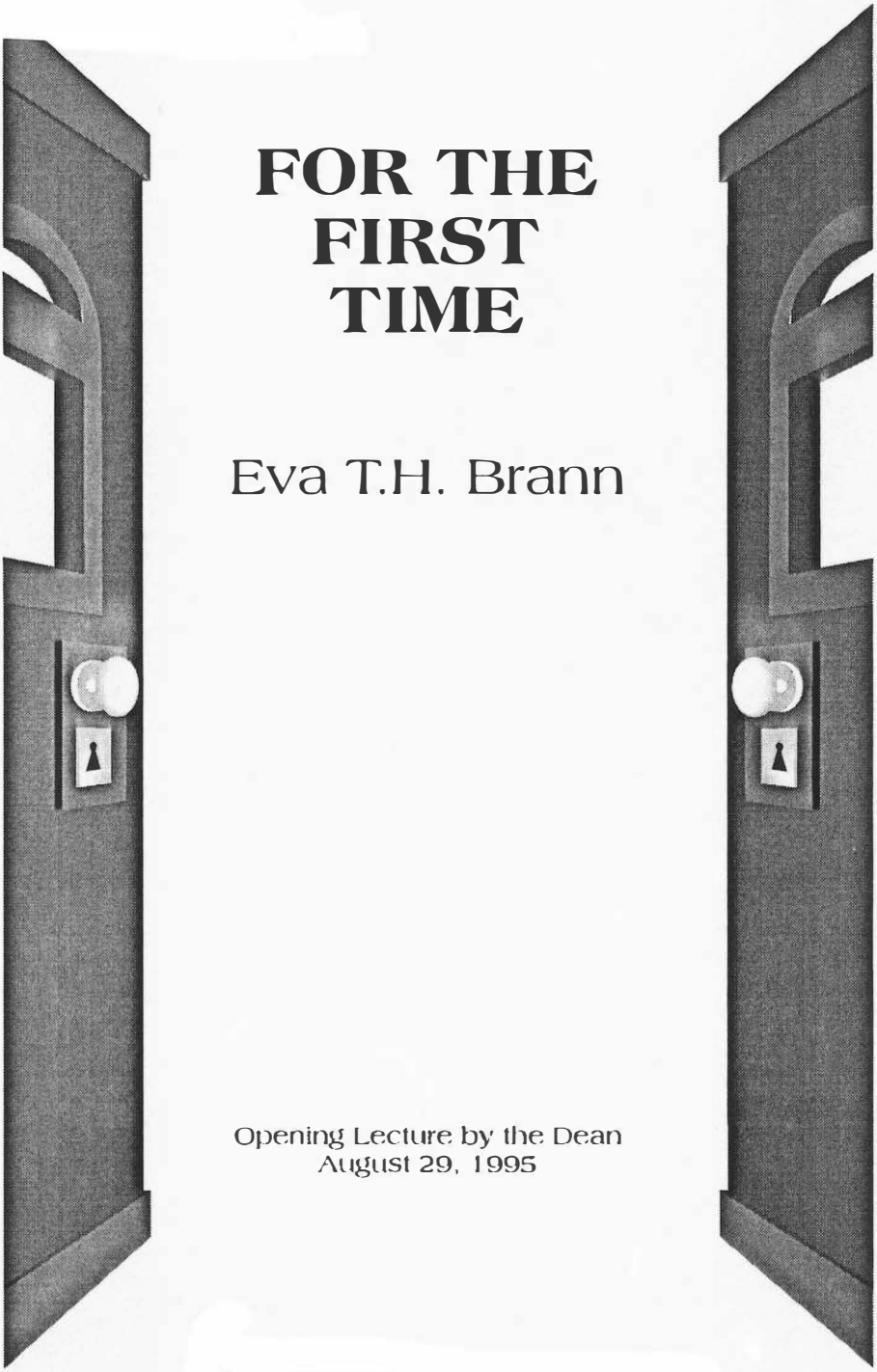

# FOR THE FIRST TIME

Eva T.H. Brann

Opening Lecture by the Dean
August 29, 1995

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This will be the first time that you, the freshmen among us, you to whom this opening occasion is traditionally dedicated, have attended a Friday night lecture — *the first time*, the first of many times, we hope. I imagine that there have been many things this past week which you did and experienced for the first time: the first time you have been really and truly gone from under your parents' roof, the first time you cast eyes on people who will be your life long friends or perhaps something even more intimate, the first time you've taken part in seminar (with two hundred fifty-five to come), the first time you've read words in the beautiful new Greek alphabet and the first time you have said the words *psyche* and *philosophia* in Greek (because they are in the first lesson of your Greek manual).

All these "firsts" make a discontinuity in your lives, and give a sort of shock to your familiar ways. St. John's does not differ from any other live-in college you might have chosen, in intending to tear you from old contexts and habits. I hasten to say that all of us are at one in ardently hoping that you will hang on to some habits with which you all undoubtedly came imbued, such as keeping your room in impeccable order, or going to bed punctually and alone at 10:30 PM and rising promptly at 6:30 AM to brush your teeth and study your Euclid. But all schools expect you to undergo some culture shock, as the anthropologists say, or defamiliarization, in intellectual lingo. You are expected to come apart in some benign sense and for a while at least.

But now arises a difference. You all know the nursery rhyme:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
All the King's horses and all the King's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

Well, if Humpty stands for a freshman who is suddenly dropped into a new environment, and the royal horses and troops for the school's courses and professors, then most colleges do succeed in putting the egghead somehow together again. You should come out reshaped as a scientist, or a historian, or a philosopher, with the methods and habits of thought that give you, as they say, an "identity" as a prospective member of a profession. And in all the colleges I know about, the professors are seriously concerned with

the bearing this reintegration in professional terms has on the personal life and the character of their students.

As you knew when you chose to come here, we do not promise or wish to put you together again as solidly trained specialists with tried-and-true categories and methods of approach to each subject. We hope — with trepidation — for something far more risky: that you should find a new integrity of person and togetherness of character while becoming permanently uneasy with routines of thinking. To put it another way: We would love it — or perhaps it is safer to say, I would love it — if you eventually appeared, and really did live, in the outer world as solid people of dependable habits, but if you had in your inner being only one habit — that of having no habits, of seeing as many things as often as possible for the first time.

For example: The title and theme of this opening lecture is "For the First Time." I came on that theme by two approaches. (By the way, for me, and, it might possibly be, for you, *that* is the test of a good theme — one that turns up along different routes.) One approach arises from the fact that I am incurably interested in time-language, such as "the first time" or "two times two" or "The New York (or Washington or London) Times." Similarly I am fascinated by all the firsts which I expect to talk about in a minute. So the conjunction of "first" and "time" is irresistible to me. A second approach came from using my imagination about the freshman condition. This is the first week of my thirty-eighth year at this school; what's it feel like for you who are in your first week? Which of us is more acutely and really here? What is the difference between beginning absolutely and beginning once again? Is there such a thing as a truly first time? Such thoughts and musings made suddenly strange to me —strange and wonderful — this matter of "the first time."

That sort of estrangement, in which the familiar turns unfamiliar and thereby becomes acutely noticeable, will be called wonder by several authors you will be reading this year. It differs from doubt, curiosity and round-eyed amazement. I understand round-eyed amazement as the naive surprise at something that appears as marvelous, curiosity as the pursuit of the variety and novelty of the world, and doubt as the uneasy sense that what you are told is not so. Amazement belongs to the perceptive child of any age, curiosity to the insatiable onlooker, and doubt to the wary initiate. It is a pity not to have in one's makeup the propensity for some degree of both of these.

But wonder belongs to a kind of lover who wishes to place things at just that distance and in exactly that light in which they will become visible to thought.

Now the wish to place things in the right way also has a name. It is called asking questions — of a certain kind. There are many sorts of questions, and most of these are not what I mean, particularly questions that are part of a self-canceling two-step mechanism. Someone asks, someone answers: the end. "Are you crazy?" — "Get lost." "What time is it?" — "8:30 PM." (Though I can't resist interjecting here, quite gratuitously, my favorite counterquestion, which suddenly raises a dead-end answer to a wonderfully loopy significance: That genius of inspired inadvertence, Yogi Berra, was asked "What time is it?" and answered "You mean now?")

The kind of question I am speaking of, the kind that does not lapse with its answer, does not in fact request an answer so much as it initiates a search. This question stays active throughout and guides an inquiry — which means that asking good questions is, or rather requires, art and skill. It is only a beginning to frame the question; then you have to know how to go on; you have to find passages into the thing asked about. Otherwise you remain without passage at an impasse. The Greek word for an impasse, which will become very familiar to you, is *a-poria*. *Poros* is a means of passage, and *a* is called an "alpha privative," a negating prefix. Thus *aporia* means exactly that: "impasse." *Aporia* is an important stage in any inquiry, when the ordinary means and the ready answers are exhausted and mere willingness is not enough, so that your own ingenuity or a teacher's know-how have to come into play. It would not be too much to say that what we hope you will become here above all is an inspired framer of questions and an artful discoverer of passages through them.

Among the best questions are often those in which we turn back on ourselves. Not for nothing is the thought that stops action for a moment called reflection. We leave off dealing with affairs to bend back on ourselves, — for that is what reflection means literally — to consider our own thinking and speaking and doing.

It is said of scorpions that, if caught in a circle of fire, they bend their venom-tipped tail back on themselves and sting themselves to death. The story is false as both fact and as simile. In fact, the scorpions' arch is a mere thermal reflex, not a mortal reflection on their own poisonousness. The simile for a reflective question should be the opposite of fatal self-canceling circularity, perhaps something more like a rising circle, a spiral.

To return to the example at hand. You, the freshmen, have uttered the phrase "for the first time," very conservatively speaking, perhaps 360 times in your life, say twice a month since you learned to talk. Now suddenly you are to hear yourself speak, to ask yourselves what you mean, what we mean, what it means, when you say those words.

So let's see. First let me frame spontaneously and randomly some questions of the sort I am talking about. Many of us are doing this week for the first time what others among us are doing for the umptieth time. Is there a special significance in such a first time? Is it begging to be gotten over with quickly or to be recorded in deep memory? What is the significance of the fact that we are beings who begin life in time, to whom things happen for the first — and it seems, by the same token — for the last time? Is the first time the best, or the least, or just like the others? Is the first day of your birth or the second day or the eighteenth year or the eightieth of most significance, or do any anniversaries matter? Does the first day of your life somehow have in it the rest of all your days as its outcome, or can a new, a second birth, occur if you will it? Could it be that some things have to happen twice to happen at all? But then, is there in fact ever a true and discernible first or, for that matter, a second time of anything? — One of the two founding fathers of philosophy, Heracleitus, said that you can't step into the same river twice, but another witty wise man topped him, saying that you can't step into the same river even once. What that one meant, I think, is that there are no first times, nor, in fact,

any discernible events, bunches of time that you can count, at all, but that everything flows continuously and smoothly, continually new and evenly undifferentiated. Think, that wit meant (he was Cratylus and according to Aristotle he was Plato's first teacher), of your life not as a sequence of seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, years, decades, but as an undifferentiated flow which has no countable times at all, first, second or last!

I want to supply examples of how books help you to think about questions of this kind. For while asking questions is the beginning and end, the *arche* and the *telos*, of your unsettling life here, in between comes a very solid and settling activity. It is the activity of study and reading — the study and practice of the skills that I mentioned before as useful for approaching problems, as well as the reading and interpretation of the stories and theories, the fictions and truths contained in books of stature. While you are here, you will divide your time between arts and authors, between studying some of the skills necessary for thinking well and reading some of the books that contain examples of such thought.

I want to use three such books as examples of help in thinking about first and second and numerically indiscernible times. One of these books, an epic, Homer's *Odyssey*, is on the program; a second, a novel, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Love in the Time of the Cholera*, might well be so some time in the future; and the third, a long short story, Thomas Mann's "Death in Venice," used to be on the seminar list. These are the books, and the area of application is *love*, where times of inchoateness, of incipience, and of incisive recognition, that is, of vague potentiality, triggered growth, and unmistakable flowering are most poignantly in evidence. Put to these books the question of first times, now in the form of love at first sight, or second sight, or without a clear epoch, that is, without a clearly marked time of beginning. They will answer with a treasury of human possibilities.

Let me begin with "Death in Venice." It is the story of an old and famous writer, one who has become a classic author, and of the love he conceives for a beautiful boy in the city of Venice in the dissolute time of the cholera. This love, the voyage that leads to it, and the author's death from heart disease or cholera which brings the episode to an end, is fraught with all sorts of time-bound significance. The purpose here is to attend to the genesis of this eventually fatal passion. It is not love at *first* sight. The first time the writer casts eyes on the boy in the elegant lobby of an international luxury hotel, he observes him with the objective, almost cool attention of a man of mature esthetic judgment facing perfect beauty. He is roused to an abstract meditation on that mysterious union of the generic and the individual that produces the humanly beautiful. Soon after, he makes an attempt, under a mundane pretext, to escape from Venice, an attempt which is fated to fail. All is atmosphere, intimation, resonance, while first in restrained steps and then through mountingly catastrophic episodes the lover begins to enter and understand his true state. From the falsely serene beginning to the deadly end, there is no word or touch exchanged between the two, no first word or first closing of physical distance. This is an unpunctuated, unrealized, unbounded affair — no first time, no consummation, no last time.

Let me go next to *Love in the Time of Cholera*, a book I came to read because our student Nick Colton, whom some of the juniors and seniors will remember, gave it to me as a parting present, and because whatever a fellow-reader wishes me to read, that I do eventually read. It is one of those responsive courtesies that carries its own manifold reward.

Love — the love that arises, once more, in the time of cholera — begins on page 55 of my book, when Florentino Ariza, who is delivering a telegram to the house of Fermina Daza, catches a glimpse of her as she is sitting in the sewing room teaching her old aunt to read. She is thirteen. She raises her eyes to see who is passing. And for Florentino Ariza "that casual glance was the beginning of a cataclysm of love that still had not ended half a century later." Of course, one must think of that Florentine Dante and his Beatrice. Fermina Daza marries another man and has a not-unsatisfactory marriage. Florentino Ariza spends a life somewhat lovelessly hunting women, mechanically replicating his young years of lying in wait for Fermina Daza. When the book ends some three hundred pages later, Florentino Ariza and the widowed Fermina Daza are sailing up and down the Magdalena River on the boat of the line that Florentino Ariza now owns. He has ordered the captain to hoist the cholera flag — though no one is sick on the boat. In cozy quarantine the two make love, and when the captain asks how long they think they can keep up "this goddam coming and going," Florentino Ariza, "who had kept his answer ready for fifty-three years, seven months, and eleven days and nights," says, "Forever." Florentino Ariza's love *has* a *first* time — and then no others, except forever.

Those two stories are one in the temporal modes of intellectualized romanticism and the other in the magicised realism of novelistic prose. Now comes poetry, straight, plain and in accordance with nature, and with it love at *second* sight. It is the girl who loves, and it takes a second apparition, a second time in the man's presence, for love to happen.

The *Odyssey* is the second book you will read together here. This episode happens near the end of Odysseus' voyage. He has been shipwrecked on the shore of Phaeacia, having escaped on a raft from seven years of increasingly savorless love-service to a voluptuous goddess. Nausicaa, the young princess of Phaeacia, and her attendants have come to wash clothes (particularly her trousseau, in accordance with a dream she has had), and to picnic and play ball on the sea shore. Odysseus, washed ashore, worn out, briny, and naked, has crawled into a lair of leaves. When he is awakened by the girls' voices he emerges like a lion, covering himself with a branch. The handmaidens run from him, but the young princess stands her ground and plays courteous hostess to the castaway; he responds with gallantry. She calls for oil and clothing, and Odysseus, having washed, shaved and dressed himself, undergoes one of those transformations from bandy-legged uncouth roughneck to smooth, beautiful lord that characterize him. This look he sometimes has is not so much a matter of grooming, as of being seen in one of the modes proper to him — a sort of splendid lovableness. Here is what Homer says in Fitzgerald's poignant translation (VI, 238-261):

And now Odysseus, dousing in the river,
scrubbed the coat of brine from back and shoulders
and rinsed the clot of sea-spume from his hair;
got himself all rubbed down, from head to foot,
then he put on the clothes the princess gave him.
Athena lent a hand, making him seem
taller, and massive too, with crisping hair
in curls like petals of wild hyacinth,
but all red-golden. Think of gold infused
on silver by a craftsman, whose fine art
Hephaistos taught him, or Athena: one
whose work moves to delight: just so she lavished
beauty over Odysseus' head and shoulders.
Then he went down to sit on the sea beach
in his new splendor. There the girl regarded him,
and after a time she said to the maids beside her:
"My gentlewomen, I have a thing to tell you.
The Olympian gods cannot be all averse
to this man's coming here among our islanders.
Uncouth he seemed, I thought so, too, before;
but now he looks like one of heaven's people.
I wish my husband could be fine as he
and glad to stay forever on Skheria!

But have you given refreshment to our guest?"

Now that is all a way of saying that Nausikaa sees him, at second sight, with love — that she has fallen in love with him. And here Homer plays one of his many lovely tricks. Where Fitzgerald has Nausikaa ask: "But have you given refreshment to our guest?," she actually says:

"Do give, my attendants, food and drink to the stranger" (209)

In Greek — and now it helps to have the linguistic skill of knowing Greek — she actually says:

*Alla dot', amphipoloi, xeinoi brosin te posin te.*

*Brosis* is the same word as our "bread," and it is contrasted to *ambrosia*, "un-bread," the ethereal solid food of the immortals. But *posis* means plain drink and it happens to be a homonym — a word with the same sound but different sense — of *posis*, the word for husband Nausikaa had just used. To Odysseus, who has for seven years unwillingly drunk heavenly nectar and eaten immortal ambrosia in divine Calypso's cave, *posis* names the first mortal, real food and drink he has had for seven years. But to Nausikaa it carries the sound and thought of marriage and husband. As it happens, Odysseus is on his way to his wife —not a girl but a woman and a mother — and cannot stay. But we *know* that the young princess is not to Odysseus simply one more

among the powerful and voluptuous women who gladly become his lovers. We can tell because when he and his wife Penelope finally go to bed together, for the first time in twenty years, he talks to her of all the witches and nymphs who have captivated him, but of the maiden Nausikaa he says not a word. He maintains the respectful discretion due to a virgin, a human being distinguished by *not* yet having had a certain experience for the first time. We may imagine that Nausikaa, in cut-off "Skheria" (the name means the "Split-off Land"), will get a satisfactory husband from the many elegant sailor boys that frequent her parents' court, but we cannot think that she will ever forget this exciting stranger. For her this was real love, arrived in the real way: sudden but not immediate, a proof of the power of the second time.

This then is an example of thinking about first — and second — times in human life and of using books, in this case fiction, to guide the inquiry by means of the imagination. But we can go beyond our individual lives to the life of our species, mankind.

For example, we might ask, was there a first time a human being stood erect, clothed in dignity, and asked questions like these? Or was the development, the evolution as we call it, so smoothly continuous that no first could have been discernible? Is the question of a first-time human a problem for science or a speculation for philosophy? What, if there was a first moment of human consciousness, did it feel like? Was it like breaking through the cracking solid surface of familiar things and falling all alone into a black icy lake, or was it like rising from the dark fog of every preceding day into a new, fiery, illuminating presence? Or was it like floating peacefully to a light surface from a misty sleep? Did this ancestor of ours, this first Johnny, run to find someone to tell about it, inventing the required language on the spot, or did this ancestor devote all the rest of life to remembering and trying to tell how it was?

These are dreamily speculative questions, in which any human being with a sense of ancestry will sometimes get lost. Books on human evolution will not help much, because while they have more to say every decade about the times and places where upright posture was achieved and where signs of sapient behavior are first to be found, they can only guess at the inner life that accompanied it — in particular they can only speculate whether there *were* discernible first times at all, and if there were, whether thought or behavior came first.

So let us leave, for the rest of this lecture, first times that have to do with one particular time, with what came first as measured by the revolutions of the earth or the pulsations of the universe. Let me set aside "times" and attend only to "first." In Lesson XV of your Greek manual you will, for the first time, come on a word of great ancient dignity, *arche, alpha, rho, chi, eta*, a feminine noun of the first declension. You will, perhaps unknowingly, be quite familiar with the word. It occurs in archangel, archetype, architect, archipelago, archfiend. In this school, the tutor in charge of the meeting in which your teachers talk over the week's work in your classes is traditionally called an *archon*, the person responsible for starting the meeting off and conducting it.

*Arche*, you may be able to guess, is what comes first, at the beginning, though not merely first in time, but first in responsibility. An *arche* might

indeed be a beginning in time. Thus Herodotus, who as a historian traces each event, in particular the Persian War, to its beginning in time, speaks near the beginning of his work of the *arche tes echthres*, "the beginning of the enmity" of the Persians towards the Greeks, which, at least in the opinion of the Persians, was the seizure of Troy (I 5). Some such beginnings continue to be at work and to have effects when their time is passed. For example, what has happened to you here this first week may well influence you when the week is over. How it does is one of that slew of questions I threw out at the beginning: whether there are ever beginnings that do not rule the rest of days? I happen to think there are such. For example, the first day of any mere routine, of any mindless repetition, has no more force than any other because nothing is coming into being or to fruition; each day is the lifeless replica of any other. Such a first is a beginning as mere lower limit, not as a governing principle.

"Principle," in Latin *principium*, is a good word to introduce here. It is Cicero's translation for *arche*. It is made up of the two words *primus*, "first," and *capere*, "to take." A principle, like a prince — a word that has the same origin —is what (or who) takes first place. The German word for prince is *Fuerst*, which is the same as our word "first." "Principal" belongs here, too; it has the same origin and meaning as principle and prince, but perhaps a more vivid meaning to you, since your high school probably had one of them, an awesome personage who took the first place and had the last word.

(I can't resist interrupting myself with a totally incidental but highly charming reference. My favorite dictionary, the American Heritage, has a lovely little disquisition on the long history of confusion in the spelling of principle as in *arche*, and of principal as in "go to the principal's office," which ends as follows:

> A key point to remember ... is that in middle English spelling was not nearly as fixed as it usually is today, a development that was much furthered by the invention of printing. When we interchange spellings for *principle* and *principal* we are doing something that would have been less of a fault in the days before the conformity imposed on us by this marvelous invention.)

This little collection of "first" words shows that people appreciate in their speech the fact that to be first does not always mean to come before or earlier in time. An *arche* may be first *out* of time. It may go before in a different sense. It may be the beginning, fountain, origin or rule. About such a first, about a timeless *arche*, clusters a whole new set of questions.

One subset has to do with the beginning of the world, or rather the transition to the beginning. Is such a transition thinkable? Was there a moment — could it be called a moment? —before time or its materialization began? Was there a time before time began, a beginning of beginnings, as is intimated in the most famous of sentences containing the word *arche*: *En archei ein ho logos*; in Latin: *In principio erat verbum* — "In the beginning was the word," the first sentence of the Gospel according to St. John? Is the beginning of time thinkable? Is the non-beginning of time thinkable? Such questions are

considered alike by those who think about God, by theologians like Augustine whose book on time, the *Confessions*, you will read as sophomores, and by those who think about nature, the physicists from Aristotle to Stephen Hawkins — but oh, how differently! The transition from eternity to time is not, however, always to be thought of in the analogy of a sequence: first a "standing" now and then a passage of nows. It can also be thought of as a simultaneity: a double world of timeless and changeless being and of passing and variable becoming. Should we accept such a duality? In what sense is the stable world the beginning, the *arche*, of changing appearances, as Plato, above all the philosophers you will be reading this year, will claim? And how does such an *arche*, such a "founding ruler," as Plato calls what always and primarily *is* (*archegos, Sophist* 243 d) — how does this *arche* govern? Is it an apex, a divinity *to* which all that lives is drawn, or one *from* which all increase flows? Or is it a foundation, a fundament, *on* which all that appears is grounded?

Or are the laws and rules that govern the physical world *throughout* everywhere equally in force, so that no one and nothing has special privileges, and the most beautifully painted porcelain vase falls to earth under exactly the same dispensation as an ugly old clay pot? This is the new claim that the scientific writers of your junior year will make.

These questions and others will arise for you as you think your way through the next four years. And they will always arise in two tiers, as it were. For you will always be asking about "firsts" — as about everything else — what are the terms, problems and arguments presented by the books, and *also* whether the authors are right in the formulation of the question and the contriving of the answer. There will continually be this double task for you: *first* to make out the meaning and *then* to judge its truth.

Let me turn a second and last time from the framing of questions to an example of an attempted development. For this second set of questions, help comes primarily not from those authors who improve on the visible world by increasing its stock of particular characters and events — I mean the poets and novelists — but from those who clarify it by lifting from it universal descriptions — I mean the philosophers.

The question whose treatment I want to exemplify belongs to that tricky type which concerns beginnings in time *and* out time as they come together, not at the origin or in the perpetuation of the external world, but in us human beings. This question arose for me, as — remember — good questions tend to do, coincidentally in several ways. (I have often noticed that there seems to be a sort of benign arsonist of the mind abroad who lights fires in several mental districts at once.)

This time the question had one beginning when I had occasion to reread Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, a work the freshmen among us will reach in February. I noticed for the first time the full force of a powerfully abrupt phrase. Aristotle speaks of the human being as a *beginning*. "The human being," he says, "is that kind of beginning" — *toiaute arche anthropos* (1139 b 7). What kind of beginning? A beginning called *choice*.

Not so long after, a colleague stopped me in the hall to ask what I thought might be the connotations of the word Aristotle uses for human choice,

*prohairesis*. There is a perfectly good Greek word for choice, *hairesis*. You actually know it from the English word "heretic," used for people who insist on making choices of their own rather than following the established doctrine, the orthodoxy. Why, my colleague wanted to figure out, does Aristotle insist on *pro-hairesis*? *Pro* is a prefix meaning before, as in pro-gnosis, that is, pre-diction. What on earth is fore-choice? Could it mean pre-ference, choosing something over or before something else? That seemed insipid. Could it mean choice before choice? That seemed mysterious. We went off to attend to the lesser matters that take most of our time.

Not long after, Mr. John White, another colleague, gave a lecture in which he dwelled on this *pro* of *prohairesis* (*St. John's Review* XLII, 3, 1994). Let me give my interpretation of his interpretation of Aristotle's understanding of the human beginning, not in the sense of how human beings first began to be human but how they are in themselves beginnings. This interpretational episode is intended to be an example of our way. Our way is by listening to each other talk about books to get closer to the things themselves, and by becoming more and more familiar with them to make them stranger and more wonderful to ourselves.

*Pro-haeris*, then, has to do with human originality, with our ability to be origins or beginnings. Let me read you my version of Aristotle's whole sentence:

> Therefore fore-choice is either thought reaching out in desire or desire informed by thought, and the human being is that kind of beginning.

"Therefore" refers to what Aristotle had just said, that mere thought by itself moves no practical action, but only when it is for the sake of something. Productive work, too, he says, begins like that — with a purpose in mind. Therefore it is choice that makes human beings beginnings or origins.

The way it works is that every originating choice implies a "before" which decides an "after," or as Mr. White puts it: a present choice is "the past of a future." Mere desirous preference in the now is mere choice, *hairesis* simply. Little children and animals live in that now, that present-choice; they do seem to exercise choice but not fore-choice, for example, when they want to be picked up and then they want to get down. Simple *hairesis* is, Aristotle implies, the word to be used for a choice driven by desire without thought. *Prohairesis* then is choice made not on the cusp of desire. In fact Aristotle had already said quite a while earlier (1112 a 17) about fore-choice:

> Isn't it something pre-planned? For choice involves reason and thinking. It seems that the name signifies something chosen before other things.

He appears to be saying that to choose something *above* other things is to choose it *beforehand*. To make a proper choice, all the possibilities have to be calculated beforehand, and then you can place one above the others.

Calculation is an aspect of beforehandedness that intelligence and thinking make possible. But there is another aspect that is not, Aristotle holds, to be gotten from the mere intelligence of one's calculations and certainly not from the truth of one's principles. That aspect has to do with being set in the right direction to make good choices, and we call it *habit*. Mr. White points out that the Greek word for habit, *hexis*, comes from the future of the verb *echein*, to have or hold. So people who have good habits will hold themselves well when the moment comes. They have gotten into the habit from way back, and it is with them, always waiting and about to go to work. They're all set beforehand, and that condition too goes into the *pro* of *prohairesis*.

Let me now lay out an understanding of that pertinent but startling claim that a human being is a kind of *arche*, namely the kind in whom desire and thought have become inextricably entangled, so that it is impossible to say which modifies which. On the one hand, as immature human beings still close to our animal nature, we may exhibit *mere* choice, *hairesis*, reaching for the desire of the moment, imprisoned in the present by each passing preference. On the other hand, there is an incomplete mode of thinking, a *mere* thinking that possesses some of us, a kind of ratiocination running on dry, that gets nowhere and does nothing, and is disconnected from any human hunger. This kind of thinking is not, like appetite or desire, in the *now*, but rather in the *never*. How does hungry reaching become tamed and mere figuring get aimed? This fusion of thought and passion is attained way back, by having made, or better, by having been made to make many choices. Such choices were first rather thoughtless, perhaps mere thwartings of appetite under the constraints of parental guidance, but then, in time, desire and thought became all but fused, and choice turned into fore-choice. For that is how we acquire a habit. A habit grows by what we now call boot-strapping. It pulls itself up by its own handle, that is, it becomes what it is by just beginning with an instance of itself, but in time it grows deliberate and thoughtful. So that is Aristotle's broadest understanding of what it means to be good, or, in an older language, virtuous: "Virtue," he says, is the "fore-choice habit" (*he arete hexis proairetike*, 1106 b 36); virtue is the habit of making choices from thought-directed desire.

Human beings project themselves into time in a peculiarly human way, by being shaped in the past to be ready for the future. That is what habit helps us do and be. At the present moment we make choices that arise from that past shaping, which amounts to an integration of our hungers and our thoughts. Much past goes into that kind of choice, and so it is called, at least by Aristotle, fore-choice. Mr. White says, finally, that the *pro* of the *prohairesis* also looks backward on the deed that will follow the choice, even before it is done. We reflect on the consequences at the moment of narrowing our options and specifying our principles; we leap into the future before us and, while still in the present preceding action, look back on the implications of our principles. *That* is what Aristotle means when he says that a human being is an origin called choice: a being who at every present moment uses the past to shape the future. We might say: a being who is a matrix of controlled beginnings and hence a source of intended consequences.

If I stopped here I would have given an exposition but not an interpretation. Interpretations get personal. We have to figure out what a *text* means and then what *we* think. Moreover we have to try not to contradict ourselves in what we say to each other in public.

If I were simply to say "yes, indeed," and "surely so," to Aristotle, like some little boy in a Platonic dialogue, it would be because I omitted to ask him if this human *arche* who makes a difference in time is itself altogether in time and why, if thought itself moves nothing, it turns out at the climax of his thought in the majestic Book Lambda of his *Metaphysics* to move everything. And then all my questions about *arche* as a timeless beginning, and whether it is source or foundation, would be left dangling.

And again, if I were simply to say yea and amen to Aristotle, who has such faith in good habits, I would have to rely on your having forgotten how I began tonight. I began by saying that we hope you will acquire here the habit of having no habits. Of course, what I meant was that we hope you will break down quite a few of your own petrified opinions and derail your scheduled trains of thought. But when thinking cuts loose, conduct becomes more original. With thinking people you will never know what interesting thing they'll say in seminar or what imaginative thing they'll do outside of class. All you can bet on is that it will be worth listening to and that they will be worth being with.

So I'll express my personal reservations to Aristotle thus, knowing very well that he has more to say in other places: You seem to me to be very right in your emphasis on the human originating activity as rooted in time, in present choices being conditioned both by past practices and by forethought. What you say is sheer soundmindedness and sanity.

Thus *students* are beings who rejoice in a habitual obedience to seminar lists, class schedules, daily assignments, and paper deadlines. But students, really good students, seem to live double lives. They are also *learners*. Learners are beings who are subject to the sudden irruptions of unscheduled insights, to the habit-disrupting exhilaration of glimpsing sources, origins, beginnings out of time and beyond themselves, to those abrupt, kaleidoscopic shifts in which the familiar world rearranges itself to appear again and again for the first time. How, I ask, do such first times come about?

I end with a question because at this school a lecture is merely the incitement to a question period. And I will tell you one more thing: If the first question is asked by one of you freshmen attending question period for the first time, I have a neat little present in my office for you, which I will give you on Monday as a token of valor—this one first time.