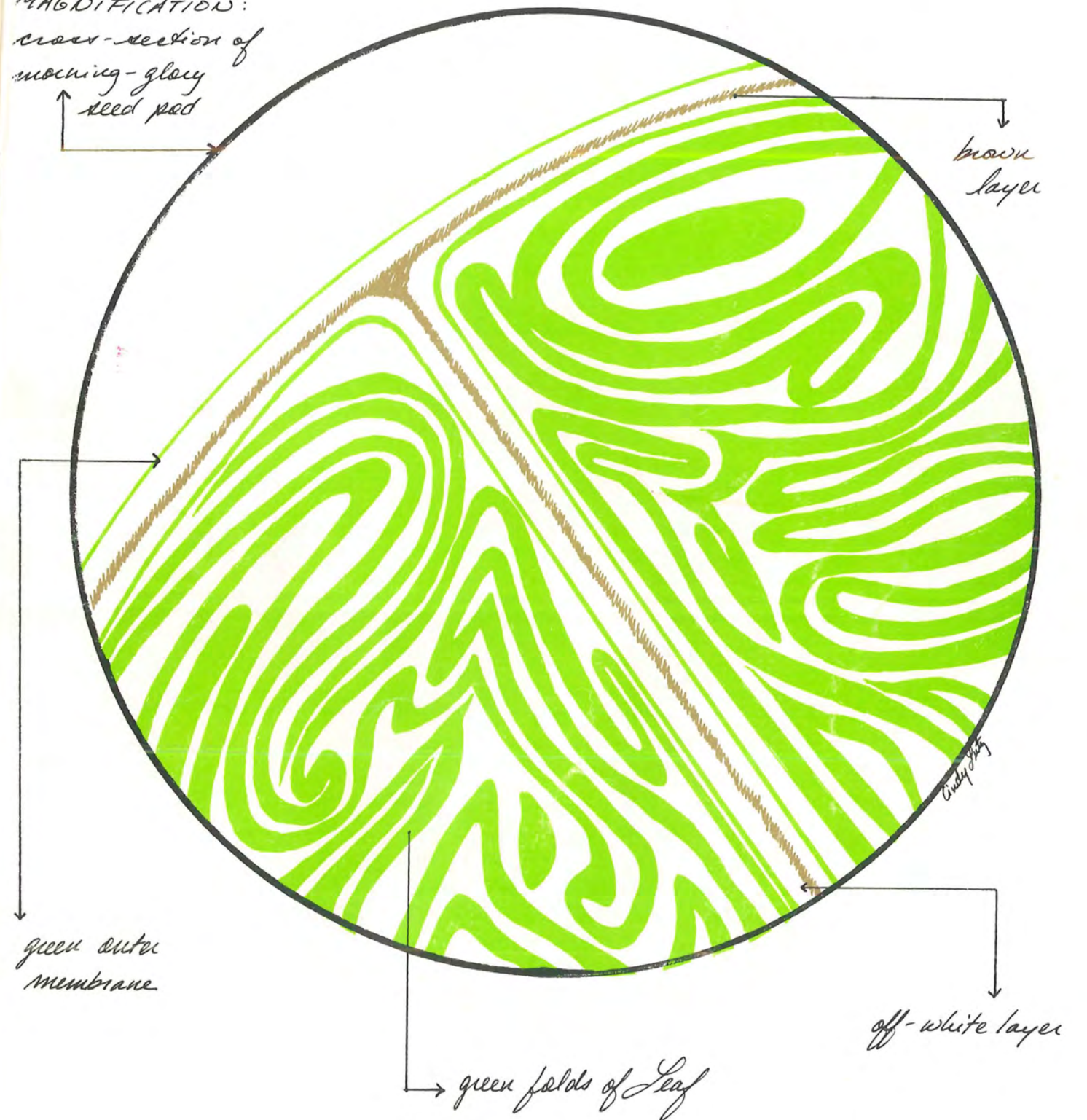


# ENERGETIA

SPRING 1995

MAGNIFICATION:  
cross-section of  
mossing-glasy  
seed pod



**ENERGEIA:** The activity in which anything is fully itself.  
η . . . νου ενεργεια ζωη . . . (Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, 1072b)

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## On Beginning Hegel's *Phenomenology*

Cary Stickney

Let me begin with a confession. Some of you may remember that in the second act of the *Tempest* the drunken butler Stefano appears with a bottle which he has somehow made of tree bark and filled from a cask of sherry which he rode ashore. He presses this liquor on Caliban with the phrase, "Kiss the book."

My confession is that the first book I ever kissed, twenty years ago this December (1994), was Hegel's *Phenomenology*. I was home on Christmas vacation and I had persuaded Robert Bart, my Senior Seminar leader and Essay advisor, that I could write my Senior Essay on Hegel. Of the *Phenomenology* I had read only the two most famous parts: the lengthy Preface and the short, mystifying, unforgettable section entitled "Lordship and Bondage." A few days into the vacation I sat down to read the Introduction and the first chapter. It was on finishing the first chapter that I kissed the book. It seems now a very strange thing to have done and it seemed a little strange even at the time, I remember, but it was the only expression I could find adequate to my gratitude and happiness at that moment. I suppose I had better add, in the interest of completeness, that I never kissed the book again, and that in fact, though I have studied it a fair amount since, and even went to live in Germany for several years largely in order to study Hegel, I cannot say that I have ever read the whole book through. I hope you will not think me fickle on this account, or conclude that I am not after all enough of an expert to be of any use to you. One of the main things I want to say is that the *Phenomenology*, like other books on the Program, is too great to be left to the experts. So why, exactly, did I kiss the book? Perhaps, like Stefano, I had the soul of a lackey and I was intoxicated with what did not even belong to me? Maybe I had no one else to kiss? Of course I must have been kissing myself in part, congratulating myself that I could make any sense at all on my own of this famously obscure philosopher. But I think I was primarily responding to a liberator. I felt that I had been set free, or restored to myself. To what had I been enslaved?

I think I had been afraid of, if not exactly in bondage to, a deep suspicion that thought didn't ultimately make any difference; things are as they are in the world, you can think about them or imagine you understand them as much or as little as you like—nothing is thereby

changed about the way things really are. I might take that suspicion another step and suspect that I myself am like everything else in the world: My being, too, will then be indifferent to any thoughts about me, even my own thoughts. I will do whatever I do and feel whatever I feel quite apart from what I or anyone else may surmise to be the reasons. If this is so, then any seeming confirmation of my understanding becomes somewhat empty. I may successfully predict an event or exert control over a force either human or natural, but I am always coming from somewhere outside. I could as well have predicted or controlled from several very different beginning points and still succeeded, so my success is not any ultimate criterion of a true understanding. Maybe it is all the criterion there is, though.

This, or something like it, was my suspicion, from which I was so grateful to be set free. I suppose I could very roughly abbreviate it with the name "Kant," though other names suggest themselves—"Descartes," or even "Modern Science," at least as that science tends to appear on television and in high schools, and hence as it appears in its claims to be a worked-out version of good solid common sense.

Hegel sets about to demolish this view at the beginning of his book and in my opinion succeeds brilliantly. It is the first task of the Introduction to step behind Kant, to turn his skeptical mistrust of the powers of human knowing back upon itself. Kant had asked, "What are the conditions of the possibility of human knowing?"; that is, "What must be the case if there is to be such a thing as knowing?". That real knowing did exist he took to be given by the existence of geometry and by the dazzling successes of Newtonian celestial mechanics. His answer was couched in terms inherited from Aristotle: form and material. Let knowledge consist of necessary conclusions about objects of possible experience and its form will be the element of necessity, while the material will be the objects of experience. Kant reasoned that necessity could not be the contribution of experience, since, as Hume and many other Skeptic philosophers had long since pointed out, the mere fact of something happening to exist or to behave in a given way says nothing at all about any necessity for things to be thus. So if there is truly necessity in things it is a form we humans have placed on experience, and it must in turn be neces

sary and inescapable *that* we do so, otherwise there would be no real necessity and no real knowledge after all. But this all feels rather cumbersome; it is a little like the children's game in which you must jump back and forth over a rope which is raised and lowered. First the experiences of mathematics and celestial mechanics are invoked as containing necessity, then empirical one-at-a-time experiences are recalled as mere happenstance, void of all necessity, then again even *they* turn out to necessarily belong under the rubric of possible experience which must after all be governed by various *necessary* categories of understanding, imposed indeed by us, but necessarily, ineluctably imposed by every human *qua* human, such that there is really no access to any experience in which this imposed necessity is not already an inextricable element. I hope I am not doing too much injustice to what I continue to find a beautiful argument and a worthy enterprise for the Junior Seminar. It has been some years since I have heard any protest in Faculty Meetings about devoting as many Seminars as we do to Kant. This year it is ten, and I take it as a sign of the depth of intellect of my colleagues that they recognize what a giant Kant is. Let me stay with him a little longer, since, as Mr. Venable has remarked, Hegel is to Kant somewhat as the New Testament is to the Old. At least, it is nearly always illuminating to ask, when one has to begin with some idea of what Hegel is talking about, "What would Kant have said about this?". Sometimes every argument Hegel makes can sound like an argument against Kant.

One result of Kant's own argument is that a world of so-called "things-in-themselves" turns out to exist, about which we can know nothing. These things-in-themselves are at least required by the terms of the argument: While the imposition of necessity and various other kinds of order upon experience is *our* constant spontaneous act of forming, we must still be *given* material to form. But since time and space themselves are products of our formative activity, then the sources of the material to be formed must lie outside time and space and indeed outside all the categories of *our* understanding. It becomes again a problem how we can be sure these sources *do* exist. Kant addresses this problem in the section of the first *Critique* entitled "Refutation of Idealism" but I think we will hasten past to what Hegel replies to all of this.

Hegel asks how we can be satisfied with a knowledge which begins by proclaiming its separation from things as they are in themselves. What then *is* it a knowledge of, if not of the way things really are? Why call it knowledge at all?

He questions one of Kant's deepest assumptions: that the world is over there being and that we are over here thinking. If that is our immovable beginning then we will never solve the problem of how to own the truth. With truth on one side and thought on the other we will need a middle term, a bridge where they can meet, a tool to pull the truth over or a telescope to observe it close up from afar. But all of these things only involve us again in Kant's difficulty: What we wanted was the truth itself and what we got was how it appears in a telescope or how much of it fits onto a certain kind of bridge or how it looks after being hooked and dragged out of its home.

The problem, as Hegel puts it, is about mediation. Words like "absolute" or "in itself" suggest a truth having nothing to do with the knower. But if this is so then all knowing, all attempts to mediate the truth to the knower will be some kind of falsification. It is not a new problem. The following exchange takes place in Plato's dialogue the *Sophist*. Theaetetus the mathematics student is replying on behalf of the "friends of the forms," that is, the believers in the εἶδη, to the Stranger from Elea, a one-time disciple of Parmenides. (248d)

Str.: ... Do they acknowledge that the soul knows and real being is known?

The.: Certainly they agree to that.

Str.: Well, do you agree that knowing and being-known is an action, or is it experiencing an effect, or both? Or is one of them experiencing an effect, the other an action? Or does neither of them come under either of these heads at all?

The.: Evidently neither, otherwise our friends would be contradicting what they said earlier.

Str.: I see what you mean. They would have to say this. If knowing is to be acting on something it follows that what is known must be acted upon by it, and so, on this showing, reality when it is being known by the act of knowledge must, in so far as it is known, be changed by being so acted upon, and that, we say, cannot happen to the changeless.

The.: Exactly.

Str.: But tell me, in the name of Zeus, are we really to be so easily convinced that change, and life, and soul, and understanding have no place in that which is perfectly real—that it has neither life nor thought, but stands immutable, holy, and exalted, devoid of intelligence?

The.: We would indeed be yielding to a fearsome doctrine, stranger.

Hegel's answer is that change and life and soul and understanding *are* inextricably entwined in the truth; in other words, that mediation is not something that must be brought to bear on a reality over there. Being *is* mediation. It mediates itself to itself. As the Eleatic Stranger's teacher, Parmenides, had written: Thinking and being are the same.

So I have arrived, as I had to, at one of those grandiose claims that always seem to infuriate a certain proportion of Hegel's readers. Parmenides doesn't provoke anything like that response; I'm not sure why. Perhaps because he wasn't a German Professor?

So Kant, that other German Professor, was not after all so very far wrong in Hegel's view. The world is, indeed, just as Kant claimed, thoroughly permeated with thought. The categories of the understanding are indeed structures of the world itself; only not of a merely phenomenal world behind which would exist some unreachable realm of things-in-themselves, forever denied us, holy, exhausted and mindless. No, the very articulation of Being into Kant's phenomenal and noumenal realms is in its entirety part of the self-mediation of Being. That is, the "things-in-themselves" belong together with thought just as much as the categorically determined objects of possible experience do. Far from being unknowable, they are known to us precisely as the other half of Kant's argument: We know them to be the noumenal source of the phenomenal world, we know them to be outside time and space, to be beyond the dominion of the understanding, to be the unreachably high standard of truth without which the humanly attainable truth would have no meaning. That is a great deal to know about something Kant himself sometimes modestly proposes to denote with no more than an "X."

It is that last thing we know that has the most importance for the program Hegel lays out in the Introduction.

We know enough about these things in themselves to say that our humanly attainable truth is not the whole truth. Thus, apparently, we *can* conceive of knowing the whole truth, if it is meaningful to us to speak of not doing so, and thus there must be more knowing left for us to do. After learning about the limits of reason, we must ask, "In the light of what kind of a Beyond have we recognized these limits as limits?" Limits cannot reveal themselves as limits unless there is some sense of what lies on their other side. But as soon as there is any sense of that at all then they are no longer absolute limits, for we are already, at least in thought, beyond them. As Socrates put it, the terrible thing is not to be ignorant, but to be unaware that you are; and on the other hand, to

*know* of one's ignorance is already to have some hope of relief from it. We can begin to have a conversation about what our experience of knowing might be, about what kind of beings we might ourselves be in order to know how to critique our knowledge, or hope to improve it. This conversation goes by the name Dialectic, both for Hegel and for Socrates, and for both of them it seeks to go beyond all ordinary human limits to the unifying source of all that is. For Hegel the full self-mediation of Being is found in the Being that knows itself to be all that is, one and many, same and other, Being and Becoming. This he calls *Geist* or Spirit. The title of his book means: The Ordered Account of the Appearing of Spirit to Itself. For we humans are Spirit, and so is everything we think about.

Let me dwell a little longer on what it means to say that Being *is* mediation. It means that nothing is simply and immediately itself alone. Everything is involved in a great whole and nothing *could* "be" by itself. So the conventional understanding of matter cannot be correct. By that account matter simply exists as a kind of inert opposite of thought. It needs nothing else to exist and on some level it is impervious to thought. Thought always connects and relates things to one another; it mediates by gathering and separating. But if matter as such is *immediate* then thought will never grasp why matter is or what it is, because there will be nothing in terms of which an explanation could be formulated. Matter would be a given, a brute fact. That givenness, conceived apart from any actual giver, that impenetrability to thought, constitutes for most people a very large part of the realness of what is real.

Such a view makes the intellect into a stranger in the world. Moreover it gives no account of any motion. If matter is only as it is, inert, then why is it always moving and changing? I think Hegel would tell us that we are not minds surrounded by matter, in the sense of two opposed and equally fundamental principals; but that we are Mind in the presence of Mind, or if you prefer, Spirit in the presence of Spirit. It is very exciting to see the details of this extremely bold thought worked out. Maybe it would be helpful for me to read a few passages aloud and approach them with these thoughts in mind.

In Paragraph 91 of the Introduction Hegel is beginning to speak of the testing of knowledge that he will conduct, and of its difficulties. A test seems to require a criterion, but how can a criterion justify itself in advance? We would seem to need already to know the truth in order to begin sorting out the true in our knowledge. This is very like Meno's paradox that we cannot learn what

we don't know because we will not know it when we see it; and Hegel has a not dissimilar answer to the one Socrates gives. Let us, he says

call to mind the abstract determinations of truth and knowledge as they occur in consciousness. Consciousness simultaneously *distinguishes* itself from something and at the same time *relates* itself to it, or, as it is said, this something exists *for* consciousness; and the determinate aspect of this *relating*, or of the *being* of something for a consciousness, is *knowing*.

Shall we dwell on this sentence a moment? It is, as he says, abstract, by which he nearly always means "rather schematic and relatively lifeless." If Hegel had a pair of columns, as the Pythagoreans are said to have had, with the good in one and the bad in the other, he would certainly have "concrete" in the good column and "abstract" in the bad. "Concrete" comes from a word meaning "to grow together" and so for one who believes that the truth is the whole, the higher the degree of concreteness a thing has, the more it is grown together with other things, the more adequate it is as an expression of the truth.

Still, abstract though it be, the sentence does show how we tend to think about knowing. It is an analysis of what we mean by saying "I am conscious of something"; this may mean "I see something" or "I imagine something" or "remember something" or "I am explicitly aware of something". "Conscious" translates Hegel's German word "*bewusst*" which might be overly-literally rendered "beknown." "Conscious" and "*bewusst*" both take a genitive object: One is conscious *of* or has a share *in* this or that. The earliest attested usage of "conscious" given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is 1601, when it appears in its Latin-derived meaning of "sharing knowledge with" or "privy to, sharing in, or witness of human actions or secrets" and is applied in a line of Ben Jonson's to Time. It comes to be applied to the knowledge one shares with oneself, so that to be conscious means to be a fellow-knower with oneself of something. Something like this is what we mean by our conscious: Not only do I know I have done something wrong, some other judging part of me is a fellow-knower of my trespass. A division in ourselves and even in the knowing part of ourselves is necessary to be able to speak this way. It is suggestive that this usage comes into English during the century of those tireless dividers Hobbes and Bacon, Descartes and Pascal, but the Latin usages of conscious are many centuries older and perfectly paral-

lel: One may very well be conscious to or with oneself of something else already in, say, the time of Ovid. "*Bewusst*" seems to have more the sense of being known to oneself *as* knower *of* this or that. But this too is a dividing up of myself into two knowers, one who knows something, the other who knows *that* the one knows something. "Ich bin mir dessen bewusst" is a common expression for "I am aware of it" which literally translates as "I am bekown to myself of it". One sometimes hears that there is no word for consciousness in Hegel's sense to be found in Ancient Greek. I think this is true if it means the same as saying that no one before Hegel endowed consciousness with such a panoply of forms and powers. On the other hand there *is* the verb συνιδᾶ which is often used with a reflexive pronoun, as when Socrates says in the *Apology*, "συνιδᾶ εμαυτῶι οὐδ οτιοῦν σοφός ὢν." "I am well aware that I am not clever at anything" or literally "I know with myself, not being clever at anything." There are also the nouns συνεσις and συνειδῆσις which mean "conscience," as well as "awareness" or consciousness." Certainly the words one is accustomed to see in Plato and Aristotle for "intellect," such as "νοῦς," "διάνοια," "φρονῆσις," do not translate "consciousness" and that fact cannot be without significance.

Still, a knowing that is doubled and thereby fully explicit, the being well aware that comes from one part of me knowing something and another part knowing *that* I know; doesn't that kind of knowing imply that another kind would exist? If the first kind is called conscious knowing, the other kind would be *unconscious* knowing: One part of me will know something without this being known to all of me, without my being well aware or my knowing fully explicit. And isn't this very much what we find in some of the Platonic Dialogues? The story told about Recollection in the *Meno* is intended to explain the possibility of learning by proposing that the soul knows all things in an unconscious way, which can be compared to the way one knows something one has temporarily forgotten. In the *Theaetetus* Socrates is constantly bringing the conversation to a halt by the peculiar consequence that we would have to know something and at the same time *not* know it, or not know *that* we know it. This does appear absurd and unacceptable to the young mathematician, but Socrates surely knows that if something of the sort is not possible, then neither is dialectic at all. I conclude that many of the thoughts which Hegel associates with the word "consciousness" are indeed present in the thought of Plato and that perhaps Whitehead is right when he says that all Western

Philosophy is footnotes to Plato. But this etymological digression is in some danger of sounding like a footnote itself.

The second part of Hegel's sentence was "... the determinate aspect of this relating or of the being of something for a consciousness is knowing." Notice that knowing is a rather loose term: Anything determinate in the aspect of a thing presents to us is something we "know" about it.

What comes next is very important.

But we distinguish this being-for-another from *being-in-itself*; whatever is related to knowledge or knowing is also distinguished from it, and posited as existing outside of this relationship; this *being-in-itself* is called *truth*. Just what might really be involved in these determinations is of no further concern to us here. Since our object is phenomenal knowledge, its determination too will be taken directly as they present themselves, and they do present themselves very much as we have here apprehended them.

I think the reservation Hegel is voicing has to do with his understanding that there *cannot* ultimately be a being-in-itself outside any relation to consciousness. Why then is this impossibility so much a part of what we first mean by truth?

I think Hegel's answer is that we are somehow inexplicitly aware, within the division of ourselves that is called consciousness, of an overarching oneness or wholeness of ourselves, or of ourselves with everything, which we nevertheless do not see directly, as we do the varying particular contents of our consciousness.

This unity cannot be reached until the end of the "necessary sequence of patterns of consciousness" has been found. It is the only real "thing-in-itself," because it is the whole, and thus needs no other to complete its being or its intelligibility. It is our implicit connection to that whole which makes us discontented with every limited and partial knowledge or pattern of consciousness we encounter, or rather become. Our discontent always takes the form of noticing that what we have understood is not the thing itself, but only how it appears to us. That is, we notice that there is more that the thing can be than we are yet seeing, because we who do the seeing know that we are limited in this or that particular respect. But as I said earlier, we only perceive those limits in the light of what lies beyond them, and so we can *go* beyond them and revise our view of the thing by means of our new posi-

tion, one step closer to the Whole. Thus *we* change along with our knowledge of the thing and this, says Hegel, is what is meant by Experience. The ordinary view according to which I learn some error of my ways when I happen to have some new experience, is only another limitation of the learning consciousness. Hegel, who is by hypothesis already at the end of the path, will show how the only way I was ready to have that new experience make sense to me was by having reached a kind of end of my previous pattern of consciousness, and by having sensed what lay beyond that end. These movements indeed were actually what constituted that which seemed to present itself as a spontaneously occurring new experience. Of course hardly anyone can experience life as a relentless march toward final wisdom, and when Hegel speaks of a necessary sequence of patterns of consciousness, he doesn't mean that it is necessary that any *one* consciousness go through all of the forms he lays out in the ordered sequence of his book. On the contrary, his claim is that everyone before him has without exception gotten stuck somewhere along the way, and that he is the first to see the completed whole of the self-unfolding Spirit. Still, if there is to be a whole, then there must be an order to its parts, and if it is a whole over time, that order must be also a temporal order. Hence there must be a necessary sequence of patterns of consciousness, ending as Hegel says, as a point where consciousness

gets rid of its semblance of being burdened with something alien, with what is only 'for it' and some sort of 'other,' at a point where appearance becomes identical with essence, so that its exposition will coincide at just this point with the authentic Science of Spirit. And finally, when consciousness itself grasps this its own essence, it will signify the nature of absolute knowledge itself.

These are the last words of the Introduction. But you were promised a talk on sense-certainty and perception. Maybe we could look at the transition from sense-certainty to perception and try to see in what sense it might be called a part of a necessary sequence.

So sense-certainty has proposed itself as true knowledge, invoking its purity and immediacy as character witnesses. But its truth has turned out to be not the immediate particularity it intends by saying "*This*" and pointing, but rather the most abstract generality, a universal "*This*" made of a universal "*Here*" and "*Now*." Only by being indifferent to any particular content can

the terms stay open to all possible examples of their meaning, and only so can they be applied to any one thing meaningfully. In Hegel's words, "An actual sense-certainty is not merely this pure immediacy, but an *instance* of it." That is, it is one among many others of the same kind. If I could manage to be and remain fully absorbed in my immediate sense-certainty of the one and only being in existence, I would have no need to say "this" or to point at all. Of course I would have to keep myself unaware that there were after all already two things and not just one, namely this solitary thing I am sensing with certainty, and myself. But once I recognize multiplicity then my knowing will have to take it into account. To know one thing will then involve knowing how it is not some other, but also how it could be. That is, I will at least need a way to recognize that insofar as they all have being, all beings are the same and insofar as each is not the others they are all different. Universal words like "this," "here," and "now" do precisely that: They single out a particular by saying that it is not any other and at the same time they say nothing about it that could not be said of any other, for every particular is a "this," every location is a "here," every time a "now," and each of them is not any other. We use them sometimes when we want to let a thing speak for itself, because we suppose if we say the very minimum the richness of the thing's own particularity will have the most room to come across. But if we are replying to the question "Wherein lies the certainty of your knowledge of the thing?" with the words, "I am certain of it because it is this unique one, here and now immediately present before me," then we say the opposite of what we intend, for all of those words refer us to the very broadest categories of things, and hence to mediation and relation, and not at all to a kind of self-contained pot of truth, sitting on its own off to one side, whether that be the side of this "I" or of this thing. The true is the universal, and insofar as we already see that the word "I" is just as universal and non-unique as the "this," we are a step closer to seeing that our being is not ultimately other than that of the things of the world, and that to understand the one will be to understand the other.

Now, how does the truth of sense-certainty become the new truth of perception?

Before addressing that let me dissent a little from a view of how to read Hegel that may seem to be implied by the selection of Senior Seminar readings. That view, if I were to exaggerate it a little bit, might claim that Hegel's thought is not only systematical, but mathematical, so that if you haven't understood steps B and C you

can't hope to get anywhere with steps D and E. I have sometimes been asked by worried Seniors if it wouldn't be better for them to reread an earlier Hegel reading several more times before going on to the upcoming assignment, since they felt they have so much left to understand already back there. I try to remind them of Aristotle, another system-builder, whose system is nevertheless more like a circle whose identical curvature reveals itself everywhere, than like a brick wall, the location of whose particular bricks would have to be gauged by keeping a careful count of how many units up and over from the cornerstone one had traveled. Not only may one fail to understand many previous sections and suddenly be illuminated by a later chapter; even within a page or paragraph one may go from the darkest kind of puzzlement about one sentence to piercing insight in another. Such at least has been my experience. A stubborn and attentive gnawing and worrying at an obscure passage is probably never simply a wasted effort, but don't imagine you must solve each sentence before you are allowed to read the next. Hegel often seeks to say the same thing in other words, or to say briefly what he has just said at length, or, most often, as Mr. Venable's note pointed out, to describe in one way for us his readers what he describes in another way as the experience of the consciousness that is his protagonist. A glimmer of understanding found in any of these can sometimes be used to unlock some of the surrounding mysteries. And sometimes not.

I will (briefly) return to perception. Sense-certainty had ended with the coming-to-be of the universal as a unity of one and many: The Here is "in its own self a simple Together of many Heres." (Even so the "I" is now know as *this I* only be not being any other I, each of which is, insofar as it too is just an I, not nameably different.)

Consciousness continues to seek the truth outside itself, as it imagines namely in the object. But the object means something different now. Hegel says,

Since the principle of the object, the universal, is in its simplicity a *mediated* universal, the object must express this its nature in its own self. This it does by showing itself as *the thing with many properties*.

One of the things these sentences are saying is that the very simplicity of the universal implies some unfinished business, a thought that has not been thought through yet. In order to be simple the way it is, the universal must be mediated. But that means it must be negatively related

to many others. Mediation always involves negation. Hegel somewhere reckons it to his credit that he has gone beyond Spinoza's insight that every determination is a negation to the realization of the converse: Every negation is a determination. Spinoza had meant that we define a thing by marking it off from what it is not; that everything we say about something is really a form of saying how it differs from some other thing and is thus a negation. Hegel's advice is to say, as he does in the introduction, that to discover a thing is not what we thought it was is never a dead end, but is always a gain. If we have negated then we have further determined. He speaks of negation that is not empty but is precisely the determinate negation of some specific previous understanding. In fact he is speaking of it in Paragraph 113, right after the passage I just read. He says:

The This is therefore established as *not* This, or as something superseded; and hence not as Nothing, but as a determinate Nothing the Nothing of content, namely of the This. Consequently, the sense-element is still present but not in the way it was imagined to be in the case of immediate certainty; not as the singular item that is "meant," but as a universal or as that which will be defined as a *property*. Suppression ("Putting Up") exhibits its true twofold meaning which we have seen in the negative: It is at once a negating and a preserving. Our Nothing as the Nothing of the This, preserves its immediacy and is itself sensuous, but it is a universal immediacy. Being, however, is a universal in virtue of having mediation or the negative within it; when it expresses thin in its immediacy, it is a differentiated determinate property. As a result, many such properties are established simultaneously, one being the negative of the other.

# Dissection of Morning Glory Vine Seed Pods

Dawn Shuman  
Cindy Lutz

We dissected a morning-glory vine from Mr. Schoener's garden.<sup>1</sup> The plant was intact, including the roots. The vine was past flowering and was producing seed pods, which became our focus.

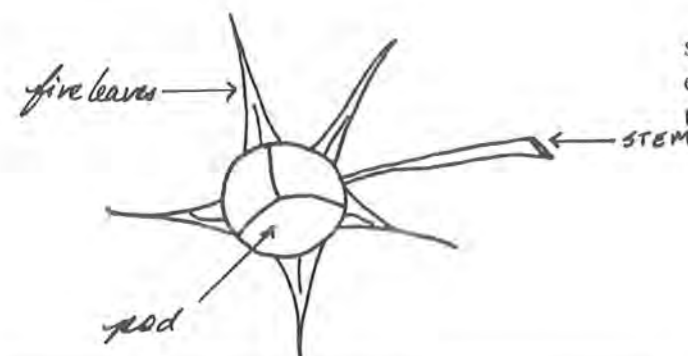
The earliest growth of the pods was somewhat unclear at first. In fact, we originally suspected that they might be flower buds. However, there were several dead flowers, still attached to what are called the "leaves" in the following notes, and when we detached the petals we found a very small, pod-shaped bud at the base of the flower. When we broke this mini-pod off of the stem and examined it under the microscope, the beginnings of the six sections in the mature seed pod were clearly visible. Therefore, we conclude that the plant flowers, then produces mini-pods after the flower dies, and that these pods then mature to produce viable seeds.

The function of these pods for the vine as a whole is obviously that of reproduction. The resemblance of the seed contents to miniature leaves is remarkable. If time were no object, it would be fascinating to germinate the seeds and observe them closely at each stage of growth. However, for now we are content with the information gathered from the pods and seeds themselves.

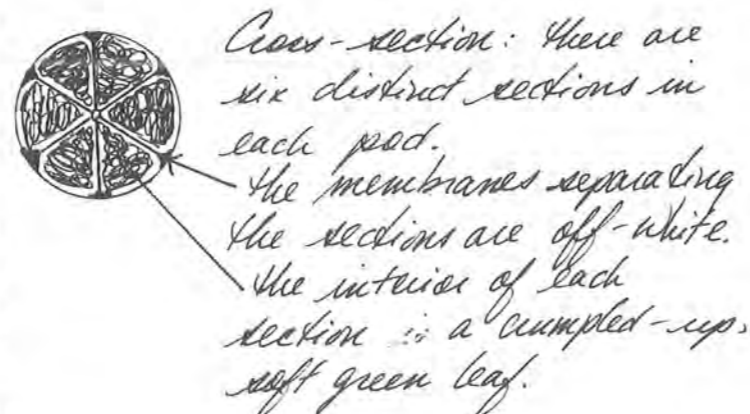
There were three basic levels of maturity of pods on the vine:

- Green (young) pods
- Green/brown (slightly dried out) pods
- Brown (completely dried out) pods

## GREEN PODS

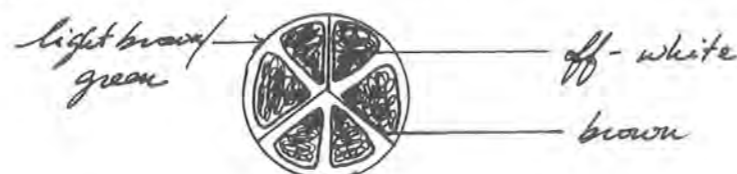


At this point, the pod is green with healthy leaves. At the spot where the three sections of the pod come together, there is a small stem-like object. When broken off, "milk" leaks out from inside the pod.

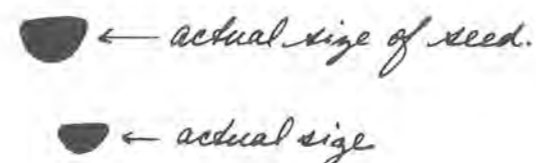


## GREEN/BROWN PODS

The external appearance of the more mature green/brown pod is very much like that of the green pod except for a slight difference in color and the fact that the leaves and casing of the pod are slightly dried out.

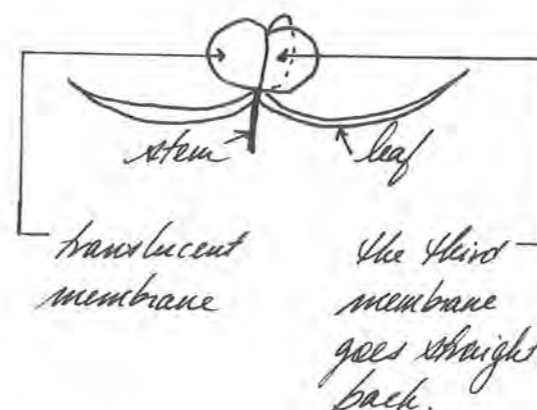


The sections have pulled away from each other slightly as well as away from the wall of the pod. The exterior of each section has turned off-white and the green that was casing each section has turned to brown. The seed can be removed at this point.

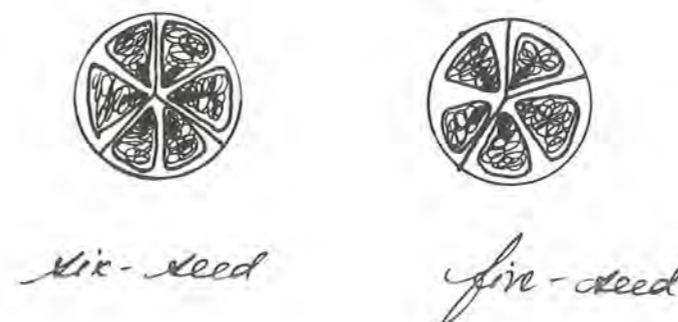


## BROWN PODS

The external appearance of the dried pod is much like that of the green and green/brown pods in shape, et cetera. However, while they felt solid to the touch, the dry pod feels hollow. Its outer membrane is hard and splitting apart at the three seams. When shaken, the dry pod sounds like a rattle. The three sections of the pod fall away easily to reveal six seeds, two in each compartment, separated by a stiff, Y-shaped membrane.



While almost all of the seed pods have six sections which form six seeds, we found a few with only five seeds.



<sup>1</sup> This was first submitted to Mr. Schoener's Freshman Laboratory Tutorial.

# Definition of Faith in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*

Devin Rushing-Schurr

For Jennifer Aileen Michael Schurr, whom I will happily marry on February 28, 1993.

## Introduction (The Proposal)

For Pascal, it happened at 10:30 p.m. on Monday, November 23, 1654. For Augustine, it happened in the summer of the year 386, when a child sang, "Take it and read, take it and read," and Augustine obeyed. It is the experience of total Christian conversion—the decisive, wondrous, all-consuming event in the life of a believer. Kierkegaard refers to it as "the moment." In the moment, the god gives me faith, by means of which I abandon my human understanding and embrace eternal happiness. In *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard tries to get inside the moment. The entire book is his attempt to give an account of the acquisition of Christian faith.

This is not to say that Kierkegaard is using *Philosophical Fragments* to proselytize. The book is an exercise in definition, nothing more. Kierkegaard wants to state clearly and precisely what faith is, but he does not seek to pass judgment:

Only let me again repeat: I do not attempt to decide whether Christianity is right or wrong. I have already said in [*Philosophical Fragments*] . . . that my bit of merit, if any, consists solely in presenting the problem. (PS 330)<sup>1</sup>

To this end, Kierkegaard writes in the voice of Johannes Climacus, and interested and inquisitive non-believer. Kierkegaard does not present us with a definition of faith as a point of doctrine. Instead, Climacus begins with a question about Socratic recollection and proceeds from there to develop the definition of faith *ex hypothesi* within an independent thought experiment.

Climacus's objectivity, his integrity, and his passion

for clarity and definition are admirable. Regardless of whether he personally will attain faith, he seeks to know what it is and what it is not. The spirit in which he conducts his experiment is summed up in his motto, "Better well hanged than ill wed," which serves as the epigraph of *Philosophical Fragments*. In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus sheds some light on the sentiment of this epigraph:

My idea is that if Christianity is the highest good, it is better for me to know definitely that I do not possess it, so that I may put forth every effort to acquire it; rather than that I should imagine that I have it, deluding myself, so that it does not even occur to me to seek it. (PS 340)

How are we to approach a book such as this, undertaken by an author whose attitude is, "All I have is my life, which I promptly stake every time a difficulty appears."? (PF 8) How can we respond to a man who casts his whole life in the stark alternatives of "Better well hanged than ill wed?" There really is only one thing for us to do: we owe it to him to determine whether, in fact, he was hanged well. Since defining faith is the prevailing task of *Philosophical Fragments*, the only question we should ask when trying to appraise the book is whether the definition is a good one. Has Climacus succeeded in giving us insight into what faith is and what it means to acquire it?

In attempting to answer this question, we will proceed in five steps. In Part I, we will briefly look at the structure of *Philosophical Fragments*, and we will cover some preliminaries for our reading of Climacus's definition of faith. In Part II, we will turn to the definition itself. This will necessitate further consideration of how the definition is developed in the book. In Part III, therefore, we will look at Climacus's presentation of the *absolute paradox*, a key stage in the development of the definition. This will make it necessary to think about the intended audience of the book. In Part IV, then, we will focus on Climacus's refutation of the Hegelians. Finally, in Part V, we will conclude with an overall as-

essment of Climacus's account of faith.

## Part I (Prenuptial Agreements)

Climacus divides *Philosophical Fragments* into six major sections (five numbered chapters with an interlude between Chapters IV and V). As the headings and subheadings of these sections show, the sequence of the book is, speaking broadly, an alteration between philosophic and poetic modes:

### Philosophy

Chapter I. Thought-Project

Chapter III. The Absolute Paradox: A Metaphysical Caprice (with Appendix)

Interlude. Is the Past More Necessary than the Future? Or Has the Possible, by Having Become Actual, Become More Necessary Than It Was? (with Appendix)

### Poetry

Chapter II. The God as Teacher and Savior: A Poetical Venture

Chapter IV. The Situation of the Contemporary Follower

Chapter V. The Follower at Second Hand

This constant switching back and forth between poetry and philosophy reflects the peculiar nature of the problem of faith, which Climacus characterizes as "pathetic-dialectic." (PS 345) The object of faith is the paradox that eternal happiness rests in a relationship to something historical: The eternal is rooted in the temporal. Grappling with this paradox is a pathetic problem, "for human passion culminates in a pathetic relationship to an eternal happiness." (PS 345) And it is a dialectical problem insofar as one must recognize that the paradox is indeed a paradox. Faith is possible only through the combination of these pathetic and dialectic qualities:

The problem here presented demands an existential inwardness adequate to an apprehension of its pathos, passion of thought sufficient to grasp the dialectical difficulty, and concentrated passion, because the task is to exist in it. (PS 345)

Thus we have a book that proceeds along two tracks at

once. For the dialectical part of the problem, there are the strict and categorical philosophical discussions (Chapters I and III, and the Interlude). And for the pathetic, there are the poetical chapters (II, IV, and V), which try to convey the passion that is bound up in the prospect of true eternal happiness. Of course, these are only broad divisions. Within each section, there is much blending of the poetic and the philosophic, if only because "the difficulty of the problem consists precisely in its being thus composite." (PS 345)

In a more particular way, the philosophic and poetic tracks of the book can be seen as addressing two specific audiences, each of which is at a disadvantage with respect to one side of the pathetic-dialectic problem. One audience consists of the mid-nineteenth century Hegelians who dominate the philosophical circles at the time of Climacus' writing. Climacus feels that these Hegelians have gone astray in their attempt to apply speculative philosophy to revealed religion. He thinks that they need a lesson in dialectic. It is primarily for the sake of the Hegelians that the book adopts its philosophic tone. Climacus wishes to address them directly, and thus he speaks their language.

This extends even to the point of adopting a completely new terminology. The word "Christianity" does not turn up in *Philosophical Fragments* until the very last page of the final chapter. Throughout the book, Climacus brings up traditional points of Christian doctrine, but all of the talk is thinly veiled in a quirky, Hegelian-sounding terminology: *the god, the occasion, the difference, the fullness of time*, et cetera.

The other audience of the book is composed of the apathetic, "matter of course" Christians. The typical member of this group is born into Christendom, baptized two weeks later, given a Bible at the appointed age, and taught over time to mouth the tenets of Christianity by rote. This person does not reflect on what it means to be a Christian. Christianity is a matter of custom, the mark of a respectable citizen, but it is not a subjective and eternal relationship with Christ. This group takes Christianity for granted, a fact that incenses Climacus:

Although I am only an outsider, I have at least understood so much, that the only unpardonable offense against the majesty of Christianity is for the individual to take his relationship to it for granted, treating it as a matter of course. (PS 19)

Primarily for these apathetic Christians has Climacus prepared the poetic side of the book. He seeks to rouse

<sup>1</sup> PF—Kierkegaard. *Philosophical Fragments*. Trans. H. and E. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

PS—Kierkegaard. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. Trans. D. Swenson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.

References to the Bible and Shakespeare are in standard form.

their passions, to spur them to become personally engaged in the issue of eternal happiness, and to put an end to their unreflective ways. To this end, the odd terminology serves a second function. By avoiding customary words that the apathetic Christians would instantly recognize, Climacus is able to present the ideas of Christianity in a fresh and unfamiliar way. He catches the apathetic Christians off guard, and for once they actually hear what they themselves have been reciting since youth.

This leads to an interesting result in the book. Caught in the cross fire between Climacus and the Hegelians, the apathetic Christians sit in their pews and watch as barrages of strange terms fly over head. Every now and then, one of these Christians will lay hold of an idea that seems familiar and, recognizing it as Christian, will bolt up to exclaim righteously, "What you are composing is the shabbiest plagiarism ever to appear," (PF 35) or "you talk like a book, and, what is unfortunate for you, like a very specific book," (PF 68) or something similar. This happens with amazing regularity. Each chapter ends with the sudden insertion of a snippet of dialogue between Climacus and one of these Christians. The Christian criticizes Climacus for his manner of speaking, and Climacus responds by suggesting that, instead of being angry, the person should perhaps try to pay attention to the ideas that are being put forth.

To get a general sense of the content of each of the two major tracks of the book, we should look briefly at Chapters I and II, in which the philosophic and the poetic are introduced.

Chapter I, "Thought-Project," establishes the philosophical exercise that will occupy the book. It begins with reflections on Socrates. Climacus observes that all philosophy involves some form of the Socratic theory of recollection insofar as philosophy presupposes every human's innate relationship with the truth. For this reason, says Climacus, philosophers who claim to have gone beyond Socrates have not really done so. Climacus then mediated on what "beyond Socrates" would mean. This leads to the assignment of the thought-project: to go truly beyond Socrates by constructing a system that departs radically from the theory of recollection. Viewed Socratically, the moment in time in which the learner passes from ignorance to knowledge is merely accidental, for the learner has been in possession of the truth all along. By contrast, Climacus's project starts from the hypothesis that "the moment in time must have such decisive significance that for no moment will I be able to forget it. . ." (PF 13) All of *Philosophical Fragments* is

framed by the thought-project, which is another way of saying that the whole book is an exploration of the moment.

Chapter II, "The God as Teacher and Savior: A Poetical Venture," begins the poetic track of the book. In the famous parable of the king and the maiden, Climacus tells the story of a loving god who seeks to be understood by the lowliest human. But true understanding requires equality, and the inequality of the god and the human seems insurmountable. Thus, Climacus commissions a poet (himself) to construct a story that enables the unequal to be made equal, so that the god and the human can embrace one another happily.

These two opening chapters prepare us for how the rest of the book unfolds. Throughout *Philosophical Fragments* there is an interweaving of the poetical venture and the philosophical project. These two strands are sometimes difficult to distinguish. In trying to keep them apart, one can easily get tangled up within them. With this as our introduction to the book, let us now turn to the presentation of faith.

## Part II (Writing the Vows)

In one sense, it is not at all difficult to discover what Climacus thinks about faith. All we need to do is open up *Philosophical Fragments* to the seventh paragraph of Chapter IV and, behold, there sits a formal definition of the term. This is true. Climacus's definition is a beautiful, powerful, concise representation of Christian belief. But to read the definition requires a bit more preparation. Climacus's definition of faith happens to be the point of convergence of three distinct lines of thought, one from each of the first three chapters of the book. Thus, before we look at the definition itself, we should briefly point to these three lines.

In Chapter I, Climacus begins to work out some of the implications of his hypothesis that the moment must have decisive significance. If the moment is to be truly decisive, it must effect a complete transformation of the learner, comparable in importance to the transition from "not to be" to "to be." It must be the transition from untruth to truth. For this to occur, the learner prior to the moment must be untruth—must be completely oblivious to the existence of truth. Moreover, the learner must not even be in a condition to understand the truth. If the learner is already in a condition to understand the truth, then the learner can begin to inquire after it. In such a case, the learner's discovery of the truth would turn out

to be self-motivated and self-accomplished, and hence merely Socratic. Thus, if the moment is to be of decisive significance it must contain not only the gift of truth, but also the very condition for understanding the truth. *The condition* is just as much a gift as is the truth itself, and both are given within the moment. This condition, as it turns out, is faith.

Chapter II, as we have said, is the beginning of the poetical venture. Given a god who loves the human but nevertheless cannot be understood by the human, the poet has the formidable task of finding a meeting ground for human and god, "a point of unity where there is in truth love's understanding." (PF 28) This point of unity also turns out to be faith.

In Chapter III, Climacus reflects on the nature of the understanding. He observes that the understanding has the potential to collide with what is, for it, a mortal threat. He gives this threat the name "absolute paradox." The *absolute paradox* is, quite simply, "something that thought itself cannot think." (PF 37) When the understanding collides with the paradox, there are two possible outcomes. The understanding can assert itself by denying the paradox—this is called "offense at the paradox"—or the understanding can give way to the paradox. The latter opinion, this giving way, becomes the act of faith.

These are our three lines. Let us see how they come together. After the metaphysical caprice of Chapter III, Chapter IV returns abruptly to the poetic mode and tells a story of the god coming down and taking the form of a man. The god-man is careful not to reveal himself directly as the god, but nevertheless the manner in which he goes about teaching in the streets raises quite a stir. People take interest in the god-man in different ways, and some speculate as to who he might be. We pick up the story with the following lengthy passage, which culminates in Climacus's definition of faith (the ellipses represent the omission of roughly two hundred words):

The appearance of the god is now the news of the day. . . the occasion for much loose and empty talk. . . But for the learner the news of the day is not an occasion for something else, . . . it is the eternal, the beginning of eternity. The news of the day is the beginning of eternity! If the god had let himself be born in an inn, wrapped in rags, laid in a manger—the swaddling clothes of the eternal, is indeed its actual form, just as in this assumed case, so that *the moment* is actually the decision of eternity! If the god does not pro-

vide the condition to understand this, how will it ever occur to the learner? But that the god provides this condition has already been explicated as the consequence of *the moment*, and we have shown that the moment is the paradox and without this we come no further but go back to Socrates. . .

How, then, does the learner come to an understanding with this paradox, for we do not say that he is supposed to understand the paradox, but is only to understand that this is the paradox. We have already shown how this occurs. It occurs when the understanding and the paradox happily encounter each other in the moment, when the understanding steps aside and the paradox gives itself, and the third something, the something in which this occurs (for it does not occur through the understanding, which is discharged, or through the paradox, which gives itself—consequently *in* something), is that happy passion to which we shall now give a name, although for us it is not a matter of the name. We shall call it *faith*. This passion, then, must be that above mentioned condition that the paradox provides. (PF 58-59)

Thus we have Climacus's definition of faith. *Faith* is the condition—provided by the moment—which enables me to let go of my understanding in order to make way for a paradox, the paradox that states that my eternal consciousness begins with an historical event.

This definition is an achievement in brevity. If we unpack what has been said earlier in the book regarding the philosophical content of the moment; if we bring forward what we have been shown poetically about the loving, suffering god; and if, further, we translate all of this out of its strange terminology and put it back into Christian dress—if we do all of this, then, without adding anything essential to Climacus's words, we see the expression of Christian faith to be something like the following:

God, out of love for me, you became human and suffered—the all-powerful God suffered! You did this for me because it was the only way I could be made to see that I have sinned and that, despite my sin, you still love me. Right now, in this glorious moment, I have for the first time seen that I truly have sinned and that through my sin I had distanced myself from you and from

eternity. But in this very same moment you have given me the boldness to accept your love. That in one moment I could come to face with eternal happiness, that by entering once into human history as you reached across time to embrace all who will accept you—these things are beyond my comprehension, they are repellent to my understanding. But in this moment you have given me faith to believe what I cannot understand, and in this moment I do believe it.

All of this is contained in the short statement that faith arrives in the moment and enables the understanding to submit to the paradox.

But Climacus does not choose to define faith in the way that he does merely for the sake of shorthand. Simply to translate his experiment back into the standard Christian wording is to do a disservice to Climacus and betray a misunderstanding of his whole enterprise. He intentionally expresses the familiar concept of faith in the awkward terminology of moment, condition, and absolute paradox. The terminology reflects his attempt throughout the book to present the essence of Christianity in a new light in order to command the attention of the philosopher as well as the lazy Christian. In the guise of a philosophical explication of an alternative to Socratic recollection, *Philosophical Fragments* is Climacus's attempt to bring out the pathos of faith, the passion that must attend a decision on which eternal life depends. Before we assess the definition of faith on the basis of how accurately it expresses the traditional notion of Christian faith, we should explore some of the nontraditional aspects of Climacus's account. Thus, we will proceed to a more careful study of the third chapter of the book, "The Absolute Paradox: A Metaphysical Caprice."

Does Climacus succeed in giving us insight into what faith is and what it means to acquire it? We cannot answer the question until we look more closely at how the definition is developed within the book. Has Climacus been hanged well? So far, we have not seen any hangings. Again we come back to that epigraph, "Better well hanged than ill wed." Those words—they are borrowed from a clown in a Shakespearean comedy, yet they loom heavily over our discussion, giving it an air not of comedy but of tragedy. If this is indeed a tragedy, if Climacus really is to be hanged, then he must somewhere make a tragic mistake. We state this as a simple literary fact. Instead of stopping now to dwell on the matter, let us continue with our analysis.

### Part III (The Last-Minute Crisis)

At the beginning of Chapter III, we leave the thought project and the poetical venture behind. We put on hold our investigation of the moment, and we temporarily suspend our story of the god who seeks to reach an understanding with the human. We do this in order to embark on what Climacus calls a "metaphysical caprice." The metaphysical caprice is a logically self-contained discussion of thought and paradox. Just as the book as a whole proceeds from the premise of the moment, so too does Chapter III begin with a premise of its own, namely, that thought is passionate. From this premise alone Climacus derives almost everything that he says within Chapter III. Much of what is said in this chapter is carried forward into the remainder of the book. The metaphysical caprice turns out to be an important step for the thought-project. But the presentation of Chapter III is such that the metaphysical caprice could, if necessary, stand entirely on its own. In this way, we can view Chapter III as a discourse within a discourse.

The premise with which Chapter III begins—that thought is passionate—is not entirely new. That thought is in some way erotic has been proposed by many ("The sense of wonder is the mark of the philosopher."). And that there is something appetitive about our continual acquisition of knowledge has also been noted before ("All people by nature desire to know."). But to this premise Climacus joins the observation that all passions are self-destructive. This leads to a remarkable conclusion that is, to my knowledge, original: Thought ultimately seeks its own annihilation.

Let us begin our discussion of Chapter III with Climacus's observation that all passions tend toward their own destruction. This is certainly true of the appetites. When I am hungry, the hunger causes me to eat, and eating destroys my hunger. Thus, the hunger brings about its own destruction. By analogy, this is sometimes said of the higher passions, too:

If music be the food of love, play on,  
Give me excess of it; that, surfeiting,  
The appetite may sicken, and so die. . .  
(*Twelfth Night* or *What You Will* I. i. 1)

But for Climacus, the way in which the understanding seeks its own destruction is more complicated. It is more in line with certain description of the self-destructiveness of erotic love. The best analogy is the familiar poetical treatment of the moth and the candle-flame.

Here, the moth is the lover, the flame is the beloved, and erotic love is that which seeks the union of the two. Driven by erotic love, the moth passes closer and closer to the flame. This, in turn, drives erotic love higher and higher. When Eros is at its highest, the moth seeks to become one with the flame. But what would happen if erotic love achieved what it wants, of the moth actually flew into the flame and burned? The love would die. The love would die because the moth would die. Erotic love lies precisely in the duality, in the opposition. When the lover loves the beloved so strongly that it actually dies for the sake of the beloved, the lover is gone, the duality is gone, the opposition is gone. There is no longer any place for erotic love. Erotic love, if it achieves the union it seeks, must itself die in the process. In this way, say the poets, erotic love is self-destructive.

So too is thought, according to Climacus. We see that thought constantly pushes outward toward its own boundaries. It seeks out that which it does not know, and it wrestles with the unknown until it comprehends it. Most have interpreted this as a positive desire to grow and to gain knowledge, but Climacus interprets this continual seeking to go beyond as an indication of self-destructive passion. This is most clearly seen, he says, in our love affair with the paradoxical. We cannot disengage ourselves easily from a paradox. Though paradox defies our understanding, for this reason alone we grapple with it more fiercely than with any other object of thought. Thought is most passionate when it confronts what it cannot immediately understand. Climacus says that this is an indication of its ultimate potentiation. In continually seeking to know, thought is really only failing in its attempt to find that which it cannot know. What the understanding ultimately seeks is the *absolute paradox*; "something that thought itself cannot think."

"That which cannot be thought"—this formal, verbal statement is the paradox. It is not a description of some other paradox. The very words "that which cannot be thought" are the rocks on which thought wrecks itself. Later in the book, however, Climacus gives the name "absolute paradox" to another, more substantial paradox. He takes the paradox that stands at the heart of Christianity—namely, that eternal consciousness depends on a relationship to historical knowledge—and he gives this the name "absolute paradox." By looking closely at the presentation in Chapter III, I hope to show that this later appellation presents difficulties. While the paradoxical notion that eternity meets time at one specific point in history may be the essential paradox for Christianity, it should not be called an absolute *logical* paradox. Pre-

cisely because it has content, precisely because it can be called a paradox of eternity and temporality, it is not the formally absolute paradox of "that which cannot be thought."

After stating that thought seeks to collide with "something that thought itself cannot think," Chapter III proceeds with a restatement of the paradox. First, the paradox becomes *the unknown*. This is a proper designation. Insofar as the paradox is that which cannot be thought, it is in principle and by definition both unknown and unknowable. Because it cannot be thought, it is the absolutely unknown.

Next, apparently for the sake of shorthand, Climacus seeks to give the unknown a name. Again, this is legitimate. If the name does not imply anything about the unknown, and if the familiarity of a name does not fool us into thinking that we therefore know something about the unknown (which, by definition, we cannot), then what harm can there be in giving the unknown a name? Climacus chooses to call the unknown "the god":

But what is this unknown against which the understanding in its paradoxical passion collides and which even disturbs man and his self-knowledge? It is the unknown. But it is not a human being, insofar as he knows a man, or anything else that he knows. Therefore let us call the unknown *the god*. It is only a name we give to it. (PF 39)

From here, Climacus takes us through a long diversion in order to tell us something that we already know, namely, that we cannot prove the existence of *the god*. We cannot use works, wisdom in nature, or goodness in governance to say anything about the god, for in principle we can say nothing about the god except that the god is that which cannot be thought.

Nevertheless, thought will not rest until it can say something concrete about the god. This is why the absolute paradox is paradoxical, and it is why the absolute paradox becomes impassioned. It seeks to do the only things it knows how to do: to think and to understand. But the more it engages with the god, the unknown, the paradox, the more it becomes frustrated by the fact that it cannot think it or understand it.

Everywhere it turns, thought collides with the unknown. Thought cannot simply give up and be content to allow that there is something that it cannot know. Such apathy is not in thought's nature:

To declare that it is the unknown because we cannot know it, and that even if we could know it we could not express it, does not satisfy the passion, although it has correctly perceived the unknown as frontier. But a frontier is expressly the passion's torment, even though it is also its incentive. (PF 44)

The unknown is a frontier at which thought continually arrives, which is another way of saying that the unknown is beyond, or is the absolutely different. "But it is the absolutely different in which there is no distinguishing mark." (PF 44-45) We cannot say that it is different from this or different from that or different in some specific way. It is the absolutely different, and as such even its differentness defies description.

Thought cannot think the absolutely different as such. So what does it do? It begins to conjure up many, varied, and fantastic things, attempting to lay hold of the god by trying to generate what is different from anything that it knows. This, of course, cannot work. No matter what novel or strange conception thought comes up with, the conception is still a product of thought, and as such it is known. To arrive at the absolutely different, thought would have to transcend itself completely. But any myth that it generated is created from within itself. Thus, deep down, thought realizes that it has not arrived at the god, but at its own fabrications.

The unknown is not just something different, it is *the difference*. It is so different that there is no point of reference or distinguishing mark by which thought can gauge the difference. This leads to an interesting result. Because thought can in no way distinguish itself from the different, it begins to confuse itself with the different:

If the difference cannot be grasped securely because there is no distinguishing mark, then, as with all such dialectical opposites, so it is with the difference and the likeness—they are identical. Adhering to the understanding, the difference has so confused the understanding that it does not know itself and quite consistently confuses itself with the difference. (PF 45)

Thus we see what strangeness results in this war between thought and the almighty absolute paradox. How will the matter end? Will thought find a way to preserve itself, or, following its true passion, will it allow itself to collapse beneath the force of the absolute paradox? We

have a mortal contest. We have two warriors. Formally, we can already state that there are two possible decisive outcomes.

But before we proceed, let us pause to see where we have come in the argument and how we have gotten here. We started with the premise that thought is passionate. From this, and from the self-destructiveness of passions in general, we said that thought must in some way will its own downfall. Reflecting on how thought works, we recognized that thought loves to embroil itself in paradox. This as a clue led us to "that which cannot be thought," which we have variously called "the absolute paradox," "the unknown," "the god," and "the difference." We suspected that thought could neither free itself from the paradox nor conquer it. Ultimately, lacking any distinguishing mark between itself and the paradox, thought began to confuse itself with the paradox.

All of this we derived from the opening premise of Chapter III simply by reflecting on the nature of thought, of passion, and of paradox. We have not had to invoke the moment, nor the theory of recollection *per se*. That is, we still stand in isolation from the first two chapters of *Philosophical Fragments*.

Ultimately, of course, Climacus wants the absolute paradox to be a Christian paradox. The highly abstract paradox of "something that thought itself cannot think" is objectified into the Christian paradox of temporality and eternity. The god that was simply defined as "the unknown" becomes the god about whom we indeed know much—a loving god, a god who suffers for our sake, a god who gives us the paradox in order to make us aware of our sins. Because he is ultimately concerned with Christianity and Christian faith, Climacus begins at this point in the argument to edge his way back toward Christian conceptions.

Why are we different from the god? Climacus harkens back to Chapter I:

...if a human being is to come truly to know something about the unknown (god), he must first come to know that it is different from him, absolutely different from him. ...But if the god is to be absolutely different from a human being, this can have its basis not in that which man owes to the god, (for to that extent they are akin) but in that which he owes himself or in that which he himself has committed. What, then, is the difference? Indeed, what else but sin, since the difference, the absolute difference, must have been caused by the individual himself. (PF 46-47)

In just these few remarks, the god that at one time was simply synonymous with the unknown has become quite recognizable. That we "owe" something to the god makes the god our creator. That the difference is somebody's fault—it is my own fault—gives us the fall and the concept of *sin*.

Once this not-so-sly transition takes place, in which the absolutely unknown god of Chapter III is replaced by the Christian god of Chapter I, we have completely abandoned the abstract, purely logical argument of the absolute paradox. This, of course, is as it should be. Climacus never meant for the metaphysical caprice to go uncorrupted. *Philosophical Fragments* is not a treatise on formal logic. It is a half-poetic, largely comical book about Christian faith. This conspicuous, shameless betrayal of the formal argument is perfectly in keeping with Climacus's ironic style. Nevertheless, this deviation from the formal argument leaves us with a question: If he never intended to see the formal argument through to the end, why did he embark on it in the first place? What does the abstract, theoretical treatment of thought and paradox add to the book? We ask the question now, but let us hold off on the answer. Let us first look at the rest of the argument as given, rife though it be with intrusions from Chapters I and II.

The god is now the god of Chapter I who seeks to make us aware of the difference (*sin*). And at the same time the god is the god of Chapter II who seeks to annihilate all difference so that god and human can become equal:

Thus the paradox becomes even more terrible, or the same paradox has the duplexity by which it manifests itself as the absolute—negatively, by bringing into prominence the absolute difference of *sin* and, positively, by wanting to annul his absolute difference in the absolute equality. (PF 47)

The absolute paradox, then, is not simply the god (as it was before when the god was simply the unknown), but it turns out also to be a gift of the god. In this way, it can be said that the god gives itself for the sake of the human.

Now, as we had already predicted, there are two decisive ways that the collision of thought with the paradox can turn out. Before returning to our question about the formal beginnings of the metaphysical caprice, let us look at these two options and consider how they help us to understand Christian faith.

We shall not be in a hurry, and even though some may think that we are wasting time instead of arriving at a decision, our consolation is that it still does not therefore follow that our efforts are wasted. (PF 25)

The first possible outcome of the collision is taken up in the appendix to Chapter III, "Offense at the Paradox: An Acoustical Illusion." Although technically a different section from Chapter III, the appendix continues in the same abstract and philosophical mode.

*Offense* occurs when thought completely rejects the paradox in order to preserve itself. Seeing the paradox—the gift of the god—as a mortal threat, thought summons the strength to thrust the paradox away once and for all. Thought does this precisely because of the paradoxicalness of the paradox. All that thought knows is that it can think, and it is too prideful to entertain the possibility that there is anything which it cannot think.

It is easy to see how the notion of offense applies to Christianity. When the understanding encounters the unlikely story of Christianity, offense may very well be the result. Someone tells us that the eternal god made an appearance in history as a particular human being. The person says that the god did this only once, about nineteen centuries ago in the Near East.

"Sure," I say, "and I have some land in Florida. . . but tell me, why would god do what you describe?"

"To suffer and die in order to save you from *sin*."

"To save *me* from *sin*? How do you know this? How do you know that what you are saying is not just a clever myth? Maybe it was a good story, and it caught on, and now millions of people believe it. But how do I know that those millions of people are not wrong, that they are not deluding themselves, that they are not throwing away their entire lives because of some concoction of the imagination? What can you do to persuade me?"

"I cannot persuade you. There is no way for me to prove to you that it is anything but a story. But I believe that it is not just a story. Even though it lies outside my understanding, I believe it to be real. And now I will tell you something else: Your own eternal happiness depends on whether *you* believe it. I know this challenge of mine offends you, but I offer it anyway. Do not expect to make sense out of what I have told you. The whole point of it is that it cannot be understood. It must be believed."

By nature, we seek to know and to understand. The understanding is our most loyal ally. In some ways, our understanding is all that we have. Christianity challenges the understanding and defies it, for all of Christianity is

built upon paradox. The understanding chokes on paradox. The notion that in order to live eternally one has to throw away one's understanding is perhaps the most abhorrent notion ever presented to a human being.

Thus, thought may take offense at the paradox. Climacus says that when this occurs it is thought misunderstanding its own passion. Thought seeks clarity. But the hypothesis of the metaphysical caprice is that what thought really wants is to pass away. Here, in the collision with the paradox, thought finally has a chance to realize its own ultimate goal. But offense occurs when thought mistakenly thinks that the more superficial drive, the urge to know and to understand, is its true tendency.

This is one of the great advances of the book. Why would eternal happiness require from us something as unnatural as the complete forfeiture of our understanding? Climacus's metaphysical caprice gives us reason to think that, ultimately, such forfeiture may not be altogether unnatural. We see that though is continually on the move, that it acts all the time. It does not seem to be erotic in this way. Perhaps, then, it really does seek a kind of passing away. Perhaps thought continues to move only because it is seeking a point of rest. Perhaps thought really does wish to stop thinking. This would not go any further toward making the paradoxes of Christianity reasonable (if they became reasonable they could not be thought's resting point), nor would it make faith any easier (just because it may be in thought's nature to give way to the paradox does not mean that thought can know its own nature). But it does suggest that the phenomenon of faith might make a certain amount of sense. Often, faith is looked upon as a kind of feebleness of mind, an easy way out for those who lack intellectual vigor and integrity. Climacus's metaphysical caprice gives us another way to look at the issue.

This brings us to the other possible outcome of the collision, the so-called happier collision which takes place in faith. The discussion of this second option does not occur in the appendix. After the offense, Climacus suddenly departs from the philosophic mode of presentation and moves on to Chapter IV, "The Situation of the Contemporary Follower." The chapter begins with the words, "So, then (to continue with our poem). . ." (PF 55), putting us securely back into the poetic mode of the book.

We have already discussed what happens in Chapter IV. The story is told in which the god comes down and takes a human form. As his presence and his teachings are reported, some fortunate souls realize that "the news of the day is the beginning of eternity." This notion, that one can find eternity within a historical moment, is a

paradox. In Chapter IV, it becomes not just a paradox, but the *absolute paradox*. The person who embraces the beginning of eternity does so at the expense of the understanding.

In one sense, this is the logical end of the argument begun in Chapter III. The metaphysical caprice begins with passionate thought, predicts a collision between thought and the absolute paradox, and then states that there are two possible results. One possible result, offense, is taken up in the appendix. The other result, the happy collision in faith, is dealt with here in Chapter IV.

In another sense, however, we have distanced ourselves as far as possible from the original project of Chapter III. Chapter III began as an abstract and isolated discussion of thought and the absolute paradox. After a while, though, the formal argument was compromised. Now, not only have we gone back to poetry, but the absolute paradox has become something completely other than it was. "That which cannot be thought" has turned into "My eternal happiness depends on my relationship to an historical event."

We shall consider the issue of formality in just a moment. First, though, let us try to see how it is possible that this latter paradox comes to be called the "absolute paradox."

I am a thinking being, but I am also an existing human being. As a human being, I have a great interest in my existence and its continuation. How much more interest must I therefore take in my own eternity! What prospect could engender in me more pathos than the prospect of eternal happiness? And if it should so happen that the possibility of eternal consciousness lies in a single decision, would that not have to be the most important decision in my life? It would be an absolute decision.

But my life—it takes place in time. Therefore, any decision I make in this life must be a decision made in time. Is it not paradoxical that my own eternity is something that is decided in time? Of course it is a paradox, but it is not the absolute paradox of thought. Of thought? Perhaps not. From the standpoint of logic, "that which cannot be thought" is the absolute paradox of thought. But here we are not talking about thought; we are talking about existence. Viewed existentially, the paradox that decides the eternity of my being must surely be called an "absolute paradox."

Here lies one of the most important messages of *Philosophical Fragments*. The paradox of Christianity is absolute in a way that differs from logical absoluteness. In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Climacus refers to Christianity as an "existential com-

munication" as opposed to a philosophical doctrine or logical structure. (PS 339) Christianity is not philosophy, and we should not treat it as if it were. If Christianity claims that its basis is a paradox, then attacking the paradox on a purely theoretical level does not ultimately do much good. Some thinkers do this, but in so doing they often fail to attach themselves personally to the pathos of the paradox. In most cases, a paradox is interesting only insofar as it is a logical riddle. The terms of the paradox, taken individually, do not need to be intrinsically interesting. But this Christian paradox is a paradox of eternal life, a term which should command some attention even from the coldest of logicians.

This gives us some insight into the rhetorical value of the transition made during the metaphysical caprice. By starting on a lofty and abstruse theoretical plane, then shamelessly violating the logic of the argument, then descending without apology to the realm of pure poetry, Climacus tries to show how foolish it is to try to treat Christianity as if it were a philosophical position or a logical problem.

In a sense, this answers our question of why Chapter III begins as a formal argument only to be abandoned later. But it is only a partial answer. While, for ourselves as readers, we may get much out of Climacus's satirical treatment of the purely philosophical approach to Christian doctrine, we must consider that Climacus wrote at a particular time to a particular philosophical audience. To fully appreciate the richness of his attack on philosophical treatments of Christian faith, we must consider how Climacus's metaphysical caprice stands in relation to Hegelianism, the prevailing philosophical trend in Climacus's day.

#### Part IV (The Rival Suitors)

The interlude between Chapters IV and V begins as follows:

My dear reader! We assume, then, that this teacher has appeared, that he is dead and buried, and that an interval of time has elapsed between Chapters IV and V. Also in a comedy there may be an interval of several years between two acts. To suggest this passage of time, the orchestra sometimes plays a symphony or something similar in order to shorten the time by filling it up. (PF 72)

The clear implication of this passage is that *Philosophi-*

*cal Fragments* should itself be thought of as a play. It would, of course, be a play in five acts, since there are five chapters. This fact, together with the epigraph, suggests Shakespeare. But which play? The epigraph is from *Twelfth Night or What You Will*, but Climacus refers to Shakespeare throughout the book: *As You Like It*, *King Lear*, *All's Well that Ends Well*. Which play? One of these, a combination, a different play entirely? In Shakespeare, the turning point of a play often occurs in the third act. The third act of *Philosophical Fragments* is, of course, "The Absolute Paradox: A Metaphysical Caprice." Let us return there and look for further clues.

There is only one direct reference to Shakespeare in all of Chapter III. It does not occur in the body of the chapter but stands slightly apart from the book. It is tucked away insignificantly in the middle of a footnote:

A fly, when it is, has just as much being as the god; with regard to factual being, the stupid comment I write here has just as much being as Spinoza's profundity, for the Hamlet dialectic, to be or not to be, applies to factual being. (PF 41)

The Hamlet dialectic, the soliloquy of "To be or not to be," does in fact occur in Act III of *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. It need hardly be said that "To be or not to be" is central to the meaning of *Philosophical Fragments*. The subject of the book is the acquisition of faith, which brings about a total transformation in the learner. Climacus calls this change one of *rebirth*. He says in several places that it is "the transition from *not to be* to *to be*." Also, "To be or not to be" is the great dialectic of the understanding, which in the moment must decide between its outward tendency toward self-preservation and its inward desire to pass out of existence.

But "To be or not to be" is perhaps the single most overworked soliloquy in all of literature. It is hard to conceive of any discussion of existence that could not in some way be linked to this famous speech. Thus, we should not make too much of the connection. In a more significant way, though, Act III of *Hamlet* is a good model for Chapter III of *Philosophical Fragments*. A key event in Act III of *Hamlet* is the presentation of the *Mouse-trap*, which is a play within a play just as Chapter III is a discourse within a discourse.

*The Mouse-trap* is performed for the audience of Claudius, King of Denmark. Hamlet's purpose in showing the play is to represent to Claudius that his reign is illegitimate and his marriage ill-gotten. Likewise, the

metaphysical caprice is performed for the Hegelians (Hans Lassen Martensent, *et al.*) who hold dominion over the philosophical circles in the Denmark of Climacus's time. Climacus uses the metaphysical caprice to demonstrate that the Hegelians's appropriation of revealed religion is illegitimate, and that despite their nominal Christianity, they are not truly wed to Christ. Climacus objects to what the Hegelians have done on their way toward an overarching conception of Spirit. As Climacus says in the preface to the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, "better well hung than by an unfortunate marriage to be brought into systematic relationship with all the world." (PS 3)

In many ways, *The Mouse-trap* can be seen as representative of the whole of *Hamlet*. To appreciate this, of course, we must see how Hamlet and Claudius interact with one another throughout all five acts of the play. Likewise, if we are going to see how the metaphysical caprice addresses the Hegelian lords, we should first point out what the book as a whole has to say to them. "We shall take our time—after all, there is no need to hurry." (PF 16)

Climacus's assessment of the Hegelians seems to be as follows. For the Hegelians, all contradictories are merely relative. Because all contradictories are merely relative, they are all subject to mediation. The Hegelian's whole enterprise is based on this presupposition. Mediation occurs within System (speculative philosophy). In System, the opposing terms of a paradox or contradiction are set over against one another, and the dialectical distinctions between them are drawn. Upon inspection, it becomes clear that the opposing terms, properly viewed, are actually identical. This being so, the barrier between them dissolves, the opposition ceases, and the terms are synthesized into a higher unity. This is mediation. Through mediation, System attends to the unfolding of the Idea. The Idea, of course, is immanently knowable by Mind.

*Philosophical Fragments* as a whole is a vehicle for Climacus to state two main objections to the Hegelians, one regarding their axiom that *all* oppositions can be mediated.

Climacus thinks that the Hegelians have entirely misunderstood what dialectic is. As he says, "Basically, an unshakable insistence upon the absolute and absolute distinctions is precisely what makes a good dialectician." (PF 108) Socrates understood this. Socrates was always pursuing precision in definition; he was always trying to cordon off one idea from another in hope of seeing correctly how the various ideas relate to and inter-

penetrate (but not become) one another.

Hegelians make distinctions, too, but even before doing so they have resigned themselves to the supposition that no distinctions can hold. They draw lines of division, but only in order to erase them. They are so caught up in the motion of System, they are so eager to mediate in order to get on to the next paradox, that they fail to experience the forcefulness of the paradox that is right in front of them. This, in part, is why we see constant reference to Socrates in *Philosophical Fragments*. Climacus is trying to shame the Hegelians into recognizing that their dialectic is weak and sloppy. By continually eulogizing Socrates as the greatest of all dialecticians, Climacus hopes to show the Hegelians that in going "beyond" Socrates they have actually failed to get even as far as he.

Climacus attributes the feebleness of the Hegelians' dialectic to lack of passion:

...dialectics has lost its passion; just as it has become so easy and light-hearted a thing to think contradictions—for it is passion that gives tension to the contradiction, and when passion is taken away the contradiction becomes a mere pleasantry, a *bon mot*. . . (PS 345)

The Hegelians are too much at ease with contradiction. They have grown so accustomed to the inevitable resolution of paradoxes that they no longer can feel the tension that makes a paradox unsettling. This gives us yet another way to view the two modes of presentation in *Philosophical Fragments*. Climacus's endless switching between poetry and philosophy is not just a depiction of the pathetic-dialectic problem of faith, but it is also a constant, inescapable reminder that thought cannot be separated from life, that intellect cannot be separated from passion. As Climacus says at the beginning of Chapter III, "the paradox is the passion of thought, and the thinker without the paradox is like the lover without passion: a mediocre fellow." (PF 37)

So it is that the entirety of *Philosophical Fragments* is an attack on the dialectical methods of the Hegelians. Ultimately, though, Climacus is less concerned with the Hegelians' faulty methods than with where those faulty methods lead.

*Hamlet*

...you shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.

(*Hamlet* III. ii. 270)

For the Hegelians, all paradoxes are relative, even those of Christianity. In their quest to mediate all oppositions, the Hegelians have sought to bring Christianity under the domain of speculative philosophy. By explaining the articles of Christian belief, they claim to have removed the need for Christian faith. Faith is crude and primitive. It lacks rationality. It yearns to be elevated to a higher form of knowing. But through System, all in principle is ultimately knowable. According to the Hegelians, Christianity can be understood. This being so, the Hegelians say that they no longer have a need for faith. But despite their lack of faith, the Hegelians still consider themselves to be Christians.

Climacus cannot abide the Hegelians' attempt to replace faith with reason. Faith is the very core of Christianity. If ever faith were made unnecessary, Christianity would no longer have a place in the world.

*Player Queen*

But here and hence pursue me lasting strife  
If once a widow, ever I be a wife!

(*Hamlet* III. ii. 228)

To render faith reasonable kills it. The Hegelians cannot kill faith and still hope to wed themselves to Christ. It simply will not happen.

This brings us to the second and more important of Climacus's objections to the Hegelians. He rejects their axiom that all oppositions are merely relative. The Hegelians seek to mediate Christianity and to explain its central paradoxes. But Climacus maintains that the paradox at the heart of Christianity cannot be resolved, and that Christianity itself cannot be brought into conformity with philosophy. If Christianity were just another doctrine or theory, it could be translated successfully into speculative terms, and then it would indeed be subject to mediation. But Christianity does not present a theory; it indicated a mode of being. Christianity is an *existential communication*. It is not a philosophical doctrine to be contemplated; it is an absurdity to be believed and lived. The absolute paradox of Christianity is not a merely logical paradox that can be treated by speculation. It is an existential paradox that engages more than the mind. The paradox states that a life entirely outside of time is nonetheless causally dependent on a personal decision made within time. This paradox challenges one's whole being, not just one's intellect, for eternal happiness is, subjectively speaking, the highest goal that an individual could ever have. In its form of presentation, in its subject matter, and in its relationship to the individual, Chris-

tianity is altogether different from philosophical doctrines. 'Because of its emphasis on the absurd, it is opposed to philosophy in general. Because of this, true Christianity lies beyond the reach of speculative philosophy, as Climacus says in the following rather lengthy passage from the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*:

Is not *mediation* a speculative category? When the opposites are mediated they (Christianity and Speculation) are not equal before the arbiter. . . . When two opposites are mediated, and reconciled in a higher unity, they may perhaps be equal before the mediating process, because neither of the entities is an opposite of speculative thought itself. But when one of the opposites is speculative thought, and the other is an opposite to speculative thought, and a mediation is proposed, and mediation happens to be a speculative category, it is illusory to speak of an opposite to speculative thought at all, since the reconciling factor itself is speculative thought or the mediation-function which is its category. (PS 335-336)

For philosophy, reason is the sole criterion, but Christianity calls for the abandonment of reason. Philosophy addresses itself to the mind alone, but Christianity is addressed to the entire self. Before speculative philosophy can mediate an opposition, the terms of the opposition must first agree to be placed within a speculative framework. Without this initial agreement, any attempts to mediate are illegitimate. But Christianity cannot be expressed in speculative terms, for speculative philosophy ("The truth can be known through reason alone.") is itself the opposite of Christianity ("The truth cannot be known through reason alone."). According to Climacus, the Hegelians hasten past this all-important initial agreement in order to get on with mediation. Because the Hegelians fail to hammer out the initial agreement, not only is their mediation invalid, but—because they themselves claim to be Christians—it is an act of high treason:

It is indeed permissible within speculative thought to assign to everything which claims the status of speculation its relative position, and thus to mediate all those opposites which have the common character of being essays in speculation. . . . But it is very different when the opposite in question is an opposite to speculative philosophy in general. If there is to be any mediation in this case. . . it will mean that speculative thought

judges between itself and its own opposite, and therefore plays the double role of litigant and judge. Or it means that speculative thought assumes that there can be no opposite to speculative philosophy, and that all opposition is merely relative, as being an opposition within speculative thought. But it was just this question which should have been dealt with in the preliminary agreement. Perhaps this is the reason why speculative philosophy . . . is in such a hurry to apply mediation and to recommend mediation: Because it fears the worst would happen if it became quite clear what Christianity is. The behavior of speculative thought in mediating Christianity is not unlike the behavior of a rebellious ministry which has seized the reins of power, and now governs in the king's name while keeping the king himself at a distance. (PS 336)

The Hegelians try to overthrow faith and supplant it with reason. At the same time, they seek to wed themselves to Christianity on their own terms. Such a mad marriage never was before. (What a superb theme for revenge tragedy!)

Climacus uses the whole of *Philosophical Fragments* to rail against the Hegelian appropriation of Christianity. The Hegelians have attempted to rationalize Christianity from top to bottom, to explain away every article of Christian belief, and to resolve the paradoxes that are at the heart of Christianity. With regard to the Hegelians, *Philosophical Fragments* is Climacus's way of saying, as a spokesperson for Christianity:

#### Hamlet

Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! you would play upon me, you would seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery, you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass—and there is much music, excellent voice, in this littleorgan, yet you cannot make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me. (III.ii.372-381)

The whole of *Philosophical Fragments* is presented as a thought-project that seeks truly to go beyond Socrates. But Socrates represents all of philosophy, or at least all of Idealism. And the result of the thought-project is Chris-

tianity. In this way, the entire book can be viewed as a statement to the Hegelians that there is something, namely Christianity, that in principle lies wholly outside of speculative philosophy. The thought-project frames the book, and the absolute paradox is its center. Both attempt to demonstrate that Christianity lies forever beyond the reach of speculation.

This, at last, brings us back to the metaphysical caprice, Climacus's version of *The Mouse-trap*. "Now we shall begin." (PF 100) When *Philosophical Fragments* is viewed as a refutation of the Hegelians, Chapter III becomes a logically independent representation of the entire book—a self-contained whole within the whole.

It accomplishes this in a synecdochical way. The book as a whole shows that speculative philosophy, which seeks to mediate all things, cannot mediate Christianity, which stands opposed to speculative philosophy. The metaphysical caprice attempts to show that the primary organ of speculative philosophy, the understanding (which seeks to understand all things), cannot understand the object of Christian faith, the absolute paradox (which stands in opposition to the understanding). The proportion, then, is:

speculation : Christianity ::  
the understanding : the absolute paradox

What I hope to show is that, as is often the case with synecdoche, the metaphysical caprice works beautifully and gracefully as a metaphor, but it must not be taken too literally.

In order for speculative philosophy to mediate an opposition, both terms of the opposition must be placed fully within a speculative framework. In the case of speculation versus Christianity, this cannot work. One of the terms of the opposition is speculation, and thus it does not fall *within* speculation. The other term lies entirely outside speculation in principle and therefore does not fall within speculation. Neither term will fit wholly inside speculation, and thus no mediation can take place.

In order for the understanding to resolve a paradox, both terms of the paradox must be placed securely within the understanding. (To begin to come to grips with "This statement is false," one must first understand why the statement has to be false and why the statement cannot be false.) In the case of the understanding versus "that which cannot be understood," this cannot work. One term of the paradox is the understanding and therefore does not fall within the understanding. The other term by definition lies entirely outside the understanding and

therefore does not fall within the understanding. Neither term will fit wholly inside the understanding, and thus no resolution can take place.

As poetry, this analogy is delightful. But if we try to take it literally, we quickly run into a problem. It is the same problem we encountered before: "That which cannot be understood" is not the essential paradox of Christianity. As we have seen, the absolute paradox of Christianity is not an abstract paradox of formal logic, but a specific existential paradox regarding time and eternity (eternal consciousness is rooted in an historical moment).

Chapter III begins as if it were a discourse all its own. Until the very end of the chapter, the presentation is highly abstract. "That which cannot be understood" is the absolute paradox of Chapter III. It is a verbal paradox, and its absoluteness lies precisely in its formality. Any significant deviation from the words "that which cannot be understood," and attempt to imbue the paradox with content, and the absolute paradox ceases to be the absolute *logical* paradox. It may very well become the absolute *existential* paradox of Christianity, but in so doing it gives up the title of being the paradox that, by definition, defeats the understanding. It is clear that we cannot have both kinds of absoluteness at once, for we see what the two paradoxes are, and we see that they are different.

Nonetheless, I think that, on some level, Climacus does want both kinds of absoluteness at once. I say this simply because he himself does not explicitly point out the two senses of "absolute" that we have been discussing. He obtains "that which cannot be understood." He gives this the name "absolute paradox" because it is a paradox that absolutely defies understanding. He then goes on to find another paradox, the essential temporal-eternal paradox of Christianity, and he proceeds to call this the "absolute paradox" as well. I think that in giving the latter the name "absolute paradox," Climacus hopes to bring forward the sense of logical forcefulness that accompanies the paradox of "that which cannot be understood." That is, I think that he wants the essential paradox of Christianity also to be the paradox that absolutely defies the understanding.

Why he might wish to do this is clear. It would fit nicely as a third step in his refutation of speculative philosophy, and thus it would serve to further secure Christianity from speculation. First, he has brought the dialectical fastness of the Hegelians' methods into serious question. Second, he has shown that *in principle* the very attempt to mediate Christianity is illegitimate. I think that Climacus wants to go the third step of beating

Hegelians at their own game. Suppose for a moment that we overlooked the impossibility of accurately representing Christianity within a speculative framework and allowed the Hegelians to attempt to mediate Christianity. Suppose further that we granted them the right to employ all of their questionable dialectical methods in trying to achieve the mediation. Would it not, after all this, be nice to be able to show very simply, in a way that even they might acknowledge, that the essence of Christianity resides in an absolute paradox that is by definition impossible to resolve?

I cannot say with certainty that Climacus wishes for the double usage of the term "absolute paradox" to have this effect. The matter becomes highly difficult to judge when we consider the profusion of paradoxes, discontinuities, and qualitative leaps that occur over the course of *Philosophical Fragments*. How does one get from a demonstration to the thing demonstrated? How can I know that something has come into existence, for when I experience it, it simply is, and afterward I am separated from it by time? Is coming to be an existential change only, or is it an essential change as well? —These are just a few of the thorny problems that come up in the book. Even the essential Christian paradox has its rivals (the suffering god, the human god). Amidst all of these difficulties, it is hard to tell exactly how to take the nominal link between the two "absolute paradoxes." Even so, I think that in some way the double usage of the name indicates an overeagerness on the part of Climacus to refute the Hegelians on as many fronts as possible.

So, then, we come to the end of our analysis of the absolute paradox. In an earlier section, we said that in order to be hanged Climacus would have to commit a tragic mistake. Has our analysis uncovered anything that qualifies as a tragic mistake? I do not think so. At worst, we have discovered a little bit of logical sleight of hand, but we cannot even prove intent in the matter. And besides, even if Climacus were guilty of misusing the name "absolute paradox," would such a minor crime be a hanging offense? No, it would not. I am not what they call a "hanging judge." I would much prefer to see our play turn out a comedy instead of a tragedy. So rather than hang the poor man, let us try to marry him off. Let us proceed to our final act, where we will try to find a proper spouse for Climacus. It is only fitting that a comedy should end with a wedding.

#### Part V (The Big Day)

We began with the question of whether Climacus was well hanged. What we meant in asking the question was: Has Climacus given an accurate and insightful account of what Christian faith is and what it means to acquire it? At the time, we did not know that we were going to opt for a wedding instead of a hanging. Nevertheless, the question still stands, and we can ask it in another way: Does Climacus really know who it is that he is getting ready to marry?

There are wonderful insights to be found in *Philosophical Fragments*. For one, Climacus makes it clear that faith requires both thoughtfulness and passion. It does not require thoughtfulness in the sense of erudition or intellectual acuteness. If that were the case, then faith would be differently accessible to different people, depending on how clever they were. No, faith requires only so much thoughtfulness as is necessary to recognize the fact that much of what Christians believe does not make sense. There are genuine contradictions in Christianity, literally embodied in Christ himself, who is believed to be not only the one, eternal, all-powerful God, but also a particular man, fully human, who lived, suffered, and died within human history. To be a Christian is to believe in these paradoxes. But to embrace a genuine paradox, one must defy one's own understanding. This requires tremendous passion. To believe in something even when one's own understanding says that the thing cannot be, one must love the thing greatly. It is not easy to say, "As far as I know, you are an absurdity, but I love you so much that your absurdity is not an obstacle to my believing you." Of course, it would be easy to say if one were, in general, not bothered by the prospect of believing in the absurd. This is where passion comes back, and this is where Climacus makes one of his greatest contributions: Thought itself is passionate. If one's thought lacks passion, then one does not bother to get worked up about contradictions and paradoxes. It takes passion in order to say firmly, "this is so," or "this is not so." *Philosophical Fragments* makes a valuable statement in saying that thought and passion are intimately connected and that, in particular, clear and forceful thinking requires its own kind of passion.

In this regard, Climacus seems to know his future spouse quite well. Faith requires clear thinking in order to discern that the object of faith is an absurdity. From here, it requires passion to believe the absurdity. But one cannot then allow one's thinking to get slack. One must have the passion of thought that is required for holding on to the recognition that the absurdity is still an absurdity even when one believes it.

But in some ways, I wonder whether Climacus really knows what he is getting himself into. He is so concerned with staving off potentially bad marriages that to a degree he has lost touch with his own notion of what a good marriage would be. That is, *Philosophical Fragments* is so caught up in the philosophical project of refuting Hegelianism that this impinges on the theological project of explicating the content of Christian faith. Because he is addressing himself to the Hegelians, he has gone to great lengths to adopt their way of speaking and to present Christianity in an abstract and categorical way. Thus, in *Philosophical Fragments*, everything is bound up in the moment, the moment of decisive significance is indeed an ingenious device for simply but totally distinguishing between philosophy and Christianity. In terms of what philosophy is inclined to consider important, the Christian idea of a single point in which time meets eternity is a unique and fascinating proposition. But Climacus sees it as more than just a handy way to set off Christianity from philosophy. He also tries to make it the entire essence of Christianity:

That an eternal happiness is decided in time through the relationship to something historical was the content of my experiment, and what I now call Christianity... To avoid distraction again, I do not wish to bring forward any other Christian principles; they are all contained in this one, and may be consistently derived from it, just as this determination also offers the sharpest contrast with paganism. (PS 330)

I do not think that this quite works. I do not think that all of Christianity can be deduced from the moment. The moment is brilliant as a way of demonstrating the need for the subjective appropriation of Christianity. Regardless of the time in which one lives, regardless of how many or how few Christians are around, the problem of faith is equally problematic for every individual. When one truly recognizes what Christianity is, when one sees that faith entails a complete turning away from the understanding, then personal belief in Christ becomes a difficult and terrifying proposition. But Climacus's nearly total focus on the subjectivity of the moment leads, I think, to a neglect of the objective elements from which the moment draws its power.

The all-important paradox of the moment is that eternal happiness rests on historical knowledge. Should we not, therefore, show some concern for the content of that historical knowledge? For the intellect, the idea that the

eternal God erupted into time is a great perplexity. But for the heart, is it not more essential that the eruption was an act of pure love, and that by coming down as a human the omnipotent God had to experience human suffering? The abstractness of the moment does not, I think, capture the full pathos of the great Christian event. Climacus speaks of the importance of God's appearance as a teacher. What then, of the teaching? Is it not important that Christ came down in order to bring us the Word? Is it not important that the historical event left the world with two great commandments? The moment places too much emphasis on the simple recognition that God appeared in time. Climacus does not show, in this book, that he fully appreciates why God appeared in time. By not talking more than he does about the objective meaning of the appearance, Climacus makes it seem as though it were merely a photo-opportunity. Climacus makes it sound as if God came down solely in order to give us the opportunity to believe that God came down. Though the simple fact of God's appearance in time is an amazement all by itself, and though it alone tells us much about God's nature and God's love, it does not provide us with the entirety of Christianity. When he made his appearance, Christ could have told us anything. I do not think that we can deduce the particularity of Christ's message merely from the fact that he brought us one.

But it would be wrong to criticize *Philosophical Fragments* too strongly on the basis of what Climacus did not say. *Philosophical Fragments* is a short work. In the space of little over a hundred pages, Climacus not only goes a long way toward summing up the true essence of Christianity, but in so doing he also offers a refutation of Hegelianism in general and of the systematic appropriation of revealed religion in particular. Given all that it sets out to do and how successfully it accomplishes it, *Philosophical Fragments* is to be praised highly.

Another of the riches in *Philosophical Fragments* is Climacus's treatment of the offense. He displays a profound awareness of how the paradoxes of Christianity are not only absurd, but also abhorrent. When the mind reflects on such attributes of God as omnipresence and omnipotence, its first impulse is to reject on aesthetic grounds the notion that such attributes are commensurate with that skinny kid from Nazareth. The understanding takes pride in its categories. We stake much of our personal worth on our ability to think. When Christianity comes along, shatters the categorical framework of our understanding, and shuts down our thinking, we are threatened with ridiculousness and impotence. Many

theological writings fail to treat the personal offensiveness of Christianity. Climacus places it in the center of his book.

Nonetheless, I think there are limitations to Climacus's treatment of the offense. Here again, we come back to the neglect of the message.

Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? (Matthew 15:12)

Why are we offended by the person of Christ? In a large part, we are offended because the very notion of Christ is defiant to reason as such. But in another significant way, we are offended by the way in which Christ's teaching challenges our understanding of the world in which we live:

Ye have heard that it hath been said to you, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue the at law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. (Matthew 5:38-44)

Or again:

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother and wife, and children, and bretheren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26)

Or again:

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. . . (Matthew 6:25)

These statements are not statements that defy our facul-

ties of thinking qua faculties. They defy our notions of justice and morality and causality. They contradict what our own experience tells us about how the world works. Climacus succeeds brilliantly in showing us how offensive Christ is to our process of thinking and, to the extent that we identify ourselves with our thinking, how offensive Christ is to our person. But I do not see much in *Philosophical Fragments* that treats the offensiveness of Christ's worldly message.

Does Climacus know his future spouse? He knows much. His insights into what it means to acquire faith are profound and, in some ways, original. Though in focusing on subjective appropriation he may de-emphasize the objective and worldly implications of Christianity, he nevertheless makes an invaluable contribution to Christian theology. They say that you never really know the other person until you are married. If this is true, then we should not expect *Philosophical Fragment* to nail down every important detail of Christian teaching—especially since abstraction and philosophical generality are partly the goal of the book. Rather, we should thank Climacus for what he has told us about his future spouse. His poem is a gift for which we should be grateful. As we take our leave of Climacus, we should say to him with all sincerity:

Name the day of marriage, and God give thee joy. (*Much Ado About Nothing* II. i. 295)

## The Manipulation of the Field

Edward Freeman

We are dissatisfied with the explanation founded on the hypothesis of attractive and repellant forces directed towards the magnetic poles, even though we may have satisfied ourselves that the phenomenon is in strict accordance with that hypothesis, and we cannot help thinking that in every place where we find these lines of force, some physical state or action must exist in sufficient energy to produce the actual phenomena.

Thus Maxwell states, in the beginning of "On Physical Lines of Force," the nagging question left unanswered by the theory of action at a distance.<sup>1</sup> Action at a distance theories do not address what phenomena could cause "sufficient energy" to enable the "actual phenomena." How does one account for the mysterious power of the magnet? In what does the energy reside? The magnet and similar phenomena exert a physical force upon objects in their vicinity. There exists, according to empirical observation, an area around such electromagnetic sources that registers a buildup of something that causes physical responses to certain things brought into proximity with them, but what is this something?

The most basic field hypothesis presented by Maxwell was that account given in "On Faraday's Lines of Force." There we found a mathematical construct designed to exhibit the lines of force found in the vicinity of a magnet, static charge, or live wire. Maxwell imagines mathematical fluid tubes carrying an unnatural, yet ingenious, incompressible fluid incapable of momentum, created to demonstrate that the direction of the natural forces displayed around an electromagnetic source could be accounted for by some type of system of real forces in the area around the source. Infinitesimal tubes which resist the passage of a massless fluid pervade the area around a source. This account certainly gave us a map of these phenomena but fell short of presenting an actual account of the physical forces involved in any electromagnetic circumstance. We could account for the diminishing strength of the field as it moved from the source

<sup>1</sup> This paper was written for Mrs. Marilyn Higuera's 1993 Preceptorial on Maxwell. The text used was *The Dialectic of the Field: Three Papers of James Clerk Maxwell*, edited by Thomas K. Simpson of St. John's College. His commentary was invaluable to our study.

by the resistance of the medium (fluid tubes). But this only demonstrated one of the many facets of electromagnetic forces. The lack of an account for induced currents and other phenomena forces one to conclude that this conception of Maxwell's falls short of a true expression of the field. Maxwell knows this and pinpoints the difficulty, attributing it to the lack of momentum in this mathematical analogy.

Even though this analogy fails to explain electromagnetic phenomena fully, Maxwell is advancing our thought, leading us to shift our perception of these phenomena. When one considers the meticulous care Maxwell exercised to prevent the infusion of false impressions through inappropriate analogies into the study in which he was employed, it seems that we can see exactly where the problem lies. There is no substance to the fluid. There is no more physical force to this conception than in that of "action at a distance." But, even with this difficulty, I find that I am no longer questioning whether the choice is between action at a distance or the field. It is now merely a question of what is truly the nature of a field which exhibits electromagnetic properties. It now seems to be possible to find forces originating in a field. Maxwell has oriented our thought towards pressures through a medium pervading the area around electromagnetic phenomena.

The proposal for an electromagnetic medium that most intrigues me is given in "On Physical Lines of Force." We still need to follow the pattern of forces indicated by the fluid tubes of the last paper, but we also need to utilize forces that are more conventionally physical. Maxwell gives the fundamental concept of this paper in the following paragraph:

Let us next consider the mechanical effect of a state of stress symmetrical about an axis. We may resolve it, in all cases, into a simple hydrostatic pressure, combined with a simple pressure or tension along the axis. When the axis is that of greatest pressure, the force along the axis will be a pressure. When the axis is that of least pressure, the force along the axis will be a tension.

The axes spoken of in the passage were formerly known to us as the fluid tubes in the first analogy. The new mechanical concept described above is the vortex. This

vortex answers the problem of having a non-physical entity create a physical force. It is the answer to the problem created by the strictly mathematical conception found in "Faraday's Lines." By whirling the fluid around and granting it momentum we initiate centrifugal pressures that, when coupled with an additional hydrostatic pressure, give us conditions that will coincide with those found around a magnet. To incorporate induced current and to keep the vortices from rubbing together and creating friction Maxwell imposes an insulating layer of "particles" between the vortices. By imposing elasticity upon the shape of the vortices we incorporate the electrotonic state into our model. We now have a complete conception of the situation in the vicinity of the magnet, live wire, and electrostatic field: Three-dimensional whirling and gliding forces silently buzzing away in impossible intricacy, all of which could, mathematically speaking, be caused by the momentous vortical fluid.

But this aura of force only occurs in the vicinity of electromagnetic items. Does this vortical fluid, with its intervening layer of particles, reside only near electromagnetic entities? This is rather absurd, if almost everything is receptive in some manner to the effects of electromagnetism. Maxwell postulates this conceptual vortical fluid to be an ether, residing everywhere, actualized in the presence of an electromagnetic source. How does this fluid appear in its neutral state? How can the particles remain in position to prevent friction in the vortices in the event of actualization? Although the vortical motion of an ether when it is actualized seems sufficient to account for the forces in a field, it is very difficult to conceive of ether in its unactualized state.

There is, of course, another difficulty presented by this ether. It must necessarily be physical and have momentum if it is to effect the forces attributed to it. It must also be able to infuse any medium with which it is presented. To answer these needs, the particles of the field are made infinitesimally small. Maxwell grants them momentum but not gross mass. Having no mass, this is a very odd momentum which he has postulated for us. Can we find the results of action with momentum but no mass? Maxwell designed an experiment to examine this question. It was entitled "The Inertia of a Current Experiment" and is found in the *Treatise* Volume II, Article 217. This experiment was designed to discover if a current carried momentums of the same magnitude as those found in fields near electromagnetic sources. Maxwell could find no momentum. Modern scientists have found momentums, but they are very small compared to the effects found in the field.

Now we are in a quandary. Maxwell's solution to the field in physical terms cannot be felt although it should be present everywhere. The degree of the force of its particles is nonexistent when set beside the effects attributed to it. Degrees of magnetic force are granted though differing densities of this ether, but no differential in weight can be distinguished. In typical fashion, Maxwell is prepared for such difficulties. Speaking of the vortical hypothesis, he says:

I do not bring it forward as a mode of connexion existing in nature, or even as that which I would willingly assent to as an electrical hypothesis. It is, however, a mode of connexion which is mechanically conceivable, and easily investigated and it serves to bring out the actual mechanical connexions between the known electromagnetic phenomena; so that I venture to say that any one who understands the provisional and temporary character of this hypothesis, will find himself rather helped than hindered by it in his search after the true interpretation of the phenomena.

Here of course is Maxwell at his best. What does it matter if the vortices are not actually there? They could be. At least this hypothesis demonstrates that physical forces can be responsible for the equations given by the "action at a distance" theorists. He now has us thinking of the field and believing that it is possible to understand these phenomena as more than mysterious forces acting upon each other from afar without physical connection.

Now that we are thinking in terms of the possibility of this electromagnetic ether, Maxwell asks us to step away from any definite conception of the manner of its existence. It is sufficient to say that it is possible that this ether could exist and could mechanically cause the phenomena we experience. In "A Dynamical Theory" we are asked to take a step away from the vortical conception and return to something very like the mathematical conception in "Faraday's Lines." He speaks of the field in terms of energy and abstracts his theory from the physical hypothesis. We now look at the dynamics of a possible field and leave the difficulties associated with its physical ordering behind us. The frailties of physical conception are no longer a factor. The field is postulated and its dynamical effects examined.

In the *Treatise* Maxwell invokes the image of bell ringers pulling at ropes to fulfill their charge. Hidden to them behind an opaque ceiling is the machinery which it is their duty to sound. Therefore, their vision of the ac-

tual sounding bodies is blocked. The "action at a distance" formulas give a like understanding of electromagnetic phenomena. The effects given by the exercise of certain actions are known, but the mechanism remains dark. The culmination of Maxwell's work is ultimately to arrive at the action at a distance formulas through the examination of the field itself, not the electromagnetic sources. Thus the mechanism itself is examined, not merely the ropes.

## A Possibility of Beauty

David Jennings

Is the Special Theory of Relativity beautiful? The answer is no. A *theory*, insofar as it is an abstract construct (as differentiated from its *presentation*), cannot be beautiful. The abstract can never be beautiful. Carravagio's "Conversion of St. Paul," for instance, is stunningly beautiful. The *concept* of the painting—its essence or meaning or whatever—is on the other hand a flimsy, insipid thing by definition (if definition is to be had). What we mean by the "Theory of Relativity" is not the progression of the argument on the page or the blackboard or the *tabula rasa* of our minds. If it were then we would not have a single theory but a multiplicity of theories, one for each page, blackboard, and *tabula rasa* that falls under Einstein's sway. We speak, however, of a theory that may be thought of as the permanent form of each of its representations. And if we have learned anything, we have learned that form is just as flimsy and insipid (and boring) as matter.

We can ask, though, whether Einstein's presentation (his "text") is beautiful. It is often said that mathematics is beautiful, the subtler the better. This means that the dizzying concatenation of logic and proof that constitutes the working out of propositions is thought of as sublime. Again, this cannot mean that mathematics itself (whatever that entity may be) is beautiful. Instead, the descriptive term beautiful is attached to what may be vaguely termed the experience of mathematics. Proof and procedure seem unsullied, clean, pure (c.f. *pure* reason). Perhaps because of evolutionary reasons, or perhaps because of the presence of our divine selves within our bodily selves, the (somewhat) neutral attribution of cleanliness is associated with the decidedly valuational attribution of beauty. So, we ask, is Einstein's theory clean?

The last question is very difficult to approach and more difficult to answer. Mathematics does not imply criteria of cleanliness. Perhaps one could claim that Einstein's work, *insofar as it is mathematical*, is beautiful when compared to dirty old physics. However tenuous, indeed ridiculous,<sup>1</sup> this claim is, it is at least a little

<sup>1</sup> I hasten to point out that for my part, I am not quick to disparage the ridiculous in a case like this. It may indeed happen that beauty resides in what is childish, silly, and (yes) unsubtle. As Heraclitus supposedly says, "Enter, for there are gods here too."

more tenable than saying, for example, that Einstein is more beautiful than Lobachevski. A part of the beauty of mathematics is that it, like a goddess, is indifferent to itself. Without some sort of recourse to something outside of mathematics only this indifference will pertain. All mathematics is aesthetically equivalent (equally "clean") when viewed upon purely mathematical grounds. But we want to know something specific about Einstein's text. It is uninformative to say that it is beautiful insofar as it is mathematical. We only gain some sort of new glimpse upon the text when we make an aesthetic judgment concerning the text itself.<sup>2</sup>

Our recourse is a common one; we reread. Mathematics, abstract or not, is not our interest. Here the reader faces a text, and just for a moment, as if in a dream, he disregards the appellation "mathematics" altogether. Under the thick veil of notational argot, and through it and in it, the reader finds a perspectival gigantomachia. The earth giants, the brutal and stone-like creatures of primitive gravity and rest, pile on mountains of calculation to comprehend the airy, motive Olympians. The Olympians on their part hurl lightening (velocity= $c$ ) upon the heads of the giants. The former are called collectively "small  $k$ " and the latter "large  $K$ ." Or perhaps there is no war at all, but rather a never-ending tension of isolated looking. The two parties,  $mr. k$  and  $Mrs. K$ , share one thing in common, one event, but the entirety of the rest of their lives (in time) are out of synch. And then there is above all (giants, gods, lonely couples, et cetera) the transcendent (unreal) hope of ultimate redemption: synchronicity. We once had it in an inno-

<sup>2</sup> To take an example: "The works of Cummings are beautiful because they are poetry." This statement, if "poetry" is thought of as analogous to "mathematics," is senseless. Now it may be argued that what the speaker means is that there is some body of *real* poetry, all of which is beautiful as compared to fake poetry. In fact, we often use the term "poetry" in this sense. However, such a use implies that task of distinguishing the real from the false. In making such a distinction, we are going through a process of judgment no different from that implied in this simple valuation: "The poetry of Cummings is beautiful." "Is beautiful" is here no more and no less informative than "is poetry" in the above context.

cent (Newtonian) age, where with Leibnitz (Einstein's favorite tragi-comedic hero) we thought that Chinese was the answer to the curse of Babel. But Einstein's work is a tragedy. We never get where we want; we live isolated in time; the greater our velocity the more we risk obliteration by candle light.<sup>3</sup>

So is this beautiful? I would say yes, but it is beautiful only in its completeness. The gigantomachia is an ancient tale, and the story of  $mr. k$  and  $Mrs. K$  is even older. Contrary to popular belief, there is nothing we can learn here from the "content." There is something remarkable, however, in the straightforwardness of Einstein's text. Seamlessly and effortlessly, Einstein winds his way (our way) through simple functions, transformations, synchronizations, electromagnetic formulae, and mathematical approximations to tell his tale. There is a great deal of finality implicit in the work; note for instance the devastation in Einstein's description of the Doppler Effect. Yet the presentation is direct, concise, and somewhat cool. Einstein, who lived to see the bomb and the Copenhagen interpretation, paints his picture like a Carravagio. There is seriousness and doom, darkness and luminescence, but there is also a coolness and distance that allows the reader/observer to encounter the text/paining as a work of sheer, simple and devastating harmony.

<sup>3</sup> Fanciful? Yes, naturally. But what tells us that Einstein's presentation is not a text in the sense that, for example, the Bible is? Where are the criteria that guide our "textual" reading? They must be *outside* of the text in a context of social exigencies, instinctual exigencies, habit, etc. (And this may—just *may*—be precisely how any text is informative in an interesting way.) And this is the point. I use this gruesome and tactless figure of the gigantomachia to get my point across in the first brutal moment.

## The Tin Star at High Noon

Eva T. H. Brann

*High Noon* is, to my mind, a movie of near-perfect artistry.<sup>1</sup> It gets to me more and in more different ways each time I see it, and I've seen it more often than I've read the *Iliad*. One of my younger fellow-tutors confided to me that often as he had seen it, it never made him weep until he became a married man. I have watched it dry-eyed and wet-eyed, but always with that sense of being all there—all coolly attentive to its artful devices, all warmly receptive to its gathering pathos. That dual consciousness, in which the powers of noticing and of empathizing are activated together, seems to me to be the trustworthy signal of being in the presence of a work of art.

The following collection of observations and interpretations are only partly my own. The Chicago Alumni invited me to a seminar on the film in the summer of 1994, and in November the Student Committee on Instruction chose it for the All-College Seminar. I have double cause for thanks to these two groups, first for indulging my enthusiasm, and then for the discoveries I made while listening, talking, and thinking along.

*High Noon* came to be from a series of happy circumstances. The first of these was the fact that John Wayne turned down the lead. I am no Wayne-basher, but Gary Cooper, as I will try to show, was just right for the story as adapted in the script, and he gives the performance of his life. The script itself is felicitous in its deviation from the story which the credits cite, "The Tin Star" by John M. Cunningham, published in *Colliers* December 6, 1947, two years after the end of World War II.

Now this magazine story actually bears scarcely any relation to *High Noon*. Its reluctant hero's name is Sheriff Will Doane, which was changed to Marshal Will Kane because, I have read, the script writers were afraid that it would come out "Well Done" on the sound track. The shift from sheriff to marshal shows the care of the script writers: sheriff is a county office, but a marshal works for a city; Marshal Kane's relation is to his town, intensely so. In the story Will is old and arthritic and speaks all the bitter words attributed to the old marshal, Will Kane's

disillusioned mentor, in the movie. Gary Cooper was fifty in 1952, when the movie was filmed, and no effort was made to make him look youthful, but he is not old, or impaired, or disillusioned, though some of the story's sad feel carries over. "Will" suits him well enough, for he is indomitable, and "Kane" fits perfectly with the new element in the screen story, because he is an outcast in his battle with the outlaws. He bears a kind of reverse mark of Cain, a mark of courage among the craven. The story itself is slight, but it evidently made a good starting point for transformation.

For another example, in "The Tin Star" Will is a sorrowing widower, while in the movie Will is newly married. The movie opens with the ominous rendezvous of Frank Miller's three accomplices on a hill. From it they are converging on the town to meet their vengeful leader, who has just been pardoned from his conviction of murder and released from the pen. There is a second beginning, Will's brief civil marriage ceremony to Amy, his young Quaker bride. He is wearing his marshal's star, and we see that he is acutely aware of his office: As marshal he is bashful about kissing her in public, though once he takes the star off and pins it to his gun belt, he is a playful enough lover. He has promised to leave town with her and turn storekeeper. He says he will try his best, but it is evidently something of a sacrifice for him to settle into a star-less life.

The point is made that the star is not just a piece of cheap beaten tin to him, and that he is marshal before husband. And now arrives a telegram telling that Frank Miller, the badman he had sent up to the pen, is returning on the twelve o'clock from St. Louis. And the clock starts ticking.

Three devices mark this movie. The first might be called "the sound of time passing": the horses' clip-clopping, the rails' clicking, the clocks' ticking and the pendulum's swing. The action begins at about 10:40 AM, comes to its culmination as the sun does, at high noon, when Miller gets in, and ends with a brief shoot-out. This is a real-time film. The movie takes—though I haven't clocked it—about the same time as the action, an hour and a half. If anything, near the climax its clocks move somewhat slower than real time. It obeys, only far more stringently, one of the requirements of dramatic unity of ancient tragedy, that the action should take place within a

day.

There are, incidentally, four more allusions to antiquity. Judge Mettrick—excellently named, for he is a cynical, if not bad, judge who takes the measure of his town's unreliability—cites Herodotus on the corruption of ancient Athens in allowing the return of the Pisistratid tyranny as an excuse for his own flight. And Will, to make his escape from the fiery stables in which the outlaws have trapped him, clings to the side of this mount as the herd rushes out, just as Odysseus once escaped from the Cyclops' cave by grasping the wool on the underside of a big ram. The beautiful woman who has known the men on both sides is called "Helen," as in Helen of Troy. And finally "High Noon" itself is an antique moment, as I will show in a minute.

To return to the unity of the film: It wonderfully concentrates the mind and allows us, the viewers, to close the distance between a fiction and an event. As we hear its time passing, we are living indistinguishably in the film's time frame and in our own.

The second device of the movie is what might be called "the critical moment." High noon, when the sun culminates, is in ancient myth the time of the god Pan, the panic time, the moment of revelatory terror. It is the time when the shadows are the shortest and blackest, when the sun beats straight down, hot and brilliant, and there is no place to hide. It might even be midsummer day. In this sunlit scene with its black edges, Will walks up and down the deserted streets of Hadleyville. Since it is, moreover, Sunday, the Lord's Day, that part of the population which is not in the saloon is in church. Will, with inclusive trust, seeks help in both places, and finds more straight talk among the drinking rabble than among the hymn-singing burghers.

The camera work is of the essence to this quintessential black-and-white film. The clean, stark rectangularity of the deserted town under the midday sun and Cooper's elongated striding figure work together to tell the moral tale. Here colorization, which works fine for, say, one of those delightful Danny Kaye musicals, is simply an aesthetic crime against the camera.

The third device is the ballad written for the movie by Tiomkin and sung by Tex Ritter. It has a clip-clopping under-theme, a lyrical melody which culminates in a heart-rending modulation, and words that might be maudlin in ordinary speech but are archetypal in a ballad: "Do not forsake me, oh my darling." The ballad makes Cooper's interpretation of Will possible by complementing it. Will is shy, sad, and inarticulate, except in the ordinary business of life, when he is simple, candid, and

plain-spoken. Cooper's facial acting is altogether minimal, a droop of the mouth, a switch of the cheek, a glint in the eye. His body language is similarly restrained; he is all held-in grace, intensely controlled length, or better, height. Will, as played by Cooper, is even in happy times a quiet, modest man, and under the pressure of time he becomes more and more laconic. As he tells Amy, he has no time to explain. He has pinned his star and buckled his gun back on, and she has given up pleading her Quaker faith and is waiting to leave him and the town on the train on which Miller is returning. The ballad sings to us what he can't say to her; it pleads where he is dumb; it is the feeling descant to his brusque words. It shows that his decision to stay and fight is not heroics but heroism, because it is made in the face of a great loss.

Some of us who watched the movie in the Francis Scott Key Auditorium asked ourselves why there was this misplaced laughter at crucial moments. I think I have an idea what induces it, aside from the fact that in a student audience not everyone will have developed the self-possession necessary to assimilate quietly the representation of strongly charged moments. Students feel that they owe something to sophistication. This film is not morally sophisticated but simple—though not simplistic. That is to say, it presents a situation which is humanly wrenching but not morally ambiguous. The laughter, though we could have done without it, is a tribute to a moral world in which gravity reigns rather than confusion, and where complexity does not entail ambiguity—at least not for the hero.

That brings me to the figures who are—for the present purpose very rightly—called the "characters" of the movie. First, Will's bride of ten minutes, Amy: She is, as was mentioned, a Quaker (which is the reason they are not married in church), but what kind? Clearly an adventitious Quaker, converted more by circumstance than by principle. For she has seen both her father and her brother shot and killed, and so she disavows all shooting and killing. Yet she ends up killing, and very mercilessly too. She shoots the second to last gunman in the back as he is reloading.

When, already settled in the train, she hears the first shot from town, she jumps out, clearly expecting to find her husband dead. She recognizes the body as that of one of the outlaws, and she walks by his gun without picking it up. Once in the refuge of the sheriff's office, we see her head next to the gun belt that Harvey, Will's childish and resentful deputy, has hung up. It is this gun she uses to kill the third outlaw, and so she becomes Will's surrogate deputy. In concert they dispose of Miller him-

<sup>1</sup> I want to thank Mr. Adam Schulman for giving this essay a critical reading which saved it from some errors and enriched it with new insights.

self. Has she given up her principles? Well, they weren't principles to begin with, but rather a strong revulsion to all the senseless killing. And that revulsion she does not disavow in her action. She is not engaging in an honest shoot-out involving manly principles of honor. She is rather saving her man in the most effective way possible. She is doing efficiently what her Quaker principles forbid but her heart requires—her heart shaken both by the reprieve from Will's death and by a new influence.

It is the influence of Helen Ramirez, "the Mexican woman." The wise madam, the south-of-the-border odd-woman-out, is a stock character of westerns. The character of Mrs. Ramirez is an upgraded version. She owns the saloon, not the house, and her business partners have genuine respect for her, though the ladies shun her. She has been intimate in turn with Frank, Will and with Harvey, the broad-shouldered boy-man against whose low, rationalizing vacillation Will's resolution stands out. She loves Will with resignation.

She is, in fact, his fit complement. She will not, as he cannot, explain her moral judgment. She is as socially solitary as he is morally alone. She has dignity as he has stature. They share a high pathos, but qualified by the sex and status of each.

It is Mrs. Ramirez who intimates to Amy, first scornfully and then kindly, what's what. *She* would not forsake her man.

Why is it nonetheless this girlish blonde (Grace Kelly was twenty-two to Cooper's fifty) who wins Will's heart and not the darkly beautiful woman? The reason is not only the stock social prejudice. The choice also makes sense, for if the Mexican is Will's complement, the Quaker is his counterpart. Will is like Amy in a certain innocence, and Amy is in turn his equal in strength of will. Mrs. Ramirez, the "nomad," is alien to them in her illusionless realism. She bends where they risk breaking. This is a marriage of like to like.

Will and Amy learn more about each other in the first hour and a half of their marriage than they seem to have discovered during their courtship. She learns of his history with Miller and with Mrs. Ramirez; he learns that just as he puts the star before his love, so she too puts her conviction before her marriage. But he is also to find out that in the end she will stand by him and that she will answer the ballad's plea. We may imagine that they will not be mere storekeepers to the town in which they settle, but that they will be among its first citizens. In Louis L'Amour's well-researched westerns, such men as Will eventually find their voice and go to the Senate.

What, above all and finally, of Will's own character?

In American golden oldies the typical moral setting is a supine crowd finally carried along by a lone hero, often through the speech of his life. Think of situations as diverse as Jimmy Stewart's in the good-natured Christmas favorite *It's a Wonderful Life* and Marlon Brando's in the brutal world of *On the Waterfront*. For Gary Cooper the case is altered: He makes no speech, and the town doesn't come through. He is morally alone for two cooperating reasons. One is his mild, brief and candid mode of speech. He is the very type of the unrhetorical man, the strong silent man, only in a finely honed version. We get the impression that the complex elements of the moral situations are all present to him, that he understands how his high practicality might look like outdated quixotism to this tame frontier town. But he is not good at articulating his thoughts and uttering his feelings. In this movie the antiheroes make the prevailing speeches.

He knows that he cannot, being the man he is, run away, because he has tried. The buggy is already running in the prairie, and he sitting silent and disturbed beside his bride, when we see it coming to a halt and turning back. Later on, in what he calls a moment of tiredness, he goes for his horse to ride off without Amy, but it takes no more than Harvey's attempt to force him on his way to bring back his resolution. He also knows that running away is not only morally impossible, it is also realistically impracticable because the outlaws will eventually find him and his wife. He gauges his outlaw adversaries more accurately than do the ostrich-like townsfolk who want to avoid provocation by having him leave, on the chance that the pen might have reformed Miller. He has a respectful sense of Miller's unregenerable wildness. Will's judgment that the town will revert to the time when no respectable woman was safe on the street in broad daytime is amply borne out by the youngest of the Miller men, Frank's brother. When they stalk through the town four abreast, he breaks away to make a commencement of crime by smashing a store window—incidentally at once warning Will of their whereabouts and giving him cause for arrest—to steal a ladies' bonnet, which he then ties to his belt as a sort of forcible favor, a sign of rape to come. But above all, Will knows that he cannot on any pretext doff the responsibilities of a sheriff by unpinning the star. He is marshal through and through. He thinks of his charges even in the most distracting circumstances, warning Mrs. Ramirez at the risk of being misunderstood by Amy, releasing the drunk from his cell before the fight starts, and untethering the horses when the stables are on fire.

Will is right and he is responsible, but he has no moral suasion, not merely because he is laconic but principally because he has no time. Will's life has readied him for a moral crisis, though even he needs a few miles' run into the prairie to find his will, but the townspeople, decent enough, are caught in moral unreadiness on this Sunday. The preacher is courteous but indecisive, the first men of the town hide, vacillate, misjudge. The mayor makes a speech, the ignobly sensible turning point for the congregation, warning of the consequences a shoot-out will have for the town's commercial prospects; Will listens in drained silence. The women have a better sense of danger and of decency, but will-lessness prevails—not the deep lack of caring that the crippled marshal imputes to his fellow-citizens out of his own impotence, but a lack of timely resoluteness.

Three times in the movie we are briefly shown the town's name, Hadleyville. It is an allusion to Mark Twain's story "The Man Who Corrupted Hadleyburg," a tale of the effects of evil on a small town of weak character. The name betokens that what is lacking in Hadleyville is indeed moral readiness. As the old marshal says: People need time to work themselves up to law and order, that is, into moral decision. That is why the inexorable clock dominates the movie as a sound and a sight.

The ending reverts to the tin star theme, though it isn't in "The Tin Star" story. (There is, incidentally, a pretty good movie of this title with Henry Fonda, which has a quite similar plot but with the tragic edge taken off.) Will and his wife—no longer a bride—have together delivered the town from evil. The townspeople crawl out of the woodwork (the shot is from above) and come running. The best man in Hadleyville, a boy who runs messages for Will, has brought up the packed buggy for a second departure. Before mounting, Will again takes off the star. It is the movie's most subtly expressive moment. Cooper does not fling it away into the street, he drops it. It lands near the pointed toe of his boot which we see slowly turning, not to grind the tin star into the dust, but away from it. It is a consummate gesture of speechless contempt—not for the star but for this town.

It must be that somewhere, sometime, on the frontier there was some such town and some such marshal. To be sure, the town would not have been so starkly clean-lined, the townsfolk so craven, the outlaw so fear-inspiring or the marshal so alone. No matter—the movie has concentrated the event and raised it to a mythic dimension, to a monumental and artful American frontier myth. Recall, however, that the movie was made just seven years after a war in which a whole nation submitted to villainy

from lack of civic courage and had to be delivered from its evil largely by American arms. It does the director, Fred Zinnemann, honor that he managed to incorporate in an archetypal American setting lessons recently learned abroad.

## Separation and Combination: The Unity of Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*

Carrie Lynn Sager

The dismemberment of orthodox religion is so severe at the beginning of Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise* that it is difficult *not* to condemn Spinoza of blasphemy. In his attack on Scripture Spinoza shows little reverence for the sacredness of Scripture. Rather, he ferociously preys upon Scripture, continually discarding crucial doctrines which had been cherished for hundreds—if not thousands—of years. His examination is exhaustive; it seems that no chapter or verse escapes his scrutiny. After his rigorous purging is complete, it seems that almost nothing in Scripture remains sacred to Spinoza. Yet, as shocking as this may seem, at the very height of his attack on the tenets of religion, Spinoza claims to have discovered the true core of religious belief—a universal faith—that he firmly establishes at the center of his political thought in the remaining chapters of the treatise. In order to better appreciate this restoration, a close examination of the extent and severity of Spinoza's attack is necessary.

Spinoza wasted little time in contesting the "tissue of ridiculous mysteries" that men had made out of religion. In going straight to the source of religion—Scripture—he declared that he

determined to examine the Bible afresh in a careful, impartial, and unfettered spirit, making no assumptions concerning it, and attributing to it no doctrines, which . . . are not clearly therein set down. (8)<sup>1</sup>

In other words, Spinoza's new method of interpreting Scripture is to let Scripture explain itself. If men try to do otherwise, they will continue to bury Scripture, and religion along with it, with misconceptions that will lead them only deeper into superstition. Rather than cloud Scripture with mystery and unnecessary meaning, men should endeavor to explain Scripture with Scripture only. This is Spinoza's "method," his only means to *his* purification of Scripture.

The first territory to which Spinoza lays waste is the prophecy sung by the Hebrew prophets. He states:

Everyone has been strangely hasty in affirming that the prophets know everything within the scope of human intellect, and, although certain passages of Scripture plainly affirm that the prophets were in certain respects ignorant, such persons would rather say that they do not understand the passages than admit that there was anything which the prophets did not know; or else they try to wrest the Scriptural words away from their evident meaning. (33)

This is Spinoza's testimony of man's predisposition to superstition. According to Spinoza, nowhere does Scripture indicate that the prophets were endowed with perfect minds. Men, therefore, should not make that assumption but rather accept what Scripture does indicate: namely that the prophets had "unusually vivid imaginations." (27) From this premise Spinoza proceeds as follows: Since the imagination is not grounded in the sure fabric of objective reality, its products—words and figures which may be either real or imaginary—lack the certainty of truth. Therefore, as Spinoza concludes, "prophetic knowledge is inferior to natural knowledge, which needs no sign, and in itself implies certitude." (28) Prophecy, as a product of the imagination, needs an external reason to make it real and to give it certitude. For the prophets this external certainty came from morality. (29) Hence, the only certainty that men should look for in the prophets' writings is moral certitude. In short, "knowledge of natural and spiritual phenomena" cannot be found in the prophetic books. (27) This, however, is only Spinoza's first salvo.

Miracles are the next part of the religious world to bear the brunt of Spinoza's "method." For while men may have traditionally looked upon miracles as the ultimate expressions of God's power and have thus stood in awe of them, Spinoza shares no such sentiment. According to Spinoza, "the masses think that the power and providence of God are most clearly displayed by events that are extraordinary and contrary to the conception they have formed of nature. . ." (81) By styling miracles after this fashion, men are only furthering their misconception of God. As Spinoza points out, what men fail to recognize is that the power of God and the power of

Nature are co-extensive, and moreover, the power of God is equal to His will. Therefore, anything which contradicts Nature necessarily contradicts God's will. (83) For Spinoza it is the mark of sheer absurdity that men claim that miracles are the most awesome demonstrations of God's power, for as men view them, miracles are a direct contradiction to his power.

Therefore, Spinoza declares:

. . . it comes to this, that a miracle, whether it has natural causes or not, is a result which cannot be explained by its cause, that is a phenomenon which surpasses human understanding; but from such a phenomenon, and certainly from a result surpassing our understanding, we can gain no knowledge. . . (85)

In short, miracles defy human understanding and stand outside of the deductive order of the universe so that they can teach man nothing about God. For, as miracles cannot be grasped by the understanding—not "clearly and distinctly understood"—they cannot be the basis for further deductive reasonings. (85) Therefore, men shouldn't make miracles out to be more than what they are. Spinoza views miracles simply as powerful tools used in the narratives of Scripture that appeal to men's imaginations. (91) In this view, miracles arouse men in such a way as to promote both admiration for, and devotion to, God.

Since miracles do not afford men sure knowledge of God, they do not constitute a dogma of religion. Therefore, under no circumstance should men solidify their faith in God solely on account of the doctrine of miracles. As Spinoza points out, Scripture does not teach the doctrine of miracles "as a truth necessary to salvation. . .therefore everyone is free to think on the subject as he likes. . ." (97) Thus, Spinoza has pruned another branch from the tree of orthodox religion by debunking the belief that miracles can bestow on man a knowledge of God.

While his onslaught against prophecy and miracles is quite clear, Spinoza's aggression towards orthodox religion is best elucidated with an examination of his review of the canon of Hebrew and Christian Scripture. Again, he begins his report by criticizing previous biblical interpretation. He states that "scriptural interpretation proceeds by the examination of Scripture, and inferring the intention of its authors as a legitimate conclusion from its fundamental principles." (99) In other words, although they have tried, men cannot possibly strive to deduce Scripture from reason. For Scripture is filled with both narratives containing miracles and rev-

elations, each of which surpasses human comprehension—they are altogether beyond reason. (100) And as reason cannot explain nor reason from what is beyond its grasp, man cannot call upon reason to help deduce the meaning of Scripture. On the contrary, the meaning of Scripture can only be deduced from Scripture alone.

Spinoza's conclusion has an important consequence, namely, "We are at work not on the truth of the passages, but solely on their meaning." (101) Furthermore, "We must take especial care, when we are in search of the meaning of a text, not to be lead away by our reason in so far as it is founded on principles of natural knowledge. . ." (101) To put it another way, men should not look for truth in Scripture, but only meaning. According to Spinoza, when men try to search for truth in Scripture, they are only succeeding in turning philosophy into superstition. As they vainly try to use their reason in a territory not fit for reason, all men's philosophical speculations cannot help but become mere superstitions. This wrongful application of philosophy results in both the contortion of philosophy into superstition and, more importantly, the usurpation of religion by this superstition.

While Spinoza's claims about prophecy and miracles could be accepted by some without too much grief, his treatment of Scripture is undoubtedly offensive to anyone who has been reared by orthodoxy and holds the Bible as The Book. For example, Spinoza is nothing short of insulting when he makes his claim that the Bible is a collection of histories written by authorities but compiled promiscuously by historians. (135) Rather than accept that there are some inconsistencies in the Bible which, like the causes of miracles, are beyond human understanding, Spinoza is quick to conclude that the Bible is a corrupted text.

On this point Spinoza surrenders to no one, not even the illustrious Jewish commentator Maimonides. To Spinoza no biblical scholar has presented a satisfactory method of interpreting Scripture which can do away with all the inconsistencies contained therein. In fact, Spinoza claims that Maimonides' method of Scriptural interpretation is not only unsatisfactory but may be dismissed as "harmful, useless and absurd." (118)

At the heart of Spinoza's analysis is the following claim: The Pentateuch was not written by Moses—which had been the traditional Jewish claim—but rather it was compiled from many sources by the prophet Ezra. (130) For anyone, Jewish or Christian, the enormity of this claim is positively shocking. God's authorship of His books of revelation is precariously challenged. Could any other claim be more damaging?

<sup>1</sup> All citations refer to *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, Dover edition, 1951, tr. R. H. M. Elwes.

Hence, Spinoza completes what he promised in his preface, namely "to point out the misconceptions which, like scars of our former bondage, still disfigure our notion of religion," (6) by exposing Scripture for what it really is, rather than the collection of philosophic speculations and theological prejudices that men have mistakenly introduced into it. Hence, he has returned religion to its proper domain by making light of how under the rule of philosophy, Scripture was corrupted by superstition.

Yet, it is here, when Spinoza's interpretative "method" is at its most incisive, that a remarkable change of face occurs. Amidst the carnage, Spinoza claims that true religious *faith* is not only unscathed, but finally free of its "trappings of superstition" so that its proper splendor can shine forth brilliantly. In fact, the faith that arises from religion, now emancipated from superstition, possesses—in Spinoza's eyes—a stature that allows it to become the centerpiece of his political theory.

Spinoza signals this rebirth at the outset of the fourteenth chapter of his treatise: "Let us recapitulate the chief aim and object of Scripture; this will indicate a standard by which we may define faith." (183) That standard, the solid and true foundation upon which to rebuild faith, is stated earlier by Spinoza as: "For from the Bible itself we learn, without the smallest difficulty or ambiguity, that its cardinal precept is: To love God above all things, and one's neighbour as one's self." (172) With this as its main precept, Spinoza declares that the aim and object of Scripture is thus to teach men *obedience*. (183) For Spinoza, obedience to God is the cornerstone of religion. (172) In fact, to him it is the only sure ground that religion has to stand on, and without which it would crumble completely and be buried again under "the trammels of superstition."

The structure of the treatise is now set into relief: Spinoza's purpose in the first thirteen chapters is to rid religion of all dogmas which men have mistakenly deduced from their reason—rather than from Scripture alone—which do not support the Bible's main precept. With this work complete, Spinoza, in the fourteenth chapter, builds his argument for a new foundation of religion based upon the aforementioned precept. His construction of this religion based on deductive reasonings that begin with Scripture alone, and not superstition, is so thorough that not only is he able to generate new dogmas from it, but this religion in turn becomes the heart of his defense for political liberty and the freedom of thought.

Faith, according to Spinoza, "consists in a knowl-

edge of God, without which obedience to Him would be impossible, and which the mere fact of obedience to Him implies." (184) As this definition follows his earlier claim that the fundamental precept of both Hebrew and Christian scripture is love of one's neighbour, and that the Bible's purpose is to teach men to obey the will of God, it follows—for Spinoza—that obedience to God is the same as loving one's neighbour. (183) In addition to considering this precept as the proper foundation for religion, Spinoza also considers it as the standard by which faith is defined.

Hence, as obedience is the standard for the definition of faith, obedience precedes faith. To put it another way, Spinoza claims that to obey God is to know him. Since without knowledge of something it is impossible to obey it, as Spinoza points out, men could not even begin to obey something they did not know. This is, in fact, one of the subtlest points in Spinoza's treatise. To grasp it fully keep in mind that for Spinoza, knowledge is not of who or what God is, but rather an understanding of the meaning of God inasmuch as is necessary for obedience. (176) And since man can only know God by obeying Him, obedience both implies and is the origin of knowledge of God, which is faith.

Following this declaration of the true definition of faith, Spinoza reveals several consequences which arise from this definition. The first is that "faith is not salutary in itself, but only in respect to the obedience it implies." (184) Next, he states that any man who is obedient is necessarily faithful. (184) Or, in other words, if a man is faithful, he must needs be obedient, while at the same time a man is not faithful if he is not obedient. His obedience, moreover, is only demonstrated through his deeds, namely loving his neighbour through acts of justice and charity to him. Hence, Spinoza concludes that, as quoted in Scripture, "Faith without works is dead," and that a man is only judged "faithful or unfaithful by his works." (185) This accords precisely with Spinoza's words in the preface: "If deeds could only be made the grounds of criminal charges, and words were always allowed to pass free. . ." (6) Soon, when we examine Spinoza's account of the beginning of the state, the importance of this conclusion will bear even greater relevance.

For now, however, consider again the design of the treatise. Spinoza has spent the first thirteen chapters eroding the foundation of religion until he found the one, true foundation upon which he could construct a new religion. The Archimedean point for his ecumenical labors is the precept to love one's neighbour. And as the love

of one's neighbour is to obey God, so obedience implies faith. Yet obedience is only displayed through works, so a man can only be judged faithful or unfaithful by his works, and faith becomes a measure of one's deeds. In short, faith leaves men free to say or think what they like, as long as their deeds conform to obedience of God.

So after beginning with a universal precept, Spinoza now has a universal rule: Faith is a measure of deeds and men are judged only according to this rule. As this rule follows clearly from what has already been proved, Spinoza is able to deduce dogmas for his newly articulated faith. Yet before listing them, Spinoza states something which sheds a bright light on the nature and scope of his project:

Lastly it follows that faith does not demand that dogmas should be true as that they should be pious—that is, such as will stir up the heart to obey . . . Thus it is not true doctrines which are expressly required by the Bible, so much as doctrines necessary for obedience. . . (185)

This conclusion has significant implications. First, according to Spinoza, men need only obey God to have faith, or rather to know God. This claim is the key to establishing an equality among all men. Regardless of the time, age, situation, language, or any other condition that may separate them, all men are equally able to love their neighbour, thereby obeying God and thus coming to know God. Men don't need to be specially *chosen* as God's people, nor do they have need of a supernatural intelligence to have a knowledge of God. Despite the disparity among all the people who read the Bible, Christians, Jews, Turks, etc., can all alike obey God. Spinoza has found one aspect that is universal to all men, of every religion: obedience to God through justice and charity. No one, according to his universal rule, can deny a man faith who is just and charitable. In short, Spinoza's restoration of religion and faith has resulted in the establishment of a "universal religion," one that is based on deeds alone.

From the "universal religion" stems a universal faith, and thus Spinoza deduces the dogmas that accompany this faith, namely only those that are absolutely necessary for obedience and without which obedience would be impossible. (186) The first of these dogmas is the one doctrine which lays the foundation for those that follow:

That God or a Supreme Being exists, sovereignly

just and merciful, the Exemplar of the true life, that whosoever is ignorant of or disbelieves in His existence cannot obey Him or know Him as a Judge. (186-187)

Remember that Spinoza does not believe his dogmas to reveal the truth of God's nature; their only purpose is to inculcate obedience.

Of faith then Spinoza believes he has shown that it

does not so much require truth as piety, and that it is only quickening and pious through obedience, consequently no one is faithful save by obedience alone. The best faith is not necessarily possessed by him who displays the best reasons, but by him who displays the best fruits of justice and charity. How salutary and necessary this doctrine is for a state, in order that men may dwell together in peace and concord. . . (188)

As we will see momentarily Spinoza is prepared to weave this strand of "universal religion" into the fabric of political life. Yet before he proceeds he undertakes one final task: to separate once and for all faith and philosophy.

Actually this divorce has already been accomplished. For Spinoza makes it quite clear that when the orthodox religious authorities began looking for truth rather than meaning in Scripture they confused the aims of philosophy and faith. The end of philosophy, according to Spinoza, is truth, whereas the end of faith is obedience and piety. Hence, as their ends "are as wide apart as the poles," faith and philosophy ought never to be conjoined. (189) Again we find another explanation of Spinoza's merciless attack on orthodox religion: The erosion of the foundation of religion and the separation of faith from philosophy are, in fact, one and the same. In other words, as Spinoza discarded all the old prejudices and misconceptions, that is, the philosophic speculations which men had wrongly layered on top of Scripture, he was in fact separating religion from philosophy. He dismembered all the alien branches of philosophy that were disfiguring religion. For Spinoza, religion and philosophy stand on completely different foundations. Thus, only by clearing all philosophical speculations from the foundation of religion could Spinoza permanently separate faith from philosophy. As religion was shown to be separate from philosophy, so too is faith in that it stems solely from the foundation of religion—whatever pertains to religion, necessarily pertains to faith also. Furthermore, this sepa-

ration was essential in order for Spinoza to salvage the one, true faith that had been lost—religion and faith could only be restored to their proper foundation by casting off all the vain adornments and embellishments of philosophy. Only by returning them, moreover, to their proper form could Spinoza establish his “universal religion,” one that is based on deeds alone.

If only this had been the extent of Spinoza’s restoration of faith, then his turn from a destroyer of faith to its savior would have been remarkable enough. Yet this is only the beginning. For now that Spinoza has rescued faith from what he considers to be crippling superstition, he intends to include this strand of theology into the workings of political life.

In order to better appreciate Spinoza’s final elevation of faith, that is, its incorporation into the state, we must take one last step backwards for just a moment. Having seen the theological part of the treatise, we must consider the political side of Spinoza’s treatise before the two can be united as one.

For Spinoza, government is fundamental for the betterment of mankind. He states:

... the ultimate aim of government is not to rule, or restrain, by fear, but contrariwise to free every man from fear, that he may live in all possible security; in other words, to strengthen his natural right to exist and work without injury to himself or others. (258-259)

That is, government is necessary for all men because it makes men free. Or, as Spinoza points out, “the true aim of government is liberty.” (259) Liberty is of utmost importance for Spinoza. For when men are held in check by fear, they cannot live properly as rational beings; it is only when they are freed from fear, that they can “develop their minds and bodies” and progress in the noble pursuits of science and the liberal arts. (261) For Spinoza it seems that without liberty and the security of public peace, men might as well be beasts rather than rational beings. Or to put it another way, the liberty afforded by government allows men to enjoy God’s greatest gift to them—their reason. (59)

Democracy is for Spinoza the ideal (or as close to ideal as possible) political association. In fact, the one political issue that Spinoza seems least afraid to declare is his love for democracy:

I think I have now shown sufficiently clearly the basis of a democracy: I have especially desired

to do so, for I believe it to be of all forms of government the most natural, and the most consonant with individual liberty. In it no one transfers his natural rights so absolutely that he has no further voice in affairs, he only hands it over to the majority of a society, whereof he is a unit. Thus all men remain, as they were in the state of nature, equals. (207)

For Spinoza, democracy is the best form of government because it is most suited for granting the greatest amount of freedom in a state. While these comments are altogether too brief in sketching the complexity and subtlety of Spinoza’s political thought, they should suffice in showing where Spinoza’s political allegiances lie.

Having established a democracy, a state in which liberty can be granted unfettered, Spinoza wants to extend that freedom as far as possible within the state: namely, all the way to the inclusion of freedom of thought and speech. In fact, freedom of thought and speech is not only a “virtue in itself” for Spinoza, but it is instrumental for the well-being and preservation of the state. For, in his preface to the treatise, Spinoza stated:

I have believed that I should be undertaking no ungrateful or unprofitable task, in demonstrating that not only can such freedom be granted without prejudice to the public peace, but also that without such freedom, piety cannot flourish nor the public peace be secure. (6)

No one can stifle men’s thoughts, not even the sovereign has enough power to lay down and uphold laws designed to make men think in a certain way. If, however, they attempt to charge men for “crimes of opinions,” they will only succeed in “surrounding victims with an appearance of martyrdom, and raise feelings of pity and revenge rather than of terror.” (265) While such laws are calculated solely to bridle the thoughts and speech of men, they in fact serve no other purpose but to inspire men to seditions and crime, both of which lead only to the sinking of the ship of state. Therefore, since men cannot be prevented from making their own judgments, the only remedy for the situation is to grant men this freedom. While it does have some disadvantages, the advantages are far greater—in Spinoza’s eyes—and more instrumental in the securing of the public peace.

The only way, however, for Spinoza to grant men the freedom of thought and speech within the state is to bind men by their actions alone, while leaving their rea-

son and judgment “free and unshackled.” For example, he says that

the safest way for a state is to lay down the rule that religion is comprised solely in the exercise of charity and justice, and that the rights of rulers in sacred, no less than in secular matters, should merely have to do with actions, but that every man should think what he likes and say what he thinks. (265)

Keeping in mind Spinoza’s declaration that the ultimate aim of government is liberty, and democracy is the form of government best suited to this end, we can begin to understand the unity of Spinoza’s treatise. It is now clear why Spinoza considers this a theological *and* a political treatise.

Here, finally, is where the aforementioned “universal religion” of deeds takes on its greatest importance and is elevated by Spinoza to its acme. For Spinoza’s only means for granting men freedom of thought and speech is to make piety and religion—in addition to all observances of the sovereign law—consist entirely in action, thereby leaving men’s judgment and their reason free. According to Spinoza, therefore:

If we hold to the principle that a man’s loyalty to the state should be judged, like his loyalty to God, from his actions only—namely from his charity towards his neighbours, we cannot doubt that the best government will allow freedom of philosophical speculation no less than of religious belief. (261)

Thus faith sets the standard for the state—only by following the standard that Spinoza had set for his “universal faith” can men be granted freedom of thought and speech: That is, through faith men are judged by the universal rule—a man is judged solely on account of his deeds. Hence, faith is the only means by which the freedom necessary for the security of the public peace can be granted. Or, for Spinoza, to extend the limit of freedom in his democracy to include the freedom of thought and speech, he can only do so by the integration of his “universal religion” that is, a religion based on deeds alone, into the political life of the state.

Spinoza does not seem to give a full explanation of the inception of his “universal religion” into the fabric of the state. Despite this minor gap, one aspect of this union is elucidated clearly by Spinoza: The sovereign is

crucial to the seamless combination of theology and politics. For Spinoza, the sovereign is the entity that wields power whether it be the body politic as a whole, a certain body of men, or one man. Upon entering the compact in forming the state, all men agree to hand over their power—and therefore their natural right—to the sovereign. By virtue of this right to rule over all men, the sovereign power is thus the origin of justice in the state. To Spinoza, in fact, justice exists only through the sovereign. (246-247) Therefore, if the “universal religion” is to be incorporated into the state, it must be codified by the sovereign. As Spinoza succinctly declares: “religion acquires its force as law solely from the decrees of the sovereign.” (245) That is, without the force of law, religion remains only a “universal precept of reason” and has no such power as to compel men any differently than does their desire or passion.

In fact, as Spinoza points out, men only obey when they are “under the fear of a greater evil, or the hope of a greater good,” (203) that is, when they are bound by the law established by the sovereign power. Hence, religion cannot be put into practice or “received as the law of a particular kingdom” until it is codified.” (248) Remember that for Spinoza religion consists exclusively in obedience to God in the form of loving one’s neighbour through acts of justice and charity. However, the existence of justice is wholly dependent upon the sovereign power. Therefore, by necessity, it follows for Spinoza that the sovereign’s rule is crucial to effect the codification of religion into the legal order of the state.

One final stitch must be made in order for Spinoza to complete his seemingly seamless union of theology and politics: the deliverance of all religious authority into the hands of the sovereign. Spinoza is quite insistent that the sovereign must be given both civil and religious authority; as the codification of religion is dependent upon the decrees of the sovereign, it follows for Spinoza that the sovereigns are the “proper interpreters of religion and piety.” (249) For:

... it is certain that duties towards one’s country are the highest that man can fulfill; for, if government be taken away, no good thing can last, all falls into dispute, anger and anarchy reign unchecked amid universal fear. Consequently there can be no duty towards our neighbour which would not become an offence if it involved injury to the whole state, nor can there be any offence against our duty towards our neighbour, or anything but loyalty in what we do for the sake

of preserving the state. (249)

Hence, if men are to obey God while simultaneously conducting themselves in a way that is most conducive to the preservation of the state (i.e. securing the public peace), the only solution—for Spinoza—is that “the outward observances of religion, and all the external practices of piety should be brought into accordance with the public peace and well-being if . . . men would obey God rightly.” (249) Said another way, Divine law must be made to conform to sovereign law. Spinoza seems to believe that the only way to accomplish this successfully is to give the sovereign authority over both civil and religious matters. All tension between church and state is resolved as they are united once and for all by having the sovereign of the state absorb the authority of the church. While this solution may appear altogether one-sided in favor of the state, in the remaining chapters of the treatise Spinoza argues vehemently that this union does not injure the church but is actually in the best interests of *both* the state *and* the church.

On the side of religion, the result is the final establishment of God’s kingdom on earth. For, as Spinoza points out,

inasmuch as the kingdom of God consists entirely in rights applied to justice and charity or to true religion, it follows that (as we asserted) the kingdom of God can only exist among men through the means of the sovereign. (247)

That is, God’s kingdom can only exist on earth through the sovereign. Without the sovereign there is no justice, and justice is the sole foundation of God’s kingdom as Spinoza declared earlier. Without the codification of religion, therefore, the whole idea of God’s kingdom and religion is nothing more than a “universal precept of reason” that cannot compel men to obedience more than can any other desire or passion.

Meanwhile, on the side of the state, Spinoza has finally found a way to secure public peace. By eroding religion and then resurrecting it on its proper foundation—obedience to God—Spinoza gave birth to his “universal faith” on the basis of a universal rule: A man should be judged only according to his deeds. Then, as he wove this standard into his political fabric he was finally able to grant men freedom of thought and speech.

In sum, the structure of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* is best captured by two words: separation and combination. Spinoza set for himself the task of demonstrat-

ing that not only can the freedom of thought and speech be granted without jeopardizing the public peace, but moreover, such freedom is necessary in order for piety to flourish and the public peace be secured. (6) As the title of the treatise betrays, Spinoza believes he accomplished this by combining theology and politics. Yet before this combination could be wrought, he had to first make a separation, namely the separation of faith and philosophy. Only by clearing the philosophical speculations and false notions that disfigured religion, could Spinoza find the one, true cornerstone of religion—obedience to God through

love to one’s neighbour. Upon this “universal” foundation, Spinoza then resurrected faith, one altogether free of “credulity and prejudices” and entirely separate from philosophy. Once Spinoza had thus cleansed faith, then, and only then, could he implement it as the single thread for the weaving together of theology and politics seamlessly into the fabric of the state. Hence, the separation is the means to combination, the end of which is the securing of public peace through allowing the freedom of thought and speech to men.

Spinoza’s enterprise, however, is ingeniously two-tiered. Not only is his separation of faith and philosophy the means to his end, but it is, astonishingly enough, an end in and of itself. Although freeing faith from the hindrances of philosophy is Spinoza’s expressed end, it seems, more importantly, that philosophy is finally left to its own devices. For, once Spinoza had separated faith and philosophy, he declared:

Faith, therefore, allows the greatest latitude in philosophic speculation, allowing us without blame to think what we like about anything, and only condemning as heretics and schismatics, those who teach opinions which tend to produce obstinacy, hatred, strife and anger. . . (189)

In short, the freedom of thought and speech—now seen as the freedom to philosophize—is both the means to the securing of the public peace while at the same time a noble end in itself.

How is one to grasp this multi-layered undertaking? Both the multitude *and* philosophers benefit from the implementation of Spinoza’s enterprise. From his presentation, on the one hand, it seems that Spinoza has tailored his treatise to serve the best interests of the multitude by affording them the preservation of the public peace. Yet, while the freeing of philosophy is not the central point nor the expressed end of the treatise, it is

seemingly ever-present, floating on the periphery, never wholly quitting the vision of either the author or the reader. In fact, in his preface Spinoza overtly declared that his treatise was meant for “philosophical readers” only, and no one else, especially not the multitude whose minds are—and perhaps forever will be—bent towards superstition. Furthermore, philosophy appears at the crucial point of the treatise: As mentioned above, at the moment when Spinoza has finished with his examination of theology and is about to embark upon his political undertaking, philosophy is given due recognition. It seems that philosophy stands between theology and politics, and this is further supported by the realization that it is the philosopher who grasped the delicate workings of theology and politics. Could it be, then, that what is viewed as Spinoza’s end is really his means? While the freedom of thought and speech is the means to the protection of the public peace, perhaps this preservation is not *the* end, but is itself the means to the truly desired end—the freedom to philosophize.

# The Offense of Socrates: A Look at the Philosopher in Athens

Mary Dietsch

I tell you that to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining both myself and others is really the very best thing that a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living . . ."

*Apology* 38<sup>1</sup>

The approach taken by Socrates in Plato's *Apology* to defend himself against the accusations of critics and the comrades of Meletus emerges as an exhibition of the true "crime" for which the court condemns him. He attempts to expose the true purpose of the court's proceedings and seeks to inform the jury of the precise nature of that truth. In the first two paragraphs of the *Apology*, the word "truth" appears four times, culminating in Socrates' declaration: "From me you shall hear the whole truth." (17c) He reveals the truth to the jurors through the way in which he conducts his defense. So begins his address as he faces the accusations of his public critics before confronting the specific indictment brought by Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon.

Pronouncing the most dangerous influence in the court to be the public's inaccurate perception of his activities, he considers the charges levied against him. He suggests that the affidavit might read "criminal meddling, in that he inquires into things below the earth and in the sky, and makes the weaker argument defeat the stronger, and teaches others to follow his example." (19b) Socrates quickly denounces these charges as having little validity. He declares that he has no knowledge of either the heavens or the earth, and unlike the character Socrates in *The Clouds*, he has never discussed the relationship between weak and strong arguments. He also asserts that, having never imposed a fee to educate others, he may not be considered a teacher. He challenges the jurors to ask any Athenian if his declaration is false. In doing so, he invites his critics to consider whether or not his actions accurately represent his reputation. He alleges that he has

committed no crime and that his behavior in no way harms Athens.

Socrates then deviates from the critics' charges to explain the origin of his unpopularity with them. He explains that his behavior reflects a spiritual revelation to him at Delphi declaring that no one was wiser than him. So, compelled by a spiritual duty, Socrates developed the habit of questioning individuals thought wise by their fellow Athenians to discover if the oracle spoke the truth. Proceeding from one interview to another, he discovered no one to be wiser than him. Having explained this to the court, Socrates then seeks to broaden his defense. He decides to explore in court the breadth of a particular man's knowledge. However, in searching for this, he irritates a sore at the heart of the public's grudge against him, for it was the result of previous encounters that initially gained Socrates their disdain.

Thus, by revealing his search to discover the nature of human wisdom, it appears that Socrates aims to aggravate the jurors. He systematically exposes to them the types of ignorance displayed by individuals who believe they know more than they actually do. He attacks all of the prominent members of Athenian society: the politicians who know absolutely nothing; the poets who by their instincts appear to know something, but in fact do not; and the artisans who possess the knowledge of a particular skill, but also presume to possess knowledge of other things. In one fell swoop, Socrates humiliates the Athenians by clustering them into various categories of ignorance. Recounting his discoveries, he now taunts the jurors, knowing full well that the politicians, poets, and artisans present in the courtroom will be aware that he ascribed a type of ignorance to each of them. It is because of this particular behavior that he accumulated enemies in the past.

Socrates next endeavors to demonstrate before the court his exact method of discerning how much an individual knows. He proceeds in this direction with a couple of purposes. First, he wants to refute the formal court charges, not as they officially stand but as they reflect the court's misinterpretation of why he stands accused. Second, he wants to demonstrate his activity as a philosopher, the true "crime" for which he stands trial. Hence, Socrates addresses Meletus directly before the jurors, for this accuser epitomizes a particular type of ignorance.

Meletus represents the aggrieved poets whom Socrates previously described as having apparent knowledge guided by instinct, but no actual knowledge. In the cross-examination before the jurors, Socrates attempts to prove that his accuser speaks in ignorance even as he seems to know.

Now Meletus has asserted that Socrates "is guilty of corrupting the minds of the young, and of believing in deities of his own invention instead of the gods recognized by the state." (24c) When questioned, Meletus maintains that all Athenians except Socrates are a good influence on the young. Here Socrates is able to point out to the court his accuser's ignorance. For he asserts that only skilled trainers have the ability to improve their wards, and educators, like trainers, are few rather than many. Therefore, education hinges not on the ability of the entire Athenian population to teach, but on that of a select number of educators. Meletus is then manipulated to alter his indictment to claim an intentional harm of the young. Thereupon Socrates replies, "Either I have not been a bad influence, or it is unintentional, so that in either case your accusation is false." (26a)

The first charge being dispelled, he proceeds to the second one. Again he influences Meletus to amend the indictment and this time accuse him of preaching atheistic beliefs. Socrates also refutes this charge; arguing that one who believes in spiritual activities must likewise believe in deities. To demonstrate that he is not an atheist, he then refers to the spiritual activities in which he has been engaged: questioning the oracle at Delphi and fulfilling his divinely inspired quest as a philosopher. Concluding this portion of his defense, he chastises Meletus. "There is no avoiding the conclusion that you brought this charge against me as a test of my wisdom, or else in despair of finding a genuine offense of which to accuse me." (27e)

So, the philosopher is successful in both purposes. He clears himself of the set of amended charges; and most importantly, he allows the jurors to witness philosophy in action. Here his performance speaks for itself. He is not so interested in proving himself innocent of the formal charges as he is in providing the jurors with a dramatization of the events which offended Meletus and his colleagues and subsequently brought him to trial. He now occupies center stage and offers Athens the truth, that is, the truth of his actions as they have been witnessed throughout his life.

For Socrates, the charges brought by Meletus are not of concern solely as they pertain to his own safety. He neglects to disprove Meletus' initial charges and instead

amends them in order to argue their validity. This alone demonstrates that he is little interested in the indictment. What he is interested in, though, is elucidating the disparity between what an individual thinks he knows and what an individual really does not know. In this, he demonstrates the profession which has occupied his entire life. Meletus is the model of an individual who appears to know something, as for example the offenses committed by Socrates, when in fact he knows nothing. The chief focus of the interrogation of Meletus is not the refutation of the charges, but something else more important.

It appears that Socrates is more concerned with his so-called spiritual duty. His life as a philosopher is to comprehend the truth, and his desire to illuminate for others the limitations and aspirations of human knowledge reflects this concern. Socrates cares little about clarifying for Meletus the nature of human wisdom, but he does offer the court this demonstration of exposing the truth. In doing this, Socrates does not give the jurors what they want, not because he does not shed tears, but because he fails to provide them with a customary defense. What he gives them, though, is something much more important. He presents them with what they need to determine his guilt or innocence, for if they recognize his defense as a reenactment of the so-called crime he is actually accused of committing, then they can reach a just verdict.

In questioning Meletus before the court and addressing the jury directly, Socrates turns away from the standard environment essential for a philosopher's inquiry. For he normally converses with individuals either on a personal basis, or within a small group. His private mission to expose what an individual knows and to help others attain goodness acquires a different quality in the courtroom. Euthyphro previously remarked to Socrates that this would be the case. He stated that Meletus brought accusations against him "well knowing how easily things can be misrepresented to the crowd." (2b) This is precisely the case during the defense since what Socrates asserts insults many Athenians who consider him arrogant.

Socrates never hides his guilt in committing the "crime" of philosophy, for his behavior faithfully reflects that of a lover of wisdom who seeks to know the breadth of human knowledge. By exhibiting the true nature of his life as a philosopher, he acts as if it were that life standing trial. He has put the Athenian court into the position of having to determine whether or not the philosopher has a right to operate in the city. He remarks, "So long as I draw breath and have my faculties, I shall never stop practicing philosophy and exhorting you and

<sup>1</sup> All references refer to *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961.

elucidating the truth for everyone that I meet." (29c) Socrates flaunts his offense by daring to philosophize whether or not the law permits him.

Hence it is obvious that Socrates will not allow his behavior to be censored by the state. He implies that there exists a natural order in the universe ranging from what is most important to what is least important. Man obeys God first, as Socrates does with respect to the revelation at Delphi, and obeys the state second. God deserves man's primary consideration since His pronouncements are faultless and indisputable. Therefore, Socrates maintains that individuals must adhere to the manner in which God commands them to act.

His offense is a grievous one in the eyes of the state. That is to say, he will continue to philosophize in Athens despite any decree attempting to prohibit his behavior. Only if the state physically prevents him will he cease to engage in philosophy. He goads the jury with this information, declaring, "I am not going to alter my conduct, not even if I have to die a hundred deaths." (30c) Such a statement leaves little latitude for interpretation and Socrates' critics have every right to be infuriated by his declaration. His impudence provokes the jurors again and again, especially as he continues to insult them by alluding to the extraordinary nature of his occupation.

So necessary is Socrates' profession to his existence that at one point he compares himself to Achilles. He remarks:

Where a man has once taken up his stand, either because it seems best to him or in obedience to his orders, there I believe he is bound to remain and face the danger, taking no account of death or anything else before dishonor. (28d)

Both he and Achilles fear living an "ignoble life" much more than they fear death. He then continues later to assert "the law of God [does not] permit a man to be harmed by a worse." (30d) The announcement reflects his belief that he is a better Athenian than his accusers insofar as he is wiser. His wisdom includes an awareness of his state of knowledge and the confidence that man should not fear that which he is incapable of comprehending. He also contends that he offers the greatest service to Athens by acting as an agitator and keeping the Athenians from becoming complacent. In comparing himself with a stinging fly, Socrates proposes that he is a gift from God to prevent the thoroughbred horse from growing lazy. Each day he must "settle here, there, everywhere, rousing, persuading, reproving every one of

you." (30e) Socrates' examples only gain the contempt of his jurors as he proceeds from one infuriating analogy to another.

His conduct indicates a man who does not fear re-creation, and who indeed tempts his jurors to reprove his insolence. Strange though it may seem, he purposely irritates the Athenians and arouses their disdain. A fear of death does not inhibit him, for he expected a guilty verdict from the beginning of the trial. In later contemplating his defense, he reflects, "I [was] quite clear that the time had come when it was better for me to die and be released from my distractions." (41d) His desire to pass from life to death is evident at the trial in his whole behavior while even his divine voice does not oppose his defense.

Socrates' trial was the first instance where he entered the political forum of the courtroom. It seems that the only reason he decided to attend the trial was because his divine voice did not prohibit him as it had in the past. For he admits that his divine voice prevented him from engaging in politics previously: "If I had tried long ago to engage in politics, I should long ago have lost my life, without doing any good either to you or myself." (31d) Yet now he engages in politics by appearing before the court and defending himself. He must have been aware that the nature of politics had not changed and that the encounter between politics and philosophy would not be a pleasant one. By appearing at the trial, he made a tacit agreement with the state to comply with the final verdict. Not only that, he is conscious that the conflict between politics and philosophy could only be resolved with the dissolution of one, and that one would necessarily include him.

However, Socrates neglects to reveal in his defense that he suffers nothing whether he continues to philosophize or whether he dies. In fact, Socrates will gain a great deal when his soul is released from his body, for in the *Phaedo* he asserts

We (i.e., philosophers) are convinced that if we are ever to have pure knowledge of anything, we must get rid of the body and contemplate things by themselves with the soul by itself. (66e)

He also explains that this liberation of the soul from the body cannot occur "until God sends some compulsion like the one which we are facing now." (62c) So it appears that a guilty verdict will oblige him by releasing him from the bonds of the living.

Yet Socrates chastises the state for inflicting more

harm on itself than on him by reaching a guilty verdict. He asserts that philosophizing improves the city, and that Athens would lose its single best influence with his demise. It seems strange that he who wishes to remove his mortal bonds would reprove his executioners. However, Socrates desires what is best for both himself and for those whom he leads to a better understanding of human wisdom. As long as he lives, he will aid them in understanding knowledge. Still, he also recognizes that he cannot elucidate the truth if an individual refuses his assistance.

At his trial, the jurors, on behalf of the Athenians, refuse to accept this assistance. Perhaps this explains Socrates' surprise that there is only a marginal difference between the number of jurors voting for his conviction and those voting for his acquittal. He expected the vast majority to vote against him, the philosopher, but a significant number vote in favor of him to continue his life without disruption. Nevertheless, his verdict is guilty and he is sentenced to die. In reaching such a decision, the state declares the philosopher to be a criminal.

Socrates manipulates the state in his defense to place the philosopher on trial. By forcing Athens to confront the conflict between politics and philosophy, he compels it "to earn the reputation . . . of having put Socrates to death, 'that wise man.'" (38c) While he refers directly to himself, it may be reasoned that it is the philosopher, and not simply the man, who is put to death. His sentence reveals an ultimate truth: The philosopher and the state cannot co-exist because the two are inherently incompatible. Their incompatibility stems from the state's inability to control the philosopher who is compelled daily to criticize and persuade men to understand the limited scope of human knowledge.

## The Infinite Straight Line in Book I of Euclid's *Elements*

Dawn Shuman

In Book I of the *Elements*, Euclid uses certain basic elements to design propositions and then manipulates them to do the proofs. The line is one of these elements. Euclid defines a line as a "breadthless length," (I Definition 2) and a straight line as "a line which lies evenly with the points on itself." (I Def. 4) These terms and definitions are certainly fascinating and complex in and of themselves. However, I will focus on the line which Euclid did *not* define: the infinite straight line.

The definitions of lines and straight lines do not exclude the possibility of infinite lines. Euclid simply does not define infinity or finiteness, although he does use "finite" in Postulate 2. Euclid defines a boundary as "that which is an extremity of anything." (I Def. 13) I think I would define as "finite" anything with boundaries and as "infinite" anything without boundaries. Therefore anything which is finite has extremities, and anything which is infinite does not. Euclid says that "the extremities of a line are points," (I Def. 3) which could cause logical problems since an infinite line has no extremities and might therefore be supposed to have no points. But an infinite line would have an infinite number of points upon it without having any *particular* end-points. This is only possible in infinite space. In some ways, infinite space is a very impractical concept, because it is difficult to imagine, and impossible to fully comprehend. In the concrete world, every human being *has* location, and is limited to comprehending those things within sensory range. We can expand that range indefinitely, but we cannot comprehend *all* of infinity because there is no *end* to infinity. The same limitation of location applies to the geometrical world, an assertion which I will support using Proposition 12 in Book I.

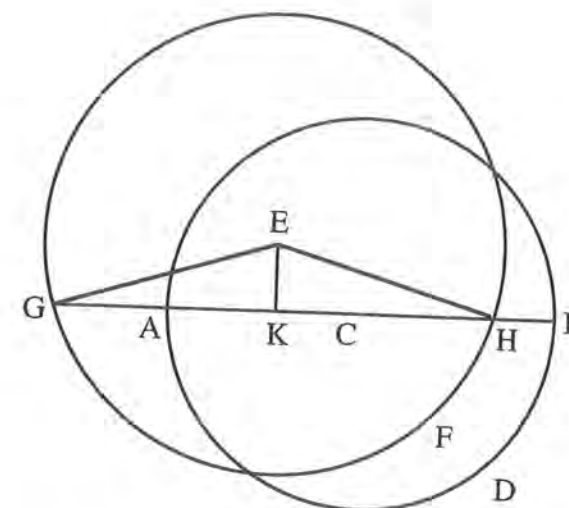
Proposition 12 is the first place "infinite" is used: "To a given infinite straight line, from a given point which is not on it, to draw a perpendicular straight line." When first reading this enunciation, I found it very odd that Euclid needed to prove that a perpendicular could be drawn from any point not on the line to any infinite line, in infinite space, rather than just using a particular finite straight line and a particular point somewhere near it. However, in a way, all of the propositions are described and manipulated in infinite space. Most propositions are applied to single elements or figures made up of several interconnected elements. These figures, in order to be truly universal, can theoretically be located anywhere in

infinite space. In this case, with any given *finite* straight line and point, a problem occurs because the elements are not connected in the enunciation and there is no specificity as to their location. The point might be located beyond the ends of the line, making it impossible to draw the perpendicular. In infinite space, with an infinite line, there will always be a sure relationship between the location of the infinite line and the location of the point, hence allowing the universality needed in an Euclidean proof.

This definite relationship between the locations of any infinite straight line and any point is very important to Proposition 12. The proof consists of picking, at random, an additional point on the other side of the line, and then, using the original point as the center, describing a circle with the radius the distance between the two points. This cuts off a portion of the line which is close enough to the point to have the perpendicular drawn to it. If it did not, if there were no way of connecting the two elements of line and point, the proposition would not work. As long as there is that connection, it will.

With a similar connection, a perpendicular line from *almost* any point to *almost* any line can be drawn using a finite straight line and a point. Had Euclid done this proposition it might have been like this:

*To a given finite straight line, from any point within the circle of which the finite straight line is the diameter but not on the finite straight line, to draw a line perpendicular to the given line.* (It also might be done using parallel lines or any right-angled quadrilateral figure.) Let AB be the given straight line, and let AB be bisected at point C. Let the circle ABD be described, using point C as the center and either AC or BC as the distance. Let point E be found anywhere within the circle ABD not on AB. Now let a point F be taken anywhere on the other side of line AB but still within the circle ABD, and let the circle FGH be described with center E and distance EF. Let the line BCA be drawn through to point G (on circle FGH). Connect the points E, G and E, H; H being the point of intersection of line AB and circle FGH. Let the angle GEH be bisected, intersecting line AB at point K.



I say that the bisecting line is also a line perpendicular to ACB. For GE is equal to EH, and EK is common, and angle GEK is equal to angle HEK; therefore the triangles GKE and HKE are similar and coincide. So angle GKE is equal to angle HKE; and they are adjacent. But when a straight line set upon a straight line makes the adjacent angles equal to one another, each of the angles is right, and the two lines are perpendicular to each other. So line EK, drawn from the point, is perpendicular to line AB. Q.E.D.

This proof works partly because of the limitations put on its universality. The point in this proposition must be within very circumscribed limits. On the other hand, the enunciation does contain its own universality: The line can be of any length; the points can be anywhere on opposite sides of the diameter of the circle, even on the circle itself; the whole figure can be located anywhere in infinite space. Euclid's enunciation is entirely universal, although the line and point must be connected and hence are limited to the same plane of infinite space. However, what is needed to draw the perpendicular and to prove that the line is perpendicular once drawn is the most striking and vitally important similarity between Euclid's proof of Proposition 12 and this proof.

Both proofs take place within infinite space, that concept which we are incapable of fully comprehending. In order to delineate the relationship between the line, infinite and finite, and the point by drawing a perpendicular, we must find what they have in common. We must be able to find, with the particular line and point we happen to be using, a relationship in terms of loca-

tion. That is, each element has its own particular location, no matter what it happens to be, and those two locations are related to one another. The proposition I put forth forms the relationship in a more usually Euclidean way than Proposition 12, by placing the point within a structure based on a line. Proposition 12 is unusual because it is explicitly in infinite space: The point may be anywhere; the line may be anywhere. However, in order to understand how these elements relate to each other we must draw a circle, as large or small as it may need to be, but it *must* be drawn to allow us to see the relationship. Without this limitation we cannot draw the perpendicular. Just as when we read a work of philosophy we can only understand what is claimed to the extent that it relates to what is within our own experience, when dealing with infinite geometrical space we can only use as much of it as is within the limits of that relationship of location.

# Character, Author, Reader, God: What It Means to Read

## *Ulysses*

Emily Katherine Brock

Woyzeck:

Devil! Was it there you saw him?

Marie:

Just as the day's long and the world ancient,  
many people can stand all in the same place,  
one after another.

Woyzeck, Georg Büchner, 1837

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall  
be; and that which is done is that which shall be  
done: and there is no new thing under the sun.  
Is there any thing whereof it may be said, see,  
this is new? it has already been, in the ages  
before us.

Ecclesiastes 1. 9

### PART I: LEARNING TO READ JOYCE'S WORDS

James Joyce's *Ulysses* greets the reader with a title whose symbolic meaning is very easy to decipher: Obviously someone in the book will parallel the classical character Odysseus in some way, and thus every reader must open the cover with that in mind. We foresee an epic imbued with timeless meaning, an imperfect but sympathetic main character, perhaps even a similar construction of the plot. As well, the book's title refers us to another book, taking it for granted that we have read, or at least know of, the *Odyssey*. We start to realize that this book will draw on an assumed background of other writings, that it is asking more of us as reader than other more self-contained novels might.

After opening the cover, words and images that the author presents to us get increasingly harder to make sense of as we read farther into the book. The first narrative image we get after beginning the book, for example, is a farcical mass given by Buck Mulligan. It seems to be just an absurdist image, until we remember that this book is an "epic," and every good epic—the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, *Paradise Lost*—opens with an invocation of the Muse. At the end of that chapter comes the word "usurper," uttered by Stephen Dedalus to his friends, and with that we become aware that Stephen must parallel Telemachus, and his friends are Penelope's suitors. With those two real-

izations, or others like them, we begin to see by what paths meaning will reveal itself in this book.

Joyce shows us Stephen Dedalus first, to train us for Leopold Bloom later. The novel starts with three chapters that deal exclusively with Stephen, before it changes to a novel mainly about Bloom. First of all, this continues the similarity between this book and the *Odyssey*, since that epic starts with several chapters centering on Telemachus' search for news of his father. However, that format also allows Joyce to characterize an easier person first, to get us trained for the important one, Bloom, when his story comes. Stephen has a very strong sense of himself, and fits a fairly recognizable template as a young, charismatic artist, conscious of his own actions and passing judgment on the actions of those around him. Although he is unhappy and confused, he remains a very concrete individual personality. As well, it helps us that Joyce's previous novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, was about Stephen, and thus that his character has already been established, making him more easily understood.

Stephen stands out against the people around him, becoming a clearly defined person not moving with the general flow of life, a charismatic personality that is fairly easy for the reader to gauge. Where Stephen stands out, however, Bloom blends in. He is not very self-aware, he does not participate in conversations, much less monopolize them as Stephen does, and he tends not to pass judgment or do anything else that could let the reader get a good fix on his personality traits. In his role as a sort of Everyman, he is necessarily much harder for the reader to picture clearly, since Everyman must blend into the background and not distinguish himself. Stephen produces poems, fables, arguments and so on, and we can understand him by looking at what he has made. Stephen's last name fits into this image: Dedalus was the artificer of Greek myth. While Stephen produces objects but stays himself relatively unchanged, Bloom blooms, producing nothing but mutating his own self. He gives us no tangible offspring to examine, and because he is in a state of change, it is harder for the reader to understand his character. Because of this, Joyce doesn't start us off with him. By encountering Stephen first, we

can get trained in understanding characters in *Ulysses*, and so when we get to the much harder case of Bloom, we are ready to see him for all that he is.

Joyce has begun to train us for the task of reading *Ulysses*, and images that reveal parallels less obviously are building upon images that are easier to understand. By Chapter Nine, for example, finding out how our Odysseus, Leopold Bloom, is sailing unharmed between Scylla and Charybdis hinges on several small phrases. Stephen imagines that the person to whom he is talking is drowning in a whirlpool of mystical Platonism, and Aristotle, on whom Stephen is basing his arguments, like Scylla, sits on a rock.<sup>1</sup> The most distinct of these references are the two sentences, "Head, redconecapped, buffeted, brineblinded," (9. 405) and "A like fate awaits him and the two rages commingle in a whirlpool." (9. 464) At the end of the chapter, Leopold Bloom, who has barely been seen in this chapter, walks between Stephen and his opponent, sailing to safety: "My will: his will that fronts me. Seas between. A man passed out between them, bowing, greeting." (9.1202) If we hadn't been trained by the eight chapters that came before, we might have skipped right over these cryptic lines. These few phrases would have been much harder to understand if we hadn't become used to thinking that every phrase is important and already been sensitized to hints of Homeric parallels.

The repetition of phrases hides the key to the symbolic parallels that will help us understand the meaning of the book. The main characters embody several different sets of historical and literary parallels for us to look out for, as well. Thus, *Ulysses* operates on many more levels than simply plot action, character traits and so on. The readers must supply the missing links to connect Leopold Bloom to Odysseus, and recognize the other

<sup>1</sup> All references to line numbers in *Ulysses* refer to the Vintage edition, edited by Hans Walter Gabler. I would like to take this opportunity to say a few words about the use of secondary texts in this essay. No secondary text was used for any interpretive points, but several of the symbolic connections I make during the course of the paper came from either published guidebooks or other people in my preceptorial and study group. I decided that footnoting these connections, most notably the one referring to Chaucer's "The Manciple's Tale," was not necessary, since they are not original ideas or interpretation, but rather discoveries of what was already there. As well, they serve only as examples in my essay, and are not at all crucial to the general argument of the paper.

parallels that together constitute a whole other set of meanings for the novel. Joyce, through training us to read *Ulysses* successfully, also uses us as a way to continuously connect the events we read to those of all of history. Our memory of every other thing we have ever read does more than enhance the imagery used; it is the building block of that imagery.

He comments obliquely on the role of memory in reading many times, in the ways that his characters read written words. Perhaps the best example is an advertising campaign that Bloom encounters in his wanderings. In it, five men walk in single file around the streets of Dublin, each with a letter on his tall hat, spelling out HELY'S, the name of a store.

A procession of whitesmocked sandwichmen  
marched slowly towards him along the gutter,  
scarlet sashes across their boards. Bargains. Like  
that priest they are this morning: we have sinned:  
we have suffered. He read the scarlet letters on  
their five tall white hats: H. E. L. Y. 'S. Wisdom  
Hely's. Y lagging behind drew a chunk of bread  
from under his foreboard, crammed it into his  
mouth and munched as he walked. . . (Bloom)  
crossed Westmoreland street when apostrophe S  
had plodded by. (8.123)

They pass him several more times: "H. E. L. Y. 'S filed before him, tallwhitehatted, past Tangier lane, plodding towards their goal." (10.310) And later, "At Ponsonby's corner a jaded white flagon H. halted and four tallhatted white flagons halted behind him, E. L. Y. 'S, while outriders pranced past and carriages." (10.1238) Bloom sees, and we see, each letter as an individual consciousness, with thoughts and actions of his own. Alone, each redlettered man also recalls the image from *The Scarlet Letter* of being branded, publicly labeled for a private sin, and therefore be an ennobled figure. Together, however, they spell out a word which has a completely different meaning than the individuals had, a comical image, five human beings turned into nothing more than an advertisement. Likewise, when we read we see the parts as well as the whole, each individual image or event as well as the completed, coherent picture that they want to make. And likewise, the final message, the whole, necessarily neglects the intricacies of the parts.

The newly trained reader's memory and sense of continuity affect the coherency of the text. Unlike most novels, here the reader is asked to draw on his past reading experience, not only to understand small references, but

to understand the whole of the book. Meaningful things that would be stated outright in other books are here hidden in a maze of literary references through which we must find our way. We remember when a phrase we read resembles, in form or content, a phrase from earlier in the book, and get better at recognizing what is important as we get more experienced. Subsequent readings may turn up even more recurrences as we learn what to remember. Joyce needs readers properly trained to remember these little things, because repeated images only become meaningful when there is a reader who remembers, and recognizes them as repetitions. Without the recognition that comes from our memory, events might appear to be random events, and therefore ignored; but the author, relying on the reader to recognize them, loads them with significance. Because we learn that our recognition of his symbols and parallels helps establish the coherency of the book, we try very hard to understand all of them. We realize this early on, when the Homeric parallels are first introduced, and as connections get more diverse and more difficult to find, we try harder to extract meaning from the events. Although Joyce cannot be sure that we have read everything to which he refers, he does seem to use books which are firmly placed in the canon of Western Literature, thus keeping the requirement for the proper reading his book as the classical education in literature, history, and religion that any person could, or perhaps should, have. We begin to see any and all superficially meaningless references, objects and events as containing, somewhere within them, a seed of meaning that will give us deeper insight into Joyce's "big themes" of the novel. Thus Joyce is counting on our presence to hold together the book, and what his words call up in our minds is not incidental, but rather something on which he relied very much as a level of meaning for the book. He can only hope that we take what he has given us and interpret it correctly, now that we know what to do with it.

The world that Joyce has created gradually becomes filled with meaning, alive and organic in its circularity, where otherwise it might seem inert. We don't want to let a single reference pass us by unnoticed or misunderstood, and thus most people that wish to read the book well read it with other readers or published guidebooks. Very few people are going to have all the background Joyce cites, and a perfect memory besides. For this same reason, it is beneficial to read it many times, and flip back and forth in it while reading. We learn from Joyce, as we progress through the book, that to read well is to read in that way, and that a good reader sees both the word

HELY'S and the men that are forming it. It is similar to the way a believer reads the Bible; since he considers the Bible the word of God, he treats each word as precious and poetically full of meaning. Thus, at the end of Joyce's book, we come away with a new, and ancient, way of reading. It becomes a reflex to study every word as if it held the key to great understanding, instead of just skimming the surface of the text for the general meaning. Joyce returns us to a time when books themselves were rarer and the written word more respected and valuable. We are reading everything as closely as if it were the Bible. Even if this reflex doesn't last long after we've closed the book, at least he has shown us how much we might be missing in everything we read. We learn to treat every sentence as if it were very important, never ignoring anything because it seems inconsequential.

Even more interesting are those recurrences, coincidences, and parallels that don't seem to have anything to do with the book's obvious symbolism or themes. The sailor in Chapter Sixteen has a tattoo that reads "6-16," which just happens to be the date of the day chronicled in *Ulysses*, for example. This is just something to remark upon, a chance occurrence at which to wonder. However, Joyce has purposefully placed that tattoo on that sailor to convey some meaning and remind us of the omnipresence of the author. Not merely a coincidence but rather a conscious act, we see in the history of such items a decision by the author to include such "accidents." If we saw such a coincidence in our daily life we would no doubt think very little of it, and dismiss it as meaningless chance, as Bloom does. As far as the action of the plot goes, it is an inconsequential coincidence, but for the readers, it can only be an encrypted message from the author to us, reminding us of his presence. In a work written with such care, we cannot dismiss it as chance, as a result of randomness, but instead must consider it as having meaning, since it is deliberately placed in the text by Joyce. Other examples of this sort include the crazy man Cashel Boyle O'Connor Fitzmaurice Tisdall Farell, whom Bloom keeps seeing on the street, who can be seen as a message from Joyce to us about what happens to form without any content. Another example is when Bloom unwittingly predicts the outcome of the horse race. He did not intend to say anything about the race but is misunderstood as having offered a betting tip on it, and the prediction he unwittingly made turns out to have come true.

However, Joyce also warns us that words are treacherous for us. We learn from him both on the one hand not to take words at face value, rather to recognize the

presence of a possibly undiscoverable deeper meaning, and on the other hand not to trust in the truth of written words. A written word differs from the object it signifies in that the word had to be written by a person, and therefore carries a particular intent that we may never understand. Some force had to inspire the person to write, and thus all writing carries such hidden motives. A person must choose between writing one word instead of another, or even whether to write a word at all. A word is born of a writer, and must be consciously brought into existence, but a physical object exists without human activity. While a tangible thing may be manipulated by human hands, its substance, its material being, exists without any intent we know of. We give more thought to the words we read than the objects we see because of this history, this connection to a writer that words have.

At the same time, however, Joyce asks us to view these precious words as untrustworthy. We could mistake the intention we want words to have for the intention they actually do carry. As an example of this kind of mistake, he shows Stephen in a heated argument about Shakespeare, *Hamlet* in particular. As Stephen's friend Buck portrays it, "He proves by algebra that Hamlet's grandson is Shakespeare's grandfather and that he himself is the ghost of his own father." (1.555) We don't hear the actual argument until Chapter Nine, and when we do, it is as tenuous and complicated as Buck jokingly made it out to be. Stephen argues it earnestly, but then on looking back realizes, as we do, just how far on the wrong track he has gotten.

You are a delusion, said roundly John Eglinton to Stephen. You have brought us all this way to show us a French triangle. Do you believe your own theory? -No, Stephen said promptly. (9.1064)

Thus, even as we grow more adept at reading *Ulysses*, events in the book warn us of how untrustworthy a medium written words are. As well, we see that we, as readers, are untrustworthy. We could be reading too much into the text, or reading with biased eyes and omitting certain points. Part of Joyce's training is teaching us to open ourselves to every part of the text. We are left always suspecting that we could be misreading—attaching more, less, or the wrong meaning to any word.

Joyce's use of multiple narrators is one of the most noticeable ways in which this novel differs from most other novels and epics. The technique of using ever-changing voices to tell a continuous story increases our

awareness of something behind the narrator. For the plot continues to progress chronologically even while the narrative technique, the filter through which we view the plot, changes periodically. Yet this change is no accident, either. Each chapter's narrative technique corresponds to the plot's action at that point, to a greater or lesser degree. In the beginning the choice of technique is fairly obvious, with chapters centering on Stephen from Stephen's point of view, presenting his thoughts, and with chapters from Bloom's point of view in Bloom's voice, but as the book goes on the narrators become less and less conventional. For example, the chapter in which Bloom hears people singing in a bar not only includes a lot of musical phrases in it, but also is itself arranged in a musical pattern, with motifs introduced in the beginning that then are used in the construction of the piece, as in a fugue. Another good example is the chapter in which Bloom is with a group of doctors, all waiting for a woman to give birth. The chapter is arranged as the development of English prose style, from druidic incantation to modern exposition, echoing the development of a fetus. After the birth occurs, the narration deteriorates into an amalgam of slang, almost mimicking a baby's babble.

Because of the training that Joyce gives us, and the ways in which we are reminded of the author behind his linear plot, we feel that author's presence, who reciprocally felt our presence as he wrote his book. He assembles a world out of literary motifs, historic events, and real places in Dublin. As he guides his characters through this world, he manipulates it deliberately to mirror them and their actions, creating the recurrences and parallels that we then notice. He affects every level of this world down to the tiniest detail, making every aspect of the world address the story and the characters. For the reader, it is as if Dublin has been turned into a giant amusement park where Leopold Bloom is the theme. His intentions in writing phrases that seem cryptic are at the front of our thoughts, and much of our interpretation of the book thus takes the form of the statement, "What the author means when he writes such and such is. . ." The effect of this is that we feel the presence of some mind at work, with which we never have direct contact, but which we sense as someone who cares that we understand the book, someone who took the time to build up our new reading techniques. The reader of *Ulysses* distinctly sees that there are two consciousnesses aware of the action, the reader and the author. We cannot be as self-centered as we are when reading more conventional things where the writer conceals himself. We have responsibilities.

Both the reader and the author are part of the narra-

tive, but while the reader always experiences the book as a linear chronology, it seems that the author does not. We get this impression from little recurrences, of the sort that indicate the author at work, some occurring many chapters apart, each time existing only as one small phrase. A good example of this is the image of a drowned man who has just been found in the sea near Dublin after floating for many days, a news story that both Stephen and Bloom hear. We see the man in their thoughts here and there, and Bloom runs into a friend, a coroner's assistant, who must handle the body. The drowned man floats through the first half of the book, a symbol of Bloom drowning in the backwaters of his life, the odious, bloated corpse always turning up in different conversations. Without a careful, trained reading, however, one might skim over each of these references as it occurred, however, and thus never see the recurrence. Once the reader notices the references as similar, they give him the impression that they were placed all at the same time, although each time it fits perfectly into the story. When a thing is recognized as recurrent it becomes more obvious that Joyce intends it to have real meaning; a word said twice might be accidental, but not a word said repeatedly. It is as though the entire book had been written all at the same time, had happened all at the same time, instead of over a period of time. We can imagine the entire book appearing suddenly out of his head, already fully formed, having the same sort of birth as Athena's, out of the head of Zeus, rather than the Old Testament creation of man in which it takes time and toil for God to fabricate his creation. We see Joyce as one who knows everything, one who is atemporally omniscient.

We begin to see a meta-narrator, manipulating the host of voices used in order to make certain statements about the characters or emphasize certain parts of the plot. This so-called meta-narrator must be none other than the author himself. Thus, because there is no single static narrator like in other novels, but a series of static narrators successively carrying the same plot line, the plot and himself and Joyce himself become independent of a single point of view. We are conscious that Joyce has chosen the different narrators, whether clear voices like Chapter Seven's newspaper headlines or Thirteen's voice of a romance novel heroine, or cryptic voices like Chapter Fourteen, the embryonic development of English prose style or Chapter Fifteen, a drama starring Bloom's unconscious, subconscious and conscious minds.

Narrators are generally taken from text styles that we have already probably read in other places, but here they have meaning apart from what is the usual. Joyce's

hand in this, separate from that of the narrators, is obvious; we know that there is a human intelligence behind the story. Since the story, on its most basic level, comes from Homer, and since much of the other material comes from various historical and fictional sources, most of what we read has the tone of reorganization rather than the Biblical creation from dust. The characters' traits, roles, their world, everything is derived from other sources, so that they are just newer embodiments of timeless templates. Yet we still can see Joyce as a creator thanks to his manipulations of the symbols and motifs that he has pulled from various places, and in the wide array of narrators that he has conjured up from our common literary background.

Because the reader senses the presence of the author in the book, we treat the book much more as if it were the author's product than we otherwise would. That the symbolism was conceived in the author's head, and conveyed directly to the reader, gives the work a tone of commentary. We see the phenomenon of chance, of blind luck, playing an important and prominent role. Joyce thus molds us into the readers he wants and needs for the book he has written. He makes a new reader by writing a new kind of novel, and then slowly reteaching us how to read. As we realize this, the question why he does this nags us more and more. We will have to examine the material that is presented to us before we can fully understand why such a roundabout, cryptic process was chosen.

## PART II: BLOOM'S EXPERIENCES IN JOYCE'S WORLD

The symbols, motifs, and parallels taken from our shared tradition of Western philosophy, history, and literature are more than simply clever ways to reinterpret and revisit the books of our heritage. Most often, they serve as commentary on the action taking place in the story. For example, Bloom encounters in the course of the day at least three things that are on the surface confusing and cryptic, but are actually warnings about the adultery that Molly is committing at those exact moments.

The first of these is the image of a crowing cock that recurs several times, connected with the name of a romance-writer that Molly Bloom has been reading, "Paul de Kock." The cock's crow becomes an image of betrayal in Chapter Eleven, when Bloom sees Blazes Boylan leave the Ormond Hotel bar to go see Molly, ostensibly about a singing performance for which he is booking her. Bloom idly suspects that they are probably having an affair, but does nothing to stop it, and sees in his mind

Boylan, in his horsedrawn taxi, approaching the Bloom residence where Molly awaits him:

By Bachelor's walk jogjaunty jingled Blazes Boylan, bachelor, in sun in heat, mare's glossy rump atrot, with flick of whip, on bounding tyres: sprawled, warmseated, Boylan impatience, ardentbold.

Several pages later he sees Boylan knocking on the front door, and here he hears the knock sounding like a cock crowing as his betrayal grows imminent: "One rapped on a door, one tapped with a knock, did he knock Paul de Kock with a loud proud knocker with a cock carracarracarra cock. Cockcock." (11.986) The sound "carracarracarra" is interjected twice more in the text before the chapter ends. The sound of the knock resembles a cock's crow, bringing to mind Christ's conversation with Paul after the Last Supper.

Peter said to him, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you." Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." (Matthew 26.33) Combining this reference to Christ with the obvious sexual connotations leaves us with a clear image of adultery. Peter's word's are like Molly's marriage vow, and the rooster-sounding knock signals her betrayal.

Another example of a warning to Bloom of Molly's adultery, and criticism of his complacency, occurs twice, in Chapter Nine and at the end of Chapter Thirteen: the call of a cuckoo. The first instance occurs while he overhears Stephen debating about Shakespeare.

In *Cymbeline*, in *Othello*, he is bawd and cuckold. He acts and is acted on. Lover of an ideal or a perversion, like José he kills the real Carmen. His unremitting intellect is the hornmad Iago ceaselessly willing that the moor in him shall suffer.

"Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" Cuck Mulligan clucked lewdly. "O word of fear!" Dark dome received, reverbed. (9.1021)

The cuckoo reappears as Chapter Thirteen ends. Bloom, sitting on the strand after Gerty bares her underwear for him from afar, thinks about Molly, and about sex, sitting, resting, looking out at the water.

A bat flew. Here. There. Here. Far in the grey

a bell chimed. . .  
Cuckoo Cuckoo Cuckoo  
The clock on the mantelpiece in the priest's house cooed. . .  
Cuckoo Cuckoo Cuckoo  
because it was a little canarybird that came out of its little house to tell the time that Gerty MacDowell noticed. (13.1285)

The cuckoo clock sounds nine times altogether, audible on the beach to both Bloom and Gerty from the nearby house, and thus the chapter ends. The cuckoo is not simply to signal the time; It recalls a passage from "The Manciple's Tale," of *The Canterbury Tales* in which a man learns of his beloved wife's adultery.

When Phoebus, the master, returned home,  
The crow greeted him with "Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Cuckoo!"

"What, crow?" said Phoebus. "What song are you singing? . . ."

"By God!" said the crow, "I don't sing incorrectly . . ."

For I saw him make love with your wife on your bed."

What more do you wish? The crow then told him  
With convincing evidence and bold words

How his wife had conducted her adultery,

To his great shame and dishonor.

The crow said it had seen the act with its own eyes.

("The Manciple's Tale,"  
lines 242-261,  
Modern edition paraphrase)

Thus Bloom hears the same bird's lament again, but still does not recognize it as a warning. He does not question why it has sounded at this exact moment, when he was able to hear it. If he thinks of it at all, it is only like Gerty thinks of it, on the most superficial level of marking the time, and thinking of a clock reaching the top of the hour at just this point does not seem significant to him.

Bloom does not recognize these or other references to literary images of betrayal and cuckoldry, but treats them as incidental events. Indeed, the reader too may not decipher all these things on the first reading, since they appear to be unimportant. We have an advantage over Bloom, however. The training Joyce has given us for proper reading of his novel means, first, that we are

not willing to treat any word as meaningless, and second, that we will be studying, not merely reading, the text. That is to say, we will read it multiple times and with groups of people, and if there is an image that seems meaningless to us, we will work together until we find the meaning we know is hidden in it somewhere. Eventually, then, we understand these things for what they are, and will be able to interpret them. We can view criticism of Bloom that he does not notice, much less heed, as primarily commentary from the author directly to us. We are already very aware of the presence of the author, and we already know for a certainty the unfaithfulness that Bloom only suspects. We are expected to have the background in literature to see these warnings for what they are. Even if one reader has not, for example, read "The Manciple's Tale," for example, no doubt someone in one's circle of fellow readers has read it, and the image will resonate for that person. Joyce is a spectator just as we are, and just as we are, he is criticizing and passing judgment on Bloom's actions. Indeed, on closer inspection, most of the symbolism can be regarded as criticism of Bloom.

We see symbolic meaning in Bloom's activities and surroundings, and we interpret some of this meaning as critical of him. Bloom, too, perceives the recurrences and coincidences, reflecting on the chance and vagary of life when, for example, he crosses paths with Blazes Boylan three times in one day, or when he tosses away a stick he has been holding and it lands with one end embedded in the sand, perpendicular to the ground. "Now if you were trying to do that for a week on end you couldn't. Chance." (13.1271) To some extent, he even half-consciously realizes the similarities that he has to the great character types of the western tradition, most distinctly to the betrayed martyr template represented by Christ and Socrates. But the only time we really see him run away with this idea is in the fifteenth chapter, in which there is a large part dedicated to the idea of "The New Bloomusalem," and where Bloom is put on trial.

The difference between Bloom's recognition of these parallels and recurrences and our own, however, is that he does not see them as anything special, or give them anything more than idle thought. To him, they are a sort of background noise, easily ignorable, present every day of life. Others he obviously passes by, such as the warnings of Molly's imminent betrayal mentioned earlier, or the parallel between himself and Throwaway, the proverbial "dark horse" in the day's big race. He is dressed in mourning, thus "dark," generally considered a loser, and considered somewhat inconsequential by his peers,

like a throwaway brochure. Boylan, then, is Sceptre, the favored horse, the bright star with a hint of royalty in its name who in the end is beaten by the dark horse, just as Bloom wins Molly back from Boylan.

It seems equally unlikely that anyone would find a parallel between one's marital problems and a horse race as that anyone would find the parallel between oneself and Odysseus, or Jesus Christ, God the Father, the famous Irish politician Parnell, or the fairytale hero Sinbad the Sailor. Such a recognition would bring the detachment that might help us to solve our problems, but we tend to think of literature and history too impersonally to equate them with our own situations. We do see the benefit that Bloom would get out of thinking this way, and perhaps Joyce is telling us that we should look to classic character templates for insight about ourselves. If we think that we resemble the Odyssean "wanderer who wishes to return home," perhaps we should pinpoint what tasks we need to do to get there, what "suitors" we must slay. If we resemble the "lover martyred by the traitorous beloved" template of Christ, then we need to find out what forgiveness we have to grant to get back into the heart of the beloved and be resurrected. Our heritage of story and history ought to be alive, not dead and mounted in a museum.

During the whole day, Bloom thinks often about his wife's suspected infidelity, the letter he received from Martha, his relationship with her, even simply his unhappy job or new ad ideas. Despite this, he does not share these thoughts with the friends he sees, his wife, or anyone at all. He has big problems, and one would think that he might ask advice from the people he trusts. Bloom has no one that he trusts, however. No one strikes up a real conversation with him, or seems to want to talk to him either, even though several people know about Molly's infidelity and pity him for his ignorance. At the funeral, at the bar in Chapter Twelve, and at the restaurant where he eats lunch, among other places, he is continually perceived by other characters as the silent, cryptic, unapproachable man. A good example comes up in Chapter Eight, in the restaurant where he eats lunch. The point of view has been firmly within Bloom's mind for several chapters at this point, and suddenly it pulls away for several paragraphs to a conversation two men are having behind Bloom's back, after he leaves his table. They ask each other questions about him that, for some reason, they didn't want to ask him directly: Whether he had recently changed his occupation, whose death he was mourning. They find him odd and unapproachable, based mainly on his Jewish background and the fact that he

never gets really drunk. After some insinuations about Molly, one of the men gives his own theory for Bloom's cryptic quality and supposed secrecy: He is a freemason. This seems unlikely and out of character, but we never ascertain the facts on this matter.

-He's in the craft, he said.

-Do you tell me so? Davy Byrne said.

-Very much so, Nosey Flynn said. Ancient free and accepted order. He's an excellent brother. Light, life, and love, by God. They give him a leg up. . . They stick to you when you're down. I know a fellow was trying to get into it. But they're close as damn it. . .

-And is that a fact? Decent quiet man he is. (8.962)

Indeed, he never even has any real conversation with anyone at all until Chapter Seventeen, when he and Stephen sit in his house talking. Thus, before the last two chapters of the book, and the accompanying breakdown of structure which I will speak of later, the author is the only one who can show him how he's acting and what his life looks like from a detached perspective.

The "scientific mind" Bloom is so proud of possessing, the craftiness any good Odysseus must have, is more than a gift; it is a tool. With it he is meant to discover the clues to decode the message, which exist in coincidence and parallel. We know Bloom is capable of looking behind the obvious to infer a deeper meaning from several events, most notably when he reads the slightly sadistic love letter from Martha. In it, she says, "I do not like that other world" (5.245) instead of, we presume, "I do not like that other word," since she is writing about Bloom's word usage at that point. If one reads that as something more than a typo, Martha appears to be someone who fantasizes and holds a lot of hope for the world of which she imagines Bloom to be a part. She unwittingly presents herself as someone who wishes she were also in that world, and is not at all satisfied with her own life. Bloom reads this as a sort of Freudian slip, as do we, and senses a great dependence on him to rescue her. He mulls over that sentence on and off for the rest of the book, and sees it as a valuable glimpse into what is really happening in their relationship. He has the gift of a very rational mind, and the insight to use it for prophecy when he wishes, just as Odysseus does.

Although a typo gives him insight into Martha's mind, he does not analyze misprints, partial words, and so on as addressing his own situation. There is another typo

late in the book, also fraught with meaning, but referring to Bloom instead. He views it as merely a meaningless error, although it can be deciphered in a way similar to Martha's. The error in this case cannot be attributed to a single person, since it occurred as a glitch in the newspaper typesetting system. Bloom reads the announcement for the funeral he had attended that morning in the evening newspaper.

So to change the subject he read about Dignam R.I.P. . . This morning (Hynes put it in of course) the remains of the late Mr Patrick Dignam were removed from his residence. . . for interment. . . The mourners included: Patk. Dignam (son), Bernard Corrigan (brother in law), Jno. Henry Menton, solr, Martin Cunningham, John Power, . . . Jeatondph 1\8 ador dorador douradora (must be where he called Monks the dayfather [typesetter] about Keyes's ad) Thomas Kernan, Simon Dedalus, . . . L. Boom, CP McCoy and several others. (Bloom was) nettled not a little by L. Boom (as it incorrectly stated) and the line of bitched type. (16. 1248)

With random chance as the culprit instead of a particular person, it is easy for him to ignore the error as annoying, but meaningless. Yet "L. Boom" does have meaning: "The decent quiet man" is being described as an explosion. A reader can interpret from this that Bloom needs to do something out of character, to break the fog of idle complacency in which he finds himself. He must do something violently different to make Molly notice him again as a man. That explosion would flatten the rickety structure of their current relationship leaving a clean, bare foundation upon which they could rebuild their lives and their relationship. We understand this because we are looking over the shoulder of the author, while Bloom is not aware that he is Joyce's creation. If Bloom were willing to anticipate that meaning can come in unexpected ways, he could see these signs. But he has not been trained the way we have, however, and although he has the ability to see these things, an hour of life is not looked at as carefully as a page of text.

Another example of Bloom's inability to interpret seemingly meaningless events as having any message for him occurs in Chapter Thirteen. After Gerty leaves, he begins to leave her a message in the sand, which she could read if she returned the next day. He is sitting alone watching fireworks over the water, thinking of Molly, fantasizing about Gerty, and worrying about Martha. He gets as

far as I AM A before he stops:

Mr Bloom with his stick gently vexed the thick sand at his foot. Write a message for her. Might remain. What?

I.

Some flatfoot tramp on it in the morning. Useless. Washed away. Tide comes here. . . What is the meaning of that other world. I called you naughty boy because I do not like.

AM. A.

No room. Let it go.

Mr Bloom effaced the letters with his slow boot. Hopeless thing sand. Nothing grows in it. All fades. . . We'll never meet again. But it was so lovely. Goodbye dear. Thanks. Made me feel so young. (13.1258)

We are first left trying to figure out what he was actually going to write: "I am a -." The answer cannot be known. But what we, and he, should be reading here is what he did write, "I am A." Bloom erases it without giving thought to any unintended meaning. But in the midst of his gloomy thoughts he has actually given himself the answer to all his problems, if he were to read the sentence written as "I am the alpha." It counsels him to make a new beginning, in light of the Biblical passage, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Revelation 22.13) He is being told that he needs to stop drifting, complacent, mired in the middle of life, and become a fire-and-brimstone, explosive beginning. This message is not purposefully ignored by Bloom, since to ignore implies recognition, and he never identified it as a message, even though he wrote it. It is hard even for us, detached though we are, to stop wondering what he intended to write and look at what he actually did write. It does, however, remain a message of criticism, not from the author but from Bloom himself. Bloom could have benefited if he had noticed it.

This brings us to the moment when the prophesied explosion actually occurs, the point towards which all Joyce's criticism of Bloom has been driving. Through the course of the book, we have seen Joyce criticize Bloom and suggest that he do something to change his situation. Bloom has not noticed these encoded suggestions, but in the second to last chapter of the book, the author's fabricated superstructure of symbolism begins to break down as Bloom nears the climax. He comes close to true recognition of his mirroring of historical and literary templates as he enters the bed, reflecting on Molly's infidel-

ity:

If he had smiled why would he have smiled?  
To reflect that each one who enters imagines himself to be the first to enter whereas he is always the last term of a preceding series even if the first term of a succeeding one, each imagining himself to be first, last, only and alone whereas he is neither first nor last nor only nor alone in a series originating in and repeated to infinity. (17.2127)

The explosion occurs when, in bed, Bloom asks Molly to bring him his breakfast in bed the next day. He wishes to wake up the next morning in a new kind of relationship with her, be greeted by the vision of her feeding him in a reversal of the unhappy roles of this day. The first time we saw Bloom, he had been fixing breakfast for Molly. Now he demands that she feed him, as she did at the beginning of their relationship. An image is repeated through the book, both in Bloom's thoughts and in Molly's, a reminiscence of an instance before they married in which, in Molly's words, "I gave him a bit of seedcake out of my mouth." (18.1575) This is a mothering image, a bird feeding her newly-hatched young, and he wants to return to the relationship where she sheltered and nurtured him. In a way, the odyssey of his entire day can be looked at, not only as a return to his Penelope, but also as a return to the bed, which is also Molly's nest, and metaphorically the womb.

The most interesting thing for us, the readers, about this explosive question is that it does not occur in the narrative. The prophesied "Boom" from the newspaper misprint is neither at the end of Chapter Seventeen nor the beginning of Chapter Eighteen, although as Molly's monologue begins, it has already occurred. In fact, the only way that we find out that he has asked her to do anything is through what Molly says at the beginning of her monologue: "Yes because he never did a thing like that before as ask to get his breakfast in bed with a couple of eggs." (18.1) It is as if the first seventeen chapters constitute Bloom's past, the eighteenth his future, and the question his present. He will not know Molly's answer until he wakes up in the morning, so her monologue represents his unknown future. We leave him suspended in the uncertain present, having ended the day and the life that it represented at the moment he got into bed, but not in the future yet. As T.S. Eliot said in "Burnt Norton,"

Time present and time past

Are both perhaps present in time future,  
and time future contained in time past  
. . . Time past and time future  
Allow but little consciousness.  
To be conscious is not to be in time.

The bed, and Molly's half-awake thoughts, are outside of linear time, existing only in the sense of a now time, and represented by the unanswered question. The question cannot be included in either the past or the future, and thus it isn't written about in either Chapters Seventeen or Eighteen, but between them. We can connect the explosion to the layers of commentary urging Bloom towards it, fabricated by the author in the first seventeen chapters. To understand this connection perhaps one needs first to understand what the last chapter constitutes.

The end of the book, traditionally called Molly's monologue, has none of the punctuation or grammatical structure of the rest of the book. It is designed to be a look at the thought patterns of this person as she lies, unmoving, in bed. This is the first thing that strikes a reader; it isn't even divided up into real sentences. It has none of the linear plot line of the rest of the book, either, but orbits around several topics of conversation, with different layers of circularity. The word "yes," for example, begins the chapter, ends the chapter, and in the middle pairs up poetically with "no." We get a view of how thought processes might link together in someone's head, and there is no sense of the passage of time here. This voice is entirely without artifice, with none of the consciousness of the reader that first seventeen chapters had. It does not have mastery of the language as all the other narrators did, using the beauty of words to seduce the reader. Here language returns to its primal state as a featureless medium, communicating all ideas. But most importantly, this voice has none of the artifice of symbol, recurrent image, and encrypted commentary that the first seventeen chapters had. If we accept that all those things were present more to help Bloom than to entertain us with empty but beautiful symbolism, then then the reason for their disappearance is obvious. All those things were there expressly to goad Bloom into action, and with his question to Molly, he has acted.

Almost all the linearity of the plot disappears from this chapter as well. Molly's thoughts could be put down in any order and the entire chapter rearranged, since it is, for the most part, a random access of all her memories. But two things stand out in this flood of memory. The first is the only physical motion of the chapter; Molly gets out of bed to go to the bathroom. There she discov-

ers that she has gotten her period, which gives us another way to view the chapter as a renewal, an end to all the problems that existed the day before, and the chance for a new beginning. For Bloom had been worrying all day about his own virility. He seems disappointed in, or at least unfulfilled by, their daughter Milly, and he is haunted by visions of their son, who had died while still a baby. He has not had sex with his wife for many years, and he wonders if he would or could ever produce another son, someone to carry on his family name, a duplication of himself. He also worries that Molly might be pregnant with Boylan's child, in which case Boylan would have stolen Bloom's dream of fatherhood. With this, the last barrier to Bloom's happiness has been removed, and the two of them can still try to conceive a son in their new relationship.

The other thing that stands out in this chapter is the last "sentence," which begins with Molly rejecting Hugh "Blazes" Boylan:

no thats no way for him he has no manners nor no refinement nor no nothing in his nature slapping us behind like that on my bottom because I didnt call him Hugh the ignoramus that doesnt know poetry from a cabbage thats what you get for not keeping them in their proper place pulling off his shoes and trousers there on the chair before me so barefaced without even asking permission and standing out in that vulgar way (18.1368)

and ends with her accepting Bloom again in a reiteration of her acceptance of his marriage proposal many years ago, and, at the same time, answering his request for breakfast in bed:

yes that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is and I knew I could always get round him and I gave him all the pleasure I could leading him on till he asked me to say yes and I wouldnt answer first only looked out over the sea. . . and the rosegardens and the jessamine and geraniums and cactuses and Gibraltar as a girl where I was a flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes

my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes. (18.1577)

Thus the entire novel ends, looking back in a retrospective arrangement to the genesis of their relationship. The final "yes" is both a remembrance of their early days together and an immediate answer to Bloom's question. Fusing these two affirmations together shows that she wants to return to their earlier form of love for each other. She, too, wants to begin again; after the return to the womb that this chapter represents, with the new day they will be reborn. The last image one has of the chapter, of Molly, of the whole book, is an absolute, all-embracing acceptance. This recalls the first image we have of her, and the first word she speaks in the book, as Bloom stands in the hallway calling in to her, still in bed, to ask if she wants any meat for breakfast. "He added: 'You don't want anything for breakfast?' A sleepy soft grunt answered: 'Mn.'" (4.58) He interprets this as a no, but it could just as easily been a yes—she is portrayed as a completely ambivalent being, not stirred by her husband enough even to articulate her desires, much less get out of bed.

Through examining the ending of the book, both how Chapter Eighteen is written and why it is written as it is, we better understand Joyce's manipulations. Indeed, we can understand all his literary parallels, encrypted warnings, and meaningful coincidences as advice for Bloom that the character himself can perceive. The role and the responsibilities that the author has taken on can now be clearly seen. He has conceived of the characters, assembled their world, and created the progression their story will follow, and having done all this, writes the book. He loves his characters as any maker must love his creation, and wishes the best for them as they play out the Homer-based plot. Since he is atemporal and hence the only being involved that knows what will happen, he is spurred, through his benevolence, to incorporate clues and warnings into Bloom's surroundings. He grants himself the ability to talk to his creation as he writes the book, to attempt to help that creation reach happiness.

From Bloom's perspective, the situation is this: He is surrounded by urgent warnings and criticism of his actions, but he ignores them all. Some of them he may not have the literary background to decode, but most of them he notices but regards as mere random events not deserving understanding. It does not occur to him who might have placed these events in front of him, that in-

stead of the indifferent visage of "fate" or chance there might be a caring face similar to his own. In the modern age, it seems, we attach meaning only to those things which explicitly tell us they are meaningful: written words, speech, memory. We pay attention to things that obviously come from the mind of ourselves or other humans, with the mark of having been conceived in our own mind or in one like ours. We think of information as something born of man. We, in this rational, data-packed age, find it difficult to think of messages coming to us through channels not based on language. At the same time, we put our history on so high a pedestal that even if, like Bloom, we do resemble Christ, or Odysseus, so that thinking of ourselves in those terms would be helpful, we will not pay attention to the similarities. Certainly even if one recognized the similarities, one would not make the next step and say that what happened to Christ is happening to oneself.

Joyce's role in the book, his relation to the characters he has both created and reassembled, mimics the relation of man to God. If we believe that the author means for authorship to be analogous, in the context of at least this one book, to being God, then the attributes he has given himself within the finite bounds of the book make sense. All authors have these attributes, but he plays them up: creative power, omnipotence, atemporality. And if Joyce is analogous to God, then it only follows that we, as people rather than as readers, are analogous to Bloom. Bloom is the quintessential Everyman even as he resembles the great heroes of literature, being, in a way, the perfect example of man's estrangement not just from God but from everything natural and good. His obliviousness to the warnings the readers find so obvious must mimic the average man's relationship to God. The ratio

Character : Author :: Reader : God,

seems to be what Joyce is finally suggesting, the ultimate analogy of this book.

We see Bloom, in his role as the both Christian and Jewish Everyman, try these methods and reject them. Because he has belonged to both religions, he is an outsider as well as an Everyman, and the alienation from religion that may be inside us is visible in him. Early in the course of the day "the cold smell of sacred stone called him," (5. 338) and he enters a Catholic church and watches a service in progress. The process seems to have very little to do with God, in his eyes.

Now I bet it makes them feel happy. Lollipop.

It does. Yes, bread of angels it's called. There's a big idea behind it, kind of kingdom of God is within you feel. Then feel all like one family party, same in the theatre, all in the same swim. They do. I'm sure of that. Not so lonely. In our confraternity. . . Thing is if you really believe it. (5.360)

Wonderful organisation certainly, goes like clock-work. Confession. Everyone wants to. Then I will tell you all. Penance. Punish me, please. Great weapon in their hands. More than doctor or solicitor. Woman dying to. And I schschschschschsch. And did you chachachachacha? And why did you? . . . God's little joke. Then out she comes. Repentance skindeep. Lovely shame. Pray at an altar. Hail Mary and Holy Mary. Flowers, incense, candles melting. Hide her blushes. (5.424)

Joyce senses that the average reader has similarly given up hope on God, and the disconnection that Bloom portrays here shows just how empty much of the ritual of religion has become. The people he sees in the church don't seem to him to have much spirituality. With the message he is conveying to us here, he shows us how we might better be able to find significance in the world after rejecting the methods that are conventionally acceptable.

Perhaps, then, Joyce is saying that we are as terminally oblivious as Bloom is. We could interpret the constant drone of "random" coincidence and parallel in our own lives as having direct meaning for us, instead of discounting it as ignorable background. In the same way, each one of us has a different set of thoughts and sights, pieces of internal and external data, which perhaps is as custom made for each of us as Bloom's was for him. We should be looking for sense and order in the white noise of events in our days, deciphering messages meant for us from what seems like a chaotic, impassive world. Recall the augury, through bird flight, that is practiced in *The Odyssey*, among other places. Specifically, we should keep in mind the passage in Book Two in which the suitors ignore an old man's prophecies about a pair of eagles. He said that Odysseus lived still and would return soon to slay them if they didn't change their ways. They scoffed at his augury, made no change, and were all proved wrong at the end of the book. It would seem that Joyce is trying to tell us to look for God, not just through the normal channels such as prayer, ritual, and revelation, but re-

united with the older, classical conception of a higher power. God is fate, luck, chance, as well as a discrete being. God is reabsorbed into nature, the chaos upon which this world is based. Faith in God means then faith in the absence of random activity, that all activity has intent behind it. If a thing was created, it was created at the hand of a rational maker, and thus no facet of the world should be considered ignorable.

By extending the analogies in this way, we see that there is indeed a force in the universe that is helping us, but not in the rational ways to which we might have always looked before. Our God wants to help us as the gods helped Odysseus, but we are not attuned to hear his commentary. He is not neglecting us, we are just not looking at the right part of our world to find these divine messages. "Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made." (Romans 1.20) Thus chance, part of nature, is one of the things God made. In the end, Joyce shows us a way back to God, that if we look for him in his creations instead of ours, we will find guidance. What seemed like a negligent God, an uncaring universe, is a very personal one, with guidance tailored to each and every person. When we accept chance as a powerful force of nature, we come back into alignment with our ancient philosophy about deities, and the universe welcomes us back with a resounding Yes.

## An Attempt at Unlocking "Benito Cereno"

Gregory Alan Brandt

"Benito Cereno" is the story of one man's assaying the character of another: Captain Amasa Delano tries to comprehend the ambiguous words and actions of his counterpart, Don Benito, in order to determine whether he is a pitiable figure, unhinged by misfortune, or a sinister one. The American withholds judgment until Cereno leaps into his boat—seemingly to attack him—and he errs in judging then. As readers we must assay Delano's character and, further, the narrative as a whole. Is he an obtuse man who saves himself and his ship by dumb luck, or is his decision "to leave open margin" to "the Spaniard's black-letter text" a shrewd one? (55)<sup>1</sup> Is the story incidentally about slavery or is that institution at its heart? We should note that *essay* and *assay* both derive from the French *essai*, "an attempt, a trial," for this etymology points to a truth about writing: An essay is an attempt to grapple with a problem that jumps at us from the books we read and the text of our own lives. The problem that I have been wrestling with, and the one that I hope will afford a means of understanding "Benito Cereno" as a whole, concerns the many religious references in the tale. To put it simply, what are they doing there? How do they fit in?

The first few references are slight and easily overlooked. The sea on the morning that the Spanish ship enters the harbor of St. Maria is "undulated into long roods of swells." (37) A rood is an English measure of length varying by locality from about five to eight yards. Yet the word originally denoted a crucifix, in particular one placed at the chancel entrance of a medieval church (hence the Old English poem *The Song of the Rood*). This overtone is quickly strengthened by the descriptions of "the far matin light" streaming from the cabin of the stranger and of the clouds that "wimpled" the sun. (38) The words *matin* and *wimple* are both associated with religious orders, designating respectively the first hour of prayer in the canonical day and the headpiece worn by nuns. These three references contribute to the feeling of strangeness that prevails at the opening of the story. The day is placid, but

flights of troubled gray vapors among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over meadows before storms. (37)

Something is not right with the foreign ship as well; it fails to show its colors, possibly a sign of piratical intentions, yet it is so badly handled that Delano dismisses any fears and soon goes to its aid. As we are not sure what to make of the grayness of the morning and the actions of the vessel, so we are perplexed by the religious overtones of these words. They do not seem to harmonize with the scene. For example, *wimple* carries benign associations, but here the sun,

wimpled by the same low, creeping clouds, showed not unlike a Lima intriguante's one sinister eye peering across the Plaza from the Indian loophole of her dusk saya-y-manta. (38)

More importantly, these passing references prepare us for the first explicit one, the likening of the Spanish ship to "a whitewashed monastery after a thunderstorm, seen perched upon some dun cliff among the Pyrenees." (38) Melville's simile is a rich one. At a simple level, it communicates the isolation and foreignness of the scene. The stranger seems cut off from both the land and other ships. Moreover, to one from Duxbury, Massachusetts, even to a captain who has sailed on the Spanish Main, the vision of a monastery in the Pyrenees might evoke thoughts of medieval romances, of the long ago and far away. When Delano steps aboard the *San Dominick*, it is no exaggeration to say that he enters a world that he is not prepared to understand.

The word "whitewashed" is especially significant because of its association in the New Testament with feigned virtue. Paul refers to a hypocritical priest as a "whitewashed wall." (Acts 23:3) In the most widely known example, Jesus says,

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." (Matthew 23:27)

We think of Babo, whose appearance of simple loyalty to his master so touches Delano while concealing the "hive of subtlety" inside him. (104) The words "dead men's bones" certainly remind us of Don Alexandro Aranda's fate, for his skeleton lies underneath the sun-bleached canvas wrapped around the prow of the ship. The *San Dominick* has become his tomb, and we get a slight foreshadowing of this fact when Melville, in the paragraph describing the shrouded area, calls the roll of the ship "hearselike." (40) A far stronger hint is the allusion to Old Testament prophecy which preceeds this description: The stranger's "keel seemed laid, her ribs put together, and she launched, from Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones." (39) For the first-time reader, these references ready one—perhaps not even consciously—for what is to come; for a reader going through the narrative again, they create a powerful resonance.

I observed at the outset that this story is about ambiguity, about how one judges the shades of grey in words and deeds. It cannot be an accident that Melville uses the word *grey* so many times in the opening of the tale. White is no less an ambiguous color, however, and few have thought more deeply about whiteness than Melville. He devotes an entire chapter to it in *Moby Dick*, published four years before "Benito Cereno." In the novel he notes the many associations of white with "divine spotlessness and power," "the majesty of Justice," and "the benignity of age." (Chapter XLII) But it can also be the color of disease and death. Babo makes a great deal of the connection between white skin and skeletal whiteness: According to the deposition, when he revealed Don Alexandro's remains, he asked the Spaniard "whose skeleton that was, and whether, from its whiteness, he should not think it a white's . . ." This question is followed by the injunction "Keep faith with the blacks from here to Senegal, or you shall in spirit, as now in body, follow your leader." (95) The problem of whiteness has bearing on the story because we can be tempted to break it down thematically to a conflict of white and black, good and evil. When Cereno says that "[t]he Negro" has cast a shadow over him that he cannot escape, we can interpret this remark to mean that the wickedness embodied by the blacks has overwhelmed his spirit. (The word *negro* in Spanish is itself equivocal, meaning both "black," as in the color or the man, and "wicked.") Delano resists this temptation and so should the reader, precisely because it is too reductive. The American not only is unwilling to resolve grayness into white or black but he also refrains from judging whiteness and blackness. We shall develop this idea further below.

One last observation about the color white concerns a change Melville made from his source for the tale, Amasa Delano's *Narrative of Voyages and Travels*. In Delano's work, the Americans take the Spanish and blacks to Concepcion, where the trial is held. Melville, however, alters the setting to Lima. He could have made the change simply for its own sake, that is, to fix his story in its own imagined place and assert his authority as its creator, not a mere reteller of another's narrative. Chapter XLII of *Moby Dick* provides us, though, with a more compelling reason. Here Melville gives the awful vision of a city rocked by "cathedral toppling earthquakes" and pounded by "frantic seas." He concludes:

—it is not these things alone which make tearless Lima the strangest, saddest city thou can'st see. For Lima has taken the white veil; and there is a higher horror in this whiteness of her woe. Old as Pizarro, this whiteness keeps her ruins for ever new; admits not the cheerful greenness of complete decay; spreads over her broken ramparts the rigid pallor of an apoplexy that fixes its distortions.

These three sentences point us at once back to the "whitewashed monastery" at the opening of the tale and forward to its closing image, the view across the white city, whose church holds the bones of Aranda, to the monastery on Mount Agonia (*agonia* means "death agony" in Spanish) where Cereno is ensepulchered.

We can now move forward to the next religious reference and the problem that it raises. Adding to the monastic appearance of the foreign vessel is its carrying what seems at first "a shipload of monks." (38) The narrator tells of "Black Friars pacing the cloisters." (39) Shortly thereafter we learn that the Spanish craft is named the *San Dominick*—after, we assume, the founder of the Dominican order, also known as the Black Friars. It quickly follows that the Spanish captain is "like some hypochondriac abbot"; (42) he listens to the reports of the ship's status in a manner

not unlike that which might be supposed to have been his imperial countryman's, Charles V, just previous to the anchoritish retirement of that monarch from the throne. (44)

The consistency of these references is pleasing, and again we see foreshadowing of Cereno's eventual fate.

I want to argue, however, that the choice of *San*

(f)lights of troubled gray fowl, kith and kin with

<sup>1</sup> All citations refer to the Dover Thrift Edition.

*Dominick* as a name is more than merely consistent. It is illuminating, giving us a way of approaching the theme of "Benito Cereno." First we shall consider its etymology. *Dominic* is derived from the Latin *dominus*, "lord or master." The Spanish title *Don* is similarly derived, and the Dons in the story are the slaves' masters—at least in name. Babo invariably refers to Cereno as "master." *Dominic*, however, comes from an inflection of *dominus*, *dominicus*, "belonging to a master." In the case of the saint, the name indicates his servitude to the Master of Creation and reminds us of Donne's claim in Holy Sonnet 14 that "I, / Except you enthrall me, never shall be free . . ." The name is a knot of master and slave, and we are not any more certain of what to do with it than Delano is with the knot thrown at him by the old sailor. *Dominic* is properly the name of a servant, yet St. Dominic was one of the lords of the Church. *Don* is properly the name of a master, yet Don Benito is the slave of Babo and Atufal. *San Dominick* is a fitting appellation for a slave ship, but the question for Delano and the reader is, who really possesses the key?

Another problem with the name concerns the actual Delano's narrative. The incident our story is based on involved the Spanish ship *Tryal* in 1805. Melville changed both the name and the date, setting his tale in 1799. He could have done so for the reason set out above, to put the story in a frame of his own imagining. But why not, say, the *San Salvador* in 1801? Leafing through a chronology of world history, I found a possible answer. In 1799 Toussaint L'Ouverture, a former slave, led an uprising against the Spanish on Santo Domingo. (*San Dominick* and Santo Domingo are, of course, different versions of the same name.) This fact, along with the etymological analysis, suggests that Melville's choice was purposeful and that he wanted the reader to consider the story as a commentary on slavery.

Before we undertake this consideration, I want to examine one further religious aspect of "Benito Cereno," the faith—if that is the right word—that guides Delano. We can compare him to a blindfolded man who walks unwittingly along the edge of a precipice where the smallest misstep will destroy him. He has glimmerings that the situation is dangerous but puts his feelings of unease aside. And it is precisely his good-natured serenity that saves him; if he were to act suddenly out of ill temper—to object too strenuously to Babo's hovering around Cereno perhaps—he would surely be attacked. It might be God that delivers him to safety or just luck, or he might be responsible for his own deliverance. His unwillingness "except on extraordinary and repeated incentives, and

hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms any way involving the imputation of malign evil in any man" (37) might be a kind of wisdom distinct from "accuracy of intellectual perception." (38) What he himself refers to is Providence. After the old seaman tosses him the knot, he feels uneasiness and tries to resist it. His qualms pass away not through the agency of prayer but through the sight of his boat *Rover*, which "had often pressed the beach of Captain Delano's home . . ." He says to himself:

What, I, Amasa Delano— . . . I to be murdered here at the ends of the earth on board a haunted pirate ship by a horrible Spaniard? Too nonsensical to think of! Who would murder Amasa Delano? His conscience is clean. There is someone above. Fie, fie, Jack of the Beach! you are a child indeed . . . (67)

We can read these words in two different ways. On the one hand, they might show a movingly simple faith, like that of a child. On the other hand, we can argue more cynically that here is a man with a remarkable lack of imagination. He cannot even conceive of his being murdered. He does not deserve the fate and hence whatever it is that is above—he himself never uses the word God—will not let it happen. Later in the story when his suspicions of Cereno return, he immediately feels remorse, fearing that "he should by implication have betrayed an atheist doubt of the ever-watchful providence above." (86) In this case, it is again the presence of his "household boat" and, above all, the beauty of the evening that restores his confidence.

In Delano's defense, we should note that he has little time to ponder theology during the rescue. He acts unreservedly to help a stranger in obvious distress when he could sail the *Bachelor's Delight* away. Like many people acting in the moment, he relies on his visceral sense of the situation. When faced with words or deeds that demand interpretation, he judges as magnanimously as possible. So, for instance, he explains Cereno's occasional incivility as a product of his misfortunes. We can wonder about Delano's mental acuity, but we cannot question his charity. Ultimately, Melville might not supply us with enough information to measure the depth of the captain's faith, but, given Delano's own kindly way of viewing others, we might hold that this belief is more than just a lack of imagination.

In the remainder of this essay, I want to apply the

analysis of religious references to the conclusion of "Benito Cereno" and to determine whether, as suggested above, we can read the tale as an indictment of slavery. After giving the reader the deposition of Cereno, Melville makes the following enigmatic statement:

If the deposition have served as the key to fit into the lock of the complications which precede it, then, as a vault whose door has been flung back, the *San Dominick's* hull lies open today. (101)

This sentence recalls to us an earlier exchange among Babo, Cereno, and Delano. When Atufal, bound in chains, appears before the two captains to be given the opportunity to beg the Spaniard's pardon, Babo draws the American's attention to the fact that "master here carries the key." Delano then notices the key "suspended by a slender silken cord" around Cereno's neck and says, "So, Don Benito—padlock and key—significant symbols truly." (53) (So they are, although the American does not realize how truly and ironically he speaks.) The key is a symbol of dominion, whether over a man, the Church, or a narrative. It is interesting to observe that we say we have "mastered" a work and thereby "made it our own" when we attain a thorough knowledge of it and can unlock its complications. Melville here suggests that we have been given what we need, yet the hull of the *San Dominick* and the whole of the tale lie open to us only if Cereno's statement to the court is the key. Melville does not write, "Thus the deposition serves as the key . . ."; he leaves the matter open to doubt. For many who read the story, including Melville scholars, its central mystery is why Cereno at age 29 loses the will to live, "the Negro" having cast a shadow over him. The deposition provides little help with this complication.

Taking up this problem, we should first remember Delano's remarks earlier in the story on the power of anguish to unhinge one's mind. Not only does Cereno endure physical hardships but he also suffers the effects of prolonged terror. He has seen his friends murdered and has lived in fear for his life for many days. One of Delano's most penetrating observations about the Spaniard occurs after Cereno recoils from one of the American's many innocuously meant comments: "He is like one flayed alive, thought Captain Delano; where may one touch him without causing a shrink?" (83) For one flayed alive, the mere weight of the air on one's skin—"the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to"—is intolerable. What makes Delano's thought especially

powerful to the experienced reader is the fact that after the blacks hack Aranda to death with hatchets, they strip the skin from his body. (It is significant that Don Alexandro's bones come to rest at last in a church named for St. Bartholomew, for this saint was flayed alive while preaching in Arabia.) Don Alexandro's skin is torn off after his murder; Don Benito's spirit is rended while he is still alive, and the damage might simply be irreparable.

Delano does not believe so, however. On the voyage to Lima, he does his best to cheer his fellow captain and understand his ailment. "Again and again," writes Melville, their conversation turned to Cereno's acting the part forced on him and Delano's failure to grasp what was really happening aboard the *San Dominick*. Don Benito sadly remarks:

. . . you were with me all day, stood with me, sat with me, talked with me, looked at me, ate with me, drank with me; and yet, your last act was to clutch for a monster, not only an innocent man, but the most pitiable of all men. To such degree may malign machinations and deceptions impose. So far may even the best man err in judging the conduct of one of the recesses of whose condition he is not acquainted. But you were forced to it, and and you were in time undeceived. Would that, in both respects, it was so ever, and with all men. (102-3)

At the broadest level, we might conclude from this passage that Cereno despairs to live in a world in which such misjudgments can occur. If malignity and the deceptions that it inspires can fool even the best of men, can one ever truly be sure that he understands another person? In this interpretation, Cereno is overwhelmed by his realization of the power of evil among humanity and so retreats from it, first to a monastery and then to a grave.

I wonder, though, whether Cereno's insight is not more personal. Don Benito is a young man from a well-known family, "a sort of Castilian Rothschild, with a noble brother, or cousin, in every great trading town of South America." (55) At least some of his family's wealth has undoubtedly come from the slave trade, and he is comfortable with the institution before this voyage. He might well never have thought about slavery—it was merely a necessary part of his country's mining and agricultural interests in the New World. What then if the "deceptions" that he mentions are those one puts upon himself? That is, when Cereno speaks of an error in judgment, perhaps he is thinking of Aranda's and his own in under-

estimating the desire of the blacks for freedom and overestimating their tractability. The two probably assumed that the slaves were reasonably content with their lot and, in any event, incapable of organizing and carrying out a rebellion. They deceived themselves about the capabilities of the blacks because their fortunes rested on a slave labor, an institution premised on the slave's lack of humanity. They are brutally undeceived: to gain their liberty, the blacks act with all the craft, vigor, and ruthlessness that rebellious whites are capable of. If errors in judgment are possible when the two men involved share occupations and cultural heritage, how much more difficult is it to weigh the conduct of one from another race and culture?

Don Benito himself is made a slave. He is compelled to say things that he does not want to say and to do things he finds repugnant. He knows the fear of one whose life is entirely at the whim of another, and we sense that Babo enjoys provoking terror in the Spaniard. The shaving incident supports this last generalization and also provides a good example of the curious reversal of the master and slave relationship we noted when we examined the etymology of *Dominic*. In this scene the ostensible servant is wielding all the power while "master" is in his thrall. For an instant Delano's mind grasps this fact, and we are told that "... in the black he saw a headsman, and in the white a man at the block." (74) The more Cereno shudders, the more coolly professional Babo acts.

To follow out this reading of the story's conclusion, I would argue that what leads to Don Benito's despair and lies behind his utterance "The Negro" is not wickedness but "subtlety." (104) He cannot believe how badly he misjudged the blacks until they become his master. The reason, therefore, that he never again looks at Babo—faints before the tribunal rather than do so—is his unwillingness to admit that the black ruled over him, used him as a means to an end. His former assumptions about his own superiority have been destroyed and he cannot live without them. In other words, he has had an experience and learned something about himself that he cannot bring into his understanding of the world and of his place in it. He cannot forget what has happened and he cannot live with it. After Cereno's enigmatic two-word reply, Melville writes what are among the saddest sentences in the tale:

There was a silence, while the moody man sat, slowly and unconsciously gathering his mantle about him, as if it were a pall.

There was no more conversation that day. (103)

Like Bartleby turning his face to the wall of the Tombs, Don Benito resigns himself to the quietness of dust.

Captain Delano, by contrast, is untroubled by whatever it is that afflicts Cereno en route to Lima. Fanned by the mild trade winds, he enjoys the beauty of the sea and sky, and cannot fathom why his companion does not. He acknowledges the role of Providence and the importance of his own "good-nature, compassion, and charity" (102) in carrying him through the danger. His own thinking about human malignity and slavery seems unchanged by his experience on the *San Dominick*.

One cannot deny that Delano does patronize the blacks throughout the story. Melville writes that "like most men of good, blithe heart, Captain Delano took to Negroes, not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs." (73) Elsewhere he thinks of them as "too stupid" to be in complicity with Cereno. (65) Yet he also sees "pure tenderness and love" (63) in a black woman's treatment of her infant and, under the misapprehension that Cereno has injured Babo to retaliate for the shaving cut, sympathizes with the black. He thinks, "Ah, this slavery breeds ugly passions in man.—Poor fellow!" (77) When the water arrives from his ship, the American doles it out equitably:

He complied, with republican impartiality as to this republican element, which always seeks one level, serving the oldest white no better than the youngest black, excepting, indeed, poor Don Benito, whose condition, if not rank, demanded an extra allowance. (70)

Judged by today's standards, Delano is a racist, but he does do what Cereno cannot, namely, regard the blacks as fellow humans and treat them accordingly. He is a decent man, and his virtue, as noted earlier, is that in a situation where he feels unable to draw clear distinction, he withholds judgment, giving everyone the benefit of the doubt.

"Benito Cereno" thus sounds no strident tocsin for the abolition of slavery but instead makes a quiet argument. If one is willing to entertain the notion that another race possesses at least some measure of humanity, then he cannot wonder when that race plots revenge for its enslavement. After Babo is captured, he gives every indication that, offered again the chance to revolt, he would do so, and he goes to his death with noteworthy dignity. During the passage to Peru, "[h]is aspect seemed to say: since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words." (103) Denying the human qualities of such a man "breeds

ugly passions" in both master and slave. Captain Delano, who thinks of blacks in terms of "the unaspiring contentment of a limited mind" (73) is no paradigm of enlightenment; he would be an incredible character if he were. But he does treat the blacks as if they have as much right to live as the whites. Constitutionally unwilling to assay men's hearts by their ambiguous words and actions, he acts charitably to all and so delivers himself and his crew to safety.

The original investigation of religious elements has therefore led us to one way of reading "Benito Cereno." Given the nature of this "grey" tale, we cannot claim to have the interpretation of it or the best one, but we have made queries and connections that merit further thought. In answer to the opening question, we can now say that the religious references serve three ends: They help to unify the imagery of the story, contribute to our understanding of its central characters, and thereby point us to a crucial theme. These "significant symbols" are not the key that unlocks the tale, but perhaps they bring us closer to knowing how to find the key.



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