soul at the same time, and transformed *eros* can proportionately reflect *agape*. So, I will try to show how different Dante's literary works are from the more modern view in respect to the way he brings *eros* and *agape* together.

Dante's writing is also provocative in the context of the idolatry issue. Like the seventh-century prohibition on the merely symbolic images of Christ, his work demands a new level of realism and historical detail. His inclusion of Virgil and the classical world in combination with his rehabilitation of the city of man suggest a new dignity in our humanity, unthinkable in many earlier Christian writers. In fact, one of Dante's central aims in writing the *Commedia* is to take temporal power away from the Church and establish the dignity of worldly government. But this political innovation is merely the flip side of Dante's theological-erotic innovation. The great novelty of Dante's political doctrines went hand in hand with the novelty of making the beloved lady of courtly love poetry into a figure of religious awe. The beautiful image of Beatrice pointed Dante toward God, both during her life and after her death. Remarkably, her earthly reality is always preserved in her transcen-

13. For Nygren's attack on Dante, see *Agape and Eros*, 616-620. His claim is simply that Dante has too many Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical elements for him to be Christian. Nygren tries to make his argument against Dante merely by identifying such elements in Dante's thought. Here is not the place to discuss in detail the parts of Nygren's book unrelated to Dante, but the radical and problematic contention that Christianity cannot involve any such classical philosophical elements is central to his broader argument.

dence, as Christ's is in the Incarnation.[14] This paradox distinguishes Dante's ideal woman from much more common symbolic or allegorical ideal women. As he himself said, by placing Beatrice in heaven gazing upon God, he praised her in a way that no poet had ever praised any woman.[15]

In fact, no one had ever done it before because it is a very odd thing to do. With what right could Dante make a beautiful woman a mediatrix to God? Is he worshipping her as an idol? Some have said Yes. In the wake of Reformation, Protestant iconoclasm, and the Index of Forbidden Books, we find a Catholic editor in Italy, Bartolomeo Sermartelli, who worried that Dante's love was simply theologically offensive. In 1576, about two hundred and fifty years after Dante's death, in the first printed edition of his early book, the *Vita Nuova*, the love theology was heavily censored.[16] All Dante's scriptural citations were removed. Passages attributing divine qualities to Beatrice were deleted or cleaned up. For example, where the text said that Beatrice offers him *salute* (salvation), we find instead the more banal word *saluto* (salutation). And where Dante says she generates *beatitudine* (blessedness), we find the word changed to *felicitá* (happiness). The chapter where she is most explicitly identified with Christ (Chapter 24) was simply deleted. This censorship was founded on the separation between *eros* and *agape*. This separation underlies the whole history of the ideal woman in Renaissance literature in this period, from Ariosto's

14. This well-worn point is familiar to most through Erich Auerbach's writings on Dante. See Erich Auerbach, *Dante: Poet of the Secular World,* trans.,Ralph Manheim (New York: New York Review of Books, 2007 and *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princton University Press, 2003). The idea originated, for Auerbach and his generation at least, with Hegel. See Auerbach, *Mimesis,* 191.

15. Dante, *Vita Nuova*, chap. 42.

16. See Brian Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy: The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 20040, 173.

Angelica, to Cervantes's Dulcinea, and later to Milton's Eve. Although some of these authors would not see themselves as fundamentally motivated by theological concerns, nonetheless they were all impressed by the idea that the beloved of the chivalric tradition was idolatrous. Just as the iconoclast reformers sought to destroy the sacred images, so also certain poets and novelists at the same time attacked the chivalric view of love. But they did not limit themselves to this renunciation of erotic idolatry. They attacked the chivalric view of both love and arms, that is, they attacked both the ideal women and the ideals of worldly honor. While we have become used to thinking of such attacks as obvious, Dante opposed them. He affirmed both the transcendence of the ideal woman as well as the integrity of honor and the worldly political order, when part of a Christian life. Hence Dante's adapatation of literary realism was not a reaction against theology, but an extension of his theological bent.

Unlike Dante's literary realism, the new literary realism that some of these later authors pursued, and which became the foundation for modern realism, was founded on the incompatibility of our terrestrial reality and the manifestation of God.[17] These authors begin from the hiddenness of God and of his providence, rather than with the sacramental idea of nature. Hence the theological issues that are involved in my defense of Dante and his challenge to iconoclasm have a relevance that extends to modern literature as well as political and aesthetic theory. I will now present Beatrice as an alternative to this early modern theology.

2. Beatrice as Christ in *Vita Nuova*

In the thirteenth century, poets explored the conflict between

17. The other element that distinguishes the two camps is their differing attitude to pagan poetry. The new realism attempts to end the ancient epic, which it regards as an ongoing tradition, while Dante is attempting to revive an epic tradition that per lunga silenzio parea fioco (from long silence seemed hoarse. (*Inferno* 1.63.)

courtly love and religion from a few different angles.[18] Guittone d'Arezzo renounced love poetry and became a monk, writing religious poems against the courtly tradition. He stressed the moral opposition between divine love and the poet's human lust. Two other poets who were extremely close to Dante, Guido Cavalcanti and Guido Guinizelli, although less ascetic and less pious than Guittone, expressed similar concerns. Cavalcanti worried about the excessive focus on one's own, and on the private possession of the beloved, which were obstacles to the universality of philosophical truth, and to our good according to reason. He thought that being overwhelmed by the passion of love divides the soul and implies forgetting that at which reason aims. Guido Guinizelli's poetry playfully suggested that the earthly lady who was object of love and praise was more than metaphorically divine, and hence was in sinful competition with God. He saw that the implicit religious elements in the courtly love tradition, and in poetry itself, were clearly idolatrous. But he never took the problem very seriously and never sought a resolution to this problem. In the story of Paolo and Francesca in *Inferno* 5, Dante gives his own account of Guinizelli's problem. But long before writing that canto, the young Dante already writes the *Vita Nuova*, a book dedicated to Guido Cavalcanti that addresses all these various objections. As we will see, the *Vita Nuova* is a miniature of the major action of the *Divine Comedy*.

Dante's love for Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova* is unusual in that it is not at all libidinal. Beatrice's beauty is inseparably bound up with her moral virtue, and beyond any lust that might make Dante forget about his highest aims.

"It happened that her image, which was always with me, gave boldness to Love to rule over [me], but was of such noble virtue that it never let Love rule me without the faithful counsel of reason."[19]

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18. For a thoughtful account of the tradition of vernacular love poetry and the question of heresy, see Pamela Williams *Through Human Love to God* (Leicester: Troubadour Publishing, 2007), especially 9-11, and 76-77.

19. *Vita Nuova*, chapter 2. *E avvenga che la sua imagine, la quale continuatamente meco stave, fosse baldanza d'Amore a segnoreggiare me, tuttavia era di sì nobilissima vertù, che nulla volta sofferse che Amore mi reggesse sanza lo fedele consiglio de la ragione.*

So, contrary to Cavalcanti's objection, Dante is never blinded or even distracted by physical passion, and never ceases thinking about God when looking on Beatrice. Dante's experience of *eros* begins from the already religiously-infused courtly love tradition. It is this tradition that explains part of Dante's simultaneous interest in Beatrice as a beautiful woman and the non-libidinal character of that interest. From the beginning Beatrice is the courtly *domina*, his "lady" in the sense of the feminine form of "lord." But as we will see, Dante goes further. Exactly insofar as her image causes Love to overcome his faculties, he becomes free of libido. Dante addresses Guinizelli's concerns by taking the religious element in the courtly tradition and radicalizing it in a most daring way.[20] Beatrice is introduced as the "glorious lady of my mind" (*gloriosa donna de la mia mente*) and a young angel. The title of the book, *New Life*, recalls Paul's phrase (Romans 6:3-4) about giving up the old life of sin and entering into the new life of grace. His meeting with Beatrice is nothing less than the experience of God's grace, now in the intimate world of his memory that the book records. Her beauty is miraculous, and is rooted in the Trinity. The *Vita Nuova* is frequently compared to contemporary accounts of saint's lives. That is the genre to which it belongs. Beatrice's appearance on earth is a unique and miraculous event that Dante claims to have witnessed, and he transcribes it from the book of his memory to share with those who never saw her.

At the opening of the *Vita Nuova*, Dante describes his vision of Beatrice as a beatific vision: "As she passed through a street, she turned her eyes to where I stood very fearful, and with her ineffable courtesy, which is today rewarded in eternal life, she greeted me with great virtue, so much that I seemed to see all the limits of blessedness."[21]

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20. For the uniqueness of Dante's gesture, see John A. Scott, Understanding Dante (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004) 16-17.

21. *Vita Nuova*, chapter 3. *[P]assando per una via, volse li occhi verso quella parte ov'io era molto pauroso, e per la sua ineffabile cortesia, la quale è oggi meritata nel grande secolo, mi salutoe molto virtuosamente, tanto che me parve allora vedere tutti li termini de la beatitudine.*

It is difficult to imagine passing a woman in the street and taking it for beatitude. Dante must have seen the inner meaning of her beauty as an effect of the Creator, not merely as the beauty of the creature for its own sake. The beauty appears as an emanation of God much as Neo-Platonic thinkers like Pseudo-Dionysius and John of Damascus might have suggested. Scholars have focused on a number of more historically proximate potential sources who followed exactly such theological theories about the vision of beauty, including Bernard of Clairvaux, Richard of St. Victor, and Bonaventure.[22]

Beatrice makes others who see her more like herself, just as in greeting Dante she will transform him into Love itself. Beatrice has this effect on all who are noble enough to be able to see her. This is the most unusual thing about Dante's love for Beatrice. It is the aspect of courtly love that is most obvious from its name, but least often taken seriously because it is so distant from us: Dante's love is shared, public erotic love, not private love. Dante is the beloved for all Florentine gentlemen. His act of charity lies in his sharing of Beatrice through his poetry with those non-Florentines, and non-contemporaries, who never saw her when she was alive. Love of Beatrice becomes universal.

Dante's love blends eros and charity. In one passage he focuses on the effect on himself of Beatrice's greeting in the street. Much of the experience of love in the *Vita Nuova* is condensed in this rightly famous passage. In this greeting she presumably

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22. See Francesco Mazzoni, *Il canto XXXI del Purgatorio* (Florence: F. Le Monnier, 1965). Of course, Aquinas, among many others, also took up the widespread Neoplatonic doctrines that described creatures as preexisting in a higher form in God. Other traditional theological avenues for explaining the role of Beatrice might be analogy (see Warren Ginsberg, *Dante's Aesthetics of Being* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999] 8-13), *deificatio* (Rosetta Migliorini-Fissi, "La nozione di '*deificatio*' nel Paradiso." *Letture classensi*. 9-10 [1982]: 39-72), or we might simply see her as a special revelation, like the phantasms and sensibles offered to prophets. (See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, q. 12, a.13: "sometimes phantasms in the imagination . . . and sometimes sensible things are divinely formed.")

said *salve*, which in Italian is the same as the now outmoded English phrase, "save you," short for "May God save you." It is a blessing, it "makes blessed," just as Beatrice's name means "she who makes blessed." Here is Dante's description in Chapter 11 of the *Vita Nuova* of the effect on himself of this greeting or blessing:

> Whenever she appeared anywhere, because of the hope of her miraculous greeting [*mirabile salute*] I had no enemy in the world, instead a flame of charity came to me that made me pardon whoever had offended me. If anyone had asked me anything, my answer would be only, "Love," with a face dressed in humility. And whenever she was about to greet me, a spirit of love, destroying all the other sensitive spirits, drove out the feeble spirits of vision, telling them "Go and honor your lady," and it remained in their place. And anyone who wanted to know love could have done so by looking at the trembling of my eyes. And when this most gentle one greeted me with this greeting, not only was Love not a mediator that could obscure from me the overwhelming blessedness, but through an excess of sweetness, he became such that my body which was wholly under Love's control, moved like an inanimate mass. So that it appears manifestly that in her greeting dwelt my beatitude, which greatly exceeded and surpassed my capacities.[23]

In this important passage, Beatrice's beauty promises beatitude for *Dante* in her miraculous greeting. But the charity he feels is not for her, but for *anyone*. This is mysterious. In this

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23. *Vita Nuova*, Chapter 11: *Dico che quando ella apparia da parte alcuna, per la speranza de la mirabile salute nullo nemico mi rimanea, anzi mi giugnea una fiamma di caritade, la quale mi facea perdonare a chiunque m'avesse offeso; e chi allora m'avesse domandato di cosa alcuna, la mia risponsione sarebbe stata solamente —Amore—, con viso vestito d'umilitade. E quando ella fosse alquanto propinqua al salutare, uno spirito d'amore, distruggendo tutti li altri spririti sensitive, pingea fuori li deboletti spiriti del viso, e dicea loro: "Andate a onorare la donna vostra"; ed elli si rimanea nel luogo loro. E chi avesse voluto*

way Dante makes an implicit distinction between *eros* for Beatrice and charity for others. The key to the passage is to understand the relation between hope and charity in the first sentence. The promise of the *salute* ("greeting"/"salvation") from the beautiful creates a hope that is so strong it generates charity. To understand it we have to think that Beatrice's greeting, in which she said "be saved," is so overwhelmingly pleasant that Dante focuses completely on her and forgets himself. The self-forgetting is represented as love destroying and expelling his spirits, here understood as the Galenic spirits that make his body function. The confidence of this hope elicits generosity for others. When his hope is this great, he exists beyond himself and can afford to become all charity and humility. He runs no risk of loss in his charity, because it grows naturally from his desire for his own good. As Aquinas puts it, charity, or love of God for His own sake, is the perfection of the imperfect love that begins in hope for one's own good.[24] This imperfect love that becomes charity we would call *eros*. We might also make this point theologically rather than psychologically, by recalling Virgil's comment in *Purgatorio* that love is a good that one has more of when one shares it (*Purgatorio* 15.55-7). Dante wishes to give to others, while also getting for himself. Both occur when he is taken over by love, becoming more than himself, even at the level of his eyes and his body. It makes his body and libido wholly inactive, with all his activity focused in the eyes.

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conoscere Amore, fare lo potea, mirando lo tremare de li occhi miei. E quando questa gentilissima salute salutava, non che Amore fosse tal mezzo che potesse obumbrare a me la intollerabile beatitudine, ma elli quasi per soverchio di dolcezza divenia tale, che lo mio corpo, lo quale era tutto allora sotto lo suo reggimento, molte volte si movea come cosa grave inanimata. Sì che appare manifestamente che ne le sue salute abitava la mia beatitudine, la quale molte volte passava e redundava la mia capacitade.

24. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II q. 17, a.8: "[Charity] adheres to God for His own sake; . . . he that hopes [on the other hand], intends to obtain possession of something for himself."

Note in this passage that he becomes charitable toward others in a way that repeats or extends Beatrice's charity for him. She blesses him with this greeting not out of *eros*, but out of charity. In contrast, he erotically and selfishly desires her greeting, while loving others charitably. The charity and the *eros* operate together in him without conflict. They have different objects. *Eros* is for something he yearns after and contemplates that is above him. Charity is an effect of his hope for that same object of contemplation, but it is aimed at people at his level or below.[25] At this point we have given an incomplete description of Dante's account of *eros* and *agape*. So far we only have the two loves in the same soul, provoked by one object, but aimed at different people. We still have to come to see how the two loves are not merely non-contradictory, but also more closely intertwined. I will complete this articulation of *eros* and *agape* at the end of this essay, in connection with Dante's definition of *agape* in *Paradiso*.

Dante's great discovery in the middle of the *Vita Nuova,* which he arrives at with the help of Guido Gunizelli, is that he must praise Beatrice, not merely describe her effect on him. His poetry must be about her, not about himself. His blessedness is no longer in her greeting as it was in the previous passage. His poetic apprenticeship takes him beyond this. Instead his salvation is now in his own charitable poetry, in praise of his lady. This new direction generates the middle section of the *Vita Nuova,* which contains many of the greatest poems of the collection. And yet, it is important that Dante himself saw this apparently self-effacing attitude of praise as actually self-regarding in a positive sense. Dante says elsewhere that praising someone who is far

25. Compare Gregory the Great's account of Jacob's ladder in the *Pastoral Rule*, Book 2, Chapter 5. We both ascend and descend on this ladder, ascending in contemplation, and descending to those we minister to through charity. This division between upward and downward loves is implicit in the *Vita Nuova* passage, and frames the treatment of the contemplative ladder in *Paradiso* 21-22. Canto 21 deals with upward movement on the ladder, Canto 22, with downward movement on the ladder.

greater than yourself is always a self-interested act, since praise implies friendship, and friendship implies likeness. Hence to praise the great is to assert that you are like the great in some way. (*Convivio* 3.1.4) The same goes, he suggests, for friendship with God.

After Beatrice dies, years pass, and he begins to forget her for a new noblewoman, whom he identifies in the *Convivio* as a symbol for philosophy. At the end of the *Vita Nuova* he repents this philosophical betrayal, and turns again to the memory of Beatrice in the final chapters, rising up to heaven where Beatrice dwells. The sequence in the final few paragraphs of the *Vita Nuova* about repenting his abandonment of Beatrice, followed by ascent to God—this is a tiny draft to be rewritten and expanded in the *Commedia*. At the end of the *Vita Nuova*, Beatrice is described as the object of his soul's pilgrimage, like the shroud on which Christ left his features, which pilgrims visit in Rome, known as the Veronica or True Icon. Dante suggests that the pilgrimage to Rome and his local pilgrimage to Beatrice are ultimately the same. The famous shroud in Rome has power, but, actually, the local miracle of Beatrice, a woman who is a mirror of God for the Florentines, is just as good as the shroud. "Christ comes alive for Dante in Beatrice."[26] Her image transports him to the good that can fulfill him. As a creature gone to her Creator, her beauty is an exemplar that is more perfect in God, just as the features in the shroud are more perfect in the seemingly absent original face that they let us see. But further, Dante's poetry itself has the power to make others feel Beatrice's beauty without ever seeing her. His words are as good as sacred relics, like the shroud with Christ's features. His poem, like Beatrice, is mediator to God, not a competitor. At the same time, his writings about her are in fact even better than the historical Beatrice and even better than the famous shroud at Rome, in that the writings can be shared with all who read them anywhere and forever.

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26. Christopher Ryan, "The Theology of Dante" in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jackoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 146.

3. Beatrice as Mirror of God in *Purgatorio*

In the *Commedia,* Dante gives an account of how all of human life should be understood in the light of eternal reality and revelation. How could so much have come out of a vision of Beatrice? Again, why isn't this idolatry? On a number of occasions, Dante distinguishes what he is doing from idolatry. I will mention only one.[27] In *Purgatorio* 19, Dante has a dream of the Siren, who Virgil will later tell him is the symbol for excessive desire for earthly pleasures:

> When geomancers see their Fortuna Major rise in the east before dawn, rising by a way that stays dark for little time, a stuttering woman came to me in a dream, cross-eyed, and crooked on her feet, with her hands deformed and pallid in color. I gazed at her; and as the sun comforts the cold members that the night weighs down, so my glance made ready her speech, and quickly straightened her, and the distorted face it colored as love would want it. Then with her speaking unshackled, she began to sing, so that with difficulty might I turn my attention away from her. "I am" she sang, "I am the sweet siren that misleads sailors in the middle of the sea, so pleasant is it to hear me! I turned Ulysses, eager for his road, to my song. And whoever gets used to staying with me rarely departs; so completely do I fulfill him!" [28]

The time is indicated by reference to a gnostic astrological tradition called geomancy. This practice involved connecting pat-

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27. Other prominent treatments of idolatry in the *Commedia* are Paolo and Francesca's idolatry of *Amor* (*Inferno* 5), the idolatry of Federick II by the poet Pier delle Vigne (*Inferno* 13), and the idolatry of the simoniac popes (*Inferno* 19). Canto 19 in all three canticles is dedicated to the idolatry issue in connection with the Church and the pope.

28. *Purgatorio* 19.1-24. *[Q]uando i geomanti lor Maggior Fortuna / veggiono in orïente, innanzi all' alba, / surger per via che poco le sta bruna: / mi venne in sogno una femmina balba, / ne li occhi guercia, e sovra i piè distorta, / con le man monche, e di colore scialba. / Io la mirava; e come 'l sol confortale / fredde membra che la notte aggrava, / così lo sguardo mio le facea scorta / la lingua, e poscia tutta la driz-*

terns drawn on the earth to constellations in the heavens. So the setting suggests a kind of superstitious mistaking of earthly and heavenly. At first the siren is ugly and stuttering, but then Dante's gaze makes her articulate and beautiful. We are invited to hear her initial stuttering in line 19, as well as the balanced fluidity he projects on her by line 21 (*Io son . . . io son*, ***dol**ce se**re**na* / che ***mar**i**nar**i* in ***mez**zo **mar** dis**ma**go*/ ***tanto** son **di** pia**cer'*** a *sen**tir** pi**e**na!*). As others have suggested, the power of his gaze to reshape her is an allegory for the power of his imagination to reshape the earthly and make it heavenly, that is, it is an allegory for the act of idol-making.[29] The parallel with *Inferno* 19 suggests that the Siren is another development of the whore with seven heads (lines 108-109), a conflation of images in *Revelations* that suggests Rome. Here, as in *Inferno* 19, the idolatry of the pope is of special interest. Later in *Purgatorio* 19, we encounter a concrete historical example of the damage the allegorical Siren can do in pope Adrian V, who is now purging his own avarice. He tells Dante that he had at first made the earthly political power of Church offices the aim of his ascent (19.103-108). Then, when he rose to its peak and became pope, he finally came to recognize that no earthly position, no ambition, would satisfy him (109-11).

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zava / in poco d'ora, e lo smarrito volto, / com' amor vuol, così le colorava. / Poi ch'ell' avea 'l parlar così disciolto, / cominciava a cantar sì, che con pena / da lei avrei mio intento rivolto. / "Io son", cantava, "io son dolce serena, / che i marinari in mezzo mar dismago; / tanto son di piacere a sentir piena! / Io volsi Ulisse del suo cammin vago / al canto mio; e qual meco s'ausa, / rado sen parte; sì tutto l'appago!

29. See Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 140-41. The allegory is a precise response to Virgil's account of the soul's perception of and inclination to desirable objects in the previous canto (18. 43ff.). In his account, the imagination takes in outer experience and presents it to us. Our role in the imaginative presentation of objects in the soul is what Dante has allegorized with the Siren in Canto 19. The doctrine on counsel and consent that Dante is following here is that of *Summa Theologica* I-II, qq. 14-15. Aquinas in turn takes it from Augustine's account of the imagination in *On the Trinity,* Books 11-12.

His mistaken attempt to ascend to the earthly, as if the earth were above him rather than below, resembles the geomancer's identification of his earthly image with the heavenly reality at the beginning of the canto. Realizing his error, he quits his post. He is finally saved, though he must spend time in purgatory weeping over his attachment to the earth. With his face and body stuck in earthly mire, he suffers while longing for heaven. Adrian's tears, which "mature" his soul in preparation for ascent, atone for his fascination with the earth, which prevented him from ascending. His fascination with the earth parallels the hypnosis of the Siren's song, which paralyzes sailors in the sea. The hymn Adrian sings together with the others in this part of purgatory also expresses this hypnosis as being stuck or adhering, but now with a new sense: *Adhaesit pavimento anima mea!* I will suggest at the end of this essay that, although Dante's poetry often brings into relief the transcendent possibilities for terrestrial beauty, Adrian's tears for heaven and his hatred for the stasis of purely earthly pursuits are intended by Dante as emblems of how we should live on earth.

Although in passages like Canto 19 Dante reflects on the dangers of idolatry, in the *Purgatorio*, rather than backing away from the *Vita Nuova*, he explicitly reaffirms it. Dante's encounter with Beatrice at the top of purgatory is a clear parallel with the idolatry of the Siren and raises all of Nygren's questions about Dante's mix of *eros* and *agape*. The preparation for Beatrice's arrival is perhaps the most daring of all of Dante's gestures of praise. When Dante arrives at the Garden of Eden in *Purgatorio* 28 he sees a variety of mystical symbols paraded before his eyes. Seven candlesticks lead a procession (the seven gifts of the spirit that illuminate human life). Following these are the books of the Old Testament, represented by twenty-four elders. Then comes a Chariot (the Church) pulled by Christ as the Griffin.[30] On either

30. I follow the traditional reading of the Griffin, against recent attempts to interpret it otherwise. For such attempts see Peter Armour, "Dante's Processional Vision" in *Lectura Dantis: Purgatorio, A Canto-by-Canto Commentary*, ed. Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 336-340.

side of the chariot are virtues represented as nymphs, while behind the chariot are various men representing the books of the New Testament. More concisely then, the procession means that the spirit of God illuminates revelation and the history of scripture, all of which centers on the transcendent moment of Christ's coming to earth and leading his Church, uniting the books in the epochs before and after him. The whole procession is in the form of a cross, with the two-natured symbol of Christ at the center. This elaborate procession contains a set of images mostly from *Revelation*, which refers the whole scene to the last judgment. As Charles Singleton emphasized, Dante is witnessing a last judgment. Even fairly uneducated medieval readers would be immediately aware of this.[31]

Singleton argued that what makes Dante's procession different from the ordinary medieval understanding of the last judgment is the person who appears in the chariot when the procession stops. Dante introduces this person as Christ, but it will be someone else. One of the representatives of the Old Testament sings the phrase *Veni sponsa de Libano* (Come, bride of Lebanon), from the *Song of Songs*, three times. Then everyone in the procession sings in

31. Many medieval churches decorated with exactly such images of the last judgment, would have taught Dante's ordinary readers about the last judgment in terms of these symbols, and perhaps inspired Dante's canto. Most iconographically similar of all to Dante's procession are the mosaics in the churches of Santi Cosma e Damiano and the identical ones in the church of Santa Prassede, both in Rome, where in each case a series of successive arches in the church contain these symbols (the heavenly Jerusalem, the twenty four elders, the seven candlesticks, the evangelists, etc.). To one who traverses the space, even merely with one's glance, the succession of arches creates the visual effect of a procession in motion towards the end of the church, where Christ appears in the vault descending to the judgment seat. Coincidentally, the mosaics of S. Prassede are of particular relevance for the question of iconoclasm in medieval art. They were done at the end of the 700s by artists fleeing iconoclast persecution in Byzantium and commemorate the relocation of the remains of martyrs and saints from the catacombs. Byzantine iconoclasts were opposed to the devotion to martyrs as well as to images. Like Dante's *Purgatorio,* the mosaics stress the value of human beings as mediators.

response *Benedictus qui venit!* (Blessed is He who comes!). In its original context, this phrase "Blessed is He who comes" describes Christ entering Jerusalem. The Old Testament erotic longing for the Bride of Lebanon is now to be satisfied with the phrase announcing Christ from the New Testament. Since his readers know this New Testament verse, and know the iconography of the procession, then it is very clear that these angels are welcoming the returning Christ, who is arriving at his judgment seat so as to decide who can be received into the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God. If we attune ourselves to the force of the scriptural citations as the last century of scholarship has helped us to do, then we recognize that nothing could have prepared a Medieval reader for what happened next. The angels quote a verse from Virgil's *Aeneid*, *Manibus o date lilia plenis* (Give hands full of lilies).[32] Anchises voices this phrase at one of the most melancholy moments of Vergil's poem, "even though it is of no use, let me throw these lilies over the shade of the dead soul." All this is overturned in *Purgatorio* 30 when angels shower the chariot with lilies, and in the midst of a delicate rain of flowers, Beatrice appears. Of course Christ, the "He" in "Blessed is He who comes," it turns out, is a she.

Now, including a line from Virgil as a part of the last Judgment is already stretching the bounds of theological propriety, and it embraces the pagan world in a new way. It transforms and completes our worldly dignity and our wholly natural desires rather than effacing them in the moment of revelation. But surprising as it is, this is not the most striking thing about the scene. If we accept the idea that the ancient inability to redeem death has been overcome by Christ's sacrifice, and that it is natural for Dante to use a bit of pagan poetry to express this thought, then Virgil's melancholy has itself been uplifted and transformed into a moment of grace. His conversation with Statius about his role in the conversion in *Purgatorio* 22 might have already prepared us for that. Rather, it is the appearance of Beatrice that makes this passage so complicated.

32. *Aeneid* 6.883-86; *Purgatorio* 30.21.

As I said, the procession suggests that the figure who emerges should be Christ coming down to the judgment seat. Dante has done everything to make us think this. And of course, only *Christ's* grace could surpass the ancient melancholy and redeem us from death. But in Singleton's words, we witness here the Advent of Beatrice.[33] In Dante's case, the person who pronounces the decision about whether he is received in the heavenly city is Beatrice. She is at the center of this heavenly procession; she is the representative of the Judge in this personal last judgment. She will make Dante confess his sin, and she will be an instrument of his forgiveness. She appears to him in Christ's place.[34] While Purgatory was structured by three-part examples from an ancient source, from the Old Testament, and from the New Testament, Beatrice's appearance takes us into a realm beyond the three citations that announce her. She is the revelation at the center of history.

The Griffin that pulls the chariot is a symbolic presentation of Christ that leaves Christ a mystery. A similar tactic is found in

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33. See Singleton, "The Advent of Beatrice" in *Journey to Beatrice*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 72-85. In the preceding couple of pages I have been trying to re-enact Singleton's understanding of Beatrice as a Christ figure in such a way as to represent the theological boldness of the gesture.

34. There is a traditional model for the procession that Dante may have had in mind. The translator John Sinclair saw Beatrice of the chariot in purgatory as an image of the Eucharist (for which see the commentary accompanying his translation of *Purgatorio* 30 in *Dante: The Divine Comedy, Purgatorio* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1939]). In the middle ages, the Eucharist was paraded through the streets in a chariot in the feast of Corpus Christi at Modena, and Dante might be expecting his readers to think of that. If Sinclair was right, the poem can be seen as a public procession of his private vision with a Eucharistic value. The living Beatrice, as I said earlier, was a public love, a miracle for all the Florentines. And the Beatrice of Dante's writings is less private still. The aim of Dante's work is to make Beatrice a universal figure available to all his readers.

iconoclastic Hebrew illuminated manuscripts in Germany in the 1200s. By making holy people into mythical animals or giving them animal heads, artists avoided giving a false impression with a non-fictional, non-arbitrary representation.[35] So the use of the Griffin can be understood as a careful, humble avoidance of idolatry here. But unfortunately Dante doesn't leave it at that, but looks at the Griffin in Beatrice's eyes. Again, Christ appears to Dante, comes to life for Dante, in the beautiful eyes of Beatrice. The two natures of the Griffin are mysteriously fused, but in her eyes he sees alternately one or the other. He says:

> Mille disiri piú che fiamma caldi
> strinsermi li occhi alli occhi rilucenti,
> che pur sopra 'l grifone stavan saldi.
>
> Come in lo specchio il sol, non altrimenti
> la doppia fiera dentro vi raggiava,
> or con altri, or con altri reggimenti.
>
> Pensa, lettor, s'io mi maravigliava,
> quando vedea la cosa in sé star queta,
> e ne l'idolo suo si trasmutava.[36]

In the soul of Beatrice, Dante can see an image either of Christ's humanity or of his divinity, but never both at once. Why does Dante see the Griffin through the eyes of a woman at all? We might try to evade the problem—as many critics do—and make Beatrice herself a mere symbol. But our knowledge of the details of Beatrice's real existence as a contemporary of Dante in the *Vita Nuova* (for instance, her life and death, her family relations) makes such a reading inadequate. Even when she is dead,

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35. See Bezalel Narkiss and Evelyn Cohen, "Illuminated Manuscripts, Hebrew" in *Encyclopedia Judaica,* ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., Vol. 9. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2007), 726-735.

36. *Purgatorio* 31.124-6, "A thousand desires hotter than flame bound my eyes to the eyes reflecting, that upon the Griffin stayed firm. As in a mirror the sun, not otherwise the double beast within rayed out, now with one now with the other nature. Think, reader, if I marveled when I saw that the thing in itself remained unchanged but in its image changed."

her eyes have the flash that distinguishes living, conscious human beings from dead ones and from statues. In Beatrice the eternal meaning is reflected in the eyes of a contemporary human being. She is not just a beautiful object or a symbol, because she is a subject who loves the Beautiful Itself, just as Dante does. He falls in love with God through his beloved, who is herself in love with God. In fact, he falls in love with her precisely insofar as she is a lover. In being moved by love she reflects the love that moves her. The reflection of Christ in her loving eyes makes others, like Dante, into lovers of Christ. (Compare Plato's *Phaedrus*, especially 255c-d, where the beloved is seduced by his own deified reflection in the eyes of the lover.) Beatrice's role as a lover removes the idolatry from Dante's love of her. And the reader is supposed to participate in this same reflection between lover and beloved by looking at Dante's love for Beatrice.

To understand why the mirroring of Christ in Beatrice's eyes is not idolatrous, we must recall the tradition of the *speculum Dei,* the mirror of God. To see God in a mirror is to see God in an imperfect and limited way, not as he is. The alternation between the two natures of Christ in the appearance of Beatrice emphasizes her limited ability to reflect him. It is all we on earth can do, as the King James translation of St. Paul puts it, to "see through a glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12). This passage from Paul was cited as an explanation for the vision of Christ in Beatrice's eyes by the earliest commentators.[37] This idea had been previously deployed in a number of debates. This phrase "mirror of God" was sometimes applied to the martyrs and saints. Saint Francis, for example, visibly reflected Christ in the stigmata, and mirrored his suffering in the sorrow within his soul as well.[38] Beatrice's soul is in the same category with such saints. Her beauty, but also her charity and her humility, reflects God's, al-

37. For example, Dante's son Pietro Alighieri cites it in his commentary (1359-64) on these lines.

38. See Bonaventure's "Life of Saint Francis" in *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, the Tree of Life, the Life of St. Francis,* trans. Ewert Cousins (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 305-306.

though she cannot perfectly express the paradox of the two natures. More generally, any reformed soul is a mirror of God, even beyond the way in which any human being is made in God's image. The importance for Dante's *Commedia* of the tradition of the mirror of God cannot be overstated. As the opening tercet of the *Paradiso* puts it, the entire universe is a mirror reflecting God's light.

> La gloria di colui che tutto move
> per l'universo penetra, e risplende
> in una parte piú, e meno altrove.[39]

Moreover, the idea of seeing God through a mirror was part of the defense of art in the early iconoclastic debates.[40] As mentioned earlier, those who staked out positions against images implied opposition to the adoration of saints and martyrs as well as the Virgin Mary. The idea of the mirror of God that was used to defend images in the eighth century iconoclastic dispute supplies a traditional account that explains Beatrice's role as a saint, and clarifies how her beauty points to its own pre-existence in God. And although her reflection of the Divine essence must be qualified, it is nevertheless surpassingly glorious—so much so that Dante cannot end this canto with a description of her unveiled reflection of God, but ends instead with the claim that her image is indescribable (*Purgatorio* 31.139-145). Beatrice is at the same time both a defense of images, and a limit to images.

Something similar to Dante's treatment of Beatrice can be understood to explain the style of his book as a whole, and it undergirds its literary realism. The eternal meaning of the characters is presented through attention to personal and historical details, especially, but not exclusively, in the presentation of Dante's contemporaries. Rather than provide sterile lexical or philosophical

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39. *Paradiso* 1.1-3: "The glory of him who moves everything penetrates through all the universe, and reflects in one part more, and less in another."

40. For the medieval artistic tradition and the *speculum Dei*, see Emile Male, "One Hundred Years of Iconoclasm" in *Early Churches of Rome*, trans. David Buxton (London: Ernest Bendt, 1960).

definitions of the sins or virtues of each group of souls, he presents the living stories of souls in their places.[41] The concreteness of such stories challenges the reader with the ambiguities of experience, but they are fruitful ambiguities. The stories suggest that readers take what is valid in ordinary experience and purify it, rather than simplifying or disregarding it. We start from where we are, and ascend dialectically, just as Aristotle does in his *Ethics*, arguing his points starting from common opinions and from experience.

4. Beatrice as Prophet in *Paradiso*

I will now focus on the limits Dante sets to the vision of God he can produce through the image of Beatrice and through his poem. The *Paradiso* opens with a disclaimer about the limits of Dante's poetic powers. Dante says that he cannot express or even recall much of what he saw in heaven. He alerts the reader that he must end his journey with a concession to some aspects of the iconoclast's demands. Although Beatrice's beauty pre-exists in God, as an individual she is ultimately merely one part of the Incarnate God. Only Christ is perfectly "the image of the unseen God".[42] Similarly, Dante's poem could never perfectly mirror the Incarnation or the Trinity. The sobering distance between Dante and God in the *Paradiso* gives the canticle a prophetic character. By

41. It is worth comparing Brunetto Latini's encyclopedia, the *Livres dou tresor,* and his poem, the *Tesoretto*. Both are extremely similar to Dante's work in that they separate out vices and virtues and define them. Both are works of exile, and both involve narrative accounts of Aristotelian morality and metaphysics. The profound difference is that Brunetto's works are purely abstract and allegorical. Their narrative form is superfluous. They merely offer a lively version of a bird's eye view. Nor does Brunetto's account suffer a genuine transcendent element. The abstract and mundane aspects of Brunetto's works prompt Dante to relegate Brunetto to the stale and unfruitful atmosphere surrounding the sodomites of *Inferno* 15. The key to interpreting most of the images in that canto is the biblical injunction not to store up one's "treasure" on earth, but in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21).

42. Colossians 1:15.

prophetic I mean looking forward to the fulfillment of justice, and living in anticipation of contact with a God who is not yet fully present on earth—that is to say, living in exile.

In order to take on the role of the prophet, Dante must put on a severity that comports very oddly with love poetry. A prophet has to live in the desert with nothing more than hope. As Emmanuel Levinas argued, prophecy does not coincide with feminine gentleness in the Old Testament.[43] But in the *Commedia* Beatrice, a woman, is the source of Dante's prophecies, beginning in *Purgatorio* 33 with the chilling condemnation of ecclesiastical corruption in their times. Beatrice is stern and harsh throughout the *Paradiso*. Such moments suggest that Beatrice is not simply an emblem of gentle, generous beauty. Rather, she is also a figure of anger. She is loved in and for her anger, and her anger is a sign of her love. For Dante at least, she is, paradoxically, both Church Triumphant and Church Militant at the same time.

The *Paradiso* emphasizes the prophetic vein more explicitly than the other *cantiche*, and presents us with a number of austere figures as role models for human life. So, for example, the paragons of human virtue in *Paradiso* are monastics like Francis, whose erotic love of poverty is itself a form of vision.[44] Others are the ascetic contemplatives Peter Damien, Benedict, and the white-haired Bernard. The non-monastic figures of greatest importance in heaven are either soldiers or kings who sacrificed themselves for heavenly justice. It may be easy to miss it while reading the *Paradiso*, which is filled with beautiful images of light, refined talk of love, and angelic harmonies, but two of the highest values in heaven are poverty and spiritual war. Though the Paradiso rises through the ethereal reaches of heaven, the Church Militant and the expression of hostility to the earth receive continually greater emphasis. The contemplatives at the

43. See Emmanual Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*. trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 30-38.

44. I take this account of Francis from Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision,* 240.

very top of Dante's celestial hierarchy are defined as those who love and minister to their fellow men, and, at the same time, those who least esteemed the earth. From their height they can look down on earth, as Benedict did from the dizzying heights of his monastery atop Monte Cassino. So the starkness of the *Paradiso* might not seem in accord with the choice of a beautiful woman as a guide. But, mysteriously, Dante sees the erotic attraction to God in Beatrice's eyes as implying a severe and unbending focus on the ugly and bad in the world, and on the need for correction. As Dante's vision becomes clearer, he and Beatrice ascend farther and farther above the world, and become angrier and angrier about its corruption. Why should erotic desire be so at one with the austerity and anger of the prophet? Isn't anger *thumos*, not *eros*?

The answers to these questions lie in recalling Dante's situation on earth after Beatrice died. In the *Vita Nuova*, following Beatrice's death, Dante initially reacted properly. He began to despise the earthly life because it had lost its *salute* (chs. 32-34). Beatrice, from heaven, offered him consolation. But a year or so after she died, Dante turned to the Siren. As Beatrice expresses it in her description of this episode in *Purgatorio* (31.44-54), love should have generated anger against the earthly Siren, against self-induced hypnosis that creates indifference to ascent. Recall the image of Pope Adrian V with his face in the dirt in *Purgatorio* 19, tearfully longing for what is beyond the earth. Dante, like Adrian, should have recognized all earthly things as lesser pleasures than Beatrice's grace. He should have risen up to heaven in pursuit of her after her death, when she had become a purer heavenly creature. Like Adrian, Dante must yearn for what has left him in permanent mourning. Unworldliness is the proper way of seeking consolation in the more distant but truly higher good, rather than finding substitutes in the sirens of the here and now. Anger at the corruption of the earth, and even indignant disgust with the earth, becomes then a way of maintaining *eros* for what is now absent. *Eros* and *thumos* work together. They are not two separate parts of the soul, but two aspects of a single activity of the soul. Adrian's face is pressed into the dirt not only as punish-

ment, but as therapy. Anger and sorrow imply a love of something toward which earthly things cannot point him. While Beatrice, before her death, was an earthly beauty pointing beyond the earth, after her death she is a creature who has reached her Creator. Although she leaves Dante in mourning, she becomes an even more effective mediatrix for him. Of course, she does not renounce her earlier function as the earthly miracle who greeted him. But in heaven she can complete that work.

The other aspect of the role of the prophet that can only with difficulty be connected to love of a woman is its public nature. The prophet is a leader of men and a master of rhetoric, as the Ulysses canto in the *Inferno* suggests.[45] This issue of public prophecy and private love complete the picture of *agape* and *eros* in the *Paradiso*, the true finale of the *Vita Nuova*. In his meeting with John the Evangelist, Dante presents the paradox of a private love for something public and universal that can help us understand his love for Beatrice as a young man.

John, like Beatrice, is a complex case. In his gospel, John's status as private friend of Christ is contrasted with the universality of Christ's relation to humanity. His gospel portrays a number of scenes that emphasize how, as a particular human being, even Christ had a special love for certain people, like his mother, and like his close friend John.[46] But the gospel writer suggests that this in no way interfered with or reduced Christ's universal charity. Because of the complexity of this portrayal, a myth arose that John had special immortality and was taken to heaven bodily. In *Par-*

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45. *Inferno* 26 is structured around the division between the true and the false prophet. Dante suggests that he mistakes Ulysses for Elijah initially, and verges on becoming a sort of false prophet himself. From Ulysses's story he must learn Paul's well-known dictum in Corinthians 13 that the power of prophecy without love is nothing. See Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 66-106.

46. Above all, the comments about John's special status in relation to Christ, and the play with Peter about *philia* (personal love) and *agape* (impersonal love) at the end of the gospel (John 21:15-23) raise questions about the role of the ordinary private individual.

adiso 25, Dante looks for this body and goes blind. In Canto 26, John questions the blind Dante about love, asking him why he loves. Dante replies first with a universal argument. He loves because of the authority of scripture and because of philosophical arguments. But the apostle seems to ask him the same question again: Are there other cords that pull you to God, or other teeth of love that bite you? And Dante replies:

> Tutti quei morsi
> che posson far lo cor volgere a Dio,
> a la mia caritate son concorsi:
>
> ché l'essere del mondo e l'esser mio,
> la morte ch'el sostenne perch' io viva,
> e quel che spera ogne fedel com' io,
>
> con la predetta coscenza viva,
> tratto m'hanno del mar de l'amor torto,
> e del diritto m'han posto a la riva.
>
> Le fronde onde s'infronda tutto l'orto
> de l'ortolano etterno, am' io cotanto
> quanto da lui a lor di bene è porto.[47]

Immediately after receiving this answer, Dante regains his sight, now made even stronger. Dante has brought the universal love of God (*agape*) into harmony with his own individual love (*eros*), transforming his love into the universal one. He is moved by God's gift of creation as a whole, by God's gift of salvation, and forgiveness, as well as by the hope that these imply for him. He is erotically concerned with his own good, and with the entire story of his that he presents in the *Commedia*, as this passage

47. *Paradiso* 26.55-66, "All those bites that can make the heart turn to God are in concord in my love. That the being of the world, and my being, the death that he underwent so that I might live, and that which every faithful person hopes, as I, together with the aforementioned living knowledge, they have drawn me from the sea of perverse love and has put me on the shore of the right [love]. The leaves with which are leafed all the garden of the eternal Gardener, I love as much as the good given to them by Him."

suggests by returning to the beginning, when he was shipwrecked like Ulysses on the shoals of the *mar de l'amor torto* in *Inferno* 1, and then bringing us right up to the present, when he finds himself on the shore of right love in purgatory. The reference to leaves is an allusion to a passage in John's gospel in which Christ describes himself as an eternal vine:

> Abide in me, and I in you. . . . I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. . . . If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.[48]

As part of the vine, Dante is now able to love the garden of the whole creation and *all* the leaves, that is, all creatures to which God has granted the gift of the good. This gift from God is *agape*. Dante's individual love is now perfected in becoming *agape* for the other parts of the vine, and his love is now proportionate to the *agape* that comes down into all the leaves from God. Dante's love for himself has now somehow cast a wider net of love around all creatures that partake in God's grace. He loves all the blessed he will meet in the celestial rose, and all those who are yet to arrive there. Christ's two commands—love God and love your neihbor as yourself (Mark 12:30-31)—are now one act for Dante, an act that springs from what was initially his self-love. For the source of all other loves is rightly directed self-love, as Dante remarked in the *Convivio*: *lo proprio amore di me medesimo . . . è principio di tutti li altri, sì come vede ciascuno.*[49]

We can now see how the public and universal qualities of Dante's love in fact have room for his private and erotic love of Beatrice. Note how very similar this passage is to Dante's description of the effect of Beatrice's greeting on him in Chapter 11 of the *Vita Nuova*. In both cases, universal charity comes from hope. Dante

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48. John 15.4-7.

49. *Convivio* 3.5. "[P]roper love of myself . . . is the root of all other loves, as everyone knows".

is exhilarated by promise of God's creation and God's sacrifice, which offers him great expectations. This confident private hope for his own happiness is transformed into charity for all of God's garden. And the more secure he feels in his expectation of happiness, the more he is able to give of himself. The same is true of Dante's relation with the beauty of Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*. His self-regarding hope for the promise of her greeting brought the flame of charity to him, and he became Love. Her beauty humbled him and effaced his self, even if at the same time, on another level, his self was actively at work achieving the goal of its own self-love. In this humility before the Good, the human soul transcends the merely private.

Dante turns to find Beatrice in *Paradiso* 31, and is surprised to see her replaced by the third and final guide, a white-haired old man. The anti-sensual element is emphatic. St. Bernard might be beautiful, but he could never be called pretty. And yet, Dante emphasizes the continuity: the severity of Beatrice's prophetic character is succeeded by the austerity of Bernard. Dante will compare his vision of the old monk to the Veronica, the same shroud bearing Christ's features that he once compared to Beatrice at the end of the *Vita Nuova*. This reference also recalls the "idolo" of Christ in the eyes of Beatrice from *Purgatorio* 31, which was discussed earlier. In Dante's final speech to Beatrice (*Paradiso* 31.79-90) she has fully transcended herself; she has become a universal figure for the blessed. In the *Vita Nuova*, he made an attempt to love the innermost meaning of her beauty, that is, the meaning of her beauty in God. This transcendent element in her beauty now reveals itself to be her place in the celestial rose as a mere part of a larger divine order. Her innermost individual meaning becomes transcendent when it is not separate from anything else in God.

At the outset of Canto 33, Bernard asks Mary to help Dante see God. He tells her that all those who have been saved throughout history up to the present day, including Beatrice, now pray for Dante. This is universal *agape*, akin to Dante's newfound love for all the leaves of the garden—only here it is made explicit that it works in reverse as well. In this moment of communion which seamlessly combines *agape* and *eros*, not only does he love the

whole garden, but the whole garden loves him in return. Mary, the more traditional universal symbol of love, does not compete with Beatrice as the mirror of God; she is now revealed as the completion of Beatrice, the more perfect mirror. She resembles Christ more than any other. Mary initiated Beatrice's rescue of Dante in *Inferno*, and now she finishes her task, turning Dante toward the Original for which she is merely the image. But even this turn to the Original in the final lines of the poem is not the end of these mirrors of God. Christ himself is an image of the Father.

And there is a further image of God implicit in the closing lines. Although Dante cannot *misurar lo cerchio* ("measure the circle," *Paradiso* 33.134), he finds himself moved by love *sí come rota ch'igualmente é mossa* ("like a wheel that is moved in equal measure," *Paradiso* 33.144). The attribution of mathematical equality in the motion with the word *igualmente* implies that his motion does in fact precisely measure the Love that moves him. This equality is the most perfect correspondence of Dante's *desio* and *velle* to God's self-understanding and self-love. In this sense, Dante himself becomes an image of God.[50]

50. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* I-I q. 93, a.4) enumerates three forms of the image of God in man: first, that which all have by nature; second, that which the just have by grace; and, third, that which the blessed have by glory, the so-called "image of likeness." In all three cases, man is in the image of God in that he loves and understands God, imitating the way in which God's intellectual nature loves and understands itself. But in the third way, in glory, the blessed have the image of God in the highest degree, because they love and understand God more perfectly. Dante's pair *disio* and *velle* achieve this third kind of understanding and love appropriate to those blessed by glory. Thomas's reference to God's self-love and understanding are echoed in *Paradiso* 33.124-126. This suggests that the three circles of the Trinity are circles because they represent the self-relation of God's intellectual nature. When Dante grasps how the human effigy fits within the circle, he sees how the human soul can come to resemble God's self-understanding and self-love.

THE EXTINCTION of SPECIES

Marlene Benjamin

To Din
In Memoriam

This is no abstract exercise.
There will be names and places
To tether you, to make you hear and note,
To make you listen and mark.

So mark this:
We live amongst the extinction of species. "Passenger pigeon, great auk,
Stellar's sea cow, Schomburgk's deer, sea mink, antarctic wolf, Carolina parakeet: all gone."
I learn this from Quammen's exhilarating book, which is yet depressingly full of incontrovertible facts,
Called *The Song of The Dodo*, a great bird also gone extinct.
Quammen was at Oxford with Saul, who was at Brasenose some 15 or so years before you, and who
Recently told me that he had long harbored a desire to meet you there for High Table fare, a desire
He never satisfied. As for me,
My desire to sit at table with you was satisfied over and over again across 43 years,
Giving me the singular joy of watching you
Grow from a child to the man you became, whose traits and habits
Could be traced back to early childish behaviors.
At five, you were insistent on being right, but with a sense of humor
That made your rightness palatable to those who were faced with
Hearing it forcefully directed at their pale and insignificant positions.
"What," you used to say, "is the point of *that*?" in mock horror at the
Emptiness of my claims concocted to counter yours.

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At six, you kindly said to me, using my own phrasing to illustrate the foolishness
Of my arguments, "Now Marlene, we don't want to hear any more about bloody California."
You knew this would kill me with laughter, and it did.
At twenty-five, you gently queried my political explanations to end the conversation by saying
"Now that sounds like an extremely intelligent position." Long pause. "Or does it?"

And what, I ask you now, am I to do without your challenges? Without your presence?
It is as if an entire species has gone extinct with your death,
Leaving a hole in the natural world that cannot be woven closed.
There are too many frayed edges.
And that is only me. For the damage done to the intimate family is far worse,
Far more savage an attack on the fabric of the world.
How shall they carry on?
Perhaps they have a memory of your last moments to lean on,
A way to conjure up the finality of your departure and thus, paradoxically,
A way to hold you closer than is given to me.
I don't know; I wasn't there.

But I have this: I have what the camera captured in the photograph
On the cover of the Order of Service at your funeral, the picture I have standing on my dresser
Facing me each morning, showing you (in Wales, is it?) surrounded by your girls – Lily and Molly and Bea;
Smiling at what I believe is Sue behind the camera – or perhaps it is Mag or Jim or Vinny or Simon –
All of whom stand, for me, invisibly behind you, all of you together
In the shadow of the astonishingly full and lovely life you had, it seemed, so effortlessly, made.
Looking at you like this is to repopulate the world,
My way to argue against the extinction of species.

However tenuous the argument, for a few moments every day, it
works – even as I know,
And love, that you would challenge my saying so. And knowing
this, the hole,
For some few tremulous moments – as if the air is being beaten
by the concerted breathing
Of all the creatures gone from our world – is somewhat, though
evanescently,
Woven closed.

Education and the Art of Writing: Christopher Bruell's *Aristotle as Teacher—His Introduction to a Philosophic Science.* South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2014. 268 pages, $37.50

Book Review by James Carey

In *Aristotle as Teacher—His Introduction to a Philosophic Science*, Christopher Bruell advances an interpretation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that pays closer attention to the wording of the actual text than does, as far as I know, any other study of that work since the imposing commentaries of the Middle Ages. It is also much the most original interpretation of the *Metaphysics* that I have ever read.

Bruell has written impressive essays on Leo Strauss, and his fine study of Plato's shorter dialogues, *On the Socratic Education*, shows the influence of Strauss. So one can call him, with some justification, a Straussian.[1] This is not to say that he necessarily agrees with Strauss about everything, only that he takes seriously certain themes that were of great importance to Strauss, such as the rival claims of Greek philosophy and the Bible regarding the possibility of revelation, the root of morality, and, more generally, what constitutes the best human life. Strauss is well known for having called attention to the fact—and it is a fact—that the ancient philosophers, their medieval followers, and even their early modern opponents often wrote in such a way as to disclose their deepest thoughts only to their most careful readers while at the same time presenting on the surface of their texts a teaching that was more in accord with common opinions, especially opinions concerning

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1. Straussians take the intellectual tradition of the West seriously, read the great books with exemplary care, and think hard about the things that are most worthy of thinking hard about. Those of us who are not Straussians can profit greatly by attending to what they have to say, whether or not we are ultimately persuaded by what they have to say.

the sanctity of law and the existence and nature of the divine. Philosophers wrote this way because they could not forget the example of Socrates, who in spite of his civic virtue and the caution with which he conversed was put to death for being a philosopher by the citizens of a regime that was democratic and, by ancient standards, generally liberal and tolerant as well. This art of writing is properly called "exoteric"—not "esoteric"—for the author realized that it would be available to be read by anyone who was able to read, whatever his ability and whatever his degree of sympathy or antipathy toward free inquiry.

Though it becomes obvious on close inspection, especially under the guidance of Strauss, that many books of the philosophers have an exoteric character, it is not so obvious that Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is one of these books. In fact, it is not so obvious that the *Metaphysics* is a book at all, not in the way that, say, the *Nicomachean Ethics* is.[2] Bruell is aware that the *Metaphysics* looks at first glance, and for most readers at last glance as well, like a patchwork; and he does not rule out the possibility that someone other than Aristotle may have been responsible for the final form of the work (30).[3] But he takes it as heuristic principle that whoever was responsible for the *Metaphysics* as it has come down to us from antiquity, whether it was Aristotle himself or one (or more) of his followers, had sound reasons for organizing it as he did, and that we cannot begin to understand the teaching of the book, much less evaluate it, without paying the closest possible attention to the stages in which it is presented. If the *Metaphysics* looks more like an assemblage of notes for lectures delivered at different times than a through-composed book like Plato's *Laws*, Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, or Machiavelli's *Prince*,[4] that very appearance should be regarded as contributing to the exoteric character of the work. On Bruell's interpretation, every chapter, and virtually every sentence, of the *Metaphysics* is in its proper place. Bruell slows the reader of the *Metaphysics* down, *way* down, and he requires

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2. See W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarion Press, 1970), Vol. 1, xiii-xxxiii.

3. Pagination for citations from *Aristotle as Teacher* will be given within parentheses. The same practice will be followed for citations from the *Metaphysics* and other works by Aristotle. When only the Bekker number is given, it should be read as referring to the *Metaphysics*, except when a different work is specified in the text.

4. See Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, xxviii, on the formulations at 1069b35 and 1070a4.

the reader to pay the closest possible attention to the exact working of the text. That by itself is one of the many merits of Bruell's book.

The layout of *Aristotle as Teacher* is unusual. It does not contain chapter headings of the kind that one typically finds in an extended study. Bruell frequently refers to what modern editors of the Greek text of the *Metaphysics* say about their editorial decisions, and he explains why he is or is not persuaded by them. But aside from these references, and a few references to Thomas Aquinas's commentary, there is virtually no mention of the secondary literature (see 135). There are no footnotes or endnotes in *Aristotle as Teacher*. There is no bibliography, there is no index of persons, and there is no index of subjects. In the course of his treatment of the individual chapters of the fourteen books of the *Metaphysics*, Bruell makes many references to passages from other chapters. These references are always interesting. But the reader longs for an index of Aristotelian passages dealt with in the book, so that he can quickly find out what Bruell says about a given passage, and what he does not say about it.

Straussians have occasionally suggested that the *Metaphysics* is an exoteric work. Those who, like the present reviewer, have found this claim implausible have wondered what in the world an intelligent and thorough interpretation of the *Metaphysics* as an exoteric book could possibly look like. Bruell's book, written with a magisterial command of the text, and in lucid and unaffected prose of a high stylistic order, *is* that interpretation. It behooves anyone who wants to know, or who thinks that he already knows, what Aristotle is doing in the *Metaphysics* to come to terms with what Bruell has to say about it.[5]

Before proceeding further, I need to say something about the translation of some key Aristotelian expressions. One of these is *ousia*, which Bruell translates sometimes as "thing" and "sometimes as "essence," in keeping with the fact that for Aristotle this word can signify both an ordinary individual and the intelligible character that the individual shares with other individuals like it. For the former signification I prefer "entity," since this word is broad enough to cover both things and persons, sub-rational animals in between, and gods too if they exist. For the latter signification, and often for the former too, I shall leave *ousia* untranslated, as Bruell frequently does

5. The reserve with which Bruell communicates his interpretation could lead one to infer that *Aristotle as Teacher* is itself an exoteric work. This inference would be an error. There is no surface to *Aristotle as Teacher*. It is all depth.

as well.[6] Another expression is *to ti ēn einai*, which Bruell translates as "the what it was to be." Clearly, this expression names something of capital importance for Aristotle.[7] Early in the *Metaphysics,* in his restatement of the four causes (983a27-32) that were presented in the *Physics* (194b23-195a3), Aristotle names *ousia* and *to ti ēn einai* first. He does not mention *eidos* here as one of the causes, as he did in the parallel passage in *Physics,* where it is the second cause mentioned.[8] In Book Lambda, the unmoved mover is said to be *to ti ēn einai*, indeed the "first" *ti ēn einai* (1074a35-36), but never "form" (*eidos*), not even "pure form."[9] In what follows I shall also leave this expression untranslated.

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6. "Beingness" is not unthinkable as a translation for the second signification of *ousia*, but it is unthinkable as a translation for the first signification. Aristotle calls such entities as individual men, horses, and plants, *ousiai*. It makes no sense to speak of these entities as "beingnesses."

7. Since the imperfect *ēn* can function as durative, I prefer translating it as "is" rather than "was." The formulation, "the what it was to be," has an odd sound to my ears, as though implying "what it *was* to be, but no longer *is*," or "what it was *meant* to be, but didn't quite *turn out* to be." Since the *ti* is interrogative, one might translate the expression as "the what *is* it to be." But that translation is not entirely satisfactory either. Something of what Aristotle means by the expression can be gathered from the contexts in which he uses it. When he launches his inquiry into *to ti ēn einai* in Book Zeta, ch. 4, of the *Metaphysics* he uses the expressions *to soi einai*, *to musikōi einai*, *to epiphaineiāi einai*, *to leukōi einai*, etc. (See 994b27: *to apeirōi einai*; and *De Anima* 429b11 ff: *to megathōi einai* vs. *to megathos*, *to hydati einai* vs. *to hydōr*, *to sarki einai* vs. *to sarks*, *to euthei einai* vs. *to euthy.*) These dative of possessors are stronger than genitives and could be translated respectively as "the being proper to you," "the being proper to musical," "the being proper to surface," "the being proper to white," etc. Such expressions are presented as exemplifications of *to ti ēn einai* in the sphere of what is sensible. (See also 1029b21: *ho logos tou ti ēn einai*; and *De Anima* 429b20.) When Aristotle is not speaking of this or that particular individual, he tends to use the longer expression, *to ti ēn einai.* In the course of his treatment of sensible *ousia*, Aristotle often uses *to ti ēn einai* interchangeably with *eidos*. But the former is not a synonym for the latter. Furthermore, though in certain contexts Aristotle will speak of *hylē* as *ousia*, he never to my knowledge speaks *hylē* as *to ti ēn einai* (cf. *Metaphysics* 1032b14).

8. The presentation of the causes in Book Delta of the *Metaphysics* (1013b16-27) follows the order of the *Physics*.

9. Eugene Ryan, "Pure Form in Aristotle," *Phronesis*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, 1973, 209-224.

Bruell says of the formal cause, or the form, that it is "the perceptible or intelligible character of a being, nothing more" (20). The "nothing more" is intriguing, since Aristotle treats the form not only as what is intelligible about a sensible (or perceptible—*aisthētē*) entity (*ousia*) but, along with matter (or material—*hylē*), as an actual constituent of a sensible, and composite, entity (*Physics* 193b6). It is not only one of the causes, it is nature (*physis*) to a higher degree than is matter (ibid., 193b7; 193b19—taking *morphē* here as equivalent to *eidos*: 193b3-5). Indeed, it is activity, or being at work (*energeia—Metaphysics* 1050b2; see 1043a28). If the *eidos* were not somehow a constituent of an entity, then it is hard to see how it could be the perceptible or intelligible character *of* that very entity, or of its nature (*Physics*, 193b7). Bruell is hardly unaware of the passages I have just cited. But he has reasons for not placing as much weight on them as I and others do.

One of the pervasive themes of the *Metaphysics* is the criticism of the "Platonic" account of the *eidē* as what is intelligible regarding sensible entities and, at the same time, as actual causes of these entities, though separate from them. Bruell detects in the *Metaphysics* a roughly parallel, but obliquely communicated, criticism of the "Aristotelian" account of *eidē* as well, and of the "Aristotelian" account of *ousia* more generally (140). Aristotle's account is certainly not problem-free, one indication being his employment of the single word *eidos* to name both a constituent within, hence bound to, a particular sensible entity, and the species to which it and entities closely resembling it belong. Aristotle's explicit teaching is that the *eidos* is present in a sensible entity, causing it to be the very being that it is, and yet also apprehensible, through the joint operation of sensation, imagination, and the intellect (*nous*), and explicable, in terms of genus and specific difference, as the intelligible character of that entity.[10] (See *De Anima* 431a16; 431b3). This is a demanding construal of the *eidos* indeed. But it is not nonsensical.

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10. Bruell writes, "In concluding this portion of the argument [in Book Zeta ch. 4], Aristotle does not speak of the form (eidos) but of species (eidē)" (138). Bruell speaks here as though *eidos* (singular) does not mean species (singular) and that when Aristotle wishes to speak of species (singular or plural) he uses *eidē* rather than *eidos*. But Aristotle will use *eidos* with speaking of species in the singular. See, for example, *Categories* 5, 2b7-23, *Topics* 4, 122b18-123a19. Nor is his usage of *eidos* (singular) for species (singular) confined to the logical writings. See, for example, *Metaphysics* 1038a25-26. Consider 1023b2. The *hylē* of the *eidos* is intelligible *hylē*, rather than sensible *hylē.* It is the genus: 1024b4-10, 1038a3-9, and 1045a33-35.

When Bruell comes to Aristotle's treatment of the Platonic understanding of the forms, he writes, "Not even the considerable latitude that Aristotle avails himself of in speaking of his teacher is sufficient to permit the mention of Plato in connection with an imperfect grasp of the formal cause (compare A 7 988a34-b6)" (29). The passage that Bruell refers to here could seem to undermine the point it is supposed to support. For Aristotle writes there that "concerning *to ti ēn einai* [which, in the case of *sensible* entities, Aristotle closely associates with *eidos*—e.g., *Physics*194b26; *Metaphysics* 1032b1-2] and the *ousia*, no one [so, not even Plato] has clearly introduced (*apodedōke*) them, though those posting the forms do speak of them." With his pointed reference to 988a34-b6, Bruell implies that Plato himself, as distinct from his followers, did *not* intend to introduce the formal cause clearly, inviting us to infer that Plato was as aware as was Aristotle of the problematic character of the formal cause.

In his treatment of Book alpha ("little alpha"), Bruell correctly notes that, for Aristotle "truth is being, as knowable" (31). Since "we do not know 'the true' without the cause" (993b23-24), Bruell is led to infer, "Truth, then, or nature is being, as caused or in so far as it is caused." But he immediately expresses a doubt about this inference, and rightly so. For the inference can be sustained only by ruling out the possibility that there could be an instance of truth that is being, not just as *caused*, but as *cause,* that is, that there could be a first uncaused cause and a first truth. For unless there is a cause that does not depend on a yet more fundamental cause, and unless there is a truth that does not owe its intelligibility to a yet more manifest truth, then we are caught in an infinite regress, both in causes and in truths, with no cause sufficient of itself, nor any number of causes in the series sufficient taken together, to account for what is caused and no truth evident of itself to ground other truths (994b16-23; see 1005b5-1006a12). But Aristotle says that what is most true (*alēthestaton*) is the cause of subsequent things' (*tois hysterois*) being true (993b26-27).[11] He expands his point

11. Thomas Aquinas and others have detected the outline of an argument, from gradations of being, for the existence of God right here in Book alpha (993b23-994a2), an argument quite distinct from the argument from motion in Book Lambda. This argument is not fleshed out. But if not only *to on*, but also *ousia* as the premier instance of *to on*, has a *pros hen* character, which I think is Aristotle's view (see, for example, 1004a3-5), then the ground has been laid in Book alpha for an argument that there is an *ousia* that *is* in the highest degree (*malista*) and is, moreover, the cause, or at least *a* cause, of other *ousiai*.

immediately afterwards by saying that the first principles (*archai*), not just of truths, but of eternal beings (to the extent that they have principles distinct from themselves—he likely has in mind the stars here), are always the most true. Nothing else is the cause of their being. And, he adds, just as each thing has being so it has truth (993b28-34). If Aristotle is serious in making these claims, then he cannot mean that truth is being as caused, period. Being as caused presupposes, in his account, being as uncaused. Aristotle says that it is clear (*dēlon*) there is some first principle (singular), and he expressly rules out an infinite regression of causes, either in a direct line or in type (994a1-2). Bruell does not deny that there is some first principle or principles, but he asks whether they are knowable (32). Whether or not they are knowable *to us*, however, they would be knowable *by nature* if they knew *themselves*, a possibility that Aristotle has already mentioned (983a6; see also 993b11; 1029b3-5; *Posterior Analytics* 71b34-35; *Physics* 1084a19; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095b2) and will argue for explicitly in chapter nine of Book Lambda (1074b15-35). Bruell presumably regards these passages as exoteric.[12]

Aristotle begins chapter 2 of Book alpha by arguing that there can be neither an infinite regress with respect to the *hou heneka* (the "for the sake of which," i.e., the final cause) nor with respect to *to ti ēn einai*. If so, then there must be both a first *hou heneka* that is not for the sake of anything else (994a8-10; 994b9-16; cf. 1072b1-3) and a first *to ti ēn einai* that is not bound up with *hylē* and is not the *einai* of anything else (1074a35-36), but is non-composite or simple (1072a31-34; 1075a5-10; cf. *Physic*s 266a10-267b20), fully actual and in no sense potential

12. Regarding latter chapters of Book Lambda, Bruell chooses "to depart so far from [Aristotle's] injunction (L6 1071b3-5) as to refrain from adding to them, elliptical though they are" (251). Apparently, Bruell understands these chapters, and earlier passages in the *Metaphysics* (e.g., 988b25-26; 1009a36-38; 1012b30-31; 1037a10-17; 1037a33-b6; 1040b34-1041a3; 1041a7-9; 1045b23; 1064a33-1064b3: *hoper peirasometha deiknunai*) that anticipate them by making mention of entities that are immaterial and separate—separate, that is, from the perceptible entities with which we are familiar—to be accommodations to readers who would rather be moved (250) than see the truth for what it is. Prior to the latter chapters of Book Lambda, Aristotle will use locutions such as "immaterial and separate *ousiai* . . . *if* they exist." One can say that Aristotle is hinting in such passages that immaterial *ousiai*, in fact, do *not* exist. But one can also say, instead, that he is reluctant to positively affirm the existence of such *ousiai* prior to advancing a complete argument for their existence, which he does not do until Book Lambda.

(1071b13-14, 19-22; 1074a36), necessary (1072b10), necessarily eternal (1071b4), an unmoved mover (1072a25-26: cf. *Physics*, 260a18-19), and the principle on which heaven and nature depend (1072b13-14).

Aristotle argues that there are only four species of cause, and that within none of these species is there procession, or ascent, into infinity. Bruell is struck by the fact that Aristotle says, without elaboration, that even in the case of *to ti ēn einai*, the formal cause, there cannot be a procession into infinity (33). He speculates that this might be because the other three causes presuppose the formal cause, and that it is only on the basis of this presupposition that each of them, too, must have a first causes—from which we are invited to infer that if there is no first formal cause, then there is no first final, moving, or material cause either. Aristotle's point, I think, is simpler. He is not committing himself here to the existence of an actual sequence or series of formal causes, but only noting that if one formal cause were the effect of another formal cause, then in this case too there could be no procession into infinity—and, again, he does argue for a first *to ti ēn einai* later on.[13] Bruell writes "[Aristotle] assumes that there is a beginning to the series [that he is considering at present in terms of their downward direction], a first cause, as if the necessity that there be such a beginning had been shown also for causes in this way, as one might have been led to believe that it had been shown for causes coincident with their effects in time" (34). It is not clear that Aristotle is speaking at this point exclusively of causes antecedent in time to their effects, rather than of causes more generally (cf. 994b6-9). He does argue elsewhere that temporally antecedent causes—for example, fathers as causes of sons—can regress backwards in time indefinitely, the world having no beginning in time and the human species being eternal (*Physics* 206a24-206b27 cf. 258b10; 266a7.). But, as for causes coincident with their effects, Aristotle does not just lead us to *believe* that they cannot proceed to infinity

13. 1074a36. In Book Zeta, Aristotle will speak of the specific differences that are present in the definitions of various species (*eidē*) as having a formal character that limits the genus, which is in turn the intelligible material (*hylē noetikē*) that is also present in the definition (cf. 1023b2; cf. 1036a9-11); see the passages referred to in footnote 10, *supra*. At the end of his interpretation of Book alpha, ch. 2, Bruell notes that an infinite ascent in formal causes would give rise to a problem for the possibility of science or knowledge (35-36). Such a thing, however, would not be problem for knowledge alone. It would be a problem for being itself: there would be no *ousiai* that *are* without qualification (consider 1086b16-19).

in the ascending direction. As Bruell noted earlier, "[Aristotle] explains more generally why there must be a first cause, if there is to be any cause at all" (33). Bruell does not elaborate on this general explanation. He speaks as though he finds it unpersuasive; and he may think that Aristotle found it unpersuasive as well. Aristotle's explanation or, rather, argument is that there cannot be an actual infinite number of anything (*Physics* 207b11-12.). Least of all, then, can there be, in a series of causes coincident with a given effect, an *infinite* number of them *efficacious at an instant*. For if, *per impossible*, there were an infinite number of such causes, each the effect of another cause, then there would be no cause, or number of causes, higher up in the series capable of producing any other cause or effect further down in the series. And so, "if there were no first (cause), there would be no cause (properly so called) at all" (994a18-19). One cannot avoid this conclusion by asserting that "the whole infinity of causes" produces the given effect, for an infinity of causes is not a whole. In the case of a series of causes coincident with their effects, then, there simply must be a cause that is not itself an effect within the series. Aristotle's medieval followers, on both sides of the philosophical-religious divide, held this to be a necessary truth. Bruell seems to think that Aristotle's shifting between speaking of causes that temporally precede their effects and speaking of causes that are coincident with their effects, and his sometimes treating both together in general statements, are hints that he may not have been altogether serious about his argument for the necessity of a first cause in the case of causes that are coincident with their effects (see 32-36). It would have been helpful if Bruell had spelled out exactly what he thinks Aristotle might have found defective in this argument, which he makes in his own name. Quite a lot turns on it.

As for causes that temporally precede their effects, it is here that an infinity of *formal* causes in particular is ruled out. For though, to return to Aristotle's example, in natural generation the series of fathers and sons regresses backwards indefinitely into time past, the formal cause, *to ti ēn einai*, in this case *to anthropōi einai*, is present throughout the series. If this formal cause itself has a formal cause, which as such would be temporally coincident with it, then the same argument applies: there can be no ascent into infinity.

Aristotle announces at the beginning of Book Gamma that there is a science that considers being qua being (*to on hēi on*). He says that being (*to on*) is said in many ways, though always in relation to one (*pros hen*) nature or principle (1003a33-34; 1003b5-6; cf. *Categories*

1a12-15). That one nature or principle is *ousia* (1003b6-10; cf. 1003b17-19; 1028b2-7). Being, then, is not a universal like horse, in which all the members of the class are equally horses. It is not a genus, and it cannot be divided into subordinate genera (998b22-26; cf. 1070b1). To be subdivided, specific differences would have to be introduced; and yet these differences, too, *are*, in some sense of that word. Aristotle gives two examples of what he means by the special kind of "universal" that being is. Many things are called "healthy," but always with reference to health. Bruell sees a problem with this example: though we call lots of things "healthy," we do not call health "healthy" (65). However, the second example that Aristotle gives is more apt, namely, "the medical" (or "that which is medical"– *to iatrikon* –1003b1-2; cf. 1030b2-3.) A medical knife, a medical procedure, a medical building, a medical degree, etc., are all called "medical" with reference to some one instance of medical that is medical in the preeminent sense, and that is the medical art (*hē iatrikē*). The medical art is rightly called "medical." In the same way, *ousia* is rightly called a being (*on*), and *ousiai* are rightly called beings (*onta*).[14] Bruell, however, has misgivings about calling Aristotle's *ousiai* "beings" (65). For being is always said in relation to some one nature or principle (1003b6; cf. 1028a 14-15), and that turns out to be *ousia*. But *ousia* is not itself said in relation to *ousia*. So it seems that *ousia* cannot be a being, after all. This, I take it, is the reasoning behind Bruell's misgivings. Aristotle, however, says at once that *ousiai* are beings: "Some [things] are called beings because [they are] *ousiai*," (1003b6; cf. 1028a 14-15) others because they are qualities of *ousia*, and so forth. The color of a horse is a quality *of* an *ousia*; but the horse itself *is* an *ousia*. It is, then, in a quite special sense that a horse is said in relation to *ousia*: the relation is one of identity, where something that is really one is thought of as two (1018a4-9; cf. 1021b6-8). Aristotle frequently speaks of *ousiai* as beings later in the *Metaphysics* (e.g., 1071b5), as he does here, and Bruell of course acknowledges this. But he regards this way of speaking as loose (100; 126), for reasons that become clearer later on (e.g., 230-231; 238).

Bruell distinguishes between two models of a philosophical science: "philosophy as originally conceived, on the one hand, and a divine

14. Cf. *Physics* 192b8-13. Among the *onta* that Aristotle lists here are animals and plants, which are incontestably *ousiai*, if not exactly *ousiai* in the fullest sense of the word. Only the separate *ousiai* of Book Lambda, chs. 6-10—*if* they exist—would count for Aristotle as *ousiai* in the fullest sense of the word, as I shall argue below.

science (A2 983a4-11), on the other" (38). By the former, Bruell means the various attempts at physics that were advanced by the pre-Socratics.[15] He speaks of a need that Aristotle found himself under to revise these two models. Regarding the model of "a divine science," Bruell says that Aristotle "cannot point to the needed revisions so visibly and unambiguously as to jeopardize the survival of a 'metaphysics' [Bruell reminds us that 'metaphysics' is not Aristotle's term] whose attractiveness offers the broad back on which the skeletal form of a philosophic science might have the prospect of riding into and through ages even less hospitable to philosophy than his own" (39). The task that Bruell sets himself in his interpretation is to bring this skeletal form gradually and cautiously into view, though only for those who have eyes to see.

Not all readers of the *Metaphysics* have eyes to see. But Aristotle, as Bruell interprets him, offers something of value to virtually everyone who reads through it. When Bruell comes to speak about Book Kappa, which makes something of a new beginning in the *Metaphysics*, he distinguishes between, by my count, four different groups of readers. These readers can be grouped as follows (using numbers in brackets, so as to reserve numbers in parentheses for Bruell's pagination): [1] In the first place are those who have *not* been "disappointed in the result, or at the lack of result, of the investigation of ousia in Zeta and Eta, at its failure to reach its announced goal (Z2 1028b27-31, Z17 1041a6-9)." That failure is "redeemed for them" by "the treatment of potentiality and truth in Theta [and/or] of 'the one' in Iota" (225). For these, the most careful readers of the *Metaphysics*, i.e., the readers who are equipped both intellectually and emotionally to apprehend and accept the austere teaching of this work, the inquiry into the science of being *qua* being is substantively finished, that is, finished to the extent that it can be finished (1028b3), by the end of Book Iota. The express theology of the latter chapters of Book Lambda, in particular, is not for them. However,

15. Aristotle does not make a sharp a distinction between these two endeavors. Cf. *infra*, footnote 34. Regarding "philosophy as originally conceived," Bruell refers us to Book Alpha ch. 3-6, 8-9, and to Book alpha ch. 1-2 (38). Book Alpha ch. 3-5, 8 (and 7 too) treat physical theories, though not exclusively. But physical theories *per se* are not obviously the chief concern of ch. 6 and 9, nor of Book alpha ch. 1, though they return for consideration in ch. 2 of that book. With his references, Bruell suggests that "philosophy as originally conceived," in distinction from "a divine science," is physics properly understood, i.e., the study of nature in the deepest sense of the word *physis*.

another group of readers *have* been disappointed by the failure of the investigation of *ousia* in Zeta and Eta, and this failure has *not* been redeemed for them by anything that was said in Books Theta and Iota. Among these are [2] readers for whom Book Kappa, with its repetitions of portions of Books Beta, Gamma, and Epsilon, is able to remind of points already made and thereby to sharpen "their awareness of a problem which they will already have felt and which the sequel will, somehow or other, have to solve" (225).[16] Some of these readers are educable, psychologically as well as intellectually, and there is a chance that by the end of Book Kappa, or by the end of the first five chapters of Book Lamba at the latest, they will have come to understand what the first group of readers understood without reading beyond Book Iota. But also among the readers of Kappa are [3] a third group to whom "the cold light of the intervening books [between Books Alpha and Kappa] . . . will have proved no avail" (225). Nothing they will have read prior to Book Lambda will have led them to doubt that a philosophical science is able to demonstrate the existence of separate, incorporeal, eternal *ousiai,* and they continue to hope that the argument of the *Metaphysics* will culminate in this demonstration. However, even within this group there are [4] some who are "unable to accept Lambda's result (its silence [i.e., Book Mu's silence about Book Lambda's result] constituting a tacit acknowledgement of their good judgment in that regard)" (254). It is largely, though not exclusively, for this fourth group that Books Mu and Nu are written. For though they were unable to accept Lambda's result, "they have retained, whether for good reasons or bad, an interest in the ideas and the mathematicals." The good reasons add up to a genuine theoretical interest in the greater intelligibility of the ideas and the mathematicals in comparison with the sensible, composite individuals with which we are familiar (999b1-4). The bad reasons add up, it is not difficult to surmise, to baseless hopes and a deluded attachment to the idea of eternity (see 264 on "we wish," and compare *De Anima* 432b5-6), from which Aristotle has gently tried to pry his most mature readers loose. In either case, Books Mu and Nu will hammer the remaining nails that Aristotle has at his disposal into the coffins of Pythagoreanism and Platonism. As for those readers who *were* able to accept Book Lambda's result, if they bother to read Books Mu and Nu at all they will likely regard them only as superfluous and annoying appendices that detract from the comforting theology of Book Lambda.

16. Bruell does not spell out what this problem is here.

To repeat, this is *my* count of the different groups of readers that Bruell indicates. If I have enumerated and distinguished them more or less correctly, there is surely overlap, and there may be other groups quite different from these.[17] At any event, at this point we have to ask what it is that the first group of readers, the fully adult readers, have come to see by the end of Book Iota at the latest. That is to say, what does Bruell think is the deepest stratum of the teaching in the *Metaphysics*? It is not easy to be sure about this. If Aristotle expressed his deepest thoughts in the *Metaphysics* with such circumspection that only a very small number of readers, perhaps no more than a handful of them, have ever read this book adequately, and if they in turn have refrained from writing down exactly what they have discerned in it, then Bruell must realize that Aristotle and his most competent readers had good reasons for their reticence. Times have changed however. The attitude of the public to philosophy today is less likely to be one of suspicion and hatred than of indifference and contempt. Contemporary readers of the *Metaphysics* underestimate the daring of Aristotle's thought, and hence fail to learn from it, because they find the express theology of

17. Working with Bruell's guiding premise that in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle tailors his teaching to different groups of readers, I venture to suggest a fifth group, distinct from the four noted above. Near the beginning of Book Mu Aristotle says—I quote Bruell's paraphrase—"'first' to be considered are what the others have said about these questions," i.e., the questions about the possibility of "some *ousia* that is without motion and everlasting" (254). Bruell emphasizes the word "first" (1076a12) because this passage "conveys the impression or suggestion" that the investigation into this possibility "is about to begin in earnest." This impression or suggestion would then be an understated repudiation of the results of Book Lambda. The alternative is that Aristotle is only announcing a fresh beginning, of which there have already been several in the *Metaphysics*: the "first" points to a "second." That is, Aristotle leads us to think that, after first treating what others have said about separate *ousia*, he will add something further of his own about it. Whether it would depart significantly from Book Lambda or not, there is no way telling since the *Metaphysics* does not contain a further account of separate *ousia* or of anything else after the critical treatment, in Books Mu and Nu, of what others have said. This fifth group of readers, of whom I am one, infers that Aristotle simply never got around to writing the sequel to Books Mu and Nu. To this group Bruell might respond that the absence of the expected sequel should not be explained away so conveniently when it can be interpreted as the tacit response to an expectation deliberately raised at the beginning of Book Mu only to be deflated when the reader in this fifth group turns over the last page of Book Nu and sees nothing there.

Book Lambda preposterous. Bruell, for all his caution, discloses what he takes to be the deepest stratum of Aristotle's teaching in the *Metaphysics* more candidly than did any previous readers, if there were any, who interpreted the book along the lines that he does. And so, I do not think it inappropriate to *attempt* to state just what Bruell understands this deepest stratum to be. As far as I can tell, it consists of several interrelated theses, which are not expressed unequivocally but are indicated here and there (again using numbers in brackets).

[1]There are no separate *ousiai*, which is to say, there is no God and there are no gods. [2] The harmoniously ordered cosmos is not eternal. It is a transient phase, destined to pass away eventually. [3] The heavenly bodies are not moved by an unmoved mover (or movers). Their apparent, circular motion is caused by what they are, including especially what they are made of, rather than by any mover apart from them. [4] The articulation of the given world and the distinctions between things is largely the effect of the human intellect, so much so that one is tempted to infer that the human intellect is the deepest root of things. But that inference would be problematic since the human intellect is mortal. It is hardly the deepest root of itself. [5] The deepest root of things is, in fact, matter, not just the "materiality" of the four elements, but something coursing beneath these, eternal, moving, not accessible to perception, and not really accessible to the intellect either. The existence of this ultimate matter can be much more plausibly inferred than can the existence of separate *ousiai*, but only as a kind of limit case of what the human intellect can infer. We know nothing about it other than that it exists, and that it is some kind of cause. We cannot even be sure that the claims we venture to make about it are governed by the principle of non-contradiction.[18] Since this eternal, moving, and imperceptible matter is the deepest root of things, it is the deepest root of the human intellect too. The human intellect is no more than a possibility, so to speak, that was always latent in this matter. [6]. On the

18. Aristotle claims that the so-called principle of non-contradiction is indemonstrable (1006a5-10). It is known, however, as self-evident, and is thereby a first principle (*archē*) for the demonstration of other things (cf. *Posterior Analytics* 99b15-100b17). It is the most certain of all principles. It is a principle about which one cannot be mistaken (*Metaphysics* 1005b8-25), though one individual might not understand the articulation of this principle, while another might feign ignorance about it because it cannot be demonstrated (1011a3-b17) or just prevaricate about it (cf. 1005b 25-26). Bruell is not convinced that Aristotle was as confident of this principle and of its logical equivalent, the principle of excluded middle, as he lets on (67-83; see the full

other hand, the human intellect, as tossed up by this matter and then impinged upon by it, constitutes, somehow, a world, an ordered whole that is more or less knowable, by physics in particular. Physics, and not metaphysics, is *the* philosophical science—though only if physics is properly conducted, that is to say, modestly conducted, without any pretense of being able to draw the deepest root of things into the sunlight. The given world is the home of man, and it is the region to which science, including philosophical science, is limited. It is given, not by God or the gods, but by primordial matter acting upon one of its own potentialities.

If Bruell's interpretation is that the *Metaphysics* is intended to communicate the above theses, or theses resembling them, to its most careful readers, then it must be said at once that this interpretation is, strictly speaking, irrefutable. Any passages in the *Metaphysics* that can be marshalled as evidence against it can be consistently interpreted by Bruell as exoteric accommodations. And there is no way he can be proven wrong. Still one can raise a few questions about these theses.

[1] The thesis that there are no separate *ousiai* is not argued for, much less demonstrated, by Aristotle or by Bruell. It is what certain passages in the *Metaphysics* "meant perhaps to suggest" (233). Since there is no way of actually demonstrating that there are no separate *ousiai*, a less strident version of this thesis would be simply that there is nothing in our experience of, and thoughtful reflection on, the given world that enables us to reasonably infer that separate *ousiai* exist. This version may be closer to what Bruell discerns in the *Metaphysics*.

[2] The thesis that the harmoniously ordered cosmos is not eternal may be intimated (1074b10-13; see 252, bottom: "many times"), but it is not argued for either. For this thesis to be taken seriously, some kind of account needs to be given of how a well-ordered and, especially, *intelligible* cosmos could emerge out of chaos by chance, rather than through the agency of something like a divine intellect or a demiurge (994b8-22; 1060a26-27; 1075b24-27).

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paragraph on 83). One thing is clear, however: if this principle, or one logically equivalent to it, is not self-evidently known, then there can be no demonstration, hence no genuine science (*Posterior Analytics* 71b20-34; cf. *Republic* 533b5-c6), philosophical or otherwise, of *anything* in this world, to say nothing of whatever is above or beneath it. (Compare Strauss, "Freud on Moses and Monotheism," in *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity,* edited by Kenneth Hart Grene, [Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1997], 285.) And that would count as a point in favor of belief in revelation, which does not need to validate its fundamental claims in the same way that philosophy does.

[3] The thesis that the heavenly bodies move themselves and are not moved by anything else is at odds with Aristotle's theory, even his very definition, of motion (*Physics* 201a10; a29). It is possible that he did not intend his theory of motion seriously. But there is no alternative theory of motion argued for in the *Physics*. And, as we shall see shortly, the denial of Aristotle's theory of motion undercuts a criticism of one of the moral presuppositions of religious belief.

[4] The thesis that the human intellect is crucially responsible for the world as we experience it (Anaxagoras's audacious thought? [26]) cannot be simply dismissed. Among other things, there is textual support for the claim that Aristotle seriously entertained this view.[19] But to argue for it, while at the same time arguing for the possibility of science as a communicable endeavor, one has to make a distinction between what is idiosyncratic about this or that human intellect and what is common or pertains to the human intellect as such. Kant and Husserl, in different ways, made this distinction, which is the distinction between empirical and transcendental subjectivity. And it is not unthinkable that this distinction was anticipated in Aristotle's distinction "in the [human] soul" (*en tēi psychēi*) between an intellect that "becomes all things," the potential (or passive) intellect, and an intellect that "makes [!] all things" (*De Anima* 430a13-16), the active intellect. Though the distinction between active and passive intellect would support this particular thesis, Bruell does not speak to it, whether because he thinks that the active intellect sounds too much like something divine, which Aristotle as a philosopher could not take seriously, or because, if it is not divine, it cannot plausibly be claimed to be deathless and eternal (cf. 250), as Aristotle says it is (*De Anima*, 430a22-24), or for some other reason, I do not know.

[5] The thesis that matter is the deepest root of things is, in my opinion, much the least plausible of these theses, both on the merits and as an interpretation of Aristotle. The most interesting textual support that Bruell adduces for it is a rather obscure sentence near the beginning of Book Lambda (1069a30-36; Bruell, 246). But, however one interprets this sentence, there are problems with claiming that matter is *the* root of all things. For one cannot make good sense of the claim that the mind is produced by, or is ultimately a property of, matter, given the intentionality peculiar to the former. In fact, it is difficult to rescue the claim that matter is the root of all things from the charge of ultimate

19. See *Physics* 223a22-27; *De Anima* 426a20-26; *Metaphysics*, 1036a1-8.

self-contradiction.[20] And even if one could show that something like Aristotle's passive intellect can be construed as physically produced by matter, or as a mysterious and superfluous epiphenomenon of matter, or as itself just a complex mass of matter—and I think that one cannot show any of these things—one would be left only with an intellect that (wondrously) *corresponds* to the things it apprehends. But on that basis one would not be able to make a meaningful distinction between true *opinion* and *knowledge* strictly so called. For this distinction one would need, again, to introduce something like the active intellect, something that *knows* it is knowing. Aristotle presents the intellect—the active and/or divine intellect surely—and matter as radically diverse principles. Neither is reducible to or derivable from the other. One can claim for whatever combination of reasons that the intellect and the truths that it knows are occult properties latent in an aboriginal *hylē*. This claim is, after all, one of the reigning dogmas of our time. But one cannot make sense of it without transforming *hylē* from mere materiality (or potentiality—*dynamis*), as we encounter it in the given world, into an uncaused cause, primordial but also permanently present in its actualizing activity (*energeia*), and essentially elusive.

[6] Bruell aims in *Aristotle as Teacher* at showing that the pursuit of a science of being *qua* being in the *Metaphysics* is as much concerned with the possibility of science or knowledge (*epistēmē*) as it is with illuminating being. The *Metaphysic*s aims at introducing its readers to a philosophical science, which precisely as philosophic, requires exposing the problematic character of science, which is in fact the problem of philosophy itself, to the extent that philosophy aspires to validate, unequivocally, its claim to be the most choiceworthy way of life for those who have what it takes to live it. That aspiration is obviously compromised if philosophy cannot get at the deepest root of things. For then it cannot know beyond the shadow of a doubt that the deepest root of things is not much more akin to what its greatest rival holds as a matter of faith than anything that natural reason can penetrate to on its own. In that case, "does not science or philosophy come into fatal contradiction with itself?" (28). If philosophy cannot know more about the root of all things than that some such root exists, then it cannot know beyond the shadow of a doubt that this root really *is* a blind, deaf, and mute necessity rather than the God who dwells in

20. See Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 127-134.

a thick cloud and reveals himself out of the freedom of his own inscrutable will, to those of his own choice, at a time and place of his own choosing.

We encounter several of the above theses in Kant. For he, too, holds that the human mind, stimulated by something essentially hidden from it, constitutes the world, and that there can be a scientific investigation, a physics, of the world, so constituted, even a metaphysics of nature, but no metaphysics of whatever it is that lies beneath nature and outside the constitutive activity of the human intellect. The conspicuous difference between Kant and Aristotle, as I take Bruell to interpret Aristotle, is that Kant expends enormous effort in arguing for his theses, and he does so openly and directly, for pages on end. Bruell's Aristotle does not clearly advance arguments for any of the theses suggested above. The arguments may exist, disassembled, their premises partially concealed here and there in the thickets of Books Zeta through Iota. But Bruell has not reassembled them. Or if he has, I have not been able to discern them. Bruell's Aristotle teaches by and large indirectly, by way of intimations (e.g., 38), divergences from earlier intimations (39), pointers (83), indications (100), thoughts that he allows himself to express only in conditional form (163), suggestions (101), tacit admissions (118), tacitly withdrawn suggestions (125), and silence (128).

The preceding paragraph could lead one who knows nothing of Bruell as a thinker and teacher to infer that his interpretation of the *Metaphysics* is just too idiosyncratic to be worth the effort required to grasp it. That inference would be seriously mistaken. The progressive deepening of one's understanding that results from following Bruell as he thinks his way slowly, patiently, sentence by sentence and word by word, looking behind and to the side as well as ahead, through the maze that is the *Metaphysics* is worth incomparably more than the effort it takes to keep up with him. That Aristotle chose to teach indirectly, with a view to the diverse abilities and needs of his readers, cannot be ruled out, if only because we know that he had before him the examples of his teacher and of his teacher's teacher. And we know how indirectly they taught.

Though Bruell speaks of the "attractiveness" of "the broad back on which the skeletal form of a philosophic science might have the prospect of riding," he does not describe it. For this reason, it is necessary to restate, if only briefly, the traditional interpretation of the *Metaphysics* so that it can be compared with the teaching that Bruell finds indicated beneath the surface. The traditional interpretation takes sev-

eral forms, and in restating it I can only sketch what *I* understand to be its most coherent form. Others would surely sketch the traditional interpretation differently than I do. But all variations of the traditional interpretation have more in common with my sketch of it than they do with Bruell's interpretation.

According to the traditional interpretation, the concern of the *Metaphysics* is being, not the being of any particular entity, but being as such, or being *qua* being (1003a20). But, as noted earlier, being is not a genus. *Ousia* is the primary instance of being (1028a 14-15), and it is that in relation to which everything else, such as color, size, position, and so forth is said, in a derivative sense, to *be*. The inquiry into being *qua* being is then primarily an inquiry into *ousia*. There is, however, a range of opinion about what most deserves to be called *ousia* (1028b8-1029a5). But since virtually everyone agrees that a sensible entity, which Aristotle calls a whole (*synolon*) of *eidos* (or *morphē*) and *hylē* (1029a5-6) or a composite entity (*synthetē ousia*—1070a14), is an *ousia*, and since we cannot at the early stage of our inquiry be sure that there are any *ousiai* that are separate from sensible *ousiai*, Aristotle begins with a consideration of sensible *ousia*, with how it is related to *to ti ēn einai* and how it is known. Now *ousia* as the primary instance of being would seem to be being least mixed with non-being.[21] So, *if* there are imperishable *ousiai,* i.e., *ousiai* that do not come to be and pass away, they would be *ousiai* more fully than perishable *ousiai* are (cf. 1059b12-14; 1060b1-3).[22] As imperishable, and hence not bound up with *hylē*, which is not itself fully intelligible, separate *ousiai* would also be more intelligible than sensible *ousiai*, if not initially so to us, still more intelligible by nature, or intrinsically intelligible, or intelligible to themselves. Similarly *ousia*, as the primary instance of being would seem to be that which is most actual and least potential. So *if* there are unmoved *ousiai*, they would be more fully *ousiai* than are moved *ousiai* (since what is moved is, to some extent, potential and not entirely actual: *Physics* 201a11; a30; b33; *Metaphysics* 1026a15-16). Finally, *if* there are *ousiai* that are altogether separate from, and in no way depend on, other *ousiai*, either as features

21. See Plato, *Republic* 476e7-478e7.

22. Consider the full implication of 1026a27-32. Even if there *are* separate *ousiai*, why wouldn't physics still be the first science, unless sensible *ousiai* are found wanting in something that should pertain to them as *ousiai*, namely immobility and imperishability? I read the *aporia* noted at 1086b16-20 as resolvable through an account of separate *ousiai* that would recapitulate, in its essentials, the chief claims of Book Lambda, chs. 6-10.

of those *ousiai* or predicated of them, then they are *ousiai* more fully than dependent *ousiai* are (1017b23-26; 1029a27-28). In sum, the primary instance of *ousia*, *ousia* in the unqualified sense, would be characterized by imperishability, intrinsic intelligibility, complete actuality, and unqualified independence.

Among the sensible *ousiai* that inhabit the sublunar sphere, we find something that, if not actually eternal, is imperishable at least as long as we can attend to it in thought. And this is the form (*eidos*) of the sensible, perishable, composite entity, to the extent that its form is identical to, or inextricable from, the species (also *eidos*) to which the perishable, sensible composite "belongs," as their common name suggests and which is there for thought long after the composite itself perishes. But for Aristotle, unlike the Platonists, the form is not separate, except in *logos*, from that of which it is the form.[23] It does not, so to speak, stand on its own, as does the perishable, sensible, composite entity of which the *eidos* is predicated. The *hylē* of the sensible composite does not, as matter, stand on its own either. Matter, taken by itself, is merely potential being (1060a20-21); in this way it exists only in relation to actual being, to something that, as such, *is*, not potentially but actually. Moreover, matter as such is not knowable (1036a8-9); we can know a perishable, sensible composite only to the extent that we can apprehend its *eidos* (*De Anima* 429a27-28; 431b3, 27-432a1), apart from its matter (ibid, 429b22). As potential being, matter can neither actually *be* nor be *knowable* or even *perceptible* (*De Anima* 424a18-19). The perishable, sensible composite entity, then, has relative to its *eidos* the advantage of standing on its own, of being an individual and not something that *is* only as predicated of something else. On the other hand, the *eidos* has relative to that of which it is the *eidos*, the advantage of being imperishable to the extent that it continues to be intelligible, as species, after the composite entity perishes.

The inquiry into sensible *ousiai* leads to the problematic result that the features of separability, individuality, and independence, on the one

23. Bruell puts repeated, and wholly justifiable, emphasis on Aristotle's criticism of the notion of subsistent universals, including any attempt to interpret his own species and genera as subsistent. There is, however, nothing particularly controversial about this. The criticism is recognized in the traditional interpretation of the *Metaphysics*, and generally concurred in as well. It has no adverse bearing at all on—in fact, it reinforces—Aristotle's account of separate *ousiai* in Book Lambda. For these *ousiai* are not universals. (And the Biblical God is not a universal either.)

hand, and immobility and imperishablility on the other, both of which are characteristic of *ousia* (see, e.g., 1017b22-28; 1026a10-16), are bifurcated in the sublunar sphere. We cannot find any *ousia* in this sphere that bears the features of *both* sets of characteristics, which is to say that nothing here *is* without qualification. As for the superlunar sphere, the stars are indeed separate individuals (as *eidē* are not) and they seem to be imperishable too, for they have been up in the heavens, participating in ceaseless circular motion for as long as people have recorded what they have seen in the heavens. But motion, including circular motion, requires a mover distinct from and causative of what is moved. The stars, then, can be inferred to be moved without cessation by something distinct from them, which is itself unmoved (*Physics* 265a13 ff.; *Metaphysics* 1072a19-26).

In Book Zeta, well in advance of the theology he advances in the second half of Book Lambda, Aristotle makes the following statement.

> Even if we had never seen the stars, nonetheless, I suppose, there would be eternal *ousiai* besides those [*ousiai*] we knew; so that also now [i.e., when we *have* seen the stars] even if we are not able to know what [these eternal *ousiai*] are, still it is equally necessary for there to be some [eternal *ousiai*]" (1040b34-1041a2).

I note at once that Aristotle's statement here is not only elliptical, but guarded as well. He uses *oimai* ("I suppose") in the first main clause; and in the second main clause he uses *isōs*, which I have translated as "equally," but which one could also translate as "probably" or even "perhaps," though doing so would produce something of a clash with the word *anagkaion* ("it is necessary"), with which the second main clause, and the sentence as a whole, concludes. In any case, my point is not that Aristotle is advancing an actual argument here for the existence of separate *ousiai*, separate from all sensible *ousiai*, the stars included. His argument in Book Lambda for the existence of separate *ousiai* is a cosmological one. What Aristotle is advancing in the above quoted passage is, I would say, only an ontological consideration. That is, if *ousia* is the premier instance of *to on*, if there are only sensible *ousiai*, and if no sensible *ousia* is both imperishable and independent, then there is nothing that *is* without qualification. And that may well be exactly how it stands with being: "the nothing" is always present with and within it. But Aristotle does not leave it at this Heideggerian conclusion. The inquiry into sensible *ousiai* has led to the conclusion that if there is anything that *is* without qualification, then it is both in-

dependent and individual, on the one hand, and imperishable on the other. The stars coming closest to fitting the bill, but their movement leads Aristotle to think beyond them to the unmoved source of their movement.

The trajectory of the enquiry into being *qua* being, which begins with an inquiry into sensible *ousia*, leads to the latter chapters of Book Lambda where Aristotle concludes that there must be an eternal unmoved mover of the fixed stars, a mover that moves by being the object of desire or imitation, a mover that engages in an eternal act of intellection (*noēsis*). This unmoved mover is that on which, again, he says heaven and nature depend. This mover is responsible for the movement of the sphere of fixed stars. But Aristotle has to invoke a number of other unmoved movers similar to it in order to account for the circular motions of other heavenly bodies. Not only are the unmoved movers intelligent beings, but the heavenly bodies that are moved by them are intelligent as well. They move because the "sight" they have of the unmoved movers gives rise to an *eros*, to a desire to imitate, to the extent possible for a sensible entity, the changeless activity of the unmoved mover's self-knowledge.[24] This imitation takes the form of perfect circular motion, the motion that is most like immobility: what *moves* in a perfect circle is always on its way to where it already *is.*

The account of the unmoved mover in Book Lambda, and especially the need to invoke a number of them, along with the necessary presupposition that the heavenly bodies are themselves luminous intelligences, is so foreign to our way of thinking that not only is it hard for us take it seriously, it is also hard for us to believe that Aristotle could have taken it seriously. However, the heavenly bodies, the fixed stars especially so, surely appear to move in circular motion, not just in Aristotle's time but according to astronomical observations predating those of the Greeks by centuries. Given the astronomical records available to Aristotle, together with his own account of what motion is, the cosmological argument he advances in Book Lambda for separate, imperishable, and individual *ousiai*, is as reasonable an account as anyone at the time could have come up with to explain the phenomena.[25]

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24. Aristotle is aware that *nous* was *eros* were claimed, by Anaxagoras and Empedocles respectively, to be principles of the whole. Such claims did not keep him from grouping them among the physicists as distinct from the mythologists.

25. The problem that Aristotle's account Lambda gives rise to, and which he does not address, is how there can be a multiplicity of unmoved movers, given

Hoping that the above summary, inadequate in more ways than one, provides something of a depiction of the "broad back" on which "the skeletal form of a philosophic science" has ridden, all but unnoticed, across more than two millennia, I turn to a comparison of the latter with the former. There is a problem with the traditional interpretation of the *Metaphysics,* for there are passages that appear to undercut it. I interpret them, not so much as lapses or "nodding" on Aristotle's part, but as the raising and re-raising of *aporiai* that do not get resolved until the latter chapters of Book Lambda, or as provisional formulations, or as formulations that are qualified by the context in which they occur—especially when Aristotle makes certain statements about "all *ousiai*" in passages where only sensible *ousiai* are under consideration.[26]

The difference between what I have called, with some misgivings, the "traditional interpretation" of the *Metaphysics* and the interpretation—if I have it in focus—that Bruell suggests turns on the question of which is the more plausible. One criterion for the plausibility of an interpretation of an ancient author is whether it does justice to the boldness of the author's teaching. If we are to evaluate these two interpretations in terms of which one brings the bolder teaching into view, we would do well to attend to the following, insufficiently appreciated passage from Strauss's lecture, "Progress or Return."

> There is a fundamental conflict or disagreement between the Bible and Greek philosophy. This fundamental conflict is blurred to a certain extent by the close similarity in points. There are, for example, certain philosophies which come seemingly close to the biblical teaching—think of philosophic [!] teachings which are monotheistic, which speak of the love of God and man, which even admit prayer, etc. And so the difference becomes sometimes al-

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that they are not differentiated by matter and that they all seem to be engaged in the same intellectual act.

26. The following passages are, in my opinion, problematic for the traditional interpretation, but they are not devastating: 999a4-5; 1030a11-13; 1032a18-19; 1043b21-22; 1059a38-b2; 1060b18-19; 1075a23-24; 1088a29-33. All these passages can be taken as hints by Aristotle (though read as hints, they are not particularly subtle) that there is no separate, individual, imperishable *ousia* or *ti ēn einai*. The traditional interpretation has to regard these passages as not intended to be taken without qualification. But there are passages that Bruell, too, has to regard as not intended to be taken without qualification. See, *supra*, footnote 12.

> most invisible. But we recognize the difference immediately if we make this observation. For a philosopher or philosophy there can never be an absolute sacredness of a particular or contingent event.[27]

According to Strauss, the existence of God (or of gods), simply as a first principle, even as an intelligent first principle, of the whole would *not* by itself be a problem for philosophy. What *would* be a problem for philosophy is an intelligent first principle that could *freely* reveal itself, or himself, to man. For revelation, at the initiative of God, in his own good time, to human beings of his own choosing who may not be philosophers, would surely be a particular and contingent event, and an event of absolute sacredness.[28] Such a thing would be a problem for philosophy because the full truth about this first principle would not be accessible to man as man. That is, it would not be accessible to reason, since reason can only work with the necessary as distinct from the contingent or accidental.[29] And so, Strauss says quite consistently, philosophy must attempt to refute, not the existence of God, but the possibility of revelation.[30]

Two divergent ways in which philosophy might refute the possibility of revelation suggest themselves here. One way, of course, would be by refuting the existence of God. Strauss thought that every argument purporting to do such a thing either begs the question outright or leads to a dead end. A quite different way would be by arguing for the existence God but, in so doing, demonstrate that, contrary to what believers believe, God is not the kind of being who is able to reveal himself to man. This is the way followed by a kind of rational theology that consists in no small measure of a *theological* critique of the possibility of revelation. Strauss is well aware of this kind of rational theology.[31] In

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27. "Progress and Return" in *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, 117. Cf. Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken, 1956—translation of the 1930 German original), 149.

28. Creation would be a contingent event also: hence the effort of philosophers to demonstrate, not the non-existence of God, but the eternity of the world.

29. *Metaphysics* 1027a19-21. *Posterior Analytics* 73a21. See Bruell, 123-125; 193-195.

30. "Reason and Revelation," (Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theological Political Problem*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 150, 174. See Bruell, 8-9; 28.

31. See Strauss's references to "natural theology" in "Reason and Revelation," 154, and "Progress or Return," 131. And consider his perhaps surprising state-

his lecture "Reason and Revelation," he writes, "Plato's and Aristotle's attempts to demonstrate the existence of God far from proving the religious character of their teachings, actually disprove it."[32]

To limit ourselves to Aristotle,[33] in the first book of the *Metaphysic*s Aristotle describes the science being sought as divine science.[34] It would be a divine science on two conditions: if God, most of all, possessed it, and if it were about divine matters (983a5-8). These formulations are, to be sure, conditional, for Aristotle has not yet advanced an argument for the existence of a god, or a separate *ousia* of any sort, though he does say that God is believed by all (*dokei . . . pasin*)—when he could easily have said, "believed," simply, if he had wished to quietly disassociate himself from this belief—to be among the causes and a principle (*archē tis*). What is most remarkable about this passage, however, is the

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ment in *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, that the "Arab philosophers . . . actually were believers in revelation" (151; cf. 155) in light of the curious expressions, "selective revelation" and "particular revelation," which he uses shortly afterwards (155; 157). By these latter two expressions, I understand Strauss to mean revelation accomplished through God's free choice, that is, revelation strictly so called, as distinct from a non-selective and more general "revelation"—though "disclosure" would be a better name for it—accomplished by philosophers, i.e., a "theology" established "on the basis of Aristotelian natural science" and culminating in the setting of "three fundamental theologems beyond all doubt" (149). *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* is an early book by Strauss. But *The City and Man* is not (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964). Note the phrase, "in the ordinary [!] sense of the divine," in the penultimate sentence of the latter work.

32. "Reason and Revelation," 146. By "religious" in this sentence I understand Strauss to mean "revealed." Rational theology is not religion. It does not rely on the claims of revelation, and it may attempt to demonstrate the impossibility of revelation strictly so called —as the demonstrations of the existence of God in Plato, Aristotle, and the great Muslim philosophers, to say nothing of Spinoza, can be interpreted as doing.

33. Though consider *Republic* 380d1-6; 381c5-9; 383e6.

34. The expression *autēs hē ktēsis* at 982b29, the beginning of the passage about divine science, refers back to *hautē (epistēmē)* in the preceding sentence, and thereby further back to the *epistēmēn* 982b8, including *to epistasthai* in between at 982b21. And *tēn ktēsin autēs* at 983a11-12 refers back to *tautēs (epistēmēs)* in the preceding sentence, the conclusion of the passage about divine science. Book Alpha, ch. 2, could hardly be more explicit in stating that the science we are seeking (982a3; 983a21) is divine science, which in this chapter is identified with wisdom (*sophia*—982a6-19; cf. 981b25-982a2). Bruell speaks only briefly to this passage. See 10-11, 38.

conjunction of these two conditions. Aristotle acknowledges the possibility that someone—a human being, given the context—other than God could come to possess the very knowledge, or science, of divine matters that God himself possesses (983a9-10).[35] God, if he exists, does *not* dwell in a thick cloud that is utterly impenetrable by man; nor is he jealous of man's attempt to know him. Indeed, Aristotle goes so far to say that it is not *possible* for God to be jealous (983a2-3). How can Aristotle be so confident on this point, unless he is already looking toward the argument he will make in Book Lambda? For according to that argument God does not think, and perhaps because of his very excellence cannot think, of what is beneath him (1074b18-1075a10). And so he can hardly be jealous of what is going on beneath him, including the speculative activity of philosophers. If God exists, according to what Aristotle says close to the very beginning of the *Metaphysics*, then he is surely not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And he is not one of the gods of Cephalus, Ion, and Euthyphro either. If God cannot even think of man, then he cannot freely reveal himself to this man. Moreover, if as Aristotle argues in Book Lambda, God causes as final cause, as object of desire and imitation, alone, then he is not a free cause.[36] Though he is the cause on which nature and the heavens depend, he does not create the world (which is also eternal), freely or otherwise. Whatever access man has to God is through man's (speculative) initiative alone, not the reverse. Because God does not even think of what is beneath him, not only does he not reveal himself, he does not reward and punish human beings for their moral and immoral choices. And if this were not enough to rule out divine freedom, and thereby the "absolute sacredness of a particular or contingent event," Aristotle argues that God is simple and not composed, pure actuality devoid of potentiality, and necessary. How then can he *freely choose* to do anything (cf. 1071b13-22; 1072b7-10)?[37]

35. Thomas Aquinas, who in his commentaries on Aristotle's works typically limits himself to stating only what he thinks Aristotle is saying, softens in his own name Aristotle's suggestion that man can come to possess knowledge of God: this knowledge, he says, is something "borrowed" (*mutuatum*) from God. (*Sententia Metaphysicae*, lib. 1 l. 3 n. 13). That is, for Thomas but not for Aristotle, if we can come to know not just that God exists, but something of what he is essentially, in himself and to himself, revelation is needed. Note the distinction between preambles to the articles of faith and the articles of faith themselves in *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 2, art. 2, ad 1.

36. Compare *Summa Theologiae* 1 q. 19, art. 3 ad 5; art. 10, *corpus.*

37. One of the great tasks that the Christian theologians of the Middle Ages set themselves, arguably their greatest task, was to answer this very question.

However persuasive or unpersuasive one finds the theology that Aristotle presents in Book Lambda, it is a rational theology that gives every appearance of trying to refute the possibility of revelation, of trying to rule out the "absolute sacredness of a particular or contingent event." If there is any reason to believe that God exists, then, according to this book, there is every reason to believe that he is incapable of revealing himself. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* throws a challenge into the face of revealed religion; and it makes no secret about this. Even the casual reader has to be struck by places where Aristotle dissociates himself from the religious beliefs of the multitude and from the poets who have, after a fashion, educated them. Sometimes he does this implicitly and gently (983b33-984a2; 989a9-12; 1023a19-21; 1091b4-8), but sometimes quite explicitly as well (997b8-12; 1074b3-8), even caustically (983a3-4; 1000a9-19; and, above all, 995a3-8).[38]

One can object that Aristotle's argument for the existence of God depends not only on a whole cosmology but also on an account of how motion occurs that modern science does not accept. For Aristotle, something in motion depends on a mover distinct from it, sustaining it in motion for as long as it is in motion (which in the case of the stars is forever), and ultimately on a mover that is not itself in motion. But if, contrary to what Aristotle teaches, a thing in motion can move itself *without* depending on a mover distinct from it, then it sounds as though something that is potential can actualize itself, or, better, that something that is actual can actualize one or more of its own potentialities, *all by itself*. If that is so, then the argument against radically free choice is compromised. For radically free choice, whether in the case of God or in the case of man, means self-determination.[39] And though the claim that things can move themselves without being moved by another is hardly identical to the claim that a being can freely determine itself to do this rather than that, the former claim is a giant step in the direction

38. The last passage cited is interesting because it does not occur in the middle of the *Metaphysics*, nor in the middle chapter of the book (alpha) in which it occurs, nor in the middle of that chapter. It is, one might say, "exposed." The existence and placement of this passage, and of others cited above, could lead one to infer that the *Metaphysics* was never intended to be a book, i.e., a written work composed for *public* distribution. If the *Metaphysics* has an exoteric teaching, it is hardly a teaching designed to throw theological-political persecutors off track. Bruell acknowledges this (253). In his view, Aristotle's art of writing in this book serves a *pedagogical* function.

39. Consider 1072a26-30.

of the latter. If man can freely determine himself to do this rather than that, then a vital component of the critique of the moral presuppositions of belief in revelation has to be abandoned. Aristotle's view that whatever is in motion is moved by another, and more generally that whatever is potential can be actualized only by something already actual, precludes, absent significant qualifications, man from acting freely, hence from deserving reward or punishment for his actions, in this world or in another. And to repeat, God, as Aristotle presents him in Book Lambda, neither rewards nor punishes.

If, as Bruell suggests, Aristotle does not intend his rational theology seriously, then there is nothing in the *Metaphysics* that seriously meets the challenge that the possibility of revelation poses to philosophy. If the deep teaching of the *Metaphysics* is that there is no divine being, it is a teaching that is only intimated. There is no argument advanced by Aristotle, or by Bruell on Aristotle's behalf, for this teaching such that one can confidently identify its premises and assess its logical cogency. So the question of boldness boils down to which of two interpretations of the *Metaphysics* causes more problems for the religious believer: (1) an implicit teaching that merely denies, without so much as the appearance of a demonstration, that God exists, or (2) an explicit teaching that attempts to demonstrate that God does exist, but exists in a way that is incompatible with how religion, whether the religion of the Greeks or that of the Bible, understands him to exist. Different readers of the *Metaphysics* may give different answers to this question.

Nothing I have said about the explicit teaching of the *Metaphysics* simply rules out there being a parallel but only implicit teaching, exactly as Bruell interprets it. But if the explicit teaching is as I have described it, and if the implicit teaching is as I understand Bruell to have interpreted it, then we are left with an oddity. Aristotle would be arguing on the very surface of the book that philosophy in its inquiry into being *qua* being can win a decisive victory against its perennial rival, revealed religion, while effectively indicating beneath the surface of the book that it cannot do any such thing.[40] Would Aristotle not be leaving himself open to the accusation that he is corrupting, not necessarily the young, but any reader of the *Metaphysics* who naively takes its surface teaching seriously? What does philosophy gain by promising more

40. One would expect the reverse: a surface teaching understating the challenge that philosophy poses to revealed religion, and a deep teaching that does not understate it.

to the uninitiated than it knows it can deliver? Different readers of the *Metaphysics* may give different answers to these questions too.

The incontestable merit of *Aristotle as Teacher* is that it leads anyone who reads it carefully back to the *Metaphysics* with an enhanced appreciation of the problems it explores and open to the possibility that Aristotle's thoughts about these problems and how they might be resolved are much more profound than has hitherto been recognized and stated. *Aristotle as Teacher* should be read as long as the *Metaphysics* is read. If I have given excessive weight to the traditional interpretation of the *Metaphysics* in this review, it is not because I find it more congenial to revealed religion than Bruell's interpretation. The opposite is true: the rational theology expressly advanced by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*, and developed further by the great Muslim philosophers of the Middle-Ages, constitutes a formidable challenge to the claims of revelation. If one does not appreciate the magnitude of this challenge, one is unlikely to appreciate the alternative rational theology developed, without appeal to the claims of revelation, by the great Christian theologians of the Middle-Ages when they rose to meet it.

Eva Brann, *Un-Willing: An Inquiry into the Rise of the Will's Power and an Attempt to Undo It.* Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2014, xi + 367 pages. $35.00

Book Review by Matthew Linck

"Does it add up? Not on your life." Thus begins the penultimate section of the concluding chapter of Eva Brann's book on the will. It is in this chapter that Brann lays out what she calls the "un-willed life." Brann has her reasons for keeping her picture of the un-willed life reserved for the end of the book. And even though one could skip right to the end, I would like to try to say why that would be a mistake. In other words, I want to say how the book makes a whole. Some questions will then be raised.

The book does not, I think, make the kind of whole one might expect. The table of contents is deceptive. Reading the names of the chapters and the section headings, one would think the book to be a study of the will as understood by many great thinkers in the Western tradition. One would also think the book to show the will in a variety of modes, from ego-centered to cosmic in scale, from grand conception to narrow academic topic. One will expect to *learn* a lot from reading the book. And these things are all true. Brann approaches her subject mostly by careful explication of the texts and arguments of individual thinkers. (A glance at the table of contents will indicate the principal players, although there are many not-to-be-missed mini-essays on will-conceptions by others in the endnotes. These are listed at the front of the book following the table of contents.) Furthermore, these expositions are grouped thematically, although those themes do not always admit of easy summary. And, indeed, one can learn a lot, especially where the subjects are unfamiliar. For me, this was true especially of the sections on Sartre, compatibilism and neuroscience.

But one cannot make a whole out of things that do not add up just by putting them between the same covers. The wholeness of Brann's book comes from two other sources. The first is the rhetorical force of the not-adding-up. This, to me, makes good sense of what might look like a lopsided book: 243 pages on something that turns out not to be

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coherent, 21 pages on the alternative. The power of Brann's concluding pages comes not so much from an accumulated argument as from the experience of being bandied about by all these competing conceptions of the will. One is made receptive to the hope that there is some way out of this mess. Let me say something about the mess before turning to the second source of wholeness.

Since Brann herself supplies summaries of the main conceptions of and approaches to the will at the beginning of her concluding chapter, I think I can be pretty brief. I will give a rundown of some of the book's main thrusts, indicating some corresponding proper names parenthetically.

There was a time in the West when a human being and a human life were understood without recourse to the idea of a will (Socrates, Aristotle). And even for those thinkers where a kind of proto-will can be glimpsed (Lucretius, the Stoics), it does not rise to the level of a full-fledged faculty. This all changes with Augustine. For Augustine, a human life—*his* life—cannot be made sense of without a faculty of willing. As Brann emphasizes, Augustine's framing of the will is deeply embedded in his Christianity and the question of sin. Correlatively, since man is made in the image of God, God too must now be understood as having a will. From here we're off. Chapters III-V offer visions of the will from Scholastics, early-moderns and German Idealists (Thomas, Scotus, Ockham, Hobbes, Locke, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Fichte). The range of conceptions run through in these chapters defies summary (but see the block quotation below). The recent queries and debates concerning free will and determinism, whether from philosophers or scientists, are already prefigured in these early chapters. Brann covers these topics in chapters IX-XI. Despite the faint echoes of prior thinking, these chapters seem to me essential since they speak the language of our own everyday thoughts about the will. Even if one has never read a philosophical defense of compatibilism or leafed through the purported findings of neuroscience pertaining to the will, the cast of mind, the questions asked, and the unexamined prejudices are deeply familiar. In between these chapters are Brann's "linguistic interlude" (chapter VI, a delightful and important aside), conceptions of the will that exceed the individual person (Rousseau, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche) and what Brann calls the "will's last ontologies" (Hegel, Bergson, Peirce, Heidegger, Sartre). It is all of this that Brann contends doesn't add up. The following gives a good sense of the range and likely incompatibility of the notions surveyed.

> [T]he will can be conceived as having the *nature* of a passion, a power, a capacity, a faculty, an agency, a decision—or an illusion. It can be conceived as an *operation* that is an extended process, a final impulse, a long deliberation, or a momentary choice. It can be conceived as having its *termination* in seamless execution or in aborted realization. It can be conceived in terms of its *causality,* as rationally connected or radically contingent. It can be conceived as having its *finality* in an external end or in itself. It can be conceived with respect to its *standing* as the highest human good in its obedience to duty or as a nugatory epiphenomenon in its subjugation to nature. It can be conceived in *scope* as a hyper-human force causing universal suffering, as bestowing individual potency, as a general determination overriding individual choice, or as the very principle of individuality. It can be conceived, looking to the soul's *salvation,* as vulnerable to perversion and sin or as analogous to binding love. But above all, it can be conceived with regard to *human selfhood* as being to some degree free from nature's determinism, as self-activating and deliberately deciding—or as altogether determined by natural law working on conditions fixed from way back. It's a notional miscellany. (243-4)

For every item on the list above, there is a text, an author, a movement, or a research program considered by Brann. So, it is a lot of work to follow her down all of these paths, but one might be ready for something *else* by the end. Hence the closing pages of the book are *fitting* given what comes before.

There is, though, that other source of wholeness in the book, namely, Brann herself. The mind, voice, and good sense that carry the book along are not incidental to its substance. Issues that might at first seem to be to one side—how to read a book, professionalism versus amateurism, the role of self-examination in sifting philosophical arguments, regard for everyday speech—turn out to be essential. They are essential because they both argue for and exemplify key features of the life Brann advocates at the end of the book. Hence the book does not just argue for this or that, but *is* an example of the very thing it means to bring forth.[1] Let me mention here the special place that

1. Here is an example (the context is Heidegger's conception[s] of the will and his propensity to rely on neologisms [under the guise of the retrieval of original meanings]): "There is the perfectly sensible Socratic inquiry into the one being, the *eidos*, intended by words in common use that have multifarious instantia-

Thomas Aquinas holds in Brann's thinking and in the book. Brann is convinced that Thomas's account of the will (notwithstanding whether there *is* a will) is the best we have. Her conviction is grounded largely in believing that Thomas's account is most in accord with experience. Well, whose experience? Brann is upfront—principally her own experience, but not just. Despite the central place that Brann accords self-examination (and she invites *us* to do it), she also, carefully, looks for whatever common ground she can obtain. (Nevertheless, the question whether there just are different human types is raised more than once in the book.) So, with a view both introspectively anchored and looking widely, Brann sees in Thomas's account a picture of human willing that is wide enough in scope (many fail by being too narrow) and rightly ordered (others fail in wrong emphasis). Her reliance on Thomas throughout the book, then, is neither an appeal to authority, nor is it a claim that Thomas simply has the best rational argument. Rather the reliance on Thomas is a shorthand for reliance on her own criteria, themselves not narrowly rational. (This would be the place to mention the centrality of *feeling* for Brann.) But, one more twist to this: Brann relies on Thomas for having laid out his picture of the will. Brann *recognizes* in Thomas's account something she can assent to, but she does not say she could have seen it all without him. Hence she needs the books (and so do we). These remarks about Thomas were meant to make good on the general claim above, that Brann's own thinking is a source of wholeness in the book, but now with this addition: her manner of thinking is not independent from the sources she is considering.

Hence the end of the book is also the heart of the book. My task now is to say what Brann thinks the alternative to willing is and why we should revoke the will's license. It is important to note that these are not the same thing. Brann could have presented us will an alternative to willing as one possible mode of living among others. Instead, she has endeavored to persuade us that it is *better* to be un-willing than willing (or worse, willful). So, first the alternative, then the revoking.

Brann presents Socrates as a model (not *the* model, not someone to slavishly imitate) of un-willing. Brann highlights some key features

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tions in the world—even in our world—for example the virtues and vices. But what does it mean to search arduously for the meaning of a word-conceit used in now-archaic language and then in different significations, words like *Galassenheit* and *Seyn*, entirely without use-context, without living exemplars?" (162) Brann, it seems to me, tries to ground her thinking in "living exemplars" wherever possible.

of his person. As a man, Socrates obeys above all his inner *daimonion* which only *stops* him from doing this or that—he has no principle of willful assertion; he is an "ontological optimist," that is, he believes (or at least proceeds as if) there is order and intelligibility in the world grounded in the forms; he calls not on courage, but on his goodness, thoughtfulness and justice throughout his life. As a thinker, Socrates is always at the beginning of things and opens his thinking beyond the tight logic of "rationality." He has a vision of the human soul without will, but one in which desire operates throughout. Socrates is committed, perhaps, to only one maxim, "Virtue is knowledge." Brann thinks virtue here should be understood "not [as] a *good will* enclosed in its subjective self-sufficiency," but as "an on-the-brink power, a readiness to pass to thoughtful doing without intermediate exertion of an executive will." Finally, she contends that "this unhesitating passage to action . . . comes from . . . doing deep, affirmative thinking." (All of the above comes from pages 248-51.)

With Socrates as a model, we might then ask, as moderns, where our freedom resides. Brann wants to "relocat[e] freedom away from the will" (253), to focus our attention not on "freedom *of* the will but freedom *from* the will," and to suggest that "collectedness," of a person or a life, is not to be attained by "strenuous inward-drawing," but by "other means" (255). The key terms of these other means seem to me *loving attachment, desire as receptivity,* the *contemplation of beings,* and *imaginative living*. How a life thus constituted issues in freedom, even Brann is hesitant to say decisively—it remains, in a way, a "mystery" (262).

As for why this un-willed life should be preferred to the willful one, is it enough to say that Brann thinks the latter is just plain bad for us? That it diminishes our powers instead of enhancing them? That it distracts us from what is important, truly worthy of desire and interest? That it distorts our vision of the whole of things and leads, at its worst, to genuine horrors? I hope it is not unfair to Brann to leave it at that.

The questions I would like to pose to *Un-Willing* were elicited strongly by the book and, I think, are related. The first is whether instead of endeavoring to revoke the will's license we should rather think of our task as overcoming the will. The second question is about how we should read.

One way to take Brann's global view is that with Augustine the West goes astray, and that by thinking in terms of a will-faculty our self-understanding becomes perverted. Some subtlety is required here, since Brann acknowledges that much of what falls under the name "will" is

not without sense. There are ways of making sense of all the talk on the will, as Brann attempts to do throughout *Un-Willing*. Nevertheless, for her these ways are neither necessary nor felicitous. But what if our errancy vis-à-vis the will was in some way necessary? What if we both need the will and need to show its deficiency? Or, in other words, what if Hegel is right? It would be foolhardy to insert here a lengthy discourse on Hegel (although maybe necessary), but I want to try to sketch out the Hegelian picture in which my questions are grounded.

While there are metaphysical aspects to my question springing from Hegel's logical writings[2] and questions about the need to revise our understanding of nature occasioned by his *Philosophy of Nature,*[3] it might be enough to limit myself to "spiritual" issues. I could perhaps locate my concerns with respect to Brann's discussion of the self/subject in chapter of XI of *Un-Willing*. Brann seems to me correct to suggest that the ancients did not have a notion of self and that their understanding of soul is not simply its equivalent. She is also correct, I think, that questions of will and agency go hand in hand with questions of selfhood. But if this is the case, then it would seem to follow that Brann might want to jettison talk of the self with that of the will. It does not seem to me altogether that she does. Maybe there is room to insert a wedge here. The Hegelian account, I believe, holds that the

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2. For instance, there seem to me to be far-reaching implications of Hegel's treating of being in the way he does. Much of this could be spun out from the fact that a doctrine of being is included in a *Logic,* and one particularly pertinent feature of that doctrine (under the heading of Essence) is that being exhausts itself in appearances. The "ontological optimism" that Brann attributes to Socrates by means of the forms seems off the table for Hegel. This metaphysical point is, I think, of direct consequence for Hegel's approach to human action.

3. At least two prominent elements of Brann's account are ripe for consideration via Hegel's understanding of nature. The first would be the cogency of the debates surrounding determinism and free will. Speaking for myself, the implicit metaphysics which grounds the mechanical view of nature is long overdue for a systematic and thorough demolishing. To continue engaging such debates on *those terms* is to throw good effort after bad. Whether a new metaphysics of nature will get a hearing is hard to say. The second issue would be that of feeling. This feature of the human soul is important for Brann, and it is for Hegel, too. But I think one would have to take up Hegel's account of *animal* feeling in the *Philosophy of Nature*, especially as the mark of inwardness and proto-subjectivity, in order to see what might be radical in his understanding of *human* feeling.

notion of self must be developed (and, perhaps, purified) because the *telos* of human history is freedom and freedom is centered on how things count or don't count, are justified or not justified, *for me*. Here a whole can of worms is opened, not the least of which would be Hegel's contention that Christianity is—was—necessary for us. At the very least we might see that the infinite relationship of the individual to the divine is a "picture-thought" of the modern subject's relationship to absolute spirit. Talk of a will would be one feature of this necessary passage through Christianity. But the real burden of the Hegelian account falls on its insistence that the realization of human flourishing is a historical achievement. It is in working out this claim that an account of overcoming the will would be located. One version of such an overcoming can be found, I think, in the closing section of the fifth chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* for there we are given a picture of human action in which willful self-assertion must be replaced by action grounded in mutual confession and forgiveness.[4] But, of course, for Hegel replacement will not mean simply canceling; the passage through willfulness must in some way remain at work in its overcoming. None of this can count as an argument against Brann, but only as an indication of the space in which to pursue a certain kind of question.[5] Another way to ask this question would be to query whether Brann is right that Socrates's thoughts "could be anyone's thoughts, anytime" (248). I suppose, in a way, I am raising the old question about

4. A perspicacious reading of these paragraphs can be found in J. M. Bernstein, "Confession and forgiveness: Hegel's poetics of action" in *Beyond Representation: Philosophy and Poetic Imagination, ed.* Richard Thomas Eldridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 34-65.

5. One full-fledged example of the kind of argument I have in mind can be found in Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Hegel's treatment of nature cuts deeply into many aspects of debates about the will, but one place to look is Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Naturalism: Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). There is some direct overlap between *Un-Willing* and Kenneth R. Westphal, "Autonomy, Freedom & Embodiment: Hegel's Critique of Contemporary Biologism," *Hegel Bulletin* 35 (2014): 56-83. An attempt to make good on Hegel's account of freedom in terms of the condition of modern institutions is undertaken in Alex Honneth, *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). A more Kantian flavored approach to these questions can be found in Christine M. Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Indentity, and Integrity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.)

ancients and moderns, whether there is a genuine quarrel and, if so, with whom to side.

Also at issue here would be whether Brann has done justice to Hegel—can have done so—by analyzing his treatments of willing in isolation. The question is not whether Brann interprets her chosen texts correctly; the question is whether such interpretations can be adequate if done (too much) in isolation from Hegel's thinking more broadly. This, as always, is a particularly vexed issue in dealing with Hegel, but I wonder if Brann's other readings don't suffer similarly. For instance, is it so clear that Thomas's Aritotelianism can be easily separated from its Christianizing (47)?

I also wonder if Brann's treatment of the major thinkers in her book is not too much one-at-a-time. After the strenuous effort of her surveying of so many conceptions of the will, Brann concludes that it does not add up. Is this way of asking the question too static? What if instead of asking if it adds up we were to see what these thinkers have to say to each other? In some cases, such engagement is explicit: Kant dwells with Rousseau in the development of his moral theory; Hegel has an eye on Kant at every turn in working out his own positions. But even where this is not so explicit, we can attempt to construct for ourselves an imagined conversation between thinkers. I think, though, that this act of the imagination cannot be just a comparing of arguments; we must, again, endeavor to take up as much of a thinker's thought as possible. On the one hand, this would require us to keep in mind how a thinker sees, in some fundamental way, how things hang together; on the other hand, it would ask us to keep an eye—if I can put it this way—on the *style* of thinking involved.

The figure I most worry is slighted along these lines in *Un-Willing* is Kant. My reservations are not about any particular assertions that Brann makes about Kant's thinking (she is illuminating here as well), but about the spirit of the engagement. Here perhaps my own prejudices and inclinations are at work, but it seems to me that both in spite of and because of his excesses, Kant allows me to *see* something that I would not have otherwise, that there is some element of human willing and action that is excavated through his stark formulations. But not simply. That is, I cannot just pluck out some insight from Kant to be combined with insights from other thinkers. Somehow, I have to let Kant's vision of things as a whole set to work my own thinking. And then by putting Kant into conversation with others, letting them, through my thinking, contend with each other, I can think things I would not have otherwise.

I fear that the structure and tone of Brann's book could too quickly invite us to be over and done with a figure like Kant.[6]

Even as these questions were triggered by Brann's book, and even as I cultivated them, the book itself made me suspicious of them. Is the Hegelian undertaking too sophisticated, too theoretical, too system-bound, and, most of all, too remote from the immediacy of lived experience? Is the question of historicism itself too bound up with the will? Is there a too-generous way of reading philosophical texts, a way that slips into indulgence? At its best, Brann's book shows us what it is like to be comfortable dwelling at the beginnings of things, locating our concerns and principles nearby and within ourselves.

6. When consulting an essay on Kant that Brann's book called to mind I found there, and in two companion essays, these formulations: "Kant's greatness, like that of other great philosophers, lies in the simplicity of the fundamental innovations on which his systematic edifice rests. . . The unavoidable dogmatism hidden behind the Kantian concept of 'freedom' (i.e., 'will' or 'pure practical reason') that has been pointed out so frequently, is irrelevant once we address the problem of the *modus operandi* of the Kantian innovation." "The greatness of Kant's practical philosophy is based on the fact that it is developed within the framework of a critique of reason and that it is closely interwoven with his theoretical philosophy, his philosophy of religion, and his philosophy of history. In contrast, most contemporary ethical thought consists of ungrounded assertions, unprincipled casuistry and reflections lacking any organic unity with the rest of our knowledge." "Kant's texts are not historical artifacts, but still-contemporary deeds, *erga*: our age is, philosophically, the *energeia* of Kant's texts." These quotations are from, respectively, Agnes Heller, "Freedom and Happiness in Kant's Political Philosophy," Vittorio Hösle, "The Greatness and Limits of Kant's Practical Philosophy," David R. Lachterman, "Kant: The Faculty of Desire," all found in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 13.2 (1990). I offer these quotations only as examples of the cast of mind I have in view.