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Vedic Tradition and the Origin of Philosophy in Ancient India

James Carey

1

"Philosophy" is a term that turns up with variable frequency in presentations and discussions of the religious and speculative traditions of ancient India. There are those who maintain that philosophy is an Indian no less than a Western phenomenon. In support of this claim they point out that in ancient India there was a vast amount of speculation about the whole of things, how it is constituted and what its origins are, and that this inquiry came to expression in a variety of highly developed systems of speculative thought. There are others, however, who maintain that philosophy is a uniquely Western phenomenon. Philosophy, they claim, is not just speculation about ultimate causes. It is, rather, a whole way of life, one that is governed by the conviction that knowledge is to be pursued for its own sake, as an end subservient to none other, however so loftily conceived. This ideal emerged first in ancient Greece, and later on only under the influence of Greek thought.

In the disagreement between these two groups, the latter appear at first glance to be on stronger ground. There was indeed plenty of speculation about ultimate principles in ancient India. There was arguably a wider range of such speculation there than anywhere else in the ancient world, Greece included. But speculation about ultimate principles is

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as old as man and often does not rise above the level of superstition.

Moreover, philosophy is not simply the love of wisdom, or the longing to see the whole, to see it clearly for what it is and without illusions. Philosophy is this longing, to be sure, but accompanied by a sense of obligation, or some kind of urge, to give a rational account of what it takes to be true, without appeal to external authority. In the West, philosophy has traditionally been regarded as one member of a pair of alternatives, the other being religion. The guiding lights of philosophy are reason and ordinary, verifiable human experience. Philosophy does not take its bearings, as religion does, by alleged disclosures from above that are supposed to transcend reason and ordinary experience altogether. That neither philosophy nor religion can be simply reduced to the other is not controversial. What is controversial is the claim that philosophy and religion are so opposed to one another that one and the same person cannot be both a philosopher and a believer. We are, of course, familiar with the arguments of such thinkers as Thomas Aquinas and Kant to the effect that reason cannot penetrate on its own to the first principles or the deepest stratum of being, that reason can recognize this limitation and can thereby infer its need to be supplemented by some kind of faith, be it only a religion within the limits of reason alone. But, against these arguments there are others, rather more widely accepted by philosophers, though until recent times less forcefully advanced, to the effect that religious belief contains, either in its explicit doctrines or in its implicit presuppositions, certain contradictions the affirming of which is incompatible with a fully rational life.

In arguing for the emergence of philosophy in ancient India I shall make use of the narrow conception of philosophy as an enterprise of rationally autonomous enquiry, not simply distinct from but opposed to and in varying degrees antagonistic to religious belief. I shall argue for the emergence in ancient India of an atheism that understood itself to be grounded in a rational consideration of the whole, and of man's place within the whole. I shall not raise the question of whether this conception of philosophy is ultimately defensible but shall assume it as a working hypothesis, so to speak. Accordingly, I shall be working with a conception of philosophy that some might criticize as excessively narrow. I might criticize it that way myself. The justification for my procedure, however, is that I wish to show that philosophy, even according to this narrow, perhaps excessively narrow conception, did in fact emerge in ancient India. If this can be shown, then it can be shown *a fortiori* that philosophy less narrowly conceived also emerged there. It is not possible, however, to argue convincingly for a tradition of autonomous rationality without exhibiting something of the variety of forms it assumed, in particular, the main points of controversy and the rival claims and arguments of the contending parties. I shall be giving no more than a rough sketch, however, and I shall omit much that is relevant to my topic. I hope, nonetheless, not only to show that philosophy, however so rigorously defined, really did exist in ancient India, but to shed new light on the conditions of its emergence and the trajectory it assumed, and perhaps to communicate something of its flavor as well.

Philosophy and religion both are ways of regarding ultimate causes, but philosophy is the younger of the two. In defining its way in opposition to that of religion, philosophy presupposes religion, not, of course, as something true, but as a mistake that it has managed to get beyond. Moreover, philosophy presupposes leisure, and human beings find leisure only within the life of political communities. Political communities are particular. They are particularized by *nomoi*, that is, by laws and other conventions, among the most important of which are religious *nomoi*. It stands to reason, then, that the peculiar character of the reigning religion would contribute something to the form that philosophical questioning of it assumes and to the prominence of certain themes taken up for specifically philosophical consid-

eration. For this reason, we need a preliminary overview of early Indian religion. It must be admitted at the outset that we are handicapped somewhat. The attitude of the ancient Indians to history seems to have been one of ethereal indifference. We possess little in the way of chronicles, and most dates given for significant events are crude approximations at best, often having several centuries as a margin of error.

2

Sometime during the second millennium B.C., a people speaking an Indo-European language and calling themselves "Āryans"[1] migrated from the northwest into the Indian subcontinent. A few centuries later their sacred hymns, prayers, and incantations began to be gathered into three collections called Vedas. A fourth Veda was later assembled. These hymns were not written down at first but were passed on orally from generation to generation by a priestly caste, to whose prodigious memory the preservation of the hymns was entrusted. Of the four Vedas, only the fourth, the *Rg Veda*, contains much that is of genuinely speculative interest. It consists of over a thousand hymns largely celebrating in the most disparate fashion a florid polytheism, somewhat akin to Greek religion and having almost nothing in common with the religion of the Bible. But the *Rg Veda* also contains material of a different sort, such as the so-called creation hymn, the beginning and conclusion of which are as follows:

> There was neither not-being (*asat*) nor being (*sat*) then. There was neither a space nor a heaven beyond. What stirred? Where? In whose protection?....That one [neuter - *tat ekam*] was breathing, windless, by its own determination [or spontaneity - *svadhā*]....Who may proclaim when this creation was produced? The gods [came] hither with the creation of this [world]. Who then knows whence it has arisen? Whether it established itself or did not establish itself, the one who surveys it in the highest heaven alone knows. Or else he does not know.[2]

Such questions about ultimate principles, real and not just rhetorical, are frequently raised in the hymns of the *Rg Veda*. Occasionally, questions are raised regarding even the existence of the particular god celebrated in the hymn, and are left unanswered or answered with what appears to be strained conviction or, perhaps, irony.

> Striving for strength, bring forth a laud to Indra, a true one (*satyam*), if he truly exists (*yadi satyam asti*). One and another say, "There is no Indra." "Who has beheld (*dadarsa*) him?" Whom then shall we honor?[3]

And from another hymn,

> He about whom they ask, "Where is he?" or say of him, the terrible one, "He does not exist," he who diminishes the flourishing wealth of the enemy as gambling does—believe in him (*srad asmai dhatta*)! He, my people, is Indra![4]

In spite of the prevailing polytheism of the *Rg Veda*, celebrated alternately in confidence and in perplexity, there are occasional suggestions of a tentative monotheism and, more remarkably, even of monism *simpliciter*.[5]

Monism, or the view that all is one and that the apparent plurality of things veils a more fundamental unity, is the prevailing perspective in the principal Upanisads, which emerged in the centuries after the Vedas were compiled. In these works certain other common features can be discerned that are characteristic of early or proto-Hinduism.[6] Among these are belief in transmigration of the soul, karmic encumbrance, the concept of *dharma* or law, the caste system,[7] and liberation as the end goal of all perfect self-knowledge. It is worth sketching each of these features briefly, since one or another of them, separately or in combination, comes to the

fore not only in the teaching of those speculative thinkers who present themselves as theorizing within the orthodox Vedic tradition, but even in the thinking of some of those who reject this tradition. There were wide differences of opinion among sophisticated thinkers regarding the most fundamental principles of Vedic tradition. In what follows, I shall emphasize those interpretations that, though far from being universally accepted by believers, were most provocative of a properly philosophical response and appropriation. I shall focus on, without restricting myself to, themes that are central to the principal Upanisads. The divine is presented there in a way that has little in common with the polytheism of the Vedas.

The word "*brahman*," which is neuter in gender, names the fundamental reality that lies behind the manifold and multiform world of appearances. *Brahman*, the hidden reality, is not many but one. The world as it appears, in all its manifoldness, is *māyā*. This word is frequently translated as "illusion," but one should not assume that *māyā* is altogether unreal. It is rather the surface play of the fundamental reality. The world of appearances is illusion only to the extent that it is mistaken for the fundamental reality.

But what intimation, we might ask, is there of an underlying unity? The answer is that there is one thing that is experienced as single and self-identical throughout space and time, throughout the multiplicity of spatial and temporal phenomena, and throughout even the manifold topics that thought takes up for consideration. This one thing is the self, the *ātman*. The self cannot be identified with the external objects and internal concerns with which it is almost always preoccupied. The self in its purity is, we are told in one of the earliest Upanisads, "not this, not that" (or "not this, not this"-*neti neti*).[8] But to the very extent that the self is distinguishable from all appearances, inner appearances—including the individual thoughts that come and go—as well as outer, it seems to be indistinguishable from all other selves. The thought dawns that there is perhaps only one self, and that

the path to *brahman*, the fundamental unity underlying the manifold appearances of the world, is through self-knowledge. This knowledge is achieved in part by study and reflection, and in part by mastery of desires, which may, though need not, entail acts of physical discipline and austerities (*tapas*). It turns out, though, that the path to *brahman* is not exactly *through* knowledge of the self, for in the Upanisads the self is actually identified with the fundamental reality: *ātman* is *brahman*.[9] Or, as it is also said, "That art thou."[10] This core of indivisible individuality at the center of our being is paradoxically what each of us really is, what is common to us all, and finally the underlying unity supporting everything else that in any way exists. It is not only one but simple and self-identical.

Brahman should not be confused with Brahmā, which is the name, masculine in gender, of one of the three primary deities in the Hindu pantheon. Brahmā is the creator, Visnu the preserver, and Siva the destroyer.[11] In the history of Hinduism, cultic devotion to Brahmā was superseded early on by devotion to Visnu and Siva, indicating a greater interest, even at the popular level, in the present and future manifestations of reality than in its originating source, a greater interest in *what* the world is and the limits of its transformations than in *who* made it or where it came from, a greater interest in constitution than in cause, one might say. Of the three gods, Siva is the most puzzling to the Westerner. He is described as the great ascetic and is typically depicted as meditating or dancing, wearing a necklace of skulls, and possessing three eyes, one of which is closed. When Siva opens his third eye, which is in the middle of his forehead, the world of appearances, it was said, will be consumed by fire. Siva is the destroyer of illusion.

Returning to the less picturesque monism of the Upanisads, it is all-important to realize that *brahman*, or the fundamental reality, is not a person. Least of all is *brahman* a transcendent deity who has created a world distinct from himself, which he governs through law, awarding happiness

in rough proportion to morality, if not in this world at least in a world to come. Hinduism is, of course, not indifferent to the question of morality. Indeed, the vexing problem of how desire for the fruit of action can contaminate the moral purity of the action, and thereby render the fruit unattainable, is discerned as early as the Upanisads and is a recurrent theme in Hinduism, and in Buddhism as well. But in conspicuous contrast to the way this problem is conceived in the West, a moral theology is not invoked to manage it.[12] Instead, the problem of the connection of the just deserts of action with the actions that merit them is addressed through the related doctrines of transmigration and karmic causality. If the self is indivisible then it is indissoluble. It cannot be naturally destroyed, and so it survives the death of the body. But the indestructibility of the self does not keep it from being encumbered with the moral effects of the acts it has committed. This encumbrance is called *karma*. Although a man may not experience in this life the effects of the *karma* within which he has encrusted his indestructible self, at death this *karma* binds the self to reincarnation. Moreover, *karma* causes the self to gravitate, so to speak, to a new incarnation and re-incarceration specifically appropriate to its moral history. By committing bad actions a man becomes bad and accumulates bad *karma*. At the death of his body he finds himself entering a new body and life worse than that from which he has just departed. How much worse that life is depends on how bad he was, and reincarnation as something subhuman is a distinct possibility. The indestructible self of a man who has lived a good life is reincarnated into a better life. As we shall see, though, reincarnation is not the only destination for the self.

If one is reincarnated as a human being, the *karma* accumulated from the preceding life determines what caste one will be reincarnated into. The justification for castes in the sacred tradition is traced to a well known though mysterious passage in the *Rg Veda* describing the sacrifice and dismemberment of a primordial gigantic man called the

purusa, a word that in later works came to mean spirit, mind, intelligence, or consciousness.

> When they divided the *purusa*, into how many parts did they apportion him? What do they call his mouth, his two arms and thighs and feet? His mouth became the *brāhmin*; his arms were made into the Warrior, his thighs the People, and from his feet the Servants were born.[13]

This fourfold division has over the course of time become transformed into a great plurality of castes governed by all sorts of injunctions and prohibitions. The original fourfold division was not nearly so complex, nor, one is tempted to add, was it so perverse as what holds sway in India today. In the *Arthasāstra*, a treatise on politics, written by Kautilya toward the end of the fourth century B.C., the specific duties of the original four castes are described as follows.

> The special duties (*dharmās*) of the *brāhmin* are: studying, teaching, performing sacrifices for self, officiating at other peoples' sacrifices, making gifts, and receiving gifts. Those of the *ksatriya* (the warrior or king) are: studying, performing sacrifices for self, making gifts, living by [the profession of] arms, and protecting beings. Those of the *vaisya* (the farmer or merchant) are: studying, performing sacrifices for self, making gifts, agriculture, cattle rearing and trade. Those of the *sudra* (or servant) are: service of the twice-born [i.e., the members of the aforementioned three castes], engaging in an economic calling [viz., agriculture, cattle rearing, and trade] and the profession of the artisan and the actor.[14]

In addition to the duties of the special castes there are the duties proper to the four stages of life for the members of the three highest, twice-born castes, *brāhmin*, *ksatriya*, and *vaisya*.[15] These are the stages of student, householder, forest

recluse, and wandering ascetic, the duties of which are also specified by Kautilya. Additionally, there are duties common to all: "abstaining from harm, truthfulness, uprightness, freedom from malice, compassion, and forbearance."[16] The entire system of duties of the various castes and stations of life make up part of what is called *dharma*. This word could be translated as "law" as well as "duty," depending on the context. No more than *lex* does *dharma* mean *nomos* or convention, that is to say, mere convention. It means rather the proper order of human life sanctioned, if not explicitly by the Veda, then at least by way of extrapolation and development of Vedic lore and tradition.[17] It is supported by and expressive of karmic causality. Moreover, and of apparently greater importance to Kautilya, *dharma*, including the distinctions of caste, is *the* shield against barbarism and chaos. It is, of course, difficult for those of us living in the modern West to regard the caste system, even the less extreme form of it that held sway in ancient India, as anything other than arbitrary and unjust. It has been argued, however, that an egalitarian social order that does not degenerate rapidly into anarchy, followed most likely by tyranny, presupposes an economics of plenty. Instead of an economics of plenty, an economics of scarcity reigned in ancient India, as it did throughout the ancient world in general. It should not be forgotten in this connection that even democratic Athens made use of slaves. An economics of plenty, such as we have today, allows for a more just social order to be sure, even the possibility of equal opportunity for all. The price paid for this social order is the technological mastery of nature as a consequence of which machines can do the work—at least a lot of it—that slaves used to do. And, needless to say, the mastery of nature generates problems of its own, problems that were unknown in the ancient world.[18] In any case, the *dharma* promulgated by the Veda not only allowed for but mandated study for three of the four castes while providing sufficient leisure for them to engage in it. And leisure, to repeat, is a

necessary if not a sufficient condition for the emergence of philosophy.

The whole system of *dharma* was upheld by the king, who was, significantly, not a member of the *brāhmin* caste but of the *ksatriya* or warrior caste. Kautilya writes that the king should employ the scepter or rod, that is to say, punishment, for the good of the people.

> For the rod (or scepter - *danda*), employed with due consideration, endows the subjects with *dharma*, material well-being (*artha*), and objects of desire (or pleasures - *kāmās*). Employed badly, whether in passion or anger, or in contempt, it enrages even forest recluses and wandering ascetics, how much more then the householders? If not employed at all, it gives rise to the law of the fishes. For the stronger man swallows the weak in the absence of the wielder of the rod. Protected by him, the weak man prevails.[19]

The education of the king in the science of politics, (*dandaka*), more literally the science of wielding the rod (*dandanīti*), is treated at length in the *Arthasāstra*. It aims at the formation of the sage-king, or *rāja rsi*.[20] Among the subjects studied by the king is *ānvīksikī* or reasoning, to which we shall return shortly.

The end goal of all action is liberation (*moksa*).[21] Liberation is, at the simplest level, release from the cycle of birth and rebirth, i.e., release of the self from karmic causality. Since the self is a pure unity it cannot be dissolved into its components. It is indestructible, and it does not need to be incarnate to exist. The liberation of the self from the cycle of birth and rebirth, then, is the union of *ātman* with *brahman*. This liberation is most often presented as a state that can be achieved only after an indeterminate number of reincarnations through which bad *karma* is gradually shed. However, if at the end of even an exemplary life, a life in full accord with *dharma*, there remains any residue of bad *karma*,

there is no liberation at death. Bad *karma* can be shed only within a life, and not in the transition (most consistently regarded as instantaneous) from the previous life to the following. But if, *within* an exceptionally good life, bad *karma* is entirely eliminated, then there is no longer a barrier to union with *brahman* within that very life. There is no need to die in order to experience liberation. Seen in this light, liberation is essentially release from the ignorance that prevents one from recognizing the identity of *ātman* and *brahman*. Although this ignorance can be regarded as due to bad *karma*, the attempt to apprehend this identity, and hence to achieve the highest possible state of existence, presupposes right action not as an end in itself but only as a means, as the taming of the passions that interfere with clarity of apprehension. Action in accordance with *dharma*, or, as we might say, morality, is for the sake of a non-moral end, namely the end of seeing the concealed, though immanent and impersonal oneness of all things, without the distraction of the desires that it is the wholly subservient and instrumental function of morality to moderate. It should go without saying that seeing the oneness of all things, and in particular the oneness of *ātman* and *brahman*, cannot be understood as a union of love, for there is not the otherness that love presupposes. There is ultimately no seeing face to face, because there is ultimately only one face.[22]

3

So far we have not encountered anything that can be called philosophy, at least not as we have hypothetically conceived it. But it is clear that the relatively "demythologized" religion of the Upanisads does not present the same kind of contrast with philosophy that one finds in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the latter religions the believer affirms allegiance to a personal creator and moral governor of the universe who transcends and is "wholly other" than his creation, and yet who loves it and commands love in return. In the religion of the Upanisads, the fundamental reality, even on the highly

questionable assumption that it can be called "God," is impersonal. It is not the creator of the universe *ex nihilo* but is its inner core. *Brahman* is not strictly transcendent to, but, rather, immanent within, the world, and is so far from being "wholly other" as to be wholly the same. Unlike the God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, *brahman* is not jealous. Hinduism has historically exhibited an exceptional willingness to concede that other religions also have insights into the reality that is concealed behind appearances.[23] It has thus been able to assimilate other religions into itself with some success, although, not surprisingly, it has failed to do this with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Judaism and Christianity have not historically been major forces in India, disregarding, of course, the missionary efforts of the latter in the last few centuries. The case is different with Islam, which began to make substantial inroads into India during the tenth century A.D. The bitterness of the conflict, often bloody, between Hinduism and Islam is due in large measure to their radically different conceptions not simply of the divine but of what religion itself is.

In this connection it is worth considering the sources of the Hindu analogue to what is known in West as revelation. The Vedic hymns are, in effect, the foundational sacred scriptures. Actually, "scriptures" is not quite the right word since, it is estimated, they were not written down until about 500 B.C., at the earliest. As we noted, they were memorized and recited by *brāhmins*, who were entrusted with preserving them and keeping them a living force in rituals and teaching. The language of the Veda is an early form of Sanskrit. To preserve the original hymns from alteration in the course of recitation over millennia, the rules for euphony in different phonetic contexts and for morphological change were specified by Pānini in his classic grammar, generally conceded by linguists who are familiar with it to be by far the greatest work of its kind in any language. It is not certain when Pānini composed his grammar, or even whether it was originally written rather than composed orally and preserved in this

form until written characters came to be employed. In any case, Pānini's grammar virtually precluded further phonetic development of the language. Consequently, the sound of the Veda when recited today is arguably the same, perhaps down to the smallest nuances, as when it was recited in Pānini's time, if not earlier.

It is all-important to recognize in this connection that the oral tradition of ancient India was entirely different from the oral traditions that Westerners have recently begun to show an interest in. Those who recited the Vedic hymns and appended works such as the Upanisads were mere vehicles for the most exact transmission of these works possible. The transmitter was anything but an integral component of what was being transmitted, unlike the narrator in many other oral traditions—the storyteller did understand himself to be part of the story. Consequently, the Indian tradition can be considered, for all practical purposes, literary, well in advance of the appearance of the written language itself. As in the case of letters proper, the best minds could address the best minds across centuries with a minimum of interference from intermediary transmitters.

The word *Veda* itself means "knowledge." It is cognate with the Greek word *eidos*. The knowledge that the Veda contains was acquired by the sages (*rsis*) of old. They did not acquire it as gift from a god. They acquired it, rather, through their superior powers of apprehension. This knowledge was passed on orally in the very form in which it was acquired. For that reason successive generations have access to it and it can be authoritative for them. This knowledge is acquired, moreover, not through seeing but through hearing, just as it was acquired by the sages.[24] The sages heard what one hears when the Veda is recited today, though back then there seems to have been, *mirabile dictu*, no one doing the reciting. What the sages heard was the eternal though hidden articulation of the truth, or, as we might be tempted to say, thinking of Heraclitus, the *logos*.

I shall continue to use the term "revelation" to designate Vedic lore, though the term is inaccurate to the extent that it implies the self-disclosure of God, not to sages, i.e., to the wise, but to the elect. Hindus have difficulty understanding the Biblical concept of revelation, and many object to the term being applied to the sources of their sacred tradition.[25] When the Muslims first began their conquest of northern India, about a thousand years ago, they were shocked to discover that the Hindus did not even pretend to have prophets.[26] Still, "revelation" is the only word we have for the Vedic analogue of Biblical and Qur'ānic revelation, and I shall continue to use it, not without misgivings, in speaking of what bears only a trace of resemblance to revelation as conceived in the West.

Now, a distinction is drawn within early Hinduism between two levels of revelation. The primary revelation is called *sruti*, or that which was *heard* by the sages. It consists of the four Vedas and appended material, the Upanisads in particular. The secondary revelation is called *smrti* or that which is *remembered*. It consists of later works, some devotional, some legal, and some speculative. An instance of the latter is the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which is sometimes accorded almost as much authority as *sruti* proper. This work is an excerpt from the *Mahābhārata*, a gigantic Indian epic eight times as long as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined. Because of the variety of material contained in the *sruti*, considerable controversy emerged among the learned as to the precise character of Vedic authority.

So far I have sketched only the most central features of early Hinduism, emphasizing the sophisticated religious speculation of the Upanisads and ignoring entirely the polytheism of the popular religion.[27] The highly sophisticated religious speculation of the Upanisads does not count as philosophy, as least not according to the conception of philosophy I have adopted on hypothesis. Nonetheless it is not difficult to see how philosophy could emerge in this intel-

lectual *milieu*. It was a period of leisure, mandated study, and, not least, freedom of speculation, including freedom to rethink and reinterpret the meaning of the Veda, which manifestly contains passages of religious skepticism and even satire.[28]

4

Sometime around the sixth century B.C. three systems of speculative thought broke with the Vedic tradition. These were Buddhism, Jainism, and Lokāyata. All three denied the authority of the Vedas and, in particular, the caste system it supported. The first two are classified as religions. The third is something else.

In Buddhism, as in Hinduism, one must distinguish between the popular belief and the philosophical appropriation. Whereas the Upanisads teach the substantial oneness of all things, Buddhism teaches the insubstantial voidness (or emptiness - *sūnyatā*) of all things. In the writings of the Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna, who is thought to have lived and taught around the end of the first century A.D., the implications of this teaching are pressed home with dialectical force. To take a single example, against the doctrine of the voidness of all things, the Hindu opponent objects that if all things are void (*sūnya*), then the very thesis that all things are void is itself void, and is thereby refuted. To this objection, Nāgārjuna responds essentially as follows. It is indeed true that if all things are void, then the thesis that all things are void is itself void. But this consequence, so far from being a refutation of the thesis, is in fact an exemplification of it and contributes to its confirmation.[29] The Protagorean relativist, familiar to us from Plato's *Theaetetus*, cannot avail himself of so neat a defense. For the thesis that all theses are relative precludes itself from being absolutely true. The thesis that all theses are void, however, does not preclude itself from being absolutely true, *if*, that is, the Buddhists are right in holding that voidness (*sūnyatā*) is at the heart of everything that in any way *is*, including absolute truth itself. It would be

a serious mistake to think that the Buddhist doctrine of voidness is mystical or even intuitive. Buddhism, at least as it developed in India, regards inference, i.e., logical reasoning, as a valid means of cognition. The teaching on voidness is supported with reasons. As the Hindu thinkers discovered in their formal disputations with the Buddhists, the latter came to the occasion well armed.

Needless to say, the Buddhist doctrine of voidness leaves no room for an eternal and substantial being, either immanent or transcendent. Indeed, it leaves no room for a being, strictly so called, at all. Every so-called being is but a phase of becoming, a segment of the indefinitely flowing causal sequence called "dependent arising" (*pratītyasamutpāda*). According to Buddhism, the recognition of the absolute insubstantiality and dependent arising of all things is enlightenment. Enlightenment is liberation from attachment to what is insubstantial and transitory. It is liberation from deluded belief in permanence, from deluded belief in any eternal presence. There have always been, within Buddhism, a significant number of thinkers who have taught that the Buddha's enlightenment was achieved through sense perception and inference exclusively, that is, through powers lying completely within the nature of man.

Jainism shares much in common with Hinduism while, like Buddhism, rejecting the authority of the Veda. There is a line of sages (*tīrthankaras*) who have disclosed the truth about reality. Reality is ultimately dual. Everything is either soul or matter, and neither of these can be reduced to the other. It is expressly taught that there is no need to recognize any higher being than man. Jainism includes doctrines of *karma*, reincarnation, and liberation similar to those of Hinduism, and the same is true of Buddhism. But, given Buddhism's doctrine of the insubstantiality of all things, and its denial of the substantial self in particular, it has the complicated task, which it does not evade, of addressing how it is that the exceptionless state of dependent arising can allow for encumbrance with *karma*, reincarnation, enlightenment, and

final liberation. The solution to this problem depends on the cogency of the Buddhist claim that continuity does not presuppose identity, at least not substantial identity. Both classical Buddhism and Jainism were regarded as, strictly speaking, atheistic, and neither seems to have made much of an effort to deny the charge.[30]

In Lokāyata (also called "Cārvāka"), the third school of speculative thought that denied the authority of the Veda, we find unabashed atheism, materialism, and hedonism. We know of this school for the most part only from excerpts of texts no longer extant but quoted, sometimes at length, by orthodox thinkers who not surprisingly dissociate themselves from what they are quoting. The following excerpt represents something of the teaching and spirit of Lokāyata.[31]

> An opponent [of Lokāyata] will say, if you do not allow for something unseen [or invisible - *adrsta*] the various phenomena of the world become destitute of any cause. But we [members of the Lokāyata school] cannot accept this objection as valid, since these phenomena can all be produced spontaneously from their own nature [or own being – *svabhāva*].Thus it has been said [and here an earlier Lokāyata text is quoted] – "The fire is hot, the water cold, refreshing cool the breeze of morn; from whom came this variety? [Answer:] From their own nature [*svabhāva*] was it born."

The word translated here as "own nature" has two components, *sva-* which means "one's own" or "intrinsic," and *bhāva*, which is the Sanskrit word for being, derived from the verbal radical *bhū*.[32] The text continues.

> And all this has been said by Brhaspati [the legendary founder of Lokāyata.] "There is no heaven, no final liberation, nor any soul in another world. Nor do the actions of the four castes, orders [that is, stages of life], etc., produce any real effect. The fire sacrifice [*agnihotra*], the three Vedas, the ascetic's three staves, and smearing oneself with ashes were made by nature [or, perhaps less misleadingly, made by the elements - *dhatu-nirmita*] as the livelihood of those destitute of knowledge and manliness. [Presumably the *brāhmins* are meant here.] If a beast slain in the Jyotistoma rite [a Vedic sacrifice] will itself go to heaven, then why doesn't the sacrificer offer his own father? ... It is only as a means of livelihood that *brāhmins* have established here all these ceremonies for the dead—there is no other fruit [than what is found in this world] anywhere."

In an ancient drama, *Prabodha-Candrodaya*, which reflects the views of this school, a materialist offers a simple response to the question of why believers wear themselves out with fasting and other forms of mortification: "These fools are deceived by the [sacred texts] and are fed with the allurements of hope."[33]

The name of this school, Lokāyata, is derived from *loka*, the Sanskrit word for world. Sankara, a philosopher working within the orthodox tradition, writes of Lokāyata as follows:

> According to the Lokāyatika doctrine, the four elements alone are the ultimate principles—earth, water, fire, and air; there is none other. Only the perceived exists; the unperceivable does not exist. [Frank materialism and, indeed, nominalism.] Others should not postulate [that is, infer] merit and demerit from happiness and misery. A person is happy or miserable through nature; there is no other cause. [A denial of *karma*.] Who paints the peacocks, or who makes the cuckoos sing? There exists here no cause except nature. The soul is but the body characterized by the attributes signified by the expressions "I am stout," "I am youthful"…. It is not something other than the

> body. The consciousness that is found in [organisms] is produced in the manner of the red color out of the combination of betel, areca nut, and lime. [Conscience is at most a mere epiphenomenon of matter.] There is no world other than this one: there is no heaven and there is no hell: the realm of Siva and like regions are invented by stupid impostors…. Liberation is death, which is the cessation of the life breath. The wise ought not to take pains on account of it. [That is, there is no need to take pains on account of liberation since, being death, nothing more and nothing less, it is going to come upon the wise and the unwise alike. No effort is needed to bring it about.]. It is only the fool who wears himself out by penances, fasts, etc.[34]

Sankara wrote around 800 A.D., but Lokāyata is much older. Its chief work, the *Brhaspati Sutra*, which is not extant, is estimated to have been composed around 600 B.C. And references to Lokāyata teachings occur in other works estimated to date from an early period.[35]

5

The denial of the authority of the Veda by Buddhism, Jainism, and Lokāyata, did not occur without provoking a response from the upholders of Vedic tradition. In the attempt to meet the various criticisms leveled at the authority of the Veda, six main schools of speculative thought emerged. These schools are usually spoken of as "orthodox", which is a rough but not altogether misleading rendering of "*āstika*," (from Sanskrit *as* - "is") which is employed to mean "accepting of sacred tradition", that is, Vedic tradition. Over and against these are the "heterodox" or *nāstika* (from *na as* - "is not") schools of Buddhism, Jainism, and Lokāyata. Each of these different schools is referred to by the Indian commentators as a view (*darsana*). They were schools in the sense that they had

sūtras, or basic texts expressing the central tenets in concentrated form, adherents, and a rich commentarial tradition of textual exegesis. Needless to say, as the schools developed, divisions emerged within them. There were, additionally, important thinkers working both at the margins of the schools and outside their confines. Formal, intermural disputations took place, and these are recapitulated and developed further in the commentaries.[36]

To get a clearer view of philosophy as it existed in ancient India, we need to undertake a brief survey of the orthodox schools. The range of themes taken up for specifically philosophical treatment is comparable in scope, at least, to what one finds in Western philosophy. Some themes strike the Westerner as not only unfamiliar, but exotic, and even bewildering, while others are familiar but approached and developed in unexpected ways. The task of our survey is twofold. We need to observe the philosophical mind at work on particular questions that are interesting in their own right. At the same time, we need to determine exactly where and how Vedic authority comes into the picture. For it is in assessing the character of this authority that we can estimate the extent to which philosophy in India succeeded in distinguishing its way from that of religion.

The six orthodox schools are conveniently grouped in pairs. In the first place there is the Pūrva-Mīmāmsā—Uttara-Mīmāmsā pair. "*Mīmāmsā*" means "inquiry"; "*pūrva*" and "*uttara*" mean "earlier" and "later" respectively. Pūrva-Mīmāmsā takes its bearings from the earlier part of Vedic lore, the Vedas proper, and Uttara-Mīmāmsā takes its bearings from the later part, in particular, the appended Upanisads. Of the six orthodox schools of thought Pūrva-Mīmāmsā is at first glance much the most orthodox. It is concerned with such things as the resolution of inconsistencies in the Veda, their claim to be an eternal revelation, and how sound can be the vehicle of revelation. These inquiries are all in the service of supporting the rule of *dharma* as the central Vedic disclosure relevant to human life.

Today one might be tempted to call Pūrva-Mīmāmsā "Vedic fundamentalism" were it not for the cunning of its apologetics and the subtlety of its investigations, particularly into the nature of speech (*vāc*), which in one Vedic hymn is presented as a goddess extolling herself as all embracing and the first of those who are worthy of sacrifice.[37] Given the uncompromising determination of Pūrva-Mīmāmsā to defend the Vedic injunctions to the letter, one might expect the texts of this school to betray the kind of blinkered irritability one often runs up against in those committed to the defense of indefensible positions. Instead, one finds there what is characteristic of the texts of almost all the schools, namely, a serene and fair minded statement of the most powerful objections that have been advanced against the tenets of the school in question, followed by a measured point by point rebuttal.

Uttara-Mīmāmsā is usually called "Vedānta," literally, the end of the Veda, since its authority and the focus of its interest is the Upanisads. It is probably the school of Indian speculative thought best known in the West, as it has well known adherents in our time. There are several versions of Vedānta, but the most influential is Advaita-Vedānta, literally, non-dualist Vedānta. Its greatest exponent was Sankara, whose account of the heterodox school of Lokāyata I quoted earlier. Advaita-Vedānta holds to the Upanisadic teaching of the oneness of all things, of the world as *māyā*, and of the identity of *ātman* with *brahman*. Where, one asks, does the manifold and illusory world that we mistake for reality come from? The world is not created, either *ex nihilo* or out of a pre-existent matter. The world is the play (or sport - *līlā*) of *brahman*.[38] This play has no purpose outside itself. In particular, this play is not for the good of the world, a claim that Sankara supports by referring to a passage from the *sruti*, "It is not for the sake of all, my dear, that all is loved, but for one's own sake that all is loved."[39] According to Advaita-Vedānta, *brahman* is both the efficient and the material cause

of the world. We might add that it is the formal and final cause as well.

Another pair is Sānkhya-Yoga. The Sānkhya school is dualistic. The ultimate constituents of reality are nature and intellect, and this school gives an intriguing account of how the two are related. The word translated by "nature" here is *prakrti*. The components are *pra-*, *kr-*, and *-ti*. *Pra-* is equivalent to our prefix *pro-* and could be translated as "forth." *Kr-* is the root of the Sanskrit verb for "to make" or "to do." And *-ti* is a suffix that, like the Greek *-sis*, endows a verbal root with a nominal character indicating process, as with *poiēsis* (making) or, for that matter, *physis* (nature or, more literally, growing). *Prakrti* is then making-forth.[40] To the extent that this making-forth is an ongoing and immanent principle of production, and not the original and originating act of a transcendent creator, "nature" could hardly be a better rendering of *prakrti*. The etymology of this word reminds one of Aristotle's discussion at the beginning of the second book of the *Physics*, where *physis* is presented as a principle of impersonal immanent governance, the source of motion and rest within the world, and is compared to a doctor healing himself.[41] Like Aristotle's nature, *prakrti* is both what makes and what is made.

It is worth noting that the two Sanskrit terms I have translated as "nature," namely, *prakrti* and, in my account of Lokāyata, *svabhāva*, are etymologically unrelated. The former names nature as process whereas the latter, which as we saw is derivative from the Sanskrit verb "to be," names nature as being, primarily in the sense of essence. Parallel to *prakrti* and *svabhāva* are the Greek terms, *physis* and *ousia*, which are also etymologically unrelated. The former, like *prakrti*, names nature as process, whereas the latter is derived from the Greek verb "to be" and, like *svabhāva,* names nature as being, also primarily in the sense of essence. Since the Sanskrit and Greek terms developed prior to any influence of Greek speculative thought on Indian speculative thought or, so far as we can tell, *vice versa*, the correspondences are

remarkable. One might suspect that these linguistic developments were not entirely independent, in spite of the absence of any influence of one on the other. Because Greek and Sanskrit are related languages, one might be tempted to chalk up the comparable derivations of *svabhāva* and *ousia* from the verb "to be" in their respective languages to merely coincidental exploitations of a possibility latent in proto-Indo-European, the hypothesized common ancestor of the two languages.[42] But the independent emergence of *prakrti* and *physis* within Sanskrit and Greek as names for the whole material order construed as immanent, ongoing, self-emergence cannot be easily dismissed as happenstance. On the contrary, there is every reason to think that these two terms came into being to express something already caught sight of in the nature of things, so to speak, and, moreover, that this discovery was the dawn of a properly philosophical orientation and outlook.

The relationship between *prakrti* in the Sānkhya school and *physis* in the philosophy of Aristotle is not limited to the central and common concept of "making forth." *Prakrti* is animated to its activity by the presence of spirit. The word I am translating as "spirit" here is, again, *purusa*, which in one of the Vedic hymns we considered was the gigantic victim of a primordial sacrifice, a victim who, on being dismembered by the gods, served as the origin of the four castes. Not surprisingly, in the Sānkhya system, the concept of *purusa* has become demythologized, as indeed had already happened in the Upanisads.[43] By itself, spirit lacks any power to produce things, and is accordingly regarded as a pure "witness."[44] The relationship of *purusa* to *prakrti* is likened to a man who is clear-sighted but lame (*purusa*) mounted on the shoulders of a man who is sure-footed but blind (*prakrti*).[45] The presence of spirit stimulates nature to evolve out of itself a manifold of beings. This evolution is from three elemental constituents (*gunas*), which, had nature not been excited to activity by the presence of spirit, would simply have remained in equilibrium. These three constituents of nature are called

sattva, *rajas* and *tamas*, for which there are no corresponding English words. *Sattva* is buoyant and shining; *rajas* is stimulating and moving; *tamas* is heavy and enveloping. Their functioning, we are told, is for a single purpose, like that of a lamp.[46] Exactly how the upsetting of the equilibrium of these three constituents within primordial nature happens is problematic because spirit itself does not act directly on nature. Spirit engages in no action at all, but only in a pure beholding. On the other hand, nature cannot be so blind as to be totally unaware of the presence of spirit, since this very presence is what provokes nature to activity. The problem has a rough parallel, at least, in Aristotle's conception of the relationship of the unmoved mover, who is pure intelligence (*noēsis noēseōs*), to what is moved, that is, to material nature. To be sure, for Aristotle, some moved things, such as the heavenly bodies and human beings, are themselves intelligent. But certain other things, such as particles of earth and other elements, which are also moved to their proper places at least ultimately by the unmoved mover, are as blind as blind can be.[47]

In the Sānkhya school the modifications of *prakrti*, or nature, entail a complex and graduated evolution, one consequence of which is the individuation of *purusa* or spirit into individual selves, which results in a delusion as to what they really are. But *prakrti*, like Arisotle's *physis*, also works for an end. The end is the overcoming of the delusion of the individual *purusas*. This overcoming of delusion is liberation.

That *prakrti* can be construed as non-sentient and at the same time as nonetheless acting for an end, and furthermore for the end of another, is addressed in the *Sānkhya-kārikā*, the fundamental text of this school, and in the commentaries on this text. The argument begins, characteristically, with an objection, in this case the objection of a theist. In an animal, many organic processes such as digestion have a purpose but nevertheless take place without the animal's being conscious of them. So another being, an omniscient and powerful deity, in fact, must be invoked to account for these processes. After

all, the objector continues, there cannot be purposes unless they are consciously intended, either by the organism or by its providential creator. To this objection the proponent of Sānkhya responds with an example. Milk flows out of the cow for the sake of the calf, without any conscious intention on the part of the cow (much less, one might add, on the part of the milk). In a similar way, the whole of *prakrti*, which is non-sentient, can be understood to act for the liberation of another, namely, for the liberation of *purusa*. Neither divine intention nor any other conscious intention needs to be invoked. No intention needs to be invoked at all. Nature, *prakrti*, is purposive, period.

The proponent of Sānkhya then assumes the offensive and advances an argument against a divine, omniscient creator altogether. Every *sentient* being acting for a purpose does so either out of selfishness, that is, for its own good, or out of benevolence, that is, for the good of another. Neither of these motives could account for God's creation of the universe. God cannot create the universe out of selfishness. For, on the hypothesis of the theist, he has all that he requires. Nor can he create the universe out of benevolence. For prior to the alleged creation of the world—which, incidentally, is not envisioned by either party to the dispute as *ex nihilo*—the *purusas* would be without bodies and organs, which are the source of their delusion. Consequently, they would not be afflicted, prior to creation, with anything that God could be aroused through benevolent pity to remove. Finally, if God created the world out of benevolence he would create only happy creatures. So, why are there so many unhappy creatures? The theist, obviously, cannot answer this question by attributing the unhappiness of creatures to their past deeds, as is required by the orthodox doctrine of *karma*. Prior to creation of the world, *purusa*, whether understood as one or many, cannot be understood to have encumbered itself with *karma*.[48]

According to the Sānkhya school, the purposive action of non-sentient *prakrti* is neither amorally selfish nor morally

altruistic. It is amorally altruistic. Its purposiveness is an irreducible given, not to be accounted for by appeal to conscious design. After all, one would not infer conscious design unless purposiveness were apprehended first. The two concepts, purposiveness (understood as having an end or telos) and conscious design, can be kept distinct. As students of Western philosophy might be inclined to put it, the proposition that purposiveness presupposes conscious design is not an analytic judgment. It is a synthetic judgment. Its denial entails no logical contradiction: one is not logically compelled to infer conscious design from purposiveness. The existence of purposiveness is so obvious, particularly in living beings, that the theist does not argue for it and the atheist does not argue against it. Unlike the Medieval theologians who argued from teleology to the conscious intention of a divine artisan, and unlike the Modern philosophers and scientists who undertook a polemic against teleology because they feared admitting it would commit them to the existence of a divine artisan, the Sānkhya school, like Aristotle, takes teleology as a given. It no more feels a need to account for the fact of teleology by appeal to a divine artisan than it feels a need to account for something equally mysterious, namely, a plurality of spirits or minds, by that same appeal. Purposiveness is, then, simply a feature of *prakrti*, just as consciousness is a feature of *purusa*. Neither of them can be convincingly accounted for by appeal to something as problematic as the intention of an omniscient creator since, again, no rational motive can be assigned for his creative act. The flowing of the milk from the cow to the calf is a paradigm of this purposiveness. It occurs without any intention from within on the part of the cow and without any intention from without on the part of a god. The Sānkhya school of orthodox thought was openly atheistic.

Sānkhya is, as noted earlier, usually paired with Yoga in summaries of the orthodox views. There is more to Yoga than the system of physical discipline and exercises familiar to us in the West. Yoga employs the *prakrti-purusa* distinction, the

distinction between nature and spirit that we find in Sānkhya, and, like that school, regards this dualism as irreducible. Unlike Sānkhya, however, Yoga is theistic. However, it introduces the concept of the Lord (*Īsvara*) more as an object of devotion than as a causal principle. The Lord can serve as the focal point of mental concentration. So envisioned the Lord is but one *purusa* among many, though unique in his eternal freedom from illusion and perfect cognition.[49] In some respects he seems to function chiefly as an ideal to approximate.

The remaining pair of orthodox schools is Nyāya-Vaisesika. Their concerns and investigations appear, at first glance, at the greatest remove from the Veda. The best known teaching of the Vaisesika school is atomism. More significant is its attempt to categorize all that in any way can be said to *be*. Though Vaisesika is at least nominally theistic, its attenuated theism is hardly central to the ontological investigations it undertakes, and the sincerity of its theistic commitment was called into question by philosophers of other Indian schools, both ancient and modern.[50]

The Nyāya school is interested in the question of how knowledge is possible. According to this school, knowledge involves a knower, what is known, the means whereby knowledge is attained, and the act of knowing. The means of valid cognition that are admitted by the Nyāya school are perception, comparison, inference, and verbal testimony. "Perception is that knowledge which arises from contact of a sense with its object, and is determinate, un-nameable, and unerring."[51] Perception is determinate in that its object is present in clarity and distinctness, and it is unerring because falsity occurs only in propositions. The argument that perception is un-nameable is directed against the claim that all cognition has a linguistic structure. A thing can be perceived for which we do not yet have a name. And when something we perceive has already been given a name, the name is not a part of the perception proper. Communicating the name of a thing to someone who has never perceived the

thing does not, by itself, produce for him a perception of it. And even when someone has at his disposal a name for something he actually has perceived, calling up the name does not produce a genuinely determinate perception of the thing.[52]

The Nyāya school developed, independently of Aristotle, a theory of the syllogism and principles of reasoning. Rather than three steps—major premise, minor premise, conclusion—the Nyāya school distinguishes five steps in the syllogism, at least as it is employed in disputation. These are: proposition, reason, example, application, and conclusion.[53] They are ordered as follows, with the favored example.

> 1. The *proposition* to be established: *Sound is non-eternal*. This step indicates that in disputation reasoning is directed from the beginning toward a conclusion that it intends to establish. The conclusion rarely pops up as an unanticipated proposition, resulting from the fortuitous conjunction of a major premise with a minor, which just happen to have a middle term in common. Not that such things do not occur, but they never or almost never occur in a formal disputation.
>
> 2. The *reason* why the proposition is affirmed: *Because it is produced*. In effect, this step is an anticipatory relating of the major premise to the minor.
>
> 3. An *example* founding what is, in effect, the major premise: *A dish, which is produced, is not eternal, so—unless our opponent produces a counter example at this point—we say that everything that is produced is non-eternal*. If the opponent cannot at this point name a counter example invalidating the major premise, the latter

has to count as established and true.

4. The *application* or reaffirmation: *Sound is produced*. This is, in effect, the assertion of the minor premise on the heels of the major premise if the latter has been established by the example, i.e., if the opponent was unable to produce a counter example in the preceding step.

5. The conclusion: *Sound is non-eternal*. This should, of course, be the same as the proposition stated in the first step. It is nonetheless a separate step in the inference. The first step announces the project. The last step concludes it.

Comparison, or knowledge by analogy, the third means of valid cognition admitted by the Nyāya school is "the knowledge of a [new] thing through its similarity to another thing previously well known." The fourth and last means of valid cognition is verbal testimony.

There is clearly a decreasing reliability reflected in the order in which the four means of valid cognition are listed. Perception was said to be unerring. The same was not said for inference, since there can be faulty inference, a problem treated specifically in the *Nyāya-Sutra*. Comparison is obviously less reliable than inference, since the fact that two things, one of them familiar and the other unfamiliar, have a certain feature in common does not, by itself, justify the inference that every feature the one has, the other has as well. Just as inference needs to draw its examples from the more reliable perception, so comparison needs to anchor itself in the more reliable inference and perception. By implication then, verbal testimony, the last mentioned means of valid cognition, is the least reliable of the four. It is, as we say, "hearsay." It is a means of valid cognition in that it *might* be true; but, then again, it might *not* be true. Some combination of the other three means of valid cognition must be employed

to determine whether the verbal testimony comes from a reliable source rather than from a child, a lunatic, or an impostor. And yet verbal testimony is the sole means for the transmission of the Veda. Consequently, we can infer that the Nyāya school regarded Vedic authority as less than fully reliable, except when buttressed by other, more reliable, means of valid cognition.

This inference is supported, as we shall see, by the curious example that the *Nyāya-Sutra* uses in its treatment of the syllogism, an example that recurs throughout this text: the non-eternality of sound.[54]

6

Of the six schools that professed allegiance to Vedic tradition, Pūrva-Mīmāmsā could appear to have been the least speculatively adventuresome. Among other things, it did not accept the Vedānta teaching that the phenomenal world is illusion. Things are pretty much the way they appear. Pūrva-Mīmāmsā affirmed a rather prosaic and sober, even tough minded, realism—with one big exception. This school based its argument for the authority of the Veda on its presumed eternity. In accounting for the revelation of the Veda, the *Mīmāmsakas* had argued that it was quite literally heard by the sages of old. We today no longer hear the Veda because it is covered by a veil, so to speak. Unlike the sages we lack the discernment to hear through this veil. The Veda is a hidden but nonetheless eternal sound. An eternal sound is conceivable, argues the *Mīmāmsaka*, because sound is incorporeal. Being incorporeal, it is not subject to decay and dissolution.

The prime concern of the Pūrva-Mīmāmsā school, as the first line of the *Mīmāmsā Sūtra* indicates, is the explication of *dharma*, i.e., right conduct or duty. The medium whereby *dharma* is announced is sound (*sabdā*), which construed as verbal testimony is a means of valid cognition. Now, an interesting principle of reasoning in formal disputation, as practiced and urged by the Pūrva-Mīmāmsā school, is that

any proposition advanced, and therefore any verbal testimony, must count as true until and unless it can be shown to be false.[55] The only way verbal testimony can be shown to be unreliable is if its author can be shown to be untrustworthy or if the testimony is itself preposterous.

The first line of attack will not work if the Veda—in particular, the sound of which it is constituted—is eternal. For verbal testimony cannot have an untrustworthy author if it has no author at all, either human or divine. Atheism is one of the tenets of Pūrva-Mīmāmsā, not in spite of, but because of its, adherence to Vedic tradition. Its atheism is not extracted from the Veda, but read off it, so to speak, as a kind of meta-atheism. The *Mīmāmsaka* asks, with a perfectly straight face, if the Veda were composed by a god, might he not be inclined to exaggerate his accomplishments a little bit, to lie, in fact? How can we rule that possibility out? The truth of the Veda is most plausible on the assumption that it is eternal. And it can be eternal, so the *Mīmāmsaka* argues, only if it has no maker, that is, no author.

The second line of attack, trying to show that the contents of the Veda are preposterous, will not work either. For example, the opponent of Pūrva-Mīmāmsā asks, "How do you know that all this [the Veda] is not like the utterance of lunatics and children? After all, we find in it such sentences as 'Trees sat the sacrificial session.'"[56] To this objection the *Mīmāmsaka* responds that all such sentences can be interpreted figuratively. This particular sentence is merely a poetic way of indicating the centrality and solemnity of the sacrificial session. The polytheism of the Veda can also be, and in fact has to be, demythologized. Of greater concern are the dharmic injunctions. There are statements about the fruits of *dharma* that seem to be contradicted by facts. But they cannot really be contradicted by the facts, for the fruits are all future relative to the enjoined action. If promised fruit follows shortly after the enjoined action, the truth of the Vedic promise is confirmed. If it does not follow shortly after the enjoined action, it will most assuredly follow later on.

Reincarnation is invoked. If the fruits of enjoined actions do not follow in this life, they will most assuredly follow in the next life. But what of people who receive fruits in this life that the Veda declares are consequent only to specifically enjoined actions, which these same people say they never performed? These people are wrong. They did perform these actions, only not in this life but, rather, in a preceding life. The Vedic promise is not contradicted.

In spite of such ingenious ways of interpreting Vedic assertions that seem on the face of it not to be true, there is a marked tendency in Pūrva-Mīmāmsā to downplay declarative statements in the Veda across the board and to emphasize those that are prescriptive only. The basic concern is always *dharma*, that is, what *ought* to be done. As such, a Vedic injunction cannot be contradicted by anything that sense perception or any other means of valid cognition might determine about what exists. Put another way, the *ought*, precisely *because* it is not derived from the *is*, cannot be contradicted by the *is*. What might appear to be the weakness of the Pūrva-Mīmāmsā position, namely the virtual detachment of the *ought* from the *is*, turns out to be its strength.

But free floating dharmic injunctions presuppose at least the declarative sentence that the Veda is eternal, and consequently that the sound, the *sabdā*, that reveals these injunctions, is eternal. This claim is so odd, not to say weird, that one is inclined to tone it down. Is it possible that the sounding of the Veda is to be understood figuratively, perhaps as a metaphor to indicate the eternal order of things having come to expression in language proper? No. The sounding of the Veda is not a metaphor. The Veda is literally sounding, sounding and resounding eternally through the cosmos. Indeed, the very letters that go to make up the verses in the Veda have an eternal sound.[57] Put together they constitute an articulation that is more than just noise, and these articulate sounds are those that one hears when the Veda is recited. The recitation that we hear only *manifests* a sound that is already

and always there. The word and the utterance manifesting it are, we are told, analogous to a pot and the lightening manifesting it in an otherwise dark night.[58] Just as the lightening does not cause the pot to come into being, so the utterance does not cause the sound to come into being. The lightening only manifests the pre-existent pot, and the utterance only manifests the pre-existent sound, which in the case of the Veda is the very sound of eternal truth that the sages heard. The eternally sounding Veda is in a language. That language—it will come as no surprise—is Sanskrit. We can perhaps see more clearly now why it was critical to freeze the development of the Sanskrit language, particularly its sound, early on. In any case, however strange we may find the notion of an unmanifest eternal sound, however much of an exception it is to everything we experience in the production of sound, the *Mīmāmsaka* makes his point: "Prove, without begging the question, that the Veda is not eternally resounding throughout the universe. That *you* cannot hear it is a trivial fact that does not contribute materially to the proof you need."

The counter-argument for the non-eternity of sound, in the example that the Nyāya school appears at first glance to have taken out of nowhere simply to illustrate its syllogistic theory, is directed quite obviously against the teaching of the Pūrva-Mīmāmsā school. But, more strikingly, this counter-argument is directed against the very concept of *sruti*, of "what is heard," construed as an eternal foundation of sacred tradition.[59] According to the Nyāya school, it is not sufficient to say that sound is eternal simply because of its incorporeality. On the basis of perception and reasoning, i.e., on the basis of experience, we know sound to be produced. At least, we have no *experience* of an unproduced sound. From the perspective of the Nyāya school, an admission of the possibility of an unproduced sound would be something like an admission of the possibility of miracles, which are by definition wondrous occurrences that are exceptions to the regularity and continuity of experience. Indeed, *sabdā*, i.e.,

verbal testimony, as understood by Pūrva-Mīmāmsā, would seem to be the miracle, *the* miracle *par excellence*, one might say. The possibility of such a thing would not only undermine the authority of sense perception and reasoning, it would undercut the possibility of there being any thing like nature in the strict sense of the word. To this concern the *Mīmāmsaka* would respond that the Veda, though wondrous indeed, even miraculous, is not an exception to anything. It is an eternal miracle. The Veda is the norm. Precisely because it is eternal it cannot be construed as an interruption to the regularity and continuity of experience.

There was a sustained controversy between the Pūrva-Mīmāmsā and the Nyāya schools on the character of Vedic authority, turning on this very issue of the eternity of sound. In the controversy, the primacy and timeless validity of Vedic revelation, advanced by the putatively ultra-orthodox Pūrva-Mīmāmsā school, takes the form of an argument *against* the existence of a creator God and for the eternity of the world, precisely so the Veda can be understood to be uncreated and its authority unqualified. The counter-argument for the temporal character of Vedic revelation, and its subordination to sense perception and reasoning, advanced by the epistemologically oriented Nyāya school, takes the form of an argument *for* a creator God and against the eternity of the world, precisely so that the Veda can be understood to be created and its authority qualified. If we are right in our contention that the root of the *Naiyāyika* denial of an eternal sound is, in effect, a denial of miracles, then it has to count as a capital irony, at least from the Western point of view, that this denial had to be supported by an argument *for* the existence of a creator God.

The depreciation of Vedic authority, and thereby of Vedic tradition, in the orthodox Nyāya school is not announced with trumpets. It can be discerned in the choice of a wry example adduced ostensibly just to clarify a simple logical distinction.

> That word is called "too generic" which, while applying to the thing desired to be spoken of over-reaches it. For example, the *brāhmin*-hood [i.e., the priestly caste that transmits the Vedic tradition]—which is denoted by the term "*brāhmin*"—is sometimes found to be concomitant with "learning and character" and sometimes found to over-reach it, i.e., not be concomitant with it.…[60]

Nyāya was not the only orthodox school to call into question, however so delicately, the authority of Vedic tradition. The *Sānkhya-kārikā* begins with a discussion of the various kinds of pain and how they can best be removed. Among pains are mental pains, of which several are mentioned, two of them being fear and "the non-perception of particular objects." The text addresses this matter bluntly.

> The revealed (or scriptural - *ānusravikas*) means [of removing pain] is like the perceptible: it is verily linked with impurity, destruction, and excess (*atisaya*); different in form and superior thereto is that means derived from the discriminative knowledge of the manifest, the unmanifest, and the knower [i.e., the discriminative knowledge touted by the Sānkhya school].

The appended commentary explicates this text as follows.

> The means of removing pain, consisting in the direct discriminative knowledge of the intellect (*purusa*) as apart from matter, is contrary to Vedic means and hence is better. The Vedic remedy is good inasmuch as it is authorized by the Veda and as such is capable of removing pain to a certain extent; the discriminative knowledge of the intellect as distinct from matter is also good; and of these two, the latter is better, superior.[61]

Vedic testimony is recognized by the Sānkhya school and by every other orthodox school (*āstika-darsana*) as a means of valid cognition. Indeed this recognition is what stamps a school as having an orthodox teaching (*āstika-mata*). But except in the case of Pūrva-Mīmāmsā, and to a lesser extent Vedānta, the authority of Vedic testimony is tightly circumscribed. We are told shortly after the passage just cited that Vedic testimony is limited to what cannot be controverted by the other means of valid cognition (perception and inference for the Sānkhya school) and to what is not accessible to them. This formulation could appear to be only the flip side of the Pūrva-Mīmāmsā principle that any proposition advanced in disputation has to count as true until refuted. But in the Sānkhya teaching it is not clear what is left over as the specific matter for Vedic authority. For, in the passage just quoted, the Sānkhya school's superior knowledge of the manifest (*vyakta*) and the unmanifest (*avyakta*) is explicitly contrasted with Vedic testimony, to the disadvantage of the latter. Even concerning the *unmanifest*,[62] then, the "discriminative knowledge of the intellect" advocated by the unabashedly atheistic Sānkhya school is superior to Vedic authority, to which this school nonetheless concedes a measure of ambiguously defined validity.

My earlier remarks on Sankara, arguably the greatest philosopher India has produced, might have seemed unduly meager. Sankara wrote near the beginning of the eighth century A.D., and so his teaching is somewhat off topic in an introductory account of the *origin* of philosophy in ancient India. Moreover, it is not possible to present an adequate summary of his complex, ingenious, and extended elaboration of Upanisadic monism in a few paragraphs. One issue, though, is of particular relevance in the present context. Sankara speaks both of an impersonal *brahman*, which, just as in the Upanisads, is identical with one's own innermost self (*ātman*), and of a personal lord (or governor - *īsvara*), who qua lord would have to differ from one's self. Or so it would seem. One way of managing this two-fold interpretation of

the highest principle is to say that *Isvara* is simply the way *brahman* is experienced under the conditions of illusion, which after all is the illusion of multiplicity and otherness. Devotion to *Isvara* has the salutary effect of elevating the mind above preoccupation with worldly worries and desires, which are mistaken for the self—a confusion of empirical ego with transcendental ego, a Kantian might say. Detachment from worldly concerns, which devotion to *Isvara* helps effect, is a necessary condition for realizing the identity of *brahman* and *ātman*, and, concomitantly, for enlightened recognition of the illusoriness of all multiplicity and otherness, including not only the world but also any lord distinct from the self.

One might have expected Sankara to reserve the term *īsvara* solely for contexts in which he is speaking of the world as it appears and our efforts to penetrate through this veil to what is fundamentally real. But such is not the case. Sankara is disinclined to treat *Isvara* as illusory even when regarded from the most privileged perspective of enlightenment.[63] Accordingly, one could infer a commitment to theism on Sankara's part, given his virtual identification of *Isvara* and *brahman*. But, then, the realization that, through this very identification, *Isvara* also becomes identical with *ātman* could as easily lead one to the opposite inference. It should be remembered that, for Sankara, *Isvara* is the material cause of the phenomenal world as well as its efficient cause, a teaching rejected by his more theistically oriented successors in Vedānta. Moreover, in spite of using *Isvara* and *brahman* more or less interchangeably, Sankara explicitly teaches that the Lord's lord-ness (*īsvaratva*), presumably his lordship over the world and over man within it, is ultimately illusory. And in the sentence, "[H]e who, having been led to be *brahman*, is consecrated to sovereignty does not wish to bow to anybody," Sankara the philosopher momentarily removes his mask.[64]

In the *Arthasāstra* of Kautilya (c. 300 B.C.), whose description of the duties pertaining to the four castes I cited earlier, we find a limiting of Vedic authority similar to what we have seen in some of the other orthodox schools. After describing the contents of his treatise in the first chapter, which is primarily on politics, Kautilya devotes the second chapter to an enumeration of the sciences (*vidyās*). The four sciences are *ānvīksikī* or analytics, the Veda, economics, and the science of politics. The first science mentioned is the science of reasoning. Since *ānvīksikī* is listed as a science, and not just a means of valid cognition, it would seem to have, like the other three enumerated sciences, a subject matter of its own. For this reason it has occasionally been translated as "philosophy." But we shall use the more precise translation of "analytics," understood as the science of reasoning.[65] Shortly after his enumeration of the four sciences, Kautilya quotes Brhaspati, whom he does not specify as the founder of the heterodox Lokāyata school. "Vedic lore is only a cloak (*samvarana*) for one conversant with the ways of the world (*lokayātrāvid*)."[66] Kautilya himself takes exception to this Lokāyata reduction and includes Vedic lore within his enumeration of the sciences, giving as his reason "since with the help [of these four sciences] one can learn *dharma* and material well being." He then proceeds immediately to a discussion of analytics, explicitly citing the Lokāyata school or system as one instance of it.

> Sānkhya, Yoga, and Lokāyata—these constitute analytics. Investigating by means of analytics *dharma*-and-non-*dharma* [*dharmādharmau* - a Sanskrit copulative compound] in Vedic lore, material gain and loss in economics, good policy and bad policy in the science of politics, as well as the relative strength-and-weakness [*balābalau* - copulative compound] of these [three sciences], analytics confers benefit on the people, keeps the mind steady in adversity and in prosperity, and brings about proficiency in thought, speech and

> action. Analytics is ever thought as the lamp of all sciences, the means of all actions, and the support of all *dharma*.[67]

This passage is interesting for several reasons. In the first place, Kautilya includes Lokāyata, along with Sānkhya and Yoga, as part of analytics, in spite of the fact that he has just quoted Brhaspati, the founder of this school, as limiting science to economics and politics. Kautilya evidently thinks that at least some of the claims of Lokāyata can be appropriated by his own ostensibly orthodox account, which includes a defense, of sorts, of the very tradition that was excoriated and mocked by this arch-heretical school. Moreover, according to the passage under consideration, analytics is autonomous. As in Western philosophy, reason is subject only to its own laws. It is analytics that determines the scope of *dharma* in Vedic lore, this latter being apparently less than fully coherent or sound in its own proper realm. Even more strikingly, analytics investigates both the strength and the weakness of Vedic lore. One can hardly imagine a similar formulation of the relation of reason to revelation by a pious Jew, Christian, or Muslim.[68] Nor can one imagine any orthodox believer saying that it is reasoning, and not sacred scripture or holy tradition, that brings about proficiency in thought (including belief?), speech (including prayer?), and action (including the performance of sacrifices?).[69] Most interestingly of all, in the final clause of passage, which is the final clause of the chapter, Kautilya assigns to analytics, rather than to Vedic lore, the "support of all *dharma*."

This mystifying conclusion is clarified in the chapter that immediately follows, the scope of which is limited to what Kautilya wishes to say about Vedic lore itself. Since he has said that analytics is the "support of all *dharma*" we expect him to employ reasoning, and not just an appeal to authority, in making his case for why Vedic lore is beneficial. This expectation is not disappointed. After a preliminary listing of the Vedas by name and the topics they include, Kautilya says in the third sentence of the chapter:

> The *dharma* laid down in this Vedic lore is beneficial, as it prescribes the special duties (*svadharma*) of the four castes (*varnas*) and the four stages of life.

This sentence, the first substantive sentence in the chapter, must be read as an expression of analytics, of the science of reasoning, in the thought of Kautilya himself, and aimed at clarifying the relative strength of Vedic lore in the "support of all *dharma*." The sentence gives the *reason* for why Vedic lore is beneficial: it prescribes the duties of the four castes and the four stages of life. This reason is meant to be accessible not just to the orthodox but to anyone reading the treatise, including adherents of the anti-Vedic Lokāyata school, who, Kautilya implies, should have known better.[70]

8

We are now in a position, at last, to see what exactly constitutes orthodoxy in those schools and thinkers who acknowledge the authority of the Veda while nonetheless subordinating Vedic lore as a "means of valid cognition" to perception and reasoning, that is, to powers possessed by man as man, powers that are independent of the hearsay of unknown sages living in the remote past. The break with Vedic tradition occurred with the emergence of the three heterodox schools of Buddhism, Jainism, and Lokāyata. Although the first two of these are typically classified as religions, all three of them are atheistic, the last one exuberantly so. Of the six orthodox schools that formed within early Hinduism, Sānkhya is atheistic and so is Pūrva-Mīmāmsā. Nyāya is theistic, though, as we have seen, its theology is advanced at least in part as a counter to the excessive claims for Vedic authority made by the Pūrva-Mīmāmsā school. Vaisesika adopts the theology of the Nyāya school, though theism is even more tangential to the atomism of the former than it is to the logicism of the latter.[71] Vedānta, taking its bearings from the Upanisads, emphasizes the identity of the self with *brahman* and the ultimate oneness of all things, and

Sankara's Advaita-Vedānta, in particular, has no room for God in anything remotely resembling the Biblical sense.[72] Yoga alone is unambiguously theistic, though *Isvara* serves there more as an object of devotion and mental focusing than as a causal principle *per se*. Still, the adherents of all six of these schools, and the independent, no-nonsense political realist Kautilya as well, concede at least some authority to the Veda, with exactly how much varying from school to school and from individual to individual. It is by virtue of this concession that these thinkers understand themselves to be situated within the Vedic tradition, however daring their speculative ventures.

But why do these thinkers bother to concede any authority at all to the Veda? Kautilya tells us why, and he tells us as clear as day, in the passage from the *Arthasāstra* we just considered: the Veda is *beneficial*. It is beneficial because it prescribes the duties of the stages of life and of the four castes.[73] But the stages of life are subsumed under the caste system, since they pertain only to the top three castes. Who, then, we are led to ask, benefits from the caste system? Kautilya's explicit answer is that the whole people benefit.[74] The more pertinent answer, which he leaves us to infer, is that the life of free inquiry, exhibited even in the most orthodox of these so-called orthodox schools, itself benefits from the caste system. We noted that economic circumstances, not just in ancient India but in the ancient world in general, simply could not support an egalitarian social order. Whatever its injustices and to whatever abuses it led, the rule of *dharma*, of which the hierarchy of castes was much the most conspicuous embodiment, permitted the leisure and mandated the literacy without which philosophy could not emerge. And it permitted surprisingly candid depreciation of the authority of sacred tradition. The interpreters of *dharma* and of sacred tradition in general, namely, the members of the *brāhmin* caste, enjoyed an unparalleled freedom of speculation. Within the orthodox schools of speculative thought we see monism, dualism, an attenuated monotheism, and

atheism, with a deity or lord (*īsvara*) forcefully denied, simply ignored, identified with the self, and construed as distinct from the self as part of a technique for disengaging the mind from worldly concerns; arguments for the necessity of creation and arguments against the possibility of creation; ontological categorization of different kinds of entities; logical and epistemological investigations; inquiries into the material constitution of the world with cases being made for and against an irreducible atomism; idealist and realist accounts of the phenomenal world; and, with surprising frequency, a distinct ranking of the authority of sacred tradition below reasoning and ordinary perception, which is a giant step toward dismissing the possibility of miracles out of hand. And this broad range of speculation can be found *within* the sphere of what passed for orthodoxy.

Now, although most *brāhmins* may well have accepted in complete sincerity the whole of Vedic lore, at least to the extent that it formed a whole, it is virtually certain, I think, that more than a few paid only lip service to it. Of these, some may have insisted on the authority of the Veda because of the social privileges accorded them by the caste system it mandated (though it should be noted that the *brāhmins* were themselves subject to a variety of strictures, social and otherwise). But it is highly likely that some *brāhmins* upheld this authority solely because of the intellectual freedom it granted them. They appealed, in a tour de force of resourcefulness, to religious authority in support of a social order that uniquely guaranteed the possibility of unimpeded questioning and inquiry.[75] To repeat, the *brāhmins* were not subject to any authority other than that of the king. And the king, who came from the warrior caste and not from the *brāhmin* caste, did not have the authority to teach the Veda. He was not in a position, then, to compel the *brāhmins* to toe a more conservative line in their speculations and queries. Furthermore, there was no ecclesiastical structure, and there were no creeds.[76] The way to whatever wisdom is naturally available to man was, for the *brāhmins*, wide open.

Some of the most astute scholars of the tradition of speculative thought in ancient India have admitted that they find the adherence of the orthodox schools to Vedic authority inscrutable, given the sophistication and independence of their views on the question of ultimate origins and on the question of Vedic authority itself. It is remarked, with something amounting to dismay, that the logical, physical, and (with a few exceptions) even metaphysical speculations in these schools are not supported by appeal to Vedic lore but by appeal to reasoning and ordinary experience.[77] The express adherence of the orthodox schools to Vedic authority is often put down to a thoughtless cultural bias, as though it never occurred to the orthodox thinkers that the caste system might be mere artifice and convention, in spite of the fact that the heterodox schools, whose emergence provoked the orthodox response, had taught precisely that.

9

It has been claimed that philosophy originates with the discovery of nature, more particularly with the discovery of the difference between nature and convention, nature being an intrinsic governing principle inherent in the world, as distinct from an extrinsic governing principle, i.e. a creator-God, transcendent to the world. We saw earlier that the concept of *prakrti*, particularly as developed in the orthodox Sānkhya school as a teleological, though unconscious, intrinsic governing principle, corresponds in large measure to the Greek concept of *physis*. Another close correspondence is found in the concept of *svabhāva*, which, I noted, can be translated as "own being" or "own nature." Lokāyata contrasts *svabhāva* directly with unseen causes and indirectly with Vedic injunctions, both ethical and ritual, that is, with convention.

That the uncaused nature of things, their own being, could emerge in explicit connection with a critique of convention in the heterodox Lokāyata school should, then, come as no great surprise. That nature did *not* emerge in

explicit connection with a critique of convention in the orthodox schools, even the most venturesome of them, should also come as no great surprise. The precarious state of *svadharma* prevented nature from being *opposed* to convention within the orthodox tradition. But for this reason a theme conspicuously present in Western philosophy is conspicuously absent in Indian philosophy. Although the nature of consciousness, mind, and intellect are central questions, the question of man *as such* does not receive much of an investigation. The reason for this otherwise unaccountable omission is that even before the question is asked the answer is given, appalling in its starkness. Man *as such* is the caste animal.

But how, the student of Western philosophy will ask, could genuinely philosophical natures endure the injustice of such a system? To this question a sophisticated *brāhmin* might respond, "It was precisely the passion for justice, coupled with the attempt to elevate the fundamental principle of reality, *brahman*, above all concern with justice, that led to the doctrine of *karma*: one gets exactly what one deserves, without any assistance from on high. One's present caste standing is determined by the moral quality of one's past deeds, just as one's future caste standing is determined by the moral quality of one's present deeds. What's *that*, if not justice?" But it's just a myth. "True, but it's a salutary myth. After all, isn't it one of the discoveries made by philosophy itself that all political communities have, and must have, their myths, their noble lies, about justice?" You're right of course, but…. "And while we're at it," our sophisticated *brāhmin* might continue, "let us not forget that the philosopher *as philosopher*, in the West no less than in India, necessarily gives wisdom a higher place than morality in his scheme of things. What business does a philosopher have being *indignant*?" (Profound silence.)

Seen in the above light, the ethical order of law and duty, of *dharma*, supported by Vedic tradition, simply could not be taught in the orthodox schools to be merely conventional, to

be only one way among others, to be "just our way." The thinkers in these schools taught, quite understandably, that Vedic *dharma* was the right way simply. But it is likely that the more speculatively bold among them upheld Vedic *dharma* solely for the reasons mentioned earlier. At any rate, it is incontestable that, by institutionalizing a system in which status and power were vested in different castes, a system in which learning was the *sine qua non* for the higher if less politically powerful, though nonetheless independent, caste, the Veda, as interpreted by the *brāhmins*, also institutionalized the possibility of speculative boldness, or philosophy.[78]

Still, one might object, is not the knowledge that this so-called speculative boldness aims at merely a means to something else, namely liberation? And is not knowledge, as an end in itself, the goal of philosophy properly understood? There is a twofold response to this question. In the first place, it is by no means clear that knowledge is conceived by all, or even by the greatest, Western philosophers as an end in itself simply. They might say that the end in itself, at least for human beings, is happiness. If knowledge contributed not to the happiness of the knower but to his unhappiness, philosophy as a way of life could hardly be defended except in moral terms. And a moral defense of philosophy would hardly be congenial to philosophy, at least not as I have narrowly defined it.[79]

In the second place, though knowledge in Indian philosophy is indeed in the service of liberation, liberation is not first and foremost liberation from successive reincarnations. It is, first and foremost, liberation from illusion, i.e., liberation from ignorance. Certainly a demythologized concept of liberation would have occurred to those orthodox thinkers whose allegiance to the Veda was mainly prudential. In any case, knowledge, and neither mere belief nor moral action and dutiful fulfillment of Vedic ritual injunctions, was in several of the orthodox schools held to be the sole path to liberation. More precisely, knowledge was held to be both the necessary and the sufficient condition for liberation, or to be

liberation simply. Knowledge for its own sake, knowledge as an end in itself, then, cannot be regarded as a specific feature of philosophy in the West in contradistinction to philosophy in ancient India.

One of the curiosities of the Indian speculative tradition was its tendency to become more, not less, theistic with the passage of time. One cannot help but suspect that the growing theistic orientation was occasioned in part by external developments, especially by contact with Islam following the Muslim conquest and with Christianity during the British *raj*. A number of articulate and well known Indian thinkers of the last two centuries, apparently construing themselves as something like good will ambassadors to the West, have offered popularized accounts of Indian speculative thought that have exaggerated the affinities between Vedic tradition, including the philosophical tradition, and the revealed religions of the West, particularly Christianity. At the other end, Westerners in search of an alternative religious experience, free from the scrutiny of a judgmental God, have claimed to find in Hinduism a less guilt-ridden spirituality, one that is less dogmatically divisive and more accepting of people for what they are.[80] All this has led to the familiar picture of Indian thought as almost uniformly mystical and intuitive, a caricature that a number of scholars, Western and Indian, have taken pains to correct.[81] Students of the rationalist tradition of the West, from Parmenides through Thomas Aquinas right on up to Husserl, as well as students restricting their attention to the contemporary analytic scene, are not inclined to regard what strikes them on first hearing as an amorphous mix of meditation and compassion as a substitute for thought. Few of them are aware that the ideal of rational autonomy, to which they themselves are committed, shaped the life of the mind in ancient India as well.

The study of Indian philosophy provides an important perspective on Western philosophy, a perspective from which Western philosophy can be viewed from without but not from

above, and as an alternative rather than an opponent. In particular, the study of Indian philosophy sheds unexpected but welcome light on a theme dear to Western philosophers, namely, the choiceworthiness of the philosophic life itself. In the West the great antagonist to philosophy has been revealed religion. The truth-seeking philosopher cannot be indifferent to the possibility that the Truth might choose to reveal itself, or rather himself, to man. For such revelation, undertaken at the initiative of the divine and eclipsing in significance everything man could find out about ultimate principles on his own, would render the achievements of philosophy paltry, to say the least. Not surprisingly, then, Western philosophy has invested a lot of energy in trying to rule out this possibility, so much so that, viewed from the outside, it can appear to be more interested in convincing itself of the rightness of its own way than in apprehending ultimate principles and ontological truth. Indian philosophy, on the other hand, devotes little attention to justifying itself. It has no comparably great antagonist. For Vedic religion, as interpreted in the various schools of orthodox speculation, is, as I have tried to show, not a religion of revelation, at least not in the Biblical sense. The existence of the divine, or the closest thing there is to the divine, namely *brahman*, does not imply limitations on what man can achieve in the way of knowing ultimate principles and ontological truth on his own. Quite the contrary. Of course, the Western philosopher might say that it is not just the possibility of revelation, of a disclosure undertaken at the initiative of the divine, that is worrisome to philosophy. Quite apart from the special problem of election that is part and parcel of the concept of revelation, the possibility that there is a being who, right now, possesses the very wisdom that the philosopher does not possess, but only loves, is humbling. To this concern the Indian philosopher would respond that it needn't be regarded that way at all. Certainly not, if *ātman* is indeed *brahman*, not just later on in some kind of misty hereafter but here and now. He would attempt to reassure his Western counterpart on this point: "That art thou." It is just

a matter of *realizing* this fundamental and ultimate truth, he would add. And he would ask what experience the Western philosopher has had that causes him to persist in doing battle against an opponent so immature and unworthy of serious consideration as is Biblical religion.

I shall not venture to suggest an answer to this question on behalf of the Western philosopher[82] The primary purpose of this paper has been to argue that philosophy, even according to its most austere conception as rational atheism, did in fact emerge in ancient India.[83] After all, if philosophy is natural to man, if it is not just the dispensation of an inscrutable historical fate, then one would expect it to have emerged, given enough time, wherever it was not impeded. The impediments to the emergence of philosophy are absence of letters, absence of leisure, and the presence of a religious or political authority hostile to unfettered speculation about the whole, its essential constitution and its ultimate foundation. These impediments were not operative in the speculative tradition of ancient India. It would be surprising, then, if philosophy had *not* emerged there, assuming that historicism is wrong and that the classical Western philosophers were correct in their assessment that philosophy is *natural*, that it is a permanent possibility coeval with man.

Notes

[1] I have adopted the current Romanization convention for Sanskrit terms, with one exception: I have rendered *anusvāra* prior to labials with an "m," but in all other cases with an "n."

[2] *Rg Veda* 10.129 in *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 23. Hereafter cited as *Sourcebook*. (In the interests of greater literalness and consistency, I have modified some of the translations from this text and from others that I cite. I have entirely retranslated certain passages.) Compare 10.121 (24-25). On the original relation of being and non-being, see *Bhagavad Gītā* (ed. and trans.Winthrop Sargeant (Garden City, NY: Doubleday), 9.19; 11.37; and especially 13.12: the "beginningless" (*anādimat*), which is neither being nor non-being, is identified with *brahman*. Compare also *Bhagavad Gītā* 2.16.

[3] Ibid. 8.89.34 (*Sourcebook*, 34). Compare 10.121 (24-25).

[4] *Rg Veda* 2.12.5 in *The Rig Veda: An Anthology*, ed. and trans. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (London: Penguin, 1981), 161.

[5] See, for example, 1.164.6 (*Sourcebook*, 21) and 10.114.5, quoted in *The Vedic Experience—An Anthology of the Vedas*, ed. and trans. Raimundo Panikkar (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 660.

[6] Vedic religion gradually turned into Hinduism. Although a distinction can be made between them, I shall, in the interests of simplicity, treat them as earlier and later stages of one evolving phenomenon.

[7] It is sometimes said that the original fourfold division should be understood as a division into classes, and that only the polymorphous divisions that subsequently emerged should count as caste divisions. This distinction, however, cannot be insisted upon. The bewildering multiplicity of castes that came into being later on appears to have emerged out of the forbidden mixing of the original four. See *Bhagavad Gītā* 1.40-44 and *Laws of Manu* 7.24, 8.352-353, 8.418 (*Sourcebook*, 186,177, 187). There was also a certain overlap in the usage of the terms "class" (*varna*) and "caste" (*jāti*) in the so-called "Epic" period of ancient India. See Wilhelm Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 350-53. The term "caste" has the advantage over "class" of naming not merely a group into which one *happens* to be *born*, but, due to karmic causality, the group into which one deserves to be reborn. "The problem of a potential injustice of such exclusion [of the *sūdra*, or servant, from the Vedic ceremonies of initiation] is…easily resolved by referring to the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth, which explains and justifies the current caste status and allows for a future ascent to higher stages" (Ibid. 72; cf. 349. See *Chāndogya Upanisad* 5.10.7; *Manu* 9.335, 12.9 in *Sourcebook*, 66-67, 188, 173). Louis Dumont, in his important and controversial study, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), refers to this karmic justification of caste (359, n. 25g.), but he can hardly be said to give it proper emphasis, although it supports his claim that hierarchy is an essentially religious concept (65-66). Dumont himself tries to limit the term "castes" to the later development and uses "classes" to name the original distinction. But in the original distinction we also find the separation of status from power that Dumont rightly insists is constitutive of Indian society, ancient and modern, a separation that is not readily suggested by the word "class." In this paper I use "caste" in referring to the original fourfold division. Since it is only about this fourfold division that I shall be speaking, there should be no confusion.

[8] *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* 4.5.15, in *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 2d rev. ed., trans. Robert Hume (Delhi: Oxford University Text, 1931), 147. The whole clause "*sa eva neti netyātman*" (with *sandhi*) is translated by Hume as "That Soul is not this, it is not that," which is fine except for the fact that *ātman* is more literally rendered as "self" than "soul." The Sanskrit text, moreover, does not distinguish between small and large case letters. The demonstrative pronoun is presumably intended to distinguish between the *ātman*, i.e., the genuine self in its purity, and the familiar though spurious self that is absorbed, one might say, in *māyā*.

[9] *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* 1.4.10; *Chāndogya Upanisad* 3.14.4; 8.7.4; 8.10.1; 8.11.1. These two Upanisads are of great antiquity. See also *Māndūkya Upanisad* 2; *Isā Upanisad* 4-6, 15-16; and *Mundaka Upanisad* 2.1.2-4,10; 3.2.9. (These texts are all contained in *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*.) The threefold relationship of *brahman*, *māyā*, and *ātman* forms something of a parallel to the threefold relationship of thing-in-itself, phenomena (the total complex of which is nature), and transcendental ego that one finds in the philosophy of Kant.

[10] *Chāndogya Upanisad* 6.9-13; 8.11.1: *tat tvam asi*.

[11] Nor should *brahman* be confused with *brāhmana*, the name of a member of the priestly caste. To avoid confusion I shall adopt the convention, employed in *Sourcebook* and other texts, of transliterating the latter term as "brāhmin."

[12] In the West, philosophy has been concerned with validating itself as the most choiceworthy way of life. It has been concerned in particular with showing that the philosophical life is more choiceworthy than the life of simple piety, that is, than the life of devotion and loving obedience to the loving command of a providential God. The evidence closest at hand for the existence of such a God is found in our moral experience. The moral view of the world, which originates out of this experience, postulates God as the ultimate author of the moral law, or as moral judge, or both. A central project of Western philosophy, then, has been the critique of morality, especially of such concepts as radical freedom of the will, transcendent law, and dutiful obedience as the unconditioned condition of the human good. There is no comparable critique of morality in classical Indian philosophy. The reason is that in the Hindu religion, at least in the sophisticated religion of the *Upanisads*, the divine is neither the author of a moral law nor a moral judge, nor providential in any sense recognizable in Biblical religion. The doctrine of impersonal karmic causality lies entirely outside the theological problematic except insofar as it supports an equally impersonal concept of the divine. See, for example *Sānkhya-Pravacana Sūtra* 5.2. (*Sourcebook*, 450).

[13] *Rg Veda* 10.90.11-12. Compare *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* 1.4.10-15; *Bhagavad Gītā* 4.13; *Manu* 1.31.

[14] Kautilya, *Arthasāstra*, ed. and trans. R.P. Kangle (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass,1988), 2:1.3.4-7, hereafter cited as *Arthasāstra*.

[15] The expression "twice-born" refers to the initiation (*upanayana*) or investiture with the sacred thread that the members of the upper three castes undergo. It is likened to a second birth.

[16] Kautilya, 1.3.13.

[17] Kautilya, 1.3.4-8. I shall use the general expression "the Veda" to refer not only to the four Vedas but also to the appended treatises that were accorded comparable authority in the tradition. Kangle makes the following observation: "[A]ctually it is only in the Dharmasūtras, a branch of the Vedānga Kalpa, that the duties of the *varnas* [castes] and *āsramas* [stages of life] are laid down in detail" (2:7). This fact may help explain why *sūdras* were not permitted even to *study* the Veda.

[18] See Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy* (Glencoe, Ill: The Free Press,1959), 37 and *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books,1969), 11-12.

[19] *Arthasāstra* 1.4.11-15. On the separation of the political from the religious, see Dumont, 263-93. On the concept of *danda* as legitimate force, see pp. 302-03, where Dumont quotes the following passage from the *Mahābhvrata*: "if there was on earth no king bearing the stick of punishment, the stronger would roast the weaker as fishes on a spike." See also *Manu* 7.22. In this connection, it is worth noting that a rise in caste status within a single life occasionally happened as a result of political exigency, a state affairs expressed in the dry aphorism, "Whoever rules is a *ksatriya*." See A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (Calcutta: Rupa and Co., 1954), 92.

[20] *Arthasāstra* 1.7.

[21] There are other end goals, namely, right action (*dharma*), wealth (*artha*), and pleasure (*kama*); but these end goals are subservient to liberation, which is, above all, liberation from ignorance.

[22] Hume, in his translation of the *Katha Upanisad* (*The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*) renders the second half of 4.2.1 (353) as "A certain wise man, while seeking immortality, introspectively beheld the soul (Atman) face to face." The translation is marred by the inexplicable insertion of the phrase "face to face," which corresponds to nothing in the Sanskrit text, at least as it appears in *Eight Upanisads*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), 1:180. There the text reads, without *sandhi*, as follows: *kas cit dhīras pratyak ātmānam aiksat āvrttacaksuh amrttvam icchan*.

[23] "Those who, even worshiping other divinities, sacrifice with faith (*sraddha*) sacrifice also to me," *Bhagavad Gītā* 9.23. Compare Exod. 34:14; Deut. 29:17; Ps. 96:5; John 4:22; 1 Cor.1:20.

[24] The Sanskrit verbal radical "*vid-*" means "know," not "see." The root sense of "*veda*" does not refer to sight, though this sense is present in the Greek "*eidos*" and "*idea*" (which were originally preceded by a digamma having the sound of an English "w") and also in the closely related Latin "*video*" and English "vision." All these words are conjectured to have derived from the Indo-European root "*weid-*", which itself may not have referred exclusively to sight. Two conjectured derivatives of "*weid-*" in English that do not refer exclusively to sight are "guide" and "wit." Cf. Calvert Watkins, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo European Roots* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 74.

[25] There is nothing in Hinduism, at least in the sophisticated Upanisadic tradition, that is comparable to, say, God's election of Abraham.

[26] Cf. W. Halbfass, *India and Europe* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 29.

[27] It should go without saying that faith (*sraddhā*), particularly in the carrying out of ritual performances, and devotion (*bhakti*) are central to religious Hinduism, however marginal they may be in this or that speculative school. Such concepts are not absent from the Upanisads. Occasionally, however, what at first glance seems like an unqualified theism turns out, on close inspection, to be quite different. See, for example, *Katha* 1.2.23. There the self (*ātman*) that reveals (or discloses, *vivrnute*) its own (or its own character, *svām*) is not exactly "a thou" since it is ultimately the *same* as the self that is seeking it. Hume (*The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 350) divines "the first explicit statement of the doctrine of Grace (*prasāda*)" just a little earlier in this section, at 1.2.20. To his credit, however, he notes that *prasāda* can also mean tranquility, that it unquestionably has this meaning in other Upanisadic passages that he cites, and that the greatest commentator on the *Upanisads*, namely, Sankara takes the term to mean precisely tranquility, and not grace. See *Eight Upanisads*: *With the Commentary of Sankarācārya*, trans. Swāmī Gambhīrānanda, (Calcutta: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989) 1:153-54. That *prasāda*, in the philosophical tradition at least, presupposes advance preparation and discernment (not to mention merit) on the part of the recipient, if that's even the word for it, further distinguishes this notion from the Biblical conception of grace.

[28] See, for example, *Rg Veda* 7.103; 9.112; 10.86.

[29] *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, Sections 21-24.

[30] "The worship of the Buddha is merely an act of commemoration. The popular gods were introduced into Buddhism in its more religious form to serve as objects for meditation," *Sourcebook*, 273. Sokyo Ono, in *Shinto: The Kami Way* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1962), gives the following account of the adjustment that, after an initial period of conflict, allowed for the peaceful coexistence of Shinto, which is the

native religion of Japan, and Buddhism, which had been imported from without. "[I]n the eighth century a compromise was reached which resulted in the teaching that the *kami* [Shinto gods] were pleased to receive Buddhist sutras as offerings and to hear them recited in worship. As a consequence, Buddhist temples were established alongside shrines, ostensibly to satisfy the *kami*, make them into Buddhist believers, and finally raise them to the level of buddhas" (85-86). One wonders if the Shinto gods, in coming to recognize their own insubstantiality, were supposed to have converted to atheism.

[31] Excerpted from the *Sarvadarsanasangraha* in *Sourcebook*, 233-34. I have added some commentary within brackets, in this text and in the next one cited, to bring into sharper relief the central claims of this school.

[32] W. Halbfass speaks of the "intriguing etymological kinship" of the Sanskrit *bhū* with the Greek *phy-* from the Greek word for nature, *physis*, is formed. *On Being and What there Is: Classical Vaisesika and the History of Indian Ontology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 21-22. On the Indo-European root *bheu-*, see Watkins, p. 8, and the table of sound correspondences on p. 111. In the first passage that I quoted from the *Rg Veda*, the word I translated as "own determination," which can also mean spontaneity, namely *svadhā*, includes the component *sva*, as does *svabhāva*. Note the use of *svabhāva* in *Bhagavad Gītā* 5.14; compare with *sambhavāmi*, "I originate myself." in 4.6.

[33] *Sourcebook*, 248.

[34] *Sarvasiddhātsangraha, in Sourcebook*, 234-35. I commented on some of these passages in my article, "On the Discovery of Nature," *The St. John's Review*, 46/1, (2000): 127-28, 141.

[35] See, for example, *Baghavad Gītā* 16.8, and compare 18.71. One occasionally comes across materialist speculation even in the *sruti*, the most venerable sources of Vedic tradition. See, for example, *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* 2.4.12; compare *Chāndogya Upanisad* 8.7-8

[36] A close equivalent in the West can be found in the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas, the articles of which commence with a statement of objections to the thesis being proposed, followed by a quotation from authority, often but not always scriptural, and, after this, a comprehensive argument in favor of the thesis, typically without appeal to authority, and, in conclusion, responses to the objections seriatim.

[37] *Rg Veda* 10.125. The dividing up of speech by the gods, referred to in the third verse of this hymn, reminds one of the dismemberment of the *purusa* in *Rg Veda* 10.90.

[38] Brahma-Sūtras 2.1.33 in *Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāsya of Srī Sankarācārya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983).

[39] *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* 2.4.5. See *Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāsya of Srī Sankarācārya*, 360.

[40] "The Discovery of Nature," 122 ff.

[41] *Physics* 199b31.

[42] That philosophy may have emerged more naturally where Indo-European languages were spoken would hardly prove that the emergence of philosophy was an accident of linguistics. After all, it is at least thinkable—if not so easily sayable these days—that some languages are naturally superior to others, precisely because they are more in tune with what is fundamentally real or at least suggest a wider range of possibilities for thought. See Martin Heidegger, *Einleitung in die Metaphysik*, 2d. ed. (Tübingen:Max Niemeyer Verlag 1958), 43. See the English translation by Ralph Manheim, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 57. In any case, the conditions favoring the emergence of philosophy in ancient India were, as I argue in the sequel, not so much linguistic as theologico-political.

[43] See, for example, *Brhadāranyaka* 1.4.1; *Katha* 1.3.11, 2.1.12; *Isā* 16.

[44] There are a plurality of *purusas*, in the Sānkhya school. But they are all of the same kind, so the system can still be regarded as essentially dualistic.

[45] *Sānkhya-Kārikā* 21 in *Sourcebook*, 424. This analogy, however, cannot be pressed too far, since for Aristotle the divine intellect does not, as final cause, direct nature in quite the same way that the lame man being carried would presumably direct the blind man carrying him.

[46] *Sānkhya-Karikā* 13 in *Sourcebook*, 429. In the *Bhagavad Gītā* it is said that the *gunas* are present everywhere, even among the gods in heaven, and that they, too, originate out of *prakrti* (18.40; cf. 3.33).

[47] *Physics* 922b19; cf. *Metaphysics* 1072b14.

[48] *Sānkhya-Kārikā* 56-57 in *Sourcebook*, 442-43. The Pūrva-Mīmāmsā school makes similar arguments against divine creation of the world. The notion that the *play* of *brahman*, and not any purpose outside of this play, is responsible for the phenomenal world may have emerged in response to arguments against creation such as the above. Sankara at least argues this way. See his commentary on *Brahma-Sūtras* 2.1.32-36.

[49] *Yoga Sūtra* 1.23-29. (*Sourcebook*, 458-459).

[50] Halbfass, *On Being and What There Is*, 231; cf. 70 and 271. Halbfass's study is a comprehensive account of Vaisesika and contains translations of some of the more interesting ontological texts of this school, 237-69. See

also Archibald Edward Gough, *The Vaisesika Aphorisms of Kanāda* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975, originally published in 1873). Knowledge of the truth is explicitly said to be the highest good in Aphorism 4, and this may be implied as early as Aphorism 2 (see the commentary on pp. 2-3). In Aphorism 3, authoritativeness, presumably of the Veda, is linked to what is said in Aphorism 2. After Aphorism 4, the author gets down to business, namely, categorizing all that exists, beginning with substances (*dravya*): earth, water, fire (*tejas*) air, ether, time, space, self (*ātman*), and mind (*manas*). Halbfass points out that the "radical [Vaisesika] innovator…identified space, time, and ether, with God." *On Being and What There Is*, 217.

[51] *Nyāya-Sutra* 1.1.4 in *The Nyāya-Sūtras of Gotama*, trans. M. M. Statisa Chandra Vidyābhūsana, rev. and ed. Nandalal Sinha, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), 3. Compare *The Nyāya-Sutras of Gautama*, trans. and ed. Gangānātha Jhā, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), 1:111, hereafter referred to as Jhā. Jhā's four-volume edition of the *Nyāya-Sutra* includes a massive amount of commentary, both traditional and more recent.

[52] Compare Aristotle, *On Sense and Sensible Objects* 442b9.

[53] *Nyāya-Sutra*, 1.32-39 in *Sourcebook*, 362-63. Jhā, 1:355-445. Note that Steps 3, 4 and 5 virtually replicate the classical syllogism familiar in the West. Whatever is produced is non-eternal; sound is produced; [therefore] sound is non-eternal. Steps 1 and 2 of the Nyāya syllogism set the stage for what we might call the syllogism proper. Step 1 is the enunciation, and this is rarely omitted, even in the West. It suffices to think of the propositions of Euclid's *Elements*, the articles of Thomas's *Summa Theologica*, and the "Antinomies" in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, all of which commence with an announcement of what is about to be demonstrated. Step 2, which is the most dispensable of the five, foretells and encapsulates the syllogism that is about to occur. What is most peculiar in the *Nyāya* syllogism is the use of an example—a single one suffices in the absence of a counter example—to establish the major premise. The syllogism implies the presence of an opponent not so much as the target of an elenchus but, rather, as a kind of conscience to check the introduction of less than fully evident major premises.

[54] In the Nyāya and Vaisesika schools, *sabdā* "is of two kinds: noise (*dhvani*) and articulate alphabet sounds (*varna*)." John Grimes, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 287. In the English version of the *Nyāya-Sutra* to which we have been referring, one and the same Sanskrit term, *sabdā*, is variously rendered as "sound," "word," and "verbal testimony."

[55] This principle occurs in a slightly different form in the syllogistic of the Nyāya school, where, as we saw, a universal proposition can be established as a major premise by means of a single example, unless the opponent can advance a counter-example.

[56] See *Sourcebook*, 491.

[57] *Slokavartika*, trans. G. Jhā, in *Sri Garib Das Oriental Series*, no. 8, (India: Sri Satguru Publications), 460.

[58] *Slokavartika*, 416

[59] Grimes, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy*, 301 and 339. See Bruce Perry, "Early Nyāya and Hindu Orthodoxy: *Anvīksikī* and *Adhikāra*," *Poznan Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities* 59 (1997): 455. "Vācaspati [a *Naiyāyika*] thus contends that the ultimacy of reasoning consists in the ability to teach someone the validity of the Veda and the nature of the objects of knowledge. That these cannot be conveyed without reasoning is a bold enough claim. That Nyāya actually establishes the validity of the Vedas is extraordinary. The Vedas, which define orthodoxy, are now dependent on reasoning. It follows that Nyāya is the most fundamental of the orthodox sciences, since it is the means by which orthodoxy itself is established."

[60] *Nyaya-Sutra* 1.2.13, Commentary; *Sourcebook*, 365; cf. Jhā, 1:571-72.

[61] *Sānkhya-kārikā* 2 in *Sourcebook*, 427; Gerald Larson, *Classical Sānkhya*, 2d rev. ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), 256. Compare *Bhagavad Gītā* 2.46 and 2.52.

[62] Not insignificantly, "the unmanifest" according to Sānkhya is nature. The products of evolving nature, among them the particulars that lie before our eyes, are "the manifest." The relationship between the unmanifest process of production and the manifest products is comparable to the relationship between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, respectively, in the philosophy of Spinoza.

[63] The complexity of Sankara's account of *īsvara* is treated by Paul Hacker in "Distinctive Features of the Doctrine and Terminology of Sankara," in *Philology and Confrontation*, ed. W. Halbfass (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 90-91: "What characterizes God as creator of the universe and Lord of the universe…is 'dependent on restriction through illusory *upādhis* [deceits, or adventitious connections, i.e., the conditions of *māyā*].' It is possible to conceive of God as creator and Lord of the universe only in the context of mundane existence…." And yet, "[t]he term *īsvara* can be replaced for *brahman* everywhere….With *īsvara*…is seldom [sic!] connected the notion that there is something illusory about it." Not surprisingly, Sankara has sometimes been accused of an unaccountable "illogicality" in his account of *īsvara*, in spite of an abundance of evidence attesting to the fact that his logical acumen was extraordinary.

[64] Vākyabhāsya on the *Kena Upanisad*, cited in P. Hacker "Relations of Early Advaitins to Vaisnavism" in *Philology and Confrontation*, 38. The word translated as "sovereignty" here is *svārājyam*. Compare *Chāndogya Upanisad*, 7.25.2, where it is said of anyone who recognizes the omnipresence of the *ātman* (self), "he becomes sovereign" (*sas svarāt bhavati*). Whereas Gambhīrānanda (564) translates *svarāt* as "sovereign," Hume (261) translates it as "autonomous," which is somewhat more accurate. The components of this word, in stem form, are *sva* and *rāj*—literally, "own king." It is worth noting here that Sankara explicitly calls attention to a significant privilege of the *ātman*: its logically indubitable existence. See Sarvepalli Radharkrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, Centenary Edition, 1989), 2:476.

[65] Perry, 466, n. 16.

[66] *Arthasāstra*, 1.2.5. See the gloss of the Malayalam commentary (Cb): "[Vedic lore] only serves the purpose of preventing people from calling [one conversant with the ways of the world] a *nāstika* [one who does not accept the authority of the Veda]."(*Arthasāstra*, 2:6).

[67] *Arthasāstra*, 1.2.11.

[68] Compare *The Decisive Treatise, Determining What the Connection is between Religion and Philosophy*, in which Averroes similarly shows how the interpretation of the *Qur'ān* can be carried out in a way that is compatible with the aims of philosophy.

[69] It goes without saying that reason was not universally accorded such authority and autonomy in ancient India. Perry, (450, 465), cites the following colorful passage from the *Mahābhārata* 12.173.47-49: "I was a savant (*panditaka*), a logician, a despiser of the Veda, devoted to worthless analytics, the science of reasoning (or logic, *tarkavidyam*), an utterer of logical doctrines, a speaker with reasons in assemblies, both a reviler and haughty in speech against the twice-born concerning Vedic rituals, heterodox (*nāstika*), and a doubter of everything, a fool and a self-styled learned man: the full fruition of which is this—my being a jackal, oh twice-born one." It stands to reason that this text and others that Perry also cites would have made sense only if certain individuals, perhaps even whole schools, were well known to be living this questionable life of autonomous inquiry. Compare *Manu* 12.95.

[70] Consider, in this connection, the following passage from Leo Strauss's *Persecution and the Art of Writing*: "Of the superstitious 'books of the astrologers,' the [Jewish] scholar mentions one by name, *The Nabatean Agriculture*, to which he seems to ascribe Hindu origin; and of the Hindus he says in that context that they are a people who deny Divine revelation (the existence of a 'book from God')" (123). "[T]he possibility is by no means excluded that the originators of some of the superstitious practices

or beliefs, and hence perhaps the authors of some of the superstitious codes, were themselves philosophers addressing the multitude….[The Sabeans] believed in the eternity of the world, i.e., they agreed with the philosophers over and against the adherents of revelation as regards the crucial question" (124). "It is perhaps not absurd to wonder whether books such as *The Nabatean Agriculture* were written, not by simple-minded adherents of superstitious creeds and practices, but by adherents of the philosophers" (125). "Avicenna's esoteric teaching was expounded in his *Oriental Philosophy*, and he is said to have called that teaching 'oriental' because it is identical with the view of the people of the orient" (126 and n. 98). Strauss refers his readers to studies on these themes by others, but to my knowledge, he does not undertake a further exploration of the possibility of an Indian philosophy, properly so called, in his own published works. See, however, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 7.

[71] It has been suggested that passages in Vaisesika texts that refer to "liberation" might be later accretions, perhaps added in response to accusations of heterodoxy. Cf. Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 271.

[72] That the non-dualism of Advaita-Vedānta is truly theistic was challenged by later Vedantists, who abandon strict monism in favor of some form of dualism that allows for an ultimate and not merely aspectual distinction between the human self and *brahman*.

[73] "An important consequence of accepting the Vedas as valid is that the whole orthodox social order (*varnāsrama*), which derives from the Veda, has to be accepted as valid as well" Perry, 465.

[74] *Arthasāstra*, 2.9. The classic if extreme expression of the necessity of staying within the confines of the caste to which one has been assigned by *karma* accumulated in a previous life is the following:

> Better one's own *dharma* defective (that is, defectively performed - *viguna*)
> Than another's *dharma* well performed;
> Doing the action (*karma*) prescribed by one's own nature (*svabhāva*)
> One does not incur guilt.

Bhagavad Gītā 18.47; 3.35 and *Manu* 10.97. Compare Socrates' use of the phrase "*to tou hautou prattein*" at *Republic* 433a ff.; see also 434c1.

[75] Not surprisingly, neither the Buddha nor Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, were members of the *brāhmin* caste. However, Brhaspiti, the legendary founder of Lokāyata, appears to have been a *brāhmin* prior to his apostasy. All teachers in the orthodox schools were, of course, members of the *brāhmin* caste since the *brāhmins* alone were permitted to teach the Veda.

[76] Consider the observation of S. Radharkrishnan, "The Brāhmins are not a priesthood pledged to support fixed doctrines, but an intellectual

aristocracy charged with the moulding of the higher life of the people," *Indian Philosophy*, 1.112. Needless to say, this "moulding" can take a variety of forms. For example, "According to all Indian traditions [the emperor Candragupta—fourth century B.C.] was much aided in his conquests by a very able and unscrupulous *brāhman* advisor called…Kautilya," A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, 51. The ruler "is told [by Kautilya] to go the length of having his secret agents disguised as gods, and allowing himself to be seen in their company, in order that his simpler subjects may believe that he mixes with the gods on equal terms" (84).

[77] Daya Krishna forcefully asks exactly what is meant by acceptance of the Veda in the so-called orthodox schools, but after persuasively ruling out the inadequate answers usually given to this question, he seems to abandon the question itself. *Indian Philosophy; A Counter Perspective* (London: Oxford University Press, 1991), 7 ff.

[78] "*…mit Hülfe einer religiösen Organisation haben [die Brahmanen] sich die Macht, dem Volke seine Könige zu ernennen, während sie sich selber abseits und ausserhalb hielten und fühlten, als die Menschen höherer und überköniglicher Aufgaben*" (#61); […with the help of a religious organization the *brāhmins* appropriated the power of naming kings for the people, while they held themselves, and felt themselves, apart and outside, as men of higher and supra-royal tasks.] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, Kritische Studienausgabe 5, ed.Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 80.

[79] Cf. n. 12.

[80] It goes without saying that Western admirers of Hinduism are rarely inclined to offer a spirited defense of the caste system.

[81] I have in mind Surendranth Dasgupta, Daya Krsihna, Wilhelm Halbfass, Paul Hacker, Natalya Isayeva, Jitendra N. Mohanty, and Dale Riepe, to name just a few.

[82] For a possible answer to this question see Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, trans. E. M. Sinclair (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 8- 9.

[83] If this is true, it follows that what is most distinctive about the West is not philosophy but the Biblical God.

Glossary of Terms

Advaita - non-dualism (i.e., monism), a branch of Vedānta
ānvīksikī - analytics, reasoning
ātman - the self

brahman - the fundamental reality
brāhmin (brāhmana) - a member of the priestly caste
dharma - law or duty
Isvara - the Lord
karma - the effect of one's actions on the self
Kautilya - a political philosopher and author of the *Arthasāstra*
ksatriya - a member of the warrior caste (the king is a member of this caste)
Lokāyata - a heterodox school—materialism and hedonism
māyā - illusion; the world of appearances
Mīmāmsakas - adherents of Pūrva Mīmāmsā
Nāgārjuna - A Buddhist philosopher and dialectician
Nyāya - an orthodox school—logic and epistemology
prakrti- nature
purusa - spirit; intellect; person; witness
Pūrva-Mīmāmsā - an orthodox school—Vedic apologetics
sabdā - sound: verbal testimony
sandhi - adjustments for euphony within and between Sanskrit words
Sānkhya - an orthodox school—fundamental dualism of nature and spirit
Sankara - an Indian Philosopher and proponent of Advaita-Vedānta
smrti - that which is *remembered* - secondary "revelation"
sruti - that which was *heard* by the sages - primary "revelation" = the Veda
sūdra - a member of the servant caste
sūnya - empty; *sūnyatā* - emptiness - the fundamental ontological concept of Buddhism
svabhāva - own being; nature
svadharma - lit."own duty" i.e., one's duties as a member of a given caste
Upanisads - speculative treatises appended to the Vedas
Uttara-Mīmāmsā = Vedānta; an orthodox school—based chiefly on the Upanisads
Vaisesika - an orthodox school—atomism and categorization

vaisya - a member of the farmer-merchant caste
Veda - generic name four the four Vedas and appended treatises
Vedānta (lit. "end of the Veda") - an orthodox school based on the Upanisads
vidyā - science; knowledge
Yoga - an orthodox school, paired with Sānkhya

Some tips on how to begin pronouncing Sanskrit words - Macrons over "a," "i," and "u" indicate a lengthening of these vowel; "s" and "s" can both be pronounced as "sh;" and "c" is pronounced approximately as English "ch." The letter r (note the dot under it) is a vowel, not a consonant (the consonant does not have a dot under it), often pronounced by Westerners as "ri" but closer to "er" uttered quickly and with a hint of a trill. Otherwise, the letters can be pronounced pretty much as written, ignoring the dots under consonants, which signify that they are cerebrals and not dentals. Native speakers of English have difficulty distinguishing between cerebrals and dentals, since the English dental is actually a cross between a genuine dental and a cerebral. I have rendered the nasal, *anusvāra*, prior to labials with an "m," but in all other cases with an "n." Unvoiced non-aspirated consonants are hard to pronounce without hearing them in contrast to unvoiced aspirated consonants. For example, Sanskrit aspirated "ph" is pronounced exactly like English "p"; Sanskrit unaspirated "p" has no English equivalent, that is, no air is expelled when it is pronounced. Voiced aspirated consonants, such as Sanskrit "bh," are hard to pronounce too.

The Forgotten Faculty: The Place of *Phronêsis* or Practical Sense in Liberal Education (Plutarch and Aristotle)

David Levine

We think in generalities; we live in details.
Airport terminal display

Reading maketh a full man,
Conference a ready man,
And Writing an exact man.
Francis Bacon

Would a new Plutarch even be possible [today]?
Nietzsche[1]

1. Prologue in Seminar

Educations tailored to each person
are better than those given in common.
Aristotle[2]

The title of tonight's talk, *The Forgotten Faculty*, is ambiguous, deliberately so. One might have anticipated a talk on the role of the teaching faculty in modern higher education, in particular the regrettable subordination of the teaching function to other lesser ends in today's universities, thereby distorting its proper role. Important though this subject is, this is not my subject tonight.

Indeed, it is our good fortune at St. John's that the faculty is rightly understood to be at the very heart of the college, the

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ministers and stewards of what we call the Program. We tutors are not content with imparting bare skills and empty generalizations, not satisfied with conveying the results of our own or others' thinking without requiring that you develop your own capacities for such thoughtfulness. We have learned from Plato's *Meno* that lecturing and learning are not correlates like throwing and catching. Thus we don't lecture at or 'talk down' (*katagōrein*) to you. In our view it is the question, and not some answer, that is the proper instrument of education. We begin each class accordingly.

Last night your seminars began with a question. Perhaps at that moment, or perhaps somewhat later in the evening, a member of the seminar, a tutor or fellow student, asked a question or made a remark that "spoke to you," that is, it seemed "tailor-made" just for your learning, that bore on your perplexity, your state of understanding then and there. In "speaking to you" it spurred you to further reflection. It somehow enabled you to step over your settled or unexamined view and opened up a horizon of possibility hitherto unforeseen. All of a sudden you were engaged as never before; you were propelled forward; you had an investment in jointly finding out where it all led. In short, you were actively engaged in that joint enterprise we call conversation. You were on your way to discovery.

The question or remark that prompted all this was not so much leading as opening, not a disguised commentary but an invitation to exploration. It didn't necessarily provide the missing link of an incomplete thought process but, rather, made you think about how you had been thinking and, in so doing, cleared the way for discovery, or it offered for consideration something that opened a window of unsuspected prospects. Such remarks or questions may have been coincidental, but they may also have been a tailor-made question that artfully and with foresight made for greater thoughtfulness. How is this possible? To help us with this we need to take a bit of a detour with the help of two authors on the program, Aristotle and Plutarch.[3]

2. "Human Beings Like to Talk"

> They fought their countries battles and
> conducted their campaigns in their talk.
> *Pyrrhus* 1.531[4]

Aristotle is not an especially funny man. But there is a remark in the *Nicomachean Ethics*—a book freshmen will spend long hours studying this spring—that makes me smile at least, one that suggests a very wry and penetrating way of looking at the world, in particular at human life and our foibles and pretensions. He observes that human beings like to "talk," in particular we like to talk about human excellence or virtue (*aretê*). Indeed, by so "philosophizing," we think we are being "serious human beings" (*spoudaios*).[5]

We all recognize this tendency to speak more loudly with words than with deeds, to posture without actually being effective, to "philosophize" and "pontificate" in the worst senses of those terms (as well as to second guess, to play Monday morning quarterback, to presume to know what one should have done "if I were only there"—in short, to enjoy the barbershop or coffee shop conversation, etc.).

There is much in Aristotle's wry remark, but minimally he is seeking to redirect his reader ("transpose them," Heidegger), and this in a decisive way, to get us to see that the "truth" of such reflections and discussions—of what has come to be called "ethics"—is not to be found in the talking, and surely not in a "theory," but can only be in the life lived and the numerous individual deeds out of which a life is made. Human beings like to talk, to be sure, but Aristotle, and we, are interested in much more than just talk.

So let us turn tonight to someone who sought to look carefully at "lives," the writer of *Lives of the Illustrious Greeks and Romans*, the first century political philosopher Plutarch. In his work we see men of action who are often also thinkers and who are distinguished by their judgment as much as by their actions. They lived their lives one insight at a time—as we all do—yet with such quality that their actions

are not a staccato series of events, but reflect and have their source in a more developed faculty. These are men who are not content to just talk but to act and live fully, if not also well.

3. Much More than History

> Antony was so great that he was thought by others worthy of higher things than his own desires.
> *Lives, Comparison of Demetrius and Antony* 2.535

There is another reason why we should turn to Plutarch. I was walking out of the bookstore last fall and about to turn into the coffee shop, when I overheard a sophomore say to a friend, somewhat puzzled and maybe even a little exasperated, "Why are we reading Plutarch? It's only history." At that point, turning around, I interjected the enthusiastic remark of Rousseau (actually he was quoting Montaigne at the time), and I quote, "Plutarch, he's my man" ("*C'est mon homme que Plutarque*"),[6] hoping thereby to encourage a reconsideration. I don't know if it helped that student, but it did spur me to undertake a course of reading this past year from which I tried to answer this question and understand the enthusiasm for Plutarch on the part of so many of our program authors. For these authors—and they number not a few,[7] including, in addition to Montaigne and Rousseau, Shakespeare, Montesquieu, most of the founders of our country (Franklin, Madison, Jefferson), Emerson, Nietzsche, Tolstoi, etc.—for them he is not "just history" but much more, a teacher of a higher order.[8]

Though I read all of Plutarch's *Lives*—all 1,451 pages!—I have to admit that it was only a first reading for most of these, and in general this is a new arena of exploration for me. Nevertheless, drawn by the question, I ventured forth. Now here I am before all of you, presenting my first formulations for your consideration (1.27). As in seminar, I trust that I am among friends, friends who help each other to think better, more precisely and deeper, about one another's first or

nascent thoughts. Thus this dean's lecture, my "annual essay" if you will, is indeed an essay, an attempt, a first effort of discovery with all the attendant uncertainty that such a venture always entails—as many of you know well from your own efforts of discovery. Thus your generosity and forbearance will be called upon this evening.

In reading Plutarch we are invited to re-enter[9] the realm of the city, of the "political" (*politikê*) in its original meaning: the realm of the probable and the unlikely, of the inadvertent and the deliberate, the unpredictable as well as of "signs and auguries," of strife (2.42) and harmony, fortune and misfortune, good and bad (2.104) (where "things can be otherwise," according to Aristotle). We re-enter, in short, the world in which we actually live our lives, "worthy of memory," Plutarch would say (1.49, 100, 583; 2.61), indeed, worthy of our deepest consideration.

Here not everything is easily seen. With some things we need assistance, a magnifying glass if you will, in order for them to be brought to fuller view. Plutarch helps us to experience the contest, travails, and challenges of the soul by portraying it writ large,[10] so to speak, in the public arena, on the world stage and on the field of battle.[11] Alongside the virtues—moderation, justice, courage, prudence—we experience the encompassing, worldly context in which virtue fights to raise its head and become effective: jealousy, fear, ambition; betrayal, flattery, avarice, cultural decline, and ambition; privilege, shame, superstition, hatred, rivalry, and ambition; avarice, disillusionment, panic, self-interest, and ambition.[12] Here we are given an opportunity to reflect on the distinctive features of lives lived, their relative effectiveness, their weighty consequences, and their manifold difficulties.

In reading Plutarch we experience the complexity of the attempt to give order to human life in the city with Lycurgus and Numa Pomplius; the precariousness of virtue with Themistocles, Aristides and Marcus Cato; the havoc of tyrannical ambition with Pyrrhus and Lysander; the limited effec-

tiveness of justice with Lucullus; the disasters consequent upon excessive caution with Nicias and Crassus. We experience also the lamentable loss of prudence with Pompey; the ineffectiveness of absolute principles with Cato the Younger; the transformation of excessive tenderness into its opposite with Alexander; the futility of virtue when undermined by life's circumstances with Phocion; the unbridled desire for glory with Agis; the suspect powers of eloquence with Demosthenes and Cicero; and, of course, the dominion of passion with Antony.

Amidst these abundant and luxurious life stories—"histories" he sometimes calls them—are observations perhaps neither bound nor diminished by time: we are encouraged to reflect on "the ages of man," the causes of political change, on statesmanship as the "art of the possible," the political force of character and example (*paradeigma*), the ambiguity of greatness and the liabilities of success. We are asked to reflect as well on the fate of youthful optimism; the clash of virtue and misfortune, the psychodynamics of human failings; on self-transformation forced by rude experience, the absolutist language of the passions, the self-justifying linguistic universes of the vices; on the pathological strategies of ambition, and the moral intractability of wealth. These, and many more, are indeed "worthy of memory."

Before we proceed, one further remark. In presenting Plutarch's mature reflections, we are reminded of Aristotle's concern about young people:[13] young people, he says profoundly, are, well, young. And this presents a difficulty. Because young people lack life experience, he says, they do not make good observers and students of "politics," that is, they do not make good students of their own lives in the city, in the *polis*.

Here Aristotle does not mean to be insulting, only honest. For experience can only be one's own. It cannot be taught, and surely cannot be borrowed or poured from one person into another. It requires time and judgment. Thus for

Aristotle, there is no alternative to "growing up," to overcoming isolating adolescence and becoming a person of experience—"mature." So it falls to us during our period of personal transformation at the College (beginning this evening) to resolve to overcome this lack, through careful reading (1.201) and greater thoughtfulness, that we might be "strengthened by [such] experiences (1.646)," made better students of our own lives in the *poli*s and better able to navigate its often-bewildering seas.

4. The Liberal Art of Life Writing

> Everyone has faults; not everyone has virtues.
> Goethe

> It is in bagatelles that nature comes to light.
> Rousseau

At various moments throughout his work, Plutarch steps back and reflects on the activity of writing lives. On the first such occasion, what strikes him above all is the benefit to himself of such exercises:

> It is for the sake of others that I first commenced writing [what he here calls] biographies [he says, yet] I find myself...attaching myself to it for my own [sake]; the [excellences] virtues of these great men serving me as a sort of looking-glass [or mirror] in which I may see how to adjust and adorn my own life. Indeed it can be compared to nothing but daily living and associating together; we...entertain each successive guest, view their 'stature and their qualities,' and select from their actions all that is noblest and worthiest to know. (*Timoleon* 1.325)

"What more effective means to one's [own] improvement [than associating with what is excellent is there]?" he wonders. He then elaborates:

> My method in the study of history, is...by the familiarity acquired in writing, to habituate my memory to receive and retain images of the best and worthiest of characters. I thus am enabled to free myself from any ignoble, base, or vicious impressions...by the remedy of turning my thoughts....to these noble examples.

What is striking about this passage is that for Plutarch this kind of writing is first of all a liberating (and hence a liberal) activity, freeing and enabling him to shape himself as he seeks to give shape to the lives of others. He here draws on two ancient nomic principles:[14] (1) we become like those with whom we associate. This he extends to writing and books: we become like that about which we think and like those from whom we choose to learn.[15] And its correlate, (2) we are moved to imitate what we admire,[16] or what one might call the principle of emulation. "The mere sight of a conspicuous example of excellence," he says, immediately (*euthus*) brings one to admiration (*thaumazesthai*) and therewith brings one to imitate the doer. Indeed for Plutarch there is nothing like the "living example" of human character (1.99).[17] The beautiful,[18] he says, moves one to action towards it (*to kalon eph'hauto praktikos kinei kai praktiken euthus hormen entithesin*) (*Pericles* 1.202; 2.2-3).[19] As a result he "thought fit to spend his time and pains" associating with these illustrious Greek and Roman "guests" for the benefit both of himself and us.

Let us note, especially for our work here at the college, the many rewards of writing that reach beyond the final product. Writing can be an occasion for self-discovery and self-improvement. It is the process, after all, that is enabling.[20]

Later he compares writing lives to portrait painting. He says, we first must do "honor" (2.245) to our subject and that

means, in the case of human beings, to capture "the stature and qualities" of the person and not be content with external likenesses (the mere "face"). Yet there is a question of judgment here. He writes:

> As we would wish that a painter who is to draw a beautiful face, in which there is yet imperfection, should neither wholly leave out, nor yet too pointedly express what is defective, because this would deform it[21]...so it is hard, or indeed perhaps impossible, to show the life of a man wholly free from blemish....any lapses or faults that occur, through human passion or political necessity, we may [generously] regard...as the shortcoming of some particular [excellence] virtue, than as a natural effect of vice...[and this] out of a tender[ness] [*aidoumenous*: respect] to the weakness of nature. (*Cimon* 1.643-4)

Conspicuous in this reflection is a different principle of care from what we are accustomed to. It judiciously abstains from journalistic realism, and above all from that sensationalism by which we are daily overwhelmed by our media. It seeks rather a measured rendering of a whole life, without at the same time ignoring or exaggerating the negative (see 1.699; 2.285, 394). Discretion, in this view, is the better part of realism: discriminating, weighing, focusing, estimating (2.394), selecting (2.445), and finally diagnosing[22] (1.699). On yet another occasion he forewarns his readers that he is not—as we might first think and as he himself sometimes says—an historian, "collecting mere useless pieces of learning" (1.699), but rather that he seeks to "epitomize" the lives of his subjects.

> It must be borne in mind that my design is *not* to write histories, but lives. [For] the most glorious exploits do not always furnish us with the clearest discoveries of [excellence and deficiency] virtue

> and vice in men; sometimes a matter of less moment, an expression or [even] a jest informs us better of the character and inclinations, than the most famous sieges, the greatest armaments, or the bloodiest battles.... Therefore, as portrait-painters are more exact in the lines and features of the face, in which the character is seen, than in the other parts of the body, so I must be allowed to give my more particular attention to the marks and indications of the souls of men. (*Alexander* 2.139)[23]

So I must be allowed to give my more particular attention to the marks and indications of the souls of men. The outside of a human being reveals the fullness of the inside, more than we might think. Little things, after all, are not any the less significant for their being little or not obvious; they are only harder to discern.

It thus falls to us as readers of Plutarch to seek to emulate his perspicacity, to attend to the fullness of being he presents to us. That this might require that we not be unduly taken by the great and the eventful (and "what is done publicly in open day" (1.469)) in favor of the private and the small means that we too must resist our own inherited tendency to look at things from an historical perspective[24] (see also 1.698)). Plutarch's psychographic art, then, entails a different kind of insight, one that sees past the obviousness of "weighty matters" to the telling marks, however small, that bespeak and "epitomize" a soul.[25]

5. "A Subtle Logic of Discrimination"

> It works in practice but unfortunately not in theory.
> French Diplomat[26]

Plutarch relates this story about Caesar:

> Seeing some wealthy strangers at Rome, carrying...puppy-dogs...embracing and making much of them, [he] took occasion not unnaturally to ask whether women in this country were unused to bearing children.... By th[is] prince-like[27] [that is, indirect] reprimand [Caesar] gravely reflect[ed] upon persons who...lavish upon beasts that affection and kindness which nature has implanted in us to be bestowed on those of our own kind. (*Pericles* 1.201)

While we may not particularly like this example—we may ourselves have puppy-dogs—Caesar's and Plutarch's intent can be made plain otherwise: human beings do not always attend to what serves them best, indeed what nature would have them do.

"With like reason," Plutarch says,

> may we blame those who misuse the love of inquiry and observation which nature has implanted in our souls, by expending it on objects unworthy of the attention either of their eyes or their ears, while they disregard such as are excellent in themselves and would do them good.

We can misdirect our attention to unworthy objects. We can even misuse our love of inquiry, philosophy. He continues, whereas

> [T]he mere outward sense, being passive... perhaps cannot help taking notice of everything...be it...useful or unuseful; in the exercise of his mental perception every man...has a

> natural power to turn himself...to what he judges desirable. Therefore it becomes a man's duty to pursue...the best and choicest of everything, that he may not only employ his contemplation but may also be improved by it.... A man ought [then] to apply his intellectual perception to such objects as...are apt to call it forth and allure it to its own proper good.

We see here a suspicion of abstract speculation, of that theorizing that takes us away to the remote reaches of thought—the "clouds," in Aristophanes' image—"mere theory," as we and Plutarch sometimes say (*Dion* 2.543)—and away from the things that bear most on our own lives. We have control over that to which we apply our "intellectual perception," yet paradoxically, in Plutarch's view, we do not always apply ourselves well to what would do us the most good. "We find such objects," as we have seen, "in the works of excellence (*aretês ergois*)," he says, "which also produce in the mind [even] of mere readers...an emulation and eagerness that may lead them on to imitation...." (1179b8-11). No less than life experience, reading provides such formative examples.

Understandably wary, Plutarch is not condemning philosophy here (as some might: see 1.476[28]). On the contrary, he seeks rather to focus his philosophic attention, and therewith to redirect ours, back onto its "worthy and proper objects."[29] In being so constrained, philosophy remains no less indispensable to the perfection of human life: How else can one find one's bearings amidst the turbulence and tides of fortune but through that human insight which enables us, amidst it all, to be thoughtful, farsighted, circumspect, principled, and steady? This he brings us to see repeatedly (for example, 1.329, 336).

Thus as we read Plutarch's accounts, the reader is brought to a new manner and degree of acuity, to a new sensitivity to the rich complexity of human things, ordinary and extraordinary. Each life is different. Each figure vigorously seeks to make a life of distinction out of circumstances that are, well, never quite "tailor-made," but rather challenging, threatening, and over the course of a career, hard to sustain. Each "story" is treated, not abstractly, but with the attention to detail that brings forth what is original and properly its own. The active judgment and skills necessary to live such lives of distinction—and write about them—is itself exemplary.

The higher degree of acuity aspired to is revealed in a reflection on two of his subjects:

> Phocion and [Cato] may be well compared together...for assuredly there is difference enough among virtues of the same denomination, as between the bravery of Alcibiades and that of Epaminondas, the prudence of Themistocles and that of Aristides, the justice of Numa and that of Agesilaus.... The mixture both of lenity on the one hand, with austerity on the other; their boldness on some occasions, and caution on others; their extreme solicitude for the public [etc...] so that we should need a very nice and subtle logic of discrimination to detect and establish the distinctions between them. (*Phocion* 2.247)

Plutarch's *Lives* are such gold mines of subtle distinctions. They actively attempt to flesh out the overly broad categories of abstract "theories of ethics" and, to be sure, that of the natural generality of language.[30] Plutarch paints his characterological studies with a subtlety of observation known to us from playwrights and novelists, embedding each in their life circumstances, rich in variables and innumerable vectors. In this regard the *Lives* needs to be seen as a necessary complement[31] to our tradition of theoretical accounts of "ethics," allowing us to consider the fate of the effort of virtue in the world, to consider the formative importance of circumstance, the variety of courses of development, and the real consequences of personal decisions, however large or

small. He was concerned that this was what the liberal arts did not teach often enough (2.440). Moreover, in Plutarch's own artful approach to writing we have seen a different sort of touch, one that is properly self-interested, discreet, measured, judicious, and self-reflective.

All this brought me to wonder whether there wasn't a different "sensibility" made evident here or more precisely, I would venture, even a different faculty of discernment at work. It is not just that we have here a different line of sight. Rather, there seems to be brought to light another rational excellence, one that has its distinction in revealing the richness of the particular as opposed to the breadth of generality, that allows us to focus on the life lived as opposed to the one that is, as we have come to say somewhat emptily, "ideal."

6. *Phronêsis*

> It is not possible to understand *phronêsis* and *sophia* under the guiding line of the Kantian distinction between practical and theoretical reason.
>
> Heidegger[32]

We are thus presented with a paradox of sorts: we are asked to consider a mode of thoughtfulness that is not speculative (1141b1), yet is deeply rational, that is not as "profound" as theoretical wisdom (1141a21; *Lives*, 2.181), perhaps, yet is more important for human life (1140b30).

Aristotle may be of help in considering this paradox. In the middle of his account of the shaping of human character—Chapter 6 of *The Nicomachean Ethics*—we find an extended reflection on our possibilities for thoughtfulness. He looks first at the various objects available and concludes that there is not just one faculty, not one "reason," but multiple modes of truth, artful know-how, deductive knowledge or science, and wisdom among them. In addition he introduces us to another active condition (*hexis*)[33] that

may be unfamiliar to us, however one that proves to be distinctively human: *phronêsis*.[34]

Let us step back. Aristotle does not think as we do.[35] We see this, for example, in his very different understanding of "choice," a concept especially important to us today. Choice, according to Aristotle, is not just some "personal preference" we willingly stick with. In his view "...without intellect and thinking [and] without an active condition of character (1139a33-4; also 1145a4f)," choice is nothing but blind self-insistence. Moreover, we tend to focus on choice in the abstract, either on the intention or on the outcome by itself. But for Aristotle choice is part of an integrated event "since [with] action there is no such thing as doing well or the opposite without thinking or [without] character." We will see in a bit why this must be so.

He begins his exploration of this special capacity by asking us first to consider what sorts of people we say have "good sense." Preserved in our languages is a recognition of a unique mode of insight evident in persons whose perspective on human things, on people and circumstances, is particularly sound. A person of "singular judgment," we might say: a wise grandfather, a seasoned friend, a native truth teller, a parent—in short, people who have taken their long experience and made it bear on their and others' lives. He puts it this way: they are people who are "able to deliberate beautifully about things that are good and advantageous for [themselves]" (1140a23-4), those also who know what is "conducive to living well as a whole." We look to people who are not necessarily concerned to know things "in general" but rather to those whose life experience has been brought to bear on their own lives, and equally, those who are not short-sighted but seek to see how each particular event and act might contribute to one's overall good.

This focus on the particularity of events and actions brings Aristotle to point out the obvious yet for us surprising conclusion, namely, that "there is no [necessary] demonstration of these things, since all of them are capable of being

otherwise" (1140a31-4).[36] Nevertheless, despite being indemonstrable, Aristotle is emphatic that these things are not therefore untrue. That they are not matters of theoretical knowledge does not invalidate them—does not make them, as we might say, matters of "mere opinion," and surely not "merely relative." (Their truth therefore is not to be dismissed as merely mundane, merely demotic, or merely ontic.[37]) Our question becomes, if not knowledge per se, what faculty is at work discerning what is to be done?

Here Aristotle introduces *phronêsis*, a faculty difficult to translate, rendered variously as practical sense, practical judgment, practical intellect, particular reason (Thomas), circumspection (Heidegger), prudence, and indeed sometimes practical wisdom. "[Practical sense] is a truth-disclosing active condition (*hexis alêthê meta logou pratikê*) involving reason that governs actions, concerned with what is good and bad for human beings" (1140b3, also b20).[38] This will take some explaining.

Phronêsis, or practical sense, differs from those other faculties that have to do with "what is everlasting" in that it is of "the part of the soul concerned with opinions," that is with the world of change we live in, the world Plutarch invited us to consider seriously. Though concerned with opinion, it is not some mere "idea" that Aristotle is looking at but something "far more deeply interfused" (Wordsworth). He brings us to see this by observing that such a developed capacity is not something one can "forget."[39] While we might forget one of the zillion Greek forms or a proposition in Euclid—not a good idea—we are speaking of a different kind of thing, a state of being of the soul, a developed state of readiness, of incipient action. And like riding a horse or mastering a craft, he points out that, while it can be perfected, once possessed we can't "lose" it.[40] We always thereafter somehow have it.[41] This points to a deeper mode of having.

Indeed, we even think we see such a deeper source in other animals. Concerning other species, Aristotle observes

"that that which discerns well the things that concern itself is possessed of [a kind of] 'practical sense'" (1140a25). Animals are said to have such a sense of what is best for them. We mean thereby that they have a "capacity for foresight about their own lives," that is, they act in such a way that they do not justly blindly react to some present stimulus but in a way that secures their overall good. By way of contrast, Aristotle gives the embarrassing human example of the early Greek philosophers Thales and Anaxagoras, whom people unfortunately said were "wise but not possessed of practical sense" (1141b3f.). He here highlights the paradox of the overly theoretical man, who knows divine things, perhaps, but not his own good.

In so doing Aristotle puts the man of practical sense into further relief: "one who is a good deliberator simply is one who, by his reasoning, is apt to hit upon what is best for a human being among actions" (1141b12-3), he says; such a person responds not to the demands of a syllogism but to that of circumstance, and their reasoning ends, not in some abstract proposition, but with action. (*Phronêsis* "lives in action" [Heidegger].) Plainly this entails a different kind of reasoning, one that "is not only about what is universal but [also] needs to discern the particulars [in their difference] as well...since action is [finally] concerned with particulars" (1141b15).[42]

Practical sense is thus that unique faculty that is able to integrate particulars—this, that, and the other this and that—into a larger view that leads to action.[43] Again contrasting the theoretical man, Aristotle points out that "those who have experience are more adept at action than those with knowledge [alone]" (1141b17). That's why we admire our grandfather or friend; because they have done things that show that they have learned the lessons of life and can turn them to account to what one should do next. Experience with particulars, Aristotle emphasizes here, is the more valuable in this regard.[44]

Indeed, it is this same capacity to deal with particulars, he notes, that is also at work on the world stage—brought so vividly to view in Plutarch—as in our own efforts to live well. "The political art is the same active condition as practical sense" (1141b22f). The ability requisite to craft a specific political decree—not a general law but a specific mandate—must have in view "an action to be performed as an ultimate particular thing" (cp. 1137b11-32). So just as the artisan crafting a chair, just as our own efforts to do the right thing in given circumstances, the lawmaker is not well served by generalities alone but must think the circumstances through to a specific recommendation. This too, according to Aristotle, is a species of knowledge.

But of what sort? Aristotle sees a kind of middle between art and wisdom. While "it is clear that practical sense is not knowledge [in the sense of science], for it is directed to an ultimate particular" (1142a22), Aristotle is emphatic that "knowing what pertains to oneself [and knowing what one should do in a particular circumstance] is [yet] a species of knowledge" (1141b33).

But how? At this point Aristotle notes something of interest. Practical sense, he observes, would seem to focus on

> ...the opposite extreme from the intellect [*nous*], for intellect is directed at ultimate terms of which there is no articulation, while practical sense is directed at the ultimate particular of which there is no knowledge [technically speaking] but only [simple] perception [*aisthêsis*]—not the perception of the separate senses, but the sort of ["intellectual perception" (*Lives*, 1.201)] by which we perceive that the ultimate figure in mathematics is a triangle. (1142a22-30)[45]

Surprisingly, the example that Aristotle gives to highlight the particular mode of insight that is practical sense comes from geometry. We "see" that the smallest figure into which a rectilinear plane figure can be divided is a triangle. We see it.

He thus asks us to consider another mode of access to things in their completeness as wholes that he also calls "perception," though of particulars that are sensible only to the mind's "eye," an intellectual perception, if you will.[46]

7. "An Eye Sharpened by Experience"

> The manner of forming one's ideas is
> what gives character to the human mind.
> Rousseau[47]

Before we proceed, let us step back for a moment and look at the requirements of responsible action. In the earlier chapters, Aristotle was at pains to point out that to act well requires a great deal of thought and experience. It requires that we somehow have a world of things in mind all at once, as the rightness of any action "results from what is beneficial in the end for which, the means by which, and the time in which it ought to occur" (1142b28).[48] Action is through and through specific and circumstantial, responsive to the many vectors that need to be factored into consideration in order for some appropriate good to be accomplished.

Thus our question: what kind of thinking can integrate such particularity in its particularity? Other than a name, we may still be hard pressed to see what it precisely is, to identify it in its own right. Aristotle thus turns to other like-seeming faculties to contrast and therewith to delimit it. For example, one might think that what we are talking about is someone who is skilled at thinking things through (*angchinoia*; 1142b14f). While there is some overlap here, Aristotle at this point says something by way of contrast that, if not shocking, may at first make no sense to us as a reply. He says: "someone who lacks self-restraint or someone of bad character will...deliberate badly." He does so first that we might see that we are not looking just for some "mental agility." Rather, we seek a deeper, more responsive source. Surprising though it may be, one's thinking, he suggests here, is deeply dependent on one's character. He therewith challenges us to make a

connection between things where today we see no connection.

Might we mean by "practical sense" a kind of astuteness of judgment (*sunesis* or sagacity), then? Yet "practical sense is something that [also] imposes obligations, since the end that belongs to it is what one ought or ought not to do" (1143a7-10). And astuteness is satisfied to identify distinctions ("mere theory," *Lives*, 2.543). Perhaps then we mean another form of thoughtfulness: "the right discrimination of what is decent," considerateness (*sungnôme*), if you will? All these various examples—skilled thinking, astuteness, considerateness, practical sense—converge for Aristotle to the same meaning: "All these capacities are directed at things that are ultimate [as well as] particular.... All actions are among the things that are particular and universal" (a27-30),[49] and this requires a different and separate faculty to apprehend (1139a9-11).

This brings Aristotle back to his earlier observation about the similarity of theoretical intellect and practical sense. He now sees that it is the same fundamental activity, though differently directed, that is at work in both universal and particular knowledge. For Aristotle, thought, whether theoretical or practical, is always rooted in specific experiences and it is intellect, we now learn, that allows us to apprehend these specific beginnings. "Intellect [*nous*]," he observes, "is directed to what is ultimate on both sides, since it is intellect and not reason [or speech, *ou logou*] that is directed at both the first terms and the ultimate particulars" (1143b1-6).[50] On the one side, intellect discerns the ultimate, first terms of logical demonstration. And on the other, the very same faculty, in thinking about action, sees the other sort of "premise," the ultimate, if contingent, particular. "Of these [particulars]," he says, "one must have a perception and this [ultimate] perception [*aisthêsis*] is intellect."

But by "intellect," we now learn, Aristotle means even more than the apprehension of these beginnings. He asks how the several perfections he's considered become useful to us. It is not through theoretical wisdom (*sophia*) that they become so. Indeed, truth be told, "Wisdom contemplates nothing by which a human being will be happy" (1143b19). Rather it is this other faculty *phronêsis* that "is concerned with things that are just and beautiful and good for a human being [;] these are the things that it belongs to a good man to do, and we are not more able to perform these actions [merely] by knowing about them" (b21f). At this point we may still be having difficulty seeing that practical sense is more than a latent potential (a "capacity"). Rather, we have to understand it as an active condition, a fullness of thought that seeks to actively integrate circumstance and experience in a complex calculus issuing in an action. And for Aristotle knowing does not get us to such a developed and active readiness of soul. It is rather practical sense, *phronêsis*, that allows us to so engage the world (1139b1-7).

Seeing the soul as an integrated whole (and not made up of disparate parts, distinguishable though they may be), Aristotle now returns to his earlier perplexing insight that the character of our minds is dependent on the character of our characters. "The work [*ergon*] of a human being," he says, "is accomplished as a result of practical sense and of excellence [virtue] of character" (1144a5f), for "the starting point [of thoughtful action]...does not show itself except to a good person." This, Aristotle observes, is plain from its opposite: vice warps our perspective and makes it difficult for us to see what is good. Thus he concludes it is the "eye sharpened by experience" (1143b9) that sees what is beautiful as an end or highest good of action and gains its active state only with virtue (1144a31-2; Sachs paraphrase).[51] Good judgment about the right action issues only from a person of like quality. (Good sense here reclaims its double meaning.)

To be effective, excellence requires even more than the having of goodness. It requires an activating intelligence (*nous*), Aristotle says, the kind of intelligence that "carries over into action," or what he calls "virtue in the governing sense" (1144b12f).[52] And it is precisely this that "practical"

sense makes possible[53] (b17: "does not come without practical sense"[54]).

Phronêsis is thus not just one among the several human excellences: "all the excellences will be present [only] when one excellence, practical sense, is present." Here we see that *phronêsis* is *the* enabling excellence.[55] Moreover, at the very beginning of his book, Aristotle emphasized that we must first discover what is the principal activity or work, unique to a being, for it is the perfection of this "work" that leads to its fulfillment or happiness. We here learn that it is practical sense that is the prerequisite to that fulfillment, our fulfillment.[56]

This conclusion is striking both for what is said and who says it: Aristotle, the man who for the tradition represents the speculative philosopher *par excellence*. Yet it is Aristotle here who urges us to develop "that other intellectual excellence," as the virtue that will enable us to think well and that is the one most important for "our own proper good" and for our lives together in the city.

8. The Looking Glass

> He did not know how to govern free men.
> *Lysander* 1.594

> It is a hard thing to give laws to the Cyrenians,
> abounding [as they do] in wealth and plenty.
> *Lucullus* 1.661

Such a view of the centrality of *phronêsis* is shared by Plutarch. Indeed here we see why the reading of Plutarch is so valuable. Many things in his work are "worthy of memory," but unlike abstract treatments, the *Lives* display pre-eminently the interplay and indeed the consequences of character and practical sense in the world of circumstance. We are brought back to our place in the city, re-concretized in our thinking, our thoughts firmly founded on the rich soil of unmediated experience.[57] This Plutarch understood to be

the proper role of "history" and "biography" in liberal education.

But not only "in theory." Just as he discovered for himself, it is Plutarch's profound hope that his readers would find in the "looking glass" of his texts experiences wherein their own capacities for "subtle discriminations" might be developed and their practical sense honed. He hoped as well that we would find therein people from whom we might "gain experience," both of what to avoid—and there are plenty of lessons there to be found—and of those rare individuals whose excellences might inspire us to emulation. Thus for those wondering, "Why are we reading Plutarch? It's only history," we would propose this as the beginning of a reply.

So we ask you to reopen the book on "that other intellectual excellence," *phronêsis* or practical sense, and reclaim its priority for our lives. Minimally, by so doing we would become more attentive to the complexity of human things and the richness of the world before us; maximally we would develop our fine judgment and perhaps begin to live up to that with which we choose to associate ourselves (2.445).

So we ask you as well to emulate Plutarch—not just by being "strengthened by the experience" (1.201, 646) of reading him—but also by ourselves taking up the "looking glass" of writing as a medium of self-discovery wherein we may shape ourselves as we seek to discover the shape of things.

9. Postscript in Seminar: The Faculty of the Faculty

> Good judgment goes with the way
> each one is educated.
> Aristotle[58]

Lastly, let us return to where we began: seminar. By a somewhat long and oblique route, we have been exploring a faculty of knowledge, distinctive to human beings, that

focuses on the confluence of the general and the specific. At the outset we spoke about an ability that good tutors and students possess that enables them to so craft their questions or remarks that they are not only generally apt but are tailor-made thoughts aiding learners in their personal struggles to find their way through the confusions of a developing conversation. That is, our prompting questions or nudging remarks might be "just right" both for the larger context—the seminar conversation as a whole—and for you, the learner with your particular degree of readiness and openness to possibilities. Such just-right questioning presupposes a knowledge both of the particular and the general; it requires that capacity, I would submit, that Aristotle identifies as "practical sense."

Thus we see that speaking is not the same as thinking. It is more complex. When we speak, we not only think about something but also speak to someone. Speaking is thus bi-intentional (or bi-prepositional, if you will). And it is this additional to-ness that is required for a conversation to be successful, for genuine communication to take place. This to-ness seems also to require an additional sense, that sense of aptness, that practical sense that enables one to speak to someone in their particularity, "where they are," not to mention at the right time, in the right way, etc, or all the qualifiers that, for Aristotle, distinguishes practical sense.

Indeed, this is the distinctive excellence of a teaching faculty[59] (as opposed to a research faculty): to hear where a particular learner is "coming from" and design our response "to order" that our question or comment might help them as they seek to find their way to discovery. In the midst of perplexity, what we want and need as learners is not a lecture or a theory but helpful, specific, "practical" guidance. (*Phronêsis* is not unique to the faculty, though perhaps it is more developed there.) Thus we do our students and one another a disservice when we do not offer an opening question but give a closed answer; we fail as a faculty when we fall back into being professors, and you fail as students

when you fall back into being passive scribes. As we learn from Plato's *Meno*, answers and abstracted, deracinated, blind thoughts do not help us to find our way to Larissa.

Such tailor-made teaching (10.9, 1180b8-9) can only happen in a place small enough for genuine conversation, where faculty are present to their students and not lost in their own thoughts, where we are all attentive to the learning trajectories of one another, and where—and this is equally important—students likewise are insistent that they must find their own way to discovery.

So we ask you to make such a place a reality, to seek to question well, to make your efforts of inquiry such that they further both your own learning and that of your fellow learners. And may we continue to say: Good question!

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in Hard Times*, #71 in *Philosophy and Truth*, ed. Daniel Breazeale (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979), 117.

[2] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Newburyport, Mass.: Focus Publishing, 2002), 10.9.1180b8-9. All references to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*—hereafter *NE*—are from this translation.

[3] All references are from *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. John Dryden (1683) and rev. Arthur Clough (1864), 2 vols. (New York: Modern Library, 2001), hereafter *Lives*.

[4] See also *Demosthenes* 2.396: They were "...better able to recommend than to imitate virtues of the past."

[5] *NE*, 2.4.1105b11-13: see also 1112a10; 6.10.143a1-20, 1179b5.

[6] Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 240.

[7] Montesquieu: "What Histories can be found...that please and instruct like the *Lives* of Plutarch? ... I am of the Opinion with that Author, who said, that if he was constrained to fling all the Books of the Ancients into the Sea, Plutarch should be the last drowned." And Emerson: "A bible for heroes." For an even longer list of those influenced by Plutarch, see Roger Kimball, "Plutarch and the Issue of Character," *Lives of the Mind: The Use and Abuse of Intelligence from Hegel to Wodehouse* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 18-21.

[8] A question we should ask of all the authors on the program.

[9] "Re-enter" because we live in more than one world, we moderns, with our abstract thoughts overriding and prisming our experience.

[10] Compare Plato, *Republic*, Book 2, where we are asked to see the city as the magnified image of the soul.

[11] "The Greeks invented the art of biography as an exercise in moral philosophy. The lives of "pre-eminent" statesmen and generals were to serve as ethical exemplars—both good and bad—for the rest of us, subject as we are to the same all-too-human appetites and temptations. Thus the early years of an Alcibiades, an Alexander, or a Cicero were mined by Plutarch for anecdotes that might reveal an unchanging and essential character; its elements becoming more manifest during the crucible of adulthood and thereby accounting for the subject's ultimate achievement" (Victor Davis Hanson, *Commentary*, vol. 116, no. 5 (December 2003): 53-4.

[12] "Beware of ambition, as of all the higher powers, the most destructive and pernicious" (1.609). "For men whose ambition neither seas, nor mountains, nor unpeopled deserts can limit, nor the bounds dividing Europe and Asia confine their vast desires, it would be hard to expect to forbear from injuring another ...when they close together. They are ever naturally at war, envying and seeking advantages of one another, and merely make use of those two words, peace and war, like current coin, to serve their occasions, not as justice, but as expediency suggests..." (*Lives, Pyrrhus* 1.527). Also, "...the innate disease of princes...." (1.523)

[13] *NE* 1.3.1095a1-10: "Therefore good judgment goes along with the way each one is educated.... For this reason, it is not appropriate for young people to be students of politics, since the young are inexperienced in the actions of life.... And since the young are apt to follow their impulses, they would hear such discourses without purpose or benefit.... And it makes no difference whether one is young in age or immature in character, for the deficiency doesn't come from the time, but the living in accord with feeling and following every impulse." Also 6.8.1142a12-20: "A sign of what is being said is why young people become skilled geometricians and mathematicians, and wise in respect to such things, but they do not seem to become possessed of practical judgment, and the reason is that practical judgment has to do with particulars, which become known by experience, but the young are not experienced, since it is length of time that produces experiences." See also 6.9.1143b 10-15, and *Lives, Lucullus*, 1.661.

[14] Plato, *Republic*, Books 2-3.

[15] As we recognize in proposing a "great books program" for one another's improvement.

[16] "For the mere sight itself of a shining and conspicuous example of virtue in the life of their prince will bring them spontaneously to virtue, and to a conformity with that blameless and blessed life of good-will and mutual concord, supported by temperance and justice, which is the highest benefit that human means can confer; and he is the truest ruler who can best introduce it into the hearts and practice of his subjects" (*Lives, Numa Pompilius*, 1.99). In this respect, there is little one can say that can approximate the radiance of the *paradeigma* or example: "Now there's a man!" Indeed it may not be something that lends itself to *logos*, "to argument and proof" (cp. 1.420). Plutarch thereby helps us to restore our attention to what is imposingly present even in our small worlds.

Martin Heidegger in *Plato's Sophist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), renders *paradeigma* as "striking example": "they show the universal through the obviousness of some particular case, through a definite example. This is the way to produce conviction in others. This is the way of *epagogê* (*Posterior Analytics*, 71a8)." "To elucidate what is familiar already at the outset is rather a matter of *epagogê*, the mode of clarification proper to straightforward perception. *Epagogê* is clearly the beginning, i.e. that which discloses the *archê* [the source]; it is the more original, not *epistêmê*" (25). How to articulate what is revealed thereby remains a question for us: do "striking examples" show the universal through the particular or the fullness of the particular? See also Emmanuel Levinas, "Without Identity," *Humanism of the Other*, trans. Nidra Poller (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2003), 61.

[17] Aristotle too urges us to take our bearings by those who are serious (*spoudaios, paradeigma*). They provide a standard or reference (not just an illustration or instance) by which to act, from our direct experience of their influence and from our reading of their deeds.

[18] *To kalon*: the beautiful; see *NE* 3.6.1115b12-13: "…for the sake of the beautiful, since this is the end that belongs to virtue." See Sachs, *NE*, p. 49, n. 61. "Measure, proportion and harmony are in the nature of things and we have a direct responsiveness to them that orients us in the world" and "Measure, Moderation and the Mean," *The St. John's Review*, vol. 46, no. 2 (2002): 9.

[19] "The supreme arts of temperance, of justice and wisdom, as they are acts of judgment and selection, exercised not on good and just and expedient only, but also on wicked, unjust, and inexpedient objects, do not give their commendations to the mere innocence whose boast is its inexperience of evil, and whose truer name is...simpleness and ignorance of what all men who live aright should know.... The ancient Spartans, at

their festivals, used to force their Helots to swallow large quantities of raw wine, and then expose them at the public tables, to let the young men see what it is to be drunk. And though I do not think it consistent with humanity or with civil justice to correct one man...by corrupting another, yet we may, I think, avail ourselves of the cases of those who have fallen into indiscretions, and have, in high stations, made themselves conspicuous for misconduct.... In the same manner, it seems to me likely enough that we shall be all the more zealous and more emulous to read, observe and imitate the better lives, if we are not left in ignorance of the blameworthy and the bad" (*Lives, Demetrius* 2.445). As we become what we do, so we live out what we have become: "...their fortunes carried out the resemblance of their characters" (2.446).

[20] Levine, '*I Hate Books*,' *or Making Room for Learning*, 3.

[21] Cp. the pimple on the nose of the Miller (Chaucer, *Prologue*, *Canterbury Tales*).

[22] In Plutarch, medicine is frequently the metaphor of the diagnostic political art—knowledge of "the causes of disorders in the body politic" (1.609): see 1.215; 2.125, 286, 336, 560, 565, 699.

[23] "Marks and indications of the soul," see 1.337, 469, 479; 2.61, 285, 294, 324, 374, 596. Also see Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 3.10.1-8.

[24] Nor is he thus a "biographer." Though he uses both terms, biography and history, Plutarch is at pains to show that his is of a very specific sort, unlike what we have become accustomed to expect. The history of these terms would be interesting to explore.

[25] Here we see the origin of Montaigne's and Rousseau's admiration for Plutarch. "Those who write lives," says Montaigne, "are more suited to me to the extent that they are interested in intentions more than in results, in what takes place within than in what happens without. That is why Plutarch is my man" (see n. 6). "Plutarch excels in these very details into which we no longer dare to enter. He has an inimitable grace at depicting great men in small things; and he is so felicitous in the choice of his stories that often a word, a smile, a gesture is enough for him to characterize his hero. With a joking phrase Hannibal reassures his terrified army and makes it march laughing to the battle which won Italy for him. Agesilaus astride a stick makes me love the Great King's conqueror. Caesar passing through a poor village and chatting with his friends betrays, unthinkingly, the deceiver who said he wanted only to be Pompey's equal. Alexander swallows medicine and does not say a single word; it is the most beautiful moment of his life. Aristides writes his own name on a shell and thus justifies his surname. Philopoemen, with his cloak off, cuts wood in his host's kitchen. This is the true art of painting.

Physiognomy does not reveal itself in large features, nor character in great actions. It is in bagatelles [trifles] that nature comes to light. The public things are either too uniform or too artificial; and it is almost solely on these [public things] that modern dignity permits our authors to dwell" (Rousseau, *Emile*, 240-1).

[26] From a Cartesian perspective, this may be taken as an expression of regret; though in this context it is intended as a conundrum of our one-sidedly abstract orientation. (Related to me by Roger Kimball.)

[27] The obliqueness of prince-like discretion.

[28] See Plato, *Apology of Socrates*.

[29] In this respect, Plutarch is seeking to reinitiate the Socratic turn back to the city, though with a specifically ethical intent (see Plato, *Phaedo*). It is thus not only modern thought that tends to the excessively theoretical or abstract. In line with this, he does not read Plato as an "idealist" (see *Dion* 2.543-550), but reads the dialogues as embedded in the world (a cave though it might be) leading thereby to action. As we see as well, he is not unaware of the precariousness of such an undertaking by philosophy even here.

[30] Consider the problem of equity at *NE* 5.10.1137b11-32.

[31] Just as the modern novel complements the abstractness of modern philosophy.

[32] "*Phronêsis* is not a speculation about *archê* and the *telos* of action as such; it is not a [theoretical] ethics, not a science, not *a hexis meta logou monon* [an active condition according to reason alone] (6.5 1140b28)," Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, 40-2.

[33] *Hexis* is variously translated as habit, disposition, active condition. We miss what is essential therein if we fail to see it as a developed, if incipient, mode of activity, an "active having" (Sachs). It is not just a propensity, predisposition, orientation, or even mere capacity or potential, but an active state of readiness that manifests itself when circumstances require, an immanent responsiveness, if you will. "Intelligence carries over into action," Aristotle will say later. Consider the sense of fullness and vitality that comes with growth and discovery, an inner resourcefulness ready to emerge.

[34] What is notable about Aristotle's classification of the faculties of the soul is his singling out of a capacity that we today don't even admit as a human capacity. It is here claimed to be different in kind from our general intelligence. Indeed the largest part of Book 6 is dedicated to the introduction and disclosure of *phronêsis*. See note 53.

[35] Aristotle presents a different view of the development of character ("ethics"). His is not a backward looking ethic, a genetic psychology where one is defined by one's first beginnings. Human motivation is not limited to hidden or subconscious sources. Rather, Aristotle's view is forward-looking, a growth psychology, an end directed and open to new possibilities. The future is defining, and not just the past. Character formation thus supersedes developmental histories, maturity supersedes "coping mechanisms."

[36] Cp. *NE* 1.3.1094b22-24: "…it belongs to an educated person to look for just so much precision in each kind of discourse as the nature of the thing one is concerned with admits; for to demand demonstrations from a rhetorician seems about like accepting probable conclusions from a mathematician."

[37] "*Phronêsis* is a *hexis* of *alêtheuein* [truth disclosing active condition], a disposition of human *Dasein* such that in it I have at my disposal my own transparency. For its themes are the *anthopina agatha* [human goods]. And it is a *hexis* of *alêtheuein* which is *pracktike*, which lives in action" (Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, 37). Also "*Phronêsis* dwells in *praxis* still more than in *logos*," (96) and "*Phronêsis* is nothing if it is not carried out in *praxis*" (115).

[38] Who do we think of as having such a "truth disclosing condition"? The examples Aristotle entertains range from those overseeing a household to political figures, and in this context he gives the wonderfully ambiguous example of Pericles, the ruler of Athens at the outset of the Peloponnesian war (and whose full ambiguity is seen in Plutarch's account).

[39] It is at this point that Heidegger makes his famous observation: "...Aristotle has here come across the phenomenon of conscience. *Phronêsis* is nothing other than conscience set in motion, making an action transparent. Conscience cannot be forgotten" (*Plato's Sophist*, 39). That *phronêsis* is not an inferential, reasoning faculty does not mean that it is an "intuitive" faculty. It is "the other intellectual virtue." Moreover *phronêsis* for Aristotle is not given in its perfection but can and indeed needs to be developed. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1982), 278-89; and Ronald Beiner, *Political Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 72-82.

Earlier Heidegger writes: "For one who has learned to understand an author it is perhaps not possible to take as a foundation for the interpretation what the author designates as the most important. It is precisely where an author is silent that one has to begin in order to understand what the author himself designates as the most proper" (32, 43). Here we see the origin of deconstruction: the premises of one's thoughts are often inexplicit, hidden even from the thinker himself. This would seem to be an over-reaction to the problem of embedded presuppositions. For it would make all science, all knowledge, mysterious, if not meaningless, where it might only be unreflective (not necessarily wrong). Moreover it would seem to mean that 'truth' ultimately resides in one's premises. While our conclusions are only as good as our premises, truth resides in the author's developed view as well. A house stands even if we can't see its foundations; its strength is evident in the sturdiness of the whole.

[40] Gadamer puts this into relief thus: its antithesis is blindness not error (*Truth and Method*, 287).

[41] Aristotle notes that while it is true, in a certain sense, that "...it is absurd for anyone to believe that...practical sense is the most serious kind of knowledge, if a human being is not the highest thing in the cosmos" (1141a21; also b1)—and for Aristotle we may not be the most important beings in the cosmos—still, without forgetting the bigger picture, this faculty remains the most important for human life, lest we not live life well as a whole.

[42] "*Phronêsis* makes the situation accessible; and the circumstances are always different in every action" (Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, 20); "This circumspection [mode of circumspective disclosure] isolates that with which the action, the bringing into being, begins" (32); "*Phronêsis* is the inspection of the this-here-now, the inspection of the concrete momentoriness of the transient situation" (112).

[43] It is thus a mistake to think of practical insight as the subsumption of the particular to the universal. For example, Thomas Aquinas: "...we must say that the practical intellect has a beginning in a universal consideration, and, according to this, is the same in subject with the speculative, but its consideration terminates in an individual operative thing" (*Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C.I. Litzinger (Notre Dame, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 1964/1993), 361 (#1132)—hereafter *Commentary*). Or again: "...to frame a decree that is simply the application of universal reason to a particular practicable..." (381 [#1199]). For Thomas practical intellect is thus a subspecies of theoretical intellect, the act of practical judgment the application of a universal rule to a specific situation.

Whereas Aristotle says that the uniqueness of *phronêsis* lies in its simple apprehension of ultimate particulars, Thomas sees it in the subordination of specific wisdom to theoretical wisdom. Here we see the beginning of the loss of *phronêsis* as a separate faculty with a unique purview and, with the loss of continuity with the things of our world, the increasing estrangement and subjectivity of thought (the skeptical spectator), with the end result that this faculty, *phronêsis*, is largely eclipsed or lost sight of in modern thought. All thinking becomes abstract thinking. See notes 31 and 54 above. The alienation of the Cartesian ego is not far behind. This is the beginning of a much larger study for us. See Burt Hopkins, "Jacob Klein

and the Phenomenological Project of Desedimenting the Formalization of Meaning," *The St. John's Review*, vol. 47, no.2 (2003): 65.

[44] For Heidegger (*Plato's Sophist*, 97) the benefit of experience is the amount of time to accumulate enough experiences to "dominate the manifold"—not the time necessary to refine and mature one's judgment to the range of possibilities, to weigh their respective worth, to assess the manifold factors as each adds yet another vector to the complex calculus of *phronêsis*.

[45] Sachs directs us to *De Anima* 431a14-18 and b3-10 as well as to *NE* 1109b23 and 1126b4. Attention to the fundamental role of intellect was highlighted for me in freshman seminar two years ago by the perspicuous questioning of Jackson Carpenter, for which I am grateful.

[46] Cp. Thomas, *Commentary*: "However it is not apprehended by that sense which perceives the species of proper sensibles...but by the inner sense which perceives things sensibly conceivable. Similarly in mathematics we know the exterior triangle, or the triangle conceived as singular, because there we also conform to a sensible conceivable singular, as in the natural sciences..." (384-5 (#1214)); "Prudence, which perfects particular reason, rightly to judge singular practicable relations, pertains rather to this, i.e. inner sense" (#1215).

"Aristotle says that we know such things by perception, not the perception of any one of the five senses, but the sort by which we perceive that a triangle is the last kind of figure into which a polygon can be divided (1142a 28-30). This sort of perceiving contains thinking and imagining, but what it judges, it judges by perceiving it to be so.... "such things are among particulars, and judgment is in the act of sense-perception" (1109b23-4). But this is the calmly energetic, thought-laden perception, Sachs, "Three Little Words," *The St. John's Review*, vol. 44, no. 1 (1997): 12, 15.

[47] *Emile*, 203.

[48] Aristotle's formulation of the utter specificity of action: *NE* 2.3.104b23: "...the ones one ought not, or when one ought not, or in a way one ought not, or in as many other ways such distinctions are articulated." See also 2.4.1105a3-35: "...with the things that come about as a result of the virtues, just because they are a certain way, it is not the case that one does them justly...but only if the one doing them does them in a certain way, if one does them first of all knowingly, and next, having chosen them and chosen them for their own sake, and third, being in a stable condition and not able to be moved out of it."

[49] Thomas says this beautifully: "...the man who considers the common features alone will not know how to proceed to action by reason of this generality," *Commentary*, 354 (#1111).

[50] "At 1142a23-27, [it is said] that intellect and practical judgment stand at opposite extremes, directed at the unarticulated and individual terms of thought and the ultimate particulars of perception. The two extremes are now said to be united in the one faculty of intellect, that contemplates the universals contained in the ultimate particulars, which can be the only terms for a knowledge of truth. The same activity that holds a particular thing together is at work on the soul even in perception. Thus the claim that a single power stands at the root of theoretical and practical knowing rests on the ultimate conclusions of the highest kind of philosophy, which are arrived at in Bk. III of *On the Soul* and Bk. XII of the *Metaphysics*. Here that claim asserts the unity of the human being" (Sachs, *NE*, 114, n.168). See 1141b15.

[51] *NE* 1113a29-b1; 139b4-5;1143b13-14;1144b30-32; and Sachs, *NE*, 117, n. 173.

[52] By "governing sense", Thomas reminds us, we mean that which will allow us to "govern ourselves" above all, *Commentary*, 377 (#1185).

[53] Thus it is the case, Aristotle says, that human excellence cannot be "...just an active condition in accord with right reason," as Socrates seems to say at times, for example in the *Meno* (though see *Gorgias*), "but one that [must actively] involve right reason" (*NE* 1144b25).

[54] This is puzzling. Since choice is rational desire for Aristotle, it is inseparable from action. Yet here it is intellect that is the motive agency underlying action. Our new question: what is the relationship of reason and desire in Aristotle?

[55] "The two highest modes of *alêtheuein* [truth disclosure] [in Aristotle] are *phronêsis* and *sophia*" (Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, 39.)

[56] Lest we still think that he is speaking of some merely practical ability like "cleverness" [*deinos*], Aristotle once more helps us by making a distinction. We're not just speaking about some natural craftiness or shrewdness. "...Cleverness enables one to do the things that are conducive to the object one sets down and to achieve it... [However] if [one's] object is base, [then this ability] is shameless..." (1144a22-29). Practical sense is not cleverness, though it too presupposes an ability to achieve ends.

[57] See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 288, and Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, 25.

[57] *NE* 1.3.1095a1-2.

[57] Indeed, this is the virtue of all good conversation (Venkatesh).

Kultur and the Obligations to Philosophy

Jonathan Badger

Michael Grenke's translations of Nietzsche's *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* and *Prefaces to Unwritten Works* offer readers of English a previously unavailable view into Nietzsche's thought. These works have not received as much attention as perhaps they deserve, and Grenke's careful and astute English rendering of them is likely to change this.

Grenke's strategy is to capture the subtleties of Nietzsche's prose by means of a rather extreme literalism. As Grenke points out in his preface, this has occasionally resulted in difficult English, but it succeeds in preserving Nietzsche's peculiar punctuation and diction, which are often "corrected" in commercial translations. Grenke's translations offer an utterly reliable reflection of Nietzsche's phrasing and word-play. Key terms are flagged with their German counterparts, and there are ample footnotes to qualify the renderings of ambiguous terms. Grenke has compiled and organized relevant portions of Nietzsche's own notes and drafts for these works, and has included them in appendices for both books. His approach allows the reader to track the use of terms through these texts, and he is meticulous and disciplined in his stated aim of leaving the task of interpretation to the reader. In this respect, these translations are exemplary. In addition to the translation and a general introduction by Grenke, each of the items in the *Prefaces* is accompanied by a short and illuminating essay. These are written by Mathew K. Davis, Lise van Boxel, and Grenke himself.

Friedrich Nietzsche. *Prefaces to Unwritten Works*. Trans. and ed. Michael W. Grenke, South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2005. Friedrich Nietzsche. *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*. Trans. Michael W. Grenke, South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2004. Jonathan Badger is a tutor on the Annapolis campus of St. John's College.

Each work emerged as a completed whole in the year 1872, and the two are deeply connected to one other. For instance, one of the prefaces in *Prefaces to Unwritten Works* is called "Thoughts on the Future of Our Educational Institutions," and Nietzsche suggests that it be read before *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* (*Prefaces*, 28). Both books focus our attention on the individual Nietzsche calls the "genius," a luminary who sees beyond the horizons of his particular time and place. The genius is unafraid to smash tablets and to propose new configurations for human community. Nietzsche depicts the genius sometimes as a philosopher and other times as a poet or "artist" (see below). The genius is a theme Nietzsche addresses in detail elsewhere,[1] but these two books specifically address the question of our response to the genius. How should we respond to the presence of such an individual? Nietzsche's view here would seem to be that the presence of the genius—be he prophet, poet, or philosopher—carries with it a specific imperative for the rest of us. We are obliged to allow ourselves to be lifted by genius. How do we do this? Nietzsche's answer seems to be what he calls "culture" (*Kultur*). A genius' vision can in principle be transferred into a group in the form of a culture or "way of life." This *way* can elevate the non-genius far above his natural capacities and include him in the work of genius. Moreover, the proper work of the non-genius includes preparing for the next appearance of genius in the world, and this work is made possible by the culture, which organizes and ennobles the activity of the non-genius.

The *Prefaces* offers a set of meditations on why *Kultur* is necessary, and *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* displays a high level thinking-through of what this might actually mean in practice at the first stage of implementation, namely at the level of education.

The *Prefaces*

Prefaces to Unwritten Works is Grenke's edition of a work originally entitled "Five Prefaces to Five Unwritten Books," which was a book handmade by Nietzsche himself and presented as a gift to Cosima Wagner in 1872, with the expectation that Richard Wagner would also read it. The care with which Nietzsche prepared this little volume, clearly intended for highly regarded readers, should alert us to its importance as a glimpse into his own conception of his larger body of work. Many of the themes taken up in the *Prefaces* are recognizable from Nietzsche's published corpus, and we can clearly see the outlines in it of Nietzsche's well-known conceptions of time, history, morality, and art. The compactness and concision of his presentation, however, shows us an example of how Nietzsche might have wished his philosophy to be presented or introduced to intelligent, educated non-philosophers. This should be of interest to anyone who aspires to understand Nietzsche.

On first glance the topics of the five prefaces seem quite disparate. Their titles are:

1. On the Pathos of Truth
2. Thoughts on the Future of Our Educational Institutions
3. The Greek State
4. The Relation of Schopenhauerian Philosophy to the German Culture
5. Homer's Contest

Grenke's introduction helps us see the common threads that unify these topics. What most conspicuously emerges is the theme of culture. Nietzsche views culture as crucial to the proper development of human life. Modern civilization seems stunted by either a lack of culture or bad culture. Nietzsche challenges his readers to foster a new culture of health, which aims to turn us toward the genius.

The order that Nietzsche envisions holds the genius in a place of distinction: he is either the focus or the founder (or both) of a culture; the culture is an ongoing context in which the rest of us lead elevated lives as we look toward the genius and take our bearings in the light of his insight and creation. Genius alone would seem to be a kind of meaningless dead end. Authentic genius propagates itself through culture, so that the entire community can be enriched, and also so that a new genius can eventually be brought into being.

For Nietzsche there are two classes of genius, "the genius of wisdom and of knowing," who is the philosopher, and "the genius in his universal concept," who would seem to be the artist or poet (13, note 1). The question of which of these is actually primary is complex. In the *Prefaces* Nietzsche at times locates the philosopher at the center of culture, while at the same time he characterizes the artist as one who can create a culture. It would seem that the two are not easily separable.

A second unifying thread running through the *Prefaces* is the theme of time (8-9). Human beings perceive time as the annihilator that separates them from their natural vision of themselves. We love ourselves and our products, and this love suggests that these things should persist, should *be*. Time, however, destroys them. We respond to time metaphysically through philosophy, art, history, culture, politics, and war. This second thread turns out to be more fundamental than the first: culture emerges as a response to the problem of time.

In the first preface, "On the Pathos of Truth," Nietzsche is explicit regarding time as a fundamental problem for man. We recoil at the specter of everything disappearing into time; it offends us. One response is to link together the "great moments" into a chain that runs through the millennia: this is the "fundamental thought of *culture*" (22). This rebellion against time also brings about the notion of "truth." Truth stands outside of time, and hence is not subject to its destructive power. Nietzsche recognizes Heraclitus as an

exemplar of the genius who explores this kind of truth-positing in a life-affirming manner. Heraclitus, however, is exceptional in this respect. The general run of philosophers falls short of "art," which aims to *live*, while "knowing" achieves only annihilation (27). "Truth" is potentially annihilating in that it is indifferent to human dignity and well being: truth informs us that human life is a short-lived, insignificant anomaly flickering in a remote corner of an indifferent universe. Yet truth is necessary in order for us to escape the annihilation of time. This, it would seem, is the *pathos* of truth.

This preface sets out the terms and the tone for the other prefaces, which explore various aspects of culture, namely, what is its source, who is responsible for it, and what should be its proper end.

The next preface, titled "Thoughts on the Future of Our Educational Institutions," builds on the previous preface's critique of "truth." Nietzsche here challenges the reader to set aside his former education so that he might escape into a position from which he may grasp the "authentic problem." Only then can the reader understand the nature of Nietzsche's proposal for a radical reformation of education, a reformation that seeks to establish a culture that takes its bearings from the greatest achievements of philosophy and poetry of the past, and that seeks to make ready the appearance of new geniuses in the future. Nietzsche is not explicit about what this "authentic problem" is. In his introductory essay to this preface, Matthew Davis persuasively argues that the "authentic problem" is the problem of *truth*, articulated in the previous essay. The pathos of truth is approached culturally by means of education. The next preface is on politics, and thus we see a path forming in the sequence of prefaces: a theoretical insight into the problem of truth, followed by an educational response, leading into a formulation of a political structure. This is a practical response to the unifying themes mentioned above. Time is the fundamental problem, and it can be mitigated by "truth."

Truth is posited by philosophy and given life by means of culture, which in turn must be established through education and politics. Philosophy, education, politics. It is striking that the concern for education is prior to politics.

The next preface, "The Greek State," tells us that a consolation for the outrage of time is a species of politics Nietzsche identifies as "artistic culture," for which he credits Plato. He seems here to appropriate and exploit the *Republic*'s city in speech for the purpose of illustrating a highly ordered "artistic culture" that places the genius at the top and orders all of life according to the insights of the genius. "Plato's" completed "state" sought the "ever-renewed generation and preparation of the genius" (57). The state in its best form does not view the individual as dignified in himself, but rather values the individual as an instrument of genius. The individual is lifted above his natural condition of moral and intellectual feebleness (and above his fleeting life) to become part of the work of the genius; each ordinary life is thus brought into the realm of genius and culture, and thereby beyond the immediate threat of annihilation.

Nietzsche notices the irony of the fact that the poets are ejected from this city, which Nietzsche has associated with the artistic culture, but he also notes quite correctly that the *Republic* is a product of "poetic intuition and painted with bluntness" (57). Further, we must ask how Nietzsche would account for the fact that "Plato" places the "genius of wisdom" (the philosopher) at the top of this "state," when Nietzsche has identified this genius as derivative from the "genius in his universal concept" (the artist). Again, he acknowledges this contradiction, but passes over it quickly, calling it a symptom of a struggle internal to Plato, who still suffers from the influence of Socrates. Nietzsche calls his interpretation of Plato's "hieroglyph" the "*secret teaching of the connection between the state and the genius*" (59, emphasis Nietzsche's).

Nietzsche then turns to a practical, contemporary challenge that emerges from this analysis. To what should his

contemporary Germans look as they contemplate what a proper culture would look like? His response to this question is Schopenhauer. Nietzsche offers no account here of Schopenhauer's philosophy; he only notes that he is "their" (the Germans') single philosopher in the nineteenth century (69). He suggests that they begin with the philosopher and then consider what culture belongs to him.

Nietzsche conspicuously avoids doing this work for his readers. He challenges them to work out for themselves what the culture of their time should be, and how they should derive it from a particular philosopher. Again, strangely, Nietzsche has selected a genius of knowledge—that is, a philosopher—for his starting point. Thus, by this point in the *Prefaces* a rich set of questions has emerged, and Grenke intelligently frames many of them in his essay that accompanies this preface (60-4).

The final preface, "Homer's Contest," addresses the culture of combat. We children of modernity have difficulty affirming any sort of goodness in war. Our desire is for a world of peace. Nietzsche poses a challenge for us. Our desire for peace is a desire to escape nature, to escape time and become eternally at rest. We must ask ourselves if this is possible or best. Is it a meaningful solution to the annihilating effects of time?

To get at this question, Nietzsche leads us back through the horrors of the Trojan war, deeper into the world of the Homeric gods, and deeper still, back into the primordial divinities of Hesiod, who describes a reality ruled by the "children of the night." This is a world of cruelty, deception, and death—the fundamental reality. The battles of the Titans, says Nietzsche, represented a *relief* from the primordial condition of chaos and disorder. Battle is "grace" and "salvation" (83).

Two kinds of *strife* emerged from this initial condition: one is merely cruel, seeking only discord, while the other is jealous and ambitious and seeks distinction and pre-eminence. This second type of strife is "good" strife; it leads men

toward excellence and is life promoting, despite its violence. It is this good strife that Nietzsche says characterizes the Homeric contests as exemplified at Troy, and this is an answer to the question why Homeric poetry seems to exult in the glorious horror of warfare.

In her introductory essay to this preface (70-80), van Boxel argues that this insight extends to our fundamental desire to see the world coherently, to render it as intelligible. Conflict tames the primordial chaos and thereby establishes *measure*. Prior to battle, nothing is measured against anything else; nothing is knowable. Battle is the means to establishing the measure of one against the other. The *greater* is established, and thus *order* is established. Further, the greater points us toward the good, which we begin to see more clearly. Through the establishment of measure by means of combat, the world is rendered not only intelligible but also moral (77-8).

Nietzsche's formulation is obscure. He claims that the pre-Hellenic, Oriental genius envisions a motion out of primordial chaos and cruelty by means of strife. This motion passes first through "disgust in existence, to interpretation of this existence as an expiating punishment, to belief in the identity of being there [*Dasein*] and being guilty" (83). The Hellenes take up this conception and extend it into a vision of the "good strife": the life-promoting violence leading to victory and excellence.

Another feature of this Homeric-Hellenic view is the conviction that an ongoing subservience to a single master is undesirable. There will be many geniuses and they must clash and mix.

> [O]ne removes the over-towering individual, [and] thereby now again the contest of forces awakes: a thought that is hostile to the "exclusivity" of genius in the modern sense, but which assumes that, in a natural order of things, there are always *more* geniuses who reciprocally incite [each other] to deeds, as they also reciprocally hold [each other] within the borders of measure. That is the kernel of the Hellenic contest-idea: it abhors solitary mastery and fears its dangers; it requires, as a *means of protection* against the genius—a second genius. (89)

Thus, although every gift must disclose itself in fighting, this is not a call to a master-slave ordering. It is rather a call to a recognition of the agonistic character of human being and seeing.

Finally, this view of being suggests that volitional action is not possible without fighting. For Nietzsche, the Greeks discover what it means to be free. In the absence of the contest neither the Greek individual nor the Greek culture can find measure, and thus cannot direct themselves. The danger for post-Hellenic civilization is degeneration into the primal chaos. Without the noble strife there is a sliding back to cruelty and vengeance. Without ongoing strife and combat man may not remain properly human.

Nietzsche was conscious that the ideas he formulated in these prefaces were unfashionable in 1872. They are perhaps even more unfashionable now. The liberal West has become quite unified in its preference for individual rights and peace. Even the proponents of particular war efforts do not defend war on the basis of its salutary effects on soldiers or culture; it is regarded as a necessary evil, instrumental for political and strategic ends. The stated aims of Western military action are the removal of brutal despots, the elimination of threats to security, and the restoration of regional stability. However paradoxical or contradictory, modern war is for the sake of peace and prosperity. We wage wars to end wars.

Nietzsche challenges a belief so deeply held that it is perhaps not even recognized as a belief. We modern liberals do not regard love of peace as an article of faith; it is, rather, experienced as a recognition of a manifest good. This makes it difficult to hold Nietzsche's challenge in front of us.

It is nevertheless important that we take up this challenge. If we reject Nietzsche's claims about war, does this mean that we reject the Homeric presentation of human life? If we reject Nietzsche's vision of the individual's relation to the genius through culture, does this mean we must reject Plato's *Republic*? Or can we rest secure in the belief that Nietzsche offers us flawed readings of these works? Would we say that our readings of Homer and Plato are superior to Nietzsche's?

The mastery and power of Nietzsche's presentation makes it difficult to dismiss his readings out of hand, but perhaps we have some room to maneuver. Could it be that Nietzsche intentionally misrepresents Homer and Plato for the sake of co-opting them into his project? Or is it that he emphasizes particular aspects of them for the sake of shocking their modern readers into seeing that at some point we must make a choice between our modern prejudices and our admiration for Homer and Plato? How would we make such a choice? At the very least this would involve two considerations: First, we should carefully examine the opinions that pull us so powerfully toward perpetual peace and universal autonomy—opinions that lead us not only to recoil from the realities of war but also to withdraw from the idea of the genius and the "cults" that follow in his wake; second, we should read Plato and Homer very carefully—is there any chance that Nietzsche is right in saying that we tend to impose modern sensibilities upon them and thereby distort or obscure their significance?

On the Future of Our Educational Institutions

Nietzsche's series of lectures delivered at the University of Basil in the winter of 1872, called *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, was a public reading of a dialogue set in an idyllic forest wilderness near the banks of the Rhein in late summer. The interlocutors are an old philosopher, his younger companion, and two passionate university students wielding pistols. A dog also participates in the drama. There

is in fact a great deal of dramatic action in the dialogue; as Grenke points out in his introduction, there is "shooting, shouting, singing, wrestling, a star falling, a torch-lit procession, a musical signal, and, of course, biting."

Because the speeches are situated within a drama, we are challenged to interpret them accordingly. Where do we locate the voice of Nietzsche? The lector identifies himself with one of the young students, but the weightiest monologues come from the old philosopher. Moreover, of the two students, the "friend" is the more articulate. Finally, as a young academic, the philosopher's "companion" seems to occupy the lector's social position and professional status at the time these lectures were delivered.

The central topic of discussion is education. What is it, and how should it be achieved? What is its relationship to politics and the "state"? Along the way we encounter the concept of "culture." According to the philosopher, many seem to believe that becoming educated means becoming "cultured." What does this mean? Is this something to which we should aspire? What are the alternatives to it? What is culture and what is its proper status within a regime?

One of the primary concerns of the dialogue is the democratization of education, which seems to imply—or at least coincide with—a trivialization of the activity and the production of countless subfields of study, all of which fail to comprehend the greatness of ancient philosophy and poetry, as well as the greatness of modern German visionaries such as Goethe. Central to this loss is the deterioration of proper language study. Contemporary Gymnasium students, says the philosopher, are not only unable to read ancient Greek in a way that gives them access to the power of Plato and Sophocles, but they are also unable to speak and write German properly. They have sunk to the level of "journalism" (2.45-57; 3.73).

This newfangled education purports to make students independent in their thinking, allowing them to eschew authority and to write about whatever they please, as though

their untutored inclinations were highly valuable. This generates a smug and unjustifiably aloof student who remains uninitiated into philosophy, says the old philosopher (5.105-7). These students learn to be contemptuous of authority, but, says the philosopher, they pay for their "grandiose illusion of freedom through ever-renewing torments and doubts" (5.111). Contemporary education indulges the personality and the particular. It celebrates the individual and his quirks. Proper education, says the philosopher, "should be purified from the imprint of the subject and carried out above the interplay of the times, as the clear mirroring of the eternal and unchanging essence of the thing" (4.97).

The two students naturally resent this critique and point out that their Gymnasium education has cultivated them and given them a taste for science, which they presume to be clearly good for mankind. The philosopher scoffs at the proposition, and remarks that he feels "terrified" by this development (5.105); this scientistic culture has spawned an industry of degenerate erudition that marks an escape from authentic life and culture.

A danger the philosopher sees is that, in the absence of philosophic leadership within the educational institutions, the students with the greatest capacity grow to despise themselves under "the unendurable burden of standing alone" without a true teacher (5.112). Another danger, he warns, is the seduction of the best students by false gods, namely, perverse ideological and political movements.

The philosopher is deeply concerned that the state has taken control of pre-university education to use for its own insidious ends. The production of serviceable citizens who are unmoved by greatness is at odds with philosophy's interest in education. The old philosopher persuades his little audience that the purpose of proper educational institutions is to cultivate the soil in which philosophy can flourish.

These institutions would acknowledge that philosophy is extremely rare, and requires extraordinary effort. Out of the multitude of students only a few would be sufficiently

endowed to participate in the work of the philosophic schools, of which there would only be a small number in all of Germany. A small number of teachers would emerge from this rarified sample of students, and even these would only serve as laborers in the service of bringing forth the rarest of breeds, the philosopher himself. Those with "second- and third-class gifts" can thus be brought to their full potential and can contribute to the work of philosophy. (4.97)

As we consider this dream, we must remember that this is not Nietzsche speaking, but a character in his lecture-dialogue. This does not mean that Nietzsche does *not* intend to advance such a vision of education and philosophy, but we are obliged, as we are with Plato's *Republic*, to hesitate to conclude that this is Nietzsche's blueprint for education.

We are encouraged, however, to consider what we think the proper relationship is between philosophy and educational institutions, and how this relationship stands with respect to the regime in which we live. Can educational institutions peacefully service both the needs of the nation and the demands of philosophy (or more broadly, the demands of genius[2])? This raises a more fundamental question for us. Do we view philosophy as an activity with an imperative? That is, does it call us and make demands of us? If it does, how does this call stand with respect to our "individuality," our "persons," and our inclinations about what a good life should be? Do we view philosophy as merely instrumental to our individual lives; that is, do we grapple with philosophic texts only so much as is pleasant and convenient for our personal inclinations? Do we view philosophy as merely a good exercise for thinking and talking about difficult matters, for the sake of a higher quality of discourse in personal life, in business life, in political life? Is philosophy then merely a handmaid to the ordinary affairs of life?

It is likely that most of us within the academic traditions of liberal democracies in the twenty-first century do not respond with vigorous principled support to the idea of a

culture of genius. We tend to believe that the artifacts of genius are to be read and considered seriously either within an enterprise of historical inquiry, or with a view toward a kind of personal enlightenment. Some of us even go so far as to believe that these notable books can help us navigate the political and social questions of our own time. It is unusual, however, for anyone to approach them out of a sense of service to something else, something higher to which one feels obliged to subordinate oneself. Academics and their students dabble in texts that strike their fancy. The old philosopher of Nietzsche's dialogue claims that, for the best students, the consequences of this casual, personal relationship with genius are confusion, doubt, and self-loathing, as well as an unwarranted arrogance. The alternative he offers is initiation by a teacher into the proper study of philosophy within a culture that surrounds genius. The student is brought into a central region of the culture, and this gives the education authenticity and authority (5.110-13). The student is brought into the work of philosophy for the sake of philosophy.

A question emerges: Are we the servants of philosophy, or is philosophy an instrument for our "personal" ends? If we answer in a manner that suggests that philosophy does carry an imperative, then we must follow that imperative or reject philosophy. If we follow it, will there be implications not just for the individual but also for human life generally or at least for the worldly community within which philosophy appears?

[1] See *Gay Science*, 361; *Human, all too Human*, 1.126,157-168.

[2] I speak specifically of *philosophy* here, although Nietzsche's conception of the genius would seem to be broader. To be safe we might speak of "the artist *or* philosopher." I frame the issue in terms of philosophy for several reasons. As noted above, Nietzsche makes the distinction between "the genius in his universal concept" and "the genius of wisdom," and we might take care to preserve this distinction in our general understanding here. One might reasonably conclude that the proper focal point or

center of a *Kultur* would be "the genius in his universal concept," and this would not be the philosopher, but rather "the artist." This, however, does not appear to be Nietzsche's application of his terms. He observes and valorizes Plato's placing philosophy in charge of the ideal regime; he names the philosopher Schopenhauer as the best source for a new German culture; and in *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* the account of the ordering of the institutions comes from the "old philosopher." We can therefore speak here in terms of *philosophy* and its relation to politics and educational institutions, though we should be mindful of the subtle relationship between Nietzsche's "philosopher" and his "artist," which a more complete analysis of Nietzsche's thought would explore. See Nietzsche's *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, for an explicit account of the distinction, as well as his view that this distinction is transcended by certain pre-Socratic philosophers.

Jan Blits and the Virtues of Commentary

John E. Alvis

The sprightliest thinker of our time once presented a lecture on the virtues of Jane Austen beginning with a list most of the audience considered an enumeration of defects: few settings within unimproved nature, no symbols, tame emotions, language under restraint, no derangements of plot, no authorial confidences, predictable outcomes, or unabashed moral assessments. Implicit in the lecture was a gentle reproof of the manner of fiction writers well regarded, though, by comparison with Austen, overwrought, as well as of the taste of a readership similarly impolite in its avidity for strong sensations. Timely and welcome, one might suppose, would be something on similar lines but directed against presently influential literary critics, too many of whom are, to the extent permissible by academic conventions, sensationalists. Yet, since not the least objectionable of the preoccupations of contemporary critics is their insistence upon telling us more of other critics than we need to know, offering a corrective by better practice seems preferable. For that we can applaud the example set by writers such as Jan Blits in his five books on Shakespeare, and most recently in his study of *Coriolanus*.

Blits has the good sense to realize that each of Shakespeare's major plays affords material sufficiently abundant to require book-length treatment for its elucidation. He devotes an entire volume to *Julius Caesar (The End of the Ancient Republic: Shakespeare's* Julius Caesar), another to *Macbeth* (*The Insufficiency of Virtue:* Macbeth *and the Natural Order*), another to *Hamlet* (*Deadly Thought:*

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Hamlet *and the Human Soul*), and a book on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (*The Soul of Athens: Shakespeare's* A Midsummer Night's Dream). His newest volume, *Spirit, Soul, and City: Shakespeare's* Coriolanus, is occupied with the play probably composed last of the group Shakespeare drew out of Plutarch's *Lives*. Confining himself to a single play enables Blits to do more than is usually done in the way of discerning connections. One of the more striking of such discoveries occurs with the discussion of the play's "two endings." Shakespeare seems to have directed his story to one conclusion with the success of the family embassy that turns back a vengefully triumphant Coriolanus, yet he ends the play a second time with the actual slaying of the title character, since returned to Corioles, the city on behalf of which he had warred against Rome. Blits makes sense of this peculiarity in the play's construction by perceiving the first climax as the defeat of spirited ambition, and the second as the destruction of the hero's soul, his death coinciding with his inability to see that his insistence upon a virtue unconditional has continued to the end to make him the victim of conditions set by meaner souls.

At times the dividend of dwelling upon a single play lies in detecting overtones of particular words or phrases that modify each other over wide intervals of text. Such a concentrated focus may also allow leisure for observing differences in superficially similar incidents, or for developing the implications of certain repeated imagery, e.g. body parts for members of Rome's political organism, beast metaphors applied to opponents, and diseases as figures for political disorders. The tight focus also facilitates attention to Shakespeare's arrangement of incidents into a plot that conveys dialectical thought by dramatic means. The focus of the dialectic, announced in Blits's title, is the relation between a particular kind of civil society and the distinctive human type that regime has produced. Coriolanus's "spirit" and "soul" have their genesis in his "city," yet Shakespeare reveals within his protagonist a persistent conflict with the

community that has educated him in spirited ambition and has by public acclamation conferred his honorific name.

But the chief benefit of Blits's approach is that by attending to one play at a time, it encourages the supposition that each play is a complete and coherent body of thought rather than an exhibit from which evidence may be extracted in service of a critic's thesis. You will notice that the thematic parts of Blits's various book titles make use of no words alien to Shakespeare's own usage. This is a departure from the widespread practice of blazoning titles that advertise intent to examine their subject from perspectives generated by modes of thought ill sorting with Shakespearean diction. It is refreshing to readers more used to immodest titles that decry, say, *Hegemony* engaged in exploiting the dispossessed, that promise a *Deconstructing* of some *Ideology*, or that propose to demonstrate *Undecideability* (sic) vaporizing some *Text* hitherto deemed determinable (Marxist powers, ideology, and writings exempted). Blits's satisfaction with a Shakespearean vocabulary for rendering Shakespeare's thought permits his audience a less mediated acquaintance with whatever play he discusses. The critic does not obstruct so much the reader's access to the thought of the poetry. Students complain of teachers who persist in standing between them and the light emitted from an author. Some rare teachers know how to remove the impediment, and come to know as well the happy result that occasionally follows, that of learning simultaneously with the class. As far as it appears possible to do so, Blits writes in the way of a teacher receptive to this lesson.

Spirit, Soul, and City further distinguishes itself by its organization. Contemporary expectations prescribe for the commentator a vantage from the heights of which he will profess to look over the head of the author whose work he has contracted to elucidate. By preferring a topical division of his own devising to the progression of action of the poem, he declares his superiority to his subject. Blits adopts a more modest but to my mind a more fruitful address to the task. He

proceeds as the progression of the play prescribes, following its development from act to act, scene after scene, line by line. Conventional Shakespeareans will object to arranging discussion in this manner and might well dismiss the result as a mere "commentary." Readers who seek to understand Shakespeare rather than tame him might wish for more such commentaries. From Blits we can collect the useful lesson that an important dimension of the thought of the play comes into view once we appreciate the dramatist's development of thought by repetition, congruence and incongruence, echo and dissonance, and progression and retrogression, all of which one best grasps when interpretive comment adheres to plot. Never mind that college must caution students not to peg their argument to the plot. They need not try this at home. Still, Blits understands, and guides his reader to understand that a Shakespearean play is already a course of imaginative reasoning. Its logic will reveal itself to patient attention operating consecutively rather than synoptically.

Obviously the risk incurred by such an organization is that, as some parts of the play may interest us more than others, a commentary proceeding in accord with the plot may not sustain a constant interest. In this case, happily, a strong theme prevents Blits's commentary from plodding. He never permits us to lose sight of his principal argument: that the play examines a Roman republican community in tension with a hero at once its product and the most serious challenge to its survival. The book gives us to see something universal, what one might call an anatomy of the excellences—accompanied by an exposure of the limitations—of spirited ambition; this in conjunction with scrutiny of a perennial problem confronted by all civil societies: how to regulate such outsized souls as are required for defense of a nation. While a nation must enlist men emulous for honor, it must also secure justice and due respect for the less strenuous temperaments these warriors lead in battle and govern during peaceful interims. To put it another way, Shakespeare's Republican Rome rejects both items of advice Aristophanes

puts in the mouth of his Aeschylus in *Frogs*. Shakespeare has depicted a republic that insists upon rearing a lion within its walls; yet having done so refuses to permit the lion to rule. In Shakespeare's version of Rome's history, the republic contrived somehow to survive until the advent of Caesar, or, alternatively, until the city-state had extended its imperial dominion as far as it ever would. The explanation for Rome's durability may lie in the republic's ability extemporaneously to produce at various crises institutions that in their eventual arrangement answer to the Aristotelian scheme of a mixed regime balancing every constituent interest with some other. Blits assists us in perceiving how such a mixed polity can preserve itself from external threats by breeding ambitious generals, and yet produce families that will defy their own blood when the ambition or indignation of such men should threaten their country.

Blits displays one field of learning not evident from his previous treatment of Shakespeare's Rome in *The End of the Ancient Republic*. His present work puts to effective use a knowledge of the precepts and method of classical rhetoric gleaned from Aristotle, Cicero, Tacitus, and Quintillian. The benefit comes with his explication of the set speeches of major characters. Persuasive speech was the operative art of statesmanship for thinkers of classical antiquity. To understand rhetoric entails grasping the practical implications of adapting political principle to political circumstance. Blits understands this significance of rhetoric and thus he understands something essential to what Shakespeare would have his more serious readers comprehend. Blits also shows a command of ancient Latin historians more reliable than one meets in any Shakespearean now writing. In contexts where other scholars might guess that Aristotle or Cicero may have crossed Shakespeare's mind, this study cites appositely a half dozen classical texts, chapter and verse, as well as such moderns as Machiavelli, Hobbes, even Hegel, when appropriate.

Coriolanus seems to be thought of now as impressive theater, but not comparably impressive when regarded as a course of thought. It certainly has failed to enjoy the reputation for philosophic scope or penetration accorded *Lear*, *Hamlet*, and even *Macbeth*. Possibly the philosophic substance of the work unfolds to readers themselves habituated to the sort of speculative thought Shakespeare would have learned in the Elizabethan schools and from the books favored by his contemporaries. His affinities seem to lie with the tradition of thinking one discovers in Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Plutarch, classical political philosophy inclusive of ethical analysis and rhetoric, its practical political instrument. The title of Blits's book assumes this tradition by taking "spirit" to mean *thumos* (spiritedness, ambition, indignation), "soul" to mean an unstable compound of reason, spiritedness, with appetitive and aversive passions, and "city" to mean a civil constitution combining a form of government with a purpose of promoting a national way of life. Such thinkers as I've mentioned were concerned with understanding the interrelatedness of human character and political institutions, the latter including religious, educational, and what in our day are termed "social" or "cultural" assumptions relating to marriage, family, manners, and pieties. The presiding questions for this tradition were the proper ordering of the individual soul together with the ordering of a regime most conducive to encouraging such souls. Shakespeare adheres to a similar syllabus with the significant addition of his concern to understand these issues as they have been affected both by historical conditions perhaps unanticipated by pagan classical thinkers—that is to say, distinctly Christian and modern conditions—and by challenges to classical thought posed by Machiavelli and Bacon. This way of thinking, attributed by Locke to "the old philosophers" and becoming less and less familiar today, Blits finds congenial. That difference in intellectual training and disposition accounts for the superiority of the book to other recent studies of Shakespeare's Roman plays. This author

manifestly understands the mode of thought I have just described and can therefore come closer than his contemporaries to tracking Shakespeare's thought. Much closer.