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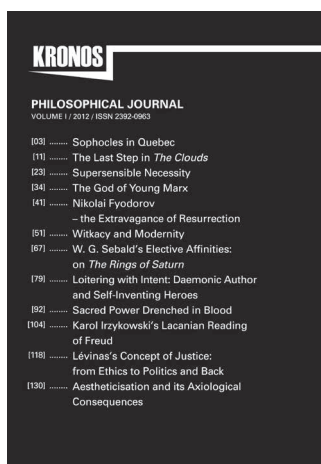
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Editor in Chief: Wawrzyniec Rymkiewicz

Deputy Editor in Chief: Piotr Nowak

Editorial Assistance: Irena Księżopolska, Krzysztof Rosiński, Andrzej Serafin

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redakcja@kronos.org.pl

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION



For the last fifty years philosophy of history has been pursued in Poland along the lines drawn out by the Warsaw School of the History of Ideas. Its adherents—historicist in their inclinations—believed that the philosophical questions which the Ancients put forward were relevant only inasmuch as they helped to understand the world of today. The Warsaw historians were not particularly interested in why thinkers of old time gave the answers which they did and not others—they took them as their own if they conformed with their modern sensibilities and self-awareness. What matters for

the historicist is the context which always determines the meaning of philosophical utterances: the question concerning truth was something entirely different for Pontius Pilate than it is for us, the Moderns. Time alters the meaning of philosophical concepts, redefines them, reshapes them without any apparent purpose or aim. Should anyone attempt to understand Plato, Dante or Machiavelli on their own terms—the way they understood themselves—his or her deliberations would run the risk of mutating into scientific fiction. It is impossible to reconstruct the historical context accurately and faithfully enough to be able to say that “Nautilus” has finally reached the shores of unadulterated truth about things past—no, truth is always a truth for us. Does that mean, however, that thoughts of ages past properly belong in a museum cabinet, or can they still exert influence? We can never know that beforehand. That is why we need to thoroughly examine the conditions—social and economic ones primarily—in which these thoughts evolved if we hope to distinguish their proper meaning from anachronistic sediment. Only thus rectified can thoughts of the past prove their usefulness for modernity. The Warsaw historians, infected by “the Hegelian virus,” assumed that every human thought, every truth, is a product of its own time and passes with it. But if this assumption is correct, we have to admit that there can be no transhistorical truth, no truth tout court, and that therefore the Warsaw historians themselves represent a short-lived phenomenon in the course of the human spirit’s development. We bid them farewell without any qualms.

The Classical thinkers—as Leo Strauss believed—did not claim that philosophy, and its truth, was limited to the time in which they happened to live and work. In Thucydides’ words, they wrote so that “their teaching would be the property of all future generations.” They wrote believing in the existence of transhistorical, eternal meanings which needed to be uncovered. For great thinkers always create “beyond time”—their ideas have their “roots,” but they do not have a history; they are not generated, they simply are. Strauss, however, did not reject history as

such; he knew how to use it in revealing ways. It is sometimes useful to take into account the historical context of philosophical statements—he stressed—but this approach can only have a supplementary function. As Thomas Pangle rightly observes in his study of Strauss: “In studying the rare cases of authorial minds from the past whose liberation appears to be complete, we need to learn to see the author’s historical environment exactly as he saw it and conveyed it to his alert and demanding readers.” Abandoning this methodological rule is harmful to historical investigations; it is tantamount to an arrogant belief that we understand Ancient thinkers better than they understood themselves—that we are more modern and therefore wiser than them. It is more challenging, however, to listen to the great thinkers of past ages without interpreters; to let them say what they wanted to say and not what we would like to hear. The esoteric method of constructing their philosophical texts—Strauss argued—points to the existence of transhistorical meaning which is passed on beyond and above time like the holy fire from the temple of Zeus. The careful reader’s obligation is to try and grasp this esoteric message and to understand the text the way its author intended it to be understood. This means that philosophical texts always conceal a meaning which should not be spoken out loud because it can be applied in destructive ways. Responsible philosophers will not only avoid putting themselves at risk but will make sure not to hurt others unintentionally. Nevertheless, conflict seems inevitable: by challenging general opinions, the philosopher provokes the polis. A given thinker’s greatness is always measured by his nonconformism; his thought is valuable only inasmuch as it exceeds its time and undermines contemporary convictions—only dead fish go with the flow. Thus philosophy turns out to be a discipline very harmful to the proper functioning of the polis: it erodes its foundations of common sense, gossip and half-truths. The polis, in its turn, threatens the philosopher by imposing its “notions” on him. In such circumstances the philosopher has to practice the art of elusion: he accepts the city’s “notions” only outwardly and writes in such a way as to deceive the many while getting his message across to the intelligent few. The purpose of this is noble, however; it is a “noble lie.” The philosopher protects the polis against the consequences of his wild and subversive thoughts. Writing “between the lines” allows the philosopher to resist the power of the polis and—conversely—safeguards the city against the power of philosophical truth which becomes diluted and difficult to grasp by the many. The philosopher thrives on truth; the polis needs illusions, veils, myths and poets, since no community—imperfect in its nature—can live up to the demands which philosophy make on its practitioners.

What then is philosophy’s attitude towards religious thought? Sergio Quinzio believed that no human community can survive long if it is cut off from religious “energy.” From this perspective, philosophy—impermeable to myth—is and has always been an alien element, an irreligious force in the ordinary man’s world. It constitutes a realm of freedom—freedom, above all, from moral and religious obligations—and as such is difficult to accept and potentially dangerous because it rejects all authority, including the authority of God. Such things, however, cannot be spoken of—the philosopher must learn to lie. As Strauss says: “The exoteric teaching was needed for protecting philosophy. It was the armor in which philosophy had to appear. It was needed for political reason. It was a form in which philosophy became visible to the political community. It was the political aspect of philosophy. It was ‘political’ philosophy.”

“Political philosophy” is the philosopher’s means of survival. Its main task is to convince the majority of citizens that philosophers are not atheists.

The third issue of the English edition of *Kronos* opens with a previously unpublished passage from Leo Strauss's lectures on Aristotle. I would like to thank Professor Nathan Tarcov, the director of The Leo Strauss Center, for giving us permission to publish it.

Piotr Nowak

Leo Strauss

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

[A course given in the Winter Quarter, 1965, in the Department of Political Science The University of Chicago, Lectures 10th and 11th]¹

LECTURE 10

LS: [Tape begins late]—prescientific or prephilosophic thought. Whereas in modern times, these concepts are inherited, and they are ready for use; used, therefore, and, which is more important, transformed, but no longer originally required. Which implies that if we wish to understand the modern concepts which came into being through the transformation of those concepts inherited from classical antiquity, we have to return first to the classical basis if we wish to understand the modern concepts. Classical political philosophy, we can also say, is related to political life directly, not through a nonpolitical medium, such as the tradition of political philosophy, or, as in our age, a nonpolitical political science. And the simple sign of that is that in classical political philosophy there are no technical terms to speak of. The terms are terms used in ordinary political life, in the marketplace,

¹ This transcription is a written record of essentially oral material, much of which developed spontaneously in the classroom, and none of which was prepared with publication in mind. The transcription is made available to a limited number of interested persons, with the understanding that no use will be made of it that is inconsistent with the private and partly informal origin of the material. Recipients are emphatically requested not to seek to increase the circulation of the transcription. This transcription has not been checked, seen, or passed on by the lecturer. The production and distribution of this transcription was subsidized by Relm Foundation, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Financial assistance was granted by Relm Foundation on application made in behalf of the recipients of the transcriptions. Relm Foundation is not responsible for any of the views expressed herein.

in senates, in cabinets, but not peculiarly scientific or academic terms. Whereas the opposite is true in modern times, and to some extent already in the Middle Ages. The classical political philosophers tried to understand political life as the citizen and the statesman understand it, with this difference, that they tried to look further ahead or afield than the practical men do. But not in a different perspective. They are not, as it were, standing outside and observing political life, the big fishes swallowing the small ones, but in the perspective in which they are seen in political life.

One can also say that the method of classical political philosophy is presented by political life itself. In all political life we find conflicts between individuals and groups, conflicting parties asserting opposed claims, ordinarily in the name of justice. Both sides use arguments in support of their claims. Not all these arguments are solid; but they supply nevertheless the starting-point for any proper understanding of what supports the claim of the opposed parties. The method is therefore to follow up and consider critically the arguments presented on both sides, and on this basis, reach an impartial decision. Because this is the primary form in which the political philosopher appears: as the arbiter, the impartial arbiter, between the groups opposing opposed claims. An arbiter who will give each side its due. So the political philosopher is, then, primarily the umpire *par excellence*, the underlying thought being, he is a good citizen, and the duty of the good citizen is to make civil strife cease and to create by persuasion agreement among the citizens. He must not be a partisan.

Now in order to understand more fully the phenomenon of the political philosopher in its original form, we have to understand the fact that as the umpire, the political philosopher is a citizen like every other citizen: he belongs to this or that city. As a rule, by birth: son of a citizen father and citizen mother. As such, he cannot fulfill his function in a city other than his own. His work is not transferable from his city to any other city. Yet one observes soon that while this work as such seems to be nontransferable, there are necessarily in political life some skills which are transferable. For example, a general may be lent to an allied city, in ancient times as well as in ours. Or someone may be banished from his city, like Themistocles was from Athens, and he may prove to be an excellent advisor to the enemy of Athens, the king of Persia. Or later on, Alcibiades, who also had to flee from Athens, and yet was the best advisor whom the Spartans could find: since he knew the weaknesses of Athens better than anyone else, he could become an excellent traitor to his fatherland.²

So there are skills which are transferable, and to the extent to which they are transferable, they are also teachable, in principle, like any other art. The teaching of the political arts developed first as that of one important part of the political art, which is the art of speaking. All political action, if it is reasonable, is based on deliberation. The

² Themistocles, an Athenian general and statesman, was the great hero of the Persian War who later fell out of favor and was exiled from Athens. He gained the confidence of the Persian king, who assigned to him several cities in Asia Minor; see Thucydides 1.135-138. Alcibiades was a prominent Athenian political figure who fled the city in 415 under suspicion of various religious offenses and generally of harboring subversive ambitions. He took refuge among the Spartans, whom he persuaded to establish a permanent fort at Decelea in Attica, to the detriment of the Athenian war effort. He later lost credit with the Spartans and eventually returned to Athens. His exploits are described in Thucydides, Books 5-8.

deliberation takes place by means of speech. In a democracy, surely, that means, of public speech. And the art of public speech proved to be susceptible of being taught by teachers of that art, of the art of rhetoric. And prior to classical political philosophy, we can say, political science as a transferable thing had emerged as the art of rhetoric. And at the end of his *Ethics*, Aristotle takes issue with those people who say the political art is simply the art of rhetoric—a view which according to Aristotle is very erroneous.³ But at any rate, this was a fact, and this is surely not an accident, that the part of the political skill which was originally raised to the level of a teachable art was the art of rhetoric.

Now this is insufficient, from the classical point of view. Deliberation deals in the first place with measures, as we would say—say, war and peace, and the other things—but also with things of a more permanent character. War or peace *now*, the question of the moment; the permanent things are the laws. Therefore, the more important, the broader object of deliberation is legislation. And that political science, in the original sense of the term, where it is identical with the political skill, the skill of the statesman, was raised to the level of a transferable teaching when it could become the teaching of the art of legislation, the highest political art; as Aristotle says, the architectonic art, related to all other arts as that of the architect to the carpenter and other artisans connected with building houses.⁴ As the net result, the political philosopher then comes to sight not simply as a legislator, but as a teacher of legislators. Every legislator has to do with the particular situation of this city, located here and there with these and these enemies, these and these resources, and so on. And he tries to do the best for that city. But he cannot do this without having implicitly notions of what is simply good for the city as such, notions which he adapts to this particular city, not necessarily being aware of the universal principles of preference implied in what he is doing here and now. The teacher of legislators, i.e., the teacher of men who are supposed to give laws or to elaborate codes for the most different cities, cannot possibly be bound by the requirements of this or that situation of this or that city. He must think primarily in universal terms. Now these are then the two figures, we can say, in which the political philosopher primarily appeared in Greece: the umpire par excellence, and the teacher of legislators. There is a connection between these two things. The umpire has to do with the settlement of controversies. Now *the* fundamental political controversy concerns, as we may provisionally say, the form of government: should it be a democracy, oligarchy, and so on. This is the fundamental controversy. And the settlement of this controversy is prior, it precedes legislation proper; for all laws are to be made with a view to the form of government. Inheritance, publicity of speech, whatever you have, depends on the form of government. Therefore, by being the teacher of legislators, the political philosopher is the umpire par excellence.

Now these two considerations of which I reminded you—the distinction between *physis* and *nomos*, and what is implied in Hegel's remark about the difference of study in ancient and modern times⁵—these two general considerations indicate the minimum conditions with which one must comply in order to have an access to classical political

³ *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.1181a14-15.

⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1-2.

⁵ See lecture 9.

philosophy. But this is only a minimum condition. In order to understand classical political philosophy, or in order to study it properly, we have to wonder where we should begin our study of classical political philosophy. My answer would be, with Aristotle's *Politics*. Not with Plato. For the writings of Plato, the *Republic* especially but the others too, are dialogues—not, as Aristotle's *Politics* is, a treatise. In the dialogues Plato never speaks. One could say, while Plato never speaks, Socrates speaks, and Socrates is Plato's mouthpiece. Yet this is not so simple, as is sufficiently indicated by the fact that Socrates was most famous for his irony. Never to speak oneself, and to have a spokesman who is famous for his irony: this is almost the same as if one were never to speak. More specifically, the word "irony" has undergone many changes in the course of the centuries, but in the primary meaning, or secondary meaning which for us is most important, it means to speak with a view to somebody, *ad hominem*, as the Latins say. So all remarks which, say, Socrates, or any other Platonic spokesman, makes are made with a view to the interlocutors: their situation, permanent or momentary, their character, their abilities, their social position. And in order to find out what Socrates would say about the same subject absolutely, not with a view to this or that type of man, one would have to translate the explicit statement into one which would be meant to be absolutely true. One would have to transform the relative statements into absolute statements, and this is not so easy to do. Whereas, in Aristotle, we hear Aristotle himself talking to us all the time. This difference between Aristotle and Plato is also the reason why it is not wise to begin one's study of classical political thought with the dramatic poets, who of course speak as little by themselves as Plato does. And it would be a great mistake to believe that the choruses present directly the view, say, of Sophocles. Even in the case of the historian Thucydides, the most important, broad statements are not made by Thucydides himself, but by his characters in his speeches. And then, again, the question arises, What did Thucydides think of the wisdom and understanding of the particular speaker?

So it is most prudent to begin the study of political thought with Aristotle. As for the so-called pre-Socratic philosophers, we have only fragments of them; and to interpret fragments, to understand them properly, is infinitely more difficult than to understand complete books.

Now, as for how to study Aristotle's *Politics* in a very external way, meaning which translation to use, I would think that the best translation available is that by Ernest Barker, in the Oxford edition, which is also available, I believe, in paperback.⁶ The translation is useful especially for this reason, that Barker gives in brackets explanations of the very terse statements which Aristotle makes and which, to begin with, would be wholly unintelligible. It is true that in this respect Aristotle becomes much more loquacious or talkative than he in fact is, and this peculiar charm that is characteristic of Aristotle is lost in that way. But you cannot have it both ways; and to begin with, one must be grateful for every help one can get. Barker has also written in this book a very useful introduction, in which he takes up an issue which is quite confusing and quite useless, namely the question of

⁶ *The Politics of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962). In what follows, all quotations from the *Politics* should be assumed to be from this volume, unless otherwise noted. Minor deviations from Barker's text have for the most part been preserved.

the so-called development of Aristotle's thought from his early time, when he was sitting at Plato's feet, until his old age, something which some philologists believed they could find out about; and Barker very wisely reaches the conclusion that it is impossible to say anything about that. Since you may be confronted with this issue of the development of Aristotle, it is quite good to read Barker's sober argument.

Let us then turn without any further ado to the beginning of Aristotle's *Politics*. And we will read at the beginning. Does everybody of you have the edition? Well, I will read.

Observation shows us, first, that every polis (or state) is a species of association, and, secondly, that all associations are instituted for the purpose of attaining some good—for all men do all their acts with a view to achieving something which is, in their view, a good. We may therefore hold that all associations aim at some good; and we may also hold that the particular association which is the most sovereign of all, the most authoritative of all, and includes all the others, will pursue this aim to the highest degree, and will thus be directed to the most sovereign, the most authoritative, of all goods. This most authoritative and inclusive association is the polis, as it is called, or the political association.⁷

Now Aristotle goes, as we see, immediately into the midst of things. The *Politics* naturally deals with the polis. Now the first question which arises, to which we have alluded before, is how to translate "*polis*." Barker follows the usual procedure by saying, "the polis, paren: or the state." But we have been reminded by Collingwood, in some passages which I read to you, that this is a grave question whether one can translate in this manner. Some people say today, in order to avoid the difficulty, "the city-state"—which doesn't make it better, because then we imply, of course, that we know what "the state" means, and there is a kind of state called the city-state—and believe they solve the question in this way.

Now let us look at a later political thinker and his definition of what Aristotle means, roughly, by the polis, and that is Thomas Hobbes. Let us see how he defines the polis.

This done—

I will not read what that is—

the multitude so united in one person, is called a commonwealth; in Latin, *civitas*.⁸

But "*civitas*" was the traditional translation into Latin of the Greek "*polis*." So "commonwealth" would be a tolerably good translation of "*polis*." Let us also see another translation of the term by Hobbes, which is somewhat closer to our concern, in the *Elements of Law*, Part 1, Chapter 19:

⁷ *Politics* 1,1252a1-7.

⁸ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), 119.

This union so made is that which men call nowadays—

he doesn't say, "a state"—

a body politic, or civil society, and the Greeks call it polis, that is to say, a city.⁹

So you see, even in the seventeenth century, the word "state" was not yet necessary, was not the most natural for a man like Hobbes to use. Hobbes translates "*polis*" by "city," which is the best translation of the word, and gives the equivalent in English of "a body politic or civil society." Now we shall, then, not hesitate to translate "*polis*" by "city." But we must be clear that this is only replacing one riddle by another; the riddle being the Greek word "*polis*," and then we replace it by the riddle in English, called the "city." For when we speak of city, we surely do not mean the polis. Think of the city of London, or the city *in* London, which has an entirely different connotation.

We have therefore to raise the question, What is the equivalent of "*polis*" in our world, in our language? Surely not "the state"; for when we speak of the state, we imply a distinction between the state and society. And the very beginning of the *Politics* which I read to you shows that this is excluded. When we speak of state and society, we do not say the state is the all-inclusive society and society is only a partial society. The simple and best equivalent in English to what the Greeks meant by the polis is the *country*. When you speak of the country—"The country is in danger," for example—you also don't make a distinction between state and society. You mean a single whole. The polis consists of the town and countryside; and so does the country, which consists of towns, cities, and countryside. "Country," we may say, is the equivalent of "*polis*" on the level of our everyday citizen's understanding. But this is not sufficient, because we are not simply thinking on that everyday level. I wonder whether the term "the country" is ever used in a scientific treatise within political science or sociology, although it will occur frequently in political speeches. This shows you the cleavage between prescientific understanding and scientific understanding, which is so characteristic of our age.

Now the passage which I read to you from the very beginning of the *Politics* shows that the polis is concerned with the most comprehensive good; whereas the other associations, the associations subordinate to the city, are concerned with subordinate, partial goods. Now the term which Aristotle uses for this comprehensive good is, in Greek, "*eudaimonia*," ordinarily translated into English by "happiness." Let us not go into this great question of how to translate "*eudaimonia*," let us simply use the word "happiness" for the time being—the complete human good.

The polis is concerned with the complete human good. Now, by happiness Aristotle understands, above all, virtuous activity. And of course, this means that you dispose of the conditions of virtuous activity. So if you are very sick, for example, and for this reason not able to act virtuously in every respect, this shows indirectly that health is a part of happiness. But of course, different people have different views of happiness, and even

⁹ T. Hobbes, *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*. (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 72.

the same people at different times of their lives. So one can assume, as men were more inclined to assume in modern times than in ancient times, that happiness is strictly subjective, and then of course it becomes impossible to define the end of the state in terms of happiness. Political society cannot be defined, then, as a society devoted to happiness. This is perhaps the best starting-point for understanding the peculiar obstacle which we have in understanding "*polis*." Yet when we look around and admit that there is an innumerable variety of notions of what happiness is, we can nevertheless hold that there is something in common despite this enormous variety, and that is certain *conditions* of happiness. Whatever you may understand by happiness, you need to be alive to pursue your happiness. Furthermore, you must have the possibility of circulation—you must be free; if you are chained or jailed, you are not likely to pursue your happiness, whatever you may understand by happiness. And thirdly, you must have the possibility of pursuing happiness, as you understand happiness. I refer to a formula known to you all from the Declaration of Independence: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. They are understood here in the Declaration as man's fundamental, natural rights. But one can also look at them from the other point of view, in no way contradicting, that they are the conditions for happiness, however happiness may be understood.

Here we have, then, this strange situation. Men are striving for happiness. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are only in the service of their enjoyment of happiness. Happiness is the end; life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are means, and therefore lower. But on the other hand, whereas happiness is wholly subjective—everyone understands something different by happiness—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are objective. Whatever you understand by happiness, you need life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Now men pursue happiness as each one understands happiness. This takes place partly in cooperation with others, and partly in competition with others. This cooperative, competitive activity, where each aims at his happiness, produces a kind of web, we can say, and this web is society, in contradistinction to the state. The state only is concerned with the conditions as specified before. Now in this understanding of the relation of state and society, there is a peculiar ambiguity. In one respect, the state is higher; it aims at something which all need, something of objective validity. But these are all only means, and therefore lower. The highest is no longer objective. In order to overcome this difficulty, this dualism where the order of rank between the two elements, state and society, is ambiguous, one must turn to something broader, of which state and society, as hitherto understood, are parts. And modern man succeeded in discovering such a thing, or in inventing it. And this matrix, of which state and society and some other things are parts, is exactly what is ordinarily understood by *culture*. When you speak of the culture of a tribe or a nation, or a city, it means this broader thing, this broader association, of which state and society are parts. I would say that the concept of culture, now so widely used, is the equivalent of "*polis*," on the level of theory, on the level of academic thought, as distinguished from citizen-thought, on which level the equivalent of "*polis*" is the country.

We would say, for example, that tragedy, dramatic poetry, belongs to culture—belongs to culture, but not to the state. Yet according to the classics, tragedy has a certain moral function, say the purification of certain passions; and the moral function is inseparable from the political function. Therefore tragedy belongs to the polis, as it in fact did in

Athens. Surely tragedy is not exhausted by that moral-political function; but to the extent to which it transcends it, it belongs to the sphere of wisdom, of wisdom which is no longer a part of the polis. So in other words, what we would call culture is from the classical point of view a composite consisting of the polis on the one hand and of wisdom on the other. And we learn from this, incidentally, that our concept of culture presupposes a much closer connection between polis and wisdom than the classics' did, that every polis, so to speak, has its peculiar wisdom—a thought which the classics implicitly rejected. Wisdom proper is universal, *de jure*; whether *de facto* is another question. Now by making this reflection (which could be enlarged) on the modern equivalents of “*polis*,” we do justice to the truth of historicism, namely, to the fact that radical changes have in fact occurred, so that the understanding of the most important and fundamental terms has changed. Now is there any point which you think needs some further clarification, or where you feel it could now be given? The last point which I made is perhaps most difficult to understand, that polis and wisdom are not only distinguishable, but have a fundamentally different character, insofar as the polis is always this or that polis, particular society, whereas wisdom is universal—*de jure*, as I said, if not necessarily *de facto*. Whereas our modern concept of culture implies an assimilation of these two things. Yes?

Student: But doesn't the fact that the Greeks regarded tragedy as having a moral function, which was in turn inseparable from a political function, imply that they regarded wisdom, at least in the form of poetry, as being more subordinate to political—?

LS: Yes, well, the word “wisdom” has many meanings. There is a practical wisdom which essentially belongs to practical, political life. I meant now “wisdom” in a severer and stricter sense, where it is theoretical wisdom, say, the understanding of man, in tragedy, for example.

Student: Well, the fact that tragedy and the tragic view has some theoretical wisdom in it, and yet the moral function of tragedy in Greece was inseparable from the political function [inaudible].

LS: The moral function belongs together with the political function. It is the purpose of the city to make the citizens good, and doers of noble deeds, as Aristotle says.¹⁰ That is inseparable. And Aristotle calls the whole teaching, which includes his *Ethics*, a kind of political investigation. That is not the point. I mean, the difficulty doesn't lie there. Well, let me start from another phenomenon which I have to touch upon later, without which one cannot understand this whole of classical <thought>. Our present-day thought, and already since some centuries, is based on a fundamentally different understanding of the relation between theoretical wisdom and ordinary human life than the classics had, and especially Aristotle had. And the change was effected by that great movement popularly called the Enlightenment, but which is much more than the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, which comprises already the seventeenth century. According to the Enlightenment,

¹⁰ Possibly a reference to *Politics* 3.1281a2-3.

wisdom can be spread, can be diffused among the whole population, and therefore the difference between the theoretically wise and the theoretically nonwise ceases to be very important. Does this thought make sense to you? The very notion of an Enlightenment of this kind is absent from classical thought; and therefore there is no simple harmony between philosophy and the polis, between wisdom and the polis. Wisdom is, according to its own intention, universal; the polis is necessarily particular. You see, what we have done in modern times is also shown by the following point. The word “culture,” which means only cultivation in itself—say, of the soil; but of course, men then speak also of the cultivation of the mind—was also used in former times in the singular: *cultura mentis*. But then in the nineteenth century people began to use the term “culture” in the plural—“cultures.” That is to say, cultures were now understood to be particular in the same way, or almost the same way, in which political societies are particular. Whereas according to the older notion there is only one culture of the mind or of the heart. This assimilation of the culture of the mind to political life is a modern phenomenon, which underlies our present use of the term “culture.” Today in the ordinary meaning, even in anthropology, culture has nothing whatever to do with any cultivation of the mind. When we speak of the culture of juvenile delinquents of a certain district, we do not think seriously of any cultivation of the mind. That is a still further step. But originally, in the nineteenth century, “culture,” even if used in the plural, meant high culture. Then it was applied to every, quote, “culture” of every tribe, and then finally of course also to every subdivision of any society, however small and deplorable.

Now let us first follow Aristotle’s argument. Aristotle goes on to prove that the polis is the highest and the most comprehensive association; and he tries to prove that by considering the most important among the other associations. These are the family or the household, and the village. At this point we take up his discussion.

Man, when perfected, is the best of animals; but if he be isolated from law and justice he is the worst of all. Injustice is all the graver when it is armed injustice; and man is furnished by nature with arms which are intended to serve the purpose of prudence and virtue, but which may be used in preference for opposite ends. That is why, if man is without virtue, he is the most unholy and savage being, and worse than all others in the indulgence of lust and gluttony. Justice belongs to the polis; for justice, which is the determination of what is just, is an ordering of the political association.¹¹

Now what has he in mind here? Let us first take another consideration. The polis comes into being out of natural associations, such as the household. Therefore it is itself natural. In a sense, it is even more natural than the preceding associations. Why? Because all the other associations are in a way imperfect. They do not fulfill all of man’s natural needs; being imperfect, they point to the city as its perfection. The end of a natural thing is most emphatically the nature of the thing. A simple example: if we want to know the nature of a horse, we look at a grown-up horse in a good state of health, etc., meaning

¹¹ *Politics* 1.1253a31-39.

that a colt, or a sick horse, is a defective horse. The nature of a thing is the thing in its perfection. The point with which Aristotle is here concerned is not only that the polis is natural, but above all that it is natural as *city*, namely, as essentially different from the household. Some other thinkers to whom Aristotle alludes, the most important of whom is Plato, had asserted there is only a quantitative difference between the household and the city.¹² Aristotle says, No, there is a qualitative, an essential difference, and that is to say, in other words, the polis is natural precisely in its character as polis and not merely as an overgrown household. The key implication of that is that if the polis is by nature—the thesis with which in a way the whole book begins—then the polis is not by convention. It is not by contract, to use the term used later on very frequently.

This being the case, that the polis is by nature, it follows that man is *by nature* the political animal. And why? Because what is the peculiarity of man? The thing characteristic of man, the specific difference of man? The fact that man possesses *logos*, speech or reason. And speech or reason is *the* reason why man is political. Aristotle says man is more political, more social, than all other social animals. *Logos*, speech or reason, socializes much more than anything else could. For without *logos* there would be only a sensual awareness, in particular, awareness of pleasure and pain. And this does not bind men together to the same degree as other kinds of awareness. Through *logos* we have awareness also of just and unjust. We can go a step further and say that the perfect union of two human individuals, of two individuals in general, is possible only in and through thought: if they think identically the same. Such an identity regarding feelings can never be known, even if they use the same words. If you take the simplest case, where they follow the same demonstration of the same theory, there can be no doubt that their thoughts are fully united—they think exactly the same.

The polis is natural to man also in another sense. As Aristotle explains more fully later on in Book 7, the city is what we would call a fairly small society: a society in which everyone knows, not everybody else (that would be a village), but in which everyone can know an acquaintance of everybody else, so that he can find out about that man, for example, if he is running for office, by direct knowledge. Also, the polis as Aristotle understands it is a society large enough to fulfill all man's essential natural needs, and small enough so that it is commensurate with the limitations of man's natural powers of knowing and of caring. In a way, we all know President Johnson and Vice President Humphrey; but in which way? From the TV. That is not knowledge in the sense in which you know someone with whom you have grown up, or who has grown up with your parents, and so on. In other words, one can say that a polis is a society small enough that it can be addressed by a speaker without the help of any artificial things. They can be assembled in body and addressed by him.

In the passage which I read to you, Aristotle makes it clear that man, to the extent to which he is not political, to which he is prepolitical or apolitical, not by accident, but incapable of living with others, is very bad. What Aristotle speaks about here reminds of what Hobbes says of the state of nature and what he expresses by saying that man is by nature, i.e., without social discipline, without being subject to laws, asocial. But what is

¹² *Politics* 1.1252a7ff.

the precise difference between Hobbes and Aristotle? That is of some importance. Now why is man such a nasty being, according to Hobbes? What makes him so nasty? What Hobbes calls pride, concern with being superior to others and with being recognized as superior by others. This is the reason why Hobbes regards him as asocial. Now Aristotle would reply, "But what you say proves men's asociality, proves men's *sociality*. A being who is radically dependent on the opinions of others is a radically social being." In other words, Hobbes has not thought deeply enough. He mistakes antisociality for asociality. But these antisocial people you see and hear a lot these days, are of course, in a very radical sense, social; they are so much concerned with being important, as they call it, and since they cannot become important by legal ways, they try to get it by illegal ways. But "important" means, of course, being looked up to by others, a radical sociality. Hobbes mistakes sociality for benevolence. But malevolence also is social; also antisocial. And a radically asocial being would not be in this sense malevolent.

Now the Aristotelian doctrine that man is by nature social became the traditional doctrine throughout the ages until it was attacked, especially by Hobbes, in the seventeenth century. And in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a running controversy between those who said that man is by nature social and those who denied it. The doctrines asserting men's natural sociality were at that time called the socialist doctrines, and the others the antisocialists. You see how much the meaning of these terms has changed. By the way, what is true of socialism applies, of course, in a way still more to individualism. For example, the Stoics are famous for their individualism; but in this sense they are of course socialists, because they too teach the natural sociality of man. This only in passing.

Now when Aristotle says that the polis is by nature, he means more than that the polis is not conventional. He excludes also the view that another kind of political association is by nature, at least to the same degree as the polis, and that is the *ethnos*, in Greek; we can translate it by "tribe" or "nation": a nonurban association of nomads, or tillers of the soil, or whatever have you. One can explain the exclusion of the *ethnos* in the following way. Man is born for civilization. "Civilization" is derivative from *civis* (citizen) and *civitas*; and there is also a Greek equivalent for that, [inaudible] to *polis*. Man is born for civilization; and in a tribal life, he cannot find that.

The proposition that the polis is natural means, furthermore, that the city is not sacred. When Homer and other poets speak of the city, say, of Troy, they call it the "sacred city"; Aristotle calls it natural. This is also an important consideration. It is confirmed by the fact that in Aristotle's discussion of the virtues in the *Ethics*, piety does not occur. Aristotle emphasizes in the *Politics* that the concern with divine things is a part of the concerns of the city—temples, sacrifices, and so on. But he indicates the ambiguous position of this concern by the following remark. In enumerating what the concerns of the city are—one, two, three, four, five, and so on—he says, at the fifth and at the first place, the concern with the divine things. In other words, from one point of view, this is of course the most important, the first place. But from another point of view, it is not. This is a hint which needs thinking through. The concern with the divine things is a part of the concerns of the city, but also it transcends the city, namely in the form of philosophy, which from Aristotle's point of view is of course the highest form of the concern with the divine things.

This view is, by the way, also confirmed by the *Republic*. The venerable old man Cephalus, the father, at the beginning goes out to sacrifice, whereas Socrates discusses the best political order with the younger men. One could find other examples. Surely this peculiar secularism must not be identified with the modern secularism, for the simple reason that Aristotle was not a man of the Enlightenment. But the situation is clearly enough indicated at the beginning of Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*, where a man, an interlocutor, has been reminded by Plato's *Republic* of the old Egyptian order, in which the place occupied in Plato's *Republic* by the philosophers is occupied by priests, and he is not aware of the difference, as Socrates or Plato were. The polis is definitely not a priestly order, although it necessarily includes priests.

Now the bulk of the first book of the *Politics* is devoted to the household as the most important part of the city, or to the management of the household. Management of the household is in Greek *oikonomia*, from which the English word "economics" is derived. In a way, Aristotle takes up the economic questions, but all within the context of the management of the household. The question of finance and any public economy is not taken up in any way.

[BREAK IN TAPE]

LS: —except that he defended slavery. Now that is true, he defended slavery; I shall speak of that immediately. But it is not sufficient to know only this fact, because then one doesn't know why he defended it and what are the conscious limitations of his defense. Well, Aristotle starts from the fact that slavery is a controversial thing. Some people say, to rule as a master over slaves is against nature; for it is merely by *nomos* that one man is a slave and the other a freeman, and by nature there is no difference. And since it is not by nature, it is unjust; it is merely an act of violence, nature is violated by that institution.

Aristotle states the problem in these very simple terms: Is slavery natural or conventional? If it is only conventional, it is, as matters stand, unjust. In order to answer this question, he must of course define what is a slave. The answer is, a possession, a piece of property, which is animate—not like a pot, or a hammer. But more specifically, an animate tool, not for the purpose of production of things, but for the purpose of life, or use, or action. Life is action or use, not production. Production is only in the service of life, but not life itself. In other words, slavery is not understood here as a tool of producing things in mines underground or in factory-like undertakings, but as a household slave, as a helper for man in his life. Aristotle asserts that slavery properly understood is natural. In order to show that, he starts from the fact that the whole of nature has a hierarchic character. Everywhere we find higher and lower; something which by nature rules, and something which by nature is ruled. The example nearest home is the difference between the mind, the soul, and the body. Desire, passions belong to the soul in contradistinction to the mind. And the mind is by nature the ruler of the desires and passions. And the soul in its turn is the ruler of the body. Also, the difference between the male and female, which is not limited to the human race, is a sign of the hierarchic character of nature, the male being the ruling part. The soul rules the body, Aristotle says, like a master does, i.e., as if the body were a slave, namely by sheer command, not by persuasion. We cannot talk to our

body as we can talk to our anger, for example. And therefore the mind rules the passions, politically, by persuasion.

Now the slave participates in speech sufficiently as to be able to listen to speech, but not to have *logos* within himself. This is Aristotle's definition. And such a man is therefore justly enslaved, and no violence is done to him; on the contrary, for him it is useful to be a slave, just as it is useful to his master to have him as a slave. Now what then is a natural slave? A man who can understand, in the way in which no brute animal can understand, and yet not sufficiently that he can guide his own life; he needs someone else to guide him. Take an example of someone who can understand the command, "Bring five logs into the house—one, two, three, four, five." He can do that, no dog could do that; but on the other hand, he couldn't take care for himself, because he might be wholly incapable of controlling his desire for alcoholic beverages, and for other things. The greatest presentation of what Aristotle understands by a natural slave, now from the less amiable side, is the presentation of Caliban in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, where, if you remember the situation, the thought that Caliban deserves to be controlled by Prospero, and at Prospero's command to be tricked by Ariel, and so on, is not a shocking suggestion. The question is, How great can the political relevance of this fact be? Aristotle thought it is very great. So slavery is therefore natural, if applied to people who are by nature slaves. If it is applied to people who are not by nature slaves, it is plainly injustice. So, for example, to enslave people merely because they have been taken as prisoners in war—this is unjust.

Now we will see later on that this is not the last word of Aristotle on the subject. Later on, in Books 7 and 8, where he describes the best commonwealth as he sees it, slavery is taken for granted; and he proposes there that the slaves be given the prospect of emancipation. Now this would be clearly impossible in the case of natural slaves, because they are by definition people who cannot be emancipated, because they cannot take care of themselves. Therefore, Aristotle must there assume that you will have also slaves who are only slaves by convention, i.e., who are unjustly slaves. How this can be reconciled with what we read in Book I, we must postpone.

Aristotle continues the discussion as follows.

It is clear from this explanation of what the slave is that the rule of a master and political rule are not the same,

as Plato among others seems to have considered it.

For the one, political rule, is rule over free men, the other is over slaves. And the rule within the household is monarchical, for every household is ruled by one man; while political rule is the rule over free and equals. The ruler is not called ruler with a view to the knowledge which he possesses—

as when we say a man is a physician with a view to the fact that he possesses the ability, skill, and knowledge of the physician—

but because he is such a one.

Meaning, because he is a master.

And the same applies also to freemen and slaves—

they are not freemen or slaves because of peculiar knowledge which they possess.¹³

Aristotle goes on to say that this does not mean that there is not a certain kind of knowledge which slaves, for example, must have. There was a man in Syracuse, he tells, who had a school for slaves, where they learned the kinds of things they had to do in the household; and it is also possible to say there is a kind of knowledge which the master needs, in order to give commands to the slaves. But Aristotle says this is not something grand, this kind of knowledge, and he who can afford it will have a bailiff who takes care of this kind of knowledge. And the masters themselves will need a political life or will seek for wisdom. Here you have the simple alternative: the truly human life is either political life or the life of quest for wisdom, “philosophy” in Greek. An alternative to which we shall have to come back more than once.

Now the next great theme, also belonging to economics, is that part which has to do not with human beings, in particular slaves, but with other kinds of property. And here the greatest question is the relation of moneymaking to management of the household. Aristotle asserts that they are two entirely different things. The distinction between moneymaking and management of the household is based on a distinction between the natural forms of property, of acquisition or possession, and those which are not natural. The natural ones are essentially limited by what a man and his family can reasonably use. The art of acquiring money is essentially unlimited, and therefore there is something wrong with it, that a finite being should seek for infinite money. And among the natural forms of acquisition, the most important is agriculture. Agriculture has a much higher status, according to Aristotle and according to Plato, than commerce, industry, and especially, which is the lowest, the lending of interest, which from Aristotle’s point of view is altogether unjust or immoral.

Now we do not have to go into the details of Aristotle’s economic teaching, his teaching regarding the natural and the unnatural forms of acquisition. Some of which points have a direct importance, and I will mention only one. The distinction which Marx makes, with particular clarity, between use-value and exchange-value is literally taken from Aristotle. Marx makes of course a very different use for it, and naturally, because for Marx the fundamental phenomenon in the sphere of economics is production, whereas this is not so in Aristotle. For Aristotle, the fundamental thing is the purpose of use, or if you look at the other side, the gifts of nature rather than that which exists by means of human production. Into this I cannot go. The main point which is so striking here as elsewhere is the orientation by what is natural and not natural. Without it one cannot understand anything of Aristotle’s teachings at any point. There is a natural way of earning a livelihood, and an unnatural. And the criterion is, for example, whether it is determined, whether it has limits, or whether it is unlimited. What is natural is necessarily limited, has a specific character. Nature means primarily the nature *of* a particular kind of things,

¹³ *Politics* 1.1255b16-22. This appears to be Strauss’s own translation.

whether they are men or dogs or horses; i.e., things distinguished from others, separate from the others, having a limit with a view to others. The unlimited is, from this point of view, not natural. After having gone through the economic question, of which the issue of slavery is a primary and in a way the most important part, Aristotle turns in the second book to a new subject.

We have learned in our way that the polis is natural. Its parts are natural; there is a natural slavery; there is a natural way of acquiring property. And now we turn to the polis. But in which sense? Book 2 begins as follows.

Since we have the intention to contemplate regarding the political association, which is the best of all, for those who can live to the highest degree as they would wish, we must consider also the other forms of government, which some of the cities use, those cities which are reputed to be well-administered, and if there should be any others, which have been said (pronounced) by some people, and which have the reputation of being good, so that we will see what is correct and useful in them and what is not.¹⁴

And so on. Now Aristotle turns, then, here to the question of the best form of government (I will leave it at this provisional translation of the Greek word “*politeia*”). But before he turns to this question, he looks to what we can learn from what others present us: first, cities which are reputed to be admirable; second, blueprints which are reputed to be admirable. You see, Aristotle proceeds in a strictly commonsensical way. He finds his bearings by reputation, assuming that reputation is never entirely unfounded, surely not in reasonably free societies, and therefore it is of some help. But the strange thing—for us it is strange—is that he treats the commonwealth, or the political orders, which exist in fact, say, Sparta, in the same way in which he treats, say, Plato’s *Republic*. In other words, whether this is an actual or a blueprinted order, does not make any difference for Aristotle. This is quite remarkable. The procedure is, incidentally, not historical; he begins the discussion of these various regimes with Plato’s proposals in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, then takes up the proposals by some earlier thinkers, and only then he turns to the actual orders which have a good reputation, such as Sparta. Characteristically, not Athens. Athens is, among the people whom Aristotle addresses, not reputed to be a good polity. Therefore, it is treated with silence. We will discuss this next time.

Now among the discussion of the second book, the criticism of Plato is of course most important, because Aristotle does here something which he did not do in Book I, namely, show that the household, the family, as we can also say, is necessary. He only showed that the polis is superior to, is essentially different from, and broader and more comprehensive than, the family. But he did consider the possibility that there might be a familyless, a householdless polis, which theoretically is possible—that is exactly what Plato does in the *Republic*.¹⁵ So in the criticism of Plato’s *Republic* he shows why the household, private property, and private family are necessary. And this is one very important

¹⁴ *Politics* 2. 1260b27-33. The translation appears to be Strauss’s.

¹⁵ *Republic* V.

point which Aristotle makes in Book 2. And the other is his discussion of the earliest political philosopher, as we can call him, Hippodamus, which you will also find there, and I think it would be helpful if you could have read it next Wednesday. That will facilitate the discussion. Now we have a minute or so left. Is there any point—Yes?

Student¹⁶: I'm not sure exactly why Aristotle thinks that moneymaking is unlimited ... [inaudible] ... energy and cleverness of a man, and conventionally, by the nature of the business, by laws—

LS: No, but a man has, say, acquired a hundred thousand dollars. There is nothing in the nature of the case, as far as the economic situation is concerned, that would speak against his making, if he can, a million dollars, a billion dollars, and so on and so on. But if you do not absolutize money, if you look at the whole context, and the whole context is human use, use of the property by the property owner, then you arrive at limits. Unless you can say, well, instead of accumulating money, he will go in for ever more luxury, he will have fifty yachts, and twenty country-houses, and whatever you do; but Aristotle would say, if you look at it again completely from the point of view of use, of good use, of virtuous use, which would exclude showing off, mere conspicuous consumption, as well as stinginess, of course—then you would see you cannot go beyond a certain point, that it is in itself limited. This is what he means. That you can accumulate as many houses, or pieces of land, or diamonds in the same way in which you can accumulate dollar bills, Aristotle knew (although he didn't know of paper money). But he thinks simply that money is a very great convenience, but it has the temptation in it to make us forget what it is for, that it is only a convenience. And this is a good example of what the ancients meant by mere convention. A mere convention is a convenience, but a convenience which somehow pretends to be independent, and therefore as it were runs away from us. Is this not clear? Mr. Levy?

Mr. Levy: For Hobbes, the prepolitical state is one of war. What was the prepolitical state or way of life of men, as Aristotle saw it? And also, why was the prepolitical state insufficient [inaudible]?

LS: Well, have you ever lived in a village?

Mr. Levy: Yes.

LS: Not Greenwich Village. (*Great laughter.*) Well, then you see there are certain things which you cannot easily get there. The chances that you would meet there someone with whom you can talk about the things which interest you are smaller than in a larger <society>. Your natural needs, the needs of your mind, cannot be so easily fulfilled. And you must not forget, of course, that any village in this country, and for that matter in Europe, is a part of a larger whole and therefore not—. Disregarding that entirely. Yes?

¹⁶ This speaker is erroneously identified in the transcript as Mr. Levy.

Mr. Levy: On the second point [inaudible] once you say, in Aristotle's own terms, forgetting about the present company, the many have [inaudible] because only *force* [inaudible]—

LS: Yes, well, as Aristotle says in the first book of the *Politics*, if we want to find out what is natural, we must look at the healthy, and in this sense normal, members of the species, and not at those who are in one way or another corrupt or deficient. That there are people who are perfectly happy without any cultivation of their mind is undeniable; but there is something wrong with them.

Mr. Levy: What you're saying is—

LS: We call them sometimes dumb, and other terms of this kind, which you doubtless know as well as I do. And we cannot take our bearings by them. We should not despise them, but we cannot take our bearings by them. And if they can be satisfied in a very dull community, that doesn't mean that we should be satisfied with that.

Mr. Levy: So what you're saying is that two students of political philosophy who lived in two different villages and wanted to go off and get married would make a city?

LS: Well, no Aristotle would say, if it is truly a village and not a part of a polis, then there will not be any students of philosophy.

Mr. Levy: Ah, well, where did the city come from? Who *knew* to make a city?

LS: How will it come about? Well, there are two ways of understanding that. That there is a kind of need, say common defense. I mean one of these crude needs which everyone can understand. And then some villages settle together, and out of this a polis comes into being, and then once the polis is there, there is at least the chance for the higher things to develop. As Aristotle puts it, the polis comes into being for the sake of life, i.e., of mere life, self-defense and so on, but it *is* for the sake of living *well*.¹⁷ Living well, not in the sense of what a glutton means by living well, but living nobly. Now, whether this settling together of the city presupposes men of the greatest stature, surpassing the greatest philosophers, the founders—that is a long question. Say a man like Theseus, the mythical founder of Athens. That is a long question. According to the popular view, of course, he was a hero, *hērōs*, and not merely a philosopher. Whether Aristotle would accept that is a long question.

Mr. Levy: You mention civil defense. Was there generally war going on in the prepolitical world, for Aristotle?

LS: I beg your pardon?

¹⁷ *Politics* 1.1252b29-30.

Mr. Levy: Was generally war going on in the world prepolitically, according to Aristotle? In the *prepolitical* world—

LS: I suppose both. There are peaceable and nonpeaceable people, and also communities. *Ça dépend*. There can be war, there will also be peace—that would not be the point. But people can defend themselves better by settling together and living together.

LECTURE 11

[no date]¹⁸

LS: Political life or political action is concerned with either preservation or change: the preservation of what is good, and change for the better. This implies some opinion of what is good or bad, and opinion as such points to knowledge. The complete knowledge of what is involved in political things would be the knowledge of what constitutes the good society. This is the full political good, the common good, and this was the concern of political philosophy as long as it was recognized. Now we are concerned today with the situation in which political philosophy has lost its plausibility, the belief in its possibility, although the general reasoning which I sketched now and again has still its former evidence. This is due in the first place to the power of what we call positivism, the view that the highest form of knowledge, nay, the only form of knowledge, is scientific knowledge, the view which we traced to August Comte, who coined the term “positive philosophy.” Now in Comte’s point of view, at the stage in which science is predominant there must be rule of the men of science, as a kind of spiritual power belonging to the modern world. We all know that this notion has lost all credibility, although it still lingers on in various places. For example, the Supreme Court makes decisions on the basis of pronouncements of social science; then we see something of this kind. It is nominally referred to as the problem of technocracy, which, as technocracy, is not democracy.

Now the key point concerning Comte’s doctrine of the three stages, theological, metaphysical, and positive, is this. In the earlier stages (theological and metaphysical), men were concerned primarily with the Why, with first causes and ultimate ends. But in scientific study it can be limited to the How. The difficulty here is that the theological and metaphysical questions, while being excluded by science, still remain: they remain questions. To avoid the difficulty one must declare that these questions are not only not answerable scientifically, but that they are meaningless. As a moment’s reflection shows, this fails, however.

This is not the immediate difficulty we have, for it is caused by a development long after Comte: the distinction between fact and value, that no value judgment as such can be a rational judgment. We must take this together with the rejection of metaphysics. The questions which concern men most deeply, the most important questions, are beyond the competence of science, and this leads necessarily to the flight from scientific reason—a triumph of science itself, about which you are aware, if not from books, at least from articles in the most sophisticated magazines. The key consideration, the only one which

¹⁸ It is clear this and the next lecture were confused at some point in the transcription phase. This should be printed as lecture no. 12, the one following as lecture no. 11.

I would like to repeat, because it goes to the root of the matter, is that according to the strict understanding of positivism, only scientific knowledge is genuine knowledge. This is in blatant contradiction to the fact that science, and especially positivistic science, rests on prescientific knowledge, or common-sense knowledge, and this common-sense knowledge can in no way be transformed into scientific knowledge, as can be shown by looking at the most interesting cases. Common-sense knowledge, which is the basis of scientific knowledge, is unaware of the distinction between facts and values. And here in the matrix of all social science, one finds no basis for this distinction which is now regarded by many as self-evident. But one can say this is of no importance to political philosophy, because common-sense knowledge, common sense, is variable historically. And so there was Greek common sense, Babylonian common sense, and so on. If there is no possibility of an invariable answer, an answer for all men at all times, then political philosophy is impossible; what should happen to it is another story, but it is no longer possible. Now this view, that there is no possibility of invariable answers, is called historicism. All thought rests ultimately upon absolute presuppositions, as Comte would put it, which differ from epoch to epoch, and which are not susceptible of rational criticism. As a consequence of the cooperation of positivism and historicism, political philosophy is today radically problematic. There is no longer any possibility of starting with the premises that existed, surely, up until about two generations ago. There is however some consolation, some kind of universal agreement, namely, as regards the possibility and the necessity of studying the history of political philosophy. Therefore we have no choice but to learn to replace, for the time being, as it were, political philosophy by its history.

The study of the history must be done properly, open-mindedly—namely, open-minded to the possibility of political philosophy, and not merely closed to it, as is the case in most approaches. We turn, therefore, to the study of the history of political philosophy. And here we observe that the primary issue is the quarrel of the ancients and moderns. Political philosophy emerged in Greece. Socrates appears to be the founder; and this led to the kind of political philosophy we call classical, which includes medieval, to the extent we can call it medieval political philosophy and not theology. The break with this tradition occurred in modern times, most vividly in Hobbes, but if you dig a little bit, you come across Machiavelli, a man who prepared the great changes effected by Hobbes. The theme of the history of political philosophy is to understand this fundamental difference between ancient and modern—the quarrel.

Now then, we discussed briefly the grounds on which Machiavelli, Hobbes, and their successors turned against practical political philosophy. And we discussed then the characteristics of classical political philosophy generally, and we turned then to Aristotle's *Politics* to acquire a more concrete understanding of what political philosophy originally meant. We observed that in Aristotle's *Politics* there is a twofold beginning: in the beginnings of Books 1 and 3. And this twofold beginning has substantial reasons. The *Politics* begins with the discussion of the polis, the city, and its relation to the household, or family. The family needs the polis; and, it is argued by Aristotle against Plato, the polis needs the family, the household. The subject in Book 3 is not the polis, but the *politeia*, a term which we translate by "regime." And we saw from the beginning of the third book that it is the *politeia*, the regime, and not the polis, which is the theme of Aristotle's *Politics*.

The difference between the discussion in Book I and that in Book 3 is simply stated, as follows: in the first book the parts of the city, the most comprehensive association, appear to be the smaller associations, among which the family is most important. But in Book 3, the parts of the city appear to be not any association, but the citizens. We will see immediately what this means.

The theme becomes the regime in contradistinction to the city. This Greek word, "*politeia*," is ordinarily translated by the term "constitution." I gave reasons why I think "regime" is a better translation. Now, what is the issue of the *politeia*? It is the political issue, meaning the divisive issue. That there should be families is not a political issue—only some crackpots suggest from time to time the abolition of the family. But the regime is always actually or potentially a political issue. Whether or not there should be a political association is not a political thought; but the regime necessarily is. When Lasswell defines the subject matter of political science as who gets what, when, one has to say, Yes, one can say that provisionally, but who gets what, when, depends on who has the power and to what degree or extent; and that is a question of the regime.¹⁹ Obviously, in a feudal monarchy, other people get what and when very differently from what they would get in a democracy. So the question of power, as it is ordinarily called, is more precisely stated as the question of the *form* of power—the question of the regime.

It is immediately intelligible today from the Cold War, with which we are all more or less familiar, that the issue is of course not this country and Russia, but the difference of regimes: liberal democracy and communism. I do not deny that between these two enormous territorial areas, one located in Eurasia and one located in this hemisphere, there might be all kinds of tensions even if they had the same regime. But as it is, the conflict as it actually exists is not understandable without taking into account the difference of regimes. The Cold War shows us directly that Aristotle's question regarding the regime is the question guiding present-day political life, and to some extent even academic political science. For an important part of that, as you know, is comparative government. But what is comparative government? Fundamentally, comparison of the various regimes—or, in another respect, a discussion of the "isms": the "isms" are the justifications of the various regimes. This is quite different from the situation of political science in the nineteenth century, where it could simply be said that the subject matter of political science is the state. Which is not in itself divisive. By virtue of the fact that civil wars played, and play, such a tremendous role in the twentieth century, whereas they played a much smaller role in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this explains again why we understand Aristotle and Aristotle's *Politics* in a peculiar light: because we are again in the grip of a radical political crisis.

It is a crisis which was not visible in the nineteenth century, for a variety of reasons, the most striking one being belief in progress, the certainty that the most desirable regime, that of maximum freedom and equality, was bound to win. That is no longer such a certainty, and therefore we have to dig somewhat more deeply. Russia, or for that matter, Upper Volta, is a theme for geography and history, or sociology; but the regimes of these countries are the themes of political science. So we see then that what Aristotle

¹⁹ See H. Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1936).

regards—and he more emphatically and clearly than any other political writers—as the theme of political science, the regime, is evidently still the theme for us. The fundamental problem is identical. But when one speaks of fundamental and invariable problems one must not assume that they are accessible equally to all times. There are times when the fundamental problems are covered over; perhaps these are the happiest times. But they are also, precisely because they are happy, an inducement to falling asleep. And therefore, to the extent to which we are theoretical men, men of science, we must not be concerned primarily with the happiness of the age in which we live, but rather with the opportunity or necessity it imposes upon itself to think about the fundamental issues.

Now we turn, then, to Aristotle's discussion of this key subject in the third book. We have read and discussed the very first lines of the third book—you have the Barker translation. In the first sentence of the third book, Aristotle makes it quite clear that we are interested in the polis only to the extent that we are interested in the *politeia*, the regime. Here there arises a question: because we are interested in the *politeia*, we must know what the polis is. Now what does Aristotle mean by raising this question again? He goes on as follows. —Is there anyone who could sit and read to the class these passages? Mr. Rankin, who does this excellently, isn't here. Is there anyone who has taken lessons in elocution? Well, then I will simply dictate. Mr. Bruell: sit down and bring your Barker with you. At the second sentence. To repeat, before we hear Mr. Bruell, the question is, Why must we be concerned with what the polis is? After all, we have heard it before.

Student:

“What is the nature of the polis?” In the first place, the nature of the polis, or city, is at present a disputed question—...

LS: No, wait. “...For now they are engaged in controversy. Some say the polis has done the actions, and others say, not the polis, but the oligarchy, or the tyrant.”²⁰ Is this intelligible? Think of what happened in Russia after the Communist revolution. The debts. Not the polis has done it, not the Russian people, but this clique. Who is speaking here? Who makes this argument? Obviously not an adherent of the tyrant, nor of the oligarchy. The speaker is a democrat. What does he imply? Democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny are of course examples of regimes. If there is no democracy, if the people do not rule, there is no polis. The polis has been destroyed for the time being. “Forms of government,” we say, which is tolerable as a phrase, but “regime” is clearer, I think you will see for certain reasons. There is a work of Alexander Pope:

Our forms of government let fools contest;
Whichever is best administered, is best.²¹

This much we can discern now: that is not Aristotelian. There are regimes which cannot be well-administered, because nothing would be improved if they were. If a tyrant

²⁰ *Politics* 3.1274b33-36.

²¹ A. Pope, *An Essay on Man* (Philadelphia: M'Carty and Davis, 1821), 40. Pope has “For forms,” not “Our forms.”

administers his tyranny well, that might be worse for his subjects than if he were very inefficient. Now what is the next argument he uses?

Student:

In the second place, all the activity of the statesman and the lawgiver is obviously concerned with the state—...

LS:

“...with the city. And the regime is some form of order operational”—let us say—“of the inhabitants of the city.”²²

That is the first definition we get. You see, it is an order of the inhabitants of the city. Of the inhabitants of the city: he doesn't say, “of the citizens.” Why? Because one depends already on the regime or he is not a citizen. And this precisely is the divisive issue: who is or is not a citizen. If there are various degrees of citizenship, full and not so full—this, of course, as we know from every daily newspaper, is today an issue, from what they say about the goings-on in Alabama and other places. The city consists on the one hand of households, and on the other of citizens. The formal issue is nondivisive, it is politically neutral, we can say; there is no difference between democrats and oligarchs or tyrants about the fact that there should be families. But the question of who is or is not a citizen is fundamentally controversial. The political par excellence—this one cannot emphasize strongly enough—is what is divisive. The reason is this. There is no city without some order, without a form. The inhabitants are the matter, to use Aristotelian language. The order gives the city its character. When we speak of the state, and forms of the state, we obscure that fact. The question then for Aristotle, as it appears immediately, is: Who is a citizen? Because we know this much, that who is or is not a citizen differs from regime to regime. Now Aristotle gives a definition of a citizen which is this: he is a citizen who participates in judging and in ruling. (“Ruling” means here “giving commands.”) But Aristotle says, this definition which suggests itself so naturally, so easily, applies primarily to the citizen in a democracy. But why does he come up first with the democratic definition of a citizen? I would say, this is not an accident, just as it is not an accident that political philosophy emerged in democratic Athens. Democracy, debate, public debate—there is some connection between that, as we all know, and political philosophy.

But still, the definition, being tailored to democracy, is for this reason too special. We need a generalized version. And then Aristotle says, a citizen is a man who participates in unlimited ruling (literally translated). What does he mean by that? There is no limit, in two respects. No limit regarding time—a citizen is a lifelong participant in ruling—and no limitation regarding subject matter. A general has his rule limited to war, a treasurer has rule limited to fiscal matters. But there is some man or body of men, as someone said later on, who must have unlimited rule. We will soon see the difference.

The rule is unlimited regarding time. The rule of the citizen is not on the basis of any election, as say a president may be—that is a kind of delegated rule. What Aristotle says

²² *Politics* 3.1274b36-38.

here must remind every one of you, I think, of a concept which has become very powerful in modern times. How would this be called, what Aristotle calls here unlimited rule, in modern times? We find, in the early definitions of rule in modern times, and especially in Hobbes, exactly this unlimitedness. The thing which is in common is this: there are always men who rule in their own right and not by delegation. Since they rule in their own right there is not necessarily any limitation regarding the [inaudible]. It is also implied there is no possibility of appeal from their decision to any higher authority. Now what is the difference between the modern doctrine of sovereignty and the Aristotelian doctrine? If you want to simply arrive at an answer which cannot be altogether wrong, you may read the classic statement in Hobbes, especially in *Leviathan*, Chapter 18. We would see then immediately that Hobbesian doctrine—the same is true also of [inaudible]—is a legal doctrine: what are the rights which the sovereign has?

Aristotle's doctrine can negatively be described as not being a legal doctrine, and this has grave implications. Let us turn to 1275b17-21.

Student:

But our definition of citizenship can be amended. We have to note that in constitutions other than the democratic, members of the assembly and the courts do not hold that office for an indeterminate period. They hold it for a limited term; and it is to persons with such a tenure (whether they be many or few) that the citizen's function of deliberating and judging (whether on all issues or only a few) is assigned in these constitutions.²³

LS: In other words, the specifically democratic institutions are the jury and the assembly. They would not exist in the same way in an oligarchy. And yet there is citizenship there, obviously: these men have perhaps *the* political power. There must be a definition of the citizen applicable to them as well as to the democratic citizen.

Student:

The nature of citizenship in general emerges clearly from these considerations; and our final definitions will accordingly be: (1) "he who enjoys the right of sharing in deliberative or judicial office attains thereby the status of a citizen of his state," and (2) "a polis, in its simplest terms, is a body of such persons adequate in number for achieving a self-sufficient existence."²⁴

LS: "Office" is of course a slightly misleading translation because the word is *archē*, which is simply "ruling, having the rule, having the initiative." "He who has the privilege to participate in deliberative and judging ruling"—meaning, giving commands. Obviously a judge gives commands; but the deliberator also gives commands, because deliberation necessarily issues, or should issue, in a decision—say, a law, declaration of war, or whatever

²³ *Politics* 3.1275b13-17. There is no indication in the transcript whether it is Strauss or the student who reads this passage. Here and in what follows, where the transcript is unclear, it will always be assumed that passages from the *Politics* are read out by the student.

²⁴ *Politics* 3.1275b17-21.

it may be—and this is a command, given to others. So in other words, in every society there are some men, more or less, from whom all power of commanding stems, and in such a way that their power is not a delegated power. The individual citizen may be elected to a magistracy, and that of course is a delegated power; but the power he has as member of a sovereign body is not a delegated power. The sovereign, as we say in modern language, cannot be called to account. So we know now what a citizen is: men who participate in three functions above all: the deliberative, which is the same as what we would call today decision making—it is quite interesting that it is not called decision making by Aristotle, but deliberation. When you speak of decision making you may forget that the decision is meant to be the outcome of deliberation. When you speak of deliberation, this danger is obviated. Mr. Levy?

Mr. Levy: Mr. Strauss, I'm sorry, but I don't see the difference between Aristotle's first definition, the one that belongs with democracy, and his second definition, the one that's supposed to be general. What would the difference be?

LS: Now let me see this wording, the precise wording. "To participate in judgment and in ruling."

Mr. Levy: Would that be from election, meaning "elected"?

LS: No, ruling is much larger—you must not forget that there are also what we now call executives, say, a general, and even down to a simple policeman. They also have the right of command. But in this case it is perfectly clear that these rights are all delegated powers. And what we are concerned with is the nondelegated powers, the original powers.

Mr. Levy: Wouldn't that rather be a right of electing?

LS: Electing magistrates? Sure, but Aristotle sees it concentrated, not in this elective power, but in the deliberative and judging power.

Mr. Levy: The word used for judging in the first definition—could that possibly be translated "electing" instead of "judging"?

LS: No. It could be stretched, but I don't think it means that. Later on he has long discussions about the order of rank between the various functions which the ruling body has. But the deliberative one; which includes the legislative, is always the most important. Yes?

Student: At the end of the second definition, he said, "the city is a body of such citizens, large enough to be self-sufficient." But according to the second definition, in a tyranny or an oligarchy you would only have one or a few citizens.

LS: Not only one or a few—that would be very extreme.

Student: Well, in a tyranny the only person who would rule in his own right would be the tyrant.

LS: Yes, but the question is whether that can be called a regime, and we will come to that later. The question would be the absolute monarchy, a subject so interesting Aristotle devotes to it the second part of Book 3. Aristotle proceeds step by step. He starts from what everyone knows from experience—in this case, in Athens, in a democracy. Then he sees that this is not sufficient, because there are regimes other than a democracy, and therefore this great enlargement is still not broad enough. In what sense you can speak of citizens in an absolute monarchy is difficult to say. You know, it was not so very long ago that in a great modern democracy called Great Britain there were no citizens, but subjects. It happened, I think in the last generation, that they became citizens. Now this was more a quaint antiquarianism of the British, I think, than anything of importance politically, but it indicates that for a long time there were no citizens. In an absolute monarchy there is no one who participates by his own right in judging and deliberating. If so, the king has appointed him.

Now let us read the next section, because this is a relatively theoretical level on which we speak, but we must never forget the simple level, of which he speaks immediately following.

Student:

For practical purposes—

LS: More literally, that is “*for use*”—

Student:

it is usual to define a citizen as “one born of citizen parents on both sides,” and not on the father’s or mother’s side only; but sometimes this requirement is carried still further back, to the length of two, three, or more stages of ancestry.

LS: So in other words, sometimes also the grandparents must have been citizens, and it can go on and on.

Student:

This popular and facile definition has induced some thinkers to raise the question, “How did the citizen of the third or fourth stage of ancestry himself come to be a citizen?” Gorgias of Leontini—perhaps partly from a sense of this difficulty and partly in irony—said, “As mortars are things which are made by the craftsmen who are mortar-makers, so Larissaeans are persons who are made by the ‘craftsmen’ who are Larissaeans-makers.”

LS: Perhaps he means here at the same time the magistrates of Larissa.

Student:

But the matter is really simple. If, in their day, they enjoyed constitutional rights in the sense of our own definition, they were certainly citizens.

LS: The main point is, if they participated in ruling and in judging, then they are citizens, regardless of whether their parents were. Yes?

Student:

It is obviously impossible to apply the requirement of descent from a citizen father or a citizen mother to those who were the first inhabitants or original founders of a state.²⁵

LS: Do you see the absurdity which follows from the political definition which Aristotle calls “political and crude”? Everything political is necessarily crude; and therefore Aristotle is compelled, in his deeper discussion, to go beyond that. But for the crude view, a citizen is a descendant of another citizen. Yet who is a citizen in an oligarchy differs from the citizen in a liberal democracy. For the notion of what it means to be a good citizen differs profoundly. The good citizen is relative to the regime. But this, Aristotle points out, does not change a fundamental nonrelativism. There is a kind of goodness which has no relativity to the regime, and that is the goodness of man as man. By a good man, thoughtful, unbiased people mean everywhere the same: a just man, a moderate man, brave, and the other virtues. And therefore the good man could possibly act as a standard, allowing us to distinguish between preferable and less preferable regimes. Aristotle does not go into this at this point. He only stresses this identity of the good man compared with the variability of the good citizen. And he gives us an inkling of a solution by saying that the good man and the good citizen coincide only in one case: namely, in the citizen of the best regime when he is exercising a ruling function. Because then all the virtues which he has in the highest form come into play when he is politically active.

After these remarks, Aristotle turns now to an explicit discussion of the various regimes. He has given us an indication of why the questions of regime are the most important questions, and he has always understood without any proof, because everyone knows it, that there is a variety of regimes. But now it becomes necessary for him to have a comprehensive notion of these varieties; after all, we must know how many and what kind these regimes are and how they differ from each other. Aristotle determines the variety of regimes on the basis of two considerations. First, what is the purpose of the city? And second, how many kinds of rule over men exist? The purpose of the city is necessary to consider, because otherwise we will have no criterion for distinguishing between good and bad regimes or between better and worse. That regime is better which is more in accordance with the purpose of the city; and this question of better and worse regimes leads, of course, eventually to the question of the best regime—as I believe I do not have to make clear.

²⁵ *Politics* 3.1275b22-34.

Now what are these purposes for which men live in civil society? There are three. First, man is by nature a political animal. This is here understood in a strict sense. Men love living together as such, independent of considerations of benefits, advantages. I think we can always check that to some extent; only in certain extreme situations would we wish to live in complete solitude and never to see another human being. Ordinarily we like human company. The second purpose is the common good. And the common good is to live nobly. Without proving it here, Aristotle assumes that living nobly is essentially living together. Living nobly means the practice of the virtues, and the practice of the virtues requires, not necessarily in all cases of all virtues, but generally speaking, living together. But there is also a third purpose which he mentions, and that is mere life; in a word, mere survival. This passage is of some interest to a broader question.

Student:

The good life is the chief end, both for the community as a whole and for each of us individually. But men also come together, and form and maintain political associations, merely for the sake of life; for perhaps there is some element of the good even in the simple act of living, so long as the evils of existence do not preponderate too heavily. It is an evident fact that most men cling hard enough to life to be willing to endure a good deal of suffering, which implies that life has in it a sort of healthy happiness and a natural sweetness.²⁶

LS: So that is very interesting—that people enter civil society for the sake of mere life, not for the good life. Does this remind you of the argument of another political philosopher?

Student: Rousseau.

LS: No—

Student: Hobbes.

LS: Yes, the teacher of self-preservation as best. (—You are quite right about Rousseau, but this is on a somewhat deeper level than I would like to go at this point.) So what a difference! What does Hobbes say about our clinging to life? Does he speak of a natural sweetness of life? No. The terror of death. That is so characteristic of Hobbes, that he never speaks of the natural sweetness which Achilles, for example, when he is in the nether-world, describes—he says, it is better to be a day-laborer and slave on earth than a king in Hades.²⁷ This is quite remarkable. To make this very clear: it is quite necessary for Hobbes to have this teaching. According to Hobbes, there is no *summum bonum*, no highest good, whereas Aristotle says, of course there is a highest good. But Hobbes teaches that, on the

²⁶ *Politics* 3.1278b23–30. “Sweetness”: Barker has “quality of pleasure”; the substitution suggests that Strauss may be reading.

²⁷ *Odyssey* 11.489–91.

other hand, there is a *summum malum*, a highest evil, a very paradoxical expression; of course, that is death. Here is one beautiful illustration of what happened—and don't think that it is only Hobbes, because what Locke teaches about pleasure and pain is in a milder form of expression (Locke being a much less nasty and naughty man than Hobbes was), but the same thing, fundamentally.

What was mentioned with Rousseau a moment ago is correct. It is one of the points where Rousseau returns in a way to the ancients against Hobbes and Locke—Rousseau's argument being that self-preservation would not have this fundamental importance if life itself did not have this natural sweetness. He does not use exactly the same words, but almost: he speaks of the sentiment of existence, which is simply pleasant, and which is the deepest thing in man.

But let us return to Aristotle. We have seen the three reasons, or grounds, why man enters society. Now we must consider, how many kinds of rule over men are there? Aristotle gives here three. The rule of the master over the slave, in Greek *despotikē*, from which “despot” is misderived. (Despotism and tyranny have totally different meanings, in the classical tradition, and the identification of tyranny and despotism which has taken place in the eighteenth century is a minor historical question. The despot means simply the rule of master over slave and, of course, if the man is a natural slave, there is nothing wrong with that, according to Aristotle.) Then there is economic rule—rule within the household, that is, which as rule over slaves is fundamentally in the interest of the master. I mean, that this poor fellow is prevented from mischief, from harming himself by his extreme stupidity, is accidental: the main point is, the master gets someone who shaves him and takes care of a few other things which are below his dignity. But the rule of a husband over his wife or a father over his children is primarily in the interests of the ruled. Then there is a third kind of rule, which is political rule, where there is ruling and being ruled in turn—clearly, the wife is not supposed to rule over the husband the next day. And even less so, the children, But in political rule there is such a thing, the assumption being that the political community is a community of free and equal men (there may be unfree and unequal ones outside). This is indeed for the benefit of the ruled; that is to say, if Vice President Johnson is still ruling, it is understood that he will rule for the benefit of the U.S. Of course, it is also understood that is for the benefit of President Johnson, because he is after all a citizen of the U.S. Aristotle has a nice comparison: if someone, a gymnastic trainer, who trains his pupils in the interest of the pupils, that they should become fit bodies, should himself join in the training by showing the motions which they make, his own body becomes fitter. Accidentally it is in the interest of the trainer; and in this case, of President Johnson. We can say that political rule is rule for the common good.

Now from these characterizations of rule it follows that despotic rule, the rule of master over slave, is always against the character of the political association. But the two others, economic rule (rule of the father) and political rule proper, are in themselves possibly good. The argument leads up to a simple schema which you must learn by heart if you do not know it. It is very simple, but it turns up again and again, and you need it to see how it is modified by other thinkers (*goes to board*).

There is the good and the bad—first distinction. The other is the number of rulers.

- One: The good ruler is *kingship*; the bad ruler is *tyranny*.
 Few: Good rule of few, *aristocracy*; bad rule of few, *oligarchy*.
 Many: Good rule of many, he calls *polity* (with the same word, "*politeia*," which is used for regime in general); the bad rule of many is *democracy*, according to Aristotle.

Nothing is here omitted. There are of course mixed forms. This division has been made by Plato in his *Statesman* before, though there is one difference, and that is that Plato does not make a distinction between a good and bad democracy. Because democracy is a weak regime, and therefore it cannot be too much bad and too much good either way.²⁸

But this is of course a merely external schema, and in itself not quite intelligible, because it is this kind of form. And Aristotle has proof for that, because he gives a long discussion which we cannot read now on the following consideration. By oligarchy is understood the rule of the rich, though it is not stated here. Similarly, by democracy everyone means the rule of the poor. No one denies that this is the most common problem, especially during the Peloponnesian War. But much beyond that, every city has two kinds of men—the most massively important distinction: the rich and the poor. Machiavelli says the same thing many years later, and even today we can still recognize it. "Poor," by the way, never means beggars, but people who have to earn their living, whereas the rich are people who do not have to work. I think we can even today make that distinction. So the practical standpoint is not this schema, although we need this to make sure lest anything has been forgotten. The practical standpoint is from the difference between democracy and oligarchy, the rule of the rich and the rule of the poor. Aristotle has a very amusing discussion, why should there not be a regime in which the few are poor and the many are rich? Theoretically possible, but not practical, to say the least.

But this much is clear: one form is defective, because wealth is not the most important consideration for rule, nor freedom, because a freeborn citizen may be very stupid and very wicked, just as a rich citizen may be very stupid and very wicked. So we wonder whether there is not a kind of mixture of the two which might be superior. Aristotle says there is. He first speaks of the *politeia*, the regime, in which all men able to serve as heavy-armed infantrymen are citizens. This means, of course, in a word, property qualifications. The arms of a light-armed soldier are much less expensive than heavy armor. Therefore, they are more or less substantial citizens. Now, you will see the way in which Aristotle argues this out. The principle is to be or have been a heavily-armed soldier. That is to say, not mere wealth, or mere freedom, but the patriotic view which sees that it is the same fatherland despite the changes in regime. From this it follows that he takes a patriotic view of the good citizen. A good citizen is the man who continues to serve his country despite all changes of regime. You know, in recent times there was some controversy in France, whether those magistrates who served under Vichy loyally, and then under de Gaulle, and so forth—whether they are not, after all is said and done, better citizens, better Frenchmen, than those who were loyal to one particular regime.²⁹

²⁸ *Statesman* 291c-292a, 302c-303b.

²⁹ Strauss is referring here and in the next paragraph to officials who served under the collaborationist government after the French defeat and occupation by Nazi Germany during World War II, and later the restored republic after liberation.

The democrats and oligarchs are those whom we call partisans; the patriots are not partisans, and the partisan is to that extent not a patriot, because he regards something as more important than the fatherland. The partisans are those who adhere to a particular regime, who say there is no polis if the right kind of regime is not established. Now people do not necessarily say, as in our case, “The city didn’t do it; the tyrant did it.” In our time, I believe the oligarchs would say, “The country is going to pieces.” Well, the country, if it is going to pieces, is no longer in existence, and its final disappearance will follow. This we call the partisan view. And clearly the partisans will call the patriots turncoats: because they served the Third Republic, they served Vichy, they were turncoats.

There was a man somehow connected with Athens, Theramenes, who did exactly this—whether from purity of heart or less pure motives is of course impossible to discern—but he was called a turncoat, whereas people who admired him said, No, he is the good citizen, he put a higher value on Athens, the permanent substance, than the superficial regime.³⁰ Do you see how important that issue is, and how it undercuts all other political discussions? And only in very happy times, when a regime is firmly established and there are no considerable clouds on the political horizon, does this question not arise.

We see it in the following manner. People like Xenophon—and especially Xenophon, who fought in the Peloponnesian War on the Spartan side, i.e., on the wrong side, against his father. In the early nineteenth century, when political historians influenced by the French Revolution went over these old facts, they thought what Xenophon had done was terrible. “He fought against his own country! Traitor.” This was the first time that Xenophon’s wreath was taken off his head—on this ground. If this historian, Niebuhr was his name, had lived a hundred fifty years he would have seen that there were people born in Germany who fought against Hitler’s German army, and we do not wish to say they were morally inferior people.³¹ Only in simple and quiet times do such questions not come up. Needless to say, that is legally insoluble, because every law will identify itself with some type of regime, but not all legally insoluble questions are for this reason nonexistent questions.

So the political question, as Aristotle presents it, is this: What makes a city the same city? What makes a country the same country? The patriots are wrong, and the partisans are wrong. The patriots say: there is always the same country. The partisans say: only if that regime we favor is established; the city is what makes the country. Aristotle says: since the regime is able to change from an oligarchy to a democracy, the city is a place by nature. But to judge one city by another city—this is the apparently paradoxical character of Aristotle’s teaching. Or you might say, Aristotle is very precise, and follows what is said in our common way of speaking, the sensible judgment. Let us now read further.

Student:

Still assuming a single population inhabiting a single territory, shall we say that the state retains its identity as long as the stock of its inhabitants remains

³⁰ Theramenes was a fifth-century Athenian politician who was involved in both the oligarchic coup of 411 and the regime of the Thirty Tyrants established under Spartan auspices after Athenian defeat in 404. In both cases he eventually clashed with the more extremist elements within the government, in the latter case fatally. The controversy surrounding his legacy is attested at Aristotle, *Constitution of the Athenians* 28.5.

³¹ See B. G. Niebuhr, *Lectures on Ancient History*, trans. L. Schmitz, vol. 2 (London: Walton and Maberly, 1852), 36.

the same (although the old members are always dying and new members are always being born)?... Or must we take a different view, and say that while the population remains the same, for the reason already mentioned, the city may none the less change?

If a polis is a form of association, and if this form of association is an association of citizens in a polity or constitution, it would seem to follow inevitably that when the constitution suffers a change in kind, and becomes a different constitution, the polis also will cease to be the same polis, and will change its identity. We may cite an analogy from the drama. We say that a chorus which appears at one time as a comic and at another as a tragic chorus is not continuously the same, but alters its identity—and this in spite of the fact that the members often remain the same. What is true of a chorus is also true of every other form of association, and of all other compounds generally. If the scheme of composition is different, the compound becomes a different compound. A harmony composed of the same notes will be a different harmony according as the “mode” is Dorian or Phrygian. If this is the case, it is obvious that the criterion to which we must chiefly look in determining the identity of the state is the criterion of the constitution.³²

LS: Now this seems a very strange example, but it makes everything quite clear. You have the chorus serving in a tragedy, and then the same chorus serving in a comedy. It is a different chorus, although they are the same individuals, because the principle of composition and the purpose for which they are composed differs radically. Aristotle says this helps in understanding what constitutes the unity of the city, above all. You see here, when you read especially the last sentence, Aristotle does not deny the continuity which we imply when we speak of the history of the British constitution from the time of Alfred the Great up to Elizabeth II. But, he says, it is the continuity of the *matter*—the English people generate other Englishmen. Furthermore, he does not say the sameness of the city depends only on the regime. That would be plainly absurd, because if this were so, then all democracies would be a single regime; there wouldn't be *n* democracies. Through change of regimes, the city becomes another city. Not simply; it also depends on some other things—for example, if all moved out and went to a new land, it would also be another city. But through change of regimes the city becomes another city in the most important respect, for it becomes a different regime regarding its end, the purpose to which it is dedicated. That is the most important consideration. No change is as important as the change from virtue to vice, or the reverse. What change can be compared to that in significance? It is of course not a different city in every respect—for example, not regarding treaty obligations, the difference with which he started. Aristotle does not give the answer explicitly here, but it is obvious, for the very same reason that Aristotle was the same man. Since the tyrant made the obligation for the benefit of the city—after all, he might say, “I want to adorn my capital, and the citizens like these beautiful streets and buildings.” But if he incurred the debts in

³² *Politics* 3.1276a34-b11.

order to maintain a bodyguard which maltreated the citizens, then of course: “Let these foreign bastards who gave him the money see how they can get it.”

Now we in our discussions today come across this question in a very simple thing: that is the question of loyalty. What does loyalty mean? “To the United States” is not enough. A Communist could say: “I am loyal to the people of the United States; I want the best for them, and for this reason, I wish to abolish the liberal democracy.” Loyalty simply is loyalty to the established regime, as characterized by the established regime. This question is illustrated in another manner by the question of citizenship. If we consider again the regime in which all men able to serve as heavy-armed infantrymen are citizens, it follows that the consideration of virtue comes in. But military virtue, that of the citizen soldier, while highly respectable, is not the complete virtue; and therefore we can visualize a still higher regime between democracy and oligarchy, having the advantages of both but avoiding their disadvantages. And that is the rule of the virtuous men simply; and this is aristocracy. So this is more, quote, “realistic,” unquote, at least as revealing Aristotle’s intention, than the other one.

This—that the mean, the middle, is higher than the extreme—is characteristic of the *Ethics* also. From a simple point of view, from our modern point of view, one doesn’t see why what is in the middle should be higher than the extremes. The reason being that the mean is not merely the arithmetic average; but it has a different principle than the extremes, the principle of moderation, for example. Aristotle also says, without contradicting himself (and this had an effect of sorts in the last election), that the mean of any virtue compared to the two opposing vices is in a sense also an extreme—especially (*goes to board*) because it stands out. Virtue is an excellence; compared with the average, it is an extreme. This landed somehow in the acceptance speech of Senator Goldwater and gave people who didn’t know Aristotle an occasion to be surprised.³³ Yes?

Student: In what sense is the aristocracy unlike the oligarchy?

LS: Because it avoids the mere principle of wealth and the mere principle of freedom. In other words, they must be between the two, while not deprived of either. But their title derives ultimately not from that great wealth on which the oligarchy relies, but from being a model for activity.

Student: In other words, the very fact that virtue is held to be an extreme seems to make aristocracy *more* than simply *in deed*, because it would be in deed only to the extent that virtue is dependent upon having to be upheld.

LS: But the point is this—and Aristotle does not make this in vain: you cannot understand virtue unless you see that it is essentially opposed to two extremes. For example, take the simple case of liberality. If you understand liberality as a virtue, only in opposition

³³ A reference to the notorious line in Barry Goldwater’s speech at the Republican convention in July 1964, “extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice (...) moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.” It may be noted that an older student of Strauss, Harry V. Jaffa, is commonly credited with inserting this line (adapted from Cicero) into Goldwater’s speech.

to profligacy, you do not understand it. You must also see it in relation to, in opposition to, extreme stinginess. I mean, proceeding empirically, you see that. You say, “a liberal man, a free spender.” But is all free spending virtuous? Then you see some cases of wholly irresponsible playboys, and you say, “No, there is also something in the middle.” But the deeper reason why it is in the middle is not merely a statistical average, but because it has a higher principle than the principle of reasonableness, a consideration which is absent from the extremes. Yes, Mr. Wyatt?

Mr. Wyatt: In the other cases, the extremes are in some way intentional. Here it doesn’t seem in any way that they are, or that aristocracy, while it may be a mean between extremes, is in any way at all a derivative from good influence. Whereas in the case of liberality the beginning is—

LS: Well, you see, the discussion hitherto is of course provisional and not concrete enough. Look at it this way. What is virtue as Aristotle understands it, especially in the political context? Moral virtue as it is described in the *Ethics* requires equipment—*ektos* in Greek. Now what does this mean in plain English? You must have some money. For example, how can your liberality be visible if you do not have something to spare? You see, Aristotle is in this respect quite tough. He knows that among very poor people there can also be the virtues. But they are immanifest, they don’t strike you. As an example of a liberal man, you would not, unless you are a kind of sophisticated novelist, give an example of two inmates of Skid Row. Aristotle does not doubt there is liberality also in Skid Row, but we would not seek our examples there, just as we would not seek our examples of martial prowess in homes for people older than ninety. So there is a certain equipment needed, and therefore aristocracy requires some wealth. And similarly he must be a free man, because he wouldn’t have a ghost of a chance to be recognized as a ruler if he were a slave or even a freedman.

Student: Is there something besides the mere fact that they are prerequisites, I mean, is there any common characteristic that makes—?

LS: No, only this, that the matter with which they deal enters into the higher levels, the matter of wealth and the other, of freedom. In the lower cases, the matter is not transfigured, from a higher point of view, and they remain therefore in simple opposition. Here are the merely free men; here are those who are, in addition, also rich. And both considerations are not sufficient. What the so-called realistic men try to do is, of course, to get rid of virtue. The word “virtue” has become so ridiculous that it is a kind of snobbery, I believe, to use it, at least in certain circles. But why not forget about it and speak only of the rich and the poor, or, with Mr. Lasswell, who gets what and when? The trouble is that even if you want to be completely down to earth, you have to bring in, in a strictly subservient fashion, the virtues. I mean, however down to earth you may be, you would prefer in a pinch to be judged by a just jury, by a just judge; and you would like to have civil servants perfectly immune to bribes on the part of these “goof-pill sellers”—is this the proper expression? (*laughter*)—and you know that. Even Lasswell has to bring in such

concepts as integrity, and other considerations. That the virtues are needed in a subservient, instrumental fashion if society is not to go to pieces is not too difficult to prove, and I believe it would be readily admitted.

The key question, then is this: Can virtue be understood as merely instrumental? That is the decisive issue on the theoretical plane. If virtue is only a means for the well-being of civil society, then the benefit of civil society alone determines the use or nonuse of virtue. That was Machiavelli's doctrine: you are virtuous when it is good for your community, but if not—when it is bad—then you are vicious. More nobly expressed, as these considerations once were: Is there not a difference between a gang of robbers and civil society? Because you know there is also a certain morality in a gang of robbers. They would not last for one day if there were not a certain trust that each will get his share and that if you have a contract (as I believe they call it) that someone will be transported to a safe place until the whole thing has blown over, and other niceties, it will be kept. What Augustine means, of course, by saying that civil society differs from a gang of robbers is that it is more consistent in trying to be virtuous than a gang of robbers, who take very narrow views of the virtue which they demand.³⁴ But above all, that virtue must be not merely instrumental but the purpose of civil society—this is Aristotle's view. But there is nothing wrong in starting from the lowest view and simply saying, "Dog eats dog, the rich eat poor and vice versa, and let us see where we come from there. There is only group politics; no one cares for the common good, the common good is simply the outcome of power relations between the various groups." But you will only be able to account for a limited range of phenomena.

In this respect, the same difficulties come out with the simplest view of citizenship, as defined by birth from citizen parents, and grandparents, and so on. Carried far enough, it would follow that the first citizens, the founding fathers, were not citizens. This is the most absurd thing to imagine—that the parents of George Washington were not American citizens. But when Aristotle points to this, he uses the opportunity to make something else clear. The joke of Gorgias, the famous teacher of rhetoric, he says, is this: that "Larissa-makers" means in the first place the people who generate citizens, parents. But it has also a double meaning, because in the case of naturalization, for example, there the Larissa-makers are magistrates who naturalize the citizens. So whereas in the first place citizenship seems to be something entirely natural, as natural as generation—being generated by a human father and a human mother—in the second place we see it can be something entirely dependent on law, entirely conventional. That this view is in a sense more true becomes clear if we reflect about the fact, pointed out by Aristotle, that who is or is not a citizen depends not on nature simply but on the regime. This throws some light on the character of the city: the city is by nature, yet not simply; and this follows clearly from the fact that every city must have a form, a regime, and the variety of regimes leads him to the question, Which of these regimes, if any, can be said to be natural? In the extreme case, if no regime can be said to be simply natural, then the city is as much conventional as it is natural. But there may be the possibility that there is a single regime,

³⁴ The reference appears to be to Augustine's *City of God*, 4, 4ff.

the only one according to nature, which would mean that the others are not natural, that they are forms of political sickness.

Now hitherto we have seen that the regime is a form of the polis. All things have their forms, their shape, their characters—horses, dogs, oak trees, and so on. When they lose their form, they cease to be. If you have ever seen a living being in a state of advanced decay, say, a rabbit, you will know what I mean. Furthermore, these forms are not changeable. A horse cannot take on the character of a dog, except in Arabian tales. But here we come to another consideration. The same city can have successively different regimes—in other words, a kind of miracle, that something which has been a cat becomes a dog. These changes of regimes are now popularly called *revolutions*. The question is, how deep do these changes go? Let us remind ourselves of the thesis of the democrats, whom we have heard. “Not the polis did it, but the tyrant; while the tyrant ruled, there was no polis.” The houses were there; the matter was there, the human beings; but there was not a polis, a commonwealth. But when we speak today of English constitutional history, for instance, we imply that there always was England. The same substance remained, despite the changes it underwent. It was feudal, absolute monarchy, constitutional monarchy, with a kind of oligarchy, and then democracy. But the same England, the same substance, remained despite the changes. The same land, the same fatherland—one needs to spell that out. And that you still need a government instead of a computer to do that is quite interesting, and seems to have something to do with the fact that man is still in a sense understood to be a rational animal.

The key point regarding the number of rulers: there is the rule of one, of few, and of many. There is not any rule of all. That has extraordinary implications. There is always the rule of a part, or of a combination of parts. Such a combination is, this kind of rich may go together with that kind of poor—you can easily figure out for yourself. The rule of a combination of parts would be a mixed regime. Aristotle has referred to this already in the second book, when speaking of Sparta and other things. This question of the mixed regime became historically relevant for the United States, as you see from *Federalist* 10.

What I wish to discuss next time is this question: Can we learn anything from Aristotle’s schema for the variety of regimes, toward the understanding of modern democracy? That we can learn something in general, namely that the concern of *regime*, and not the very vague word “power,” is that which is a peculiarly political phenomenon—this I think I have shown. Because power—there is electrical power, there is the power of the chief rooster in the yard, there is that of a nasty husband over his wife, and vice versa—these are all wholly uninteresting politically. The peculiar thing is the regime. This is obviously sound, and very topical. But if we turn to our more immediate task, that is connected with the question of democracy. So the point which I would like to take up next time is: Can we learn from Aristotle something about a democracy?

Transcription and annotation Catherine H. Zuckert

Thomas L. Pangle

XENOPHON ON WHETHER SOCRATIC POLITICAL THEORIZING CORRUPTS THE YOUNG

*What is implied, about Socratic political theorizing, by the Athenian democracy's execution of Socrates as a corrupter of the young? Is Socratic political theory "tragically," because necessarily, "criminal" in this regard, as Hegel insisted? Most attempts at answers have focused on Plato's Socrates and especially Plato's *Apology*. But Plato has Socrates subordinate his response to the charge of corruption to a defense against the other charge, of impiety. Not so Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. I follow in the tracks of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Shaftesbury, who, while disagreeing in much, agree that Xenophon, interpreted as subtly comic, is the more enlightening source of evidence for the content of Socratic political theorizing and in particular for the question of that theorizing's "corrupting" effects on the young. Yet in these thinkers the needed exegesis of the text of Xenophon is not provided—as it is here.*

What, if any, substance is there to the charge that Socrates, and by implication Socratic political theorizing more generally, "corrupts the young"? Was the Athenian democracy's execution of Socrates, as guilty of this crime, in any way justified?

Attempts to answer these questions have tended to focus on Plato's *Apology of Socrates*. But it can be doubted whether Plato's presentation of what purports to be Socrates' defense speech at the trial deals adequately, or in a fully informative way, with the corruption charge (as distinguished from the impiety charge). Plato has Socrates

interweave his defense against the corruption charge with his defense against the impiety charge, subordinating the former to the latter. Plato's *Apology* makes no mention of Socrates' relations with and his influence upon the youths who were to become the notorious political leaders Alcibiades and Critias. Plato's Socrates does not address the question of his posture, in his teaching, as a political theorist, toward the democratic regime of Athens, or towards republicanism in general.

In contrast, Xenophon's defense of Socrates, in the *Memorabilia*, sharply distinguishes the charge of corruption from the charge of impiety, and devotes the greatest space to a separate rebuttal of the former, with elaborate explanations of Socrates' relations with Alcibiades and Critias, and with explicit consideration of Socrates' doctrinal posture toward Athenian democracy.

Yet Xenophon's Socratic writings were in the Twentieth Century largely ignored or dismissed by political theorists—as exhibiting a rather conventionally moralistic and pious outlook, and therefore as an unreliable conduit for the serious dimensions of Socrates' political theory. This gross underestimation (in my judgment) has gone along with and been partly caused by a gross failure to appreciate the subtle irony and even comedy that pervades Xenophon's writing—peeking out from behind the apparently earnest, reverentially pious surface with which Xenophon has chosen to veil his impishly radical Socratic thinking.

Hegel emphatically goes counter to the twentieth century underestimation and misreading of Xenophon. In order to understand the “world-historical” achievement and significance of Socratic political theory, Hegel insists, we must interpret Socrates more through Xenophon's Socratic writings than through Plato's.¹ But Hegel adds that both Xenophon's and Plato's presentations of Socrates need to be interpreted also in light of Aristophanes' comically accusatory portrait in *The Clouds* (and vice versa). Then we see more clearly that, and why, Socrates is necessarily and tragically “criminal” (*Verbrechen*) inasmuch as he founds “morality” (*Moralität*) in opposition to “lawful custom” (*Sittlichkeit*). Read conjointly with Plato and Xenophon, we see that the “exaggeration” which may be ascribed to Aristophanes is that he drives Socratic “dialectic to its bitter end”; but “it cannot be said that injustice is done to Socrates by this representation.” Indeed, “we must admire the depth of Aristophanes in having recognized the dialectic side in Socrates as being a negative; and—though after his own way—in having presented it so forcibly.”²

The need to interpret Xenophon's writings in light of and even as belonging to Greek comedy was underlined earlier, by the greatest Socratic thinker of the Enlightenment,

¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 2, ed. K. L. Michelet in *Werke*, vol. 18, ed. Marheineke et al (Berlin: Duncker, 1833), 42-122; G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-26*, trans. R. F. Brown and J. M. Stewart, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), 149 n. 71; and G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 2, trans. E. S. Haldane (London: Kegan Paul, 1892), 384-447, in particular 414: “in regard to the personality and method, the externals of his teaching, we may certainly receive from Plato a satisfactory, and perhaps a more complete representation of what Socrates was. But in regard to the content of his teaching and the point reached by him in the development of thought, we have in the main to look to Xenophon.” See also 450.

² G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977 [1807]), 470, 473, 475, 477-80; G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 426-30; Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, 85-89; Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-26*, 153, 154; P. R. Harrison, *The Disenchantment of Reason: The Problem of Socrates in Modernity* (Albany: SUNY, 1994), chap. 1.

Shaftesbury (1.167).³ He linked Xenophon to the New Comedy of the Greeks rather than the Old, describing Xenophon as the “philosophical Menander of earlier time”—“comprehended by so few and so little relished by the vulgar.”

Still more helpful is the characterization of Xenophon found in the aphorism “*Socrates*” in Nietzsche’s most humane and sober, least shattering and visionary, work: *The Wanderer and His Shadow*. There (no. 86) Nietzsche declares that in “the Memorabilia of Socrates” we find “the simplest and least perishable of mediator-sages,” to whom “the pathways of the most diverse philosophic ways of life lead back” inasmuch as they are “at bottom directed to joy in living, and in one’s own self.” Xenophon’s Socrates, in contrast to “the founder of Christianity,” possesses “the gay form of seriousness” and “that *wisdom full of roguish trickery*”⁴ which “express the best condition of soul of the human being.”

Nietzsche’s stress on the Xenophontic Socrates’ “roguish trickery” is particularly helpful for today’s readers. Nietzsche lifts the cloak of boy-scout-like earnestness with which Xenophon envelops his, and his Socrates’, radically free spirits. It is to understand better that free-spirited political theorizing, in its possible danger as corrupting, that we undertake here a close textual analysis of Xenophon’s defense of his teacher against the charge of corrupting the young.

SOCRATES’ SELF-RESTRAINT PROVES THAT HE WAS NOT A CORRUPTER

Xenophon launches his rebuttal of the charge that Socrates corrupted the young by proceeding, with a straight face, on the assumption that the indictment aimed to charge Socrates as being, and as encouraging the young to be, lascivious, or gluttonous, or bibulous, or flabby and soft, or a luxurious spendthrift who flaunts fancy clothes and footwear. Xenophon is then able to protest the preposterousness of such an accusation, given the barefoot Socrates’ well-known, austere self-restraint as regards carnal and monetary matters (see esp. Aristophanes’ *Clouds*). “How then,” our advocate expostulates, “could such a man corrupt the young?!—Unless, of course, the caring for virtue is corruption!” (1.2.8)⁵

These last words contain a subtly comical-paradoxical formulation of the seriously intended meaning of the indictment. This becomes more evident if we recall what Xenophon spotlighted earlier but now keeps offstage. Socrates’ peculiar and unprecedented “caring for virtue” is a ceaseless questioning of what is piety and impiety, what is noble and base, what is just and unjust—accompanied by an insistence that only those who can give knowledgeable answers to these questions are “gentleman” (*kaloï kagathoi*, noble and good), while those who can not do so are justly to be called slavish (1.1.16). This

³ A. A. C. Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964).

⁴ *Weisheit voller Schelmenstreiche*: Nietzsche’s italics. It is all too typical of conventional Xenophon scholarship that, when this passage of Nietzsche’s is quoted, these words are omitted or excised: see, e. g., L. Brisson and L. A. Dorion, “Pour une relecture des écrits socratiques de Xénophon,” *Les études philosophiques* 69 (2004): 137–40, n5—who thus obscure or misunderstand the key point of Nietzsche’s appraisal.

⁵ Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* will be cited in parentheses by book, chapter, and section. Translations are my own, from the text as established by C. Hude, *Xenophontis Commentarii* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1969) and the recent critical edition of M. Bandini and L. A. Dorion, *Xenophon Memorables*, 3 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres (Budé), 2010–11), with help from the very accurate translation of Bonnette: *Xenophon Memorabilia*, trans. and ed. A. L. Bonnette (Ithaca: Cornell U. 1994).

relentlessly skeptical and judgmental questioning may well strike serious citizens as corrosive of traditional, habitual and unquestioning, civic virtue, with its inbred respect for conventionally taciturn gentlemen, whose chief care is not for themselves but for others and for their city, and who exercise their virtue not in dialogues questioning what virtue is, but in virtuous civic actions, orations, and deliberations.

Socrates, Xenophon here says, “made many *desire* virtue,” and instilled in them “hopes, that if they cared for *themselves*, they *would* be gentleman.” Yes, but “virtue,” and “gentlemen,” in what sense? The true meaning of Socrates’ self-control as regards carnal and monetary matters depends on Socrates’ understanding of the *reason* for the *goodness* of such self-control; and Xenophon allows us to see that Socrates did *not* regard self-control as being a virtue in the sense of a noble end in itself (contrast Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1117b23-19b18). Instead, Socrates declared his approval of the “habitual disposition” of self-control on the grounds that “this was sufficiently healthy, and did not *impede* the care for the soul.” The question then becomes, how did Socrates understand the care for the soul? What were the *spiritual* ends, for the sake of which, Socrates practiced severe restraint as regards money and body?⁶

Xenophon obliquely trenches on a gravely serious intended meaning of the indictment when he gives, as a leading instance of Socrates’ “not making his companions erotic lovers of money,” the fact that Socrates did not charge anything for his companionship—and, what is more, decried those who do so, as enslavers of *themselves*, because they thereby become compelled to converse with those who pay them. Xenophon thus begins to make visible his keen awareness of his need to rebut the opinion that Socrates taught the young, for his own profit, a dubiously sophistic meaning of virtue and of gentlemanliness. Xenophon reports that Socrates was amazed that someone professing to teach virtue would charge a fee; for Socrates conceived that the truly greatest profit for anyone professing to teach virtue was the acquisition of a good and very grateful friend in the student. Before this last can ring an alarm bell, Xenophon rushes in with a fire extinguisher: but Socrates “never professed (to teach) any such thing to anyone.” Or as Xenophon put it shortly before, “Socrates never promised to be a teacher” of gentlemanliness—except “by manifestly being such.” But Xenophon adds that Socrates “trusted that those of his companions who were receptive to the things that he judged favorably would be good friends with him and with one another for the whole of life.” Socrates was indeed a teacher of (a non-traditional) virtue, learned not so much through “teachings” as by example.⁷ Through this innovative educational process, Socrates deliberately formed a lasting circle of grateful friends. Serious citizens might well ask, “what is the relation of this circle to the wide friendship

⁶ In his *Apology of Socrates to the Jury* 18, Xenophon reports Socrates saying: “others procure for themselves expensive delights from the market, but I contrive for myself, without expense, delights from the soul more pleasant than those.” Cf. M. Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 2.67 and 2.100, and contexts; also 3.58.

⁷ Contrast 1.2.3 and 1.2.8 with 1.2.18 and 4.7.1 (“whatever he himself knew, of the things that it is fitting for a gentleman to know, he *taught* most eagerly”); L. Strauss, *Xenophon’s Socrates* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1972), 11; D. R. Morrison, “Xenophon’s Socrates as Teacher” in *The Socratic Movement*, Ed. P. V. Waerdt (Ithaca: Cornell U, 1994), 203-5; the puzzle of the surface contradiction is highlighted, but left unsolved, by Bandini and Dorion, *Xénophon Mémoires ad loci*, as well as by J. Luccioni, *Xénophon et le socratisme* (Paris: Presses universitaires, 1953), 36.

among the citizenry that is essential to, and prized above all by, the city?" (cf. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1155a23-27).

The life together of the Socratic friends is a key dimension, and a profoundly distinctive dimension, of what Socrates meant, and practiced, and inspired in others, as "virtue." His refraining from charging money was part of what enabled him to be highly selective in forming his community of lifelong friends.

DID SOCRATES PROMOTE CRITICISM OF THE ATHENIAN REGIME AND LAWS?

At this point, Xenophon's reply to the indictment's charge of corrupting the young seems at first to have been completed.⁸ Yet he has uttered not a word about Socrates' posture toward political ambition, and the achievement of self-control over the hubris to which that spiritual passion is susceptible. Now, suddenly (1.2.9), Xenophon ventriloquizes a cursing accuser, whose bellicose eruption sounds like an exasperated reaction to this massive inadequacy of Xenophon's rebuttal of the indictment thus far.⁹ The accuser (whose words and tone remind of Aristophanes' *Clouds*)¹⁰ yells out that, "by Zeus!" Socrates "made his companions look down on the established laws!"—and did so, by deriding the foolishness of the egalitarian-democratic mode of selecting rulers according to lot, instead of on grounds of proven expertise and competence. Through such speeches, the accuser charges, Socrates "aroused the young to have contempt for the established regime!"—and "made them violent!"

Xenophon responds only to the latter charge, of promoting violence. He comically (and provocatively) acts as if he has failed to hear the first and most substantial part of the shouted accusation that he has put into the mouth of his character.¹¹

⁸ O. Gigon, *Kommentar zum ersten Buch von Xenophons Memorabilien in Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft*, Heft 5 (Basel: SVAW, 1953), 4, 25.

⁹ Starting with C. G. Cobet, *Novae Lectiones quibus continentur observationes criticae in scriptores graecos* (Lugduni-Batavorum: Brill, 1858), 665ff., scholars—L. Robin, "Les Mémoires de Xénophon et notre connaissance de la philosophie de Socrate," *Année philosophique* 21 (1910): 20-21; E. C. Marchant, "Introduction" to *Xenophon: Memorabilia and Oeconomicus* (Cambridge: Harvard University, Loeb, 1923), viii-xi; Luccioni, *Xénophon et le socratisme*, 17-43; A. H. Chroust, "Xenophon, Polycrates and the 'Indictment of Socrates,'" *Classica et Mediaevalia* 16 (1955): 1-77; E. Delebecque, *Essai sur la vie de Xénophon* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1957), 223; H. Erbse, "Die Architektonik im Aufbau von Xenophons *Memorabilien*," *Hermes* 89 (1961): 262-63; recently, G. Giannantoni, "Pour une édition des sources antiques sur Socrate" in *The Philosophy of Socrates: Elenchus, Ethics and Truth*, ed. K. Boudouris (Athens: Center for Greek Philosophy and Culture, 1992), V. P. Waerdt, "Socratic Justice and Self-sufficiency. The Story of the Delphic Oracle in Xenophon's *Apology of Socrates*," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 11(1993): 1-48 and Bandini and Dorion, *Xénophon Mémoires*, ad loc.—have identified the unnamed cursing accuser with an Athenian sophist named Polycrates who is known to have published an *Accusation of Socrates* (see Isocrates' *Busiris* 4; Diogenes Laertius 2.38-39), which has not come down to us. Taylor preferred Friedrich Blass's identification, on the basis esp. of Libanius's *Apology of Socrates* (see W. Calder and B. Huss and M. Mastrangelo and R. S. Smith and S. M. Trzaskoma, *The Unknown Socrates: Translations, with Introductions and Notes, of Four Important Documents in the Late Antique Reception of Socrates the Athenian* (Wauconda, Ill.: Bolchazy Carducci, 2002)) of the unnamed accuser as Meletus (A. E. Taylor, *Varia Socratica* (Oxford: James Parker, 1911), 4). These speculative suggestions have no basis in Xenophon's text, and distract from the needed careful (and wryly appreciative) interpretation of Xenophon's teaching as he has presented it, with his dramatic artfulness.

¹⁰ Bandini and Dorion, *Xénophon Mémoires*, ad loc.: "La formulation de cette accusation rappelle étrangement les termes memes qu'emploie Phidippide pour exprimer le sentiment de supériorité que lui procure la fréquentation de Socrate (*Clouds* 1399-1400)."

¹¹ "Xenophon does not even attempt to defend Socrates against the charge that he made subversive speeches to his companions; he only tries to show that men like Socrates do not favor violence and do not make others violent"

Moreover, the argument Xenophon gives for the implausibility of Socratic promotion of violence is based on the much greater political efficacy, safety, and self-sufficiency of a prudent employment of persuasive rhetoric: “for who would wish to kill someone rather than make use of him alive, persuaded?”; and “the one capable of persuading needs no one—for he would hold himself capable, even alone, of persuading” (1.2.11). Xenophon tacitly reminds readers familiar with Aristophanes’ *Clouds* of the widespread imputation that Socrates employed and taught effective, manipulative rhetoric, “making the weaker argument the stronger.”¹²

Now but if, prodded by this reminder, we look more closely at what Xenophon is saying, we notice that he in fact attributes nothing to Socrates here.¹³ Instead, speaking repeatedly in the first person singular, Xenophon refers to unnamed persons who “cultivate prudence and believe that they will be capable of teaching the citizens what is advantageous.” Xenophon’s use of the first person singular will continue to be a feature of his defense of Socrates against the charge of corrupting the young. Xenophon thus quietly reminds that he is himself a preeminent exemplar of Socratic education (or “corruption”) and that there is much to be discovered about the nature of Socrates’ didactic influence by reflective attention to Xenophon’s unobtrusive self-revelations.

SOCRATES’ ASSOCIATION WITH CRITIAS AND ALCIBIADES

Xenophon contrives to have the nameless accuser focus his rejoinder on the corruption exhibited by two notorious youthful intimates of Socrates: Critias, “the most thieving, murderous, and violent of all those in the oligarchy,” and Alcibiades, “the most unrestrained and hubristic as well as violent of all those in the democracy” (1.2.12). That these Socratic associations are very much in need of an explanation—and that the explanation is not easy—is indicated by the length of Xenophon’s response. Yet we see that Xenophon would not have had to enter into these troubled and troubling waters if he had confined himself to rebutting the official indictment. Xenophon evidently wants us to puzzle over the question: how and why, for what important purpose, did Socrates attract, and befriend, and spend time and energy upon, young men of such extreme and questionable political ambition?¹⁴ Socrates’ association with these young men was (predictably) costly: it obviously involved Socrates and his other friends in grave political dangers; it continues to tarnish the Socratic legacy.¹⁵ And neither Critias nor

(Strauss, *Xenophon’s Socrates*, 11; see also J. R. Smith, *Xenophon Memorabilia* (Boston: Ginn, 1903); N. Freret, *Observations sur les causes et sur les circonstances de la condamnation de Socrate*, in *De Socrate Juste Dam-nato: La Nascita del Problema Socratico nel XVIII Secolo*, ed. Mario Montuori (Rome: dell’Ateneo, 1981), 83; G. Vlastos, “The Historical Socrates and Athenian Democracy,” *Political Theory* 11 (1983): 495-516, 497; I. F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1988), 64; D. K. O’Connor, “The Erotic Self-sufficiency of Socrates: A Reading of Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*” in *The Socratic Movement*, ed. P. V. Waerdt (Ithaca: Cornell U, 1994), 156-57). Xenophon allows some readers who do notice his silence, but have failed to catch on to his puckish wit, to think that he has blundered: e. g., Marchant, “Introduction,” xix-xx; Gigon, *Kommentar zum ersten Buch von Xenophons Memorabilien*, 38; A. H. Chroust, *Socrates, Man and Myth: The Two Socratic Apologies of Xenophon* (London: Routledge, 1957), 58.

¹² Bandini and Dorion, *Xenophon Memorables* 1.2.15.

¹³ O’Connor, “The Erotic Self-sufficiency of Socrates,” 156-57.

¹⁴ See the critical questions and the animadversions in Bandini and Dorion, *Xenophon Memorables*, 1.2.17-18, 27, 31.

¹⁵ Cf. Aeschines *Against Timarchus* 173 and G. Vlastos, “The Historical Socrates and Athenian Democracy,” 495-516.

Alcibiades sound like very promising candidates to join Socrates in his philosophic way of life, with its minimal, defensive engagement in political action. Why did Socrates not focus his educative efforts on youths like himself, when young, or the “young Socrates” we meet in Plato’s *Statesman*—youths who were ambitious only scientifically and philosophically? Why did he expend his educational efforts on youths who were “by nature the most ambitious for honor, wishing that all things be done through them, and that they might become the most renowned of all” (1.2.14)? In his response to the impiety charge, earlier in the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon’s stress on Socrates’ talk of his *daimonion* indicated that Socrates sought, at some risk, to attract youths who were skeptically perplexed as regards traditional religion, without being simply unbelievers. Now Xenophon shows us that the young men whom Socrates sought out were also such as he could “exhort to desire the noblest and most magnificent virtue, by which cities and households are well managed” (1.2.64). Why did Socrates put before himself the challenge of converting, to his outlook on life, young men of such an unusual “theologico-political” spirituality? Was it because Socrates understood that there was something of the utmost philosophic, even cosmic or theological, importance that he could learn best through observing the sometimes successful, sometimes unsuccessful outcomes of attempts at such unlikely conversions?

Xenophon’s exculpatory response explicitly focuses on the motives, not of Socrates, but of the young pair of miscreants (1.2.13-16). They were attracted to the master not only by their knowledge of his very great economic self-sufficiency, and self-control over pleasures, but by their knowledge of a momentous fact that Xenophon only now allows to come to the fore: Socrates “in speeches dealt as he wished with all who conversed with him.” It was this extraordinary dialogical power of Socrates that made the pair believe that “if they associated with him, they would become most competent to speak and to act.”¹⁶ Xenophon insists that they were so far from being drawn to adopting Socrates’ way of life and moderation that if a god had given them the choice, they would have chosen to die rather than to live their whole lives as they saw Socrates living. This is made clear, Xenophon avers, by the fact that as soon as in and by their association with Socrates they “considered that they were superior to their companions, they immediately left Socrates, to do the political things—which is why they had reached out to Socrates.”

¹⁶ Conventional scholarly bewilderment at the idea that Socrates’ dialogic art could be a crucial source of political power is summed up by Bandini and Dorion, *Xenophon Memorables* 1.2.31: “one will never insist enough on the fact that the dialectic is a technique or argumentation that has no utility in the public sphere. (...) in fact, since refutation is a technique of argumentation which lends itself well to private exchanges, it is hard to see what use it could be to a politician who needs to convince a crowd.” But as Xenophon will later report (4.5.12; see also 3.7.4 and 4.6.15), Socrates declared that, for those who possess self-control, “it is possible to examine the most important matters, and, having distinguished them according to their kinds through dialogues in speech and in action, to choose the good things and to avoid the bad”; “from this, men become best, and most hegemonical [artful-at-leading] as well as most skilled in dialectics.” In the central passage of *Hiero* (5.1), Xenophon has a great tyrant disclose that tyrants have a fear of wise dialecticians, for their uncanny capacity to “contrive something” – cf. W. R. Newell, *Tyranny: A New Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge U., 2013), 191. Conventional scholars have not reckoned with the political power that can result from the spiritual liberation, and from the profound understanding of human psychology—not least the psychology of the politically ambitious—that is entailed in authentic Socratic refutations. We will glimpse something of that when we follow Alcibiades’ refutation of Pericles.

Xenophon thus implicitly concedes that Socrates did teach, and very effectively, the political things.¹⁷ This becomes more explicit when Xenophon goes on to reply to another possible criticism (which he no longer ascribes to any accuser—one does not have to be an accuser of Socrates to voice this animadversion): “Socrates ought not to have taught companions the political things before moderation.” Xenophon says that he does not contest this. But he insists (with first person emphasis), that Socrates, *like other teachers* (see also 1.2.27) presented himself to his students as a model, in action, of what he was teaching—namely, “gentlemanliness” and “conversing most nobly about virtue and the other human things.” Socrates did this with such didactic success that “I know,” Xenophon asseverates, that even and precisely Alcibiades and Critias did in fact become “moderate” when they were associates of Socrates; and this because they became convinced “at that time that this was the superior way to act” (1.2.17-18). Or as Xenophon puts it a bit later, Socrates brought about moderation in the pair, just as successful teachers of music or of other arts bring about in their students skill in practice (1.2.26-27). This disclosure stands in stark tension or contradiction with Xenophon’s immediately previous claim, that the two would have chosen to die rather than to live as Socrates lived—and with the claim Xenophon will subsequently make, that the pair could have had no education from Socrates because he never was pleasing to them.¹⁸ Here, on the contrary, Xenophon reveals that the two came to believe that Socrates lived a superior way of life—the example of which impressed them so much, that it induced a major change in their own outlook and even to a considerable extent in their active lives. In other words, Socrates succeeded in effecting in the young men a rather dramatic, if incomplete and temporary, spiritual conversion. And it becomes clearer that Xenophon is using his explanations of Socrates’ relation with Critias and Alcibiades to provoke the reader’s puzzled reflection on controversial facets of Socrates’ educative activity.

If we put what Xenophon has said thus far together with what we will find him saying much later, at 4.3.1-2, we may draw the following conclusions. By the example of his way of life and not least his ceaseless, provocative questioning or skeptical dialogues about the “human things,” including the “political things,” Socrates induced in his young companions “moderation.” He did this as the first stage in his guiding them toward a deep understanding of the human, including the political, things—which eventually included knowing how “skillfully to speak and to act and to contrive.” “Moderation” (*sōphrosunē*) means, then, much more than self-control (*egkrateia*) over the bodily and economic passions. Moderation as the opposite of hubris¹⁹ entails a spiritual conversion that curtails or diminishes political ambition (the ambition to rule), on account of coming to emulate the philosophic life, as led by Socrates and his friends—who continue, as good citizens

¹⁷ Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates*, 12; Bandini and Dorion, *Xenophon Mémoires*, ad loc.: “Alcibiade et Critias étaient donc justifiés de se rendre auprès de Socrate pour acquérir une compétence dans le domaine de la politique. (...) ils ont également reçu une formation politique qui survit à la séparation d’avec Socrate.” Cf. Gigon, *Kommentar zum ersten Buch von Xenophons Memorabilien*, 52-53.

¹⁸ 1.2.16 and 1.2.39; see also 1.2.47; Gigon, *Kommentar zum ersten Buch von Xenophons Memorabilien*, 44; Bandini and Dorion, *Xenophon Mémoires*, 1.2.17-18, 39.

¹⁹ Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates*, 12.

defending philosophy, to engage in “moderate” or un-hubristic public speech and action, especially about divinity.

IN WHAT SENSE VIRTUE IS KNOWLEDGE

At this point Xenophon digresses somewhat, in order to respond to an imagined phalanx of “many” critics among “those claiming to philosophize,” who challenge the very possibility that Critias and Alcibiades could have for a time become moderate or virtuous under the influence of Socrates. The challengers invoke a general philosophic-psychological proposition: someone who has become just cannot become unjust, nor can someone who has become moderate become hubristic, even as someone who has learned anything learnable cannot ever cease to be a knower of it (1.2.19). The criticism sounds like a half-baked or commonly misconceived version of the famous Socratic thesis that virtue is (a kind of) knowledge.²⁰ Xenophon exploits the occasion to correct this common misunderstanding.

Xenophon begins the correction by focusing on the parallel that obtains between active virtues of the soul, and the virtues of the athletic body. Both require for their acquisition and maintenance habitual practice that includes associating with others who are exemplars—as is attested by poets, whom Xenophon adduces as possessing a psychological wisdom that is lacking in “the many claiming to philosophize.” In his characteristic fashion, Xenophon leads off sounding as if he is treating virtue on a rather low level, insofar as it is chiefly a matter of self restraint (*egkrateia*) involving habituation of the bodily passions. But the context is of course the explanation of the loss, in Alcibiades and Critias, of Socratic-induced *moderation*, that for a time supplanted its opposite, including above all the spiritual hubris of overweening ambition to rule and to win civic honor. Besides, the poetry whose testimony Xenophon adduces warns that bad companionship can “destroy also the *intellect* (*nous*) within.” And when Xenophon proceeds to offer his own testimony (based on personal experience?), he reports his observation that just as poetry, though once known, can be forgotten if it is not regularly recalled, so a “forgetting of the instructional reasoning in speeches”—“the admonitory reasoning in speeches”—occurs to those who “neglect,” or fail to keep repeating and mulling over in their minds, such reasoning. When this forgetting occurs, then “the soul has forgotten those things that it experiences [the passions that the soul undergoes] when it desires moderation”—and with the loss of those spiritual experiences or passions, “it is no wonder that moderation is also forgotten.” Xenophon adduces two leading examples of what causes such “forgetting”: fondness for intoxicating drink, and erotic love—the latter of which he stresses. Again, Xenophon puts in the foreground virtue insofar as it is self-restraint of bodily passions. But then Xenophon extends this teaching to the entirety of nobility and goodness (gentlemanliness): “to me at least it seems therefore [*men oun*] that *all* the noble-and-good (gentlemanly) things are matters of practice.”

²⁰ As has been noted by Devereux (D. T. Devereux, “The Unity of the Virtues in Plato’s *Protagoras* and *Laches*,” *Philosophical Review* 101, no. 4 (1992): 782 n25), O’Connor, “The Erotic Self-sufficiency of Socrates,” 156, and Bandini and Dorion, *Xenophon Memorables*, ad loc., Xenophon’s nuanced understanding of the Socratic thesis contradicts the rather simple-minded “intellectualist” conception of virtue that conventional scholars generally attribute to Socrates—on the basis of a misunderstanding of Plato. For a needed corrective see L. S. Pangle, *Virtue is Knowledge: The Moral Foundations of Socratic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2014).

We may summarize Xenophon's Socratic teaching here as follows. Moderation, as the opposite of hubris—moderation as a key ingredient of virtue in its entire range—lives or dies depending on success or failure in the constant revitalization of Socratic reasoning that entails passionate psychic experiences essential to the continuing strength of the desire for moderation. All this is threatened by the experience of the pleasures of erotic intoxication, which expresses powerfully persuasive, quasi-rational opinions of its own—and is by no means simply “physical.” But: the “success” of which we are speaking varies in degree, as is illustrated in and by the cases of Critias and Alcibiades. Those two were initiated by Socrates into a life of moderation so long as, and to the extent that, their souls held perspicuously in view certain Socratic reasonings, which they were hearing from and in the company of Socrates. But just as “knowledge” of wise poetry can range, from mere rote memorization to an ever fuller and more deeply taken-to-heart understanding of the poet's teaching—and the “knowledge” can become arrested at various intermediate points along this range—so something similar is true of the acquisition of knowledge of Socratic reasoning (consider Plato *Theages* 130). Critias and Alcibiades never fully understood—and, to the extent that they did understand, the disposition of their passions prevented them from holding firmly in view and taking fully to heart—the decisive Socratic-refutational (1.2.47) reasoning that entails disenchantment with hubristic political ambition.²¹ During the time when they admired the Socratic life and its moderation as best, their souls continued to experience the strong lure of their pre-Socratic enchantment. They lived, we may surmise, in a kind of blur: of emulation of Socrates, and of his questioning analysis of the political things, together with dampened but continuing, hopeful, political ambition; as Xenophon now says: “so long as they kept company with Socrates, they were able by using him as an ally to *restrain* the ignoble desires” (1.2.24).

THE BIG DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CRITIAS AND ALCIBIADES

As Xenophon turns back, in light of the preceding, to tell the story of how the two black sheep were drawn away from Socrates and as a consequence from the virtue that they had acquired in his company, a significant change emerges. Previously, Xenophon treated the duo almost as twins; now, a divergence opens up, and expands.

CRITIAS

Xenophon reports in a half-sentence that Critias became detached from Socrates and his influence by being sent into exile, among lawless people who corrupted him (1.2.24). Xenophon remains primly silent here on what was the alleged crime on account of which exile was imposed on Critias—while he was still associating with Socrates. Writing as a historian in his *Hellenica* (2.3.15), Xenophon informs us that it was the *demos* or democratic element that imposed exile on Critias—and that this was a cause of Critias's killing “many” honored by the populace when he subsequently became a leader among the Thirty oligarchs. We also find that the banishment of Critias evidently occurred when he was a mature man in

²¹ See Plato's *Charmides* for a dramatic portrait of exactly where Critias wound up on the range of genuine understanding of Socratic teachings.

his fifties²²—contrary to the impression Xenophon gives here in the *Memorabilia*, that Critias apostasized from Socrates at a rather early age.²³ But before the reader can puzzle over the very brief account of Critias's separation from Socrates, Xenophon rushes on to a more elaborate and arrestingly vivid recounting of what detached the young Alcibiades—after which Xenophon returns to treating the two as nigh twins (1.2.25-28).

Soon, however, Xenophon focuses our attention on a dramatic narration of the incident that brought Critias to “hate” Socrates (1.2.29-31). It is not entirely clear how this elaborate story is consistent with Xenophon's short first explanation of Critias's apostasy. Apparently some time after returning from his period of exile,²⁴ Critias was still in the company of, and being admonished by, Socrates—who exhorted Critias to master his physical lust for his beloved (Euthydemus). When Critias ignored the admonition, Socrates “is said” to have pronounced before “many” a harshly humiliating censure of Critias (not for anything political, but) for his failing to heed Socrates' previous, gentlemanly exhortation. Socrates' brutally ugly characterization of Critias as a pig-like lover, uttered (worst of all!) in the presence of the beloved, was obviously bound to infuriate and to alienate Critias. (Since, as we later learn at length in Book Four, Socrates was himself intent on educating Euthydemus, we may surmise that it was chiefly out of concern for that beloved and beautiful youth that Socrates behaved as he did.)

Xenophon proceeds (1.2.31-38) to tell us that it was this private break (and not anything political—Dreisig 1981, 106-7) that led to the targeting of Socrates by Critias when he became a legislator during the reign of the Thirty. Critias couldn't get at Socrates in any other way (Socrates was not easy prey for the Thirty, even though—we learn from Xenophon's *Hellenica*—they were rounding up, putting on trial, and executing numerous partisans of democracy), so Critias went after Socrates by outlawing “teaching the art of speaking.” Critias's aiming thus at Socrates, Xenophon expostulates, was a “calumny,” since “I at least never heard this from Socrates, nor perceived another claiming to have heard it!”²⁵ Yet that this law was aimed at Socrates, Xenophon tells us, became manifest when word of Socrates' private, ironic criticism of the destructiveness of the Thirty's rule reached the ears of the ringleaders Critias and Charicles. They thereupon summoned Socrates and impressed upon him, in a threatening way, the relevance of this law to his conversational engagement with the young—and thus left themselves open to becoming trammelled in the sly master's deliciously ironic, insolently irritating, dialogic questioning and confounding of them and their law. (In this, the very first Socratic dialogue²⁶ that

²² Cf. D. Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 108-9.

²³ Cf. Bandini and Dorion, *Xenophon Memorables*, 1.2.47.

²⁴ Smith, *Xenophon Memorabilia* 1.2.31; Nails, *The People of Plato*, 110.

²⁵ Xenophon ironically speaks as if he has never heard of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, and as if it was the Thirty oligarchs who were the source of the “slander” that Socrates taught the art of speaking. As is observed by Bandini and Dorion, *Xenophon Memorables*, ad loc., if Critias, who was well informed as to Socrates' educational activity, took the trouble to formulate a law targeting Socrates through forbidding the teaching of the art of speaking, one may justifiably assume that Socrates was indeed engaged in such teaching.

²⁶ Socrates' first quoted words in the *Memorabilia* are, “I for my part am prepared to obey the laws.” Only much later (4.4.3) does Xenophon disclose that Socrates was lying; Socrates in fact proceeded to disobey the law at issue here.

he depicts, Xenophon contrives to bring Socrates' roguish sophistic skill to vibrant life in the most respectable sort of context—challenging oppressive rulers and their laws.) Inspecting this conversation, we get the distinct impression that Charicles as well as Critias knew Socrates rather well, and, while angered by him, were not altogether surprised, nor totally outraged, by his insolence—and were disinclined to hurt him. To be sure, Xenophon leaves no doubt as to Socrates' (muted, indirect, and ironic²⁷) criticism of the Thirty, including not least his former companion Critias, with whom he had previously effected the private break. At the same time, Xenophon lets us see that despite Socrates' power with words, he lacked the politically essential coercive power to check or to weaken the Thirty.²⁸ Xenophon makes it evident that if the Thirty had been more tyrannical and less concerned with the appearance of lawfulness, Socrates would not even have been able to embarrass them in speech.

ALCIBIADES

Meanwhile, Xenophon has told us the very different story of how Socrates lost his influence over Alcibiades.²⁹ It was the latter's rapid political success on democratic terms, it was the self-forgetting or self-alienating allure of his esteemed popularity, combined with the flattery of powerful men (and women) in the democracy, that corrupted him. He was like an athlete to whom victory in competition comes easily, and who as a consequence slips into believing that he need not care for self-discipline and, thereby, for himself. And by implication, it was Socrates' attempt to teach Alcibiades virtue and the political things, and thus lead him toward the greater contest and victory that consisted in cultivation of his own excellence, above and beyond a career serving the Athenian populace, that would have saved the young man from this corruption (cf. Plato *Republic* 492aff. and *Alcibiades I*). One may say that Xenophon's teaching is: Socratic "corruption" is the essential antidote to the profound corruption that democracy effects on youths such as Alcibiades; Socratic "corruption of the young" is essential for saving democracy from its own self-destructive or self-threatening corruption of such youths. Needless to say, the antidote does not always work.

In concluding his account of Critias's association with Socrates (1.2.38-39), Xenophon insists again that neither Alcibiades nor Critias associated with Socrates because he was pleasing to them, but rather because, from the outset, they sought preeminence in the city. Yet then suddenly Xenophon reveals that while they were companions of Socrates they tried to imitate their master by engaging in his distinctive kind of refutative dialogues—although, Xenophon insists, not with other sorts of interlocutors more than with those deeply engaged in politics. Xenophon illustrates by depicting the still teenaged Alcibiades carrying out artfully and successfully an elenctic Socratic dialogue with no less an interlocutor than Pericles (his legal guardian as well as the acclaimed leader of Athens), on a most fundamental and radical "what is ...?" question—"what is law?" We

²⁷ L. Strauss, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 172-73; Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, 158-60.

²⁸ Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates*, 14.

²⁹ Xenophon "gives no example of Socrates rebuking Alcibiades, to say nothing of a conflict between Socrates and Alcibiades"—*Ibid.*, 14.

witness Alcibiades making manifest, step by step, to Pericles himself, that and how the great democratic statesman's conception of law is deeply confused. Since we find in the *Memorabilia* no other explicit presentations of Socratic dialogic refutations effected through pursuing "what is" questions,³⁰ we do well to follow attentively this singular and excellent³¹ example.

Xenophon has the Socratic Alcibiades begin by asking Pericles, "would you be able to teach me what is law?" Unlike the Platonic Socrates in his Delphic mission (*Apol. Soc.* 21c-d), Xenophon's more discrete Alcibiades questions and refutes the statesman in private.

When Pericles unreservedly answers in the affirmative, Alcibiades asks to be given the teaching—expressing his keenness with an oath that invokes the gods in general. (Xenophon may thereby signal that to grasp the full import of what follows, we would need to consider the implications for our understanding of divinity and divine law.) Alcibiades then explains the reason for his eagerness. He has heard some "praised" for being "lawful men," and supposes that one would not "justly" happen upon such praise if one did not know what is law. So: the Socratic Alcibiades declares that he is concerned to know what law is because he is concerned with the public honor that justly attends a man of lawful virtue, which virtue depends on one's knowing what is the lawful, as standard and substance of virtue.

Pericles accepts this outlook and starting point. He is supremely confident that he knows, and can teach his young ward, what is law. He declares with consummate fatuity that what Alcibiades "desires" is "an affair of no difficulty," as regards the "wish to know what is law." Pericles, despite his shrewdness as a politician, does not have an inkling of what will be proven by his young ward in the next few moments—that the great Pericles cannot give a coherent explanation of what law is and therefore, by the moral principle that he accepts, is not justly honored as a man of lawful virtue. Pericles is completely naive about both the conceptual perplexities involved in this question and about the psychological disposition as well as the potent wisdom of his young Socratic questioner (and possible political rival). And this despite the fact, disclosed by Pericles near the end, that he recalls being in his youth one of those who were "terrific" at practicing such dialectics—which he regards as sophistry.

Pericles, as the democratic statesman, defines law as all things that the assembled multitude has decided on and promulgates, as to what ought and ought not to be done. Alcibiades responds with what might seem a boyish and simple minded question: is it good things that they lawfully hold ought to be done, or bad? Pericles patronizingly and emphatically answers: "the good—by Zeus!—my boy, and not the bad." Now, there lurks behind this obvious answer two other more acute questions: the good *for whom*? And: what is law when the multitude, out of ignorance, proclaims that something bad ought to be done, or something good ought not to be done? Alcibiades does not directly raise these troublesome, typically Socratic, questions (consider the sequel, 1.2.49-51, 53-55),

³⁰ Bandini and Dorion, *Xenophon Mémoires*, CXVIII.

³¹ Gigon speaks of "des fein und planmässig geführten Dialoges" (Gigon, *Kommentar zum ersten Buch von Xenophons Memorabilien*, 68); Bandini and Dorion, *Xenophon Mémoires*, ad loc. comment: "cette réfutation est très bien structure et elle est fort habilement menée (...) irrécusablement conduit." See also Smith, *Xenophon Memorabilia* 1.2.45.

whose pursuit might take some time. Instead, he asks a question that immediately awakens Pericles to the inadequacy of his stated definition of law—showing him that it fits only law in democratic regimes governed by assemblies where the majority always predominates, while there are other types of regimes, in which not the majority, but some minority predominates, regimes that also have and make laws. A somewhat uneasy Pericles now declares, with a slight note of hesitation, that what “is called” law is: all the things that the dominant power in a city, having deliberated (scil., about the good), promulgates as to what ought to be done.

But then Pericles has to agree that it necessarily follows from this that whatever things a ruling tyrant promulgates as to what ought to be done by the citizens are also to be called laws. And at the same time, he also agrees that the essence of violent lawlessness—the antithesis of law—is when the stronger, through violence or its threat, coerces the weaker, without persuading or getting consent, to do what accords with the opinion of the stronger (scil., about what is good). And Pericles further agrees that such promulgations characteristic of a tyrant are lawlessness, the antithesis of law. His contradiction and confusion stare him in the face: what he said are to be called laws can constitute the antithesis of what he holds to be law. Pericles attempts to escape by changing what he said was the meaning of tyrannical law, adding the crucial qualification that whatever is promulgated by a tyrant to the citizens without persuading them or getting their consent, is not law.

In response, Alcibiades asks Pericles about how “we are to speak” about the promulgations of a regime where the few, a minority, rule without persuading or gaining the consent of the many: are we to say, or to deny, that this is violent, i. e., lawless? In response, Pericles makes more explicit his changed articulation of the meaning of law in general, conceived now in contrast to violence or lawlessness, the antithesis of law: “all things, whether promulgated or not, that someone compels another to do without persuading, constitute violence rather than law.” At this point Alcibiades asks a question that compels Pericles to contemplate how this conception of law must be applied to democracy: “so then, whatever the entire multitude promulgates for the few rich without persuading them and gaining their consent, would be violence rather than law?”

If Pericles is to overcome what has now transpired to be his incoherent confusion as regards the meaning of law (and of lawfulness, as a virtue), he must abandon one or the other (or both) of two contradictory conceptions of law that he has been shown to hold: 1) that whatever the majority in a democracy promulgates as good and to be done is law (and to abide by it is the virtue of lawfulness, to disobey it lawlessness); and 2) that law must rest on persuasion or consent of all who are to be subject to the law (and where that is missing, lawlessness prevails—which a man of virtuous lawfulness will resist).

Pericles refuses even to try to clarify his thinking on this momentous matter, and breaks off the conversation with a dismissive quip—to which Alcibiades replies with a deserved if insolent put-down. This final word of Alcibiades allows us to surmise that what he aimed at and achieved in this private conversation was indisputable confirmation of what he previously surmised: his decisive superiority, over the greatest political figure in Greece, as regards coherent understanding of the most important political things—upon whose understanding, virtue and its true honors are agreed to depend.

It is more difficult to determine, from this short exchange, what is Alcibiades' own, Socratic-instructed, conception of law and the virtue of lawfulness. We can glimpse this much. The Socratic Alcibiades sees with penetration that the unexamined respect for law and lawfulness veils the truth that all law has an essential element of coercive violence, made necessary because law is always the expression of a conception of the good held by a factional regime (of the one, few, or many) that is strongly opposed by other factional regimes having antagonistic conceptions of the good. We may add that this insight either arises from, or puts us on the threshold of, the critical Socratic inquiry into the political good—and into the extent to which the competing factional regimes' conceptions of the political good approach or veer away from the true political good.³² Xenophon will give us some adumbration of this inquiry in the pages that immediately follow. Alcibiades, for his part, failed to complete this inquiry with Socrates. His failure was less demeaning than the failure he exposed in Pericles, because Alcibiades did not shrug off his own failure. In the very next sentence Xenophon tells us again that Alcibiades and Critias left Socrates and went back to the affairs of the city—adding, for the first time, that Socrates was not pleasing to them because they “were *pained* by being refuted as regards their errors” (1.2.47).

Xenophon concludes his account of Socrates' association with Alcibiades and Critias by contrasting this errant pair with seven others who associated with Socrates not in order to become clever popular or forensic orators, but so that, by becoming gentlemen, they might nobly use household and household servants and kin and friends, and also city and citizens (1.2.48).

SOCRATES' TEACHING ON WISDOM AS THE TITLE TO HONOR AND TO RULE

But what was it that Socrates taught as “use” of others that was “gentlemanly” and “noble?” This immediately becomes a question because once again Xenophon ventriloquizes the nameless accuser, now vociferously responding with a series of charges³³ to the following effect. Socrates taught his companions that it is not fathers or other relatives or well-intentioned friends who as such deserve respect and heed, but instead those who are wisely capable of benefiting—who as such have a lawful right to chain up the ignorant! What is more, Socrates persuaded the young that *he* was both the wisest and the most capable of making others wise, and thereby disposed his companions to regard others as “nothing,” compared to him (1.2.49-52).

Once again Xenophon replies as if he has not heard the worst part (this time it is the last part) of these charges that he has put in the mouth of the nameless accuser. Xenophon concedes, however, that he himself knows that Socrates did indeed say, as regards fathers and other relatives and friends, much if not all of what the accuser reports; and Xenophon adds still more teachings of Socrates along the same lines (most provocatively, about what respect one should have for the dead bodies of one's closest relatives). Xenophon offers as a defense a fuller articulation of the Socratic teaching about family and honor that all this implies: Socrates showed that lack of prudence is dishonorable, and he urged

³² See also Plato *Alcibiades I* 124e-27e; *Laws* 712e-13a, 714b-15a.

³³ The accuser's language again echoes prominent passages in Aristophanes' *Clouds*: Smith, *Xenophon Memorabilia* 1.2.49, referring us to *Clouds* 1321ff.; Bandini and Dorion, *Xenophon Mémoires*, ad loc., referring us also to *Clouds* 1405ff.

that one take care to be most prudent and most beneficial so that, if one wished to be honored by relatives, or anyone else, one should not be neglectful, trusting to kinship, but should try to be beneficial to those by whom one wishes to be honored (1.2.50-55). This Socratic teaching makes no reference to filial obedience, or to love, or to the wish to be loved, even within the family.³⁴ Xenophon places only a thin veil over Socrates' radical departure from traditional conceptions of paternal authority.³⁵ He can avoid dealing with questions concerning Socrates' piety in this context because he has separated the charge of corrupting the young from the charge of impiety (even though he has acknowledged in passing that the two charges overlap—1.2.2; see also 1.3.1).

Xenophon proceeds to present and then to rebut a further, more directly political charge of the nameless accuser—no longer expressed in direct discourse and thus less dramatic (1.2.56-61): Socrates picked out, from the most esteemed poets, very wicked passages on whose authority he taught his companions to become evildoers and tyrants. In particular, Socrates invoked a line in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (311) praising industry and blaming idleness to teach that in the pursuit of gain one need not refrain from anything unjust or shameful; and he "on many occasions" employed lines from Homer's *Iliad* (2.188-91, 198-202)—in which Odysseus is described as treating leaders with great respect and men of the people with contempt—to teach that it is praiseworthy to beat the populace and the poor.

Xenophon does not deny that Socrates appealed to these poetic passages as authorities supporting his teachings. But he insists that what Socrates taught using the Hesiod line was that those who do something good are thereby industrious, and good workers. This certainly sounds innocent—to the point of banality. How could anyone find this teaching objectionable, let alone corrupting?³⁶ We may descry an answer when we notice that Xenophon does not deal with the question pointed to by the accuser: what does Socrates teach, invoking Hesiod, about the relation between "good work" and the "gainful," and the "just," and the "noble?" Surely this was exactly the kind of question that thoughtful students were prompted to ponder by Socrates—and that we are now prompted to ponder by Xenophon.

³⁴ As we learn from *Hiero*, the concern with being loved is more characteristic of the political man than of the philosophic, while the concern with being honored is more characteristic of the philosophic than of the political man: see L. Strauss, *On Tyranny: Corrected and Expanded Edition, Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence*, ed. V. Gourevitch and M. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2013) passim, and esp. ch. 5, n. 58 and context: "the desire for praise and admiration as distinguished and divorced from the desire for love is the natural foundation for the predominance of the desire for one's own perfection."

³⁵ See also Xenophon's *Apology of Socrates to the Jury*, 20-21. Commenting on these passages, Hegel expostulates: "Ist es also zu verwindern, dass Sokrates schuldig befunden wurde?" Bandini and Dorion, *Xénophon Mémoires*, comment ad loc.: "Pour les Grecs, le manque de respect aux parents constitue une offense très grave"—G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 1, ed. R. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel in *Werke*, vol. 18 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 508. Cf., entre autres, Platon, *Crito* 51c; *Lois* 930e; Aristophanes, *Oiseaux* 755 sq. et 1347 sq." See *ibid.*, 1.2.55, criticizing Gigon, *Kommentar zum ersten Buch von Xenophons Memorabilien*, 80.

³⁶ The famous investigative reporter Stone, who is more suspiciously alert than most conventional scholars, finds the line from Hesiod to be "so irrelevant we can only conclude that it is dragged in" by Xenophon "as a diversionary tactic"—Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, 30.

Our present teacher hastens on to insist that Socrates used the Homer passage to teach that those who do not benefit army or city or populace—especially if they are in addition bold—must be checked in every way, even if they are very rich. This leaves unexplained, and indeed bewildering, why Socrates would have chosen so arrestingly “elitist” a Homeric passage to illustrate and to authorize so conventional a teaching. As Stone alertly points out, the puzzle at first grows but then the solution comes into view when one looks at the Homeric context, and especially at the lines that continue the passage in the original. Then one sees that the quotation as presented “is so carefully truncated by Xenophon that its significance is hidden from” the casual reader—and revealed to the painstaking.³⁷ In the lines immediately following those quoted by Xenophon, Homer has Odysseus continue by declaring: “it is not good that many rule; there is to be one ruler, one king.” This is not to deny that one may teach the superiority in principle of rule by a wise king while embracing actual democracy.³⁸

Certainly Xenophon goes on to contend that Socrates was *dēmotikos* or well disposed toward the populace—and a lover of mankind in general, foreigners as well as fellow Athenians. The proof Xenophon offers is that Socrates refrained from charging a fee for his teaching, and thereby unreservedly helped everybody. This is in some tension with Xenophon’s previous indication of the exclusivist reason Socrates thought it was imprudent to charge a fee for teaching virtue (recall 1.2.6). However that may be, Xenophon adds that Socrates “adorned the city in the eyes of the rest” (of humanity) by “spending what he had, throughout his entire life, in benefitting, as regards the greatest matters, all those who were willing.”

This last statement prepares the ground for the second and much longer part of the *Memorabilia*, which begins on the next page. Having completed his defense against the charges that Socrates was unjust, Xenophon devotes the rest of the work to recalling “how in my opinion Socrates benefitted those who associated with him” (i.e., how he was actively just).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 30–32; cf. S. F. Dresig, *De Socrate iuste damnato* in *De Socrate Iuste Damnato: La Nascita del Problema Socratico nel XVIII Secolo*, ed. M. Montuori (Rome: dell’Ateneo, 1981), 110–11, XS 17 and O’Connor, “The Erotic Self-sufficiency of Socrates,” 157–58.

³⁸ O’Connor, “The Erotic Self-sufficiency of Socrates,” 158.

DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION IN ARISTOPHANES' *CLOUDS*: A SKETCH

What kind of education does a democratic citizenry need? How does democracy shape education? These questions are at the heart of the current debate on both sides of the Atlantic about the future of the university and the purpose of higher education. Its focal point is the role of the humanities, often viewed as the core of the liberal arts curriculum, whose status as a pillar of higher learning has come under intense scrutiny.

On one end of the controversy is the insistence that university education should be democratic by being *useful* to the individuals who receive it and to society as a whole. Accessible to all, it should impart the knowledge and skills that prepare young people for careers and help them become successful members of society. From this perspective, the four-year liberal arts degree that has epitomized US college education is charged with being elitist and irrelevant, much in the way humanistic studies are viewed in Europe.

On the other side is the argument that thinking about education in terms of utility is equally prejudicial to individual and social wellbeing and the academic enterprise itself. More than training a skilled labor force, the university's role is to educate self-directing human beings by cultivating their faculties and expanding their horizons. So higher education should be democratic not by bowing to the people's notion of utility but by *enlightening* this notion. To this end, liberal and humanistic studies claim to be the *sine qua non*.

Though flaring up anew this debate is age-old. First staged in ancient Athens, it was memorably dramatized in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. This essay proposes to bring the *Clouds* to bear on the current discussions on education and sketches one way this could be done.

The *Clouds* is traditionally read as a personal attack on Socrates. There are good reasons for this reading. Though neither the main protagonist nor an eponymous hero, Socrates is the only real-life personage that appears in the comedy and occupies a significant part of its action. The nature and effects of his activity constitute a crucial element of the plot, and a key source of the play's comic laughter. Moreover the play anticipates and helps explain Socrates' fate: his conviction by the Athenian people on charges of impiety and corrupting the youth. In short, who Socrates was and what he did seems to be the most significant stake of the play and its main preoccupation.

This interpretation, shared by the majority of modern scholars, goes back to Plato. Plato has influenced the reception of the *Clouds* both by directly commenting on the play and indirectly, by creating through his oeuvre an image of Socrates so compelling that it has shaped the historical perception of who Socrates was.¹ In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates claims that it is not his actual accusers but the older prejudices against himself and philosophy, popularized by Aristophanes' play a generation before the trial, that are responsible for his formal indictment and likely conviction (*Apo.* 19 a-c). He thus suggests that the comedy's aim was an attack against him and philosophy, holding both responsible for the decline of traditional beliefs and the corruption of the Athenian young. This Platonic view goes hand in hand with the allegation that the *Clouds* misrepresents Socrates' person and endeavors—a caricature if not downright slander that missed the point of his activity. Even when read not as a misguided attack, but as an intelligent critique, still Socrates and philosophy are perceived to be the main target of Aristophanes' laughter.²

Without devaluing this time-honored interpretation, and drawing on its many insights, this essay proposes a change of perspective. As Redfield and Nowak have suggested, the exclusive focus on the problem of Socrates tends to obscure critical dimensions of the comedy, notably the struggle between generations that is at the heart of the play, and in which Socrates' role is that of catalyst more than agent.³ If foregrounding Socrates tends to overshadow the play's rich social commentary and its true target: the Athenian demos, taking Socrates out of the limelight helps restore to their stature and importance dramatic aspects that otherwise go unnoticed. Central among them, I will argue, is the critique of democracy and its relationship to education.

Paying closer attention to the account of Athenian democracy that underpins the comic drama promises to shed a fresh light on its relationship to Socrates, and make evident some continuities between Aristophanes and Plato. What is more, reading the *Clouds* as a dramatic rumination on the role of education in democracy helps uncover an insightful ancient perspective on the contemporary crisis of higher education.

DEMOCRACY AND PERSUASION

The *Clouds* opens with a story of a family in crisis. Its head Strepsiades, the comedy's protagonist—an average Athenian of rustic origin who has climbed the social ladder by taking a patrician wife—finds himself in serious debt that takes his sleep away. In a lengthy nocturnal monologue he reflects on his financial straits and blames them on his wife and son, whose lavish tastes and luxurious living have proved too large for Strepsiades' modest fortune.

¹ As Charles Kahn puts it, "Plato's success as a dramatist is so great that he had often been mistaken for an historian," *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: the philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.

² While this view has many partisans, including such luminaries as Voltaire, Hegel, and Kierkegaard, the scholarly locus classicus is Dover, whose commentary and critical edition of the *Clouds* continues to be influential, K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes' Clouds* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

³ J. Redfield, "Aristophanes and Education," *The Center Magazine* 9, no. 1 (1976): 10. P. Nowak, "The Last Step in *The Clouds*," in *The Ancients and Shakespeare on Time* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014).

In the course of this monologue it becomes clear that behind the financial crisis lurks a deeper one: that of conflicting values. The rustic notions of the social climber Strepsiades clash with the aristocratic aspirations of his wife. The resulting compromise is epitomized in the name of their son: Pheidippides, which could be rendered as “thrifty horseman,” a flagrant oxymoron.⁴ Alongside the laughable name, the clashing values of mother and father have issued in an ineffectual parenting and authority crisis.

She would take this son of hers and fondle him, saying,
 “When you are big and drive a chariot to the city,
 like Megacles, wearing a festal robe...” But I would say,
 “Rather, when you bring the goats away from the rocky ground,
 like your father, clad in leather...”
 But he wasn’t *persuaded* by my speeches at all:
 He’s been pouring horse-ities upon my money.”
 (70-74, emphasis added)

As paterfamilias, Strepsiades has no clout whatsoever. Even his slaves refuse to obey him. In his own account, Strepsiades has submitted to his wife’s and son’s extravagances without much resistance—out of love, perhaps, but no less likely out of opportunism or sheer weakness. A social inferior whose occupation carries no glamor, his moral outlook and way of life, centered on money-making by any means, hold no attraction to his son.⁵

As he cannot command or discipline his offspring, Strepsiades’ only recourse is persuasion. First broached at this juncture, the problem of persuasion, and its Greek cognate ‘obedience,’ punctuates all of the exchanges between father and son. It is also the central theme of the play, of which the titular *Clouds* are the divine incarnation.⁶

Having awoken his son “most pleasantly” (78), Strepsiades tries to convince him to go to school and rescue his father from financial debt by learning how to speak well and win lawsuits. Rather than as duty, Strepsiades phrases his demand as personal favor, which his son indignantly refuses to grant, as he finds the proposition lacking in manliness and social prestige. Yet again unable to persuade his son, Strepsiades resolves to go to school himself, and find an educational solution to his financial problem.

The opening scene is a pithy commentary on Athenian society. The family in crisis stands for the polity in crisis. If followed closely, the family-polity analogy would suggest that the crisis of the Athenian society is of a moral nature and has in great part issued from the marriage of incompatible value systems and modes of life. This results in the erosion of paternal authority and intergenerational clash that necessarily accompany a diluted consensus as to what is just and valuable; and in the concomitant rise of persuasion as the only non-violent way to establish shared norms.

⁴ “Aristophanes’ *Clouds*” in: T. G. West and G. S. West, *Four Texts on Socrates*, “Introduction” (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 116 n 16. All quotations from the *Clouds* are from this translation.

⁵ Strepsiades’ name comes from the verb *strephein* which means to twist and turn, but also to cheat, *ibid.* p. 117 n 7.

⁶ J. L. Kastely, “*The Clouds*: Aristophanic comedy and democratic education,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (2009): 25-46.

In the *Clouds* persuasion is contrasted not only with compulsion – the specter of tyranny that looms large at the end of the play – but also with the vision of social harmony produced by respect for fathers and tradition, and by unspoken, unreflective agreement about right and wrong. Later in the play, in the contest between Old and New Education that makes up its dramatic center, this bygone social harmony is extolled as a time when the young were taught to endure hardship and obey in silence. Having an unpracticed ‘slender tongue’ (1013) was integral to the martial spirit and the virtues of fortitude, self-restraint and moderation that were the aim and focus of their upbringing. Patriotic songs and traditional harmonies was all the rhetoric the young needed to learn.⁷

Depicting the childhood circumstances and luxurious tastes of the youth Pheidippides, “who farts away, enwrapped in five blankets” (9-10), the opening scene shows that this educational ideal and the traditional order on which it was based have been bankrupt for some time. Growing up with two competing ethical views and life aspirations, Pheidippides could not learn to simply respect and obey—he had to choose between the moral codes of his parents, and side with the more persuasive. That he should embrace the expensive pleasures of his mother is an illustration of how that kind of moral choice is likely to be met.⁸

Yet the questioning of ancient ways likely predates Pheidippides. In order to marry each other both Strepsiades and his wife must have suspended or made adjustments to the inherited norms and valuations of their respective milieus. The play’s opening is a dramatic comment on the aftermath of this opportunistic adjustment. Never quite reconciled with his wife’s or son’s mode of life, but not really opposed to it either, Strepsiades dwells in a kind of moral paralysis manifesting itself in his thoroughgoing materialism and consistent refusal to take responsibility for his choices.

Zooming in on the mundane tribulations of an ordinary Athenian citizen, the comedy’s opening scene shows that the traditional ethos, and the tacit cross-generational agreement that characterized it, has been compromised by the pluralism of values that is both the precondition and result of social equalization. Democratic equality not only leads to, but is crucially enabled by, the decline of respect for ancestral ways. Life in democracy then is synonymous with a situation where norms, previously received as given, become subject to questioning and the vicissitudes of deliberation and argument.⁹

Yet the same spirit of relaxing social norms that equalizes the classes and makes possible the overcoming of social distance, issues in the erosion of the community standards, or rather in a contest of competing sets of standards, and the threat of paralyzing relativism. The opening of the *Clouds* urges that unless moral consensus is somehow reestablished, the democratic polity is in serious trouble. And the only way to reestablish

⁷ As Old Education makes clear, this unspoken consensus was upheld by force: those who would dare a poetic innovation “would be thrashed and beaten with many blows” (972). Considering the pride the poet qua first Cloud takes in his originality and poetic inventions (Parabasis, 545-548), it is highly unlikely that the fierce traditionalism of Old Education is an ideal Aristophanes himself would espouse.

⁸ Pheidippides’ siding with the life of luxury and equestrian contests is akin to the hedonism promoted by New Education.

⁹ J. P. Euben, “When There Are Gray Skies, Aristophanes’ *Clouds* and the Political Education of Democratic Citizens,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 95, no.4 (1996): 890-891.

it is through persuasive speech, and an education that teaches the young to speak effectively and choose wisely.¹⁰

While persuasion may seem like a good thing when juxtaposed with its ugly alternative: compulsion, it is also shown as problematic. Strepsiades' resolve to learn communication skills in order to evade justice and escape responsibility for his debts sets in motion the play's dark scenario that culminates in violence. The art of rhetoric, while indispensable for realizing democracy's ideal of uncoerced social agreement, is not sufficient to produce that agreement and alleviate the moral problem of democracy. If there is no common good or common ground, and all hangs on the rhetorical force of the speaker, the skills and capacity to speak become a form of domination.¹¹ What kind of education can address the problem of democracy and forestall these dangers is the main question dramatized in the play.

EDUCATION

The elaborate opening scene, and Socrates' absence from it, suggests that the crisis of Athenian society and its moral malaise predates Socrates and is independent of his activity. Socrates then, as Redfield puts it, is merely a symptom in a larger syndrome that is arguably the play's main subject.¹² While not the cause of the problem, Socratic education is both a response and a sought-after solution. Yet this solution is offered and sought after for two very different sets of reasons, which come to light in the education of Strepsiades. The mismatch between Socrates' and Strepsiades' understanding of education takes up the greater part of the play, and supplies much of its comic laughter.

Strepsiades' quest for a schooling that will make him a persuasive speaker is the dramatic occasion to learn about Socrates' school and its ambitious curriculum. Highly theoretical and encyclopedic, this curriculum includes comic versions of what we might recognize as experimental natural science, mathematics, geography, astronomy, but also such humanistic subjects as theology, linguistics, poetics, as well as logic, rhetoric and dialectic said to be the special province of the eponymous Clouds (316-319). The purpose of this comprehensive program baffles the pragmatist Strepsiades who keeps questioning its relevance:

STREP. But how will rhythm benefit me in getting my barley?

SOC. *First* they will make you elegant in company

an expert in what sort of rhythm is

'enoplion' and again, what sort is 'dactylic.'

(648-650 emphasis added)

¹⁰ This is why, as patrons of speech and persuasion, the Clouds can claim to be the divinities that "of all gods benefit the city most" (577).

¹¹ Compare with *Republic* VIII, where the radicalization of democratic equality, and the resulting moral anarchy, culminates in tyranny. The same trajectory is dramatized and warned against in the *Clouds*. In both cases, the "father's lack of knowledge about rearing" (559b) proves to be key. Allan Bloom (tr.) *The Republic of Plato* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 238.

¹² J. Redfield, "Poetry and Philosophy in Aristophanes' *Clouds*," in *Literary Imagination, Ancient and Modern: Essays in Honor of David Grene*, ed. Todd Breyfogle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 54.

Strepsiades' deftly turning this exchange into an obscene joke prevents us from hearing what other purposes the study of poetics and acquiring cultural literacy may have. Yet when similarly questioned by his son, he gives a recognizably Socratic (if not an earnest) answer:

PHEID. What would someone learn from them that is of any use?

STREP. Truly? Whatever is wise among human beings. And you will know yourself—how unlearned and dense you are.

(840-842)

As commentators have pointed out, not only the content of the program taught at the Thinkery, but also Aristophanes' presentation of its innovative pedagogy aiming at self-knowledge, is strongly reminiscent of the Socratic approach we know from Plato.¹³ Rather than a one-size-fits-all curriculum, it is an individualized program, tailored to the needs and capacity of the student as diagnosed by Socrates.¹⁴ Along with being custom-made, it is also radically undogmatic. Starting from the student's own concerns, its aim is not to give doctrinal answers or impose solutions, but to aid the student in thinking through a problem and ascending to an answer of his own.

In short, the Thinkery seems to represent liberal arts education at its best—a robustly interdisciplinary course of study geared toward enhancing the individual student's faculties and self-awareness through the pursuit of learning for its own sake. As in Plato's *Republic*, so too in the *Clouds* the essential purpose of Socratic education is not to impart skills or supply information, nor to impose a moral or political view, but to improve the mind and reorient the soul toward a new end: knowledge.¹⁵

This conversion to a life of contemplation requires as a necessary step attaining erudition: i.e., a degree of civilized refinement and broad intellectual horizons, as well as the habits of thoughtful self-direction. As Strauss has it, the moral and political wager of this program of study is that in pursuing knowledge for itself, the students lose both the taste and the incentive for doing harm.¹⁶

¹³ West and West, *Four Texts on Socrates*, 30-36; R. Legutko, *Sokrates* (Poznan: Zysk i s-ka, 2013), 70-71. See also, H. Tarrant, "Midwifery and The *Clouds*," *Classical Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (1988): 116-122.

¹⁴ Having admitted Strepsiades to the school, Socrates invites him: "Come then describe your own way (*tropos*) to me so that when I know what sort it is I may next bring novel devices (*mēchanas... kainas*) to bear on you (478-80, also 695, 736-738). In the play his personalized approach is exemplified, among other things, by the two very different educational tracks followed by Strepsiades and Pheidipides. It is also corroborated by the fact that Socrates refuses to teach Strepsiades the art of argumentation, even though this is the one and only thing he wants to learn. Evidently, Socrates judges Strepsiades not ready for that kind of study, and insists that he "must learn other things before that" (658).

¹⁵ In *Republic* VII, Socrates depicts the effect of education not as "putting sight into blind eyes" but as a "turning-around" (*periagogē*, in Latin, "conversion") of souls that is both liberating and potentially dangerous, 518 b-c.

¹⁶ L. Strauss, "The Problem of Socrates: Five Lectures," in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 124-125. In rethinking Cardinal Newman's classic statement, Roger Scruton offers a fresh formulation of this ancient ideal: "Confine learning and teaching within a sacred precinct, shut it off from the world, so that it can move by its own inner force towards futile knowledge, and you will produce a whole and healthy mind, the mind able to adapt, to focus and to comprehend, in all the changing circumstances of the world outside." R. Scruton, "The Idea of a University," *The Salisbury Review* 20, no. 1 (2001): 8.

Through the characters and actions of Strepsiades and Pheidippides, the *Clouds* explores two different yet kin ways in which Socrates' ambitious educational program fails to achieve its purpose and aggravates rather than alleviating the problem of democracy. While the education of Strepsiades takes up more dramatic time, it is that of Pheidippides that reveals the gravest dangers of that failure.

An old man going to school is the wildest element of the comedy's otherwise banal plot, largely free of the fantastical scenarios typical of Aristophanes' drama. An early instance of the idea of continuous education, Strepsiades' scholarly endeavors seem to signal that the dynamism of democratic society requires life-long learning. It also reveals the democratic aspect of Socrates' pedagogy. Contrary to Strepsiades' initial expectation (98, 245ff.), studying at the Thinkery is free of charge. And though there is some kind of admission or initiation process, if aged, street-smart Strepsiades can get through it, the suggestion seems to be, anyone can.¹⁷

Strepsiades, as already signaled, enrolls in the school for strictly instrumental reasons and with a restricted goal in mind. The only thing he wants to learn is rhetoric and the "most unjust speech" (657) that will help him argue his way out of debt. Steadfast about this end, he shows remarkable flexibility about the means to achieve it. This emblematic flexibility, that is his very name, comes to light in his reaction to Socrates' new theology: in the hope of serving his own financial interest, Strepsiades readily throws out the old gods and embraces Socrates' new divinities – not out of theological conviction but as a tryout, in case it might prove advantageous or expedient.¹⁸ Strepsiades, in short, is a user not a convert. His unshakable rigidity of concerns and the resulting resistance to instruction bedevil Socrates' student-centered pedagogy.¹⁹

If not his ignoble motives, certainly Strepsiades' resolutely utilitarian mindset is a characteristically democratic one. Immersed in the ways of the world, Strepsiades expects his studies to provide him with the skills—and *only* with the skills—necessary for excelling in those ways, and has no patience for useless erudition. If the unworldly purpose of Socratic education is cultivation of the mind and reorientation of the soul, what Strepsiades desires is a strictly vocational training: rather than soul-turning, all he wants is tongue-twisting (*glottostrophein*, 791) that would guarantee his personal success. And he is committed to a petty understanding of success.²⁰ Not surprisingly, soon enough he finds himself expelled from the school.

And yet, though failing to complete the program, Strepsiades does learn something—enough to persuade his son Pheidippides to join the school in his father's stead. He

¹⁷ Berg interprets the admission of Strepsiades into the Thinkery as evidence that Socrates is on a campaign of popular enlightenment for which vulgar "Strepsiades represents the perfect touch-stone," S. Berg, "Nature, Rhetoric and Philosophy on Aristophanes' *Clouds*," *Ancient Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (1998): 3. In Plato's *Apology* Socrates likewise portrays his activity as democratic in spirit: taking place on the market place, it is accessible to anyone. In contrast, most of Plato's dialogues take place in secluded settings.

¹⁸ "SOC. Now won't you believe in no god but ours: // This Chaos and the Clouds and the Tongue, these three? STREP. I simply would not converse with the others even if I should meet them" (423-426; 1477).

¹⁹ "SOC. You yourself first discover and say what you wish? STREP. You've heard ten thousand times what I wish: // about the interest, how I can pay nobody back" (737-739).

²⁰ "STREP. Don't speak to me of great proposals, for I have no desire for them but only to twist justice enough to give my creditors the slip" (432-3, also 205, 259, 648, 739, 792).

also acquires a new confidence in his own learnedness—what one of his deceived creditors names *hubris* (1298)—manifesting itself in his claim that education is a fair title to the property of others who, in turn, are rightly “the booty of us wise men” (1203).

Although Strepsiades’ encounter with Socrates serves to highlight their antithetical orientations—extreme pragmatism versus extreme distance to practical concerns—and opposed, instrumental vs. liberal, views on education, there is a way in which these are shown to be alike.

For one, both have benefitted from democratic conditions. Strepsiades’ upward social mobility, and the opportunistic mindset it has required, are quintessentially democratic phenomena. So is Strepsiades’ individualistic fixation on his narrow interests, manifest in the inclination to perceive everything—including the education and future of his son—as means to his family’s material wellbeing. Socrates too seems to be the beneficiary of specifically Athenian and broadly democratic circumstances. As the chorus makes clear, he is one among the many “sophists-of-the things aloft” (359) active in Athens. The existence of his school and his philosophical activity are no doubt aided by a social context in which formal education is not only the fashionable preserve of the wealthy few, but—as in the case of Strepsiades—in growing popular demand.²¹

What is more, both Socrates and Strepsiades belong roughly to the same generation, and both – the one as parent, the other as educator—are involved in, and responsible for, the formation of the new generation represented by Pheidippides. Both if for very different reasons fail that responsibility. Though polar opposites, their respective attitudes conspire to complete the corruption of the young Pheidippides. How and why this happens, is the subject of the remaining reflections.

Unlike his father, Pheidippides is initially unwilling to study. He views the Socratics as effeminate and despicable, in a word: “villains” (102) and joins them only because Strepsiades has “persuaded him against his will” (867). His admission process includes the most infamous part of the play: the “very great contest” (*agon megistos*, 957) of the Just and the Unjust speech, which turns out to be a quarrel between two kinds of education that struggle for the young man’s soul. Presented with this contest, Pheidippides remains unmoved. Forced to enroll, he warns his father that he will regret it (1114, 865).

Tellingly, Socrates is absent from this contest, which may be another instance of his undogmatic pedagogy: not a teacher of injustice, he is not a teacher of justice either. In his school, both arguments are granted an equal hearing and battle it out to the best of their rational abilities. A poignant comment on the pitfalls of rationalism, this scene may also have another meaning. As the opening scene of the play suggests, the life of carnal self-indulgence championed by New Education has already permeated Athens and needs no Socrates to teach it. Moreover this giddy lifestyle bears no resemblance to the asceticism of the Thinkery. Taking place at the outset of Pheidippides’ schooling, it seems that naturalistic reasoning and the rational justifications of hedonism is the point of departure

²¹ The egalitarian mixing of standards and walks of life characteristic of democracy is surely a stimulus, if not an enabling condition, for the Socratic project. In the *Republic*’s political typology, philosophy is only mentioned in relation to democracy (561d). Plato’s Socrates signals in passing that this “fairest of the regimes,” which he likens to a “many-color cloak” (557c), is a favorable circumstance for the study of the human dispositions in their multiplicity.

rather than the culmination of Socratic education—the very problem to which that education seeks a solution.²²

Be that as it may, while the education of Strepsiades takes up most of the dramatic time, his son's speedy zooming through the curriculum highlights the difference in age and capacity. The outcome is very different too: whereas Strepsiades has at best learned some new means to old ends, by the time Pheidippides graduates from the Thinkery not only his "complexion" (1171) but his objectives seem utterly transformed. If previously his life was dedicated to the extravagant joys of horsemanship, now his extravagance is of another kind: he has acquired intellectual tastes and new sophisticated pleasures – chief among them that of debunking old ways and subverting all things established.²³

At the graduation dinner, which Strepsiades throws in his honor, Pheidippides' praise for the avant-guard poet Euripides, and manifest contempt for the old classics, rubs his father the wrong way, and turns the play's final exchange between father and son into a violent confrontation. In the course of it, Pheidippides not only beats his father up but proceeds to persuade him that he has done so with justice. Skillfully historicizing the time-honored convention that children should obey their fathers, he proposes a "novel law" (1424) of father beating grounded in nature, and points to the behavior of "the chickens and the other beasts" (1427) as evidence for this natural standard.

This again is a caricature form of a Socratic teaching familiar from Plato. Starting with the sophisticated distinction between nature and convention, Socratic philosophy is a quest for uncovering a natural foundation. As clear from Plato's *Republic* and the *Laws*, the search for natural right, or a universal standard of justice grounded in nature is integral to philosophy's critique of existing institutions, and the attempt to think through the possibility for, and preconditions of, moral and political reform.²⁴

Though adept in manipulating theoretical arguments drawn from science and philosophy, Pheidippides' purpose is far from philosophic. Like his father he uses what he has learned from Socrates to pursue his own goals—goals that are not only foreign to the Socratic project but, in the play's finale, prove destructive of it. Though his moral horizon has been widened and transformed, this transformation consists in pursuing expanded versions of his old ends: victory and recognition. No longer satisfied with equestrian contests, he reaches for the greatest contest and highest stakes: tyrannical rule.

IN CONCLUSION

I have argued that the opening of the *Clouds* portrays not only the particular struggles of one Athenian family, but the larger crisis of Athenian society and the decline of its traditional ethos. At its core, this decline is due to the mixing of classes and ways of life

²² L. Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 32-33. For a different reading of the agon that views New Education as mirroring Socrates, see M. Nussbaum, "Aristophanes and Socrates on learning practical wisdom," in *Aristophanes: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

²³ "PHEID. How pleasant it is to consort with novel and shrewd matters (*kainois pragmasin kai dexiois*) And to be able to look down on the established laws" (1398-1400). "Novel" and "shrewd" as well as sophisticated are precisely the terms in which the poet qua first Cloud praises his own work (547-548).

²⁴ L. Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), ch. III.

that is both the result and precondition for democratic equality. The play's opening thus suggests that pluralism about what is good or just is an inevitable aspect of democracy. While socially desirable, this pluralism is an inherent source of corruption and authority crisis. Straining the bond between generations, it threatens to undermine the social fabric and trust needed for the functioning of institutions, and for society's very existence.

The democratic intuition, embodied by Strepsiades, is that the privileged way out of this predicament is through education. Yet as represented by Strepsiades, the characteristically democratic approach to learning as a means to private ends is part of the problem rather than the solution. If education is treated only instrumentally for the acquisition of skills and mere means without affecting moral ends, it is bound to subject the future to the present, and aggravate the problem of democracy sooner than solve it.²⁵ From the main avenue to individual and social wellbeing, education so understood may well become the instrument of society's undoing.

If the thoroughgoing utilitarianism of a Strepsiades is one of the comedy's targets, the radical unworldliness of the Socratic project is the other. Though infinitely more respectable, taking flight in the theoretical proves just as individualistic and dangerous as Strepsiades' pragmatic pursuit of rapacious self-interest. And like the latter's attempt to escape the bonds of society, it is bound to backfire: while a few might actually convert to philosophy, most are likely to use it as means to enhancing their own non-philosophical and anti-civic ends—a corruption of which Strepsiades and Pheidippides are the object lessons. So even if successful in elevating select individuals, because of its highly ambitious, essentially elitist nature, the Socratic program cannot but fail to educate the broader public. By emancipating its adepts from moral scruples and theological constraints, it may help actualize the tyrannical potential of democracy.

And so, while polar opposites, the two approaches to education embodied by Strepsiades and Socrates stand equally accused of being derelict in civic duty and ethical commitments. Against both of them, or rather as their synthesis, the comedy seems to propose that the education democracy needs must be public in a triple sense: focused on the larger public, and broadly accessible to it, it must aim at forming public opinion and a shared sense of the common good. How can this be done, and what role does comedy plays in it, is a subject for another paper.

²⁵ As Redfield puts it, "in pursuit of this self-interested aim the old systematically alienate their sons from themselves. By attempting to use education as a means to the solution of social problems, they contribute to the breakup of society." Redfield, "Aristophanes and Education," 14.

DANTE'S RETURN TO GREECE: THE SOPHIST AND THE PHILOSOPHER IN *THE INFERNO*

Dante presents all the sinners in his *Inferno* as human beings, and hence they evoke our sympathy and our respect. For Dante as for Aristotle, the worst vices are perversions of what is best in us, and hence the darkness of such sins is a sharp reminder of the depth of reality of the individual. But Dante's Ulysses is an especially grand figure. He is by far the most difficult of the sinners to condemn. Far from being simply repulsive or pathetic, Ulysses is above the common run of men. He is disdainful, heroic, and sublime. Critics have seen in him speculators like the Latin Averroists and explorers of the Renaissance like Columbus, figures who at enormous personal risk, put tradition and convention aside, setting out for adventures in the unknown and the infinite. Others saw in him Nietzsche's superman, whom Dante, against his intentions, cannot but help glorify even as he tries to condemn him. The great appeal of Ulysses is wholly intentional. Dante wants the reader to see that Ulysses' path to hell is, in many ways, similar to his own pilgrimage to God. Dante carefully outlines a series of parallels between himself and the pagan hero. Both leave their native lands, both are shipwrecks, both are masters of the arts of speech, Ulysses as a rhetorician and Dante as a poet; and both seek to learn the ultimate meaning of the virtues and vices. What most closely links the two figures is a desire for a perspective above the human perspective.

Human beings are exceptional in that they desire not simply to be comfortable in their surroundings, but seek to understand their surroundings and themselves. They seek a view of the whole, a perspective above the fray. We must consider this desire with ambivalence. Such a desire to be above the fray may lead to the truth, but it can just as well lead us to a desire to consume the whole and to subvert the order of reality. The desire for a vision of the whole sometimes does more than illuminate, it sometimes gives sparks that ignite our desire to be our own makers. From our own subjective standpoint, it may never be completely clear to us whether our desire is a desire for the truth or a more superficial desire for our own idols of the truth. This confusion is always present when we begin to learn anything important. What is clear is only that our highest possibilities thrive and grow in an essentially risky undertaking: curiosity. Despite our uneasiness, this danger is part of philosophy.

Ulysses seems to be something like a philosopher. Some argue that Dante's condemnation of Ulysses to hell is a religious condemnation of philosophy. But as I will suggest, what is condemned in the canto of Ulysses is not simply philosophy, but sophistry.

The limits set out by Socrates in his understanding of philosophy are very much in line with the limits that Dante is calling for us to respect in this canto. Ulysses is not the philosopher in the Socratic sense, but a disenchanted virtuoso of the art of speaking.

In canto 26 of the *Inferno*, Dante meets the counselors of fraud, and chief among them, Ulysses. They are cunning sophists punished by being hidden in flaming tongues through which they speak, since they had hid with their actual tongues in their lives. When Dante first sees them, he describes them with two metaphors. He compares them to fireflies, and to the prophet Elijah. These two metaphors, I will argue, are essential to understanding both the danger and the greatness of Ulysses:

As many as the fire-flies which the peasant resting on the hill—in the season when he that lights the world least hides his face from us, and at the hour when the fly gives place to the mosquito,—as many as he sees along the valley below, perhaps where he gathers grapes and plows; with so many flames the eighth ditch was all gleaming, as I perceived as soon as I came where the bottom was in sight. And as he that was avenged by the bears saw the chariot of Elijah at his departure when the horses reared and rose to heaven, who could not follow it with his eyes, so that he only saw the flame alone, just like a little cloud, rising upwards, so each flame moves along the bottom of the gullet, for no flame shows the theft, and each flame steals the sinner within.¹

Dante first says that these sophists are in quantity like the fireflies which a peasant sees from the top of the hill in summertime, looking down into the valley at dusk; second, he says that they are in quality like the prophet Elijah transcending humanity in his death, rising up to heaven concealed in a cloud, as his disciple Elisha (referred to as “he who was avenged by the bears”) watches his disappearance. The two images complement each other. The peasant sees the tiny lights flickering in the valley, creating a humble but beautiful illusion. In contrast, the disciple is in awe of his master rising into the sky towards the divine mystery hidden in the little cloud in the distance. Both images are images of freedom from work. The peasant rests from his work at the end of the day, and the prophet in the wilderness is free from all worldly cares. Both the peasant and the disciple of the prophet lose themselves completely in an object of contemplation. But the prophet is an image of the sublime apophatic moment; in contrast, the fireflies are an image of beautiful, but meaningless, idleness. There is a strong contrast between the seriousness and sobriety of the disciple of the prophet and the vulgarity of the peasant. The most basic contrast is simply one of direction: The disciple looks upwards towards the rapture of his master, the peasant looks downwards at the bugs in the valley.

¹ *Inferno* 26.25-42: “Quante ‘l villan ch’al poggio si riposa, /nel tempo che colui che ‘l mondo schiara /la faccia sua a noi tien meno ascosa,/come la mosca cede a la zanzara, /vede lucciole giù per la vallea, /forse colà dov’ e’ vendemmia e ara:/ di tante fiamme tutta risplendea /l’ottava bolgia, si com’ io m’accorsi/ tosto che fui là ‘ve ‘l fondo pareo./E qual colui che si vengìo con li orsi/ vide ‘l carro d’Elia al dipartire, /quando i cavalli al cielo erti levorsi,/ che nol potea sì con li occhi seguire,/ ch’el vedesse altro che la fiamma sola,/ sì come nuvoletta, in sù salire:/tal si move ciascuna per la gola /del fosso, ché nessuna mostra ‘l furto,/ e ogne fiamma un peccatore invola.”

Dante's confusion about whether the sophist is the single eternal figure above him in the sky or the many transient figures below him in the valley suggests the experience of spinning vertigo, where the fear of falling below is also a desire to fall. This desire to fall that we experience in vertigo is essentially a desire for freedom, a desire, not only to fall, but also to fly. Dante has lost a sense of high and low, and wishes both to fall and to fly. Dante describes this experience of vertigo immediately after he introduces these images of the peasant and the prophet. He says:

I was standing on the bridge, having risen up to see, so that if I had not taken hold of a rock I would have fallen down without a push.²

Dante's desire to see the sophist is almost a fall, almost a flight. He rises up to see, climbing up to the precipice hanging above the pit. The reversal of height and depth is a central focus of this canto, as Yuri Lotman has shown.³ In no other canto does the word "high" (*alto*) appear so often. But these images of the flight of vision and the fall are also essential to Dante's journey as a whole. His downward motion in hell will be revealed to him later as a motion upwards, when he passes through the center of the earth in canto 34. Dante is constantly re-orienting himself spatially throughout the *Divine Comedy*. Once he leaves the surface of the earth and discovers that the world was not as he thought it was, he can never be sure which way is up. Hence images of flight in the *Divine Comedy* are always images of the danger of the desire to know. This desire to see what is beautiful but dangerous is curiosity, the sin which, according to Augustine, lies close to pride because it involves a desire to treat the object of vision as a toy. Ulysses' canto is centered on the question of curiosity. As with the opening pages of book 10 of Augustine's *Confessions*, Dante uses *Inferno* 26 to force us to call into question the motivation of the whole of his epic, and the motivations of his readers to read it.

Ulysses is the greatest of the sophists, and Dante is desperate to speak with him. Virgil explains that Ulysses is in hell for deceiving other human beings, and for his theft of the statue of Athena at Troy, after it is prophesized that the theft of the statue will assure Greek victory. Deceit is understandably a crime for a Christian, but why would Ulysses be punished in hell for stealing the statue of Athena, a pagan idol? The theft of the statue of Athena is an allegory for Ulysses' desire to master wisdom. Ulysses wishes to possess wisdom by theft and art. He wishes to take wisdom despite wisdom. Ulysses does not understand that wisdom is not the kind of thing that one can gain through mastery. Rather, wisdom must give itself to man. Or as Heidegger puts it, Being must give itself to man.⁴ Ulysses' sin is precisely his blindness to this fact. For Ulysses, stealing the statue of Athena means fulfilling the oracle that makes it possible for the Greeks to conquer Troy. Stealing the statue is a manifest impiety, and idolatry. But for Ulysses impiety means fulfilling

² *Inferno* 26.43-45: "Io stava sovra 'l ponte a veder surto,/sì che s'io non avessi un ronchion preso, /caduto sarei giù sanz' esser urto."

³ See Y. M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. A. Shukman (Bloomington: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 177-185.

⁴ M. Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism* in: *Basic Writings*, trans. D. F. Krell (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), 238.

the oracle, and hence this impiety for him is still piety. His religion is a game. Dante also might be thought to play games, insofar as he is a poet. Dante, like Ulysses, also makes these games a part of his religion in his bold attempt to represent the holy in his poem. Hence Dante, like Ulysses, is in danger of idolatry. Ulysses and Dante are again in this respect twins we need to distinguish.

Hence the fate of Ulysses is of immense importance to Dante. He yearns to know what happened to Ulysses, as if he could learn from his death to see his own future, his own death by shipwreck, and avoid it. With the help of his guide Virgil, Ulysses is convinced to tell Dante the story of his death. But Virgil does not let Dante address Ulysses directly. Virgil says that Ulysses would not listen to Dante's vulgar modern style, but would only listen to his own more elegant Latin style. Virgil convinces Ulysses to speak through a complex rhetorical address. Virgil says to Ulysses:

If I merited of you while I lived, if I merited of you much or little, when on earth I wrote the high verses (...) let one tell where he, having lost himself, went to die.⁵

The phrases are spoken in the weightiest or loftiest style of classical rhetoric as Dante understood it. It is the style that Paul refused to use in the opening of his first letter to the *Corinthians*. There is something absurd about Virgil using this style, given the context of the speech. Virgil and Ulysses are both condemned to dwell outside of paradise. Virgil must stay in limbo, and Ulysses in hell. But here Virgil speaks as if they are both still dignified noblemen deserving respect. The classical world here appears as the young Nietzsche saw it, as the culture of the agon. Virgil's aristocratic tone suggests that he and Ulysses are like two victors in a contest who recognize each other's virtue, yet in fact they are the losers.

Virgil convinces Ulysses to speak, and Ulysses begins his story as follows:

When I departed from Circe, who subtracted a year from me (...) neither the sweetness of my son, nor reverence for my father, nor the love I owed Penelope, which ought to have gladdened her, none of these things could conquer within me my passion to become expert of the world, and expert of the vices of men and worth.⁶

Ulysses begins by suggesting the common medieval Neo-Platonic allegory of his life. By departing from Circe he overcomes the animal passions and lets reason rule him. He sails home, which would suggest the end of the soul's journey, the spiritual homeland that is prior to our wandering in the earthly world. But Dante immediately changes the old story of Ulysses, and in consequence, moves past the allegorical meaning. In Dante's

⁵ *Inferno* 26.79-84: "O voi che siete due dentro ad un foco,/ s'io merita di voi mentre ch'io vissi, /s'io merita di voi assai o poco/ quando nel mondo li alti versi scrissi, /... ma l'un di voi dica /dove, per lui, perduto a morir gissi."

⁶ *Inferno* 26.90-99: "Quando/mi diparti' da Circe, che sottrasse/ me più d'un anno là presso a Gaeta, /prima che si Enëa la nomasse,/né dolcezza di figlio, né la pietà /del vecchio padre, né 'l debito amore/ lo qual dovea Penelopè far lieta,/vincer potero dentro a me l'ardore/ ch'i' ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto/ e de li vizi umani e del valore..."

version, after Ulysses returns home, he gets bored, and decides to sail out again, to study the world and the vices of men and virtue. Notice how his phrasing “expert of the vices of men and of worth” suggests a particular kind of inquiry. Ulysses seems to think that man is vicious; he is interested in worth, but not in human beings. His desire to see the vices of man suggests that his primary way of understanding man is unmasking vices. Is Ulysses a misanthrope? We can easily see how such a view of man might agree with his expertise as a fraudulent counselor. Ulysses continues:

I set out on the high open sea, with just one ship and the few men who had not deserted me. The one shore and the other I saw, as far as Spain, as far as Morocco, and Sardinia, and the other islands which that sea bathes round.⁷

Like the Greek sophists, and unlike Socrates, Ulysses is a traveler. He knows the various cultures of the Mediterranean and studies their conventions. But no set of conventions appeal to him. Ulysses is not seeking to discover the best life possible for man, but merely to observe the cultures around him out of a pure speculative interest in human vices. The unmasking of the vices is a way of dominating men in thought, of looking down on them from above. At the same time, he wishes to commune with humanity only insofar as he wishes to learn to use their tricks. He leaves his own family, but creates no real community, except that which serves his own needs. And yet, a speculative interest in culture is not simply the interest of the sophist, but also of the philosopher. The philosopher wants to know about all of the various cultures from the perspective of God. Like Ulysses, the philosopher seeks something beyond the human world, and so also does Dante. Dante himself journeys to discover not only the vices of man, but also that which is beyond man. But here the differences between Dante and Ulysses begin to show up. Dante will also pursue human virtues that will be rewarded in heaven. The vices of his hell lead not to “the land without people,” but to purgatory and heaven, where a community of the blessed share a vision of God while still caring for those on earth. Dante’s vision of the vices and virtues will orient his understanding of human community. His poem has an essentially practical aim, as he says in the letter to Can Grande della Scalla. It is not simply an escape to the theological heights. It is a call for a new kind of human government based around the fulfillment of the potential of the human race in philosophy, as he outlined it in his treatise *On Monarchy*. But it is also a government at the same time led by a ruler who can “discern at least the tower of the True City.”⁸ That is, the temporal ruler should be able to orient human politics so that it is also open to the spiritual world that transcends human politics. But Ulysses is like Dante, and like the philosopher, in that he is not satisfied with merely what he has seen in the Mediterranean. After having spent all his life sailing around it, he says,

I and my companions were old and slow when we came to the narrow outlet where Hercules set up his landmarks, so that men would not pass beyond

⁷ *Inferno* 26.100-105: “ma misi me per l’alto mare aperto/ sol con un legno e con quella compagna /picciola da la qual non fui disertio./L’un lito e l’altro vidi infin la Spagna,/ fin nel Morrocco, e l’isola d’i Sardi, /e l’altre che quel mare intorno bagna.”

⁸ *Purgatorio* 16.95-96.

them. On my right hand I left Seville, and on the other hand had already left Ceuta. "O brothers" I said, "who through a hundred thousand perils have reached the West, to this brief vigil of our senses that remains to us, choose not to deny experience, behind the sun, of the world without people. Consider the seed from which you spring. You were not born to live as brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge." With this little speech I made my companions so eager for the voyage that it would have been hard to hold them back from the path.⁹

Ulysses convinces his men to sail out to the "land without people." He is no longer interested in seeing the vices of men, but now considers his virtue to be the knowledge of what is beyond man. But his desire to transcend the human is strange. He does not wish to fly up into the world above him, but merely to sail to another part of the earth. He seeks paradise by going sideways, not upwards. Again following Yuri Lotman, we see that Ulysses has no idea of up and down.

The earthly paradise he seeks is the pure realm of the active intellect. And yet he seeks to get there by maintaining the same attitude he had in his journey among men, namely negation. He seeks to find the absolute simply by negating the limits of human particularity. He negates each human society one by one, until finally he negates man as a whole in "the world without people." The phrase Ulysses intends to mean a world without a nation, a world of universality free from convention. But it comes out in a different sense than he intends.

In his old age he does not stop to reflect on the limitation of his death; he wishes to sail off into the infinite despite his death. He wishes to forget his finitude, and conquer death through knowledge. Ulysses wishes to look at his own death from a position of superiority, he wishes to sail beyond Hercules' landmarks as if Hercules was a competitor and not a benefactor. Here again we are reminded of the agon of the young Nietzsche. Ulysses sails around the Mediterranean so as to see the vices of man from a perspective above them. In the ordinary ethical world, what appears to be a virtue is merely a vice. The only true virtue is knowledge that stands above the fray of human activity. But what does it mean to stand above the fray? For Ulysses it means to be superior to those whom one manipulates with his gaze toward the skies and with his words. Like the Greek sophist, Ulysses thinks that rhetoric is the whole of politics. He thinks that in knowing virtue he is already virtuous, without actually acting virtuously. Just as his knowledge of vice is a contest with mankind, so also departure beyond the human world is only a further contest. He strives against Hercules, and as we will see, against God. This competition with God is already suggested by Ulysses' desire to go, as he says, "behind the sun." Metaphorically, to go behind the sun means to follow the sun to the west, into the regions of death. But

⁹ *Inferno* 26.106-123: "Io e' compagni eravam vecchi e tardi/ quando venimmo a quella foce stretta/ dov' Ercole segnò li suoi riguardi/acciò che l'uom più oltre non si metta;/ da la man destra mi lasciai Sibilia, /da l'altra già m'avea lasciata Setta./ 'O frati', dissi 'che per cento milia /perigli siete giunti a l'occidente, /a questa tanto picciola vigilia/d'i nostri sensi ch'è del rimanente/ non vogliate negar l'esperienza, /di retro al sol, del mondo sanza gente./ Considerate la vostra semenza: /fatti non foste a viver come bruti,/ ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza./ Li miei compagni fec' io sì aguti, /con questa orazion picciola, al cammino,/ che a pena poscia li avrei ritenuti."

literally it means to unmask the sun, to see what is behind it. Ulysses wants to go behind the principle of illumination, behind the Divine Mind, to see what is real apart from any light. He does not want to depend on the light, the light for him would be a rival; instead Ulysses wants to be master of what he sees. Ulysses describes the journey beyond the Mediterranean, which takes him south, towards the mountain of purgatory, at the top of which is paradise. Ulysses says,

We turned the back of the ship towards morning, and made our oars into wings for the foolish flight, always gaining on the left. Night then saw all the stars of the south pole, and our northern pole so low that it did not rise out of the ocean floor. Five times the light of the underside of the moon was rekindled and as many times spent, since we had entered on the lofty pass, when there appeared to us a mountain, obscure in the distance, and it seemed to me of such a height as I had never seen before. We rejoiced, and suddenly it turned to lamentations, for from the new earth a storm rose and struck the fore-part of the ship. Three times it whirled round with all the waters, and the fourth time it lifted the back of the ship aloft, and the front of the ship it plunged below, as pleased Another, until the sea closed over us.¹⁰

Ulysses' journey behind the sun is described in a series of night images. He counts time by the moon, not the sun, and he loses the pole star under the floor of the ocean. He and his men rejoice to see the mountain of purgatory that no living person had ever seen before, but the novel height of the mountain refuses to let itself be seen; and Ulysses' curiosity is stopped by the clouds of the storm that hide the height. Ulysses understands this obstacle as God's spiteful pleasure in his death. For Ulysses, God is also a competitor in the agon. Ulysses does not understand what the symbol of the mountain means. He thinks to achieve wisdom by moving everywhere horizontally, while what the mountain suggests is the impossibility of a horizontal or earthly vision of God. In order to see what is beyond the human, we must change our perspective. Ulysses refuses to change his perspective. The great height of the mountain, higher than any mountain previously seen, suggests the foolishness of the horizontal passage that Ulysses calls "flight." His foolishness is that of a false prophet, leading men to heights that are in fact depths.

In Plato's dialogue the *Sophist*, the Stranger says that the sophist can't distinguish the general of an army from the man who kills rats, the exterminator. The exterminator is in the class of hunters, and so too is the general, the one kills rats and the other, men; hence, they may be treated as equal. Such irony can make a joke of anything. The obvious one-sidedness of such a statement about the general makes clear the one-sided character

¹⁰ *Inferno* 26.124-142: "E volta nostra poppa nel mattino, /de' remi facemmo ali al folle volo, /sempre acquistando dal lato mancino./Tutte le stelle già de l'altro polo /vedea la notte, e 'l nostro tanto basso, /che non surgèa fuor del marin suolo./Cinque volte racceso e tante casso /lo lume era di sotto da la luna, /poi che 'ntrati eravam ne l'alto passo,/quando n'apparve una montagna, bruna /per la distanza, e parvemi alta tanto /quanto veduta non avèa alcuna./Noi ci allegrammo, e tosto tornò in pianto; /ché de la nova terra un turbo nacque /e percosse del legno il primo canto./Tre volte il fè girar con tutte l'acque; /a la quarta levar la poppa in suso /e la prora ire in giù, com' altrui piacque,/infin che 'l mar fu sovra noi richiuso."

of the sophists. Their world is flat. Meaningful conventional distinctions evaporate in the crucible of a seemingly pure reason. Making distinctions in speech that mirror real distinctions in the world outside us is a difficult task. One can never understand what a general is if one will never allow the conventional feelings of respect or hatred for the rigors of war which one ought to feel for a real general to enter into one's consideration of him. The danger of becoming lost in empty words in a flattened world arises because of the attraction of power: When one reduces the real to our chatter, the world lies completely exposed in front of us, and nothing escapes our curiosity. In such an aerial perspective, no human motives can appear high. There can be no unknowns if we remove all laws external to and independent of us, and if only our manipulation of speech remains. The mistake of the sophist is to replace the object of wonder with his own procedures and practices. By staying only with the surfaces that curiosity sets out before us, we can be total masters, but as Heidegger says in *Being and Time*, thus we are left everywhere and nowhere.¹¹ Ulysses is such a master, with much curiosity and without any humility.

Let me entertain an objection against what I am suggesting. One might argue that Ulysses' lack of piety indicates that he is in fact the philosopher, not the sophist. For example, one might point out that Aristotle tells us in the *Nichomachean Ethics* that shame is not a virtue.¹² He says that shame is appropriate only to children and women. Why then should we be *humbled*? However, Aristotle's statement here clearly does not apply to piety in every sense, for we also know that another form of awe, namely, wonder, is the origin of philosophy; and we know further that Aristotle speaks of the reverence of the philosopher for mind in book ten.¹³ Doubt is the origin of modern philosophy, but the origin of ancient philosophy is wonder. Wonder resembles doubt insofar as it is also an uncertainty, but wonder is particular in that it is a doubt that also aspires to positive knowledge of what lies outside of the one who thinks, and above the one who thinks. Wondering, learning, and wondering again, is like climbing a mountain. This is a special kind of doubt that is a medieval version of Socratic eroticism. Dante speaks of it in the *Paradiso*: "Doubt, like a shoot, is born at the root of truth, and it is nature that pushes us upwards from height to height."¹⁴ In contrast, modern doubt operates on a level plane, bringing the object down to the level of the subject; like Ulysses' progress, doubt is horizontal, while at the same time, demonic. It tries to take all the power that the height of the old God once had, and transfer that to the horizontal, just as Hegel did with the "*Humanus*, the new Holy of Holies."¹⁵ Hegel, like Ulysses, lacks the Socratic *eros* that Dante also has. Hence, although the piety of the ancient philosopher is certainly not the piety of revelation, it is clear that Ulysses is not the ancient philosopher either. Just as Ulysses' desire to dominate and his lack of interest in his community is not the politics of Socrates, so also the impious curiosity of Ulysses is inappropriate to Socrates' dialectic aimed at the Good.

The cognitive mastery of the sophist over theory, and its analog in his political mastery over the men he dominates, derive from his lack of wonder. The character of the

¹¹ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie, E. Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 217 (H 173).

¹² *Nichomachean Ethics* 1128b10-11.

¹³ *Nichomachean Ethics* 1178a1-2

¹⁴ *Paradiso* 4.130-3.

¹⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 607.

sophist's knowledge is strange. He knows everything, and yet his knowledge is so impersonal that it is difficult to say just to whom this knowledge actually belongs. Similarly, he is so unaffected before the crowd that it is difficult to find the real man behind the many masks. He is malleable, and this means at the same time, that he lacks an identity. Ulysses' name in Greek indeed resembles the Greek word for no one, "*Udeis*." The power and knowledge that Ulysses has, imply his losing himself. He is reason without a reasoner. In the same way that Ulysses' identity vanishes, so too does the meaning of his speech. His claim to desire "virtue and knowledge" is false, although he genuinely seems to believe it. The phrase "virtue and knowledge" is false here because the two words are divorced from two other words that give them meaning, namely, "prudence and wisdom." Because Ulysses knows at the expense of his identity, Dante describes him as invisible, hidden in a tongue of flame. The tongue wanders as if it were a man, as in life Ulysses' tongue seemed a tool separable from his true self. Yet this empty instrument, now fully detached from the mouth of its user, has effaced the one it imprisons as it had once concealed his intentions. The perfect dexterity of the tongue is the power of language to create changing forms,—to be the sophist and appear the philosopher, to be impious and appear holy. A parody of the gift of tongues in the *Acts of the Apostles*, this flame is knowledge and speech for its own sake, that is, a tongue wandering in a throat, a means taken as an end. At the same time, the flame is the disappearance of the speaker into the flickering nothing of mere words.

Why is he such an important figure for Dante? What does it mean that Ulysses is Dante's twin? Dante cannot easily reject Ulysses. He sees Ulysses' evil, and yet compares his own shipwreck to Ulysses'. Dante gives the impression that he could only have written his poem if he had dabbled in Ulyssean evils, and at one point been quite close to Ulysses. We can return more profitably now to Dante's vertigo, to his inability to see whether the sophists were like the transcendent figure of the prophet vanishing into heaven watched by his disciple, or whether the sophists were like fire-flies in the valley watched by the peasant. The two possibilities that Dante advanced are the two possible meanings of his own art of speech. The image of the fire-flies suggests a stupor. The peasant is dazzled by the fire-flies as one may be dazzled by a virtuoso. The emptiness of the peasant's intoxication with the fire-flies suggests that for many art is merely a moment of rest to prepare us for further work; it may have a useful function, but a function no different than that of alcohol. The peasant's use of aesthetic experience as alcohol accounts for most of our experiences of art and beauty. On the other hand, the vision of the prophet ascending to heaven suggests the higher aim of Dante's art is to show us the divine reality above our busy active life of petty purposes. This is the true use of literature and leisure. His poem uses his divine gifts of speech to serve the human community of his times to let them see beyond their times. Hence the difference between Dante and Ulysses is simply love. Dante is a true prophet because he is moved by love, unlike the false prophet Ulysses, a mere tongue. "Though I command tongues both human and angelic, if I speak without love I am no more than sounding bronze, a cymbal crashing; and though I have the power of prophecy to penetrate all mysteries and knowledge (...) without love, I am nothing."¹⁶

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:1-2.

DANTE'S TEMPORAL MONARCHY AS THE PHILOSOPHERS' COUNTER-COUP D'ÉTAT

Dante Alighieri was the finest poet of his age, and he knew it: he acknowledged that pride in his craft was his most grievous sin (*Purgatorio* 13.133-8). The poet of the *Inferno* boldly placed himself as a character within the small number of the finest poets of all time (*Inferno* 4.102). By contrast, in a short work on natural philosophy, *Questio de aqua et terra*, Dante modestly counted himself “the least among those philosophizing truly.”¹ In the *Convivio*, literally, “the Banquet,” he represents himself as sitting not at the table with the wise but at their feet, from which position he can pass on to the vulgar, us, what falls from the discourse of the wise (1.1.10). Here Dante, writing in Italian and alternating between poetry and prose, casts himself as popularizing philosophy.

Dante venerates classical thinkers, especially Aristotle, “the master of those who know” (*Inferno* 4.131), and yet in crucial respects he eschews the moderation of classical philosophy. In his principal political work, the *Monarchia*, his modesty as a philosopher falls away and he declares it his duty not to recapitulate the teachings of others, but to advance an inquiry never before attempted.² He accordingly describes a “temporal monarchy” that encompasses all human beings and, guided by philosophical writings, directs them to their natural collective end, “to always actualize the entire potential of the possible intellect” (1.4-5). The conflict with Aristotle’s political teaching makes the novelty of the treatise manifest: for the ancients, political rule is by its nature limited in scope to the *polis*. Dante’s vision of humanity, based on the study of human nature and directed to a natural end, prompted the judgment that, “the *Monarchia* is the first act of rebellion against scholastic transcendence.”³ Yet for most modern readers of Dante, this view of

¹ *Questio* 1.1, 24.87; *Epistole* 12.3.6.

² *Monarchia* 1.1. I make use of the edition of B. Nardi, *Monarchia*, in vol. 2 of *Dante Alighieri—Opere Minori* (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1979). This volume also includes the *Questio de aqua et terra*, ed. F. Mazzoni; *De vulgare eloquentiae*, ed. Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo; and the *Epistole*, eds. A. Frugoni and G. Brugnoli. Nardi’s edition of the *Monarchia*, however, following the edition of P. G. Ricci, *Monarchia* (Milan: Mondadori, 1965), partitions book 3 into 15 chapters, whereas most editions have 16 chapters. For those chapters where Nardi’s numbering is not conventional, both numbers will be given (e.g., 3.15[16]). For the *Convivio*, I make use of *Convivio*, ed. G. Inglese (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1993).

³ G. Gentile, *Studi su Dante* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1990), 50. This judgment is affirmed by Nardi: “Il concetto dell’Impero nello svolgimento del pensiero dantesco,” in *Saggi di filosofia dantesca* (Florence: La nuova Italia,

the *Monarchia* draws the author of the *Comedy* too close to secular modernity. In Etienne Gilson's reading, the idea of the monarchy is inextricably tied to the church: "The only universal community of which the idea existed at the time was a community essentially supernatural and religious: the Church (...). In order, then, to conceive of the possibility of a universal temporal community, it was necessary to borrow from the Church its ideal of a universal Christendom and to secularize it."⁴ Both statements have some truth, but to comprehend Dante's teaching about the monarchy, one should neither look to modern rebellion against transcendence, nor to the church, but precisely to the thinker whom Dante reveres most highly: Aristotle. Despite the manifest conflict between Dante's universal temporal monarchy and Aristotle's *polis*-based view of politics, we pursue the following question: how far can one proceed in understanding Dante's thought as resulting precisely from his reverence for Aristotle and his fidelity to the core of Aristotle's thinking on the relationship between philosophy, politics, and religion?

Political rule, according to Aristotle, is an arrangement in which citizens share rule with one another because they jointly submit to the rule of law (*Politics* 1287a17-19). The complete political community, the city, cannot contain a very great number of inhabitants because citizens sharing rule must be acquainted with one another (1326b22-26). Aristotle considers whether the best regime should be ordered towards the highest virtue simply, contemplative virtue, but ambiguously or modestly concludes only that a well-ordered city might outwardly appear inactive while being inwardly active, analogously to a contemplative man (1324a29, 1325a1). Instead, the best practicable regime aims at the virtue of justice (1328b35ff.), and the best existing polities (e.g., Sparta) are ordered toward a still less exalted virtue, courage (1324b13). In sum, for Aristotle, political rule is shared among citizens in cities that are relatively small and, in the best of all cases, aimed at practicing the active, political virtues; for Dante, by contrast, the "temporal monarchy" is the rule of one man over the whole of humanity for the sake of actualizing the full potential of the human intellect. The contrast with Aristotle could not be more striking.

This initial opposition appears less striking, however, if one narrows one's focus exclusively to what Aristotle says about the best regime, kingship, and especially about a particular form of kingship, "complete" or "total kingship" (*pambasileia*). For, according to Aristotle, if the virtue of one should be so great that he is not commensurable with other men, that he should be like a god compared with other men, then a law that treated him as equal to the others would be unjust (1284a3-15). For men of such superlative virtue, "there is no law, they themselves are law." Either such a man should be banished from the city in order to preserve the law, or he should be obeyed willingly without the law; while banishment is politically just (1284b17), in the best regime the obedience towards the best man is the natural course (1284b25-34). Because this total kingship supersedes law,

1967), 256, and contested by E. Gilson, *Dante and Philosophy*, trans. D. Moore (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 162-163, among others.

⁴ Gilson, *Dante and Philosophy*, 166, 179.

the circumstantial limitations inherent to the rule of law seem not to apply: kingly rule may extend over multiple cities, over an entire nation, or even several nations (1285b33). Aristotle does not state what sort of virtue might warrant this type of rule; one may suppose that it is connected with philosophizing since this kingship is called “most divine” (1289a40), and the contemplative life is the one most like the activity of the gods (*Ethics* 1178b7-24). If Aristotle has something like a philosopher-king in mind, it might explain why he notes historical or mythical examples of the other four types of kingship, but mentions no example of total kingship.⁵ The brief discussion of total kingship appears to be a tacit reminder of the inherent justness of the claim of the wise to rule, a silent nod to Plato’s inquiry into the philosopher-king.⁶

Dante’s teaching on the temporal monarchy is therefore not entirely without precedent in Aristotle.⁷ He emphasizes a part of Aristotle’s teaching to the detriment of the whole: he takes up what is best but impracticable, and presents it as necessary and having actually existed in the rule of Caesar Augustus. In comparison with Aristotle, Dante’s teaching appears wildly immoderate. This immoderation is somewhat mitigated by concessions made to political practice. Dante’s “temporal monarch” or emperor is not himself a philosopher, but only draws counsel from the works of philosophy (3.15[16].8). A human being does not rise to the office of monarch on the basis of his exceptional virtue. In fact, the reverse occurs: once a human has been named monarch, he acquires the virtue of justice in the highest degree since he, ruling all human beings, has nothing further to desire unjustly (*Monarchia* 1.11). The virtue of justice is reduced to the absence of avarice, rendering it attainable. Furthermore, Dante is more willing than Aristotle to deem wars of conquest just: because the “Roman people” prior to Augustus conducted their wars under constraint of necessity and with a zeal for justice, their victories revealed the judgment of a just, natural providence (*Monarchia* 2.7-9; cf. *Politics* 1325a31-b10). Finally, Dante conceives of the temporal monarchy not as the territorial expansion of the city or polity, but as a supra-political form of rule: cities and peoples must always craft laws to suit local conditions, and the city remains the natural locus of political life.⁸ The monarchy is intended to guarantee the correctness of local regimes (*Monarchia* 1.12.9, *Epistole* 7.6-8),

⁵ *Politics* 1285a2-b33. See R. Bartlett, “Aristotle’s Science of the Best Regime,” *American Political Science Review* 88 no.1 (1994): 154.

⁶ In his discussion of Plato’s *Republic* in *Politics* 2, Aristotle surprisingly omits any discussion of the philosopher-king; it appears to be postponed to the discussion of kingship in *Politics* 3 (R. Bartlett, “Aristotle’s Science of the Best Regime”: 148; T. Lindsay, “The ‘God-Like Man’ versus the ‘Best Laws’: Politics and Religion in Aristotle’s *Politics*,” *The Review of Politics* 53, no. 3 (1991): 506). There is some controversy over whether the unnamed virtue of the king refers to theoretical wisdom or practical wisdom; see R. Bartlett and M. Nichols, “Aristotle’s Science of the Best Regime: A Controversy,” *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 1 (1995): 152-160, and W. R. Newell, “Superlative Virtue: the Problem of Monarchy in Aristotle’s *Politics*,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1987): 159-178.

⁷ Allan H. Gilbert has noted that Dante cites the *Politics* with much less precision than the *Ethics*, and that several passages attributed to the *Politics* were likely derived from intermediate sources, thus bringing into question Dante’s familiarity with the work (A. H. Gilbert, “Had Dante Read the *Politics* of Aristotle?” *PMLA* 43, no. 3 (1928): 602-613). For the present argument, what is essential is that Dante grasped the difference in the *Politics* between political rule by law and kingship in the full sense. Intermediate sources (e.g., Giles of Rome’s *De regimine principum*) tend to draw more attention to kingship and the right to rule on the basis of wisdom.

⁸ *Monarchia* 1.14.4. That the city remains the locus of political life is abundantly clear in Dante’s obsessive concern with Florence’s partisan conflicts (e.g., *Inferno* 6.49-90, *Paradiso* 16).

and the absence of this supervisory rule permits cities to fall into corruption, tyranny, and civil strife (*Purgatorio* 6.76-126). Despite these efforts to reconcile Aristotle's perfect kingship with practice, Dante's teaching remains immoderate in comparison with Aristotle's: in *Politics* 4 Aristotle sets aside kingship, the regime that is simply best and what one might pray for, in order to discuss at rather greater length the regimes that are best and most practicable under a variety of circumstances (1288b22ff). He is reticent about the claim of the philosopher to rule and refrains from making contemplative virtue the *telos* of any regime.⁹ By contrast, Dante explicitly connects the highest kingship with philosophy and makes the exercise of theoretical virtues the end of humanity as a whole.

Dante's deviations from Aristotle's teaching on kingship cannot be understood without remembering that the universal monarchy is set alongside the universal church. Humankind has two ends, happiness in this life and happiness in eternal life; the two ends require two teachings, philosophical writings and spiritual writings, and likewise two guides, the emperor (i.e., the monarch) and the supreme pontiff (*Monarchia* 3.15[16]). It is necessary to consider how Aristotle's description of total kingship was understood in a medieval Christian context. When Aristotle discusses the "most divine" regime that "one would pray for" (1289a40, 1288b23), where one man is distinguished by his extraordinary virtue from others as a god is distinguished from men, this unique regime was understood by some medieval readers as referring to the kingdom of Christ. The association is unexpected but not irrational: perfect kingship is the regime where good men obey the best man because they recognize his superlative excellence; to do otherwise would be, in Aristotle's words, like "claiming to rule over Zeus" (*Politics* 1284b32). Despite the surprising suitability of Christ's rule to the philosopher's *pambasileia*, the association radically transforms the idea. Aristotle's teaching investigates whether a human being might by his own effort ascend to a divine excellence and thus merit a supra-political kingly rule, even if such a rule is highly improbable. The medieval Christian reader holds it certain as a matter of faith that the divinity, conversely, has descended into human flesh, and that this improbable reign has begun and will be perfected. The Christian teaching looks like the fulfillment of Aristotle's teaching and at the same time its reversal: the arduous moral and intellectual striving for excellence, and the unlikely political recognition of that excellence, are replaced by faith in a divine action that brings this excellence into being and ensures its recognition.

In the Christian teaching, the unification of humankind under one king has already begun: although humankind was divided into different peoples at Babel through the multiplication of languages, this division was remedied when the Holy Spirit enabled individuals to speak the languages of all nations so that the kingdom of God could receive all peoples (Acts 2:1-12; Augustine *City of God* 18.49). The conviction that this universal kingdom actually exists did not controvert Aristotle's view that human beings naturally divide themselves into multiple, opposed political communities. Christian doctrine and classical political philosophy remained compatible inasmuch as Christ's universal kingdom

⁹ Socrates says the rule of the philosopher is paradoxical and a cause of laughter (*Republic* 472a, 473c). In Aristotle's reprisal of this problem, in order to render superlative virtue effective, it is concealed; this means concealing the difference between superlative virtue and mere political virtues (cf. H. Jaffa, "Aristotle," in *The History of Political Philosophy*, eds. L. Strauss and J. Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 106-107, 127-128).

has a dual character: it is both the kingdom as-it-will-be when its king returns to execute judgment, and the kingdom as-it-is-now, imperfect, on its earthly pilgrimage toward that end, that is, the community of the faithful led by the clergy. Insofar as the latter is not identical to the former—for the wheat must still be separated from the chaff (*City* 20.9)—the advent of Christ's universal kingdom did not fundamentally contradict the limited range and ambitions of political rule under classical political philosophy. Thus, Ernest Fortin said of Augustine that his “general stance (...) appears to be (...) consonant with the typical pre-modern position, which is best described as a judicious blend of high ideals and moderate expectations.”¹⁰

Some authors in Dante's era, however, obscured the distinction between the kingdom as-it-is-now and as-it-will-be with a view to expanding the “temporal” (political) powers of the church. As Dante makes us aware repeatedly in the *Comedy*, Italy had been ruined by the conflict between Guelph and Ghibelline, between nominally papal and imperial partisans. By Dante's account, prelates acting from avarice had usurped the secular power of princes and arrogated it to their own offices.¹¹ Medieval canon jurists developed a legal doctrine attributing a “plenitude of power” to the papacy, which alleged that the pope's authority stood above the law and which granted prelates a limited appellate jurisdiction over secular courts.¹² In this rhetorically charged atmosphere, Aristotle's description of total kingship could be taken as referring to the kingdom of God as-it-is-now, the church, and therefore as giving *philosophical* legitimacy to the *legal* doctrine of the plenitude of power. Dante's near contemporaries Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham examined and critiqued Aristotle's account of total kingship precisely because it was susceptible to being employed in defense of ecclesiastical power.¹³ Whereas Marsilius repudiated Aristotle's account of total kingship, Dante sought to recover what one might call the secular, philosophical character of Aristotle's total kingship from the ecclesiastical misappropriation. Dante's wide deviations from Aristotle's account of kingship may be understood as the outcome of restoring one element of it—its secular, philosophical character—at the price of forsaking the others.

It should be remembered that, for Aristotle, religion is a feature characteristic of any city ruled by law: the priesthood is a subordinate part of the city, and the laws posited by the city determine the forms of worship, such as what to sacrifice and to whom.¹⁴ Of the things usually said about the gods, a few—such as, that the divine encompasses

¹⁰ E. Fortin, *Classical Christianity and the Political Order: Reflections on the Theological-Political Problem*, ed. J. Brian Benestad (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 148.

¹¹ For example, *Inferno* 19, *Purgatorio* 16.109–111, *Monarchia* 3.3.17.

¹² Giles of Rome, *On Ecclesiastical Power* 3.9, in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, eds. J. Parens and J. Macfarland (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 341–344.

¹³ Marsilius maintains that legislative power can never belong to a human being on the basis of his greater nobility; in other words, he denies the justice of total kingship lest the clergy put it to tyrannical use (*Defensor Pacis*, trans. A. Gewirth (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 1.11, 2.30). From this principle follows the famous proto-liberal doctrine that the “legislator” is, “the whole body of the citizens, or the weightier part thereof” (1.11.2, 1.18.6). For the same reason, but to somewhat different ends, Ockham closely examines Aristotle's account of total kingship precisely when investigating papal monarchy (*The Dialogue* part 3, tract 1, book 2, chapters 3–19). This reading of Marsilius and Dante in reference to Aristotle's account of total kingship is initiated by H. Mansfield, *Taming the Prince* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993 [1989]).

¹⁴ For example, *Politics* 1285b13–19, 1329a27–33, 1335b13–17, 1336b13–20; *Ethics* 1134b23.

nature—are “divinely” said (although still said in the “form of a story”), whereas most things said about the gods—such as, their resemblance to men or animals—are fictional stories devised for the purpose of persuading the vulgar and supporting the laws.¹⁵ These implications of Aristotle’s discussion of total kingship for religion have to be contrasted with its appropriation in the medieval period, and here the aforementioned “reversal” of Aristotle’s teaching becomes more apparent. For Aristotle, the superiority of the kingly rule of the best man over rule by law tacitly correlates to an analogous superiority of the philosopher’s account of the divine over how it is represented in (civil) religion. For some Christian readers, the association of Aristotle’s total kingship with Christ’s reign necessarily connected kingship not with philosophy so much as with religion, especially a religion that had subsumed and surpassed what is best in classical philosophy. Augustine had long since maintained that Christianity, no less than classical philosophy, transcended the absurdities of pagan *civil* religion, and that it did so more completely than the multiple, contentious schools of philosophy.¹⁶ In other words, facing the classical opposition between philosophy and civil religion, Christianity took the side of philosophy. Inasmuch as Dante sought to free political rule from ecclesiastical supervision and to restore a wholly secular conception of total kingship, he established much more vividly than Aristotle the connection between total kingship and philosophy. Dante gladly acknowledged the reign of Christ in the *eternal* monarchy, but asserted on the other side that the *temporal* monarchy was guided by philosophical teachings and directed towards a philosophical end, the actualization of the intellect.

Having made the tacit connection between total kingship and philosophy thoroughly explicit, Dante’s *Monarchia* goes much further than Aristotle in maintaining the certainty of political philosophy: he argues that the ends and means of this-worldly life were made “entirely known to us by the philosophers” (*Monarchia* 3.15[16].9, cf. 1.1.3). When drawing an analogy between the temporal monarch and God as the first mover, he says that the relation between the first mover and the first moved—heaven—is made “most evident” by philosophy (*Monarchia* 1.9.2). Moreover, the treatise itself is structured in a manner that appears to contradict Aristotle’s claim that the degree of precision and necessity exhibited in mathematics cannot be expected in political philosophy.¹⁷ Each of the three books of the *Monarchia* demonstrates a single statement, and the proof of each statement begins from a first principle, an irrefutable truth, to which one can return analytically (*Monarchia* 1.2.4, 2.2, 3.2). Throughout the treatise Dante repeatedly—and, to modern tastes, pedantically—exhibits his employment of logical forms in order to emphasize the demonstrative character of his political science (e.g., 1.11.9, 2.10.9; 3.12.3). He

¹⁵ *Metaphysics* 1074b1–14. Lindsay has argued for the religious implications of the discussion of kingship and law (T. Lindsay, “The ‘God-Like Man’ versus the ‘Best Laws’: Politics and Religion in Aristotle’s *Politics*,” *The Review of Politics* 53, no.3 (1991): 497–98).

¹⁶ On the contentious schools of philosophy, see *City* 19.1. To rebut critics of Christianity, Augustine shows that ancient philosophers had already discredited paganism by developing a natural theology distinct from the city’s civil theology (or the poets’ theology; *City* 6.5, 7; 8.5, 11). Christianity endorses the philosophical critique of pagan civil religion, but carries the work of philosophy still further by making truths in philosophy available to all men (Fortin, *Classical Christianity and the Political Order*, 94–95).

¹⁷ *Ethics* 1194b13. Dante affirms Aristotle’s claim about precision in book 2 (*Monarchia* 2.2.7), which deals with human acts, but this leaves open the possibility that Aristotle’s qualification does not apply to book 1.

not only reasserts the connection between the highest form of kingship and philosophy, but, anticipating early modern philosophers such as Spinoza and Hobbes, he emphasizes the certainty that philosophical reasoning can attain even when applied to ethics and politics. In the *Monarchia* philosophy assumes a public status in guiding human affairs that was unprecedented in classical thought; it boldly assumes a public responsibility for steering the whole of humanity to its highest possibilities.

By this reading of the *Monarchia*, one would not say that Dante developed the idea of temporal monarchy by “secularizing” the church, except insofar as this re-appropriation of Aristotle’s total kingship is conditioned by the intention to reverse its prior consecration by hierocratic thinkers. If “to secularize” an institution means to convert it from an ecclesiastical to a civil use or status, then Dante certainly did not do this to the church, since the treatise, like the *Comedy*, celebrates the existence of *two* universal communities, empire and church. The two universal communities recall Augustine’s pair, the city of God and city of men (*civitas hominum*), especially in those instances when Dante speaks of the universal civilization of humankind (*universalis civilitas humanis generis*).¹⁸ Against the background of Augustine’s two cities, it was hardly necessary to secularize the church in order to justify studying human civilization as a whole. Seen in this context, Dante’s thinking about the temporal monarchy and its instantiation in the Roman Empire seems less a secularization of the church than a deliberate rehabilitation of the city of men. Only by considering this rehabilitation of the city of men can one adequately appreciate Dante’s political thinking as secular from its origins.

For Augustine, the Roman Empire must be evaluated in the light of the story of Babel, the first attempt to unify humankind under a single rule. Human beings are social animals who not only form households, as do many animals, but who seek fellowship (*societas*) with “all men” (*City* 19.12). This natural sociability of all human beings is not properly “political” (in Aristotle’s sense) since it lacks any kind of coercion or mastery. This original, natural fellowship was marred by Cain’s murder of Abel; the lost unity of mankind is sought, in different ways, by both the city of men and the city of God. In Augustine’s reading, Babel was the capital city of a great empire; its ruler sought mastery over all humankind and impiously put himself in the place of God. When God imposed the diversity of languages, he ensured that the whole of humankind would never come to serve one man in the way it ought to serve Himself. The inner truth of the Babel story was reenacted in Rome: the Romans suppressed in themselves every vicious desire, giving the appearance of virtue, in order to satisfy one vice alone, the love of praise (5.13). The fitting reward for this extraordinary but perverse self-restraint was the vain, “earthly

¹⁸ *Monarchia* 1.2.8; cf. *Convivio* 4.4.1. According to Lorenzo Minio-Paluello, *civilitas* was widely taken as a translation or modernization of Augustine’s *civitas* (“Tre Note alla ‘Monarchia,’” in *Opuscula: the Latin Aristotle* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1972), 295-296). Furthermore, although *civilitas* occasionally means regime or constitution (*Monarchia* 3.3.2, *De vulgare eloquentiae* 1.9.4), a usage prompted by an early, incomplete translation of the *Ethics*, Dante generally uses *politia* to refer to regime in Aristotle’s sense of *politeia* (*Monarchia* 1.2.6, 1.12.9).

glory of high empire,” nothing but “smoke without weight.”¹⁹ Although Rome strove to encompass the whole, it never lacked foreign enemies and, still worse, the more the empire expanded, the more it was torn by civil war (19.7). Augustine, echoing the classical political philosophers, judged that, if it were possible for men to give up the love of praise, they would do better to content themselves with living in numerous, small states.²⁰ The “city of men” is not properly a city at all since it lacks the commonness of purpose that characterizes a city (2.21, cf. 4.4, 19.24). The most appropriate name for the so-called “city of men” is “Babel,” which, as Genesis underscores, means “confusion.”

For Dante as well the division of humankind and its state of confusion begins with the tower of Babel, but in Dante’s account the tower is an offense against “nature” and a “naturing” God; the tower is an artifice employed not to imitate nature, but to surpass it (*De vulgare eloquentiae* 1.7.4). The division of languages associated with Babel likewise occurs naturally: since a language is composed of signs selected at the pleasure and judgment of each speaker, it inexorably changes with time; just as the heavens ceaselessly rotate, humans ceaselessly seek novelty; vernacular languages therefore vary by region, by city, even by neighborhood!²¹ As languages diverge through a natural process, this divergence has a natural remedy. The variation of languages occurs in vernacular speech, the mother tongue that we speak effortlessly and without appeal to rules (*De vulgare eloquentiae* 1.1); in contrast with this, we also have “grammatical” speech that requires assiduous study and remains the same in different locations and different ages (1.9). Human nature is double: we react to an endless variety of natural stimuli, whose endless motion is ultimately caused by the ceaseless rotation of the heavens, but we also have intellect, akin to the First Mover of the heavens, and intellect renders our will free from the action of natural causes (*Purgatorio* 16.73-79). By our variable nature we are willful and prone to sin, but by our intellectual nature we are rational beings capable of virtue and rectitude; thus, when we devise arts in order to arrest this natural variability, we do not act contrary to nature, but fulfill our better nature.²² The division of humankind at Babel is partially remedied by the work of the intellect in developing “grammatical” language, Latin, the language of Cicero, Virgil, and Augustan Rome.²³

¹⁹ *City* 5.15, 17. Translated phrases are taken from *The City of God*, trans. M. Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1950).

²⁰ *City* 18.45, cf. 3.10, 4.15. Recall Fortin’s view that Augustine’s stance appears to be “consonant with the typical pre-modern position” (Fortin, *Classical Christianity and the Political Order*, 148).

²¹ *De vulgare eloquentiae* 1.3, 1.9; *Paradiso* 26.128-29.

²² *De vulgare eloquentiae* 1.7.1, 1.16.3, 2.2.7-8. According to Albert Russell Ascoli, “the use of language binds reason to the will and to the world of corporeal contingency, and thus continuously subjects it to individuality and historicity” (A. R. Ascoli, “‘Neminem ante nos’: Historicity and Authority in the *De vulgari eloquentia*,” *Annali d’Italianistica* 8 (1991): 209); this renders human rationality historical and contingent. For Dante the linguistic sign must be rational and sensible; this does not require, however, that reason be entirely bound to the will and contingency. The fact that Dante draws comparisons between grammatical Latin and the Italian vernacular with respect to their capacities to render manifest “concepts in the mind” indicates that these concepts are not wholly bound to either language (*Convivio* 1.5.12, 1.10.12). If human rationality were wholly historical and contingent, it would not be possible for men of “genius and science” to make the vernacular “illustrious” through eloquent use (*De vulgare eloquentiae* 2.1.5-8 and 1.10.2).

²³ There is some ambiguity about the meaning of *gramatica*, and the interpretation proposed here is complicated by the complete absence of the Roman Empire from *De vulgare eloquentia*. The phrase *ydiuma Latinorum* refers to contemporary Italian (1.10.2). The language at the root of Italian, French, Provençal, presumably (vulgar) Latin,

Just as *gramatica* is the human artifice by which we overcome the deleterious effects of the natural diversity of languages, the temporal monarchy is the human artifice by which we overcome the deleterious effects of the natural diversity of peoples and regimes. In the wake of the multiplication of languages, humans were dispersed geographically to every inhabitable, climatic region (*De vulgare eloquentiae* 1.8). As climates differ, so also do the ways of life of the inhabitants, and because the laws in each geographical region must be fitted to the distinct way of life there, no single body of law can encompass all peoples (*Monarchia* 1.14). The wide variation of languages and dialects examined in *De vulgare eloquentia* is matched by an equal variation in habits and customs (*De vulgare eloquentiae* 1.16.3). Amidst this diversity of laws, humankind taken as a whole must be guided by a single rule or law (*regula siva lex*) that particular princes receive from the monarch, just as the practical intellect receives the major premise from the speculative intellect. Despite this suggestion of a higher law, Dante does not propose a natural law teaching: he does not enumerate these higher principles of law or even suggest that an enumeration is possible.²⁴ Diverse legal codes are united not by a body of articulated law, but by a human being actively employing his intellect. According to one analogy, the ruler is related to the law as a mover is related to the motion it causes: in whatever way the monarch moves men to act, this is the law (*Monarchia* 1.9.2). The foundation of the empire is “human right” (*ius humanum*); “right” in Dante’s lexicon corresponds to Aristotle’s *dikaion*, what is just.²⁵ The only positive content Dante gives to “human right” in the *Monarchia* is that the emperor cannot deliberately weaken the empire. Thus, although the *Monarchia* says nothing of Babel or the variation of languages, and the *De vulgare eloquentia* does not speak of the Roman Empire, when the two works are viewed in parallel, it is clear that the activity of the monarch is the political counterpart to *gramatica*, the artifice that ameliorates the natural divisions between peoples.

The temporal monarchy does not offend God, as Babel did, because it enables humankind to achieve its natural end, “to always actualize the entire potential of the possible intellect.” At first blush, Dante and Augustine seem to agree on the purpose of the temporal Monarchy or the city of men: to attain peace in this life (*Monarchia* 3.4.3; *City of God* 19.13-16). But for Augustine, worldly peace serves to permit men to attend to their inner discord and attain eternal peace, whereas for Dante worldly peace is the means by which humankind can actualize its intellect. In performing this task, humankind not only attains its own end, but serves as the means by which the natural whole attains its end as

is referred to only as *ydiuma tripharium* (from, *tri*, three, and, *fari*, to speak; 1.8.3). According to Maria Corti, *gramatica* refers not to a particular language, Latin, but to the rules that underlie the grammars of all conventional, mutable languages (M. Corti, *Dante a un nuova crocevia* (Florence: Libreria Sansoni, 1982), also see *Convivio* 2.13.10), a thesis criticized by Ascoli, among others. The *Convivio* distinguishes Cicero’s “latino romano” from “gramatica greca” (*Convivio* 1.11.14). Nevertheless, among the several senses that *gramatica* has, one sense, probably the primary sense, is classical Latin (see note 5 to *De vulgare eloquentiae* 1.1.3 in the Mengaldo edition).

²⁴ Dante refers once to the natural law in the *Monarchia*, but only in the formulaic phrase, *nec lege nature nec lege Scripture* (2.7.7).

²⁵ For *ius humanum*, *Monarchia* 3.10.8. Right is a “real and personal proportion between man and man which, if conserved, conserves the society of men” (*Monarchia* 2.5.1; cf. *Ethics* 1131a21). Dante’s distinction between “human right” and local laws echoes Aristotle’s distinction between political right by nature and political right by law (*Ethics* 1134b19ff.).

well. The immaterial forms of all things are laid up in the mind of the First Mover; at the same time these forms exist potentially in prime matter. In order for the naturing God to diffuse his goodness in every way, all forms must be brought to actuality in matter; the full potentiality of matter must be exploited.²⁶ The intention of God is that each and every thing should manifest its own peculiar likeness of God in the limited way its nature permits (*Monarchia* 1.8). Since God is wholly known to Himself, all these worldly things would present a very poor likeness of God *if* the natural whole were in every way ignorant of itself and ignorant of its likeness to its Maker. Because humankind exists within the natural world and comes to know the natural order, it is by means of human beings that the natural whole comes to be known to itself and thus to manifest within the world a fitting likeness of a naturing God. This work of having nature come to know itself through man is not the work of a single man or a few, but of humanity as a whole. Just as the potential of all prime matter is entirely exploited in bringing forth a vast multiplicity of natural beings, so the potential of the human intellect is fully exploited only when all human beings employ this potential in a variety of ways, theoretical and practical (*Monarchia* 1.3.9). To the single work of humankind, contributions are made by different peoples who have different ways of life (2.6.6, cf. *De vulgare eloquentiae* 1.7.6). Thus, the end of humankind is attained not by a few astute men in isolation, but only by all humankind under the monarchy, and Dante states that the monarchy is necessary not only for the well-being of humankind, but for the well-being of the world simply.²⁷

Although Dante's opposition of church and empire echoes Augustine's opposition of the city of God and city of men, the parallel serves only to highlight how thoroughly Dante rehabilitates human civilization against Augustine's critical judgment. This reversal of Augustine's teaching extends into the realm of ethics as well. As noted above, Augustine sardonically praised the Romans of the republic for their extraordinary self-restraint in suppressing most vicious desires for the sake of gratifying the love of praise. Self-restraint exercised on behalf of a vain end is not virtue; for Augustine there is no true virtue where there is no true piety (19.4). Dante, citing Roman authors such as Livy, Cicero, and Virgil, and echoing Italian proto-humanist writers of his own time, took a much more favorable view of the same republican heroes: these men sacrificed their comfort, their wealth, their bodies, and their lives in order to promote the good of the republic; in so doing they sought the "end of right" and they went to war from a "zeal for justice."²⁸ In the *Comedy*, Dante famously set in limbo those virtuous non-Christians who "did not sin" and whose only

²⁶ *Questio* 17.45-46, *Monarchia* 1.3.8-9.

²⁷ *Monarchia* 1.5.10, 1.9.3, 1.14.11, 1.15.10. In one case, Dante even says that the monarch is "necessary for the world," as if the collection of natural beings would not constitute a world unless they were being thought by humankind (1.10.6). This exception is noted by Mansfield, *Taming the Prince*, 98, 314-315.

²⁸ *Monarchia* 2.5, 2.9. In *City of God* 5.18 Augustine admires the self-restraint the Romans exercised, as he surveys the sacrifices made by eleven men from the Republic. As Davis has shown, Dante's Florentine contemporaries, Ptolemy of Lucca and Remigio dei Girolami, wrote praises of the Romans that mirrored Augustine's qualified praise, but omitted his ironic deprecation, contributing to a proto-humanist, pro-republican political theory—see C. T. Davis, *Dante's Italy and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); cf. *On the government of rulers: De regimine principum of Ptolemy of Lucca*, 3.4-6, trans. J. Blythe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997). Dante's praise of the Romans in the *Monarchia* 2.5 includes six of Augustine's eleven figures and adds Cato; the parallel chapter in the *Convivio* (4.5) gives eight of Augustine's eleven *exempla* (see Davis, *Dante's Italy and Other Essays*, 262-263).

punishment is “to live in desire without hope” (*Inferno* 4.34-42). For Dante, as opposed to Augustine, true virtue and temporal happiness are attainable without Christian piety; the effects of the sin of Adam, though perhaps rendering man infirm, were not so great as to prevent humans from attaining moral and intellectual virtues without grace. Dante reverses Augustine’s moral estimation of the Romans: the Romans, along with Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, and Alexander of Macedon, all competed, as if in a race, for the “palm” or the “prize” (*bravium*) of Empire.²⁹ Of himself as well, Dante says he is writing something entirely new for the sake of a *bravium* (*Monarchia* 1.1.5). This word is not classical Latin but a transliteration of the Greek *brabeion*, which likely became current in Latin on account of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians: “Know you not that they that run in the race, all run indeed, but one receives the prize (*brabeion*)? So run that you may obtain. And every one that strives for the mastery, restrains himself from all things: and they indeed that they may receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible one.”³⁰ Paul, like Augustine after him, noted that everyone who strives for worldly glory exercises self-restraint for the sake of success, so likewise Christians, striving for a greater glory, should exercise no less self-restraint. In characterizing the quest for empire as a race for the *bravium*, Dante reverses Paul’s rhetorical emphasis: even as those who strive for heavenly glory gain merit, likewise worthy are those who strive for a certain kind of earthly glory.

This rehabilitation of the city of men leads Dante to propose somewhat unusual views of the fall and salvation of man. Since the first sin, humankind had never been happy until the universal peace of Caesar Augustus (*Monarchia* 1.16.1-2). The justice of Roman rule was shown, first, in that Christ elected to be born under this rule and, second, that through his death the sins of all human beings were correctly punished under the auspices of this rule (*Monarchia* 2.10-11; cf. *Paradiso* 6.82-93, 7.19-45). Even though the empire serves an essential purpose in the redemption of humankind, empire need not have been brought about through divine agency; Dante allows for the possibility that it was brought about solely through human agency (*Monarchia* 1.16.1, 2.10.6). He exploits the circumstances of Christ’s birth and death as the grounds on which to persuade those “zealous for the mother church” to acknowledge the justice of Rome’s rule, but the justice of Rome’s rule is not made dependent on its instrumental role in Christ’s birth and death.³¹ The universality of the empire was undone by the first great Christian emperor, Constantine, who allegedly assigned the rule of the western Roman Empire to the pope.³² Although acting from pious intentions, by dividing into two what is one by nature, he acted contrary to the nature of his office (*Paradiso* 20.55-60; *Monarchia* 2.11.8). The pious intention has an impious outcome that is compared to the tearing of Christ’s garment at the crucifixion: the golden era of the empire, it seems, was pagan.³³ The sufficiency and

²⁹ *Monarchia* 2.7.9; also *Monarchia* 2.8.2-11.

³⁰ *1 Cor.* 9:24-25. The likely provenance of *bravium* is suggested by Nardi in his note to *Monarchia* 1.1.5.

³¹ On the zealous as the intended audience for Dante’s dialectical arguments, see *Monarchia* 3.3.18. Although this comment prefaces the arguments from Scripture in chapters 3.4-9, it applies equally well to the prior arguments from Scripture (2.10-11).

³² *Monarchia* 1.16.3, 2.11.8, 3.10; *Inferno* 19.115-117.

³³ *Monarchia* 1.16.3, 3.10.6; *Purgatorio* 10.73-93, *Paradiso* 20.43-48. The exception to this would be the reign of Justinian.

perhaps even superiority of non-Christian rule in administering to the temporal ends of humanity reaffirms Dante's rehabilitation of human civilization.

Dante's rehabilitation of the city of men illustrates that the theory of monarchy-empire is inherently secular, rather than the secularization of something originally sacred. Humankind through the exercise of its intellect, a natural endowment, overcomes the divisions in culture and language that arise from equally natural variations, and it attains a degree of political virtue sufficient to govern itself and guide itself to its natural end. Yet in one respect, exactly the one Gilson put his finger on, Dante's vision of human civilization does seem post-Christian: its universality. For Aristotle and Augustine alike, the natural condition of human beings (in their fallen state) is to live in numerous cities in competition with each other, and often at war. For Augustine, the city of men is not properly a city at all, but a state of confusion, yet Dante retains the concept and purges it of its ironic overtones. Yet by taking the city of men in earnest, he precludes a thoroughgoing return to Aristotelian thinking, since a complete return would require denying that even a quasi-political institution could supervise humankind as a whole.³⁴ Dante's recovery of Aristotle's total kingship animates a rather un-Augustinian rehabilitation of the city of men, but his retention of the city of men as an association significant for political thought is reciprocally un-Aristotelian. It remains a question, therefore, whether Dante follows Aristotle and the classical tradition in the decisive respect: Aristotle's total kingship stands above all law, and so equally above the priesthood and religion as products of law. Does Dante's expansion of total kingship imply a correlative superiority of philosophy to religion in guiding human affairs? Thus we approach the troubled subject of Dante's "Averroism" but without tying ourselves to an ambiguous historical term that inevitably obscures the essential question.³⁵ The answer appears to be 'no' precisely because of this hard-fought parity of the empire to the church: the empire and the church seek two separate ends and are counseled by two separate sets of teachings; in neither case does the philosopher rule. Nevertheless, one might affirm Dante's fidelity to Aristotle even on this extremely delicate point, through a more precise interpretation of select passages. This requires first that we examine more closely the relationship between philosophy and monarchy as a pattern on which to understand the analogous relationship between philosophy and the church.

While the *Monarchia* encourages its reader to take the words "monarch" and "emperor" to be synonymous (and the interpretation here has done so up to this point), attending to the distinction between them suggests that this rulership is conceived in two ways. The word "monarch" is used primarily in reference to the theoretical question of whether the

³⁴ In this respect Marsilius is more faithful to Aristotle: even though he implies that the Roman Emperor is the "universal" and "supreme" "faithful human legislator" (e.g., *Defensor* 2.18.8, 2.30.8), a genuinely universal political rule is contrary to nature (1.17.9-10, also 2.28.15-16). Even the universality of the church is compromised insofar as the power of church councils is limited by human legislators (*Defensor* 2.19-21).

³⁵ For a useful recent treatment of this subject, see J. Marenbon, "Dante's Averroism," in *Poetry and Philosophy in the Middle Ages: A Festschrift for Peter Dronke*, ed. J. Marenbon (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 349-374. The classic treatment is Bruno Nardi, "Il concetto dell'Impero nello svolgimento del pensiero dantesco," cited above.

whole of humankind should have a single ruler (book 1), whereas the word “emperor” refers specifically to the office established by the Roman people and persisting in some form into Dante’s own time (books 2 and 3). The first term is philosophical, the second is historical and juridical.³⁶ When discussing the first, Dante’s foremost authority is “the Philosopher”; when discussing the second, the foremost authorities are “our Poet” (Virgil) and the Bible. The discourse concerning the monarchy often sounds more metaphysical than political: for the monarch, ruling is an activity in which the ruling agent “unfolds its own likeness” (1.13.2; cf. 1.9), since every agent delights in its own being and delights in causing others to become like itself. Being one is the root of being good (*Monarchia* 1.15.2-4), and human beings attain unity when they tend voluntarily towards a single thing that is formally present in their wills. This unity proceeds from the single will of the monarch, *domina et regulatrix* of all human wills; the intellect, by comparison, is the *regulatrix et rector* of all human faculties (1.5.4), so that “those more vigorous in intellect, of course, naturally rule others” (1.3.10). The monarch holds the same relation to humankind which the one God holds to the world; the monarch is the analogue to the unmoved mover, to God as thought-thinking itself.³⁷ In these passages of book 1, the monarch resembles a philosopher more than he resembles Augustus or Tiberius. Empire, by contrast, is founded on command and conquest: the Roman people, as noted above, acquired the empire by use of arms in the service of right and glory. In this case, the rulers certainly do *not* wish to make the ruled similar to themselves (2.6.6), and their characteristic activity is commanding rather than contemplation (cf. *Convivio* 4.4.7). The Romans who built the empire (Cincinnatus, Camillus, Cato, etc.) are characterized by their political virtues, their lack of avarice, their love of liberty, and love of the public good (2.5). Dante points out that the Roman people jointly held an empire long before there was an emperor, a single man, to embody the unity of their rule.³⁸ Where the monarchy is presented as the act of an individual man, perhaps even the act of the intellect, the empire is the accomplishment of an entire people.

We are concerned with the relationship between three figures: the emperor, the pope, and the philosopher. The *Monarchia* tends to elide the difference between the emperor and the philosopher because its practical aim is to investigate the quarrel between the emperor and the pope. The only “philosopher” in the *Monarchia* is Aristotle; philosophy becomes a fixed resource for the emperor in his opposition to the pope.³⁹ The space between the emperor and the philosopher is glimpsed only by teasing apart the philosophical concept of monarchy from the historical-juridical concept of empire. The *Convivio*, by contrast, is silent about the pope and investigates the relative “authorities” of the emperor and the philosopher. A brief study of the separation of philosophy and

³⁶ An observation made by Gustavo Vinay in his edition of the *Monarchia* (Florence: Sansoni, 1950), 9, note 2.

³⁷ On the unity of God, *Monarchia* 1.8.3, 3.15[16].16; on the unmoved mover, *Monarchia* 1.9.

³⁸ *Monarchia* 2.5.7, citing Cicero’s *De officiis* 2.8.26-27.

³⁹ In every instance in the *Monarchia* but two, the word “Philosopher” refers to Aristotle by antonomasia; in the other two cases the word is plural and no philosopher is mentioned by name (3.15.3, 3.15.9); Cicero is generally cited in book 2 as an authority on human deeds, similar to Livy (but see *Monarchia* 1.1.4). The *Monarchia* exaggerates the unity of philosophy in order to support the emperor against the pope; the *Convivio*, by contrast, reports disputes between schools of philosophy and acknowledges the aporetic character of several questions in philosophy (2.4, 4.6, 4.21).

empire in the *Convivio* will help us to reveal more clearly the status of philosophy vis-à-vis empire in the *Monarchia*.

In the *Convivio* Dante delimits authority by making use of the architectonic argument from the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: each person performing an art or activity should “believe and obey” the one who has knowledge of the end to which that art or activity is directed (4.6.6ff., cf. *Ethics* 1094a7-18). Dante distinguishes four kinds of human activity: the speculative sciences, in which reason only considers objects but does not make them; the logical arts, in which reason considers and makes within its own act; the mechanical skills, that are discovered by reason in varying degrees from nature, and through which reason brings form to material outside itself; and finally moral action, in which reason is most of all a maker, for reason operates on the will.⁴⁰ The emperor’s authority extends to everything concerning the last category, especially matters of written law (4.9.7-17). As his title implies, his authority is limited to things that are subject to our will and able to be commanded (4.4.7), in which art predominates over nature. He has no authority beyond this, no authority where nature predominates over art.⁴¹ This limitation put upon the scope of the emperor’s authority opens room for the authority of the philosopher: the philosopher is the “master and the leader” who has knowledge of the ultimate end to which all other arts and activities are subordinated; in regard to such matters, he is “most worthy of faith and obedience.”⁴² The two authorities should not conflict with one another, each complements the other: the emperor without the philosopher is dangerous; the philosopher without the emperor is weak.⁴³ The two authorities, when joined, rule perfectly.

Returning our attention to the *Monarchia*, we see that in this work Dante has elided the monarch with the emperor, presenting a seamless conjunction of imperial command with philosophical knowledge, so that he may focus instead upon the practical end of distinguishing the domains of the emperor and the supreme pontiff. Yet the subtle separation between the monarchy as philosophical concept and the empire as historical-juridical concept permits one to see how the rule of the philosopher is asserted. The first book of the treatise says that between any two princes, when one is not subject to the other, there will be a quarrel (*litigium*), and, when a quarrel arises, there must exist a third prince with a wider jurisdiction who can serve as a judge between the first two (1.10). The third book says that the authorities of the pope and of the emperor do not depend on each other, and that this truth is often not recognized because of the quarrel (*litigium*) that has arisen between them (3.3.3). The quarrel between the pope and emperor that occasions the treatise suggests that a third prince would be useful precisely in order to judge between these two litigants. Dante alleges that his opponents make the following argument: there exists one member in every species that is the rule or measure of those belonging to the species;

⁴⁰ *Convivio* 4.9.5ff. Compare the first paragraph of Thomas’s *Commentary on the Ethics*.

⁴¹ Dante’s example is the nature of nobility: this is discovered through philosophy and cannot be dictated by the emperor.

⁴² *Convivio* 4.6.6-8: Aristotle is “dignissimo di fede e d’obediencia.” It is on the basis of this passage that I have spoken of Dante’s “fidelity” to Aristotle’s teaching.

⁴³ *Convivio* 4.6.17-20. The philosopher is not inherently weak, but weak insofar as the people around him are disorderly.

furthermore, the pope cannot be reduced to another human as the measure; therefore, the pope is the measure and rule of all men, including the emperor (3.11[12]). In response, Dante admits the major premise and denies the minor. The papacy and the imperial office do not belong to a human being by his nature, but are accidents or attributes which describe relations of fundamentally different kinds: the papacy is a relation of fatherhood, the imperial office a relation of lordship, and one relation cannot be reduced to the other (i.e., fatherhood is not a type of lordship). No higher, more authoritative "relation of higher-standing" belongs to any human being. Thus, although the coda to the treatise says that "Caesar" owes to "Peter" the reverence which a firstborn son owes his father, this does not subordinate the emperor to the pope in political terms: the argument in 3.11[12] establishes that, while the emperor owes the pope the reverence due to a father, the pope reciprocally owes the emperor the obedience due to a lord.⁴⁴ Since each is superior to the other in a distinct mode of "higher-standing," the argument regarding fatherhood and lordship sustains a complementary parity between pope and emperor.

In this context, Dante notes in passing that, according to the major premise, the pope and emperor, not as officers but simply as human beings, are reduced to that best human being (*optimus homo*) who is the measure or the *ydea* of all others, "as can be had from the last parts of the *Nicomachean Ethics*" (3.11[12].7). Thus, the pope and emperor merely as human beings are led back to the philosopher as their measure.⁴⁵ As the best man the philosopher does not hold a "relation of higher-standing," he is neither a father nor a lord to other human beings, he cannot command them, but he may be a "venerable authority" (*Monarchia* 1.5.3). This revelation helps us to understand how the philosopher stands behind the monarch earlier in the treatise. Dante explicitly argues that, because every end or final cause has the form of the good, whatever is nearer the end is greater (1.2.7, 1.14). Because the monarch has under his care the end of humankind as a whole, he is greater than princes who care for proximate goods (1.14). Yet the monarch does not actively bring about the ultimate end of humankind, actualizing the entire potential of the possible intellect (1.4.1), the monarch brings about universal peace, the means nearest to that end (1.4.5). In the beginning of the treatise Dante establishes universal peace as the "pre-established sign" (*signum prefixum*) for the rest of the arguments, so that the final goal lying behind peace, the actualization of the intellect, gradually recedes from view (1.4.6). Thus, the argument applied to kings and consuls to subordinate them to the monarch may be turned upon the monarch as well: kings, consuls, and the temporal monarch are lords over others with respect to the paths (*viae*) that lead to the end, but with respect to the final end they must all be servants (1.12.12). It must be the philosopher who has care over the end simply.

⁴⁴ *Monarchia* 3.15[16].17-18. B. Nardi, *Dal "Convivio" alla "Commedia"* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo, 1960), 303, 311.

⁴⁵ Nardi noted the affinity between Dante's formulation and Averroes's commentary on *De anima* (cited at *Monarchia* 1.3.9) in which Aristotle is called "the rule in nature and the example that nature finds for showing the highest human perfection in material things." (Nardi, *Dal "Convivio" alla "Commedia"*, 268, citing Book 3, Commentary 14: "*regula in natura et exemplar quod natura invenit ad demonstrandum ultimam perfectionem humanam in materiis*" [Nardi's emphasis]).

Given the implicit, if limited, superiority of philosopher to monarch or emperor, what standing does the former have towards the church and its head? In other words, we return to the decisive question: does Dante's expansion of Aristotle's total kingship imply a correlative superiority of philosophy to religion in guiding human affairs? First, it must be recognized that when the treatise concludes by emphasizing the parity of emperor and pope, it exaggerates the distinctiveness of their two ends, earthly happiness and eternal happiness, in comparison with how they are represented elsewhere in the treatise. Human beings, on earth and in heaven, become happy through the *one* faculty, rational freedom, even if we are happy *here* merely as men and *there* as gods.⁴⁶ Even on earth, the end and the proper work of humankind is "almost divine," and the humans engaged in it are "little less than angels," angels being substances whose essence is to think without interruption.⁴⁷ But on earth, the end of humankind is to actualize the entire potential of the possible intellect not only through angelic contemplation, but also through action and production of particulars (*Monarchia* 1.3.9). *Here* very few humans dedicate their lives to contemplation (*Convivio* 1.1.1-6); most by far contribute to the end through action and production. *There*, the same end is attained, the actualization of the intellect, and every (redeemed) human attains this end through "enjoyment of the divine vision," the activity of the angels (3.15[16].7). Happiness *here* and happiness *there* do not differ in their fundamental character as an activity, inasmuch as that activity is based on a single faculty. The two forms of happiness differ rather in the division of labor in the community attaining the end: on earth humans perform a wide variety of tasks hierarchically organized, in which relatively few lead a contemplative life (*Convivio* 1.1.2-6), whereas in heaven all human beings are engaged in the same contemplative activity (although with varying capacities [*Paradiso* 29.139-141]). Distaste for this aristocratic and egalitarian element in Dante's political thought may motivate readers to regard earthly happiness as inferior to heavenly happiness, simply on the grounds that *there* a greater number enjoy the highest activity.⁴⁸ But insofar as heavenly happiness is deemed superior precisely on the basis of the number who enjoy it, it is not disputed that the highest activity *here* and *there* is the same in its essential character.

Since the pope and the emperor stand in perfect parity, acting reciprocally to one another as father and lord, it should not be surprising if the pope, like the monarch-emperor, is concerned not with the final end, but with the last means to attain that end. He is concerned not with the ultimate, but the penultimate. Just as the monarch-emperor leads humanity to the last and most important means (peace) for attaining the end on earth,

⁴⁶ *Monarchia* 1.12.6; *Paradiso* 5.19-24; cf. *Convivio* 4.20.9.

⁴⁷ *Monarchia* 1.4.2; Ps. 8:6; on angels, *Monarchia* 1.3.7; cf. *Paradiso* 29.79-81. The *Convivio* is more audacious when praising the wise: if intellectual virtue is perfected and received in a pure soul, such a human would be "almost another God incarnate" (*Convivio* 4.21.2-10; cf. 4.28.15). Dante is reporting the opinion of Avicenna (*Metaphysics: The Healing*, chapter 5, in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, eds. Parens and Macfarland, 88), perhaps as repeated by Albert in *De somno et vigilia* (see B. Nardi, *Dante e la cultura medievale* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1983), 188-89, 366-69).

⁴⁸ G. Vinay, *Interpretazione della Monarchia di Dante* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1962), 49. Not coincidentally, the more aristocratic *Monarchia* is written in Latin for a limited audience (although geographically dispersed), while the more egalitarian *Comedy* is written in the vernacular for a much wider audience (although geographically limited).

so also the pope and the clergy enact the last and most important means for attaining the end in heaven: the imitation of the earthly life of Christ. The life of Christ is the form of the church, the “*ydea* and the example” for all priests (3.14[15].3). In truth, Christ is the Lord who made the world and rules it, yet it is Christ’s *human* life that serves as the “sign” (*signum*) for the form of the church. For this reason, not all of God’s powers belong to the church: Christ’s words, “my kingdom is not of this earth,” are false when applied to Christ simply, since he is the Lord, but these words are true when applied to those humans who take Christ’s earthly life as their model (3.14[15].7). As we have seen before, it is the emperor, not the pope or any cleric, who correctly follows Christ the “anointed” (*Cristus* or *unctus*) as an earthly lord (*Monarchia* 2.1.1; cf. *Epistole* 5.7.20-22). In his earthly life Christ is the “door” to the eternal conclave; in giving the keys to Peter, Christ assigned Peter to stand at the door.⁴⁹ Peter seems not to supervise what lies behind the door: Dante commends Peter on his faith, purity, and simplicity, even though this simplicity led him to misunderstand the metaphorical sense of Christ’s words (3.9.9). He is guided by the metaphors without always understanding what lies behind them, and this is sufficient. According to the *Monarchia*, the clergy do not supervise or manage the end as such, but the passage towards the end. This reading is confirmed in the *Comedy*: Virgil’s words to Dante at the entrance to earthly paradise (“I crown and miter you over yourself”) suggest that political and ecclesiastical authorities simultaneously end when rational freedom is attained and exercised.⁵⁰ Insofar as the philosopher knows better than the clergy the true nature of the end, the activity of the intellect or the divine vision, his authority is greater, although certainly no one is obliged to revere him as a father or a lord.

In the treatise, Dante has taken it upon himself to arbitrate in the quarrel between the emperor and the pope: on what grounds has he assumed this position? Insofar as the emperor is counseled by philosophical documents, and the pope by spiritual ones, there appears to be no single scholarly discipline upon which to base this arbitration. The treatise is partitioned into three types of arguments: arguments based on reason (1.5-16, 3.11-15), on human deeds (2.3-10, 3.10), and on Scripture (3.4-9). The first block of chapters presents “indisputable arguments” that cure the “higher intellect,” the second refers us to “experience” that cures the “lower intellect,” and the third appeals to the “sweetness of divine persuasion” that cures “affections” (1.16.5). Omitting at present the central case of arguing from human deeds, we may say that Dante argues both as philosopher and as theologian. Yet it is not difficult to discern the priority of the former mode over the latter. While the philosophical arguments are intended to be demonstrative, the theological arguments are explicitly dialectical: Dante’s primary intention in these chapters is to refute his opponents through careful use of the rules of logic (3.4.4-7) so that their zeal may be better directed (3.3.18). In the theological chapters, the opposing arguments are usually revealed as false for having begun from inappropriate, metaphorical interpretations of Scripture. Naturally Dante sometimes substitutes his own more salutary, metaphorical interpretations, but he understands them as persuasive rather than demonstrative (3.9.18-19). The

⁴⁹ *Monarchia* 3.8.9, 2.7.5-6; cf. Lev. 17:3-4; John 10:9, 20:23; Mt. 18:18.

⁵⁰ *Purgatorio* 27.139-142. The church and empire are each “remedies against the weakness” following the first sin (3.4.14); thus, neither would have been useful in earthly paradise.

theological arguments mark a politically necessary digression in a work that begins and ends with arguments from reason.⁵¹ It is as a philosopher—even if only as “the least of the philosophers”—that Dante takes it upon himself to arbitrate the quarrel between the emperor and the pope. In his letter to Cangrande della Scala, he argues that, despite his low station as an exile, he is a fitting friend to the imperial vicar because, “those who are vigorous in intellect and reason (*intellectu ac ratione vigentes*), endowed with a certain divine freedom, are not bound by any customs; it is no wonder, since they are not directed by the laws, but rather they themselves direct laws” (*Epistole* 13.2.7). The phrase “vigorous in intellect” we have seen before in the *Monarchia*: Dante attributes to the *Politics* the notion that “those naturally vigorous in intellect (*intellectu vigentes*) rule over others by nature.”⁵² Thus, in defending his equality with the imperial vicar on the basis of his intellectual activity, Dante attributes to himself the status of Aristotle’s king, to be a law unto himself (1284a14-16). It is in this capacity that he took it upon himself to judge the dispute between emperor and pope, while still acknowledging the emperor as a lord and revering the pope as a father.⁵³

We have advanced an interpretation of Dante’s political thought, leaning especially on the *Monarchia*, which remains as faithful as possible to Aristotle’s thinking within the context of medieval Christianity. Despite this intention, we have noted several respects in which Dante utterly abandoned Aristotle’s moderation. For example, whereas Aristotle leaves the superlative virtue of the best ruler unstated, only silently gesturing in the direction of Plato’s philosophic kingship, Dante parades the dependence of the temporal monarchy on philosophical learning, and he explicitly raises the end of all political organization to its highest possibility, the contemplation of all things. Dante eschews Aristotle’s moderation because the scope and the aspirations of his political thinking have not been set by philosophy at all, but by a Christian doctrine that came into its own in the wake of classical philosophy. Since the obscure perfections of Aristotle’s total kingship seemed to be fulfilled in the kingdom of Christ, and sometimes claimed for the church, if Dante were to attempt a secular re-appropriation of total kingship—a philosophers’ counter-coup d’état in speech—then the philosophically-guided community must correspond to the community of Christians in its scope and in the nobility of its ends. In Aristotle one finds that total kingship may exist over a nation or even several nations, and one may reasonably infer that its end is contemplative happiness, but for Dante to extend this reign to *all* nations and to make contemplation *explicitly* the end suggests that the immoderate aspects

⁵¹ It is worth noting that despite the generous epitaph (“*Theologus Dantes, nullius dogmatis expertus*”) written for Dante by Giovanni del Virgilio, Dante in his writings never refers to himself as a theologian.

⁵² *Monarchia* 1.3.10; *Politics* 1252a31. Gilbert points out that Dante’s phrasing resembles passages in Giles of Rome’s *De regimine principum* and in Thomas’s *Commentary on the Metaphysics* more than the Latin translation of the *Politics* (Gilbert, “Had Dante Read the *Politics* of Aristotle?” 608). The phrase was repeated widely in various formulations and was consistently attributed to Aristotle, taking on a greater salience in medieval thought than in the *Politics* itself.

⁵³ Cf. *Ethics* 1165a24-27, brought to my attention by Gabriel Pihas.

of his interpretation of Aristotle are keyed to the analogous features of the church. As a consequence, philosophy assumes a novel and more pronounced public status in guiding human affairs. In other contexts Dante acknowledged the genuinely aporetic character of philosophizing, the disputes among schools and the intractability of certain questions, but in the face of this political problem, such an aporetic philosophizing would have to lie concealed beneath a more politically assertive mode of philosophy, one calling for faith and obedience.

In one respect, however, Dante's political thought appears more modest than Aristotle's. Whereas the ancient philosopher is wary of openly basing total kingship upon philosophical excellence, he openly subordinates the priesthood and religious practice to political rule. Dante's situation is roughly the reverse: while the medieval philosopher openly connects the highest monarchy with philosophy, he preserves a scrupulous parity between the church and the empire-monarchy, and he is coy about any right of the philosopher to adjudicate in ecclesiastical matters. In the interpretation developed here, Dante remains true to Aristotle's teaching even regarding the superiority of philosophical inquiry to religion in guiding human affairs, but it will be granted by all, even skeptical readers, that this superiority of philosophy to religion is more evident in Aristotle's works than in Dante's. The medieval thinker, therefore, is not altogether lacking in moderation: moderation in making claims for philosophy has been transposed from the field of politics to religion. Nor should this be surprising, if from Aristotle's time down to Dante's, the balance of power between politics and religion shifted: religion passed from being a part of the city to having a geographical scope as well as moral and intellectual ambitions that transcend the city (*polis*) and even the nation. Having emerged in the wake of classical philosophy, Christianity subsumed its highest ends. Indeed, we observed just now that Dante scrupulously preserved the parity between church and empire, but it would be more accurate to say that his theory intentionally expanded the scope and legitimacy of the empire so as to bring it into parity with the church. As Christianity is more ambitious than classical paganism, geographically as well as spiritually and intellectually, as a social phenomenon it could never have been made to fit into the narrow confines that classical philosophers had established for (pagan) civil religion. The faithful recovery of Aristotle's thinking about philosophy, religion, and politics could never have been a repetition of that thinking. Nor would Dante have desired a mere repetition of classical thought and its patronizing treatment of civil religion, since the eternal monarchy, like the temporal monarchy, steers humankind to its highest end.

THE CONCEPT OF THE POLITICAL WHOLE IN LIGHT OF THE CURRENT CRISIS IN THE WEST: CARL SCHMITT REVISITED

The present great crisis shows us the new meaning of the political, the concept created in XX century by Carl Schmitt. The triumph of neoliberalism in the Western world from the 1970s onward seemed to cut short all the discussion on that topic. The belief in the universal and final neutrality and depolitising of the modern world was so strong that there were many ready to believe in the end of history and politics. The slogan “make schools—not politics” could be treated as an expression of the attitude of the whole post-cold-war generation in Europe and among European nations. This was characteristic for the new post-political age: no great ideas, reluctance to strategic thinking and taking risks, negation of drama of human existence and the approval of reactivity as a basic method of acting.

CRISIS OF THE WEST

The crisis which invaded Europe along with the financial crisis (the crisis of public and private debt) quickly revealed many of its threatening faces. It is not only the crisis of one or two banks, it is not just the ethical downfall of some specialized profession of people managing financial institutions in an irresponsible or cynical way. It is not even merely the crisis of a certain political-economic project called Euro. It is not simply another of many crises within the frames of the capitalism development process, but it is of a strictly systematic character, and by this it represents the crisis of a European (West European) civilization model of modernization. For this reason it needs to be considered as comprehensively as possible, comprising all the subsequent and accompanying phenomena, including the geopolitical crises induced by Russia, the security crisis caused by the Islamic state or the new challenges triggered by BRIC states.

The hope of making the Western model global and transferring it to other cultures was proved wrong. We can now observe the adverse process, the process of deglobalization, world fragmentation and creation of new divisions. No global economy of the Western type or global Western society has been created. The crisis of the Western

model (often called the democratic capitalism¹) accelerates the process. The state in the Western model of modernization served as a traditional regulatory mechanism, controlling social conflicts and mapping economic processes onto social order. For those in favour of globalization these functions were supposed to be extended to the international level, causing, as a result, gradual degradation of the state as a traditional regulator of social and political relations on the national level. The crisis has undermined this point of view. It has shown us that we have been dealing not only with the collapse of the state as a traditional model of control and regulation and a concept of a democratic society as a legitimization mechanism. It has turned out that the attempts to transfer these traditional functions of control, regulation and legitimization to a European level (not mentioning the global scope) do not succeed as well.

While searching for adequate allegories that would help us understand the sense of the crisis situation and its crucial character we tend to refer to classical, ancient models. According to the ancient Greeks crisis is the breakthrough moment in the process of a disease. Hence comes the optimistic belief in the chances that every crisis brings, if we perceive it as a turning point, where negative consequences are transformed into positive results. However, if the present crisis is not one of many which create the process of the Western model so far, if it is something unique and systemic, we are then facing something more important than just taking advantage of the chances. We need to agree with Alain Touraine that this crisis poses a question of a principal and existential character and it is a question whether the Western states and nationalities are still capable of joint actions directed at a whole.² Questioning this capability addresses Europe as a model and the particular European states as well. The ability to act as a whole for the common good is actually a question about the ability to build the order and what follows, the chances to overcome the crisis, which results in breaking the mechanisms and connections existing so far. It refers exactly to the issue that Carl Schmitt tried to describe in his theory of the political unit.

SCHMITT'S IDEA OF THE POLITICAL

Schmitt's concept of the political unit was referring to his understanding of the political, which he saw as opposite to the modern neutrality and depolitising. His reflections refer to some extent also to the issue of a state, as can be seen in a short but significant text from 1930 "State ethics and the pluralist state."³ However, the state is a subject of Schmitt's analysis only to some point. Its historical role as the most advanced, thorough form of creating a political order is undeniable. In this sense, the modern state with its centralized, independent authority, as described by Hobbes in the 7th century, represents the central political achievement of European modernity.

Still, Schmitt was aware of the historical moment in which the modern state reaches the end of its capabilities. This is exactly what is happening nowadays, before our very

¹ W. Streeck, *The Crisis in Context: Democratic Capitalism and its Contradictions*, Discussion paper no. 11/15 (Köln and Cologne: Max-Planck-Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung, 2011).

² A. Touraine, *Après la crise* (Paris: Seuil, 2010).

³ C. Schmitt, "Staatsethik und pluralistischer Staat," in *Positionen und Begriffe* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1988).

eyes, as a gradual long-lasting process of decay of the democratic capitalism. Unlike many thinkers of his times, Schmitt did not believe that the change of the role of the state undermines the meaning of the political for human life. To the contrary, in his opinion, the political remains the basic principle according to which the order is to be constructed. The indispensability of this is especially visible in extreme situations such as a crisis or a war, and hence its significance nowadays. What is the political then?

To give the answer to this question Schmitt suggests a possibly clear and simple explanation referring to a comprehensible opposition of the friend and the enemy. From this perspective, the political is just the ability to define the enemy or rather to define the danger. If we lose this ability a disaster is inevitable. General consequences of the absence of the political would be disastrous as well. However, aiming at a simple formula Schmitt multiplies new questions and second thoughts. The political is not a “substantial unit”—it has no content. It is a gradation of unity devoid of any content, a combination of everything that constitutes a unity through a political decision. The neutralization of the political, depolitising will therefore lead to the opposite result, namely to a growing dispersion, disintegration and chaos.

This understanding of the political simplifies it but also evokes disturbing consequences. First of all, the political is empty. It does not consist of any ethical, religious, social or economic content. It does not constitute any separate category or a superior and additional dimension. It would rather resemble the defensive memory of an organism, which is represented by a survival instinct practically mobilising the resources at the moment of danger. In the case of the human world this aspect is further enhanced by the willpower. Schmitt thus depicts the notion of the political being beyond the notions of good and evil. And he portrays it with the commonly quoted sentence of his that the one who speaks of a common good lies.

According to this approach, if the political is only of an existential, volitional and decisionistic character it makes us unable to assess it in terms of ethics. It cannot be in any way connected with culture or a spiritual aspect of human existence. The political unit, devoid of any “illusionary dimensions” is no longer an expression of an identity and subjectively gained substantial knowledge but merely a superior mechanism consisting of will and decision. Its superiority over any other forms of human organization is represented by the principle of sovereignty.

THE POLITICAL UNIT VERSUS THE POLITICAL WHOLE

As we know after the analysis of one of Carl Schmitt’s texts, the notion of the political unit (*politische Einheit*) was crucial to him. It is definitely more important and meaningful than the notion of a state or even a political system, which in fact refer solely to some political phenomena. The political unit is an actual manifestation of the political (*das Politische*), which being a primary, pre-normative, existential situation does not require any more additional justification than its existence itself.

Unlike Schmitt, I prefer to use the term of a political whole due to the fact that the notion of the political unit suggests a possibility and in some conditions even a necessity of a total internal homogeneity and integrity/unity as its ultimate goal. I do not also share the belief that the political unit is exclusively a product of free will built on the basis of the

causative power of decision. In my opinion, the political idea, even treated as an overriding phenomenon, does not exist without a relation to an actual identity shared by a group. Otherwise, we could come to the conclusion that the political whole depends solely on willpower and decision, which is not entirely true.

So what is the political whole actually? The primary definition states that it is a relationship or such a type of a relation which arises as a result of objectifying commonly shared norms, opinions, judgements, expectations, claims, interests, values and goals. The political whole will thus describe a result of obtaining a specific ability to express oneself as a complete whole. This kind of an objective perception of ourselves, as the group following shared basic values and beliefs and aiming at common goals is closely related to political identity, without which the political whole cannot be realized and manifested. However, it needs to be remembered that this ability does not arise by itself. It is more of a skill or an art that results from an intellectual and spiritual effort. The political whole is also an expression of a certain aspiration, some primary claim to enclose oneself in a certain form and to be recognized and acknowledged as an integrated self-defined whole by others. This aspiration is therefore essential for creation and understanding of the international order.

What is then essentially the phenomenon that is liable to objectivization? What fulfils and creates the political identity? Are we dealing here with a comprehensible systematic approach to some current arrangement of interests and power or rather with something more basic and durable, comprising a tradition of existence? For the moment suffices it to say that the political identity is a specific and cultural phenomenon. It is significant, because nowadays we tend to ignore a spiritual and a cultural aspect of the political whole and focus much more on the mechanism itself, the ability to control and overcome the differences and conflicts and mobilize the resources. This gives priority to a technocratic character of a whole instead of its political features. The political whole however, can never exist without the political culture.

After all, identity comprises mainly of similarities, generally approved values, goals, interests and experiences acknowledged, obeyed, perceived and exchanged with others. Such an identity (its content) is always a product of a history and culture, though there lies at its base some ontological recognition of the situation and the decision about who actually comprises those “us,” who constitutes the relationship. These are those we perceive as similar to us, as the ones equal to us (*isonomia*) and those we want to be together with—*identitas*. For the moment, I leave aside the reason for this kind of recognition and decision in the particular situation, namely the kind of and the actual occurrence of a particular specific event establishing the relationship. The function of the identity is necessary to perceive ourselves as a whole. In other words: the political identity is a necessary condition of similarity between the members of a political unit enabling the perception of ourselves as a whole. We perceive ourselves through the content, not just by the ability or the claim to be a whole.

For these reasons specifically, the political whole, as political and therefore related to a particular identity, is not something you can pack into your suitcase and take with you on the journey anywhere. It is not a formula that can be administered in any circumstances. Political identity, which expresses itself through the political unit, is much more

than just a result of a mediation process between interests of opposite or agreeable nature, of individuals and groups (A. Osiander: the definition of politics).⁴ Or an outcome of intersubjective expectations towards human actions and behaviour, which allow to expect particular behaviours and providing particular conditions to behave in a predictable way (A. Osiander: the definition of a society)⁵—it is a specific creation of a certain situation and cultural conditions.

When we discuss the political identity in terms of contemporary society in Europe we still refer to the democratic political identity. Regardless of the changes that are happening contemporary European nations are still democratic. Therefore this particular aspect of the political identity as a minimum unit achieved by the *isonomia* is absolutely indispensable to create the political whole in the case of a democratic society. A tyranny or any other system of absolute power (e.g. a technocratic-bureaucratic system) does not need political identity and will rather fight it as a burden. The political whole being identical and aware of its members' equality, has always opposed the extreme forms of absolute power, which in turn legitimizes itself with setting insurmountable differences and instead of referring to commonly shared values, interests or goals, uses orders and the necessity of submission as its tools.

Isonomia (equality) serves thus as a basic rule of the political identity (similarities are best recognized by the equals). Greek understanding of the political identity is crucial here (Christian Meier considers the Greeks to be the fathers of the political identity⁶). It does not mean, however, that the idea of democracy must be the only determinant of the political identity. It can be of a theological nature, as in Christianity (the *isonomia* of individual souls) or of a public nature, as in the republican concept of a political body and an appropriate participation in it by performing one's functions. In any case however, it is the political identity that gives the opportunity to share norms, beliefs, expectations and values along with mutual trust and searching for similarities (and not redistribution, which is rather treated as a mechanism of managing internal differences, as in the conditions of tyranny—even if it is an enlightened tyranny of a technocratic law and bureaucracy).

Political identity as a cultural phenomenon must be recognized as the political whole, if it aspires to be treated as more than just a stream of individual and group experiences, beliefs, customs or expectations. The ability along with the effort and claim to consider ourselves as an integrated subject is only possible after the objectivization of our similarities, which allows us to perceive ourselves as a political entity. Until we reach this level, the self-defining and awareness of being the whole is not possible. To perceive oneself means also to perceive all others and to be able to create meaningful relationships with them. Thanks to the ability of self-reflection over our own whole we can realistically shape our political identity; we also become capable of creating relationships with others and of seeing that the whole does not necessarily mean everything. The political whole is

⁴ A. Osiander, *Before the State: Systemic Political Change In the West from the Greek to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 28-29.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 25-27.

⁶ C. Meier, *The Greek Discovery of Politics*, trans. D. McIntock (Harvard University Press, 1990), 141ff.

also defined by setting limits to our own political and indicating the areas of the individual and group neutrality.

The current crisis of the Western model of modernization questions many of the previous methods of setting the order. However it gives rise to rethinking the role of the political in resolving the issue of growing fragmentation and gradual decomposition of social and economic relations. That is why we should now revisit the promising concepts of Schmitt.

THE TAKING OF THE BASTILLE: THE ROLE AND THE RULE OF THE TRUE OPINION

*It was not an anti-royal revolution.
It was, and remained to the end,
an anti-aristocratic restoration
of Adam's equality.*

(Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy)

1

In the very opening of his monumental history of the French Revolution, Hyppolyte Taine reports that the king, having heard of the fall of the Bastille, asked whether what had happened was only a further insubordination that since a few months ago regularly played havoc with the capital. Allegedly the duke of Rochefoucauld-Liancourt answered that the explanation of events which occurred at the Bastille could not rely on the old political vocabulary built of categories such as disorder, rebellion, and uprising. The taking of the Bastille belonged to a new semantic field of political change: the revolution.¹ It is not by chance that a serious historiographical study begins with a rumour, for—as we shall see—rumours, legends, false information, and hearsay constitute the heart of the revolution. According to the Italian political philosopher Alessandro Biral, “the revolution exists in legend, that is, in false information.”² And yet, during that first revolutionary day horrible and forgotten crimes were committed and real heads were cut off.³ We were taught to comprehend those actions not as crimes but as fruits of the oppressed people’s spontaneous reaction to the violence of feudalism, because there is no other way to interpret the revolution in political categories. Otherwise, revolution can be understood

¹ Cf. H. Taine, *Les origines de la France Contemporaine. Tome 2. La révolution: l'anarchie* (Paris: Les Éditions Robert Laffont, collection Bouquins, 1986), 315.

² A. Biral, *La società senza governo. Lezioni sulla rivoluzione francese. Volume primo – 1984-85*, ed. L. Furano (Padova: il Prato, 2009), 227.

³ On the 14th of July 1789, beside the well-known study J. Godechot, *La Prise de la Bastille: 14 juillet 1789* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), see also: F. Furet, D. Richet, *La Révolution française*, vol. 1 (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 1988 [1965]); A. Mathiez, *La Révolution française. Tome 1. La chute de la royauté* (Paris: Bartillat, 2012 [1922]); J. M. Cottret, *La Bastille à prendre: histoire et mythe de la forteresse royale* (Paris: P.U.F., 1986).

only in criminological categories. We were taught that both historically and conceptually revolution is beyond the law due to the fact that it incarnates the beginning of new law.

The revolutionary version of events, corroborated after the ex-fortress fell, depicted the Bastille as the symbol of crimes committed by the feudal regime. The French public opinion used to acknowledge the Bastille as the semi-secret place of tortures and suspension of rights, where the *Ancien Régime* displayed its real face by violating the laws itself had promulgated. Thereby, the old regime was not only despotic and cruel, but irrational as well. Even before the revolution started, there were rumours circulating in Paris, which gave rise to the suspicion that inside the Bastille thousands of prisoners were incarcerated. Around the 14th of July all detainees were believed to be patriots imprisoned on political bases and subjected to worst tortures. The pre-revolutionary rumours were considered plausible for they came from the pens of illustrious prisoners like De Sade and Linguet. Moreover, the major French intellectuals never questioned their descriptions. In the 1787 Latude's work—which rose to fame during the revolution—reaffirmed all the rumours by illustrating once again horrifying details about everyday life in the old royal prison.⁴

Historically ascertained facts report a completely different version of events. The famous men of letters falsified the historical reality; the public opinion was induced to ignore the factual evidence; the Bastille was compelled to turn into the symbol of the despotism. In 1782 the Bastille hosted ten detainees. A year after, we find only seven prisoners. There were twenty-seven in 1784 and once again just seven at the moment of the storming. The infamous prison was almost unused and in the mid '80s the royal administration planned to demolish it and replace it with a big square. Moreover, contrary to widespread legends, the few prisoners were not treated badly,⁵ since life in the Bastille was more comfortable than in any other royal prison. Detainees were allowed to have their own furniture and servants. The latter could cook for them. In case a prisoner could not provide for his own sustenance, he had the right to royal aid. Some among them had the right to ask for permission to leave the prison temporarily and visit the city, but only after swearing to come back before nightfall.⁶ To sum up, the Bastille was a prison for the undesirable upper-class individuals of all backgrounds.

When the crowd burst into the Bastille, seven prisoners were found instead of the thousands about whom the city had been gossiping. Such a contradiction between reality and opinion leads to the next rumour: the prisoners were in fact inside the prison, hidden

⁴ Cf. F. De Sade, *Letters from Prison*, ed. and trans. R. Seaver (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999); S.-N.-H. Linguet, *Memoirs of the Bastille* (North Hollywood: CJ Books, 2005); H. Latude, *Le despotisme dévoilé ou Memoires de Henri Masers de Latude, Detenu Pendant Trente-Cinq ans dans Diverses Prisons d'Etat* (Paris, 1889). On Voltaire's description of life in the Bastille, cf. H.-J. Lüsebrink, R. Reichardt, *The Bastille: A History of a Symbol of Despotism and Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 26-27. For a historical analysis of tensions between regime's and enlightenment propaganda, see J. Klaitis, *Printed Propaganda under Louis XIV: Absolute Monarchy and Public Opinion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976). On the history of suffering bodies during the *Ancien Régime*, see Ph. Stewart, "Faire souffrir" in *Le corps romanesque. Images et usages topiques sous L'Ancien Régime*, Actes du XXe colloque de la SATOR, ed. M. Moser-Verrey, L. Desjardins, C. Turbide (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009), 25-55.

⁵ Cf. S. Schama, *Citizens: a Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1989), 331-333.

⁶ On everyday life inside the Bastille, cf. E. Dutray-Leicon, D. Muzerelle, *La Bastille ou "l'enfer des vivants."* *A travers les archives de la Bastille* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2010) and C. Quétel, *L'histoire véritable de la Bastille* (Paris: Larousse, 2006).

in the basements by the old regime's government. The visible part of the Bastille played the displayable role of despotism. Indeed, no despotic regime can allow transparency and publicity. The despotic society of inequality and privilege is necessarily grounded in the double truth: on the one hand, the public one, being actually a *mise-en-scène* furnished to public opinion in order to reassure and calm it down, and on the other hand the cryptic one, murky but true to reality. The fact that the old regime was hiding something from the people meant that king was secretly plotting against the regular and rational society grounded in equality and freedom. The one who is tenaciously clung to his privileges does not want a society of equals, and will always plot against its realization: their real goal will invariably be a conspiracy. Indeed, the realization of a regular society entails the abolishment of every privilege. As the public opinion could not believe that only seven prisoners had been held captive at the Bastille, on the day after the storming, the newly established revolutionary municipality called back the old regime's engineer, who had exercised the superintendency of the prison, in order to make him uncover the maps and disclose all hidden basement doors. Nevertheless, no other prisoners were found. This evidence did not stop the production of rumours. The subsequent stated that all the imprisoned patriots had already been assassinated before the storming, which explained why the revolutionists could not find them.

A few days after the storming, detailed and realistic descriptions of tortures that had taken place started to invade the papers. The public was being informed of underground jail cells, innocent patriots enchained for life, and of unthinkable tortures. At a later stage, graphic representations of prisoners, cells and the glorious conquest of the Bastille would be printed even on playing cards. The first souvenirs of European history, miniature sculptures of the prison, would be sold soon as well.⁷

2

The canonical version of the taking of the Bastille states that people, unable to bear any longer the violence of the despotism, assaulted the prison spontaneously. This version does not rest on historically ascertained facts. The people were induced to act and, at a later stage, to believe to have acted spontaneously. Nevertheless, historians of different political backgrounds, such as Michelet and Taine, agree upon the canonical explanation centred on the idea of spontaneity. The spontaneity of the revolution presupposes the idea of its necessity. The spontaneous is necessary *in potentia*: the spontaneous growing of the child is necessary, but it could not happen if other factors, such as illnesses, external to the growing process, intervene to halt it. On the other hand, the spontaneous process that was accomplished had been necessary from the very beginning. The idea of spontaneity refers to a deterministic philosophy of history. Only if the revolution was necessary and spontaneous did it represent a political event instead of being part of criminal history.

Subsequent historical researches proved that people assaulted the prison because they were searching for gunpowder. A few days before the 14th of July a strange rumour started to circulate in Paris: it concerned the plan of the General de Broglie, loyal to the old regime. According to the rumour, the General was planning to surround the city and

⁷ Cf. H. Bocher, *Démolir la Bastille. L'édification d'un lieu de mémoire* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2012), 224.

attack it from the four cardinal points with the intent to imprison and kill all patriots. Allegedly, his army was already gathering outside the city. The people accordingly started to seek for guns and gunpowder, even though nobody actually saw the royal army. On the 13th of July it was announced that there might be gunpowder at the Bastille. All these information were false. The plan of de Broglie never existed. The army was nowhere to be seen. There was no gunpowder in the prison.

False news and not the real inability to withstand the regime any longer induced the people to go under the walls of the Bastille. Only after its taking was the myth created of the people who, having embraced the flag of liberty, conquered the Bastille and saved the patriots from the clutches of despotism. Each piece of news that brought people closer to the prison (alleged thousands of prisoners, alleged gunpowder) was entirely made up.

3

The myth of the Bastille is the outcome of an enormous falsification campaign imposed on French people so as to force them to embrace one single version of events. The paradox lies on the fact that such a version, though false, corresponds to the true opinion deriving from rational principles. According to true opinion the old regime was despotic and the revolution incarnated a necessary, entirely spontaneous reaction to its cruelty and irrationality.

In one of the most accurate philosophical studies of the European revolutionary essence, *Out of Revolution*, Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy observed that the greatness and the absolute novelty of the revolution consists in the fact that it is not being projected. It is not the fruit of a conspiracy directed to upset the social and political order. The revolution cannot be explained with a subjectivistic hypothesis referring to the free will of social actors.⁸ In other words, contrary to conjures, the revolution is not originated by a decision. Otherwise, it would be a mere chaotic sequence of crimes. Yet, we have observed that, even though the events which happened on the 14th of July had not been part of a planned agenda, the historical reconstruction of the first revolutionary day showed that these events were not a part of a historically or cosmically necessary mechanical process. The revolution is not spontaneous. On the contrary, it is *provoked*: called into reality. Its uniqueness results from the fact that it is not provoked on purpose by someone's free will—it is provoked necessarily by the impersonal true opinion.

The later Bastille myth asserts the truthfulness of false rumours that induced the people to assault the prison: the Bastille was overcrowded, and de Broglie and the king were conspiring. The gunpowder story was removed from the official revolutionary myth-history. This is why the well-known explanation is not true, according to which the abuses of despotism drove people to react. Historical necessity and social spontaneity are not the fundamental mechanisms of revolution. Yet, as Augustin Cochin, one of great historians of the French Revolution, observed, this does not entail that the sequence of revolutionary events does not obey to an iron logic.⁹ It only implies that, contrary to well-established

⁸ Cf. E. Rosenstock-Huussy, *Out of Revolution. Autobiography of Western Man* (Providence and Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 191. By the same author see also: *Revolution als politischer Begriff in der Neuzeit* (Breslau: M. & H. Marcus, 1931).

⁹ Cf. A. Cochin, *Meccanica della Rivoluzione*, trans. C. Montesano (Milano: Rusconi Editore, 1971 [1924]), 198-224.

opinion, the revolution has nothing to do with, as for instance Sheldon Wolin suggests, “material consequences of exclusionary politics.”¹⁰ Roots of the revolution are not to be found in historical or social facts, but in principles, theories, over-interpretations of reality and false information. Therefore, its understanding needs to be first of all philosophical.

4

Whether or not the revolution is necessary, the edification of the theory of its necessity is: otherwise the revolution could not be realized, and we would speak of disorders, rebellions, and subversion.

People did not assault the Bastille to remove the old despotic regime, but to obtain the imaginary gunpowder necessary to defend themselves from the imaginary attack of monarchist troops. And yet the 14th of July was immediately interpreted as the first day of the revolution and nobody even attempted to explain it differently. Who convinced the French to interpret the events in only this sense? The intellectuals, in articles and public speeches, consecrated the revolutionary version of events. They were trustworthy and well-educated men of letters, *philosophes* familiar with the principles of the enlightenment philosophy.¹¹ Alexis de Tocqueville was the first to identify them with the engine of the revolution. In the 1st chapter of the 3rd book of his *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*, where the account is given on how literary men became the most important political party of the country in decades before the revolution, Tocqueville stated that men of letters are used to living within the abstract world of principles. Instead of confronting social reality and political theory, they interpreted the reality through the lens of theory and then confronted such an over-interpreted reality with theoretical models of the perfect society. Their distance from everyday practical life, from concrete difficulties of feudal relationships and from the real function of Three Estates within the overall social order, generated a strange but necessary result: whatever men of letters observed, they perceived it in the light of principles. In fact, the principles and not the experience gained in the practical life are at one with the truth:

The situation of these writers fostered in them a taste for abstract, general theories of government, theories in which they trusted blindly. Living as they did almost totally removed from practical life, they had no experience that might have tempered their natural passions. Nothing warned them of the obstacles that existing realities might pose to even the most desirable reforms. They had no idea of the perils that invariably accompany even the most necessary revolutions. Indeed, they had no premonition of them because the complete absence of political liberty ensured that they not only

¹⁰ S. Wolin, *Tocqueville between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 381.

¹¹ On the role of the intellectuals in the preparation of the revolution, see: P. Goubert, D. Roche, *Les français et l'ancien régime. Tome 2. Culture et société*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Armand Colin, 2000); D. Mornet, A. Matthiez, *Les Origines intellectuelles de la Révolution française: 1715-1787* (Paris: Editions Tallandier, 2010); M. Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge. Public Debt, Inequality, and Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007).

failed to grasp the world of affairs but actually failed to see it. They had nothing to do with that world and were incapable of recognizing what others did within it. Hence, they lacked even that superficial instruction that the sight of a free society and word of what is said by free men impart to those least involved in government. They therefore grew bolder in their innovations, much more enamored of general ideas and systems, much more contemptuous of ancient wisdom, and much more confident of individual reason than one commonly sees in authors who write speculative works about politics. (...) ¹²

All who were hindered by the daily practice of legislation soon became enamored of literary politics. The taste for this sort of thing spread even to people whose nature or situation would normally have kept them aloof from abstract speculation. (...) Thus, every public passion disguised itself as philosophy. Political life was forcibly channeled into literature, and writers, taking it upon themselves to direct public opinion, for a while took the place that party leaders ordinarily occupy in free countries. ¹³

On top of the real society, whose constitution remained traditional, confused, and haphazard, and in which laws were still diverse and contradictory, ranks clearly defined, conditions fixed, and tax burdens unequal, an imaginary society was constructed piece by piece, in which everything seemed simple and coherent, uniform, equitable, and shaped by reason. Gradually, the imagination of the multitude deserted the former and retreated into the latter. People lost interest in what was in order to dream about what might be, and in their minds they lived in the ideal city that the writers had constructed. ¹⁴

Literary men wanted to transpose into reality what is possible only in books—a coherent social system perfectly harmonized with human nature. It was their distance from social reality that allowed them to understand its deep truth. Political writers, intellectuals, philosophers, had to live within the “imaginary society.” Only this isolation prevented them from distorting their theories by their own personal passions and prejudices. Alienation from reality allows seeing objectively its real truth, the one the actual political regime always attempts to hide. Alienation impedes the outbreak of passions and makes critical thinking possible. To be alienated from the irrational reality of the feudal society means to be really free. Thereby only the one who does not govern and legislate can *prescribe* how to govern and legislate. ¹⁵ Only the one who does not live in the real society, in which

¹² A. de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*, ed. J. Elster, trans. A. Goldhammer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 129.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁵ In the *Introductory Note of The Social Contract* Rousseau wrote: “I shall be asked whether I am a prince or legislator that I write on politics. I reply that I am neither; and that it is for this very reason that I write about politics.

men are not equal and free, can understand that they are all born equal and free *secundum naturam* and that the feudal irregular society is *contra naturam*. The writers' popularity drove the French to start to learn politics from literature and not by practising it, because literature—as Biral stated—“became the only source from which can be learned what now politics is.”¹⁶

The true principles, through which men of letters observed the French state of the art, compelled them to understand the identity between monarchy and despotism. Indeed, when people are deprived of the right to freely choose the government, the true opinion states that citizens live under despotic oppression. Furthermore, from rational principles we infer that all despotism is grounded in violence, so we know that somewhere—even if the regime hinders us to localize the place—there are abuses and tortures of dissidents. If we add to this the testimonies of famous writers who described the tortures taking place in the Bastille, it is possible to understand why people embraced the idea that the old prison was the horrible place it never really was. The French started to believe what newspapers and books reported, for they reported the true opinion and the truth of the *philosophes'* disinterested reason: who could ever call reason itself into question?

5

The revolutionary version of events rests on the great *inversion*: starting from pre-revolutionary years, people began to ground their thinking in the true opinion and not in the knowledge acquired through experience. The foundational methodological truth of literary men sounds: *primum philosophari, deinde vivere*. In consequence, the true and the false are inverted. It is not the case that literary descriptions of life in Bastille are consistent with the principles and not with the historical evidence. What the reason affirms is plausible because only the reason, free from particular passions, is able to illuminate the deep, not immediately visible, monstrous truth of the irregular society. For only the impartial reason has nothing to hide and nobody to protect. On the other hand, those who have privileges to defend shall inevitably be prone to deceive, given that their personal interests contrast with the true opinion stating the natural equality of all men. Nevertheless, true opinion does not coincide with the factual truth. But the one who affirms that the true opinion is false, would (obviously but paradoxically) state the false. In fact, the confutation of the true opinion is consistent with the old regime's account of events, which in turn corresponds to false opinion secretly aiming to preserve the irregular political order by the means of expressing the factual truth. Anything in contrast with rational principles is deceit and conspiracy. Whoever thinks otherwise is not only wrong: they are wrong because they are enemy or still victims of the conspiracy plotted by those refusing to abandon privileged positions. The experience, the practical *vivere*, is falsified by the irregular society. This is

If I were a prince or a legislator, I would not waste my time saying what ought to be done; I would do it or remain silent.” Cf. J. J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses*, ed. S. Dunn (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 155.

¹⁶ A. Biral, *Storia e critica della filosofia politica moderna* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 1999), 305. See also R. Boyd, C. Williams, *Intellectuals and Statesmanship? Tocqueville, Oakeshott, and the Distinction between Theoretical and Practical Knowledge*, in *Alexis de Tocqueville and the Art of Democratic Statesmanship*, ed. B. Danoff and L. J. Hebert Jr. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 117-136.

why the inversion of the inversion is betrayal of reason and leads to false opinion, even if such inversion is consistent with historical evidence.

The necessity of revolution hails from the necessity with which literary men, entirely separated from “real life,” falsify the reality by means of spreading true opinion. The truth (the society of the equals) that their reason achieves has no correspondence in social reality. True opinion must thus individuate the colossal irrationality of the reality. The social reality appears as the denial of true opinion, according to which all men are free and equal by nature. Incapable of generating false opinion, the reason displays the truth by stating the irrationality of the old regime. The old political and social order has to be abolished, as it could never correspond to principles, as it is unreformable. The revolution, as the beginning of new law, is thus necessary.

The origin of all false information and rumours that made the revolution burst is to be sought in the necessity of the true opinion to over-interpret and falsify reality. Revolution was accomplished in the minds before being translated into reality, and this dyschrony between opinion and fact is where rumours are born: the already revolutionized minds observed the un-revolutionized reality and, instead of seeing the reality, recognized the lack of revolution caused—in the only possible way—by conspiracy. Once the revolution has started, every event shall always have two versions: the revolutionary one, at one with the true opinion and rational principles, and the anti-revolutionary one, corresponding to the experienced evidence, but expressing the regime’s interested and therefore false opinion. No historical opinion can any longer be politically neutral. Each word that agrees with the feudal version is false, even when it is true. The false opinion of the uncritical reason governed by egoistic passions or subjected to mental habits of despotism correspond to the historical truth and experienced evidence. To sustain the historical truth means to be victims of the existing and unjust social order.

The false information that induced people to demolish the old regime is related to the opinion that describes, faithfully to reason, the abstract (unrelated to the experience) operativeness of all despotism. In this way the abstract-logical deduction from principles to reality, separated from concrete histories of men, proves the truth of falseness (thousands of prisoners) and the falseness of the truth (seven prisoners, but “in very truth” all other prisoners were eliminated by the regime). The true opinion affirms the truth stating that France is living under tyranny. The subjects are not free to choose their delegates, so their destiny depends on king’s political will. The people were really compelled to carry out the emancipation from feudal chains, forced to do so by the same chains and by the law regulating the human behaviour: to follow one’s own interest. Ultimately, the true opinion proves that the storming of the Bastille is a mechanically necessary answer to the old regime’s repression of human nature and, therefore, the 14th of July represents the beginning of the revolution.¹⁷ The miracle of the revolution consists of the fact that for the first time in history the theoretical, abstract necessity became operative in the social-political reality, which has since Aristotle been understood as the reign of “the merely probable.”

¹⁷ On this logic of the revolution see especially G. Duso, *La logica del potere. La storia concettuale come filosofia politica* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1999), 157-184. A different interpretation is given by E. Voegelin, *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, ed. J. H. Hallowell (Durham: Duke University Press, 1975), 160-194.

In order to comprehend the revolution we are forced to develop two different and non-communicating levels of discourse because what is true according to the principles is factually false and what is factually true is false in terms of true opinion. If the revolution is grounded in both true principles and false rumours and is realized thanks to both of them, it means that the revolution, having the aim to realize socially the truth of reason (the natural liberty and equality of all men), can be launched only by seducing the hearts by means of false information—that is to say, only arising violent passions, instead of convincing minds through a rational and peaceful discussion.¹⁸ In fact, it is not normal not to agree with true opinion. Those who do not agree are victims of “mental feudalism” or mentally ill. The people have to be forced to want the freedom, for they—ignoring the principles—do not understand the abstract language of reason. The people are still in the state of minority. They have always lived in an irregular society. From their birth they were exposed to unjust laws and taught to perceive as natural what is *contra naturam*: that is, the feudal relationships of superiority and inferiority. They have to be forced to want what they really want, that is, what they would autonomously choose if only they were free: freedom. Revolution is the historical realization of the only compulsion that liberates without oppressing. It incarnates the only good violence and the last one as well. True opinion compelled the Parisians—inducing them to believe in abstract opinion that falsifies the experienced evidence—to burst into the Bastille and be embraced by liberty.

This compulsion liberates because it is not a product of someone’s free will. Indeed, the true opinion is widespread by men of letter, citizens of the already democratic and free *République des Lettres*, the only ones who do not need to be freed, for they already can see the truth thanks to the light of the reason. The true opinion is disinterested and necessary. The compulsion can liberate other citizens because it does not represent the realization of literary men’s personal interest. For this very reason the liberation cannot concern only the French, but is directed towards all of mankind.

6

Given that the minds of French people were led to embrace the true opinion’s statements alone, the possibility to think differently was permanently prevented. This impossibility was necessary in order that revolution be possible:

The common version of the storming of the Bastille is the first successful attempt to make one opinion prevail, to replace in the heads of French people the opinions they had or might normally have with another, entirely different, opinion. Only in this way can we explain the inundation of post-cards, prints, playing cards, fans, sculptures of every sort, all of them very detailed, that very accurately describe how the alleged Bastille prisoners lived, how they were bound, what the torture instruments were—this inundation of information breaks out immediately after the storming of the

¹⁸ On the development of the idea of public opinion, see E. Voegelin, *Expression of Opinion and Opinion Formation*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin. Volume 9. Published Essays: 1934-1939*, ed. T. W. Heikle (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 111-114.

Bastille. Up against so detailed descriptions, so concordant, so multiple, how not to believe that maybe really this was discovered at the Bastille? The attempt is evidently to make the French believe that this happened in Paris (...). So the 14th of July represents a clear attempt to make the French move from one opinion to another. This 'to make move' is the thread of the history of the revolution. If this can be accepted, the problem returns because the publicized version is completely false. Well, exactly this is the essence of the revolution: whatever the revolutionary version ever says, is false from head to toe. Hence you can already begin to doubt that the king ran away (...). The revolution exists in legend, that is, in false information.¹⁹

By telling the truth the opinion unrelated to the experience falsifies the reality, producing the theory of double reality according to which there is the visible one (which is a representation made by social actors fighting against the regular society) and the *ob-scene* one (which is literally behind-the-scene and needs to be illuminated). The reality shall continue to be double until it becomes entirely rational, just like the true opinion—entirely different with respect to what man, living his pre-scientific life, expires, perceives, observes. Until it becomes flat and linear, without basements in which to lower the conspiracy truth.

7

Our world descends from revolution: true opinion became more and more a reality as the society became less and less feudal. Those who refuse to believe in true opinion side with the unreason and the unjust society of inequality and dependence. Revolution gives birth to a world divided in two: on the one hand, there are societies of free and equal men, in which rationality and morality reign and the Bastille had been taken long ago; on the other, there are societies of oppressed and oppressors, governed by those refusing the true opinion only because to accept it is not in their egoistic interest. On the one hand, the friends of mankind, on the other its enemies, the criminals.²⁰ The only possible form of relationship between these two types of society is war: latent, underground or direct. A war that shall end with the final elimination of the enemies of mankind. This war, according to Carl Schmitt, "simultaneously degrades the enemy into moral and other categories and is forced to make of him a monster that must not only be defeated but also utterly destroyed."²¹ This nihilistic war is the essence of the revolution and according to Biral it is not over:

In this way (...) like from Minerva's head, the world in which we live in was born, the world in which two powers vie with each other. The world is reduced to the two, to a confrontation between the two, and it is a confrontation, once again, between freedom and oppression. This is the enormous

¹⁹ Biral, *La società senza governo*, 227.

²⁰ Cf. C. Schmitt, *The Turn to the Discriminating Concept of War* (1937), in *Writings on War*, ed. and trans. T. Nunan (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 66 (see also 30-74).

²¹ C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. G. Schwab (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 36.

success of the revolution and, unfortunately for me, its tragic modernity. That is to say, the revolution is not over.²²

The totalizing war between true opinion and the official version of the government, between modernity and conspiracy, science and superstition, theory and experience, freedom and oppression, mankind and its criminal enemies, compels everyone to choose a side. Neutrality is impossible, for both contenders consider the not-siding as tolerance towards the enemy—the only intolerable tolerance. Tragic is the human condition deprived of neutrality: to side with the true opinion means to falsify the reality and to reiterate the rumour; to side with the experienced evidence implies to support the feudal unreason, the lack of criticism and the enemies of the mankind. An un-political history cannot be written anymore. An un-political philosophy cannot be thought anymore. It would be “unreasonable.” Nevertheless, man cannot fall silent and stop bearing witness, since—according to Franz Rosenzweig—“the visible witness of his soul, that which could not be lacking without him ceasing to be man, is the spoken word, exclusively.”²³

8

Without the primary role played by the true opinion there would not have been any revolution. Ever since we have lived under its rule, we have progressively learned to strive for the true opinion’s rationality and impartiality: every tiny privilege, abuse, and lack of equal rights offend us. We have learned to want back Adam’s freedom and equality. We are exiting the state of minority.

The desire of freedom and equality was induced by the means of purely theoretical truth promulgated and certificated by the disinterested opinion of the intellectuals. Even if we were able to comprehend and account for the colossal, partial and plausible falsification within which we live, we could not transpose our opinion into political action, since to act involves to side pro or contra the society of freedom and equality and, thus, to be already within the true opinion “discourse,” which has partially become our political reality and which does not admit neutrality. On the other hand, if we philosophically interpreted the falsification, we would be labelled as reactionaries or even anarchists and would be comprehended as just discourse-makers with a side to defend and promote, although we are merely attempting to think *before* every modern political connotation and distinction.

²² Biral, *La società senza governo*, 338.

²³ F. Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. B. E. Galli (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 159.

IS HANNAH ARENDT A MODERNIST AFTER ALL?

When analysing Hannah Arendt's work, it is not uncommon to stress the antimodernist strain of her writings. It is also not uncommon to assess this strain as a philosophical bias against modernity that can be attributed to the (evil) Heideggerian influence on Arendt's thought. The most plausible justification of this line of analysis is delivered by the masterpiece *The Human Condition*. Its main thesis is namely that a basic feature of the modern age is world-alienation. Moreover, the work is obviously informed by Heidegger's Marburg lectures of the intellectual period of *Being and Time*. Some interpreters combined those two facts and drew the following conclusion: Hannah Arendt is an antimodernist and her antimodernist attitude must be the result of Heidegger's antimodernist teaching. In this paper I would like to: firstly, discuss the antimodernist strain in Arendt's thought and shed some light on the less obvious, modernist value of her work; secondly, reconsider the Heideggerian impact on Hannah Arendt's philosophical method and her attitude towards modernity.

A CRITIQUE OF ARENDT'S ANTIMODERNISM

First of all, I need to briefly outline the most prominent critiques of Arendt's antimodernism. As my goal is mostly to exemplify the main line of argumentation rather than to depict the whole range of possible stances in the enormously extended Arendt-debate, I will concentrate mostly on two American scholars who were the most explicit on the point: Richard Wolin and Seyla Benhabib.

Richard Wolin's book *Heidegger's Children* is devoted to tracing back the intellectual dependence of Heidegger's Jewish disciples (Arendt, Löwith, Jonas and Marcuse) on their teacher. According to Wolin, Arendt's almost "blind loyalty" to Heidegger is responsible for the essential damage to her intellectual legacy. As a result of this loyalty, Arendt's political thought, according to Wolin, "is rooted in the visceral antimodernism of Germany's *Zivilisationskritiker* of the 1920s,"¹ and particularly in its right-wing version presented by Heidegger. The main feature of Arendt's Heideggerian antimodernism is her critique of modern society in *The Human Condition*. "Like her mentor from Messkirch, she suffered profoundly from 'polis envy'—a tendency to view modern political life as

¹ R. Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2001), 63.

a precipitous fall from the glories of a highly mythologized Periclean heyday.”² As we will see, to form such a conclusion, Wolin needed to ignore not only the problematic attitude of the early Heidegger towards modernity but also the deep, ironic and profound polemics Arendt conducted all her life with Heidegger. Kindred to Wolin’s account of Arendt’s antimodernism is in an article by Michael Jones in which Jones goes so far as to say: “The root of this perplexing glorification of a mythical Greece is the German mandarin’s condescending view of modern ‘mass society.’”³ It does not need to be mentioned that according to Jones, Arendt’s German mandarinism is a sin she absorbed uncritically from her teacher Heidegger.

The context in which Seyla Benhabib discusses Arendt’s work is more complex and profound. She devotes the whole book (*The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*⁴) to analyse the question of Arendt’s attitude towards modernity and its provenance. Yet, the main thesis of Benhabib’s book is not difficult to grasp: she polarises Arendt’s work according to the scheme “modernism/antimodernism” which is perfectly parallel to, and can be measured with, the Heideggerian impact on Arendt’s scholarship. Briefly, Arendt’s modernism is allegedly inversely proportional to her Heideggerianism: “[A]lthough Hannah Arendt, the stateless and persecuted Jew, is the philosophical and political modernist, Arendt, the student of Martin Heidegger, is the antimodernist Grecophile theorist of the *polis* and of its lost glory.”⁵ The modernism of Arendt’s thought emerges when she departs from a phenomenological approach with its search for original phenomena and where she lets herself be inspired by the fragmentary historiography of Benjamin: “There are two strains in Arendt’s thought, one corresponding to the method of fragmentary historiography, and inspired by Walter Benjamin; the other, inspired by the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger, and according to which memory is the mimetic recollection of the lost origins of phenomena as contained in some fundamental human experience.”⁶ For instance, Arendt’s biography of Rahel Varnhagen suggests, according to Benhabib, the non-Heideggerian, “alternative genealogy of modernity.”⁷

Such a reading, although it is no doubt revealing in certain aspects, leaves us with a schizophrenic image of Arendt as if she were a double-faced Janus: the predominant Heideggerian face supplied with the reverse visage of Benjamin. Furthermore, it antagonizes Arendt’s thought from within. The perfect example of this (rather artificial) antagonism may be the question Benhabib posits at one point of her book: “How to reconcile

² *Ibid.*, 69.

³ M. T. Jones, “Heidegger the Fox. Hannah Arendt’s Hidden Dialogue,” *New German Critique*, 73 (1998): 188.

⁴ S. Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Lanham and Boulder and New York and Toronto and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

⁵ *Ibid.*, xxxviii-xxxix.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁷ *Ibid.*, xi. “Alternative” as it may be, Rahel Varnhagen’s biography can surely not be immediately inspired by the Benjaminian fragmentary historiography: the simple reason being that the main part of it was written *before* Arendt met Benjamin, i.e. before she went to France in 1933. So, if we agree with Benhabib that *Rahel Varnhagen* presents a first new strain in Arendt’s writing, which is rebellious to Heidegger’s teaching, we cannot at the same time agree with her that it was Walter Benjamin who was the “prime example” for her version of “fragmentary historiography” (x). I would rather argue that it was mostly Herder’s idea of history as an unprecedented chain of events that inspired Arendt at this point.

these complex historical-cultural analyses with the categorical oversimplifications that stare at us from the pages of *The Human Condition*?"⁸

THE ANTIMODERN STRAIN IN ARENDT'S THOUGHT

Before reconstruction of the modernist (or even pre-postmodernist) features of Arendt's work, it must be admitted that the above two assessments of her thought as antimodernist are not utterly unjustified.

In *The Human Condition*⁹ Hannah Arendt depicted modernity as an epoch in which man gradually alienated himself from his human world. The alienation from the Earth and Cosmos is for her just a precondition for a subsequent, gradual alienation of man from the human, political world, understood as the sphere of free speech and action. For Arendt, alienation from the world means foremostly a severing from Greek contemplation with its awe and immediateness, and subduing human relationships to nature to means-ends categories. The turning point in the modern understanding of the world was the age of scientific discoveries and a transition in cognitive attitude. Galileo and Newton radically transformed the human understanding of the world: the most important being the unification of the laws of movement for terrestrial and heavenly bodies. It resulted in incorporating the Earth into a cosmic sphere as an element of a unified Cosmos as well as in making hitherto godlike heavenly bodies something more earthly. Thus, not only did the earth lose its pre-modern status, but also man became a completely different observer of the cosmic sphere. Along with the discovery of experiment and with accepting Cartesian doubt as a scientific method, Greek contemplation of the Cosmos had to yield to a completely new approach: the search for absolute certainty. It turned out that one can be absolutely certain only in the limitations of one's mind, or, only in what he *makes* or produces himself, i.e. within subjectivity: "In the experiment man realised his newly won freedom from the shackles of earth-bound experience; instead of observing natural phenomena as they were given to him, he placed nature under the conditions of his own mind."¹⁰

Modern science substituted Greek contemplation and awe of the miracle of being with bringing forth reproducible phenomena, i.e. it substituted the concept of Being with the concept of process. This ontological shift also transformed human relationships and the human world. As a consequence of the scientific revolution, natural laws were applied to the human world and humans were reduced to objects of scientific calculation. The traditional hierarchy within *vita activa* (labour-work-action) was turned upside down: first of all, free political action was instrumentalised and put under the social control of human behaviour (through statistics and political economy); secondly, after the industrial revolution, labour itself (understood as a biological interaction with the environment) gained primacy over other human activities. In short: first instrumentality, then life in its barest form overshadowed the political realm of speech and action. Modern society is the outcome and symptom of those transformations, blurring the classical distinctions

⁸ Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism*, 139.

⁹ H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 265.

between the private and public realms and contaminating the public world that people can share with each other.

Hannah Arendt's evaluation of the modern age is obviously dependent on the premise of the reconstruction of Greek worldliness as a universal model of the concept of the world. This model underlies her description of the modern age and determines the purpose of the book, which is: "to trace back modern world alienation, its twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self."¹¹ In addition, it cannot be denied that the Arendtian concept of the world contains traces (or even more than traces) of Heidegger's analyses from *Being and Time*, or, that the idea of alienation resembles Heideggerian "fallenness."

Nevertheless, I would like to argue: first of all, the all too obvious antimodernist attitude of *The Human Condition* can be misleading if taken at face value; second of all, the line between the modernist/antimodernist aspects of Arendt's thought is not to be clearly drawn along with the Heideggerian/non-Heideggerian mode of her thought. Arendt's complicated attitude towards modernity cannot be simply measured with Heidegger's impact on her thought. There are two reasons for this state of affairs: firstly, the early thought of Martin Heidegger—and this is the most important source of Arendt's "Heideggerianism"—is not as clearly antimodernist as the later, "after-the-turn" works. *Being and Time* is anti-Cartesian no doubt, but its anti-teleological and deconstructionist framework leaves us with the "benefit of the doubt" that makes a simple linear assessment impossible. Secondly, and more importantly, although Heidegger's impact on Arendt must not be understated, she was too autonomous a thinker to simply adapt the categories of her teacher. Most of Heidegger's premises, antimodernist as they might be, she reinterpreted in such a way that they work in a different intellectual context with a different sense.

THE NON-OBVIOUS MODERNISM OF HANNAH ARENDT

Now, I would like to support my thesis by elucidating three interrelated points of Arendtian modernism: freedom, anti-teleology, and the category of the human condition.

FREEDOM

The problem of freedom in Arendt's thought reveals the complicated impact of Heidegger's philosophy. It is true that Arendt understood freedom as the essence of political action and that she found a model of free action in the political conditions of ancient Greece (as

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6. It is exactly this premise that Hans Blumenberg discards in his monumental book: *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. R. Wallace (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1999). What Blumenberg discards in Arendt's approach is what he calls *historical substantialism*; it means for him that Arendt took for granted that in history there are certain *constants* that facilitate its understanding (Greek worldliness). Blumenberg claimed that *historical substantialism* hinders our capacity to comprehend modernity in its originality and newness. Arendt's mistake would lie in the fact that in her assessment of the worldlessness of modernity she used as a criterion a concept of reality that was shaped in pre-Christian times: "Only where the category of substance dominates the understanding of history are there repetitions, superimpositions and dissociations—and also, for that matter, disguises and unmaskings" (9). Blumenberg's allegation would be that Arendt's premise of the ancient concept of the world prejudiced her in the way that any other historical concretisations of the relationship between man and the world must *ex definitone* mean world-alienation. According to Blumenberg, and against Arendt, modernity created a completely new concept of the world and reality that cannot be justly assessed with heterogeneous criteria like Greek contemplation or Greek political life.

it is presented in “What is Freedom?”¹²). Freedom is above all related to human spontaneity, the power of beginning something new (the Greek *archein*, the basic feature of free action) in the public world independent of partial interest and given goals: “Action, to be free, must be free from motive on one side, from its intended goal as a predictable effect on the other.”¹³ Its precondition is plurality and being-with-others in a common world. Outside this world there is no place for freedom—it is natural necessity that rules. Arendtian political freedom, based on plurality, is a thoroughly reinterpreted ontological freedom to *Being and Time*, which is based on solitude.

Heidegger’s work is a polemic with metaphysically understood freedom as an autonomy of subject. His concept of freedom is not a correlate of will, or consciousness. It is based on the time-related structure of being human. In *Being and Time* Heidegger develops a characteristic phenomenological conceptuality: the human being is named *Dasein*, as it refers to a conscious “being-there.” The time-related structure of this “being-there” Heidegger calls “care” and explains it with the idiomatic “thrown project.” *Dasein*’s situatedness in the circumstances it did not choose, i.e. its “thrownness,” reveals the scope of its existential possibilities. These are not ontologically “outside” *Dasein* but constitute its being: *Dasein* ontologically is a project on these possibilities and here lies its freedom. Freedom is basically understood as a transcendence towards one’s ownmost existential possibility: the authentic being towards death.

Arendt could not accept straightforwardly the concept of freedom that is entangled in the rhetoric of authenticity and solipsistic decisionism. That is why she made her definition of freedom exactly opposite to Heidegger’s solipsism: “We first become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with ourselves.”¹⁴ And yet, she took advantage of the ontological premises of the Heideggerian concept of freedom.¹⁵ Ontologically, Heideggerian freedom is based on description of the human way of being, which is independent of metaphysical and theological interpretations (e.g. as a feature of human nature given by God). *Dasein*’s freedom is based on negativity and groundlessness. No God or Reason can deliver the basis of human freedom which is a structure of the project itself. The human being is the only being that is free to transcend his or her factuality. Although Heideggerian deconstruction is, according to Arendt, incomplete (as Heidegger never overcame philosophical prejudices against public life: his concept of freedom is not negotiable with the conditions of plurality), she generally accepted the independent structure of the thrown project as a premise of the concept of freedom. As a result of an indirect dispute with Heidegger, Arendt’s analyses are not directed against a modern concept of freedom, but against the classical philosophical attribution of freedom to the phenomenon of the will. The freedom of the will is derivative from the primordial freedom of action and being with others. Arendt and Heidegger, each on their own terms, freed freedom from traditional theological connotations as well

¹² H. Arendt, “What is Freedom?” in H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁵ See also: D. R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger. The Fate of the Political* (New Jersey and Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1996), 13.

as from the shackles of modern subjectivity: now we can understand the stress Arendt put on spontaneity and the power of beginning, independence from motive and goal, and separation of action from any forms of instrumentality.

Nevertheless, this Heideggerian inspiration never blinded her to specifically modern and unprecedented phenomena of political freedom. It is in the modern age itself that Arendt seeks hitherto unknown flashes of freedom and the public world. Her example of modern revolutions is telling: “revolutions are the only political events which confront us directly and inevitably with the problem of beginning.”¹⁶ Since revolutions were bound with the human ability to start something new, “what they brought to the fore was this experience of being free.”¹⁷ In the book on revolution we come across a diagnosis of the modern age, competing with *The Human Condition*: it is not so much an alienation from the world any more (that can be easily conceived as analogous to Heidegger’s “fallenness”), but a new (and specifically modern) experience of political freedom, forgotten since the fall of The Roman Empire: “[T]he political spirit of modernity was born when men were no longer satisfied that empires would rise and fall in sempiternal change; it is as though men wished to establish a world which could be trusted to last forever, precisely because they knew how novel everything was that their age attempted to do.”¹⁸

This reconsidered attitude towards modernity does not mean abandonment of the Heideggerian method. Arendt’s interest is not genetic or historical. Instead, she seeks the essence of revolution: “If we want to learn what a revolution is—its general implications for man as a political being (...), we must turn to those historical moments when revolution made its full appearance.”¹⁹ In other words, we must grasp the phenomenon of revolution in the mode of its truth (*aletheia*). To pinpoint the polemics with Seyla Benhabib: Arendt is not an anti-Heideggerian “persecuted Jew” who presents this modernist attitude. She is still a Heideggerian phenomenologist, although it is a phenomenology radicalized so that it fits not only in the description of the meaning of being, but also in the description of human political action. And, of course, it is also inspired by other, non-Heideggerian, approaches.

As we can see, Arendt was not oblivious to specifically modern phenomena. What is more, she was ready to find in modern philosophy a different (and competing with her own account) concept of freedom. It is freedom bound with a certain mode of thinking, specifically with the Kantian “enlarged mentality.” Free action cannot be completely impartial (although it needs to be free from both motive and goal). Action always presupposes the particular perspective the actor takes. Real impartiality is possible only when we (even if only for a brief moment) withdraw ourselves from activity, assuming the perspective of spectator. As spectators we are free in a different way than we are as actors: it is freedom from boundness to the place we inhabit in the world and our own perspective. Only as spectators can we take into consideration the other point of view, enlarge our thinking by other perspectives, or put oneself (through imagination) in another’s place. Such a distance is possible only where the public space exists. But it does not need to be the Greek Agora. It can also be “the public of readers,” where we can be free to make “a public use

¹⁶ H. Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

of reason.” The enlargement of thinking is preconditioned by freedom from partiality: of private interest, of biological needs, and—last but not least—from the limitations of action. The Kantian enlarged (or critical) thinking (described in *What is Enlightenment?* and the *Critique of Judgement*) serves as a base for Arendt’s theory of judgement. This theory cannot be traced back to Greek thought (Socrates was responsible for another mode of thinking).

This example shows that Arendt’s thought cannot be easily labelled as antimodernist. Arendt was a modernist in so far as she traced in the modern age symptoms of freedom and the public world. And, as much as she appreciated Greek historians and poets, it is in the thinkers of the modern age (Kant, Machiavelli, Montesquieu and Herder) that she found the tools to deconstruct the framework of metaphysics towards the understanding of action. The idea of deconstruction itself she learned from Heidegger.

ANTI-TELEOLOGY

The thesis of Arendt’s antimodernism has often been supported by the myth of an Aristotelian inspiration of her concept of *praxis*. It is true that Arendt appreciated the step Aristotle took towards a description of *praxis* and in *The Human Condition* stressed those aspects of Aristotelian ethics and politics that Heidegger omitted in his platonic interpretation of Aristotle (during the lecture course in 1924, *The Sophist*). It is not true however, that Arendt, as Benhabib claims, “revived the missing [Aristotelian] concept of *praxis*,”²⁰ or that Arendt’s critique of modern politics is—as Wolin puts it—“an exotic blend of Aristotle and the German *Zivilisationskritiker* of the 1920s.”²¹ The thesis of the Aristotelian provenance of Arendt’s concept of action nicely supports the antimodernist and conservative reading of her thought. The only problem is that to draw such a conclusion one has to ignore both her explicit statements (like: “Nothing could be more alien to the pre-polis experience of human deeds than the Aristotelian definition of *praxis* that became authoritative throughout the tradition”²²) and the implications of her own concept of action.

It was first Dana R. Villa, who convincingly showed that Hannah Arendt was never any sort of communitarian or hermeneutist (like MacIntyre, Gadamer or Strauss) who aimed to revive Aristotelian ethics or politics. For Arendt—as he put it—“The pressing problem is not to recover ancient concepts and categories or to restore tradition in some form, but rather to deconstruct and overcome the reifications of a dead tradition.”²³ Arendt adapts the very modern (or even post-modern) strategy of deconstruction as it was presented by Heidegger in his Marburg lectures. As Heidegger wanted to disclose the derivative understandings of being (from theological concepts) present already in Greek classical philosophy, Arendt wanted to discard the traditional philosophical prejudices against the freedom of action: subduing action under the demands of philosophical contemplation or interpreting action in the instrumental categories of means and ends, i.e.: “translation of

²⁰ Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 116.

²¹ R. Wolin, *Heidegger’s Children*, 66.

²² H. Arendt, “The Tradition of Political Thought,” in H. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 46.

²³ Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, 9.

action into the idiom of making,” as Villa put it.²⁴ According to Arendt, both vices are very characteristic not only of Plato, but also of Aristotle. From the Arendtian point of view, it is not a primarily modern understanding of politics that demands deconstructive work, but also the philosophical tradition from its Greek beginnings.

Although Aristotle made necessary distinctions in the realm of human active life (*poiesis* and *praxis*, resp. *techne* and *phronesis*), his idea of politics is ultimately inscribed into the teleological, metaphysical structure of his philosophy. In Arendt's view, in Aristotle (as in Plato) politics is deprived of its own independent meaning and serves virtue and the good life. In this sense Aristotelian politics is as instrumental as Plato's. Instead of the *idea* of Good as a measure of public affairs we have the *telos* of a good life: “The state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life.”²⁵ This sentence alone is sufficient to understand why Arendt had to overcome the Aristotelian concept of politics: first of all, *polis* by Aristotle is a crowning of the natural order, and, second, it refers to the goal of a good life, happiness of citizens and their virtue, and thus, its role is ancillary. *Polis* is assessed not according to the mere possibility of action, but according to the conditions of a good life: “[T]he best life, both for individuals and states, is the life of virtue.”²⁶ For Arendt it meant: apart from the promise that lay in Aristotelian differentiation between *poiesis* and *praxis*, action was ultimately instrumentalised and inscribed into heterogeneous structures (metaphysical, ontological, ethical) and its internal value levelled (Arendt comments on Aristotle: “Just as eating is not life but the condition of living, so living together in the polis is not the good life but its material condition”²⁷). By Aristotle action becomes ultimately a means to an end and the value of politics lies in making good citizens (as in Book VII of *Politics*), or actualisation of the highest good (as in Book I of *Ethics*). That is why Arendt can write in her *Denktagebuch*: “Just as Plato sees everything in the perspective of Idea, Aristotle sees everything in the perspective of τέλος. These are but only different ways of interpretation of ποίησις and τέχνη; in πράξις there is no τέλος or Idea.”²⁸ Freedom of action excludes the *telos* of virtue or a good life. The main feature of free action is its discontinuity with any hierarchical structures.

To summarise: it is not modernity that alienated freedom of action, but the very nature of metaphysical thinking, no matter whether ancient or modern. Consequently, Arendt would not seek the true meaning of action in Greek thought, but in documents that are on the margins of the whole metaphysical tradition. Reading the core of the philosophical tradition from the perspective of those margins was her way to show the hidden premises (antipolitical bias) of philosophy. A bulk of Arendt's inspiration is modern. Just to name a few: Machiavelli liberated politics from ethics, and saved the autonomy of action; Montesquieu divided monolithic political power into three instances, and undermined the quasi-theological dogma of sovereign power; Kant invented the power of judgement

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁵ Aristotle, *Politics* 1252b, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920).

²⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1323b.

²⁷ H. Arendt, “Socrates,” in Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 17.

²⁸ H. Arendt, *Denktagebuch*, Bd. I, 1950-1973, ed. U. Ludz and I. Nordmann (München and Zürich: Piper, 2003), 469. In the quotations I preserve the original Greek script.

as independent of knowledge and morality; Herder in his philosophy of history affirmed the concrete historical plurality of humans. Last but not least: it was Heidegger himself who taught Arendt how to dismantle the remnants of the tradition and read the past anew (ultimately, Arendt used the deconstructionist strategy of Heidegger to deconstruct his own philosophy of being).

THE HUMAN CONDITION

One of the fundamental distinctions of Arendt's work is that of the human condition and human nature. Although her project is clearly anthropological, Arendt does not want to describe the essence of man. She is aware that the attempts at grasping human essence, attempts that western metaphysics has always made, "almost invariably end with some construction of deity, that is, with the god of the philosophers, who, since Plato, has revealed himself upon closer inspection to be a kind of Platonic idea of man. (...) the fact that attempts to define the nature of man lead so easily into an idea which definitely strikes us as 'superhuman' and therefore is identified with the divine may cast suspicion upon the very concept of 'human nature.'"²⁹

Although Arendt supports her idea of the human condition with St. Augustine, it is clear that she owed the distinction itself to Heidegger, who, in *Being and Time*, tried to grasp the being of *Dasein* independently of inherited metaphysical structures and concepts. The initial idea was to describe *Dasein* in its own terms, and not to derive the sense of its being from other, non-human beings. That is why Heidegger does not posit the traditional question *what* is man. Instead, he asks, *who* is *Dasein*. The question *what* is man suggests an answer that locates a human being in a structure or hierarchy of beings. And such were the traditional philosophical answers: man was either a created being (*ens creatum*), or *animal rationale*, or a combination of body and soul, or a substance with attributes, or *ego cogito*.³⁰ When we ask *who* is man, these answers cease to be adequate; it opens up space for new answers. It is not locating humanity in a supra human structure any more, it is describing actual ways of being human; answering the question *what it means* for a human being to be. In this way Heidegger tries to dissolve the understanding of being that originated in the idea of the timeless highest being. The whole existential analytic needs to start not with the abstract idea of God or being as a whole, but with the only being that is accessible in experience: everyday ways of being human that—at least this was Heidegger's hope—can help to reconstruct the meaning of being as such.

Arendt did not share this Heideggerian hope; she never cared about the meaning of being as such. Her goal is not phenomenological ontology, but phenomenological anthropology: to describe the specifically human ways of being. The direction of *The*

²⁹ H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 11.

³⁰ In his recently published *Black Notebooks* Heidegger throws some more light on the point of understanding human being as an *animal rationale*: "So far as the essence of man is pre-conceived as animality (*animalitas*), one can only ask *what* is man. Never is the question of *who* is man possible. The question of *who* is as a question something fundamentally different (...). It is only this question that overcomes the modern anthropological description of man and along with it all the previous anthropologies: Christian-Hellenistic, Jewish and Socratic-Platonic." M. Heidegger, *Überlegungen VII-XI (Schwarze Hefte 1938/39), Gesamtausgabe IV. Abt., Band 95*, (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2014), 322.

Human Condition is clearly opposite to *Being and Time*. The book is a description of fragile conditions of being human that are often opposites to Heidegger's existentials (like: plurality against solitude, speech and action against speechless fear, and natality against being-towards-death³¹). And yet, the inspiration for the Heideggerian question of *Who is Dasein* is all too obvious: what the two thinkers have in common is an anti-metaphysical description of humanity. The "human condition" is a (very modern) term that stands for the attempt to grasp humanity independently of any theological and teleological structures.

Although it is true that this description is informed by a Greek model, its goal is not nostalgic or hostile to modernity (just as Heidegger's early attempts to overcome metaphysics are not). Arendt is well aware that, as she put it, the thread of tradition is broken, and never believed that it was possible or even desirable to mend it. Her phenomenological description of the human condition on the basis of what she imagined to be the Greek existential structure is never restorative. It is aimed at providing intellectual devices for coming to terms with the present. She digs in the ruins of tradition to get the clarity of distance needed for an understanding of the 20th century. Her archaeological efforts are not primarily longing for the good old times of the golden age, but trying to refill the "empty shells" of concepts by tracing back the semantic and ontological transformation of those concepts. Using these quasi-Greek concepts as measures she intensifies our feeling of the gap between past and future.

One of the many really progressive features of Arendt's thought is that she was ready to abandon familiar categories she believed were not any longer fit to describe what was happening. She was always attuned to the new and unprecedented nature of events and was always looking for a new language to comprehend them. That is why she was one of the first to describe totalitarianism in new categories (neither religious nor metaphysical), adequate to the newness of the phenomenon. She was aware that thinking in the category of ever-lasting human nature can be noble, but is helpless when the conditions of humanity change rapidly. The basic premise of Arendtian analyses of the present times (e.g. totalitarianism) is that the human condition can be changed and that certain precedents can destroy its certain aspects (like freedom, plurality and being-in-the-world). This accounts for Arendt's phenomenological flexibility in the description: she does everything to avoid the intellectual trap of philosophers, i.e. reducing the new phenomenon to old categories and familiar concepts (which is why she could not agree that totalitarianism was a new form of old autocracy or a new emergence of gnosis, the sinister effect of instrumental Reason or modern paganism).³² Moreover, she also avoids Heidegger's error: seeing events as actualisations of inauthentic being, which led to sweeping generalisations.

³¹ As Seyla Benhabib succinctly puts it: "Being-unto death is displaced by natality; the isolated *Dasein* is replaced by a condition of plurality; and instead of instrumental action, a new category of human activity, action, understood as speech and doing, emerges." Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism*, 110.

³² It was the theme of the controversy between Arendt and Eric Voegelin. Starting with theological premises, Voegelin argued in his review of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, that human nature is unchangeable (it was the term still used by Arendt by the time or writing *Origins*). For Voegelin, an understanding of totalitarianism as a danger for human nature or the human condition is a cardinal philosophical mistake that stems from the liberal and pragmatic premises of Arendt's work. As such, it is a symptom of the decline of western civilisation. For Voegelin, totalitarianism is an outcome of liberalism and agnosticism and its roots should be looked for not in the historical processes of the 19th century—as Arendt did—but in middle ages heresies. See E. Voegelin, "The

Although one can discuss the arbitrariness of Arendtian models, her thinking of humanity in non-metaphysical categories of the human condition was the prelude to some cutting-edge modes of thinking over conservative theories (we could think for instance of the Foucault's concept of biopower, or the Agambenian analyses of modern politics).

CONCLUSION

It is true that in Arendt's attitude there is a certain ambivalence towards modernity. Yet, the basic tension in Arendt's thought is not primarily informed by the dichotomy of modern and pre-modern modes of thinking, but by a dichotomy of philosophical (metaphysical) thinking that discarded the freedom of human action and an alternative political thinking that preserves the fragile conditions of plurality. This combat against philosophical prejudices regarding politics and action she led at the same time with and against Heidegger. It was Heidegger who taught her how to deal with the philosophical tradition. It was Arendt herself who radicalised his methods and combined them with other, non-Heideggerian inspirations. The criterion of those inspirations is not non-modernity but freedom from metaphysical prejudices, either ancient or modern. That is why she let herself be influenced not only by Thucydides and Herodotus, not only by Benjamin, but also Herder, Kant and Lessing.

It is also true that Arendt was suspicious of certain features of the modern world and it is true that she had a penchant for measuring the modern age with heterogeneous ancient models. Yet, what is decisive when we consider the modernity of her thinking is not the positive point of departure she took, but the way of thinking itself which is the exact opposite of the anti-modern, conservative or traditional. The modernity of Arendt's way of thinking is indebted to Heidegger's thought. The modern mode in Arendt emerges not when she ceases to be Heideggerian (and becomes Benjaminian, or Jewish) but when she consciously transforms her own inalienable Heideggerianism into an original attitude.

Origins of Totalitarianism," *The Review of Politics*, 1, no. 15 (1953): 68-76. Arendt opposes reducing totalitarianism to inherited ideas and votes for making fine phenomenological distinctions. For her, the complete abolishing of human freedom is an artefact accomplished by totalitarian rule, that had no precedence in the past: "Under these conditions it will be hardly consoling to cling to an unchangeable nature of man (...). Historically we know of man's nature only insofar as it has existence, and no realm of eternal essences will ever console us if man loses his essential capabilities." H. Arendt, "A Reply to Eric Voegelin," in H. Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 408. The dispute between Arendt and Voegelin is a paradigm of the difference between phenomenological and "essentialist" attitudes.

APOCALYPSE AND TRUTH: ON HEIDEGGER'S UNKNOWN GOD

*Qui sine periculo volet in Aristotele philosophari,
necesse est ut ante bene stultificetur in Christo*¹

The University of Freiburg has two inscriptions carved on its facade that could be regarded as the cornerstone upon which the edifice of Heidegger's thought was erected: "Die Wahrheit wird euch frei Machen" and, added in 1933, "Dem ewigen Deutschtum." Heidegger's philosophy spans between the quotation from the gospel of John—ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς (John 8:32)—and the appeal to the myth of *Germania Aeterna*, starting with the early reading of Pauline eschatology, the Christian protestant thought of Kierkegaard and Luther, up to his later appropriation of Hölderlinian theology. In other words, those two quotations could well serve as epigraphs for the entire Heidegger's oeuvre. One could argue that Heidegger's philosophy, in particular his reading of Aristotle, is apocalyptic in two senses. First and foremost, his interpretation of ἀλήθεια, the central concept of his philosophy, is apocalyptic. He rejects the traditional, scholastic, one could say "catechonic" understanding of ἀλήθεια in favour of an apocalyptic, or revelatory reading. This reading is also phenomenological, since on Heidegger's account, ἀλήθεια is the *Unverborgenheit*, or the disclosedness of the world, of worldly things, the "Sichzeigenlassen der Sache selbst,"² and the locus of disclosure is *Dasein*, as Heidegger interprets the Aristotelian phrase ἀληθεύει ἡ ψυχή (*Eth. Nic.* VI 1139b).³ Thereby every manifestation of every phenomenon is an epiphany, albeit one that is not a theophany in the traditional sense, since from this perspective we can no longer speak of any beyond. It is the self-revelation of the world itself, an auto-epiphany, a *Sichoffenbaren* (GA 13:96). It can only be considered a theophany if the world is identified with god. Indeed, according to Thomas Sheehan, "the 'god' that Heidegger's philosophy awaits is simply the epiphany of world."⁴ To put it differently, Heidegger's "last god" is simply the world as such.

¹ M. Luther, "Disputatio Heidelbergae habita," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Band 1, (Weimar: Metzler Verlag, 1883), 355.

² M. Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975-), vol. 11, 147 (all quotations from this source are referred to as GA followed by volume and page number).

³ GA 62:376 and GA 19:21.

⁴ T. Sheehan, "Heidegger and Christianity," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

It is arguable whether this is indeed Heidegger's ultimate view. How then could one explain his later statements like "Wagen wir noch einmal die Götter und mit ihnen die Wahrheit des Volkes?" (GA 94:183), or "die Götter sind immer die Götter des Volkes; in ihnen enthüllt und erfüllt sich die geschichtliche Wahrheit des Volkes," (GA 93:170) not to mention his postmortem utterance "Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten" (GA 16:671). This leads us to the second meaning of Heideggerian apocalypics, or the awaiting and preparation for God. The longed for event is indeed *παρουσία*, which Heidegger explicitly translates as *Ereignis* (GA 60:149). As he explains, the event of *παρουσία* is preceded by the arrival of the Antichrist, who presents himself as "the god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4).⁵ Only a true Christian can recognize the Antichrist, Heidegger adds. It is hard to resist the impression that the apocalyptic reading of *ἀλήθεια* and the above mentioned understanding of the "last God" are meant to introduce "the god of this world," but perhaps with the ultimate goal of achieving the *παρουσία*. Such an intention is confirmed by the epigraph to Heidegger's Nietzsche-book, an aphorism from Nietzsche's *Antichrist*: "Zwei Jahrtausende beinahe und nicht ein einziger neuer Gott!" (GA 6.1:1).⁶ One should not conclude hastily, as Franco Volpi did, that Heidegger is tantamount to Antichrist.⁷ Heidegger's stance is well explained in his 1946 lecture *Wozu Dichter?*, which he begins by repeating the Hölderlinian diagnosis that we are in the "Night of the World" characterized by the absence of God. In order to overcome the Night, it is necessary that there are some who reach "the abyss of the world" (GA 5:270). This abyss, or Abgrund, is also called by Heidegger the open, *das Offene*, which he elucidates further on in this lecture, following Hölderlin's call: "Komm! ins Offene, Freund!"⁸ But to enter the open, as Heidegger explicates, is to enter the domain of *Zusammensein* (GA 16:728). *Dasein* is thus no longer *jemeinig*, instead becoming "unsere Dasein," "geistig-volkliche Dasein," "völklich-staatliche Dasein" (GA 16:109-111) or even "deutsche Dasein" (GA 16:184, 238, 766; GA 36/37:13, 89; GA 39:290) that should undergo a "total transformation" (GA 16:192). It is no coincidence that Heidegger started interpreting Hölderlin at the time of his epochal engagement.

In order to understand how Heidegger was able to bring about a transition to a collective *Dasein*, we shall first ask the question: what does he mean by *Dasein* at all, rather than simply condemning him as Karl Löwith did in his 1946 essay.⁹ To state it briefly, Heidegger's *Dasein* never meant an individual, a person, a strictly delimited being; instead it was always meant as ecstatic, from *Sein und Zeit* till the last seminar in Zähringen, where Heidegger says that *Dasein* is "wesenhaft ek-statisch" (GA 15:383). If "*Dasein* is its openness" (GA 2:133), then it is also open towards collective, e.g. *völklich* forms of being. But to grasp what's at stake here, we must remember that Heidegger is constantly trying to develop a theology of facticity, following Luther and Paul: "what

⁵ GA 60.110.

⁶ cf. GA 50:107.

⁷ F. Volpi, *La Selvaggia Chiarezza. Scritti su Heidegger* (Milano: Adelphi, 2011), 297ff.

⁸ F. Hölderlin, "Der Gang aufs Land," in *Sämtliche Werke, Grosse Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, ed. F. Beissner, v. 2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1951), 84.

⁹ K. Löwith, "Les implications politiques de la philosophie de l'existence chez Martin Heidegger," *Les Temps Modernes* no. 2 (1946).

is invisible in God is seen by thought in His works” (GA 60:281). The introduction of a “volkkliche Dasein” is therefore equivalent to stating that “die Götter sind immer die Götter des Volkes.” In other words, if *Dasein* is the locus of manifestation, then a theophany can occur in its *volkklich* mode. This should nevertheless be further clarified by returning to preliminaries.

Heidegger’s peculiar use of the term *Dasein* combines at least two diverse aspects. One is the traditional German translation of the Thomistic “*existentia Dei*” as “*Dasein Gottes*”; this is the divine aspect of *Dasein*. Furthermore, in Heidegger’s philosophy *Dasein* replaces ἄνθρωπος. This is justified by the claim that “human” is a concept overburdened by unwanted metaphysical load (GA 63:21ff.). Thereby Heidegger realizes Nietzsche’s postulate that “man is something that shall be overcome.” This replacement is also a consequence of Luther’s facticity, which leads Heidegger to question the idea of *homo as imago Dei*, introducing instead the analogical relation of *Dasein* as manifestation of *Sein*. One more aspect of *Dasein* needs to be underscored, i.e. Kierkegaard’s shift of meaning of the concept of existence from divine to human, providing the link that connects the previous two aspects. In the early twenties, having immersed deeply into Kierkegaard and Luther, Heidegger undertook a large project of interpreting Aristotle phenomenologically. One of the major outcomes is the introduction of the concept of *Dasein*. This can be demonstrated by comparing two subsequent translations of the statement ἀληθεύει ἡ ψυχή from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, traditionally translated as “die Seele die Wahrheit bekennt.” Whereas in 1922 Heidegger translates this as “die Seele Seiendes als unverhülltes in Verwahrung bringt” (GA 62:376), in 1926 he rephrases it as “das menschliche Dasein als Zu- und Absprechen das Seiende erschließt” (GA 19:21). We shall analyse the translation of ἀληθεύει later, but here it is important to notice the replacement of the “metaphysical” concept of soul with the existential-phenomenological *Dasein* as ecstatic, or transcending itself, and as the place of the manifestation of phenomena.

This interpretation of ψυχή as *Dasein* is further supported by Heidegger’s reading of Aristotle, especially of the treatise Περὶ Ψυχῆς, which he describes in 1927 as “*Ontologie des Lebens und des Daseins*” (GA 22:182). Already in 1922 he states that translating Περὶ Ψυχῆς as *Von der Seele* is misleading, because this is not “psychology in modern sense, since it deals with man’s being in the world” (GA 17:6). Instead it should be translated as *Über das Sein in der Welt* (GA 17:293). The misleadingly named “faculties of the soul,” perceiving, thinking and willing, are not *Erlebnisse* for Aristotle, as modern psychology would have it, but rather “Weisen des Da-seins eines Lebenden in seiner Welt” (GA 17:293). Aristotle does not deal here with an “An-sich-Erleben” of the ψυχή, but with its *Leben*, i.e. “ein Sein, dem es auf sein Sein ankommt.”¹⁰ This expression from 1922 will reappear in *Sein und Zeit* to characterize *Dasein*. Furthermore, one cannot even conceive of something like the psychology of Aristotle, since the assumption of a possibility of psychology requires the concept of a self-knowing, self-willing, self-certain man, i.e. man as subject, who experiences the world as his object. Such a concept is entirely foreign to the Greeks (GA 55:234,312).

¹⁰ A. Denker and G. Figal and F. Volpi and H. Zaborowski (eds.), *Heidegger-Jahrbuch 3: Heidegger und Aristoteles* (Freiburg und München: Karl Alber, 2007), 25.

Instead, Heidegger would rather call *Περί Ψυχῆς* the phenomenology of *Dasein*: “Aristotle was really in *De Anima* phenomenological (without the explicit reduction).”¹¹ He even calls Aristotle “the first phenomenologist”¹² who thought the self-manifestation of phenomena “more originally than Husserl” (GA 14:99). This phenomenological reading, Gadamer recalls, allowed Aristotle “to speak like a contemporary.”¹³ What allows Heidegger to issue such a claim? During his reading of Aristotle, Heidegger once again attempted to interpret Husserl’s sixth *Logische Untersuchung*, which was hitherto incomprehensible to him. Through Aristotle he finally understood what Husserl meant by categorial intuition. This needs to be clarified in order to justify Heidegger’s claim. Husserl’s discovery of categorial intuition is the *Brennpunkt* (GA 15:373) of his thought, since it allows, as Klaus Held has put it, for the “Vorgegebenheit einer transsubjectiven Offenbarkeitsdimension.”¹⁴ Simply speaking, it allows for the perception of being itself. This is indeed the essence of the phenomenological revolution, since it extends Kantian sensuous intuition to the domain of the categorial: “Für Husserl ist das Kategoriale (das heißt die Kantischen Formen) ebenso sehr gegeben wie das Sinnliche” (GA 15:376). One of the books studied by the young Heidegger was Carl Braig’s *Vom Sein*, which opens with an epigraph from Bonaventura’s *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*: “as our eyes, turned towards the multiplicity of colours, don’t perceive the light, so our mind’s eyes, turned towards particular and universal beings, don’t perceive being itself.”¹⁵ Now, thanks to the new Husserlian method, the scales have fallen from Heidegger’s eyes. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of this discovery for it is indeed a breakthrough. In order to realize its far reaching implications, one has to understand that Heidegger is not talking about some form of contemplation that focuses upon an object, albeit a holy one. What he is talking about is the possibility of opening the third, phenomenological eye that perceives something other than beings: being, *esse*, εἶναι itself.

It needs to be properly emphasized why Heidegger regards Aristotle’s analyses as phenomenological. Among other reasons, this is due to the fact that they do not presuppose a subject-object framework (GA 62:377). Therefore the locus of truth for Aristotle is not the proposition, as the classical theory of truth claims. Locating truth within the sentence, or in the mind that’s thinking the sentence, and treating the criteria of truth as external, located in some external reality, requires certain questionable premises that are not obvious for Aristotle and valid for all of his writings. Instead, even in *Metaphysics* one can find a conception of truth that does not operate within such a framework, and of *ψυχή* that finds itself in a primary, pre-established relation to the things it encounters in the world. Phenomenology requires such an originary mode. Therefore Heidegger regards early Husserl as phenomenological, but he considers

¹¹ H. Spiegelberg, “From Husserl to Heidegger: Excerpts from a 1928 Freiburg Diary,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 2, no. 1 (1971): 73.

¹² H.-G. Gadamer, *Hermeneutik im Rückblick* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 18, 351; H.-G. Gadamer, *Ästhetik und Poetik I* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 404; H.-G. Gadamer, *Neuere Philosophie I* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 402.

¹³ Gadamer, *Neuere Philosophie I*, 199, 286.

¹⁴ J. E. Faulconer, M. A. Wrathall (eds.), *Appropriating Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 103.

¹⁵ C. Braig, *Vom Sein: Abriss der Ontologie* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1896), V.

Husserl's later shift into idealism a regress. Aristotle's phenomenological analyses of *Dasein*'s Being-in-the-world is what Heidegger finds in *Eth. Nic.* VI and repeats them in a properly crafted language in *Sein und Zeit*, which is phenomenological in its originary sense, i.e. Aristotelian, and not Husserlian.

It is of utmost importance that when Heidegger pinpoints the Husserlian *kategoriale Anschauung* in Aristotle, he doesn't associate it with θεωρία, or contemplation, which would seem to be the most straightforward choice. Heidegger's groundbreaking discovery and the core of this entire thought boils down to his recognition of categorial intuition in ἀλήθεια. This singular choice is more decisive than any translation or elucidation of the meaning of ἀλήθεια as *Wahrsein*, *Unverborgenheit*, etc. Heidegger can try to explain this decision by translation ἀλήθεια as "die Unverborgenheit des Anwesenden, dessen Entbergung, sein sich-Zeigen" (GA 14:99) but in order to grasp its meaning one has to return to the above quoted passage from the sixth book of *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is indeed the Aristotelian equivalent of Husserl's sixth *Logische Untersuchung*. Heidegger was able to discover in this passage not a statement of intellectual or dianoetic virtues, but a phenomenological analysis of "der Weisen, in denen das menschliche Dasein das Seiende erschließt" (GA 19:21), i.e., of *kategoriale Anschauung*. Some of those ways are theoretical, some are practical. In fact the discovery of ἀλήθεια πρακτική stands among Heidegger's revelations. In other words, *Dasein*'s disclosedness also occurs through practice. This Aristotelian observation is analyzed by Heidegger further in *Sein und Zeit* under the title of *Zuhandenheit*. Once again, since one cannot repeat this often enough: revelation occurs not only in contemplation.

It is necessary to stress the verbal form of ἀλήθεια in the *Eth. Nic.* passage. Translators were hitherto utterly helpless in the face of the fact that contemporary languages don't have the equivalent verbal forms for Greek ἀληθεύειν. Therefore they replaced it with its nominal form, ἀλήθεια, or *Wahrheit*, and added an auxiliary verb chosen by mere chance, e.g. *bemächtigt*, *trifft* or *bekannt*. Heidegger states explicitly that ἀληθεύειν doesn't mean "sich der Wahrheit bemächtigen," but rather "das je vermeinte und als solches vermeinte Seiende als unverhülltes in Verwahrung nehmen" (GA 62:378), or "das jeweilig Seiende, mit dem das Dasein Umgang pflegt, unverdeckt zur Verfügung haben," which is the phenomenological description of the process of intuition. Heidegger's translations of ἀληθεύειν as *Wahrsein* and *In-der-Wahrheit-sein* (GA 19:23), or *being-true* and *being-in-truth* preserve the verbal, kinetic character of "trueing." Furthermore, as Heidegger observes, ἀληθεύειν doesn't "originally and properly" have a theoretical character in the modern sense of the word. Instead ἀληθεύειν has the primary character of κίνησις, which is confirmed even by the verbal form of the word expressing it (GA 62:374,377,385). This is why in order to further analyse the movement of ἀληθεύειν Heidegger will have to take recourse to Aristotle's *Physics*. It is also necessary to underscore that even though one can find in *De Anima* expressions like ἡ ψυχὴ τὰ ὄντα πῶς ἐστὶ πάντα, i.e. ψυχὴ is somehow everything (431 b 21), or the identification of ψυχὴ as τόπος εἰδῶν, the locus of manifestation (429 a 27), those statements are not interesting for Heidegger since they don't describe how the manifestation of beings in ψυχὴ occurs. Such a description is only contained in *Eth. Nic.* VI which is why Heidegger begins his interpretation of Aristotle with it (GA 19:21ff; GA 62:376ff.).

Let us state once again: ἀληθεύειν has the character κίνησις. In other words, *Dasein* is a movement. Even νοῦς, the highest, most “theoretical” of the five modes of *Dasein*’s ἀληθεύειν that Aristotle distinguishes, is kinetic. Yet, Heidegger observes, it is not νοῦς that is “theoretical,” but rather the “theoretical” that is νοῦς-like (GA 62:378). He could not have stated otherwise from the perspective of facticity, but to have Aristotle as his ally is indeed an accomplishment. Heidegger explains his claim about the kinetic character of νοῦς thus: as pure apprehension νοῦς is properly movedness, *Bewegtheit*, since in the apprehension of the purely apprehensible it not only does not cease its movedness, but only then—as that what has reached its end—is it movement (GA 62:386). As a βάδισις εἰς τέλος, a going-towards or not-yet-having-reached its end, every physical movement is principally different from having-gone or having-arrived: ἔτερον καὶ κινεῖ καὶ κεκίνηκεν (*Met.* Θ 6, 1048 b 32).¹⁶ However, having seen is simultaneous with seeing, one cannot see without having seen: νοεῖ καὶ νενόηκεν (*Met.* Θ 6, 1048 b 34). This illustrates the idea of pure movedness as pure θεωρεῖν. Hence the etymology of θεωρεῖν: θεωρός is someone who goes to a festival and is “all eyes.” Aristotle regards θεωρεῖν as divine, θεῖον, precisely because it is the purest kind of movement available to *Dasein*. Therefore θεωρεῖν is not divine as the explication of a religious experience, but as the radicalization of the idea of pure *Bewegtsein*, or being-moved. For Aristotle θεωρεῖν is θεῖον only because it satisfies most purely the idea of being-moved as such (GA 62:389). This is possible because Greeks understood movedness from the perspective of rest. Movedness is what determines both movement and rest, which is the cessation of movement, its παύεσθαι (*Met.* Θ 6, 1048 b 26).¹⁷ Lack of movement, movement = 0, is a boundary case, having movedness nonetheless as its essence. The apex of movement is therefore the moment of rest, however not as cessation of movement, but rather as its summation. E.g. when an object is thrown up and the force of the thrust equals the force of gravity, then in the highest point its movement stops, its kinetic energy equals zero, but its potential energy, or its internal movement is at its highest. Heidegger calls this its *Stillhalten* (GA 19:284). One can understand *Dasein* only through this ontological radicalization of this idea of movedness (GA 62:386).

This allows us to understand why ψυχή is called by Aristotle ἐντελέχεια. To translate it as actuality or entelechy does not explain a lot. It is a concept upon which the entire philosophy of Aristotle dwells.¹⁸ When in Zähringen Heidegger quotes Aristotle’s remark on the relation of ἐντελέχεια to κίνησις: ἡ τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος ἐντελέχεια, ἢ τοιοῦτον, κίνησις ἐστίν (*Phys.* Γ 201 a 10-11), he observes that Descartes and Pascal ridiculed it, because they were no longer able to see what manifested itself in entire clarity to Aristotle: κίνησις, movement as phenomenon (GA 15:343). Heidegger attempts to recover the originary meaning of ἀλήθεια by grasping the manifold unity of movement that presented itself to Aristotle as ἐντελέχεια. When Heidegger comments upon Aristotle’s statement that ψυχή ἐστίν ἐντελέχεια (*De Anima* B 412 a 27), he explains that ψυχή as something animate is determined by movement, but not merely “local” movement understood as motion

¹⁶ GA 62:101,108,386.

¹⁷ GA 9:283-284.

¹⁸ T. Kisiel, T. Sheehan (eds.), *Becoming Heidegger: On the Trail of His Early Occasional Writings, 1910-1927* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 226.

from place to place, but any sort of movement at all, μεταβολή, the coming to presence of a change. Therefore every πράξις and every νοεῖν is a movement (GA 19:17-18; cf. GA 62:229). Heidegger translates ἐντελέχεια as *Sich-im-Ende-Haben*, from the Greek ἐν τέλει ἔχει (GA 9:282,284). Someone sees and seeing he has seen: ὁρᾷ ἅμα καὶ ἐώρακε (*Met.* Θ 6 1048 b 23). This movement of *Sehen*, *Umsehen* and *Nachsehen* achieves the highest point of having seen in *Stillhalten*, in its τέλος, where its movedness does not cease, but only then becomes grasped. *Dasein* thus achieves its summit (GA 9:284). One can conclude that if *Dasein* is *Sein-zum-Tode*, then death is the *Stillhalten*, the summation of life. Only having understood the ontological significance of κίνησις can we appreciate Heidegger's claim that Περὶ φύσεως is the fundamental book of Western philosophy, never thoroughly thought through (GA 9:242).

The question posed to Heidegger by his friend, "When are you going to write an ethics?" (GA 9:353), might seem ridiculous, but it is indeed essential. For if *Physics* and not *Metaphysics* or *Ethics* is the fundamental book, or if we accept Heidegger's perspective of facticity, then there is no way to sustain the ethics of values, which were traditionally grounded either upon reason, or upon God's biblical revelation, both rejected by Heidegger. Therefore to accept facticity is to enter the abyss, or to become post-human. It is not difficult to see how Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle is Nietzschean from the outset. Or rather, as Heidegger would prefer to say, how Aristotle is originally Nietzschean, perhaps even more radically than Nietzsche (but that would rather apply to the Presocratics). The question is: what is the basis of Aristotle's primordial ethics, or: how does one make decisions if one cannot appeal to reason or norms, since norms are no longer valid in the existential mode of authenticity, where one cannot treat them as objectively binding? Heidegger's solution is to recognize the kairotic moment of φρόνησις, of ἀλήθεια πρακτική (GA 62:384; cf. GA 24:409, GA 60:150). Now, καιρός does not mean here a due measure or an appropriate moment; it possesses, rather, the Pauline, eschatological, and hence Kierkegaardian meaning of *Augenblick*, or *Øjeblikket*, related to Kierkegaardian decisionism. Briefly put, one can make a decision without basing it upon any ground or reason, so that it can be a pure, i.e. purely ungrounded decision. Thereby its *Grund* will be the *Abgrund*. In other words, it will be an abysmal decision, opening *Dasein* to the unknown, the unfamiliar, the *Ungeheuer*. Hence Heidegger could exclaim, as Gadamer recalls, that φρόνησις is *das Gewissen*.¹⁹ But it is not a conscience that opens one to God as *Grund*, but rather to the *Abgrund*.

In an essay on Heidegger printed as an appendix to *The Gnostic Religion*, Hans Jonas observes that Heidegger's God is an unknown God, an ἄγνωστος Θεός.²⁰ To understand this claim, and thereby to understand Heidegger, it is necessary to examine to origin of this idea of God. It has been made famous by Paul who found the inscription ΑΓΝΩΣΤΩ ΘΕΩ on an altar in the Areopagus and used it in his famous speech to the Athenians: "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" (Acts 17:23). To present the unknown God to the Athenians Paul takes recourse to quoting two pagan

¹⁹ Gadamer, *Neuere Philosophie I*, 200.

²⁰ H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 324.

poets who were subsequently identified by Clement of Alexandria as Aratos of Soloi and Epimenides of Crete: ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν, ὥς καὶ τινες τῶν καθ' ὑμᾶς ποιητῶν εἰρήκασιν Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν (Acts 17:28). “For in him we live, and move, and have our being,” says Epimenides, a pantheistic statement used by Paul to translate his ideas to the Greeks. The entire passage from Epimenides is nevertheless worth quoting: “They fashioned a tomb for you, holy and high one, but you are not dead: you live and abide forever, for in you we live and move and have our being.”²¹ Paul only quotes the brief statement “For we are also his offspring” from Aratos, which in its entirety has a similar tendency to Epimenides: “Let us begin with God, whom we mortals never leave unspoken, for every street, every market-place is full of God, even the sea and the harbour are full of this deity. Everywhere everyone is indebted to God, for we are indeed his offspring.”²² Therefore the unknown God is the omnipresent God, the God whom everything is. The forgotten God, now recalled.

To return to Heidegger it is necessary to examine how according to Paul it is possible to find this God: “haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us” (Acts 17:27). There are two interesting clues in this sentence. The first is that one can find him haply, i.e. by touching (ψηλαφήσειαν). The second is that he is not far from us (οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου ἡμῶν ὑπάρχοντα). We shall return to touching in a moment, but now let us concentrate upon the second formulation. The interesting thing about it is the usage of the verb ὑπάρχω to describe our relation to God. Ὑπάρχω means to pre-exist, to be ready or at hand, to be the beginning, to be already in existence, to be already there. The interesting thing is that this verb appears in Aristotle’s analysis of movement in *Physics* and Heidegger pays special attention to it in his interpretation. Discussing the concept of φύσις, Aristotle deploys it in a passage translated by Heidegger as follows: “Darnach ist dann die φύσις so etwas wie Ausgang und Verfügung und damit also Urtümliches für das und über das Sich-bewegen und Ruhen von Solchem, darin sie im voraus (ὑπὸ) ausgänglich verfügt (ἄρχει) erstlich an sich und von sich aus und auf es zu und daher nie so, als stellte sich die ἀρχή eben doch nur beiher (in dem Seienden) ein” (*Phys.* B 192 b 20-23).²³ The essence of φύσις is formulated here simply and harshly, “Einfach und fast hart.” Heidegger remarks that φύσις does not belong to the “ausgängliche Verfügung,” to the initial disposal over the movedness of that which moves, but rather belongs to that which moves. The ἀρχή is therefore not an initial point of departure, a primordial thrust that only initiates the movement that it then leaves to itself. Instead, what is determined by φύσις remains in its movedness not only by itself, but it returns to itself in its development according to this movedness. Heidegger gives the example of a plant that sprouts and grows “into the open” thereby returning to its roots. “Das sich entfaltende Aufgehen ist an sich ein In-sich-zurückgehen,” summarizes Heidegger (GA 9:254).

But the decisive sentence of *Physics*, according to Heidegger, is: καὶ ἔστιν πάντα ταῦτα οὐσία (*Phys.* B 192 b 32): “und alles Dieses—nämlich das von der φύσις her

²¹ J. R. Harris, “A Further Note on the Cretans,” *Expositor*, 7th Series 3 (1907): 332–337.

²² Aratus *Phaenomena*, in *Callimachus: Hymns and Epigrams. Lycophron: Alexandra. Aratus: Phaenomena*, ed. J. Henderson, trans. A. W. Mair, G. R. Mair (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library 1921), 207.

²³ GA 9:254.

Seiende—hat das Sein von der Art der Seiendheit” (GA 9:259). Why does Heidegger translate οὐσία as *Seiendheit*? This is an interpretative gesture of the utmost importance, for he himself claims in *Sein und Zeit* that philosophy is a γιγαντομαχία περὶ τῆς οὐσίας. As he explains, the term *Seiendheit*, though awkward to ordinary ears, is “the only proper translation” for οὐσία. “It doesn’t say a lot, barely nothing, but precisely in this lies its advantage!” (GA 9:260). With this translation Heidegger introduces us to the unknown, the ἄγνωστος, the open. Abysmal language is a means that Heidegger uses in order to prepare for the arrival of the unknown. This translation is even more intriguing, since in his early *Geistesblitz* Heidegger realized that οὐσία means presence. Grasping this requires a broader perspective. Traditionally οὐσία means substance or essence, but as the participle of εἶναι it is the equivalent of God’s name from Exodus 3:14. If we keep this in mind, Heidegger’s translations become even more striking. When he first discovered that for the Greeks οὐσία meant property, belongings, that which is available, and decided to translate it as presence, *Anwesenheit*, it was as though he suggested God’s availability and presence, like Paul on Areopagus. Heidegger’s second translation of οὐσία as *Seiendheit* was guided, in turn, by an intention to introduce the unknown into the notion of God. Henceforth οὐσία became Paul’s Ἄγνωστος Θεός.

One more discovery of Heidegger has to be mentioned here, namely recognition of *Met. Θ 10* as the *corpus alienum* within the womb of metaphysics. His analysis of *Θ 10* will allow us to understand why Aristotle uses the verb ἀληθεύειν to name the relation of ψυχή (*Dasein*) to beings. Heidegger translates ἀληθεύειν as *Wahrsein*, or “in Verwahrung nehmen” (GA 62:378).²⁴ Furthermore he claims that Aristotle’s analysis of ἀληθεύειν in *Eth. Nic. VI* is the explication of ὃν ὡς ἀληθές, one of the modes of being (GA 62:380), the primary one according to Heidegger, since it describes *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world, or, in other words, the primordial, pre-metaphysical relation of beings to being in its particular being-here. In other words, ἀληθεύειν, the presencing of the present, is equivalent to Husserl’s “sich-selbst-Bekunden der Phänomene” (GA 14:99). As Heidegger notes, ὃν ὡς ἀληθές does not denote the domain of validity of “true judgments,” as it has been traditionally understood, but rather “das Seiende an ihm selbst im Wie seines Daseins als unverhülltes” (GA 62:380). He then refers to *Met. Θ 10* as Aristotle’s *locus classicus* on this topic. Theta 10 contains an analysis of ἀλήθεια that has been rejected by scholars like Jaeger and Schwegler as non-Aristotelian, essentially different from the rest of the treatise (GA 21:182). Heidegger takes their argument at their face value but only to reverse their conclusion and claim that it is in fact the most authentic part of the *Metaphysics*, one that could be rejected only by someone who regards traditional metaphysical clichés as Aristotelian (GA 31:83). In *Sein und Zeit* he refers to Theta 10 briefly in stating that “for Greeks the originary, preontological (i.e. premetaphysical) understanding of truth was vivid and it prevailed—at least in Aristotle—despite being covered by their ontology” (GA 2:225). Heidegger developed this remark into a comprehensive analysis in his two courses in the thirties (GA 21:171ff.; GA 31:81ff.). He claims there that chapter 10 is the pinnacle of fundamental ontological considerations, “the keystone” crowning the entire book Theta or even the entire metaphysics of Aristotle (GA 31:106). It is the proper τέλος of the entire

²⁴ Cf. Kisiel, Sheehan, *Becoming Heidegger*, 214ff.

treatise (GA 33:11-12). He who rejects it is not only thinking in a non-Aristotelian way, but also non-Greek, because here ὄν ὡς ἀληθές, *Sein als Wahrsein*, comes to its “first and ultimate radical expression” (GA 31:82). In Θ 10 Heidegger finds an analysis equivalent to the Husserlian description of categorial intuition. He refers to it briefly in the *Letter on Humanism*, stating that “der Mensch selber erst im Vernehmen (voeĩv) an das Sein rühren kann (θυγεĩv).”²⁵ Indeed, at the peak of his analysis of ἀληθεύειν Aristotle discovers the possibility of θυγεĩν καὶ φάναι ἀληθές, “Betasten und Ansprechen des Unverborgenen” (Met. Θ 10 1051 b 24).²⁶ In other words, it is possible to touch and address “die unmittelbarste,” “die ständigste und reinste Anwesenheit,” “die beständige schlechthinnige Anwesenheit,” “die anwesende Anwesenheit selbst,” “das höchste und eigentlichste Sein,” “das allereigentlichste Sein,” “das Wesen der eigentlichen Wahrheit” (GA 21:192-193, GA 31:102-104), or, as Paul would have said, to find it haptly.

²⁵ GA 9:332.

²⁶ GA 21:176.

A POLITICAL KIND OF LOVE: TERRY EAGLETON ON SOCIALIST ETHICS

Aristotle considers man a political being, *zoon politikon*. It is more than *animal socialis*, a social animal, which has been the conventional Latin translation of the Aristotelian concept since Thomas Aquinas. Hannah Arendt writes in *The Human Condition* that Aquinas's "unconscious substitution of the social for the political (...) more than any elaborate theory (...) betrays the extent to which the original Greek understanding of politics had been lost."¹ Her diagnosis is only partly exaggerated. "Political animal" implies that in order to develop what is most primordial to man, we have to endow a person with substantial leverage over the workings of his or her community. Politics is necessary for a human animal if it is not to stall at some early, larval stage of development. It does not suffice to lump people together and let them reciprocally shape their thoughts, reactions and pursuits. The opposite of a human being worthy of the name is not only a feral child raised at several removes from other members of its species but also a private person (from Latin *privatio*, meaning lack or absence) or the Greek idiot (from the Greek word *idios* indicating separation or difference), that is, someone focused entirely on the household and indifferent to the matters important for the community. Unlike us, the ancients associated the privacy of one's home with lack and exclusion. True life took place on the agora or forum and in meetings of the assembly or senate where the noble *agon* was practised through arguments and decisions shaping the republic's government.

Political apathy is thus not a problem pertinent only to political institutions. It is equally consequential to the state of the individual soul. The latter's condition, or even its very existence, depends precisely on what we manage to secure in our dealings with others. "There is a science that studies the supreme good of man, Aristotle informs the reader at the start of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, adding somewhat surprisingly that its name is politics,"²—writes Terry Eagleton in *Trouble with Strangers*. It is to this aspect of the British philosopher's work, mingling Aristotle with Marx, and classical moralism with the critique of late capitalism, that I want to turn my attention in the following paper.

¹ H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 23.

² T. Eagleton, *Trouble with Strangers: A Study of Ethics* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 304.

LIBERAL AND MARXIST FALLACIES

Ethics and politics represent different points of view on the same issue of the human “good life.” Happiness can only arise through the proper determination of their proportions. Eagleton uses this position against both liberalism and the orthodox varieties of Marxism. The former claims that there is such a thing as an authentic human interiority, which remains intact in all circumstances and tends towards self-expression by the shortest possible path. Therefore, for liberalism (at least in its contemporary version, market driven and somewhat vulgarized, though Eagleton never introduces this distinction), the mystery of the good life depends on providing each of us with a space free from the interference of those who desire recognition as much as we do. We can attain happiness without exerting any real influence on the shape of the social environment in which our lives take place, and thus without undertaking any political action. The argument advanced by the contemporary advocates of liberalism often looks something like this: “It’s true that our lives haven’t been quite what we might have wished them to be for a long time now, but nobody is stopping us from reading only those books that we regard as valuable. Anybody who desires more has simply never gone beyond the stage of infantile narcissism and continues to fantasize about a time when his cries translated into the most ridiculous contortions from those around him.” On the basis of an iron law of rationalization, this attitude soon leads to the formation of an even bolder thesis: not only can a person attain the good life without getting mixed up in politics, but keeping politics at a distance becomes a condition for attaining it. Marxism, on the other hand, especially in its Leninist or even Stalinist variants, manifests an attraction to the opposite extreme. Politics can get by without ethics. The good life will appear the moment we introduce the appropriate social and economic reforms by force. Decency can only get in the way of this task. After all, thanks to morality, we remain imprisoned in the fetters of the dominant ideology. Our most basic intuitions, including the language we use to distinguish good from evil, have been inculcated by the system, which exploits the human needs for recognition, happiness and the good in order to increase its own efficiency.

Therefore, the error of liberalism, which remains a problem to be solved today (since the possibility of a politics reaching to the foundations of the human personality has been effectively eliminated), springs above all from the conviction that the inside of the human being is an isolated and impregnable fortress. This argument no longer holds. In postmodernity—and even earlier, from the very birth of bourgeois society—power no longer depends above all on the use of an apparatus of coercion familiar from feudal absolutism, but rather on seduction by means of soft, cultural measures that appeal to our emotions and sense of taste: “Liberal humanism is fond of imagining an inner space within the human subject where he or she is most significantly free. (...) The bad news for the liberal humanist is that this ‘inner space’ is actually where we are least free.”³ In short, liberals are not students of sociology. By forgetting that the human subject is socially constructed, they have created a system ideally suited to rebellious teenagers. When we lose all creative influence on what shapes us, we are ultimately forced to acknowledge that the most

³ T. Eagleton, *The Significance of Theory* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 36.

important thing is not what we choose, but rather the simple fact that we—or rather all of us as separate individuals—get to choose.

As a result, the retreat of ethics from the public sphere and the aestheticization of power have led to a situation in which it is “possible to be thoroughly miserable and not know it. (...) But what *is* happiness? If it means simple contentment, then human beings can presumably be happy slumped sluggishly in front of the television set for fourteen hours a day, glazedly munching great fistfuls of potentially lethal substances. It is hard to avoid the suspicion that living a good human life might involve a touch more than this.”⁴ Eagleton illustrates the same idea with an anecdote about the brilliant English soccer player George Best, who was famous for his wild lifestyle. Best is lying on a bed in a five-star hotel, with caviar and champagne on a silver platter, and a former Miss World looking beautiful beside him. A bellboy enters the room and shakes his head with disbelief, asking: “George, when it did it all go bad?” Best himself supposedly told this story to underline the naivety of the hotel employee, who demanded constant football deeds of him, when in fact he had everything even without them. Yet Eagleton claims in the style of a classical moralist that the boy was right. Best “was certainly enjoying himself (...) but he was not *flourishing*.”⁵ The problem of liberal ethics appears here with extraordinary clarity. It is not enough to feel great. The good life is one in which a person is not afraid to follow his or her inner and often barely audible voice. To find the necessary courage within oneself, the mediation of the community or politics is necessary, since they allow us to control the conditions in which our common life unfolds. Otherwise, we may easily find ourselves in a situation in which what we call success—and the psychological and social rewards it brings—serves to mask the deeper lies we have told in order to reach this goal. Far too many people today achieve success from fear.

Feminist thought has repeatedly addressed this idea. In an essay on “Postmodernism and Feminism,” Sabina Lovibond writes:

Not long ago it would have been widely accepted as self-evident that if for example I find that buying new clothes helps me to stave off boredom or sadness, that is not an argument in favour of shopping but a starting-point for reflection on my otherwise unsatisfied needs. If this is no longer common ground among feminists, it’s arguable that the change is indicative not so much of an advance in wisdom or humanity as of a recourse to the consolations of the powerless—or rather, the consolations of those who have more purchasing power than power to influence the course of their common life.⁶

In Lovibond’s view, postmodernism has supplied feminism with arguments allowing it to view guiltless shopping as an act of subversive politics. In short, the purchase of new clothes (a car or electronic gadgets, according to the male stereotype of this scenario) can be a source of undeniable pleasure. However, this does not

⁴ T. Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 111.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁶ S. Lovibond, “Feminism and Postmodernism,” in T. Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 406.

change the fact that the condition of its possibility is often the frustration arising from the previous blocking of truly significant paths of self-realization. As a result, I buy objects that I neither want nor need for money that I do not possess in order to impress people for whom I have no respect. A correction for this lamentable situation would be possible only via political means. After all, the very logic of the “social distribution of rewards” is fallacious. The world rewards me for things that demand falsity of me, and yet it still rewards me! In this way, a person may live a pleasant and satisfying life without any great hardship, quietly convincing himself or herself that there will only be a few more sacrifices, compromises, car payments, academic titles and expenses for children’s education, and then finally the right moment will come to start doing something truly important, something “for me.” Then everybody will see how secretly sensitive I have been all along.

This example also reveals something else. According to the claims of Marxism, in opposition to liberalism, politics forms the essential foundation of ethics. On the other hand, contrary to Marxism and according to what Eagleton often repeats after Aristotle, the road to politics (especially in our times) leads through ethical demands. Genuine politics will not be possible or even necessary as long as we do not find a way to refute “those who insist that all is well as long as we are feeling fine.”⁷ When we restrict ourselves to purely political arguments, we will not manage to convince anybody that the pleasure felt by this person is wrong. Jean Baudrillard puts the problem in radical terms, criticizing the Marxist distinction between use and exchange value:

From the point of view of the consumer’s own satisfaction, there is no basis on which to decide what is ‘factitious’ and what is not. The enjoyment of TV or of a second home is experienced as ‘true’ freedom; no one experiences these things as an alienation. Only an intellectual can say such a thing, from the depths of his moralizing idealism, but this at most marks him out as being, for his part, an alienated moralist.⁸

Axel Honneth finds a similar incoherence in Lukács’s analysis of reification. This description, which Lukács intends to be scientific (just as socialism was meant either to be scientific or not to exist at all), in reality draws its power from an essentially ethical intuition:

The detached, neutrally observing mode of behavior, which Lukács attempts to conceptualize as ‘reification,’ must form an ensemble of habits and attitudes that deviates from a more genuine or better form of human praxis. This way of formulating the issue makes it clear that this conception of reification is in no way free of all normative implications. Although we are not dealing with a simple violation of moral principles, we are indeed confronted with

⁷ Eagleton, *After Theory*, 131.

⁸ J. Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London: Sage, 1998), 73.

the much more difficult task of demonstrating the existence of a ‘true’ or ‘genuine’ praxis over and against its distorted or atrophied form.⁹

We should also note that the words “authentic” and “sensitive” very often arise whenever we attempt to make a moral appraisal of a certain attitude or behavior, while still remaining in conformity with a professed worldview—whether it be liberal and political or rational and scientific—which prohibits us from supporting a specific vision of individual or collective life. The lines “Be authentic” or “Develop your sensitivity” have the flavor of ethical commandments, when in reality they are devoid of any positive content. Authenticity and sensitivity are scientific or liberal substitutes for ethical virtues—or, to paraphrase from Marx, the moral aroma of our amoral world. Therefore, Marx and Marxism, though they aim to refer exclusively to rational argument in their critique of capitalism, in reality draw their critical élan from thoroughly ethical sources. According to Eagleton, there is no contradiction here, since “Marx was a classical moralist who did not seem aware that he was.”¹⁰ The left should take this interpretation of his views strongly into account today, when simply acknowledging the need for politics, as an activity aspiring to attain genuine influence on the shape of the social world, requires us to break away from ourselves and to perceive the falsity of the pleasure we experience: “The most difficult form of emancipation is always a matter of freeing ourselves from ourselves.”¹¹ There is no rupture between ethics and politics, but rather one flows seamlessly into the other (“Politics is not just instrumental to creating the conditions for personal well-being, but a major instance of it”¹²). Precisely for this reason, Eagleton can write that “radical politics is the re-education of our desires.”¹³

POLITICAL LOVE

The ethical program that a future socialism should adopt figures in Eagleton’s work under the unexpected heading of love: “Love is the very model of a just society, even if the word has these days become faintly ridiculous when used in anything but interpersonal terms.”¹⁴ Even more troubling for many could be the fact that in his search for the political love, an ethical counterweight to both postmodernism and postmodernity, Eagleton turns towards the body. Casting the body in the role of the main opponent to late capitalism clearly requires some explanation: “Postmodernism is obsessed by the body and terrified of biology.”¹⁵ Therefore, the ubiquity of dishabille in postmodernist iconography is simply a mask concealing a deep-seated and consuming anti-materialism: “The body, that inconvenient reminder of mortality, is plucked, pierced, etched, pummelled, pumped up, shrunk and remoulded.”¹⁶ If postmodernism were really interested in material, then we

⁹ A. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look at an Old Idea (The Berkeley Tanner Lectures)* (Oxford and New York: University of California, 2008), 26.

¹⁰ Eagleton, *After Theory*, 143.

¹¹ Eagleton, *The Significance of Theory*, 36.

¹² T. Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 85.

¹³ Eagleton, *After Theory*, 129.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 164.

might finally be satisfied with some of the objects we possess, including our bodies. Yet today's consumption is governed by insatiability: a destructive desire in which successive experiences and objects merely represent the necessary pretext for reveling in our own power (another "postulate" of Nietzsche). What once "used to be known as the pioneer spirit and is nowadays known as postmodernism. Taming the Mississippi and piercing your navel are just earlier and later versions of the same ideology."¹⁷

We find a good illustration of this point in the apparently amusing story of an old man who sued an insurance company that refused to pay out for the repair of his twenty-three-year-old car. The expert claimed that the car had no market value, which automatically released the insurer from any liability. But the man was determined to get compensation, so from boredom or stubbornness he repeatedly made the journey to a court a few dozen miles away over a period of three years. Eventually, he won a satisfactory judgment. The car had sentimental value, and thus compensation was due. Of course, this is a heartening tale, but not all of us have the time and patience for lengthy court cases. Therefore, it is difficult not to notice that various mechanisms have been built into the legal apparatus of contemporary society to encourage us to abandon everything without market value—or, more precisely, everything that does not contribute directly to the continuing process of accumulation. Material is necessary in capitalism insofar as it represents a useful carrier for the bad infinity of capital. But when it begins to put up resistance the system immediately initiates procedures to liquidate any excessively substantial shred of reality: "Absolute freedom like desire, rages at the various bits and pieces it stuffs into its infinite maw, all of which threaten to balk it in the very act of gratifying it. Desire is secretly as monkish as asceticism, ransacking whatever comes to hand only in order to close its fist over infinity."¹⁸ Precisely for this reason, anybody who wishes to possess objects today for reasons other than their market value does so only at his or her own risk.

This definition of the status of material in capitalism makes it possible to break with the clichéd critique of consumption and the "civilization of materialism" spouted with equal erudition today by both the priest and the progressive university student at a demonstration. In fact, the consumer's problem is not possession of an excessive quantity of goods, as it is usually presented, nor even the unchecked desire for such possession. The real problem is quite the opposite. The contemporary consumer possesses too little, though not in any quantitative sense, but rather in the qualitative sense of what to do with what he possesses. In a story entitled "Winter," the Polish writer Andrzej Stasiuk writes the following about objects (I will emphasize the key words and phrases for my argument with italics):

So I would like to start all stories from *bodies and things*, since I lack faith in the resurrection of both. Even if they rise again, what will they do without all the rest? (...) What will they do without dogs, homes and changes in the weather? (...) This is why I have an *obsession with things*, events, worthless details and lists. I like to know what things are called, and so I prefer poorer

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁸ T. Eagleton, *Holy Terror* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 81.

regions to wealthy ones. Because these objects have *genuine value* and it is even possible that people *love* them, at least a little, since they don't have anything else. *They don't adore them, they love them*, without even having any idea about it. The wealthy adore things. They admire their images in mirrored surfaces and eventually they turn into their own reflections. Their things are so expensive that they never wear out, and this is their immortality. (...) In the old city of Levoča I saw Slovakian gypsies as they sat in front of their houses, which were cracked and old. In the custom of free people, they sat on their front steps beside tape recorders—Grundig, Panasonic, Sony—filled with their music. I don't think they owned much more than this. And then I imagined the moment when eventually the *heart in the gleaming mechanism* would break and a silence would fall that nothing could drown out.¹⁹

The power that allows us to break out of the vicious circle of capitalist accumulation is love. This does not mean that we cannot buy anything. Yet we should touch the objects long enough that a human heart begins to beat in their gleaming mechanism. In Marxist terms, love allows us to break the spell of the fetishized nature of the commodity. This also accords with Eagleton's suggestion that love is the power which allows us to combine the apparently contradictory registers of morality and politics—with one caveat. Eagleton strongly emphasizes the social dimension of his understanding of love. Therefore, he is not so much concerned with an unusually emotional relationship with objects or a spiritual state in which every cat we encounter on the street immediately becomes the subject of a tear-jerking poem. On a personal level, love is eminently comprehensible to all of us. Eagleton is more interested in raising it to the status of a political problem on the level of the social structure: "Modern ethical thought has wreaked untold damage in its false assumption that love is first of all a personal affair rather than a political one. (...) One consequence of this blunder is that it is harder (...) to achieve love even at an interpersonal level."²⁰

This last claim is especially important. If we do not imbue the social space with political love we will never be ourselves, not to mention the quality of our common existence with others. A person must *become* what he or she *is*, in accordance with the Aristotelian rule of *entelechy*. Love is the indispensable midwife to this process. Once again, this position is relatively easy to accept on the level of personal relations. After all, without loving parents, would it be possible for us to thrive as we do thanks to their care? Of course, we might say that many orphans and people who have taken only pain and bad examples from the family home also grow into wonderful people. But is this really an argument against parental love or evidence that it is unimportant for the development of a child's personality? Perhaps we should beat children black and blue, publicly humiliating them at every opportunity, since this type of tough upbringing represents the surest guarantee of sainthood if the adult person is able to overcome the toxic emotions resulting

¹⁹ A. Stasiuk, *Zima* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2001), 40–42.

²⁰ T. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 413.

from it (an idea that recalls the arguments of certain conservatives against raising taxes: high taxes have a demoralizing effect on society, since they proportionally create less opportunity for citizens to show their own personal generosity)? Ultimately, we might ask what those amazing people might have yet become without the burdensome fear that they could never satisfy their parents' expectations. Of course, we will never know the answer to this question. But if such controversies arise on the relatively simple level of the family bond, then how much more difficult must it be to accept the need for political love, which, according to Eagleton, is the only love that can make the world we live in a slightly better and happier place?

According to liberal doctrine, in order to create a just world it suffices to provide a space free from illegitimate interference from others. Yet for socialism, as Eagleton understands it, justice is impossible without *agape*—political or brotherly and sisterly love. Other people are not merely potential obstacles on the road to my freedom. On the contrary, only through other people, by taking them into account in my most intimate calculations, can my own freedom fully be realized. The inter-human space must be filled with contact. It cannot be indifferent and empty. Being ourselves—which we are so enthusiastically encouraged to do in liberal democracies—will be an impoverished and crippled experience if it does not encounter the mediation of institutions that are favorably disposed towards us (and not merely neutral). According to Eagleton: “Love is a practice, not in the first place a state of soul. It involves both freedom and autonomy, since it allows one to be set free from fear to become oneself. Fear, not hate, is the opposite of love.”²¹ Are we really respecting the freedom of another person in the best way when we politely get out of his or her way in every situation? When somebody close to us asks for our opinion, how often do we avoid giving a frank response through politeness or a misplaced sense of tact, only for that person to come back filled with guilt and sorrow because our reticence made it easier for him or her to follow the path of least resistance, instead of encouraging the person to make the difficult decision that he or she wanted to make *deep down* from the very beginning? Children have the disturbing habit of raising these kinds of questions in the middle of a Christmas dinner, often at least ten years after the controversial event.

Without love, we cannot do justice to the Other person. We must engage with their freedom, since cool distance does not suffice, unless we understand it in a very specific way: “Clinical, cold-eyed realism of this kind demands all manner of virtues—openness to being wrong, selflessness, humility, generosity of spirit, hard labor, tenacity, a readiness to collaborate, conscientious judgment, and the like; and for Aquinas, all virtues have their source in love. Love is the ultimate form of soberly disenchanted realism, which is why it is the twin of truth.”²² But does the same principle not apply to our relations with Others in the public sphere? Surely we must “love” a person and enter into his space, as the ethical principle of socialism enjoins, before we can offer him his freedom or even understand him at all. Or perhaps society would then become too oppressive for us to move freely

²¹ Eagleton, *Trouble with Strangers*, 308.

²² T. Eagleton, *Faith, Reason, and Revolution. Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 122.

within it? In response to these questions, Eagleton uses the example of feminism, arguing that only somebody interested in the liberation of women can understand the operations of the patriarchy.²³

It would be worth examining this example more closely. Indeed, feminism is probably the case that best allows us to demonstrate—even to those attached to the liberal model of freedom—that if we wish to create a just society it is not enough for the state to perform the role of policeman, removing overly aggressive others (including the state itself) from the path to our fulfillment. We might imagine a woman who insists that despite the time she devotes to what we might call—for want of a better term—the “economy of reproduction,” she does not accept that a man working in the same position should receive a higher salary. She maintains that she has the right to have children, but also not to experience any frustration in her professional life as a result. In becoming what she is—a woman and a mother—not only does she have the right to have others remove themselves tactfully from her path, but also to be happy. Today it is difficult for us simply to reply that in deciding to have children she knew what she was doing and that nobody is stopping her from finding a second job where she could work “for instance, at night.” But this only goes to show the significance of the little precedents set by the hundreds of ideological and discursive battles that feminists have won over many years. Accordingly, the case of this woman no longer fits with any consistent form of liberalism, with its repeated mantra that as long as we may do whatever we want within the limitations of the law we have reached the Himalayas of social justice. The condition for her satisfaction with life can only be socialism, which insists that as long as we do not establish institutions (of course, the mediation of the law is also crucial here) guaranteeing that we need not be afraid to follow the fragile voice of our hopes and dreams, then there will be no chance of freedom or justice. Yet the struggle between these two options is and will continue to be fierce and unclear, since two opposing principles of human life are “working” at their foundations.

For Eagleton, love and socialism remain closely tied to the needs of the body. Of course, this does not mean those needs that we might satisfy in a Thai massage parlor, but rather those that can be appeased only when two or three bodies gather together in a single name. Without this mutual space, in which we observe the body of a neighbor, recognizing in it both what we have in common and our irreducible difference (the body of the other is “at once strange and familiar,”²⁴ different from our own and the same, which is precisely why it is to become the model for a new “non-oppressive” universality), we will immediately be sucked into the self-referential abyss of our own will, whose political equivalent is liberalism: “One’s freedom is shaped from inside by the demands of those through whom alone it can be realized. My freedom must posit the freedom of others, not just respect it—and posit it in a way which makes it constitutive of my own. Only in this way can freedom shed its potentially terroristic character.”²⁵ Therefore, freedom is either socialist or terrorist. Alternatively, if we look at things from a different perspective, the

²³ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁴ Eagleton, *After Theory*, 161.

²⁵ Eagleton, *Holy Terror*, 80.

opposite of desire is not renunciation, but love. William Blake wrote in his “proverbs of hell”: “He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence.” After all, our sexuality does not become something noble through mechanical asceticism, but thanks to its recreation or perhaps even “dissolution” in a higher order. In precisely the same way, the alternative to the capitalist unleashing of the will is not to liquidate it or tear it away from the attractions that form its scaffolding. A person does not become free by winning the right to darken the windows of his apartment and take spiritual nourishment from silent films, Stendhal’s novels and Verdi’s operas. A person will only leave a system in which he can do what he pleases in isolation for one in which he gains an influence on the everyday world that is important to everyone. We will only abandon a system that allows us to scream with rage for one in which somebody will definitely be listening to us. According to Eagleton, “in the modern age this project has been known as socialism.”²⁶

²⁶ Eagleton, *After Theory*, 126.

SURVIVING POST-HISTORY OF JULIAN BARNES

In *A History of the World in 10 and ½ Chapters* Julian Barnes turns to the biblical story of Noah's Ark in an attempt to connect disparate episodes, both historical and fictional. The novel, published in 1989, is considered to be his second masterpiece, after *Flaubert's Parrot* which appeared five years earlier. Referring to this book, Salman Rushdie wrote of Barnes that "he's like a worldly, secular reincarnation of a medieval gloss-writer on sacred texts, and what he offers us is the novel as footnote to history, as subversion of the given, as brilliant, elaborate doodle around the margins of what we know (...) what we think we know."¹

The structure of the book seems to suggest that what is perceived as history is actually a random selection of isolated events with a varying degree of significance. Yet, what holds the text together—despite its transgressive and discontinuous nature—is the theme of the flood. Through the use of an image of the Ark as a semi-fabulous reference, the author introduces a pattern into this menagerie of obsolete detail, imposing certain continuity, even cyclicity, on the process of time, turning it into a narrative lined with an ethical pathos.

Some readers believe this book to be a collection of short stories, strung together through that motif of the Ark, but not connected to each other in any meaningful or significant way.² Others insist that this work should be seen as an experimental novel which hides a water-proof structure underneath its obvious fragmentation.³ Thus, even the book's composition sparked controversy among the critics, but the dispute may be considered resolved with the remark made by the author himself: "I'm a novelist and if I say it's a novel, it is."⁴ One may side with Barnes on this point: the book appears to be more than a series of isolated fictions spun around a central theme, but rather—a lucidly constructed novel that uses its fragmentary appearance as a disguise.

¹ S. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and criticisms 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), 241.

² See, for instance: D. J. Taylor, "A newfangled and funny romp," *Spectator*, June 24, 1989: 40–41; R. Nixon, "Brief Encounters," *Village Voice Literary Supplement*, November 7, 1989: S5; M. Rubin, "From Nebulae to Noah's Ark," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 10, 1990: 13.

³ C. Kotte, "Random Patterns? Orderly Disorder in Julian Barnes's *A History of the World in 10 and ½ Chapters*," *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 22 (1997): 109.

⁴ V. Guignery, *The Fiction of Julian Barnes: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 61–62.

BARNES AND THE QUESTION OF HISTORY

The fictions of Julian Barnes seem to be preoccupied with history throughout. Time and again he returns to the problem of history and memory, posing such questions as “how do we access the past?”, “would it be justified to deduce the past from the position in which we find ourselves in the present?”, “how can we assign responsibility over the past events?”, “can we understand history as a process without leaning on the grand narratives of ideology?”. His texts seem focused on these questions and yet strive to avoid providing any definitive answers. Obsessed with history as Barnes seems to be, he is often counted among the contemporary writers of historiographic metafiction⁵: well aware of the problematic nature of historical accounts and inadequate documents, viewing history as a narrative conditioned by the state(s) of mind of its author(s), and liable to revisions.

While these views seem to be in perfect harmony with contemporary approaches to history as a narrative, introduced and developed, among others, by Hayden White⁶, in Barnes’s texts one may sense certain ambivalence about these issues. In one of his interviews Barnes stated that he is “deliberately unaware of literary theory” and denied having ever heard of Hayden White.⁷ This seems odd: Barnes is not a writer happily creating his fictions in blissful isolation from the external world, and he must have heard about post-structuralist take on history numerous times, and had ample opportunity to look into a notion that appears to be very close to his own ideas. The question, then, poses itself: how does Barnes’s oeuvre relate to the post-modernist understanding of history?

BARNES’S NARRATORS AND MEMORY

One of the recurring themes in Barnes’s novels, articulated at various times by his characters, is the subjectivity and ambivalence of history. The reader learns that it repeats itself like “a raw onion sandwich,”⁸ that it is just “the lies of the victors”⁹ and that “we need to know the history of the historian in order to understand the version that is being put in front of us.”¹⁰ These notions mirror the ways in which approaches to historiography have been evolving during the last decades. Some scholars even use a word “crisis” in order to describe these changes, others, like Jacques Le Goff—prefer to call them a “mutation.”¹¹ But while in contemporary discourse history became discredited as a grand narrative falsifying reality,¹² memory seems to be enjoying a vogue as a way of looking into the past without totalizing it into a homogenous coherence. If history is proved to be manipulative

⁵ L. Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, theory, fiction* (New York, London: Routledge, 1988), 139; G. J. Robinson, “History’s Genres: Julian Barnes’s *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*,” *Modern Language Studies* 30, no. 2 (2000): 161.

⁶ Most notably in: H. V. White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

⁷ R. Freiburg, “‘Novels Come out of Life, Not out of Theories’. An Interview with Julian Barnes” in *Conversations with Julian Barnes*, ed. V. Guignery and R. Roberts (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 37, 42.

⁸ J. Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending* (London: Vintage, 2012), 16.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹ J. Le Goff, *History and Memory*, European Perspectives, trans. S. Rendall and E. Claman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), ix.

¹² Cf. J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*, Theory and History of Literature v. 10, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

and unstable, a made-up story full of holes and gaps, memory appears as an elegant, though slender, draw-bridge that allows us a mental crossover from past to present in comparable safety. An individualized, admittedly subjective account appears both more honest and appealing. And, as a writer obsessed with the past, or rather with ways to relate to it, Barnes frequently turns to the problem of memory in his texts. His narrators think back, attempt to understand what happened and why—and without fail, discover that their remembrances are deeply flawed.

This proves that memory is riddled with precisely the same problems as more generalized history: our private histories are still stories we tell ourselves to make sense of the world, or more frequently, to deny the truth about the world to ourselves when it proves to be more than we can handle. The supposed “authenticity” of memory is further undermined if one considers its unconscious and “raw” nature—the very fact that it is so little understood makes it prone to manipulation, be it premeditated or involuntary. If human faculties for storing and retrieving information evade all scrutiny then perhaps, as some scholars argue, it might be that memory is even less reliable than history, with its orderly narrative structure, defined apparatus and deconstructable agenda.¹³

Perhaps, this is why Barnes finds it possible to return to the issues of history and memory so often: there is a central ambivalence in this dichotomy that he attempts to reveal and explore. This ambiguity is at the heart of *A History of the World in 10 and ½ Chapters*, and Barnes’s endeavor to follow all the tangled threads in this knot constitutes the underlying structure of the book. Only one chapter from the novel will be examined in this article, but this should suffice to elucidate certain peculiarity that disturbs both the assumptions of the unreliability of history and a hope of finding coherence in the fragmentation of our experience of time.

SURVIVOR

THE FLOOD, TAKE NUMBER FOUR

“The Survivor,” the chosen text for this article, is the fourth chapter in the novel. The first chapter revises the biblical account of the flood, telling it from the hilarious viewpoint of a “stowaway,” a woodworm. It is interesting to learn how the author’s conception has changed over the years: Barnes revealed that his original idea was to have the protagonist of *Flaubert’s Parrot* as a narrator of what was to be *Geoffrey Braithwaite’s Guide to the Bible*, spanning “the entire Bible, restructured for handy modern use, with the boring bits cut out, written by an agnostic skeptic rationalist.”¹⁴ However, the woodworm’s resilience proved to be of a more enduring kind, exactly what the insect needed for what was to come.

The surprising part of this text is not that it presents a discursive alternative to the well-known account but rather how little this revision actually changes. There are amusing additions (fabulous creatures not mentioned in the book of Genesis, elucidation on the process of selection of the animals, etc.), furious contradictions (Noah and his family as decidedly unrighteous), reasonable amendments (the Ark as not a single ship, but a whole

¹³ Cf. J. Le Goff, *History and Memory*, xi.

¹⁴ A. Stuart, “Endpapers: A Talk with Julian Barnes,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 1989.

fleet). But after all is said and done, the essentials of the story are left curiously unchallenged: the wickedness of humankind, the wrath of God, the concept of salvation for the chosen, the mountain on which finally the Ark comes to rest in the brand new world. If “Barnes’s woodworm is the quintessential embodiment of an oppressed past that demands acknowledgment,”¹⁵ it is only fair to note that, all revisions notwithstanding, his version actually corroborates rather than contradicts the Biblical account.

The second chapter casts the story of Noah in a totally different perspective: a ship with tourists, taken over by terrorists, becomes a wicked Ark from which passengers with “wrong” nationalities are expelled—i.e., killed. Thus, from paired-up animals rescued from the perishing world, the focus is moved to paired-up humans (there are mostly couples on this ill-fated cruise) forced to face extinction. We may read this as a historical irony (a raw onion sandwich, particularly unpleasant in the post-digestion burp), or as a wry commentary on the state of the world in which not the personal sins but merely one’s belonging to a nation is basis enough for irrevocable punishment.

The third chapter returns to the amusing figure of the woodworm who becomes the party prosecuted in a medieval legal process for the highly symbolic offense of ruining and causing to collapse a bishop’s chair. The shift back from the present times to ornate legal practices of an era so far removed from us as to become legendary is highly disorienting. This is precisely the effect that Barnes is after. If his readers opened the book expecting a historical account of the past, faced with the woodworm’s story of the chapter one, they had to abandon their notions of what kind of discourse they were dealing with. If, on the other hand, they expected a novel, then within the first three chapters they were made to realize that, embarking on this journey, they must bid farewell to such old-fashioned items as chronology, conventionally continuous plot or psychological development of realistically drawn characters. Even the reappearing woodworm is not the speaker of the Chapter One but some obscure descendant. There are further surprises: even though this chapter reads as a return to the fabulous style of the “The Stowaway,” it is based on solid historical documents. What appears to be fictional is quite simply the truth.

THE MAD NARRATOR

Chapter Four returns to the image of the Ark as a way of escape from the world’s damnation—with a twist. Its narrative begins with an account of a childhood faintly reminiscent of a fairytale: a little girl, Kath Ferris, stubbornly believing that the reindeer can fly. The reader is invited to feel sympathy for the girl even if she appears slightly unreasonable. But then, she is lovable in her idealistic love of the animals. Kath’s fascination with reindeers’ antlers, looking like tree branches covered with “some posh material from a smart shop,” develops into a belief that “everything’s connected.”¹⁶ The passage about the reindeer is both intensely poetic and childish in its language: “They looked like branches in some forest where nobody had trodden for centuries; soft, sheeny, mossy branches. She imagined a sloping bit of wood with a gentle light and some fallen nuts cracking beneath her foot.” When the girl watches the reindeer fight and sees their lovely antlers bleeding,

¹⁵ J. Buxton, “Julian Barnes’s Theses on History (In 10½ Chapters),” *Contemporary Literature* 41, no. 1 (2000): 64.

¹⁶ J. Barnes, *A History of The World in 10 1/2 Chapters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 84.

she compares them to “a tray of bones at the butcher’s.”¹⁷ These metaphors are in stark opposition, startlingly unpleasant as the second image is. And this introduces a descent from the fairytale dreaminess of the story into a very different, embittered and aggressive tone of a person with an agenda, annoyingly single-minded and desperately unhappy.

What follows is the quick progression into a nightmare of a post-nuclear war disaster world, very real to Kath but not so to the people around her, her boyfriend Greg including. As a consequence, accompanied by two cats, she boards a boat and sails out from the Australian coast near Darwin, Northern Territory, in order to escape radioactive poisoning. After several days on board, undernourished and delirious, she finally reaches shore. Meanwhile, Kath’s hallucinations intensify and she struggles to retain her sanity by refusing the diagnosis of her condition given by two doctors in her dreams.

There are at least two ways of reading this story. One may choose to see it as a fantastic but not unrealistic version of the post-nuclear future in which Kath escapes the disaster with her two cats, and suffers from hallucinations in which she appears to be in a mental institution. The second reading, however, is much more viable: Kath is, in fact, a mental patient suffering from persistent victim syndrome with a disposition for fabulation.¹⁸ She imagines the nuclear disaster and her escape to a distant and rather barren island because she is unable to face the reality of her miserable life. The story uses a double narrator: one is omniscient, talking of Kath in the third person; the other is Kath herself, speaking in a kind of acid, obsessive, paranoid voice. Kath appears to be in constant combat with the world’s indifference and its shallow unwillingness to face its own self-annihilation. She insists that the only solution to the world’s problems is to become self-sufficient and ecologically minded, to care for the animals and to turn one’s back on androcentric civilization. However, she sounds annoying and unreasonable, overly emotional, guilt-ridden and aggressive at the same time. Quickly, the reader begins suspecting that Kath, perhaps, is not quite right in the head.

This impression, however, is contradicted by Barnes’s use of the omniscient narrating voice which consistently confirms Kath’s vision of the world. The rather ridiculous-sounding story about radioactive reindeer being fed to mink¹⁹ does not come from the first person narrator, who may be immediately suspect to the reader, but from the supposedly omniscient voice. Furthermore, all the parts of this story are firmly based on facts: after Chernobyl disaster, the Lapland reindeer were deemed too dangerous for human consumption and the government initially planned to slaughter and bury the corpses, but because this would be too great a shock to the Lapland people, the deer meat was instead sent off to the mink and fox farms (after being dyed blue). Thus, the story that sounds preposterous and initially serves to convince the reader of the narrator’s problematic grasp of reality, is as factual as one can possibly get—if one only cares to check the outside sources, unmentioned in the novel. This indicates an ironic aspect

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ Steven Connor made a thorough analysis of this chapter within the context of apocalyptic disasters and their representations in various works of literature. Cf. S. Connor, *The English Novel in History. 1950-1995, The Novel in History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 199-245.

¹⁹ Barnes, *A History of The World in 10 1/2 Chapters*, 86.

of reality and the peculiar focus of the novel on the odd events which appear legendary despite their fidelity to historical fact.²⁰

Even if one does not care to verify the factual side of the story, still the use of the omniscient voice provides support to Kath's phobias, obsessions and strange beliefs which are being communicated as simple truths. Only after the reader finishes the story s/he may suspect that the supposedly omniscient voice is Kath's own, speaking of herself in the third person. Perhaps, she is telling her story this way, trying out a pose of detachment (only illusory, as there is never a point of disagreement between Kath and this disembodied voice). Perhaps, this is simply one of the symptoms of her mental instability.

However, when Kath voices her views about the world and its history, she seems to be making perfect sense. She speaks of the problematic nature of our reality ordered through narratives, she mocks our obsession with dates and achievements and great men: "Names, dates, achievements. I hate dates. Dates are bullies, dates are know-alls."²¹ When she looks forward to the future, she seems to be imagining a world without history, with a different, more organic, system of connections:

They say I don't understand things. They say I'm not making the right connections. Listen to them, listen to them and their connections. This happened, they say, and as a consequence that happened. There was a battle here, a war there, a king was deposed, famous men—always famous men, I'm sick of famous men—made events happen. Maybe I've been out in the sun too long, but I can't see their connections. I look at the history of the world, which they don't seem to realize is coming to an end, and I don't see what they see. All I see is the old connections, the ones we don't take any notice of any more because that makes it easier to poison the reindeer and paint stripes down their backs and feed them to mink. Who made that happen? Which famous man will claim the credit for that?²²

It is with certain shock that, after reading these perfectly sound passages, we become convinced of Kath's madness, as a twist in the plot reveals her installed in a mental hospital. These perfectly up-to-date phrases, which could have been borrowed from one of the post-structuralist texts, are thus pronounced from the point of a *mad narrator*. Is this coincidental or may this be a covert comment on the insanity of denying history its hold on us?

There is a complication, though, to the reading which dismisses Kath's story as a product of a deranged mind. The doctors who speak to Kath use the term PVS, persistent victim syndrome, to identify her condition. However, this is not something one may find in psychiatry books, which creates interesting possibilities. If Kath is hallucinating about the island and her own radiation poisoning, then the other reality that appears to her as the dream should, in theory at least, be terminologically and logically sound. It is not. Therefore, either the post-nuclear island is the reality and the mental hospital truly a persistent

²⁰ Cf. F. X. Clines, "Chernobyl shakes reindeer culture of Lapps," *The New York Times*, September 14, 1986.

²¹ Barnes, *A History of The World in 10 1/2 Chapters*, 99.

²² *Ibid.*, 97.

nightmare (making of Kath a persistent victim), or it is a dream within a dream, a delusion within a hallucination. Wherever Kath really is, her mind is building a fantasy of the psychiatric ward within the fantasy of the island. And this fantasy may be, in turn, based on some scraps of reality—perhaps, the images of real asylum where Kath is the inmate. Frame within frame, or rather, a zoo within a prison.

Thus, Julian Barnes seems to contend against simple-minded reconciliation to any fixed standpoint—including the postmodern denial of history—as a viable perspective on reality. And this episode is not an exception in Barnes's oeuvre. The characters who are ever so eager to voice their thoughts on the unreliability of historical discourse are frequently disturbed, mentally unstable or menaced by some (often undisclosed) trauma in their past.²³ Talking about the bankruptcy of history and/or inherent fallacies of memory, these characters are seeking for an exit out of history, dodging either responsibility for the damage they have caused to someone, or the necessity of dealing with their own injuries.

At some point in Kath's story she tries to explain her shifts between two types of reality (island / hospital): "The mind, being in a state of shock because of what had happened, was creating its own reasons for denying what had happened."²⁴ It is a fitting depiction of the processes at work within the story: no matter which interpretation is correct, Kath is definitely searching for an escape route out of a horror that is too terrible to contemplate (home abuse/nuclear disaster). But it is also a very good explanation of the phenomenon of history itself: a story we tell ourselves in order to escape the memory of the truth, a story that is coherent, while reality is not, and teleological, while life is random. And then again, it may be that "creating [our] own reasons for what had happened" is something we do when we deny history. We no longer wish to believe the evil story of the past, and we turn away from it, just like Kath is turning away from her doctors.

PATTERNING

There is another theme that Barnes works into the patterns of his book which "The Survivor" exposes. It is the question of belief, and it is just as ambivalent as the tortured question of our relation to our past. Kath sees the history of the world—in her version it is motivated by a pathetic drive to self-destruction—as a good, darkly funny, and edifying *story*. Yet, she senses certain deficiency: "She didn't believe in God, but now she was tempted. Not because she was afraid of dying. It wasn't that. No, she was tempted to believe in someone watching what was going on(...) It wouldn't be such a good story if there was no-one around to tell it."²⁵

God appears as the story-teller, or a story-maker, and without such figure the story loses its meaning. And perhaps, this dependency on stories is the essential human quality, so it should not be looked down upon. Of course, in Kath's case she should not have worried: there was a deity controlling the discourse—the author. But to Barnes this is more than a metafictional game. His memoir-novel *Nothing to be Frightened of* begins

²³ One of the most recent examples is Tony Webster, the protagonist and the narrator in the novel *The Sense of an Ending*; and the most famous – Geoffrey Braithwaite from *Flaubert's Parrot* – J. Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*, Vintage international (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

²⁴ Barnes, *A History of The World in 10 1/2 Chapters*, 100.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

with a phrase: “I don’t believe in God, but I miss him.”²⁶ Throughout the book he keeps coming back to this rather clever phrase, worrying about his inability to imagine the world without a central deity, and about his incapacity of accepting the existence of that central figure. There seems to be a lurking disbelief at the bottom of his idealism, and a stubborn irrational faith at the bottom of his denial of God.

However, the need for caution is evident when dealing with such authorial remarks (even more so when they are Barnes’s own), and it is expressed by the writer himself: “This is not, by the way, ‘my autobiography.’”²⁷ But, one may ask, what should be treated as fictional in a semi-autobiography: the facts inserted there by the author, or a denial of their veracity, residing within the same narrative? Once again, as Frederick M. Holmes put it, “Barnes’s text crosses ontological boundaries while refusing to construct a stabilizing hierarchy of meanings.”²⁸

The theme of God—or His absence—is developed in the last part of *A History of The World in 10 1/2 Chapters* where the reader is provided with a “sneak preview of Heaven,” or rather a disappointing vision of a world where there is nothing left to wish for. This chapter appears to be a wry illustration of the “end of history” notions put forth by Alexandre Kojève²⁹—when ideals are fulfilled, dreams realized, the process of history has no purpose—therefore, this part is set in the New Heaven, a postmodern version of the religious destination of desire. The story becomes bankrupt because with all desires fulfilled, there seems to be no need for a narrative. This, paradoxically, is expressed via a narrative, once again building a space for nuance in a view that only appears to be settled. As Daniel Bedgood notes, “history” is hard to target, let alone dispatch.”³⁰ We may also notice that while “the book’s very form questions the idea that the past’s passage into the future is linear and progressive,”³¹ discarding framework of chronology,³² the novel begins with rewriting of the *Book of Genesis*, and ends with a chapter full with oblique echoes of the last book of the Bible, *The Revelation*. Matthew Pateman interprets this as follows: “the teleology that the Bible demonstrates functions for the novel as a metaphor for both what is desired and for what is impossible to achieve—the certainty that fabulation can provide.”³³

The story-teller, the artist, the pattern-maker—this figure haunts the margins of Barnes’s texts, sometimes taking the center of the stage, at other times gloomily waiting in the wings. But even while ostensibly mocking history, he often seeks to find something akin to a pattern in that chaos of vying perceptions and versions, and it appears that the

²⁶ J. Barnes, *Nothing to be Frightened of* (London: Vintage, 2009), 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁸ F. M. Holmes, *Julian Barnes*, New British fiction (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 82.

²⁹ A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980).

³⁰ D. Bedgood, “(Re)Constituted Pasts. Postmodern Historicism in the Novels of Graham Swift and Julian Barnes” in *The Contemporary British Novel*, ed. J. Acheson and S. C. E. Ross (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 203.

³¹ P. Childs, *Contemporary Novelists. British Fiction Since 1970* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 83.

³² Cf. B. Legget, “Alternatives to Metanarrative in the Work of Julian Barnes,” *American, British and Canadian Studies* 2 (2009): 29.

³³ M. Pateman, *Julian Barnes, Writers and Their Work* (Tavistock, Devon, U.K.: Northcote House in association with the British Council, 2002), 45.

“truth” of the past may still be achieved—through art. The missing God is excused, because the author manages without him—debris of incongruous detail, transient beauty of human emotion, inescapable futility of memory, ties of universal kinship and painful knots of injustices of fate, all taken together create the admittedly fragmentary, flagrantly unreliable, and yet absolutely amusing History of the World.

Coming back to the problem of the history and memory dichotomy, one is tempted to quote from Barnes’s recent novel, *The Sense of an Ending*: “History is that certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation.”³⁴ This sleek definition—borrowed by the character from an invented French philosopher, Patrick Lagrange—makes perfect, though paradoxical, sense. History seeks a certainty—and it is produced when human memory complements the surviving documents. On the other hand, that very certainty is created by a piling up of uncertainties—proverbial imperfections of memory and unavoidable deficiency of documentary evidence, always incomplete, even when accurate. Thus, this formula encapsulates both the ambivalence about the reliability of history and a suggestion, half-concealed behind all the mockery, that after all, the (un)certainities of the past are the only certainties at our disposal.

³⁴ J. Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending*, 17.

THE MIRROR'S UNDERSIDE: VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FICTIONS

*My little helper at the magic lantern,
Insert that slide and let the colored beam
Project my name or any such-like phantom
In Slavic characters upon the screen.
The other way, the other way, I thank you.
("An Evening of Russian Poetry")¹*

THE MAP AND THE BUTTERFLY

Speak, Memory, Vladimir Nabokov's autobiography, is prefaced by a map of the lands his family owned in Russia before the Revolution.² Nabokov drew the map in 1965, over 40 years after he had to leave his homeland. It features the gracefully winding river Oredez, the criss-cross of straight lines (the railway, highway and a smaller road), a small white rectangle of the station, unevenly distributed dots, indicating wooded areas, and—in the corner—a small circuitous route mysteriously labelled "*Chemin du Pendu*," the path of the hanged man, leading, it seems, nowhere in particular. Crowning the drawing, there is a very large butterfly. Do not mistake this rather plain-looking creature for a decorative vignette or a digressive drawing of a cabbage white. This is a scientifically exact representation of the *Parnassius Mnemosyne* butterfly, drawn with the full advantage of lepidopterist's expertise. The butterfly thus provides the title to the drawing of Nabokov's lost homeland: the land of art and memory.

We may presume that this is the image of the territory as seen by the butterfly soaring above it. Memory, growing wings of nostalgia, soars over the lands of imagination, once inhabited by the writer. The butterfly, together with fabulous Russian names of the estates and villages (Vyra, Rozhestveno, Batovo) introduces a touch of the fairy tale, while the bold straight lines and information about the scale of the drawing declare its aspirations to a documentary status. Finally, pouring over the map, we may notice its

¹ V. Nabokov, *Selected Poems*, ed. T. Karshan (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 134.

² V. Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*, ed. B. Boyd (New York: Everyman's Library, 1999), XXXVII. All further in-text references refer to this edition.

most tantalizing aspect: North is at the bottom of the page, while South is at the top. This is not a whimsical curio, but a warning. The map of the past is reversed, held upside down.

Why is the map inverted? The self-evident answer may be, it is because the writer is looking back from the future at a world left behind (irrevocably, uninvertibly). But it may also mean something more subtle. Andrew Field notes that while the writer (who was also a lepidopterist) was working in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, he used to spread his butterflies “reverse side up,” because he was interested in studying the nether sides of the wings. Incidentally, it is easy to spot the specimen spread by Nabokov in the Cornell butterfly collection, because of this particularity.³ May the reversed map signal that Nabokov now tries to study the undersurface of the wings of his memory?

While Nabokov was still writing the memoir, its provisional title was *The Person in Question*.⁴ Nabokov called it a “mystery story where the mystery is a man’s past,” “something very weird and dynamic”⁵—a description that puts the writer into the position of self-investigating detective. This notion was reaffirmed in the first title of the published memoir, *Conclusive Evidence*, which led some of its first readers believe that the book they naïvely purchased was a detective story.

The butterfly on the map may, in part, be Nabokov’s way of paying homage to the literary magazine that considerably improved his material conditions in America by publishing his stories, as well as almost all the chapters of the future *Speak, Memory*. In *Pale Fire*, *The New Yorker* is renamed as *The Beau and the Butterfly*, referencing the cover design of the magazine, reappearing with each February edition: “top-hatted beau, Eustace Tilley, peering through a lorgnette at a butterfly.”⁶ Combining the various levels into a single picture we would see the following: *The New Yorker*’s Beau is looking through his monocle at the butterfly, which is looking at the lands of the past. The fact that the Beau is examining the butterfly, rather than what that butterfly is hovering over, is quite appropriate in the context: Nabokov is also looking at his memory as an artistic object, rather than at the past for its own sake.

Field bemusedly reports having suggested to Nabokov that in the memoir “the self and the past are evoked by means of a great deal of guile (...) [with] puppets of memory to evoke the past while leaving Nabokov’s intimate life and family untouched”—to which the writer replied “Yes, yes, exactly! I planned it that way!”⁷ Field is stating the obvious: from the start Nabokov did not pretend to be attempting to trace the reality underneath his public persona, steadily growing more and more structured, rehearsed, fictionalized into “an anthropomorphic deity.”⁸ His letter to a prospective publisher described the book as a “blending of perfect personal truth with strict artistic selection”⁹; even earlier, he

³ A. Field, *VN: The Life and Art of Vladimir Nabokov* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1986), 282–283.

⁴ B. Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 117.

⁵ *Vladimir Nabokov: Selected Letters 1940–1977*, ed. D. Nabokov, M. J. Bruccoli (San Diego and New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), 69.

⁶ B. Boyd, *Nabokov’s Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 107.

⁷ Field, *VN*, p. 255.

⁸ V. Nabokov, *Bend Sinister* in: *Novels and Memoirs, 1941–1951: The Real Life of Sebastian Knight; Bend Sinister; Speak, Memory*, ed. B. Boyd (New York: The Library of America, 1996), 169.

⁹ *Vladimir Nabokov: Selected Letters 1940–1977*, 88.

claimed to be inventing a new subgenre: "this will be a new kind of autobiography, or rather a new hybrid between that and a novel"; he intended to add "a definite plot" to the amorphous "strata of personal past."¹⁰ He did nothing to hide his "calculated use of fictional elements"¹¹—and this goes for his statements about the work as well as the text itself. The memory is turned into a carefully plotted narrative, at one stroke exposing the unreliable nature of human ability to remember—or to forget—the past, and suggesting that in this fiction we may still hunt for the illusive "person in question."

THEMATIC DESIGNS

Constructing his memoir, Nabokov insisted that the biographer's task consists in "following of (...) thematic designs through one's life" (16). And the pattern that he ostensibly pushes toward the reader is the following. Upon leaving Russia, the writer tried to alleviate the burden of his memories, retained in pathological clarity, by giving them away to his fictional characters, whereupon these precise, almost tangible images immediately faded and were replaced by the memory of the fictional situations and surroundings. This produced a relief, but also an uneasiness, since the essence of one's identity is constituted precisely out of memories. The mislaid identity of the writer had to be reclaimed from the creatures of imagination, thus proving that he belonged to a higher order of beings than those spurious, fictional selves. *Conclusive Evidence* therefore refers to memory as evidence of one's existence outside fictions. However, the memories are not so much polluted, as subtly transformed, matured and ennobled by the imaginative process and the version that the writer now lays before his reader is, admittedly, a simulacrum, rather than the original item. And, appropriately, simulacrum takes on a life of its own, producing third-hand reflections, with an uncanny effect of increasing the vividness of the image with each retake.

This pattern is additionally complicated by the fact that the memoirist seems to never quite achieve the task set for himself. Long before completing *Conclusive Evidence*, Nabokov wrote isolated chapters, publishing them as short stories, first in émigré editions and then in *The New Yorker*. Very soon after compiling the complete memoir, where slightly more polished versions of rearranged stories were strung together (*Conclusive Evidence*, 1951), the book was once again reissued as *Speak, Memory*, dropping its coy and deliberately misleading first title. A laborious translation of the memoir into Russian followed under the new title of *Другие берега* (*Other Shores*) in 1954, in which some fragments were dropped and others added. Finally, in 1966 a third English edition combined new material from the Russian translation with revised original chapters.¹²

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹¹ J. B. Foster, *Nabokov's Art of Memory and European Modernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 179.

¹² The process of revised republication, further complicating the confusion of texts, was continued even after Nabokov's death: in 1999 Nabokov's estate released for publication in The Everyman Library edition of the book its 16th chapter, described by Nabokov as "the most important one of the series (...) since therein are carefully gathered and analyzed (by a fictional reviewer) the various themes running through the book—all the intricate threads that I have been at pains to follow through each piece"—*Vladimir Nabokov: Selected Letters 1940-1977*, 95.

Each chapter of memoir is structured—in an unobtrusive, light-handed, almost negligent way—around loss. This loss, however, has been subjected to a complex transmutation, and it is no longer the poignant trauma of nostalgia, acute longing for the never-to-return bright moment of perfect childhood, or the “animal aching yearn for the still fresh reek of Russia” (220), but calm, comfortably confident dream of having almost completed a full circle, to repossess the past as future, finding yet another piece that will snugly fit into the puzzle.

However, the stance of looking back—with tremulous insane hope of merging into the picture projected by memory—is ever present as a source of continuous sadness. There are also side effects: every instant when the hero of the memoir was—for some reason—ignored by the surroundings—is brought back as a glimpse of the future, in which a homeless émigré will glide through the alien worlds proudly believing in his own genuineness and contrasting it with the perceived wreath-like nature of actual reality. For instance, the memoirist recalls seeing peasant girls bathing on one of his morning butterfly-hunting adventures “heeding me as little as if I were the discarnate carrier of my present remembrances” (105).

There is also a bonus: the same technique is used to describe events not actually witnessed by the child self of the narrating hero. The chapter about Mademoiselle, Nabokov’s French governess, provides a highly stylized, romantic description of her arrival in Russia in the dead of winter, in which she is met by the author’s incorporeal projection. All of a sudden, the imaginative memory—the preciseness, detailedness of the description is quite enough to convince the reader about its authenticity—seems to over-exhaust itself:

There, in the limitless gloom, the changeable twinkle of remote village lights seems to [Mademoiselle] to be the yellow eyes of wolves. She is cold, she is frozen stiff, frozen “to the center of her brain”—for she soars with the wildest hyperbole when not tagging after the most pedestrian dictum. Every now and then, she looks back to make sure that a second sleigh, bearing her trunk and hatbox, is following—always at the same distance, like those companionable phantoms of ships in polar waters which explorers have described. And let me not leave out the moon—for surely there must be a moon, the full, incredibly clear disc that goes so well with Russian lusty frosts. So there it comes, steering out of a flock of small dappled clouds, which it tinges with a vague iridescence; and, as it sails higher, it glazes the runner tracks left on the road, where every sparkling lump of snow is emphasized by a swollen shadow.

(73)

The scene is carefully focalized through Mademoiselle’s eyes, its loveliness neatly balanced by its thematic developments. The lights of human settlements which should look inviting to the tired traveler are seen instead as hostile, dangerous, hungry eyes of wild creatures; the sleigh with luggage is a phantom ship—predicting some kind of catastrophe, no doubt; the moon (added as an afterthought) is at first a proud and adventurous dweller of the polar regions, swiftly steering a pack of sled dogs (a flock of dappled clouds,

resembling rather pathetic French poodles), and next—a sinisterly luminous ship sailing the dark cold seas and enlarging shadows instead of lighting up the wintery landscape. Mademoiselle's mannerisms, her fondness for exaggeration, her flustered preoccupation with the material side of life are in-set within the overall impression of sentimental tendency to overemphasize her loneliness and misfortune. Suddenly, the writer finds himself stranded in the created scene:

Very lovely, very lonesome. But what am I doing in this stereoscopic dream-land? How did I get here? Somehow, the two sleighs have slipped away, leaving behind a passportless spy standing on the blue-white road in his New England snowboots and stormcoat. The vibration in my ears is no longer their receding bells, but only my old blood singing. All is still, spellbound, enthralled by the moon, fancy's rear-vision mirror. The snow is real, though, and as I bend to it and scoop up a handful, sixty years crumble to glittering frost-dust between my fingers.

(73-74)

The pale ghost of the memoirist is left behind, while the sleigh with his governess rushes on. Instead of recovering reality (lost when he “loaned” his Mademoiselle to little Luzhin in *The Defense*, and then again, when he wrote his first memoirist exercise “Mademoiselle O”), the writer succeeds only in inscribing himself yet deeper into his fictions. The Mademoiselle fragment in *Speak, Memory* is especially important, because its history extends even beyond the complex transformations of the memoir alluded to above: Nabokov first wrote the essay (which may be seen as a short story in disguise) “Mademoiselle O” in French in 1936, revising it multiple times and finally using it as “the essay that initiated the series” of *Conclusive Evidence* (3). What is more, Nabokov expressly explains this in the Foreword to *Speak, Memory*, highlighting its privileged status for the attention of the reader. This is the germ of the book, and when within its pages memory is shown as no more than the “fancy's rear-vision mirror”—imagination twisting back, working itself into the past,—the readers should take the hint. Memory as “fancy's rear-vision mirror” works only too well.

TWO MIRRORS

Speak, Memory is full of mirrors. For lack of space, we will analyze only two of these, which seem not only emblematic, but also deliberately unsettling, producing the effect of defamiliarization of the quite ordinary reality which is as yet happily unaware of the ominous future. Both mirrors are tilted—they hang at an odd angle, and their reflections are startlingly unstable. The first appears in Nabokov's recollection of their country house in Vyra, but before we can glimpse it, there is a stylized vignette of colored lamplight in the hushed house lost within a wintery landscape:

A large, alabaster-based kerosene lamp is steered into the gloaming. Gently it floats and comes down; the hand of memory, now in a footman's white glove, places it in the center of a round table. (...) Revealed: a warm, bright,

stylish (“Russian Empire”) drawing room in a snow-muffled house—soon to be termed *le chateau*—built by my mother’s grandfather, who, being afraid of fires, had the staircase fashioned of iron, so that when the house did get burned to the ground, sometime after the Soviet Revolution, those fine-wrought steps, with the sky shining through their openwork risers, remained standing, all alone but still leading up.

(74)

Memory may wear multiple disguises: it may appear as the *Parnassius Mnemosyne* butterfly, or “a female fox terrier with bells on her collar and a most waggly behind,” running up to her mistress, Colette, with some item in her teeth (114), or—as in this case—a faceless footman, holding the carefully trimmed lamp. When Mnemosyne’s hand places bright lamp on the table of a drawing room, by its light we glimpse not only the lovely stylishness of the furniture, but also—the starkly prominent iron staircase, remaining among the post-Revolutionary ashes of the house (74). The comfort of the old world is made even lovelier by contrast with the overhanging shadow of the future. The detached staircase appears as a Gogolesque figure, strangely noble in its stubborn insistence on “still leading up,” even in the midst of the most degrading circumstances of poverty, destruction, confusion, death and oblivion.

Some more about that drawing room, please. The gleaming white moldings of the furniture, the embroidered roses of its upholstery. The white piano. The oval mirror. Hanging on taut cords, its pure brow inclined, it strives to retain the falling furniture and a slope of bright floor that keep slipping from its embrace.

(74)

The mirror is also a part of the pattern binding together the past and the future: it vainly tries to hold in its embrace the lovely, gleaming white world, perpetually slipping away. It is very tempting to read this scene as an emblem of the times: the delicate beauty of the old Russia (radiant, white, glowing) is already in the process of slipping away, disappearing, even while the family around the table watches the tender shadows fleet over the embroidered roses.

The mirror’s double crops up in the last chapter, among the rubbish left in the Berlin park of Grunewald:

Curious things turned up in this Grunewald. The sight of an iron bedstead exhibiting the anatomy of its springs in the middle of a glade or the presence of a dressmaker’s black dummy lying under a hawthorn bush in bloom made one wonder who, exactly, had troubled to carry these and other widely scattered articles to such remote points of a pathless forest. Once I came across a badly disfigured but still alert mirror, full of sylvan reflections—drunk, as it were, on a mixture of beer and chartreuse—leaning, with surrealistic jauntiness, against a tree trunk. Perhaps such intrusions on these burgherish

pleasure grounds were a fragmentary vision of the mess to come, a prophetic bad dream of destructive explosions, something like the heap of dead heads the seer Cagliostro glimpsed in the ha-ha of a royal garden.

(237-238)

Again, the mirror predicts the future, and this time Nabokov makes sure that the reader will not miss the fortune-telling conducted by the “disfigured but still alert mirror,” pointing out the ominous “bad dream of destructive explosions” in the sylvan green of its reflections. Unlike Cagliostro, Nabokov’s narrator sees not the heap of heads, but the rubbish that constitutes the underside of burgher’s life, where the iron bed, its guts exposed, replaces the finely-wrought iron staircase of genteel Russia. Again, the special powers of the looking glass are caused by the odd angle at which it is placed, but now the orderliness of the drawing room with its gently tinkling chandelier is replaced by the raging sea of dusty greenery. This poor excuse for a forest (more littered, than the surrounding streets) compares unfavorably with the ancient park of Nabokov’s Russian estate, which, however, also had a certain fondness for oblivion. Nabokov’s narrator notes its stubborn tendency to resist cultivation and revert to the state of nature, which yet yields the delicious (and quite fraudulent) foretaste of adventure: the young writer’s self compares the overgrown patches of the park with “the terra-incognita blanks map makers of old used to call ‘sleeping beauties’” (104).

The discarded mirror in Hitler’s Berlin looks forward to a different kind of oblivion. Yet, beyond the historical symbolism of the image (always suspect within a Nabokovian text), there is a metafictional twinge—the mirror of the text tries and fails to retain in its embrace the image of reality, perpetually sliding out of its grasp. And here we may find it appropriate to remember that Cagliostro was a famous charlatan, who fleeced the rich and the powerful by skillfully playing on their fears, ambitions and desires.¹³ What appears as a symbol is, in fact, a gentle mockery of the gullible reader: the mirror is not reflecting the historical truth, but the Magician’s projection.

THE UNDERSIDE OF THE FAMILY CREST

Nabokov foregrounds the unreliability of memory and its willingness to fill in the gaps with seemingly plausible, but entirely fraudulent information, in his discussion of the family coat of arms. Humorously, he compares himself with a medieval adventurer, whose memory models the visual representations of the newly discovered creatures after the

¹³ Cagliostro’s horrific predictions of the upcoming French Revolution are alluded to in Carlyle’s *The French Revolution: A History* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company Publishers, 1893), 366-367. Nabokov’s source for this reference might have been a novel by T. A. James, *Count Cagliostro: or, The Charlatan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1838). In the novel, two French noblemen under Cagliostro’s influence communicate with Rousseau, who predicts apocalyptic future, which might be seen as a forecast of Russian October Revolution of 1917, as well as of the French Revolution: “Ay, rush on, the seas of blood, fill each neighboring countries with ruined exiles. Accumulate the glorious pile of broken hearts and severed heads, until the mangled and gory heap touch the clouds (...). Already ye have entered the dull and fatal circle, which reconducts the groaning nations, after much toil, blood, and suffering, to the same miserable goal from whence they started—first, tyranny and revolt—then madness, confusion, anarchy—then tyranny again” (117-118). Curiously, to induce this vision Cagliostro uses a very special “metallic couch,” somewhat reminiscent of Nabokov’s iron bedstead, abandoned in the glade.

shapes of his old “domestic bestiary” (35). Thus, Nabokov’s original recollection of his family coat of arms contained two bears holding a chessboard—a travesty fashioned out of the stock symbols of Russia (bears) and Nabokov’s own obsession with chess. He might have just as well added a mirror in the background and a butterfly above the board to make the emblem complete.

The actual emblem is described by the memoirist as follows:

a couple of lions—brownish and, perhaps, overshaggy beasts, but not really ursine—licking their chops, rampant, regardant, arrogantly demonstrating the unfortunate knight’s shield, which is only one sixteenth of a checker-board, of alternate tinctures, azure and gules, with a botonee cross, argent, in each rectangle. Above it one sees what remains of the knight: his tough helmet and inedible gorget, as well as one brave arm coming out of a foliate ornament, gules and azure, and still brandishing a short sword. *Za hrabrost’*, “for valour,” says the scripture.

(35)

The colors of the shield (red and blue) and its decorative crosses decidedly obscure the chessboard it might have represented before such embellishments were bestowed upon it. The lions, proudly displaying the shield of the “unfortunate knight” freshly consumed by them (with the exception of a single arm, still clenching the useless sword), seem ironically congruent with the motto “for valour”: the lions gratefully celebrate the courage of their recent victim, since it provided them with necessary, though not easily digestible, nourishment. It is curious that Nabokov chooses this interpretation of the emblem, and not, for instance, a reading in which the valiant knight, very much alive, is engaged in a battle with some mysterious enemy behind the shield, held up by the friendly lions. Or, a projection of the knight as half-concealed behind the shield, supported by two ferocious lions, fiercely loyal to the crest they uphold, and all three ready to defend their world from any approaching enemy.

The reason for Nabokov’s reading (the knight as the lion’s trophy) becomes clearer when the narrator relates the tragic story of his father’s death. Nabokov senior was fatally shot when he shielded his friend and political opponent Miliukov from the assassin’s bullet. The assassin was not an envoy of Bolsheviks, but a member of Russian extreme right monarchist organization, who would later become responsible for émigré affairs in Berlin under Hitler.

The very real and, to Nabokov, unforgettable and irrepressible event neatly answers the challenge of the family emblem. This theme of noble altruistic chivalry is developed not only in Chapter Nine, devoted to Nabokov’s father, but also—briefly and all the more piercingly—when young Vladimir’s grandmother fails to understand her son’s liberalism which “in the long run, as she correctly foresaw, [will] leave him a pauper” (119). The Revolution and Monarchism become the two ugly lions, obscenely “licking their chops” over the human sacrifice.

The combination of the comic and tragic strands in this motif is highly disturbing, and this is precisely the effect Nabokov is after. It allows him to skirt sentimentality,

and to allude to the Quixotic qualities in his father without a shadow of disloyalty. The perfect correspondence between the image and the story—kept quite separate in the memoir, leaving the work of relating the episodes to the reader—is exemplary of the artistic method employed by the writer. This is probably why Nabokov alludes to his family crest at all: it makes sense of the otherwise senseless exile and death of his father. The ability to work through visual items, evoked with playful vividness for the reader, morsels of factual data and stylistic devices takes all Nabokov's acrobatic agility. J. B. Foster calls it "a self-conscious pictorialism in (...) mnemonic images, a fascination with shifts between concrete sense impressions and figures of speech."¹⁴

THE THREE-FOLD REALM OF MEMORY

The artistic pattern may be perceived in the various aspects of Nabokov's life in Russia, as described in *Speak, Memory*. The child's world is constructed out of three separate, though corresponding, realms: the family estates in the countryside, a city house in St. Petersburg and the foreign resorts (Riviera, Biarritz). Each of the realms is governed by a separate set of rules and dominated by a different color scheme.

The countryside (rainbow-colored, like the windows of the park pavilion that plays a role of the magic prism in *Speak, Memory*) is consistently linked with the fabulous, romantic, adventurous and glorious. There is a lovely white mansion with history extending far back to the times of Peter the Great (his son Aleksey resided in Rozhdestveno which later became the property of Nabokov's uncle Vasili Rukavishnikov and, after his death, was inherited by Vladimir). It is a land of rich forests and bogs, teeming with exotic northern butterflies, which will instill in the young hero the passion for exploration. Everything in this magic kingdom is enveloped by legend: a name of a path preserves the trace of the mysterious hanged man, and a lovely linden alley still seems to host the shadows of two Romantic poets preparing for their duel (Rileev and Pushkin). In his commentary to *Eugene Onegin* Nabokov constructed the story of this previously undiscovered duel by a feat of rigorous research and imaginative conjecture,¹⁵ and now *Speak, Memory* casually alludes to it, forming a phantom line of ancestry for the writer among the poets of the past.

This realm also inspires poems—with the young poet suspended between time and space in a creative trance. Thus, it establishes itself as the true homeland of the writer: the place where his identity of a creator of worlds came into being. And, unsurprisingly, here the poet finds his first love, or, rather, succeeds in bringing to life, Pygmalion-like, his dream of a lovely woman (Tamara / Mashenka / Lyusia).

Life in St. Petersburg is fashioned out of a very different material. "Brown hyperborean gloom" (139) greets the child in the morning. School enforces the alien regime which vies with fierce individualism of the hero. His father is arrested and then nearly killed in a duel. Newspapers print anti-Semitic slurs. Human body parts are found in a park. Ruthless gendarmes shoot at children hiding in the trees from the encroaching massacre of January 1905. Even the first love, so miraculously began in the countryside, withers in the strange atmosphere of the city. Here the young couple, craving privacy, visits museums,

¹⁴ Foster, *Nabokov's Art of Memory and European Modernism*, 185.

¹⁵ A. Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, trans. V. Nabokov (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 426-434.

seeking out the quietest, least frequented nooks. This becomes an exercise in obscurity—a continuous descent into oblivion, foreshadowing the time when history with one sweeping move will make a museum exhibit of the entire culture, so dear to the two lovers.

The city thus stands for restlessness, violence and darkness, there are innumerable echoes of the disturbing disruptions already heralding the future cataclysm of Revolution. It may even be contended that St. Petersburg with its worries, instabilities, injustices and outright horrors is the actual present, the “real” life of the hero’s family, while the countryside with its fabulous texture is already the past, to which, for a time, he is still allowed to retire. It is the past within the past—past perfect. Fittingly, Nabokov called chapter 1 of the memoir “The Perfect Past” when it was published in *The New Yorker*. And there is also the future—the third sphere.

The foreign resorts (golden and azure and brilliantly white in their coloring) from the beginning are associated with the illusory, artificial dimension, in which the piercing nostalgia, presentiment of the future pain of homelessness, give depth to insipid and unreal scenery. The first story in the memoir dealing with this realm is about Nabokov’s grandfather, who loses his health and sanity in Nice, but refuses to leave, and is brought back to Russia in secret, his room arranged to look exactly like his old hotel room, creating a phantom Riviera in the very Russian house, where he dies without seeing through the deceit. This sets the tone for all the future references to foreign resorts, for all the scenes set in that other realm of the world, including the years of the exile:

As I look back at those years of exile, I see myself, and thousands of other Russians, leading an odd but by no means unpleasant existence, in material indigence and intellectual luxury, among perfectly unimportant strangers, spectral Germans and Frenchmen in whose more or less illusory cities we, émigrés, happened to dwell. These aborigines were to the mind’s eye as flat and transparent as figures cut out of cellophane, and although we used their gadgets, applauded their clowns, picked their roadside plums and apples, no real communication, of the rich human sort so widespread in our own midst, existed between us and them. It seemed at times that we ignored them the way an arrogant or very stupid invader ignores a formless and faceless mass of natives.

(215-216)

Reality is deliberately inverted when the narrator places the exiles in the position of the conquerors, and there is a symptomatic denial in this gesture, signaling the depth of trauma of alienation. Being cut off from one’s culture is nothing, however, in comparison with being convinced that the homeland itself exists now as merely a memory, disintegrating with each day. This produces a stance of fierce pride in the remains of the culture still retained (“nothing had been lost”), and a hostility towards anyone who may in any way undermine these “crumbling frames” containing the equivalent of ancient decorations—“a windy heath, a misty castle, an enchanted island” (33). Some of the statements in *Speak, Memory* appear painfully dismissive: “with a very few exceptions, all liberal-minded creative forces—poets, novelists, critics, historians, philosophers and so on—had left Lenin’s

and Stalin's Russia. Those who had not were either withering away there or adulterating their gifts by complying with the political demands of the state" (219). This sounds both acrimonious and self-delusional. When Nabokov's narrator thus extols the volume and quality of émigré culture at the expense of those who, often heroically, chose to stay in Russia, braving the dictatorship and still managing to create something extraordinary, he is betraying the very same arrogance that made him see the locals of his adopted lands as "a formless and faceless mass of natives."

Thus the third, illusionary dimension of the hero's life swells and threatens to swallow his entire reality, turning it into a kind of airless dream and him into a bitter phantom. The sensation of being fictionalized is the particularly nasty affliction common to many Nabokov's characters, starting from his first novel *Mary* and ending with his last finished text, *Look at the Harlequins!* In each case the hero has to invent his own way of dealing with the encroaching unreality, and, appropriately, the hero of *Speak, Memory* develops a tactic of his own. It consists of building secret tunnels in spatio-temporal world, which allow him to move "without any passport"¹⁶ between countries and continents, as well as between time past, present and future. The memoir, in presenting his childhood neatly distributed between these three realms (seemingly spatial, but, in fact, temporal), fuses the three tenses and prepares the way for further practices and observances of what some critics called Nabokov's chronophilia.¹⁷

TRESPASSING

The narrator's perverse pleasure in transgressing the limitations of time and space manifests itself in various ways. It is done, by turns, with the flamboyant audacity of glamorous adventurer or in the quiet, self-effaced manner of Sebastian Knight's half-brother, always more interested in some aspect of the patterned world than in his own corporeal existence in it. Quite often, it casually restructures the world through the points of reference relevant to the narrating self:

Summer *soomerki*—the lovely Russian word for dusk. Time: a dim point in the first decade of this unpopular century. Place: latitude 59° north from your equator, longitude 100° east from my writing hand. The day would take hours to fade, and everything—sky, tall flowers, still water—would be kept in a state of infinite vesperal suspense, deepened rather than resolved by the doleful moo of a cow in a distant meadow or by the still more moving cry that came from some bird beyond the lower course of the river, where the vast expanse of a misty-blue sphagnum bog, because of its mystery and remoteness, the Rukavishnikov children had baptized America.

(58)

The passage begins with daintily alliterative phrase, with a Russian word, spelled with the long "o" instead of regular "u," which is echoed in the "doleful moo of

¹⁶ V. Nabokov, *Mary* (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 109.

¹⁷ M. Hagglund, "Chronophilia: Nabokov and the Time of Desire," *New Literary History* 37, no. 2 (2006): 447-467.

a cow”—double oo once again. This very elongation is part of its attraction: the light still lingers (a particularity of summer evenings in the North, where the dark approaches by imperceptible stages, rather than in one leap, as in the South), prolonging the languorous listlessness and delaying that dreaded *finis* of the day when the child has to face the terrors of darkness and insomnia. The fading world—gradually losing color, becoming indistinct—seems perfectly encompassed in the Russian sounds. In *Другие берега*, the Russian word would sound too familiar and inconspicuous to the readers, and Nabokov estranges it by exclaiming: “какой это томный сиреневый звук!” [what a languorous, lilac-colored sound].¹⁸ It is not mere coincidence that the Russian *сиреневый* (pale violet or watered down maroon color) contains within it “Sirin,” Nabokov’s pseudonym with which all his Russian works were signed.

We may note that the word *сумерки* almost automatically associates in the mind of a Russian reader with Alexander Blok’s poem:

*Сумерки, сумерки вешие,
Хладные волны у ног,
В сердце—надежды нездешние,
Волны бегут на песок.
Отзвуки, песня далекая,
Но различить—не могу.
Плачет душа одинокая
Там, на другом берегу.*¹⁹

[Twilight, springtime twilight,
Cold waves at my feet,
Alien hopes in my heart,
The waves lapping the sand.
Echoes, a distant song,
Indistinct from afar.
Some lonely soul is crying
There, on the other shore.]

The poem invokes the aching longing for someone stranded on “the other shore.” Nabokov’s Russian title for the memoir reinvents Blok’s nostalgia, as if making clear, untangling, articulating the strange, mysterious and uninterpretable sounds that the poet hears “from the other side.” Nabokov’s own early poem about dusk (written in December 1918) captures the elongation of the suspended moment, quite like in the passage cited above:

*Как пахнет липой и сиренью
как золoteет серп луны!*

¹⁸ В. Набоков, *Другие берега*, *Собрание сочинений русского периода: столетие со дня рождения: 1899-1999* [Collected Russian Language Works in Five Volumes: Century of birth: 1899-1999], v. 5 (St. Petersburg: Simpozium, 2000), 190.

¹⁹ А. Блок, *Лирика* (Moscow: Pravda, 1988), 53.

*Неторопливо, тень за тенью,
подходят сумерки весны.²⁰*

[A scent of lilac and lindens in bloom
And golden crescent of the moon.
Unhurriedly, a shadow after shadow
The springtime twilight is slowly creeping in.]

This memory—long evening, the mother reading a bedtime story to the child—is connected to the present moment through a web of delicate threads: first, making the reader aware of the language difference (Russian word in an English sentence); second, pinning down the time to a “dim point”; third—providing exact, but idiosyncratic geographical coordinates. The point of reference is not Greenwich, but “my writing hand”—firmly set in the American present, conditioned by the creative power of the memoirist. The writing “I” is the center of the universe for the moment, contrasted with the observing “I” in the fabulous country of the past. The observer’s eye sees not only the immediate beauty of the summer dusk, but also—with a tinge of unmistakable excitement looking forward to exploration—the distant paradise bog of butterfly habitation, audible (a bird’s cry), rather than visible from the child’s position. The words “mystery and remoteness” only repeat what has already been communicated by the preceding phrase “misty-blue sphagnum bog”—mossy, fragrant, dangerous, unapproachable as yet. Then, in the last turn of the sentence, the writer recalls that the children used to call this bog “America” and the two worlds merge: the real, no longer remote, domesticated but still exciting America where Nabokov goes for extended butterfly hunts every summer becomes inset within the larger framework of his beloved Vyra.

This is a very special kind of trespassing—not just the future self illicitly appearing in the space of the past, but quite the opposite: the child self of the hero quite simply walking into the adulthood in another culture, on another continent. This happens with the daring literality in the Chapter Six (“Butterflies”). Throughout the chapter, Nabokov’s autobiographical narrator describes his passion for Lepidoptera. He mentions that the butterfly hunts occupy his mornings, and his exploratory hikes take him further and further into the fabulous bogs of Vyra. At the end of the chapter he finally recounts the ultimate adventure of reaching that distant “misty-blue sphagnum bog”:

There came a July day—around 1910, I suppose—when I felt the urge to explore the vast marshland beyond the Oredezha (...) No sooner had my ear caught the hum of diptera around me, the guttural cry of a snipe overhead, the gulping sound of the morass under my foot, than I knew I would find here quite special arctic butterflies, whose pictures, or, still better, nonillustrated descriptions I had worshiped for several seasons. And the next moment I was among them (...) Still unsated, I pressed forward. At last I saw I had come to the end of the marsh. The rising ground beyond was a paradise

²⁰ В. Набоков, *Стихотворения и поэмы* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1991), 32.

of lupines, columbines, and pentstemons. Mariposa lilies bloomed under Ponderosa pines. In the distance, fleeting cloud shadows dappled the dull green of slopes above timber line, and the gray and white of Longs Peak.
(105-106)

Almost imperceptibly, the fairytale “once upon a time” tone mounts into an increasingly fantastic narration. This is no longer a recollection of an event, nor a wistfully retouched image of the past, but a memory of a fantasy, or a phantasm of memory: a child, entering the undiscovered forest. The superimposition of the pattern of that remembered dream and the image of Longs Peak in Colorado Mountains where the grown-up Nabokov will hunt those fabulous butterflies, gives a satisfying illusion of continuity and meaning to a life that may, from a different perspective, be seen as tragic and discontinuous. The last section of the chapter ends with a stylized passage, almost insolent in its exaltation:

I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another. Let the visitors trip. And the highest enjoyment of timelessness—in a landscape selected at random—is when I stand among rare butterflies and their food plants. This is ecstasy, and behind the ecstasy is something else, which is hard to explain. It is like a momentary vacuum into which rushes all that I love. A sense of oneness with sun and stone. A thrill of gratitude to whom it may concern—to the contrapuntal genius of human fate or to tender ghosts humoring a lucky mortal.
(106)

The magic of superimposed patterns consists in transferring the boy with his butterfly net straight into the future—the American butterfly paradise—without all the fuss of revolution, emigration, war, destitution, deaths of the loved ones, etc.

A similar illegitimate border-crossing occurs when Nabokov’s narrator reminiscences about his first butterfly which kindled the “*passio et morbus aureliani*” in him: Swallowtail, “a splendid, pale-yellow creature with black blotches, blue crenels, and a cinabar eyespot above each chrome-rimmed black tail” (90). It is caught by the house janitor (who moonlighted as a spy for the Police, reporting on the activities of Nabokov senior). The substance used to kill the butterfly proves inefficient, and the next morning, when Mademoiselle opens the cupboard, it manages to escape. The narrator then tracks the flight of his former captive through space:

over timber and tundra, to Vologda, Viatka and Perm, and beyond the gaunt Ural range to Yakutsk and Verkhne Kolymsk, and from Verkhne Kolymsk, where it lost a tail, to the fair Island of St. Lawrence, and across Alaska to Dawson, and southward along the Rocky Mountains—to be finally overtaken and captured, after a forty-year race, on an immigrant dandelion under an endemic aspen near Boulder.
(91)

The forty years elapsing between the original attempt and the final capture of the butterfly are irrelevant, as if the lepidopterist simply followed his prey through the geographical points he names (relevant only as the Swallowtail's temporary habitats), finally catching up with it in Colorado, which unexpectedly resembled Vyra. Memoirist as an enchanted hunter, time and space as decorations, and the only exile in this story is the "immigrant dandelion." It is curious how this fragment is rendered in Russian: "я настиг её и ударом рамлетки 'сбрил' с ярко-жёлтого одуванчика, вместе с одуванчиком, в ярко-зелёной роще, вместе с рощей, высоко над Боулдером" [I have caught up with it, 'shaving' it off with my net from a bright yellow dandelion, together with a dandelion, in a bright-green glade, together with the bright-green glade, high above Boulder].²¹ Thus, together with the butterfly the enchanted hunter captures the world around him—to be transcribed in his works.

THE UNDERSIDE OF MEMORY

Even though the above discussion consistently treats *Speak, Memory* as a peculiar type of Bildungsroman (with a narrator, protagonist and secondary characters, plot and stylistic structure), it is undeniable that Nabokov took extreme care to keep true to the factual side of his biography. Brian Boyd's tremendously well researched and splendidly detailed biography of Nabokov uses the episodes of *Speak, Memory* as promising clues for the inquiry into historical and personal records and consistently reveals supporting evidence for Nabokov's recollections. Boyd identifies 21 factual errors in the memoir, however, most are caused by the lack of available information to check the facts, hindering Nabokov while he was writing his work. It was important to him to retain the unadulterated reality of his childhood, simply because his creed was to worship the particular, unrepeatable quality of reality—his "method would lose all sense unless the material were as true an account of personal experience as memory could possibly make it" (248). Most of the scenes depicted in *Speak, Memory* show clear traces of stylization and structuring, and yet, there is a luminosity, sensual exactitude of multifaceted detail, convincing the reader not only of the artistic genius of the memoirist, but also—and primarily—of the supreme accuracy of the image.

Nabokov himself gamely identified instances in which his memory had erred, and which he had to correct once the evidence from documents or eye-witnesses of the events became available to him. Thus, he corrects the depiction of the family crest and rewrites one of the family trips abroad, from which his memory wrongly excluded his sisters (7). He insists that in the memoir he did not meddle with "the hush of pure memory," resisting any temptation to "fill gaps with logical verisimilitudes posing as precious preserved recollections" (248). He does not attempt to cover his tracks in correction of these errors, instead rather boastfully drawing the reader's attention to his scrupulous adherence to the truth.

Some of these changes were a source of turmoil. For instance, the memoir ends with a description of the—still distant—liner, about to take the writer and his family to America:

²¹ Набоков, *Другие берега*, 221. The original text published in *The New Yorker* reads: "to be finally overtaken and captured, after a forty-year race, on a bright-yellow dandelion in a bright-green glade above Boulder"—V. Nabokov, "Butterflies," *The New Yorker*, June 12, 1948: 25.

There, in front of us, where a broken row of houses stood between us and the harbor, and where the eye encountered all sorts of stratagems, such as pale-blue and pink underwear cakewalking on a clothesline, or a lady's bicycle and a striped cat oddly sharing a rudimentary balcony of cast iron, it was most satisfying to make out among the jumbled angles of roofs and walls, a splendid ship's funnel, showing from behind the clothesline as something in a scrambled picture—Find What the Sailor Has Hidden—that the finder cannot unsee once it has been seen.

(243)

A splendid ending for the memoir, drawing the reader's attention to the task set for him/her by the writer: to find the pattern that has been hidden in the text. In the original story in *The New Yorker*, the description of the funnel included its color—white. It fits, quite naturally, into the pattern of pink underwear on the laundry line and other casual objects on the balconies which still block the view of the harbor—the white blends easily into the clouded patchy sky. However, the rigorous fact-checkers at the magazine discovered that the funnel of the ship (SS Champlain, sunk in 1940 by the Germans on the return voyage from America, immediately after it deposited Nabokovs in their new country) was supposed to be red and black. The editor requested the writer to change the color. Nabokov did not agree:

As my policy throughout the book has been to remain absolutely true to a vision of a personal past, I cannot change the color of the funnel although at a pinch I might omit any mention of that color. As you have probably noticed I often make mistakes when recalling names, titles of books, numbers; but I very seldom err when recalling colors. Since I am absolutely sure (and so are my wife and son) the funnel was white I can only surmise that it was painted white by order of military authorities at St. Nazaire, and that they had taken this liberty with the Champlain's funnel without informing the American office of the French Line. (...) The voyage was a very dangerous one and it is most unlikely that the liner flaunted its usual black and red.²²

The New Yorker's publication included "white," but eventually Nabokov did delete that offending word from the final publication of the revised memoir.²³

All this shows that he aimed to retain not the generally understood and accepted truths about the past which, after all, he shared with many Russian émigrés, but that it was the precise memory of that past—personal, uniquely colored, lovely as only a mortal creature can be—that obsessed him. In this light it is unsurprising that even his close friends from the years of European exile criticized *Speak, Memory*, not finding there some of the conventional features of Russian autobiographical writing. The case in point is Zinaida

²² Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 147.

²³ Nabokov relates the entire episode in the 16th chapter of *Speak, Memory*, which he ultimately decided not to publish (260). The Russian text of *Друзья детства* also does not contain "white" in the description of the funnel.

Shakhovskaya's reaction in her *In Search of Nabokov* book: she considers Nabokov's memoir lacking because

his radiant, sweetly melodic descriptions of Russian nature are akin to a tourist's ecstatic patter, rather than to admiration of someone deeply rooted in the native soil. (...) It is as if Nabokov never knew the smell of hemp, heated by the sun, the clouds of chaff flying to the floor of the mill, the fragrance of the breathing earth after the flood season, the sound of the threshing coming from the mill, the sparks flying from the hammer of the blacksmith, the taste of the fresh milk or a loaf of rye bread, sprinkled with salt. (...) There are no Russian people in Nabokov's Russia, neither peasants, nor middle class.²⁴

It would seem that this passage comes not from a Russian princess, living in exile, but from a typical critical journal of the Soviet era, denouncing the "decadence" and decay of émigré literature which is too self-obsessed and remains blind to the sufferings of the "common people." Nabokov's book is not about the historical truth of Russian life in the first two decades of the twentieth century, but about his own, very private and very particular truth—exactly the way it is remembered by him. He consistently warned off any readers looking for "the deep human glow" (247) or "the socio-economic angle"²⁵ in his works.

If in *Speak, Memory*, he was seeking to understand his past and reclaim it from his fictions, did he succeed? It seems that, despite the sustained, even exaggerated particularity of the recollections, "the person in question" rarely comes into focus at all. The reader sees the world around that mysterious stranger, but whenever the observing "I" claims the center of the scene, it is somehow always detached from the experiencing, acting "I" of the story. One example of this uncanny dissociation may be found in Nabokov's concluding scene of the "First poem" chapter. He is reading his first poem to his mother, completely engulfed in the stylized world of his rhymed lines, and once he finishes, his mother passes him a small mirror: "Looking into my own eyes, I had the shocking sensation of finding the mere dregs of my usual self, odds and ends of an evaporated identity which it took my reason quite an effort to gather again in the glass" (177). The image in the mirror—faithful, no doubt, to the physical reality of the moment—is unrecognizable, alien, and, in addition, inadequate, sketchy and reductive. The self of the protagonist (the true self, connected with his creative endeavors) dodges the captivity of the mimetic representation.

This happens again when the memoir briefly addresses Nabokov's career as a Russian writer. Instead of describing the creative life of an émigré novelist, his struggles with the language, his search for themes and characters or the real events in his daily life that inspired his fictions, instead of exhibiting the underside of writer's life that must be fascinating to his readers, the narrator coolly observes: "the author that interested me most was naturally Sirin," proceeding to detachedly describe the style of "the loneliest and most

²⁴ З. Шаховская, *В поисках Набокова. Отражения* [In Search of Nabokov. Reflections] (Moscow: Kniga, 1991), 63.

²⁵ V. Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, ed. F. Bowers (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 3.

arrogant” émigré writer (225). This somewhat coquettish approach to his own persona is explained in the (unpublished) chapter 16 of the memoir, written as a mock review of *Speak, Memory* (once again, implementing the same dissociation technique):

An observer makes a detailed picture of the whole universe but when he has finished he realizes that it still lacks something: his own self. So he puts himself in it too. But again a “self” remains outside and so forth, in an endless sequence of projections, like those advertisements which depict a girl holding a picture of herself holding a picture of herself holding a picture that only coarse printing prevents one’s eye from making out.

(254)

If we do not manage to see Nabokov clearly enough in the brilliance of his recollections, it is probably because this was not the author’s intention (despite all the false trails in the tentative titles of the memoir). Neither it was, as argued above, his intention to reflect an image of reality for the sake of recording some truth about his country, deleted by history. His attention is focused intensely on a single purpose of studying the underside of memory, of understanding the furtive workings of Mnemosyne, who could be “a very careless girl” (6), misplacing things, needing spectacles (5), or a splendid winged creature, soaring over the lands of the past in the carefree manner particular to butterflies.

THE SELF-PERPETUATING MAGIC OF CREATIVE MEMORY

I would like to close with a personal recollection. In the late eighties, when Nabokov was a fresh discovery in the Soviet Union, my friend managed to buy a glorious 4-volume edition of his Russian works (which, as I later learned, was pirated, printed without permission from Nabokov Estate). While I read through the novels in the volumes 1-3, my mother was reading *Друзье Бежега*, the Russian approximate equivalent of *Speak, Memory* in the volume 4. I distinctly remember her animated face and excited voice, when, as we were swapping impressions, she related to me an episode which she found especially captivating. A young boy is walking through a long alley with his uncle, who stops, stands on tip-toe, reaching for a green red-veined leaf from a tree and presents it to the boy, upon which the leaf turns into a butterfly and flies away, dipping down every few steps, and finally merging into the gloom of the winding alley.

I have since read and reread *Друзье Бежега* and *Speak, Memory*, and all the various versions and variants of Nabokov’s memoir, without being able to locate the exact passage my mother retold with such passion. There is a passage with a leaf, which is presented as the most precious gift to the boy by his uncle (50)—but no butterfly. There is an episode in which, drawing the child’s attention to some delicate detail in the surrounding natural world, his mother says: “Вот, запомни” [Now remember], (25)—a scene reminiscent of the nostalgic glamour of my remembered recollection of recollection. There is also a number of various episodes connected with moths, butterflies and other winged creatures—but no darkening alley, no fading green-red leaf, no magical transformation.

It is very difficult to understand precisely where the problem lies. Did my mother misremember an episode remembered by Nabokov’s narrator? Unlikely, since our talk

happened almost immediately after she finished reading the book, and my mother was famous among her acquaintances for remembering plots of books decades after reading them. Do I misremember her story? I am ready to vouch for the reliability of my own recollection. Perhaps, my search for the source of her inspired re-telling was unsuccessful, because I misremember the book itself? It is true that the multiplicity of versions is an obstacle, but still, I reject this possibility.

What might have happened, is that my mother, in her excitement, embroidered—quite unconsciously, of course—the account she found in the book. I might have further enhanced the changes by focusing my attention on the very fragments added by her, and forgetting some slight details that were true to the context. Thus, my search for the relevant passage in the book was flawed from the start: I have been looking for the wrong story. This gallery of distortions may be continued: Nabokov may have let his narrator modify whatever the author actually remembered, and his memory, in its turn, probably had already done its silent work of deletion and re-alignment of subtle accents.

This might be used as a proof—inconclusive evidence, I'm afraid, unverifiable, but suggestive nevertheless—that Nabokov's fictive-autobiographical hybrid has a special quality: it excites the fictions of memory in its readers, perpetuating the creative process from a muster-seed of personal remembrance of someone, whose existence is asserted by the semi-transparent cloud of fictional characters.

SUICIDE OF BODY AND SUICIDE OF SOUL: TWO FACES OF THE FINAL DECISION IN RUSSIAN EXPERIENCE

Suicidal thoughts are like the fever that accompanies flu. At first, they manifest fleetingly, but later resurface whenever the soul loses its natural resistance. With time, the organism becomes increasingly susceptible to them, gradually succumbing to the rising fever. As the temperature is going up, there comes the moment when thoughts begin to revolve around a single image—the idea of one’s own death. The mind starts to paint ever more detailed scenarios, choosing place and method, as well as arranging the funeral and imagining the tears shed by friends or the comments made by the family. However, the peak does not last long and temperature soon goes down. The one who is “infected by thoughts of death” finally returns to everyday monotony. Still, the fever comes back in the evening and, without appropriate medication, the mind becomes again prone to contemplating death. In this specific state every hour and minute counts. In order to survive, one has to wait. The suicidal person is addicted to the feeling of time passing. The antidote may be found in the form of a single sentence, a passage from a book, or a conversation with a random acquaintance. The key is to survive the apogee of illness and avoid being left alone with the infected soul. Suicide is generally a chronic disease, characterized by recurring crises. However, in some cases it may contract to a three-day-long critical run leading straight to death. It is in fever that the suicide makes the final decision to take his or her own life, but it is not always provoked by that individual’s own entanglement of thoughts. Sometimes it is transmitted like a viral infection.

Suicide may be contagious. This is why such phenomena as group or cyclic suicides are so interesting. They are induced by a shared fever, as in the case of the Russian Skoptsy, described by Professor I. A. Sikorski in the essay *Russian Graves*, which is extensively commented upon by Vasily Rozanov in his book *Dark Visage: The Metaphysics of Christianity*. What I am going to focus on here is the process of making the decision to commit suicide. In the case of the Skoptsy, suicide is meant to kill the body, but in the case of lonely thinkers, like Venedikt Yerofeyev, it also aims to annihilate the soul.

The article by Professor Sikorski, unearthed by Rozanov, describes the group suicide committed by the Old Believers community in Ternówka, a small village in southern Russia. Professor Sikorski refers to this group of people as a sect and his description of them is quite melodramatic: “Here, in this wonderful corner of the earth, a dark

sect of man-killers has made a nest for itself. It poisoned with its toxic breath the joyful lives of people from the valley, provoking terrible events which—even if they weren't so bloody—would still be just as horrifying."¹ The events described by Professor Sikorski took place in 1896, in the Kowalów khutor [farm], which is referred to as a religious and charitable centre. This hermitage was supervised, or rather spiritually looked after, by a woman called Witalia, aged about 35. The inhabitants of the khutor represented different age groups. Among them were elderly people, families with children and the kind of youth that had not yet found its place in social structures. They were usually preoccupied with prayer, which was made possible by the owner of the property and heiress to the estate—Mrs Kowalowa, a widow. In the autumn of 1896, the atmosphere in the khutor turned apocalyptic when news reached it that a general census had been ordered by the government. Witalia—a “charismatic spiritual leader,” as Sikorski describes her—began to spin a visionary tale about the nearing end of the world, related to the Antichrist and the second giving of names (i.e. census): “They said that the census was the seal of the Antichrist; thus, being listed actually sealed one's fate, condemning the individual to eternal damnation.”² The isolation of the khutor as well as the suggestive visions of the end of the world, of tormented imprisonment and of divine punishment led the inhabitants of the hermitage to consider suicide. The fear of receiving symbolically a second name and a number, which were considered to have their origin in a godless source, persuaded people to protect their souls from the defenceless body. Flesh is prone to suffering, making us susceptible to sin by our very existence in a society whose members can be catalogued and numbered.

The atmosphere in the khutor, conveyed in the account of Professor Sikorski, is unambiguous: the fever was constantly rising. It was accompanied by the fear of an overwhelming evil and the notion of living in a world without God. Believers who wanted to flee from the Antichrist had only one choice: to bury themselves, annihilating their body so that the soul could return, purified, to the Creator. Burying has a deeply symbolic dimension, since earth, dust and matter are the building materials of man, according to the Bible. The Skoptsy did not perceive their suicide by self-burying as a breach of the commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” They rather saw it as a sacrifice of their bodies to the Creator in purity, untainted by sin. It was the very form of suicide—i.e. by entering earth—that would somehow absolve them. They found themselves living in a world which made it impossible to follow the commandments. It had become a place of disillusionment, forcing people to abide by rules different than the ones laid down in the Bible. This is no madness, but adamant faith entailing the elevation of spiritual values over earthly ones. This is how Vassily Rozanov interprets the behaviour of the Skoptsy:

Let us recall the sadness of prayers: “He bathed in blood for humanity and we shall bathe in blood for him” and “Through blood he united with humanity and we shall unite with him through blood.” What do “sectarians”

¹ В. Розанов, “Русские могилы,” *В темных религиозных лучах*, ред. А.Н. Николутин [V. Rozanov, “Russian graves,” in *In the Dark Religious Rays*, ed. A. N. Nikolutin] (Moscow: Respublika, 1994), 192.

² *Ibid.*, 193.

and “sects” have to do with it? After all, this is the path of the Orthodox Church. We are called to embark upon it—not directly though, but symbolically—in all prayers, songs, fasts, icons, everything! Monastyr is the Alps of Christianity, but the khutors near Triaspol have risen high into the sky with their own Alpine peaks.³

When officials knocked on the doors of the khutor, they received a note through a crack in the door. It read: “We, Christians, cannot take up any new obligation and refuse to have our names taken down, as well as the names of our fathers. For us, Christ is all: the name and the name of the father (...). We shall never be able to submit to your new laws and rather prefer to die for Christ.”⁴

Professor Sikorski describes the suicides in great detail, quoting the witnesses of those events and relating how more and more people decided to “go down into the grave.” The narrative is fast-paced, reflecting the thickening atmosphere of confusion and terror. Sikorski uses such words and phrases as “hurry,” “ready-made plan,” “joint decision,” “rapid progress,” “devious trick,” “psychological moment” and “crazy idea.” The aesthetic of the narration focuses on haste and madness, or even the madness that emerges from haste. As I already mentioned, it is time that seems to play a crucial role in making the decision about suicide.

Witalia began to implement her deceitful and deadly plan swiftly and with great determination. (...) Kowalowa herself was astonished at how quickly Denisowa agreed to be buried. (...) Witalia did not spare appropriate words and did not hesitate to employ any means whatsoever—she said that the Antichrist has come and that the end of the world may not occur in a year or two, but perhaps even within the next two or three days.⁵

There is only one moment when the fever is so high that reality begins to blur and the survival instinct is weakened and yields to the disease of the soul. “Everybody was extremely nervous and Witalia was rushing them. Before the decisive moment, all victims dressed in attire that is proper for the dead.”⁶

Nine people entered the first pit: “Nazar Fomin (45) with wife Domna (40) and their daughter Praskowia (13), Jewsiej Krawcow (18, a worker), Aniuta Kowalowa (22) with two daughters (one was 3 and the other a breast-fed baby), Elżbieta Denisowa (35, Witalia’s own sister) and an elderly man Skaczkow (70). Those who were buried alive in the first grave represent a full spectrum of age. During the process of making the decision to be buried, it was haste and fear of the Antichrist that played the key role. However, the situation was completely different in the case of the last burial—that of four elderly ladies. Instead of running away from time, those women used it to confirm their decision. The grave of those ladies was already the third pit dug up to bury people alive, so it was not easy

³ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 206-207.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

to convince others to help prepare it—especially because the Antichrist had not appeared so far. The elderly ladies asked, begged and prayed for the possibility to die voluntarily. The whole week long the elderly ladies were imploring Kowalow, but he would not agree. However, when Witalia returned from arrest, the ladies resumed to trouble Kowalow with their requests. In the case of the elderly, suicide was not a hurried decision, but a calm one, made by taking advantage of the passing time. Approval of this decision must have been won among the closest by force—with repeated entreaties and prayers. The elderly ladies were not so much excited or exhilarated by the atmosphere; they rather wanted to close a certain chapter. Parents with children entered the first grave, while elderly women were buried in the last one.

In both cases, time affected the younger to a greater degree. The elderly used it to achieve their goal and confirm their decision, ensuring that others accept it as final. In the case of the first two graves, choices were made immediately, in a hurry, without leaving space for consideration, which was due to the tension that originated in the impending end of the world. The third grave was dug without haste—it all boiled down to the persistence of the elderly ladies, who could not bear to wait a day longer for the end of the world. Altogether twenty people were buried in the graves. In all those cases we are dealing with the desire to annihilate the body. It is exactly the slaying of corporeality that provokes uncertainty as well as fear of pain and death.

Suicide of the soul, on the other hand, has nothing to do with corporeal fear. Not hurried by time, it is a conscious act. The decision ripens for many years until death becomes an inseparable friend to which the weakened soul turns to in difficult moments. Such suicide, or contemplation of it, can be found in the case of Venedikt Yerofeyev:

I left the house with three revolvers. I put the first two on my bosom, but cannot recall where the third was. Entering a backstreet, I asked ‘Is this what life is?’ It is no life but the waving of flowing water and verminous spirituality. God’s commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ does include—it would seem—one’s own self (i.e. thou shall not kill yourself, regardless of how terrible life can be). However, today’s vileness and realities exceed the scope of the commandments.⁷

This passage opens a short story by Yerofeyev in which he recorded his views on suicide. Subsequent stages include the disintegration of the soul as well as running around in circles and pondering the absurdity of one’s existence. First, he describes suicide attempts—train, shooting range—in a slightly humorous convention, recounting some unsuccessful meetings with death. When the greatest breakdown occurs, Yerofeyev hits upon the idea of paying a visit to his friend, a pharmacist, and asking him to concoct a poison. After some persuasion, Pawlik agrees, but apart from the poison he hands the would-be suicide several books by Vasily Rozanov. With the help of those works, Venedikt cures his soul.

⁷ W. Jerofiejew, “Wasilij Rozanow oczami ekscentryka,” in *Dziela prawie wszystkie* [“Wasili Rozanow in eccentric eyes” in *Corpus*, trans. A. Drawicz, K. Krzyżewska, I. Lewandowska, E. Siemaszkiewicz, N. Woroszyńska (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000), 275.

What I would like to draw particular attention to is the manner in which Yero-feyev attempts to make up his mind about committing suicide, particularly the words he uses to describe the state in which he comes closest to taking his own life. Already on the first page we can find the following account of a breakdown: "I started for the Gagarin Square, squinting my eyes and hunkering down to display sadness. My soul swelled up with bitterness and I felt a twinge somewhere to the left of the heart, as well as to the right. Everybody has abandoned me."⁸ The exceptional nature of this description lies in the attempt to convey metaphysical pain in terms of physical suffering. Yerofeyev hunkers down in sadness, indicating that it is the soul that causes the change of posture. Moreover, it is the soul that has swelled up with bitterness and is responsible for the twinges to the right and left of his heart. This, however, is only the beginning of agony: "The soul kept swelling inside me. Tears were flooding front and back—I was so pathetic and embittered that the elderly ladies, who were peeking at me, had to be administered some drops and chloroform."⁹ Venedikt obviously retains his sarcasm and sense of humour, which surface especially in those moments when the author is looking at himself. Still, what becomes discernible in such sniggering is the terrifying feeling that accompanies suicides—an acute sense of helplessness and insignificance. The suicide senses—reminded by the primal survival instinct—that self-destruction is evil. Despite this, he cannot stop pondering it, although every minute of such meditation makes matters worse. "No, is that what life is? This is no life but a torrent of faeces, a whirlpool of hogwash and shattered hearts. (...) Without lifting myself from the ground, I reached for my revolvers, two on my bosom, the third I do not know where, and shot all three at the same time into my temples, falling on the flower bed with my soul pierced through."¹⁰ What transpires from all of Venedikt's descriptions is that his soul has turned into a hotbed of suffering. It is the soul that makes him unable to function properly because it swells and becomes embittered beyond endurance. Thus, the soul is the actual target of the suicide. In this case the body is not guilty of anything. In fact, it functions as a mere vehicle of the immaterial element in man, which is sick and incapable of living anymore.

When the Skoptsy were making their decision to commit suicide, they did so in a hurry, not feeling any pain but just fear. Venedikt, on the other hand, is not afraid because he knows death as intimately as the philosophers whose writings he read. He carefully thought it through. However, his agony is long, since his thoughts on death inflict physical pain, which is caused not only by the slow decay of the soul, but also the struggle between the survival instinct and the internal striving towards death. In both cases, we encounter a symbolic separation of man's death. The Skoptsy killed only the body, which is mortal, while their souls were to gain a better world. Venedikt wants to kill the soul since it rots inside the body and becomes an unbearable burden. Making the decision to kill the body is simple, for it is no partner in discussion. It had been recognized as evil and capable of letting sin inside. Therefore, it needs to be removed, so that the pure

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 276.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 277.

soul could return to the Creator. This decision is accompanied by a fear that is corporeal. A healthy body is afraid of pain and death, just like a healthy soul.

However, taking the decision to kill the soul is not accompanied by corporeal fear. The body had already suffered enough due to the diseased soul. The suicide of the soul, or rather the act of taking the decision to commit it, is the fruit of many hours spent on debating the issue. The decision is taken in the privacy of one's heart. Postponing it only provokes more pain. Venedikt exemplifies an existential suicide, the kind that is defined by Stefan Chwin in the book *Suicide as the Experience of Imagination*: "An existential suicide is not just a calculating mind that coldly assesses the pros and cons of existing. He judges existence with his heart, breath, sight and touch. The internal world of his suicide is an entanglement of feelings, thoughts, anxieties, ambitions, hopes, animosities as well as experiences of imagination and moral hesitation of a frequently high emotional temperature."¹¹ Venedikt's contemplation of suicide is a sometimes more and sometimes less painful process. What makes Yerofeyev's view of suicide poles apart from that of the Skoptsy is the possibility of making a different decision. The Skoptsy have no alternative. If they do not save their souls from the Antichrist, eternal damnation will await them, the body being just an obstacle and an accessory to the Antichrist sneaking inside. Venedikt does not have to evade the weakness of the body, because his soul—which he wants to annihilate—is still an active partner in discussion.

As long as the debate is upheld and the whole matter is being considered, there exists the possibility of making a different decision. Venedikt may still cure his soul, in which he is aided by reading Rozanov's books. The Skoptsy, on the other hand, have no choice because the body cannot be impregnated in this world so as to save it from the Antichrist. These two radically opposing attitudes share, however, something that cannot be overlooked while discussing the problem of the decision to commit suicide. In both cases, it is time and the way of experiencing it that affect the final decision. The Skoptsy have no time and keep fleeing from it, while Venedikt has an excessive amount of time. It prolongs his suffering and at the same time is the only thing that can save him.¹²

¹¹ S. Chwin, *Samobójstwo jako doświadczenie wyobraźni* [Suicide as an experience of imagination] (Gdańsk: "Tytuł," 2010), 7.

¹² Publication supported in the framework of the "National Programme for the Development of Humanities" in 2012-2015 by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

BABETTE'S FEAST: CULINARY NARRATIVE AS A PROCESS OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF MEANINGS

To approach the truth about the culture, ourselves and the other, it is worthwhile to consider the meanings that come from exploring and analyzing cuisine. We will quickly discover that food and cooking can provide a useful context for posing some meaningful questions about the human nature. What is cuisine? It is not merely our breakfast, dinner or quick bite in-between, but rather, it is one of the fundamental elements of the culture in general, deeply connected with private and social life of every man. Human beings have a direct experience of cuisine, renewed every single day of their lives. In her book *Cuisine and Empire: Cooking in World History*, the anthropologist Rachel Laudan, writes that the developing skills of cooking, as well as the changes in techniques of food preparation had influenced all stages of the development of human civilization. Supporting her claim with an extended bibliography of the history of cuisine, Rachel Laudan reminds us of the basic fact that the development of first civilizations started around 10.000 years ago and was parallel to the process of mastering of the grain farming. "Cities, states, and armies appeared only in regions of grain cuisines."¹ Grains were crucially important not only to the earliest civilizations but, as she writes, "the ancient Romans built their empire on barley porridge, the Chinese enjoy rice porridge (congee), the Indians—rice and lentil."²

The impact of grains farming on the process of creation and development of states is attributed to the fact that grains are not only very nutritious, but can also be stored for long periods of time. The possibility of storing food created conditions for development of state structures, allowing to feed numbers of people not directly involved in the food production, such as, for instance, a military force, and to create surpluses that could be distributed by the state. The grains harvested by the first states were barley and millet, and later wheat and rice gained importance. The role of grain in the development of a civilization was well understood by the ancients: "those who ate grains contrasted their civilized state with the barbarism of surrounding nomads, who, they asserted, did not eat grains."³

¹ R. Laudan, *Cuisine and Empire: Cooking in World History* (London: University of California Press, 2013), 16.

² *Ibid.*, 33.

³ *Ibid.*, 37.

In short, grain made the birth of civilization possible and the first pot of cooked grain (or let us say it straight—the first pot of kasha) may be used as the point of demarcation pointing to the beginning of the civilization. The pot of cooked grain is more than just the grain itself: unprocessed grain would not be such an important factor in the development of advanced social structures. It had to be first grinded, then cooked or baked. In the first sentence of her book, Rachel Lauden writes: “*Cuisine and Empire* takes seriously the fact that we are the animals that cook.”⁴ Acts of cooking and grain farming are bound together, and together create foundations of cuisine.

Until the beginning of 19th century there were two kinds of cuisine. The first kind was high cuisine prepared for nobles, aristocrats and rulers. The second kind was the humble food of peasants and slaves. They differed in products used for cooking, complexity of the preparation process and the manner in which the food was consumed, and depended on the place in the social and political structure. Thus, one may even contend that food was a part of a cosmic order. This has changed with the revolutions of the 19th century. High and humble cuisine was replaced by something that Rachel Lauden calls “middling” cuisine. This new cuisine should rather be called the mixed cuisine, since it removed the old divisions, adding new products and introducing new ways of processing and consumption. The cuisine became a patchwork.

The old, long-lasting order of cuisine disappeared from European culture. However, it does not mean that cuisine stopped influencing social and political life. On the contrary, its presence and impact became universal. Cuisine narratives are present in all spheres of contemporary culture: religion, social relations, political activities, fields of aesthetic, ethic and economics. Moreover, cooking and eating became entertainment, and sometimes even an art. Without the choice of what and how people eat it would be difficult to imagine categories such as freedom or a democratic political system. Global economy also depends on cuisine: it develops and grows thanks to the fact that humans develop and grow as consumers who eagerly try new food products. Cuisine is crucial for understanding such a category as taste, and it influences beliefs and identity.

Multilevel presence of cuisine in culture is reflected in the modern media, full of information about food and ways of its preparation. It is a real maze of content that is often contradictory and supplies incompatible recommendations. Research on nutrition, illnesses, old habits, beliefs, traditions, ancient recipes, exotic or innovative ideas for cooking—all this creates an overflow of information, the white noise, making a project of objective investigation of the modern cuisine nearly impossible. However, since one has to find a point of departure, in this essay we will use the approach already well-established in contemporary culture and supported by Sigmund Freud's methodology: the practice of free association. This invaluable liberating tactic brings us to the film *Babette's feast*,⁵ a story about riches that can be discovered through cuisine when it ascends to the level of art, suggesting that a banquet of haute cuisine can affect the quality of life of individuals and society.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵ *Babettes Gæstebud* [Babette's Feast], film, dir. G. Axel (Danish Film Institute, 1987).

The film *Babette's Feast* directed by Gabriel Axel in 1987 is an adaptation of a short story written by Karen Blixen (literary pseudonym of Isak Dinesen) in the fifties of the 20th century. The book and the movie are bound together, and it is crucial to consider them jointly. Do both versions tell the same story? In general, we may suppose that the film remains faithful to its literary source, as the storyline of the written text is kept intact in the film. Differences seem to be minor, but they still exist and their apparent insignificance veils important shifts in the meaning.

The most obvious difference between the written and filmed versions comes not from the director's intentions but from the very nature of food and the way we may experience it. Namely, a dish is always more appealing when seen and not merely heard of. The film therefore can have a more direct and decisive influence on senses because it can show the image of a beautiful dish, arranged on a beautiful plate. Of course, we should not forget that poetic language could be even more imaginatively attractive than a film frame. But in Karen Blixen's writing, the food is simply not described, but appears only as a name in the menu, as opposed to the work of Gabriel Axel, where dishes are celebrated. Thus, in the film, the food is the centerpiece of the narrative, while in the short story it is hidden in the silence of the unsaid.

Let us briefly recall the plot of "Babette's Feast."⁶ It takes place in the remote Norwegian province, by the fiord, in a small village inhabited by a Protestant sect. The story consists of two parts that seem not to have much in common. The first one speaks about two sisters and seduction that they withstand, rejecting their respective suitors and deciding not to marry, choosing to live a sacred life, almost like nuns. The second part presents a feast prepared by Babette who invites the poor people of the village to the sophisticated haute cuisine dinner she prepares. The dinner is unwanted, the religious villagers dedicated to simple life are afraid of the event. They think about it in terms of the work of the devil. However, they cannot refuse the invitation and they come to the feast. During the course of the dinner all their worries slowly fade away, they enjoy the wonderful food and nothing evil takes place. The excellent food and wine brings about a feeling of general well-being. Sitting at the table, they forget their old conflicts and rediscover the joy of being together. The feast lifts their spirits, allowing them to overcome the depression of the last years. Thus, the narrative seems to convey the following message: when the cooking becomes art it has the capacity to improve, enlighten our life, heal and deepen the human relations, developing the ties binding a community together. Excellent food is not evil, but goodness itself. This is propaganda of a creative cuisine.

However, one may offer an alternative, somewhat perverse interpretation of the story, in which the man abandons God and follows Satan. One may easily argue that the riches of the Babette's table, with their undeniable sensuality, represent the devilish temptation, and those who were naive enough to succumb to it have lost their souls. This interpretation, in fact, is stronger because it connects the two threads of the story, the seductions of sisters and the feast. We may view the plot as a pattern of three seductions: first two are resisted and overcome, while the third temptation of the feast proves irresistible. Thus, evil enters through the kitchen door.

⁶ K. Blixen, *Babette's Feast and Other Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 2011).

Both interpretations of the story, the one that presents the cuisine as a rich source of renewing energy and the second, presenting the feast as a temptation, are quite obvious. What is more puzzling and mysterious is the curious behavior of the peasants whose strategy in addressing the unwanted feast is to keep silent about the food. They agree that since they cannot refuse Babette's invitation and have to participate in the feast, they will at least not take any interest in the dishes prepared by their hostess. They make a vow that they will not speak a word about the food and not discuss nor comment on its taste. They pledge to each other that by the table they will only speak about the sacred memory of their spiritual leader. Their silence regarding the food is supposed to be their line of defense.

This decision is put in practice, and no word about the wine or food is uttered by the villagers. But does their strategy succeed? On the one hand, it allows them to go to the feast without fear or uneasiness, but with eagerness, making it possible for them to simply enjoy the wonderful meal. This, however, makes them appear to relax their ascetic principles. On the other hand, they do fulfil their promise of never mentioning the food until the very end, and thus seem to achieve at least some degree of success. This dilemma is, however, misleading: the silence is not, in fact, a strategy to avoid or overcome temptation. It is an expression of helplessness of the people who face a new world, which they have no words for—as yet.

To help us understand this situation better we might refer to Jonathan Lear's *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*,⁷ a well known interpretation of the story of the Crows, a native American ethnic group that experienced destruction of their own culture as a result of the clash with Western Civilization. Plenty Coups, the chief of Crows, in a conversation with Frank B. Linderman (1885), says that for Crows, after the buffalo went away, the events had ceased, therefore he has nothing to say about the life of Crows in the reservation. Jonathan Lear explores the peculiar expression that the chief uses: "after this nothing happened."⁸ He concludes that such devastation took place when the old lifestyle of the Crow people, informed by traditional meanings, was replaced by a new world of meanings that the Crows had no symbolic representation for. In fact, the Crows people simply could not find such representation for the new ideas and concepts.

Plenty Coups talks willingly and plentifully about events from before the time when the Crows were confined in the reservation. Yet, he refuses to speak about the life of the Crow people after the change which he could not really understand, as he seems to have no language for it. In this case, not to understand is to not to have the words to speak of it, i.e., words that are meaningful, that have representation in an internal life. In this, the situation of the Crows and the villagers from Karen Blixen's text are alike. Both deal with the unstoppable change forcefully brought about by an incoming new culture, and its impact on internal life of individuals who have to begin to live in a completely new way in the world void of meanings.

Karen Blixen is silent about the food. This appears as a paradox: her short story is all about the feast, yet the text foregoes any description of the food at its heart. She

⁷ J. Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2, 3, 7.

merely names the dishes, nothing more. Gabriel Axel, on the other hand, plays freely with food, treating it as a fetish, placing the plate with a seductive dish at the very center of his narrative, as a center piece of his film. It seems that he is already on the other side of the cultural transformation, in the world in which cuisine is not only a matter of social status, physical needs, and religious practices. It is the world where food and cuisine becomes a source of meaning, like to all of us today.

Plenty Coups, the chief of the Crows, says to Linderman that the Crows will wait for a poet who will be able to translate to them the new world.⁹ This shows that poetic narrative takes part in a process of transformation of the internal life of the individual, as well as of the cultural life of a community. Therefore the narrative (both in the film and in the text) is not merely descriptive of the changes, but by using the poetic language and symbols it becomes an element in the process of cultural transformation, the process of the transformation of meanings.

In this context, the double interpretation of *Babette's feast*, one projecting it as an opening to the treasures of the new world of the cuisine, and the other—as the diabolical temptation, becomes part of the complete symbolic order. If the members of the passing (declining and disappearing) culture are faced with the challenge of the new world, for which they have no symbolic and conceptual system, they are unable to deal with it. Without the system of meanings that may be used to make sense of the objects and events brought about by the new world, they are forced to use a substitute, the only universal symbol available: that of the generalized evil, the Satan. Invasion of the evil, the Apocalypse, the end of the world,—all these are subsidiary symbols. None of them helps to understand the new world, but at least, they aid one in accepting the fact of the definite end of the old culture. To the villagers from the 19th-century Norway, to speak of or to dream about the evil may seem to build a symbolic bridge to face the unknown.

The “diabolic plot” was clearly a way to explain the nature of events to the inhabitants of Beaverlag, helping them to deal with the new. It is worth mentioning that the evil does not appear in the symbolic world of the Crows. However, in the case of the Crows, the difference between the old world and the new white man culture is much greater. Despite the many changes that accrued in Europe of 19th century, the Christians foundations of its culture and its use of the symbol of evil, in particular, remained intact. There is, perhaps, a critical mass of change within a culture, beyond which the transformation is impossible, which limits the common ground allowing one to build a bridge between the new and the old.

No doubt, 19th century changes have been experienced very differently by the Norway peasants and the North American tribes. Though differences are clear, similarities are significant. One can observe them in the changes of the internal world of individuals, and the connection is the absence of the language for the world of new meanings. This critical lack allows one rooted in the old culture to be understood the new in intellectual terms only, and not on a spiritual level. When Johnathan Lear speaks about the cultural devastation of the Crows, he is also talking about a spiritual devastation. When men have

⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

to live their lives in the world for which they have no meaningful worlds, they may be able to adapt to it in some way, and eventually to take control over the physical reality, but their spiritual life loses its depth and order.

This may help us properly understand the idealized lifestyle of the primitive cultures. These people, despite their backward ways, despite being exposed to the brutal natural and tribal laws, still managed to lead a deeply meaningful life. The life of the Crows prior to the white invasion may be seen as an example: their world was not an earthly paradise, since they remained perpetually exposed to the threat of annihilation by the adversary tribe of Sioux; yet, according to Plenty Coups, this was still a world full of meaning, making possible an intensified spiritual life. Each member of the community had his role assigned to him, and knew what path of development to undertake. The culture provided ample space for the intimate and social life, the children aspired to emulate their parents, while the parents believed that they have something valuable to pass on to their children—a complete system of knowledge about the world. This world order was utterly destroyed with the coming of the “higher” civilization, which, all its sophistication notwithstanding, could not create an opportunity for a better, more enlightened life, quite to the contrary, brought with it spiritual and physical desolation, deprived the world of any meaning. The children lost faith in their parents, and the parents no longer knew what to pass on to their children. The deficit of meaning is characteristic of the cultural change in general, which makes adaptation and development possible only at the cost of the rejection of the inner order, emptying out of the symbolic system, spiritual devastation.

We may, therefore, attempt a comparison between the situation of the Crows or the Beaverlag village in Norway and the modern progressive culture. Continuous technological development of our times carries with it the danger of draining the human life of its spiritual dimension, forcing us to adapt to the new ways, yet cancelling the old values. The adaptability, so crucial in the process of development, and possessed by the humans as the necessary evolutionary condition, may cause the redefinition of symbolic meanings, which, it may turn out, are not as adaptable to external changes. One may even suggest that the meanings cannot evolve at all, but can only be created anew, replacing the old values. The chief of the Crows apparently believes that these are created by the poet. Even though the perpetually changing world may make the task of the poet futile, the effort itself should definitively be undertaken. As long as man possesses the immanent life force, he cannot abide in a void.

Here we finally come to the most important function of the contemporary culinary narrative: it may be seen as a medium to accommodate the new. It may be that the cuisine always was the agent of internalization of the changes, or it may have acquired this role only recently. Perhaps, this is what *Babette's feast* is all about. With the new world, the new food is coming as well. By consuming the new food we internalize the change, we convince ourselves that we truly belong in this new world. Mounting changes in our environment are immediately reflected in the increasing number of the new dishes and inventive recipes that appear; and civilizational flexibility is reflected in the increasingly varied diet of the society. Cuisine and culinary narrative plays the role of a poet that Plenty

Coups was talking about—reduced in size and pathos, but still a poet. Of course, *Babette's feast* suggests that the cook may indeed become a poet, a true artist. This, however, may in the final reckoning appear to be a counterfeit, a devil's trick, seducing us by a vision of plenty resembling the contemporary world of consumerism.

In conclusion, we may once more insist that *Babette's feast* is not only a metaphor of a change, but it creates a complex poetic narrative and takes part in this cultural process – the process of the transformation of meanings.

Henryk Głębocki

COUNT ADAM DE GUROWSKI (1805-1866)

The Crimean war in the second half of 19th century had been the event that for the first time drew public attention in the U.S. to the role of Russian Empire. Among the most influential political writers and publicists introducing Russia to the readers in the West, and particularly in America, was Count Adam de Gurowski,¹ a Polish émigré, a participant of November Insurrection (1830–31) who turned to Pan-Slavism. He arrived in America in 1849 with other refugees from the revolution of 1848, but his political and intellectual development prior to his settlement in the U.S. was long and complex.² In his youth he attended Hegel's lectures while receiving his education in the German universities, and under the romantic influence of these ideas he participated in the anti-Russian underground movement in the Kingdom of Poland, which in 1815 had become part of the Russian Empire. A radical enthusiast of democracy, he was one of the key figures during the November Uprising of the 1830, and had to flee to Paris after its fiasco. Here he communicated and conspired with the various radical politicians of Europe, democrats and Carbonari, starting with Guizeppe Mazzini and ending with Louis Bonaparte, Napoleon III, the Emperor of the Second French Empire. He also became a close friend of the German poet Heinrich Heine.

¹ Cf. N. Saul, *The Distant Friends: The United States and Russia, 1763-1867* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 303.

² A biographical outline of Gurowski's life in American may be found in: Lee Roy H. Fischer, *Lincoln's Gadfly, Adam Gurowski* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967). See also F. Stasik, *Adam Gurowski, 1805-1866* (Warsaw: PWN, 1977); H. Głębocki, "Diabeł Asmodeusz" w niebieskich binoklach i kraj przyszłości [The Devil Asmodeus in blue binoculars and the land of the future] (Cracow: Arcana, 2012).

The fiasco of the uprising, combined with political realism which showed him quite clearly the lack of any opportunities for Poland to gain its independence in foreseeable future, eventually made him forsake the Polish cause. In his thought, the historical mission was transferred from the defeated Poland to the victorious Russia, in keeping with the Hegelian historical logic. Russia now became "the land of the future." Its calling was to unite the Slavs in a single Russo-Slavic Empire, to bring the European civilization to Asia, as a "substitute force of Providence," in accordance with the ideas of universal progress, understood as brutal homogenization by absorption of the inferior by the superior beings. Czarist autocracy personified by Nicholas I of Russia featured as a particularly efficient instrument of such visions.

Even though Gurowski had been originally sentenced to death, he was pardoned and could return to Russian Empire in 1835, where he remained until 1844, serving as a zealous propagandist of the Russian Empire, under the attentive supervision of the secret police. He prepared a range of Pan-Slavic projects, calling for russification of his compatriots on the one hand, and on the other, proposing to reform the backward State of Nicholas I into a Russo-Slavic Empire of the future, which would conduct an actively expansionist global policy. He aspired to be "the engineer of human souls," yet, could not quite convert Nicholas I to his visions. Though obviously fascinated by Gurowski, Nicholas was held back from engaging too deeply with Pan-Slavic ideas by his conservative advisers. Disappointed, Gurowski the Pan-Slavist escaped to the West, without, however, forsaking his political philosophy, propounded in still new projects that he continued to send to the Czar from abroad.

When Nicholas I failed to show enthusiasm for Gurowski's idea of making use of the post-revolutionary chaos of 1848-49 to create a Russian hegemony in Europe (ideas also held by Mikhail Bakunin), Gurowski decided to find a new "land of the future" in the United States. Here he befriended James Fenimore Cooper, Charles Sumner (congressman, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee 1861-1871), as well as Walt Whitman and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Thus, he quickly found himself in the very center of the political and intellectual elites in New York and New England. Even though his Boston and Cambridge friends did not manage to install him in the Legal History department of Harvard University, he did secure the position in the editorial board of the most important daily of those times, *New York Daily Tribune*, edited by Horace Greeley, with whom Gurowski shared fascination with Fourierism.

The unique experience acquired in Russia, the Crimean war and the growing interest in the Nicholas I's Empire made Gurowski the acknowledged expert in the European issues, especially in the aspects of Russian policy in the Eastern Europe. He practically presided over the foreign affairs department of the newspaper. In his successively published works, and in particular, in the most famous *Russia as It Is* of 1854, he compiled the *Manifest Destiny* of U.S. and Russia, a document supported by the philosophy of history, where he advocated the cooperation of these two countries, their political differences notwithstanding, in the name of universal progress and for the general benefit of humanity.

In his comparison of Russia and America, developing Tocqueville's idea, Gurowski outlined the historical mission for these countries: Asia was to be Russia's dominion, while the U.S. was to civilize the Western hemisphere. 20th century was to be the era of

these two states, when they would possess the whole world between them. He drafted his visions from the global point of view, observing entire nations, races, civilizations and empires. All these would have to submit to the universal determinist laws of history, with the goal of common good and progress. However, something had to be sacrificed: the fittest only survived; the natural selection in the human, as in the animal world, wiped out the defeated.

Becoming the guide through Russia for the Americans, Gurowski strived to extend his influence over the Russians as well, familiarizing the public opinion there with the fundamental concepts of the American civilization and democratic political values in his letters to Russian periodicals. He saw democratization of Russia as the necessary condition for it to fulfil its historic mission. This could be achieved through a spontaneous, bloody revolt of the low classes or by reforms. Thus, during this period of his émigré career his old belief in the Russian autocracy was replaced with a new faith in the Russian people, as the historical tool of the great changes to come.

Russia's victory in the Crimean war, the taking of the Constantinople were to herald the long awaited changes, as the victorious advent of a State acting in the name of progress. Using similar logic, Gurowski compared Alexander II, "the liberator Czar," with Lincoln during the Secession War, striving to prove that Russia and U.S. shared common values.

Gurowski's political activity could not be fully understood if we failed to include in this context Karl Marx and Alexander Hercen, who accused Gurowski of being a Russian agent of influence. We now have the opportunity to properly evaluate these accusations thanks to the opening of the Russian secret police archives, dating from the 19th century. The documentation shows that though Gurowski's views were held sincerely, he did receive financial support from the Russian embassy in Washington, and in especially difficult times the money was sent to him on Czar Alexander II's personal instruction. Edward Stoeckel, the Russian ambassador in Washington during the Crimean war, praised Gurowski's pamphlets in his letters to the Minister Nesselrod as written "by the hand of the master."³

At the same time, Gurowski participated in the heated political discussions of his new homeland during the Civil War. He emphatically supported the abolitionist movement, bitterly criticising the institution of slavery, which undermined the values of the democratic Republic. Connected with the radical wing of the Republican Party, Gurowski was also harsh in his criticism of Abraham Lincoln's irresolute policy of half-measures in suppressing the secession of the South. He called for a speedy liberation of the Afro-Americans and was in favour of including them in the regiments of the army. His diaries, published during the Civil War, throw light on the backstage goings-on of the political struggle in the capital, showing the peculiar *Washington Behind Closed Doors*. For this portrayal, he was legally sued by the US Government.

Gurowski died in Washington, D.C., 4 May 1866 and was buried in the Historic Congressional Cemetery.

³ Cf. Архив Внешней Политики Российской Империи (Москва) [Archive of the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of Russian Empire], фонд 170, опись 512/2, лр 52, Стеклъ Нессельроду, Вашингтон, 10/22 II 1855, к. 46v.-47. Compare also the personal receipts for the money received and the list of sums paid out to Gurowski: Государственный Архив Российской Федерации (Москва) [State Archive of the Russian Federation], фонд 109, 1 экспедиция, опись 1830, лр 448, ч. 320, к. 478, к. 460, к. 467.

MANIFEST: DESTINY OF AMERICA AND RUSSIA (1849-1866)

RUSSIA CANNOT FALL!¹

Russia is under the iron rule of despotism (19).

The Czar is a despot. Despotism is his trade. Often heartless. It is his character. Unga-geous² and suspicious. This results naturally from the two former conditions. But he is neither faithless nor perfidious. Russia is fierce, savage, anything you like; but both the Czar and Russia act openly (20).

England with her tendency to subjugate the whole world by her so-called free trade—thus rendering all nations her humble and impoverished tributaries—in the present state of human development, aims infinitely more to establish universal dominion than does Russia.

The still well remembered declaration of Earl Clarendon,³ that she will watch, united with France over the affairs and therefore over the destinies of the TWO HEMI-SPHERES, reveals longings for universal preponderance⁴ and of interference with other people's affairs to which no act of the Czar can be compared.

¹ Selected passages from: A. Gurowski, *The Turkish Question* (New York: William Taylor and Co, 1854). All further references in the parentheses correspond to the page numbers of this edition. In all the fragments, from this and other sources, the original idiosyncrasies of grammar, spelling and punctuation were preserved.

² I.e., inclined to take offense easily.

³ George William Frederick Villiers, 4th Earl of Clarendon (1800-1870), English diplomat, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs 1853–1858, 1868-1870.

⁴ I.e., superiority.

The destinies and the natural tendencies of Russia point visibly towards the east and towards central Asia. There they must and will be accomplished; and no power should or will be able to arrest her expansion in that direction or check her progress in this, for her, predestined orbit (23).

Europe is one great area of oppression.⁵ Only its intensity is variagated, and of different shadowings and degrees. The oppressed, in England in various phases and manner, number several millions. France yielded, and yields willingly to the chains put on her. Italy, Germany and Russia complete the whole. The clang of chains is general, only differently tuned. Time will and must come, when an end will be put to this. But when?—there is the enigma (28).

The crescent will be shattered. This can be said without any pretention to prophecy. Nature in her works, does not recur to restorations of what is worn out and withered, and what has already lost the inborn conditions of life. Neither does history. Whatever in the realm of Nature shrinks and can exist no longer by its own essence—whatever this essence may be—and dies out, dissolves to make room for or nourish new creations.

The process of history is similar. She is original, and ever moving; she looses no time in nursing decrepitude, or in patching up decomposition; she does not carefully take by the arm and drag forward that which possesses no life, no strength for an onward march. As long as the Ottomans breathed even a ferocious but strong spirit, history was on their side. In the present issue, between Christians and Islams, between the Greeks, the Slavi, the Russians—admitting that both parties are barbarians—the one is incresing, growing, expanding and tending onward; the other diminishing, withering, and sinking down both morally and physically. History and humanity will make the righteous choice (42-43).

THE EXISTENCE, THE STRENGTH OF RUSSIA, ARE ONE OF THE CONDITIONS AND AGENCIES OF CIVILIZATION⁶

Russia is no apostle of constitutional institutions. No one supposed she is. But it was still Russia alone that procured for, and secured to the Principalities as well as Serbia, their privileges, their constitutions, with emancipation from Turkish misrule, and the abolition of serfdom in Moldavia and Wallachia.⁷ And Russia did this at a time when no

⁵ After the failure of the Revolutions of 1848 (the Spring of Nations).

⁶ Selected passages from: A. Gurowski, *A Year of the War* (New York and London: D. Appleton & Co, 1855). All further references in the parentheses correspond to the page numbers of this edition.

⁷ After the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–1829 and the Treaty of Adrianople, Wallachia and Moldavia fell under the

one in Europe had any thought of ameliorating their condition. English high-sounding philanthropy was mute, and Austria squinted at this liberal seed thrown in her near neighborhood. These are facts of history (20).

How very different are the relations between Russia and the United States. No jealousy, no bone of contest whatever exists between them. Russia alone has no reason now, and never can have any, to interfere, or to envy the progress and the extension of the United States. Russia alone will sincerely hail the federation, if it absorbs the Gulf of Mexico, the Antilles, the Sandwich or Polynesian Islands, whether it reaches the line⁸ or the poles. As Russia will never attempt to step beyond the boundaries of the ancient Eastern Asiatic world, her relation with America for centuries to come, can only be that of a friendly intercourse. Russia will never attempt to transform the globe and its inmates into day-laborers for her account and benefit. Russia will never attempt herself, or aid others, to establish a balance of power on this hemisphere (28).

Various is the historical development of races, nations, and states; various are the missions, the functions assigned to them. Their social or governmental forms, always transitory, generally aid in the fulfilment of these great and diversified duties towards the human family, as well as towards the earth inhabited by it. We owe her culture, as well as we owe it to ourselves. To these duties and functions are adapted external or geographical extension as well as political power. They must harmonize with each other. Can any one speak or wish for a balance of power on this continent, that would be a limitation of the creative activity of the United States, for the sake of the ignorance, laziness, and incapacity of the other states and nations? Without the preponderance of the United States, there would here be Spanish, English, French sway. No freedom, no civilization, no progress, no culture, but darkness and oppression. Can there be a balance of power between the United States, full of vigor and life, and the Spanish race, and the republics formed by it, full of indolence, and of all the disorganizing elements, void of energy, of mind and intellect? (28-29)

Very likely the wresting of the Crimea from Russia will prove an impossibility. The Crimea is by nature a part of Russia, as Florida is of the United States. If Sebastopol is a stronghold menacing Turkey, are not Portsmouth and Plymouth equally menacing

Russian military rule (but still under Ottoman suzerainty), obtained a semblance of constitution and their political and social system was reformed.

⁸ I.e., equator.

to France,—Gibraltar and Malta to the borders of the Mediterranean,—and above all, are not Bermuda and other spots in the Antilles exclusively directed against the United States? (80)

Where the Turk destroys, Russia plants and sows. (...) Various as are the exigencies and situations, as various are the ways and means by which the initiatory labors of civilization are performed; its sparks kindled, the light, at first feeble and vacillating, is gradually diffused. (...) [This] is the function of autocracy, and so Russia is already laying the foundation for civilization in her own country, in Asia, and perhaps she may do the same for some parts that have been desolated by the Turkish sway (97).

America and Russia now represent most strikingly the harmony of contrasts. America and Russia are progressive, albeit by an opposite method and by a different law. There exists no reason whatever why they should not stretch out their hands and mutually assist each other in working out their respective destinies, not only now, but for years and centuries. There lies nowhere between them a single bone of contention, and thousands and thousands of threads of interest extend between the two countries. Americans, even in the closest intercourse with Russia, cannot run the risk of becoming monarchists, or of losing their republican character and sentiments (99).

The American may teach and initiate the Russian in this great business. It was the interest of the English to maintain the Russians, in this respect, as far as possible in a state of dependence.

Russia's internal industry grows continually, without, however, being able to satisfy all the domestic demands and those of the immense and constantly increasing trade of Asia. Thus American industry and enterprise can find a large market in Russia. She will increase her demand for raw cotton, and receive it hence direct in American vessels, and no longer at second-hand from Liverpool in English bottoms.⁹ The greater the prosperity of Russia the larger must become the demand.

England, on the other hand, threatens America that she will emancipate herself before long from buying this important American staple. Railroads and canals will facilitate internal communication in the East Indies. This once done, cotton will easily be brought to the ports. Cotton can, and will be produced, and far cheaper than in this country. England stimulates the culture of cotton in Africa, as France does in Algeria—both

⁹ I.e., English ships.

with the wish to find there their supplies, and so cripple the wealth of this country. Russia alone can never become a large cotton producer.

The republican principles of the Americans do not oblige them to stiffen, fall back, and keep aloof from a friendly intercourse and interchange of mutual products with Russia. A wide and immense field will be thrown open to American activity, enterprise and intellectual productions. Engineers, mechanics, manufacturers, artisans, ship-builders, and ship-owners, will find in the wants and in the increasing demands of Russia, incalculable resources to promote, to nourish, and lucratively extend their diversified occupations. In one word, the relations between America and Russia, based on mutual advantage, will increase continually for the benefit of both countries; nature and reason do not protest against these countries extending to each other the hand of fellowship (100-101).

Death or life depends upon her mastering the great outlet; her great canal of respiration. That outlet is the Bosphorus. The prosperity of America would become endangered without the possession of the mouth of the Mississippi, and the command over the Gulf of Mexico. Would she suffer the presence of a powerful enemy there, ready to attack her navy, to injure her commerce in a thousand ways? The possession of Cuba is a necessity resulting from geographical position. "Who has the house must possess the key," I once heard an American statesman (Crittenden)¹⁰ say, and every American feels its truth. The definitive possession of the Bosphorus is, perhaps, of much more consequence to Russia. (...) The spirit of war once let loose, Russia ought only to follow a Russian policy. Her interests are paramount to the interests of the West.

Neither Christianity nor the further progress and development of the human race can be promoted by the fall of Russia, or by her being crippled and weakened. The countries surrounding her, and over which she has extended or may extend her dominion, never were her superiors in culture or civilization. She introduced order where anarchy prevailed; to others she secured prosperity. This was the case with Finland, and above all with Poland, in the South with Bessarabia, the Crimea, and the Trans-Caucasian regions; this is the case in the immensities of Asia to the mouth of the Amoor, to the northern and Pacific shores. The existence, the strength of Russia, are one of the conditions and agencies of civilization. Take away the dominion of Russia, Poland will fall back into a state of traditional anarchy, and become covered with rags. Bessarabia, the Crimea, cultivated now, will bristle with Bohemians, with unruly Tartars, with idlers, marauders and robbers. In Georgia blood will flow daily—Christian blood shed by Mohammedan invaders. Asia will again become a waste, a beehive of vagrants, killing and destroying each other. Instead of towns and villages, camps and wagons of nomads will cover her, weeds will grow on furrows now opened for cultivation.

¹⁰ John Jordan Crittenden (1787-1863), politician from Kentucky in the House of Representatives and the Senate; Governor of Kentucky 1848–1850; Attorney General 1841, 1850-1853.

Thus prepared and armed Russia meets the new year. Russia cannot fall! The genius of history, the future of a race, stand at her side (107-109).

RUSSIA AS IT IS¹¹

I was among the first who gave to the conception of Panslavism a scientific and historical explanation, searching therein for a clew¹² to the apparently savage and aggressive expansion of Russia. If I have changed my point of view concerning the mode by which Panslavism is to fulfil its destinies, my convictions are not at all changed as to the essential signification of the Slavi and of Russia in the great family of nations. Once I thought that autocracy would be the great and luminous beacon in this movement; this I no longer believe. In this consists the change of my convictions, and this I am about to explain.(...)

In my youth with other patriots, I took an active part in the affairs of Poland, the country of my birth. After I had been for several years the object of violent individual persecutions, by our joint efforts was effected the insurrection of 1830-'31, during which I tried to establish the republican government, and whose disastrous end threw me upon the world a condemned exile. Years of wandering were spent in Europe and principally in Paris. I had thus an opportunity to mingle on a large scale with ideas of every shade, and men of all opinions; to observe and judge various events, and to devote my time to social and historical studies. A revolution in my mind was effected. Analyzing with conscientious scrutiny the causes of the political death of Poland, I lost the faith in any possibility of her resurrection. The destiny of the Slavic race, dawning now on the horizon, could not depend on one of its feeblest, withered and destroyed branches. Russia alone represented the Slavic vitality in the moving complications of Europe and of the Western world. Among the various reasons of the destruction of Poland, the most deleterious¹³ was, the utter want for centuries of any centralizing idea, of any organized and directing power. Russia's growth was the result of the existence of such an influence. At that time not only political theoreticians, but new systems aiming to reform society in its foundations, as for example that of the St. Simonians, whose conceptions I studied and shared; all of them established as an axiom that society ought to be directed by a supreme will embodied in one individual, ruling or inspiring the rest. Thus sprang up in my mind the fallacious belief shared with many others, that an energetic concentration of power was an absolute necessity for the existence, the development and progress of society at large as well as for single nations. According to such a notion, civilization was to be spread from above, and the more a nation was behind-hand, the greater the need of such a supreme leader. All the political as well as social schools

¹¹ Selected passages from: A. Gurowski, *Russia as It Is* (New York: D. Appleton & Co, 1854). All further references in the parentheses correspond to the page numbers of this edition.

¹² I.e., clue.

¹³ I.e., detrimental.

resounded with expositions about the necessity of organization, to be obtained by the unity of direction. The more my mind was overpowered by such ideas, the deeper I felt the curse of the existence of an exile, rootless on a foreign soil; a dejection so admirably described by Ballanche, who says that “man has not the choice of his fatherland; but if he exiles himself to avoid living under institutions disliked by him, then he remains without a tie, he is a stranger on earth.” The devotion and interest felt for my ancient country became wholly superseded by my interest for the whole race, of which Poland was, after all, rather an insignificant offshoot.

For the last thirty years all general historical studies, as well as the philosophical comprehension of history, were directed to elucidate the character of various races, and their bearing on the affairs of the world. To the distinct characteristics of whole races which of old took possession of Europe, rather than to single nations, were traced all great historical events and the progressive evolutions of civilization. Thus originated those generalizations introduced in the philosophy of history, as that for example of German civilization, which framed out the whole political and intellectual state of Europe after the downfall of the Roman world. By birth a Slavi, I looked around to see where was alive the powerful trunk of my race, and found that Russia alone represented it. Thus originated with me the idea of Panslavism. Its signification is the union of disseminated Slavic families—some of whom vegetate miserably under the foreign dominion of the Magyars, Turks and Germans, into a homogeneous whole, around one mighty stock. Panslavism does not aim to give laws to Western Europe, but only not to receive any from her, or from Ouralian invaders.

The study of, and devotion to the great truths revealed by Fourier, nay, his personal advice, influenced powerfully my decision. Whoever has read his works, knows how repeatedly Fourier points to Russia and even to a Czar, as to the means of the speediest realization of the theory of association. And thus I went to Russia and to the Czar.

At that moment the Emperor Nicholas shone with the light of an autocrat, kindling the beacon of civilization. He proclaimed his wish to evolve it from the national Slavic genius. To such a focus converged all the aspirations of the Slavi, from the Elba, the Danube, the Carpathian and the Balkan Mountains. With many others, I was dazzled by the apparent brilliancy of the aim, and became conscientiously a believer in the lofty and providential calling of Czarism. For several years I was in a position to observe its nature, its action, and how far it could fulfil the mission which in my ardent imagination and wishes I assigned to this supreme, this almost superhuman power. Penetrating, however, more deeply, not only into the nature of the man, but into that of the institution itself, my enthusiasm began to cool. Still I strained my reason to hold out, hoping for the best. One by one the scales fell from my eyes, and finally I violently, broke the voluntary chain, retook the staff of the exile, and with it my liberty (VIII-XII).

A homeless wanderer over the world, I reached America. Here my once youthful aspirations were reinvigorated. I found a partial realization of that for which as yet Europe

vainly craves. From these shores I cast a glance on the past, on the rockings of the European world, and on the destinies of the race from which I descended, on those of the country abandoned forever.

The social organization, the institutions of America, raise her into the higher regions of humanity. How long will it be before Europe follows in the wake of her younger sister? (...) The present book aims to show how in the future, the Slavi may harmonize with the eternal laws of nature and the general destinies of mankind. (XIII-XIV)

The despotic, all-devouring and absorbing creed which we have called Czarism, is thus a simple result of time and of events. But such results, whatever be their strength, however deep their roots, or however great their duration, are finally undone, dissolved, destroyed by the same elements, by the same agencies which raised them. Time evokes new elements of activity and a new range of events; some of them springing from its own existence, will carry Czarism away with irresistible force into the eternal abyss. The question is, when its knell will sound?¹⁴ (43)

The communal organization¹⁵ is deeply intertwined in the social life of all classes of the Russian people. All its artificial subdivisions, nay, the differences of descent and race, unite on a general and common social ground, that of communal institutions (226).

Restricted, cramped now, and denationalized, the commune will reconquer its normal growth and vitality, when the Russian soil shall become moved and turned over by the fructifying share of revolution (232).

Whatever may be the future revolution of Russia, it will bear a mark of its own, as does everything connected with this people (234).

The emancipation of Russia is an absolute condition of the emancipation of Europe, and thus of the future harmonious and progressive activity of the European or Christian world.

¹⁴ I.e., when will the summons be given?

¹⁵ *Obshchina* (Russian: *община*) or *Mir* (Russian: *мир*), peasant village communities in Russia in 19th century, where peasants held their land in communal ownership.

(...) Slavic race must participate more generally in the European movement than it does now, being represented there by partial and weak and insignificant branches. Without its adhesion, the universal wheelwork can never turn with ease and security. Russia alone cannot only facilitate but decide the peaceful union of the whole race (239).

In Russia the social upheaving will come from below. The real people will rise, stirred up, awakened by the consciousness of their imprescriptible rights. They will act for themselves. The revolution will be at once social and not merely political. There will be no class to turn the common efforts to its own especial benefit, and there will not appear those locust-like swarms of old respectabilities, political speculators,—that curse of European revolutions. The people, the mass, will find and give its sacramental word, it will find the solution for all emergencies. In Russia neither the people, nor even any class now above it, are entangled in, encumbered with any social or political formulas. This is one of the boons for the future, derived from the now all-crushing, all-levelling, all-stifling and destroying despotism. Common original reason will be enabled to act freely. The Russian, unacquainted with any political systems or theories of foreign growth or elucubration,¹⁶ will not lose time and generations in experimental essays of application. (...)

This social commotion will crush to atoms the artificial structure now pressing on the people; despotism, privilege, Czar and nobility will be overrun by the same destructive lava; and with them will disappear their accessories. Nothing will be done by halves, that mode being repulsive to the national character, and nowhere known in the history of Russia.

The people and its communal organism will alone remain standing, when everything else is prostrated, pulverized. This primitive organism will cement and keep together the new self-unfolding society. (...)

The revolution will not begin in cities, but in the country, resembling that now going on in China;¹⁷ the flag of emancipation will be raised by the strong hands of the peasantry. Thus again will take place the reverse of what generally occurs in Europe. An efficacious revolution in Russia must originate in rural districts, in villages among the serfs; and there alone it will originate (242-244).

MANIFEST DESTINY¹⁸

¹⁶ I.e., prolonged concoction.

¹⁷ Taiping Rebellion, millenarian movement and rebellion of the people against the ruling Manchu Qing dynasty in southern China in 1851-1864 which caused civil war.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

This Slavic and Russian colossus solders Northern and Central Asia with Europe; it is a channel to convey in the future, an easy, peaceable intercourse, furthering the final ends of civilization. (...)

Manifest destiny of a nation, a lift of the curtain veiling its future! This axiom, bearing on the present and future, and not merely an explanation of a past: an axiom for life and not for the definition of bygone historical relics; was for the first time boldly uttered by the great vivid spirit of democratic America! (252-253)

The great, harmonious combination of aims and tendencies in which consists the future, can alone be realized in liberty, based on equality; in one word, in a real, genuine democracy. Thus it is a manifest destiny, that democracies are to spread and form an electric chain over all regions where European, Christian civilization is already implanted. Then only will brutal force begin successively to disappear, and peace and order, right and justice to prevail (259).

Fraternity and solidarity are ideas already sinking deeper and deeper into the consciousness of the people, and the time must come when they will be established social facts; their advent is the manifest destiny of humanity.

The destinies of the European world are not limited to that part of the globe, but have already received a signal manifestation in America, the historical offspring of Europe, and the loftiest social application of the European—the Christian idea.(...)

The Russian people are now in this isolated position; if therefore a purer light is to beam over the West, and evoke there a new and fresh life, the Russians and Slavi must likewise be penetrated and warmed by its rays.

It has become very common of late to compare the growth of America with that of Russia; to look for a similitude in their development and progress; and finally, to divide the future of the two hemispheres between these two ascending states (260-261).

America is the light, and Russia the darkness; the one is life, the other inertia, depending on the will of one. Russia is saddled by despotism, that old inheritance of the East and of heathenism; America initiates history and humanity into a new era—which a century ago was looked on as an Utopia—constructing a social order on the foundations of equality and liberty, realizing in a broad manner the sole principle of social truth. The one raises the broken-down, the degraded by oppression and misery, restoring to him the enjoyment of right and the dignity of man; the other, if she does not introduce slavery and serfdom in her conquests, subjects them to an all-crushing, all-levelling despotism; both being accursed twin brothers. In America real progress rules; in Russia there prevails a sham-imitation of progress (262).

In America the individuality of every one is raised to the dignity of social truth; in Russia individuality is a fault, sometimes a crime. Every thing is implanted artificially, or as the result of brute force. In Russia, a sickly unreality, resulting from convulsive efforts of despotism, compresses the inward national vitality; in America, reason shoots off freely in all practicable radii, everything rises, grows, and unfolds itself, germinating from an inborn, vital force. In Russia, as yet, one absorbs in himself the life, the activity of the whole nation; in America, everyone and all act and live according to their own will, propensities, and impulses. In Russia, the government is the soul and the life, it is the exclusive medium for the respiration of millions; in America, there exists nowhere a government according to the ancient meaning of this word. It is an association of freemen, cemented by the principle of equality. (...) In Russia, the sword of Damocles is suspended over the Czar, as well as over the whole social order; every new day of the existence of America is brighter than the past one, is marked by a material as well as by a social and moral improvement and ascension. There we see a master or driver of millions; here millions of independent, intellectual, freely-moving beings. Here the legislator is the people; there the law is the result of the will of one, often of his whim. In the self-consciousness, in the self-reliance of each individual, is founded the greatness of America; in Russia an order from the government is the only life-inspiring agency (264-265).

America is thickly thronged with humanity; Russia is as yet peopled by docile tools (266).

America's manifest destiny, as felt and proclaimed by her people, is to extend around her the reinvigorating institutions of which she is the focus; to teach and implant farther and farther the principle of self-government with the free and alone supreme action of law; in one word to continue the work of the emancipation of man, restoring him every where to his inborn rights and dignity. (...) America should attract by the power of example,—and, daily extending the gulf which separates her from the past, she should no more recur to, or use, violence and invasion as means of propaganda. If unprovoked, America ought for ever to renounce brutal force (267).

Russia represents an ancient historical and social element, still prevailing in the territorial divisions, in the formation of states, in one word in the whole national economy of the old world; that is, as before stated, the element of race. Russia moves on the old track,

and her destinies—whatever they may be—must run and be partly, at least, fulfilled under the pressure of the imperious laws of warlike force. Slavic and Russian destinies point towards Asia, to the East. For their realization Russia will be obliged to appeal to the old law of force; but in her future relations with the West, Russia, emancipated from despotism, must contribute to fix the emancipation of Europe on a firm and civilized basis (268).

The Slavi and the Russians are now in darkness, and under the freezing action of despotism and caste: but the nations of western Europe were for centuries troddon down by kings, priests and nobles, and how far even now are they emancipated? (269)

In Russia despotism is preparing, nay, facilitating the ways for a new era. The stronger the compression, the more vigorous will be the reaction, as in fountains the height of the jet is regulated by the volume and the pressure of the water. (...)

Having re-established the true balance in Europe, the Slavic and Russian current will undoubtedly turn towards Asia. There, in those vast spaces, is the immense field opening for their action. And no other nation or race can fulfil this mission (270).

Ideas are propagated by land; contiguous races, even if differing in civilization, have a certain similarity of habits and notions, which, fostered by the facility of contact in peace or war, and by other physical circumstances, such, for instance, as navigable rivers and open plains, act as so many connecting links between the adjoining races. And so are the Russians with all the Asiatics. Tartary, Thibet, Mongolia, the snowy northern regions of Asia deserve as much a human, European, civilizing solicitude as Asia Minor, India, parts of America, or any other spot whatever on the globe (271).

Whatever may be at present the black stains on Russia, neither its government nor its people are laboring under the inhuman and heinous prejudice against any difference of race, against any variety of shape or color in the human family. Descendants of Calmucks and Tartars count among the Russian *Knaizia* or Princes; Pouschkine, the greatest Russian poet, had African blood in his veins from the maternal side, and spoke of it with pride. Already in contact with various Asiatic tribes, the Russian does not dispossess them—either by law or by violence (...). The Russian neither exterminates nor transforms into bondsmen, serfs or slaves, any conquered people. The change of form, the transition from despotism to liberty, can neither alter nor endanger the real destinies of Russia and the Slavi (271-272).

Very likely Czarism may fulfil this work. But Czar and Czarism are tools used by the genius of history, who will break and shatter them after their task shall have been done. In the foregoing drama the Czar, wrapped in his toga of despotism, is after all an agent of the national tendencies. He hews out the path for the future, loading on his shoulders the malediction of the moment, and is thus the sin-offering of the nation. In the present imminent crisis, as in several past ones, history, which is seldom anomalous or commits errors, stands opposite to the sympathies and to the excited feelings of the moment. Generous, and to a certain extent seemingly well-deserved wishes, surround the fate of the Turks (275).

The conquest of Constantinople will be the satisfaction of an old—and in the feelings not only of the Russians but of all the southern Slavi, of a pious—covetousness (278).

For Russia, for the present or any future Czar, the complication will really begin with the possession of Constantinople and its Turkish dependencies. The destinies of the nation, of Czarism, and of Europe, will then enter a new phasis (279).

The annexation of Turkey, and the possession of Constantinople, will influence the destinies of the Russian people in a manner directly opposed to that in which it must affect the autocracy. Constantinople will become a mighty opening valve for Russia, a channel connecting and uniting her, really for the first time, with the European nations. A great mart¹⁹ will be opened, not only for the exchange of goods but likewise for that of ideas. Through Constantinople the Russian people will mix freely, not only with the few foreign merchants and speculators visiting or established in St. Petersburg, but with the world at large. This broad opening for commerce will, like a pioneer, carve the way for other and more bright results. Nowhere will commerce prove to such an extent a mediator of civilization, as when Constantinople shall initiate the Russian people to the trade of the world (284).

¹⁹ I.e., a great market.

Constantinople will prove an immense gate, not only opening to Europe, but to all the world. In St. Petersburg despotism, with its vast civil and military mechanism, stands day and night a watchful and menacing sentinel to intercept every breath of air which may impart a moral contagion. No such quarantine can possibly be established on the Hellespont, and no police can maintain there its impervious nets. Western ideas and culture will make their way, and irresistibly stimulate the whole empire. What is now benumbed will be raised to elasticity and to cosmopolite intercourse. Odessa is already one of the most liberal and facile spots in Russia, where despotism is felt less painfully. Intercourse on a large scale with other nations will result, and the Russian, the man of the people, will no more be kept, as now, isolated from his brethren (285).

The nation will thus rise to the level, feel the impulses, claim the advancing rights of civilized humanity, and share in the ebb and flow of the European social tide. Through this Hellespontic gate way the people shall enter the scene of the world, and no longer be represented there by the autocracy and its hirelings (286).

It will become a galvanic spark, applied to the combustible and explosive elements, accumulated in Russia for centuries. Whatever may be the ambitious purpose of the Czars, and their hostility to the triumph of the principles of liberty and democracy, the enterprise set on foot against the world's welfare will turn against them. Emancipation and the destruction of autocracy will rise from the dreaded conflagration (287).

THE POLITICAL TESTAMENT OF PETER THE GREAT²⁰

Throwing a glance on the continual expanse of Russia, on all points of her extensive frontiers, witnessing the arrogant manner with which she comes forth in her recent attack on Turkey, considering the haughty attitude assumed by the Czar in the affairs of the world, one easily is inclined to perceive or to try to detect in this mounting tide of Russian ascendancy, deeply laid schemes for enslaving at least the ancient hemisphere. It is not only supposed, but positively asserted that this world-embracing activity is the fulfilment of a hereditary legacy inspiring and directing the wide-spread actions of one Czar after another. Thus at present Russian horses quench their thirst in the Danube, Russia incites, as it is said, her nominal vassal the Khan of Persia, to attack Herat, and form a Russian vanguard towards Afghanistan, and in due time towards the British possessions. Russian steamers disturb the waters of the Lake Aral, navigate the Oxus and Jaxartes, and it is rumored that armed corps are ready to land towards Khiva, Bokhara, Khokand; Russian Engineers survey the table-land between Altai and Thibet, and raise

²⁰ Apocryphal so-called Testament of Peter the Great, as the program of Russian policy of expansion and universal dominion, was used by the French anti-Russian propaganda from beginning of 19th century.

forts along the skirts of the salt lakes of the grand steppe of Tartary; Russian armed battalions and Cossacks gather along the frontier of China, menacing on the west the little Bucharia, and Mantchouria on the northeast; Russian fleets begin to appear in the Pacific, and the flag with the two-headed eagle will soon make its appearance among the diplomats in the Sandwich Islands; Russian colonists and merchants navigate from Ochotsk, Kamtschatka or Sitka down to the shores of Japan, founding cities on the Ainos on the edge of the Mantchou-land. From the Euxine to the Pacific opposite to Yesso, extends an uninterrupted chain of armed vanguards, forerunners of a storm ready to hurl on the more conspicuous points of this immeasurable line (302-303).

AMERICA AND EUROPE²¹

And if there is an absolute historical law, revealed by the uninterrupted labor of the human race, by its struggles with nature and with itself, by the bloody as well as the luminous pages which fill history, by the efforts for ameliorating the moral and material state wherein consists civilization, by the religious and philosophical speculations enkindled in the succession of ages, by the multifarious manifestations of the human spirit in literature, in refinement, in arts, in industrial, mechanical, and agricultural pursuits—it is the law of the successive appearance of races and nations in the course of history. It is the law of transmission from one to another of the sacred fire of civilization; it is the succession of nations to each other on the foreground of the events of ages. Not simultaneously in all places, and by all races and nations, but in succession is civilization to be elaborated (3-4).

Paleontology teaches that in the animal kingdom, genera and families disappear after having fulfilled their time, or become transmuted and further developed in others, called more perfect. The so-called monsters of the antediluvial world were as perfect in the condition of their existence, as can be the actual living animals, created among different vegetations, a different state of the earth-crust, different combinations of air, gases, atmosphere, and the thereby stimulated productivity of the soil. Animals of the last creation, man included, would have been unable to live when our planet was in the Jurassic or even diluvial condition. The animals of every kind belonging to those by gone epochs, were as perfect in their way as the conditions of life and existence required and allowed. An animal world disappeared in revolutions of the globe, revolutions covering it with new strata, and fostering new creations.

The present animal kingdom is subject to the same absolute conditions, but modified or adapted to new combinations, appropriate and adapted to the so-called higher

²¹ Selected passages from: A. Gurowski, *America and Europe* (New York: D. Appleton & Co, 1857). All further references in the parentheses correspond to the page numbers of this edition.

forms and functions. And so it is, in a higher philosophical appreciation, with races, nations, and even individual families. Their work done, or transmitted to successors, they retire into the background,—or even, above all the so-called historical families—they die out. New ones succeed them in the ascension of an infinite spiral. During the periods of their vital activity those races, nations and individual families, answered fully to given and existing conditions, and in given epochs they constituted the acme of general life. For right and for wrong, even dynasties and families embodied, influenced and directed human events during long spaces of time. Now the race enters a new era. The actors of the past disappeared and disappear from the worlds stage, in accordance with the same laws that ruled the disappearance of the animal creations of the antediluvian world.

The aspirations for freedom, the struggles for social equality, and even for democratic organization, were familiar to other races as well as the Indo-European or Germans, and fill the history of the past as they do that of the present. The Hebrews belonging to the Semitic or Aramaic stock, represent the most ancient republican and democratic society, with Jehovah for president, and judges for administrators. No social privilege or distinction prevailed among the tribes, excepting that one derived from religious functions, as in the tribe of Levi (11-12).

Nations, like individuals, have destinies to fulfil. Seldom individuals, however, as well as nations, have had a clear comprehension of the task allotted to them. Only when their course was run could it be said—that their destinies were ascertained (230).

Expand civilization, extend culture and industry, stimulate intelligent activity all over the continent, and utilize its various and almost inexhaustible resources, together with the extension of those institutions to which the Americans owe their greatness, prosperity, and rapid progress, owe their lofty position among the nations of the earth; all this is a simple and natural revelation and development of the American destinies (235).

America as a nation is so situated that her extension, even if aimed at indefinitely, can be accomplished more easily by peace than by aggression. The band of the federation is limitlessly elastic. To it gravitates—at present it may be imperceptibly the North and the South—Canada as well as the republics of Central America. That the result of such union will be the successive disappearance and dissolution of the creole race in its own shiftlessness, is almost indubitable²² (253).

²² I.e., indisputably clear.

European powers, as well as European nations, daily and daily more clearly understand, that the prosperity of that hemisphere increases with the preponderating influence of North America. (...) The free North Americans are alone born to start, to create, to organize and direct new communities, and thus to facilitate the efforts of Europeans. They alone possess the required self-consciousness and energy, and above all the inborn faculty of social organization. By the extension of American freedom Europe becomes benefited, and new and prosperous marts are opened as outlets for her industry. War will not therefore prevent the progress of America, and is not necessary to forward the fulfilment of her manifest destiny (256-257).

American nationality has two hearth-stones—democracy and self-government. The origin of all other nations and states, past or present, was different from that of the American commonwealth. America was evolved from a fruitful social element and principle. (...) And so to the present day, whatever may have been the changes and modifications, European society, like that of the ancient world, is composed of three principal elements. The one, which under different names rules and legislates; the second, which shares in the power, in the spoils, prominently executes the laws, defends, fights and upholds the privileged state; the third, on whose shoulders reposes and presses the whole structure.

Not one of these elements existed at the outset of American communities. No hero or chief, implanting his sword or banner, marked out around the foundations of the city the boundaries of an empire. No submissive companions or subjects were the pillars of the genuine American structure, nor was it cemented by any authoritative will. Democracy was the vital essence of this new society, and democracy was cradled and nursed by the combination of events which brought it into existence. And not one of the facts, axioms and theorems, which for ages ruled the old world, had any bearing on the new one (76-77).

The first commune or village was composed of equals, socially and politically. From such a germ the whole society was developed. No masters nor lords obliged others to work for them and obey. Neither the functions in the community, nor the economic occupations, pursuits, labors, separated its members into different classes or stamped them with inferiority or superiority. All were equally necessary, useful, and therefore honorable; pulpit, office, trade, artisan, workman, daily laborer, were equal, closely interwoven and connected with each other (78).

European democracy, in order to breathe freely, to come to daylight, to acquire and enjoy rights, was of old, in Greece or Rome, as well as in modern times, forced to uplift, to pierce and break through a thick and heavy social crust pressing over it. European democracy must question, attack, break down and destroy her masters and oppressors, whatever their name, or their influence. So it was of old, so it is now. The space, the soil, as well as the moral convictions have been and are occupied by the enemies of her existence, of her principles. Democracy to get air must necessarily destroy the superincumbent structures, clear away the rubbish, and thus only is she enabled to act freely, and to generate a new social organism. Thus European democracy is absolutely, exclusively militant in idea, in conception and in action; in order to be, she must be aggressive, or she is nothing. Imperatively, she must be born in revolutions. Her present existence and action is a whirlwind. She has no clear insight, no clear conception of the future. Destruction of what exists, what presses upon her, what crowds her out of life, is and can only be her fixed purpose. The actual European democracy can only prepare the soil for the future; but what structure, what social form shall become inaugurated, is an enigma to be solved by time.

In America the democratic elements are normal, and no other ever existed or exist now in society. American democracy was not born from a social struggle; it is the growth of an original social germination. In America a man is born a democrat, and from childhood breathes democratic air and sucks in invigorating, constructive democratic ideas. In Europe democracy must be taught to the people; from a theory it must be transformed into a fact (82-83).

As has been already stated, American democracy was not born amidst the convulsions of a social struggle; she came neither violently, nor painfully and laboriously to life, amidst the death rattle of castes, social classes, or political parties, warring for opposite and deadly antagonistic interests. The conditions of its political and social existence and activity do not depend on the violent depression or subjugation of an irreconcilable social enemy. The European political writers and statesmen seem not clearly to comprehend this primordial character of American democracy (84).

American society cannot move in the circle to which philosophers have hitherto limited the destinies of the race. Whether Hobbes or De Maistre, Bossuet or Vico, Herder, Lessing, Rousseau, or Haller, Ballanche, Hegel, or Comte, they have all seen only this circular orbit, and assigned to the course of society in its mental, moral, and political march, the same or similar phases for the future. Authority under various manifestations or characters, but always the authority of one, be it patriarch or king, lawgiver or hierophant, is said to have been the starting point, and whatever forms society may have successively run through and lived, it is to return to absolute or modified, but always

to a superior authority, or by decay and anarchy, even to despotism. American society, the American nation was neither engendered nor brought into action by the authority, by the influence of a supreme moral, mental, or political leader; it is the offspring of a principle. Admitting therefore even the value of the established axioms, they cannot be applied to America—and she is not to run out into monarchy, anarchy, and despotism. Sociology, with all its various theorems, is at fault, and America does not adjust itself to its frames. All societies began in a synthesis, religious, mental, philosophical, as well as in a social or political unity or authority; and after traversing various phases of activity and development, they run out into the epoch of analysis, subdivision, research, science, and criticism. America, religiously or philosophically considered, is the creation of analysis, and accordingly of that phasis in which other societies have terminated; politically and socially, America personifies the combination of free individuality with association, in a self-conscious democracy—a combination hitherto unknown in the history of nations. The problem before America is therefore different from those which other societies had to solve. She has therefore emphatically to reconstruct a new and higher synthesis, out of the negation, criticism, and analysis, which generated and gave her birth. America, it may be, is destined to lead the ascension on the spiral, and by her example relieve society from the vicious circle in which it has hitherto been imprisoned. And as in the dialectic process, a lower, inferior term dissolves in one of a higher and more general order; of the same ascending character ought to be the solutions which are evolved from the social existence and functions of a genuine democracy. The present state of America is considered an experimental one. Be it so. To a successful experiment succeeds generalization (125-126).

SLAVERY IN HISTORY (AND IN UNITED STATES)²³

Human institutions experience ups and downs—they have their luminous and their gloomy epochs. Ignorant and debased masses throw a shadow over universal suffrage and self-government; and only genuine freedom goes hand in hand with reason, knowledge and morality. These, too, mutually reproduce each other. It is, therefore, easy to be understood how freedom disappears from the Slave South, and is no more cherished or believed in.

Many consider the American institution of self-government as a new experiment; and European serviles and American slave oligarchs utter fearful forebodings that the experiment is already a failure. But the prophecy only expresses their desires. For this so-called experiment is but the natural, progressive development of man, and for this reason proves itself every day more and more successful in the Free States. The kingdoms and nations of the old world are now diligently studying this experiment of freedom, and

²³ Selected passages from: A. Gurowski, *Slavery in History* (New York: A. B. Burdick, 1860). All further references in the parentheses correspond to the page numbers of this edition.

trying to appropriate its beneficent results. Agents of European governments uninterruptedly investigate the system of free communal schools, the manufactures, the inventions, the multifarious industrial and agricultural progress of the Free States. But no government sends its messengers to study out the condition of slave plantations, slave huts, or slave pens; for they know well that by the action of self-government and universal suffrage, qualitative and quantitative knowledge is more generally spread, and has reached a far higher grade in the American Free States than among all the militant oligarchs and knight-errants of slavery the world over.

An experiment generally proves successful if made with properly adapted and unadulterated materials. A structure raised on a treacherous foundation and built with rotten materials must fall. It is an experiment altogether new to the human race to construct a society and government with chattelhood²⁴ as an integral element. It is an experiment to attempt to bring down horrified humanity on its knees to the worship of chattelhood and the devilish slave traffic. Such an experiment is now being tried by the apostles of slavery; and that too, though morality, civilization and history have unanimously and forever pronounced the sentence of condemnation against holding property in man. The civilized and Christian world of both hemispheres and every race unanimously awarded to John Brown²⁵ the crown of a martyr, who fell in the cause of human liberty.

One deviation from a sound social principle is speedily followed by another; violence ever begets violence; and this is the fatal genesis of all oppressions and tyrannies. The oligarchic despotism in the Slave States runs rapidly through all the stages with which individual despotism has filled the dark records of history. It has already succeeded in the suppression of free speech and even free thought, violation of seal, censorship of the press, and the centring of political control in the hands of officials and lacqueys. If individual tyrants dispatch their victims by special executioners, lynch law and mob law—although often executed by misguided “poor whites”—are as lawless as the murders of the tyrant, and bear a striking analogy to the executions perpetrated by agents or court-martials. Despotism drills the masses in all kinds of degradation: thus a part of the population of the Slave States is drilled in ignorance by the slaveholders, and blindly perpetrate their murderous biddings. To these deluded men who execute the bloody behests of the tyrant, the words of the Christ on Calvary apply: “Forgive them; *for they know not what they do.*”

A society based on a violation of cardinal human rights can never be considered free. Freemen are never governed by violent passions. Injustice and tyranny cannot recede; they divorce themselves from mercy, and are guilty of the most remorseless actions: thus fatally, of late, the gallows was once more ennobled. Executions and burning at the stake, amid the applaudings of the ignorant and the infuriated, are nothing new in history; and neither is the transmission of the names of the murderers to the maledictions of eternity.

²⁴ I.e., slavery.

²⁵ John Brown (1800-1859), a white American abolitionist who organized the armed insurrection against institution of slavery in U.S. 1859, sentenced for death by hanging.

Human society will perhaps always be subject, in one shape or another, to wrongs and disorders: but humanity specially revolts at the hideous wrongs which now exist, such as the claim of property in man, and the traffic in man. As long as this claim is found on the legal record, as long as slavery exists as a common fact, futile will be all efforts to stifle the voice of freedom, to crush into oblivion the question of, slavery, or to expel it from the chambers of legislation or the tribunals of the people. It will and must ever reappear on the surface:—as in bodily disorders, when the virus has eaten its way into the innermost organism, external eruptions may be locally, healed or closed up, but again they reappear on another spot, or attack another organ, until a radical cure relieves the body from the poison. Until utterly destroyed, slavery will always be paramount to all other political questions, to all political complications, and it will forever force its way into them all. To a greater or less degree, diseases assume the characteristics of a prevailing epidemic. When several diseases are complicated together, the physician first attempts to cure the most virulent and dangerous. This question of slavery must have a solution; and it is in vain that the weak-minded deny the existence of the devouring disorder, or attempt to conjure it with paltry expedients.

Humanity would gratefully applaud even an intermediate step from absolute chattelhood toward emancipation, or any public measure foreshadowing an intention on the part of the slaveholding States to become humane. First of all, let them recognize in the bondman the sacred, imprescriptible, natural rights of man and of family; then let them abandon the slave traffic, and thus avoid separation of man and wife, of parent and child. Even the transformation of the slaves into serfs, into *adscripti glebae*,²⁶ would be an alleviation, and a cheering sign of progress (255-259).

DIARY 1861-1865 (FROM CIVIL WAR)

MAY 1861²⁷

(...) Americans will find out how absolute are the laws of history, as stern and as positive as all the other laws of nature. To me it is clear that one phasis of American political growth, development, &c., is gone, is finished. It is the phasis of the Union as created by the Constitution. This war—war it will be, and a terrible one, notwithstanding all the prophecies of Mr. Seward²⁸ to the contrary—this war will generate new social and constitutional necessities and new formulas. New conceptions and new passions will spring up; in one word, it will bring forth new social, physical, and moral creations: so we are in the period of gestation.

Democracy, the true, the noble, that which constitutes the signification of America in the progress of our race—democracy will not be destroyed. All the inveterate enemies here and in Europe, all who already joyously sing the funeral songs of democracy, all of them will become disgraced. Democracy will emerge more pure, more powerful, more

²⁶ *Glebae adscripti*—adscript of the soil, when laborer could be sold or transferred only with it.

²⁷ Selected passage from: A. Gurowski, *Diary from March 4, 1861 to November 12, 1862* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1862).

²⁸ William Henry Seward (1801-1872), Secretary of State (1861-1869).

rational; destroyed will be the most infamous oligarchy ever known in history; oligarchy issued neither from the sword, nor the gown, nor the shop, but wombed, generated, cemented, and sustained by traffic in man (38-39).

JANUARY 24TH 1863²⁹

(...) The Africo-Americans ought to receive military organization and be armed.³⁰ But it ought to be done instantly and without loss of time; it ought to be done earnestly, boldly, broadly; it ought to be done at once on all points and on the largest scale; it ought to be done here in Washington, under the eyes of the chief of the people; here in the heart of the country; here, so to speak, in the face of slave-breeding Virginia, this most intense focus of treason; it ought to be done here, that the loyal freemen of Virginia's soil be enabled to fight and crush (...) the progeny of hell; it ought to be done here on every inch of soil covered with shattered shackles; and not partially on the outskirts, in the Carolinas and Louisiana. Stanton,³¹ alone, and Welles among the helmsmen, are so inspired; but alas, for the rest of the crew.

On the flags of the Africo-Americans under my command, I shall inscribe: *Hic niger est! hunc tu (rebel) caveto!*³² I shall inculcate³³ upon my men that they had better not make prisoners in the battle, and not allow themselves to be taken alive (104-105).

JANUARY 27

The military organization of Africo-Americans is a powerful social and military engine by which slavery, secession, rebellion, and all other dark and criminal Northern and Southern excrescences can be crushed and pulverized to atoms, and this in a trice. But as is the case with all other powerful and explosive gases, elements, forces, etc. this mighty element put in the hands of the Administration must be handled resolutely, and with unquivering hands and intellect; otherwise the explosion may turn out useless for the country and for humanity. At present the indications are very small that the administration has a decided, clear comprehension how to use this accession of loyal forces on a large scale; how to bring them boldly into action in Virginia, as the heart of the rebellion. Nothing yet indicates that the administration intends to arm and equip Africo-Americans here under the eyes of the government. Nothing indicates that it intends to do this avowedly and openly, and thereby terrify and strike the proud slave-breeders (...) of Virginia, in the heart of treason, and do it by their own once chattels,³⁴ now their betters (113).

²⁹ Selected passages from: A. Gurowski, *Diary from November 18, 1862 to October 18, 1863* (New York: Carleton, 1864). All further references in the parentheses correspond to the page numbers of this edition.

³⁰ U.S. Congress passed two acts allowing for the forming of African Americans troops on July 17, 1862, but official enrollment was possible only after the "Emancipation Proclamation" in January 1863.

³¹ Edwin M. Stanton (1814-1869), Secretary of War (1862-1868).

³² Source: Horace, *Satires*, Latin: *Hic niger est, hunc tu, Romane, caveto!* ("This man is black, you, Romans, beware of him").

³³ I.e., impress, implant the idea in the minds of his men.

³⁴ I.e., slaves.

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Wrote a letter to Stanton with the following suggestions for the organization of a large and efficacious force, nay, army, from the Africo-Americans.

1. It may be possible—even probable—on account of inveterate prejudices and stupidity, that an Africo-American regiment may be left unsupported during a battle.

2. It would be therefore more available to organize such a force at once on a large scale, so as to be able to have strong brigades, and even divisions. At the head of six to eight thousand men, resistance is possible for several hours if the enemy out-numbers not in too great proportions—four or five to one, and if the terrain is not altogether against the smaller force.

3. The Africo-Americans ought to be formed, drilled and armed principally with the view to constitute light infantry—and, if possible, light cavalry—but above all, for a set fight. (...)

5. In the case of the arsenals not having the requisite number of fire-arms, I would have the third line armed with scythes³⁵. As a Pole, I am familiar with that really terrible weapon (115-117).

Selection by Henryk Głębocki

³⁵ During Thaddeus Kościuszko uprising in Poland (1794) as well as other Polish insurrections against Russia, due to difficulties with providing sufficient armament, large troops of peasants armed with scythes were formed.

Paulina Orłowska

WAITING FOR THE KINGDOM: THE LIFE AND WORKS OF SERGIO QUINZIO

Sergio Quinzio, the 20th Century's most radical Italian religious thinker, spent almost fourteen years of his life in Isola del Piano, a small and unknown area in the region of Marche, where he lived in isolation, rejected by the local community. No inhabitants aspired to befriend this already famous literate who professed strange ideas about the Last Things, and begged for God's Kingdom to come. According to Quinzio, indeed, the faith has to be a scandal to the world. A faith the world accepts, accepts in turn the world, so that such a faith, based on the compromise with requirements of worldly living, ceases to be faith in the Kingdom and turns into antichristic faith in the world. Daniele Garota, who would later compose several essays dedicated to Quinzio's teaching, was just a youngster when, in spite of negative rumours about the writer, he decided to get to know him better, eventually becoming Quinzio's only friend in Isola del Piano. In an essay dedicated to his *maestro* Garota stated that "he made you understand that to tell something to other people is worth nothing if our life is not speaking for us."¹

¹ D. Garota, „Sergio Quinzio: testimone e maestro,” in *Sergio Quinzio: Profezie di un'esistenza*, ed. M. Iritano (Soveria Manelli: Rubbetino, 2000), 187.

THE CHILDHOOD AND THE PRIMORDIAL ORDER

Sergio Quinzio (precisely Sergio Guinzio) was born on 5 May 1927 in a small Ligurian village, Alassio. At that time Alassio was not a touristic seaside destination it has subsequently become and its population consisted of approximately five thousand inhabitants. The young Quinzio reminisced about his childhood frequently and with a dose of sentiment: "I was staring at fishermen pulling up their nets, at female fish-sellers (*le pesciare*) carrying their trolleys (...). There were some brand new things in Alassio: during the summer, twice a week, an airplane used to fly from London to Alassio."² In *The Cross and the Nothing* (*La croce e il nulla*), one of his most theoretical texts, Quinzio furnished a detailed description of his birthplace:

I was born and I grew up on the Ligurian coast. It was neither a city, nor a village. In the south, in front of me, there was the sea, and the sun passed above it from Santa Croce cape to Mele cape; behind my back, the mountains. Mules carrying wood and coal climbed down the slopes. This picture remained in me as the primordial space order. On the other side of the mountains, only a few thousand steps away, there was the anti-world: cold, humid, ugly, sad. Trips to the anti-world started early, and they represented violent amputations. A man from some ancient tribe suffered from the same amputations when he was dragged out of his village, which was built around a pole stuck as the world's axis. Although periods of absence did not last long, comebacks were comebacks to life.³

Some years later Quinzio shall describe his family as: "middle-class, calm, modest, cheerful, the one in which everything worked well."⁴ Before the war, his father, a native of Rome, served as a sergeant of the Carrabinieri, the Italian national police, and chief officer of Alassio municipal police. He did not exercise decisive influence on his son. Being a rather pragmatic person, he only reluctantly reflected on themes such as faith or existence: "My father, like many others, went to church when he was baptized, when he got married and when he was buried." Quinzio remembered him as a good and kindly person, easily moved and willing to help everyone. On the other hand, Quinzio depicted his mother, a devotee, with gratefulness and nostalgia. She lived her faith in a 19th Century manner: "One used to go to church on Sundays. Moreover, one used to confess and receive communion once a year. There was nothing more. It was a faith lived with great sobriety. The faith exists and remains. What counts is to fulfil one's duties: those of a mother, of a wife, of a son, of a scholar, of a workman and so on."⁵ Quinzio's faith, on the contrary, will be insatiable and will radically turn back to the apocalyptic character of the Christian promise of redemption.

² G. Caramore, "Una conversazione con Sergio Quinzio," in *Sergio Quinzio: Apocalittica e modernità*, ed. G. Trotta (Melzo: CENS, 1998), 163.

³ S. Quinzio, *La croce e il nulla* (Milan: Adelphi, 1984), 11.

⁴ Caramore, "Una conversazione con Sergio Quinzio," 163.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

EDUCATION AND WAR

Quinzio began his education at the age of eight at the Father Bosco's Salesian Institute in Alassio in the fourth grade of primary school. After many years, he still remembered particularly strongly the figure of father Pietro Lignetti, his teacher, who used to repeat: "We, Salesians, do not continue Father Bosco's activity. We are Father Bosco's traitors: we teach rich people's children, forcing them to pay high admission and tuition fee."⁶

Meanwhile, on the 10th of June 1940, the Fascist Italy entered the war. That day represented a *caesura* in Quinzio's life, for it divided carefree childhood from maturity: "All night long military troops moving to the Western front, to France, advanced through the village I had described as a paradisiacal place. (...) Somehow the rationality of this world was invaded by another reality."⁷

During the war, from July 1944, Quinzio experienced enemy occupation. The Nazis forced him to work in infirmary:

Once I went with a wheelbarrow to collect the cadaver of a poor devil, who, having been taken to be a partisan, was shot there (...). Another time, in San Rossore Hotel, I swept away the spread remains of a little boy, who had stepped on the balcony to watch the firework show [allusion to the bombing]. I cleaned everything (...). A young mother died hit by a shrapnel. When I came back home, my hands could not touch food.⁸

The same year Quinzio's father, still bound to the fascist regime, was arrested:

On the evening the first partisans came to Alassio, they had long beards and long hair, red scarfs around their necks, and red ribbons on machine guns. They came to take my father when it was dark outside, they broke down the door and beat him up. For over four months, every second day I rode the bike from Alassio to Savona [almost 50 km] to pay him a visit and bring him something to eat. It was a trauma to me and the whole world seemed to fall apart.⁹

Quinzio completed his education at the Salesian Institute in 1945. During all those years his school status remained that of the "outsider," as he never became a resident pupil or a member of the community.

Apart from the recreation hours in the school yard—which were what they were meant to be, that is, recreation, the suspension of a normal day—at the Alessio Institute, just like in any other Salesian Institute, (...) the atmosphere, from today's perspective, was dark rather than cheerful. Another recollection concerns the Jesuit prayer called "the exercise of the good death," which

⁶ S. Quinzio, *Domande sulla santità, Don Bosco, Cafasso, Cottolengo e gli zaddiqim* (Casale Monferrato: Sonda, 2007), 21.

⁷ Caramore, "Una conversazione con Sergio Quinzio," 163.

⁸ S. Quinzio, *Diario profetico*, 2nd ed. (Milan: Adelphi, 1996), 15.

⁹ S. Quinzio, L. Lestingi, *La tenerezza di Dio: L'ultima intervista sulla vita e sulla fede* (Rome: Castelveccchi Editore, 1997), 8.

we used to say. A boy had to imagine himself at the end of his life, at the moment of agony, and to already begin invoking the Lord's mercy for that moment, when he shall stand, with the luggage of his sins, in front of the Last Judgment which will decide upon his eternal destiny. (...) I remember exactly the continuous emphasis placed on such themes as sin, death, end of the world, judgment, eternal damnation. *Servite Domine in laetitia*? It was not that easy. (...) Of course, neither Father Bosco nor the Salesians from Alassio were theologians: they were not, in the sense that radical deepening of theology was not the goal of their lives; their whole life was consecrated to helping youngsters. But the lack of theology is always an implicit theology, and not always the best one.¹⁰

In August of the same year Quinzio's family moved to Rome. They managed to find an apartment in Simon Boccanegra Street, close to Bologna Square.¹¹ Quinzio used to stop by at the Verano Cemetery to watch the hearses: "I reflected—he recalls—upon the meaning of human life." He used to call Rome "the heap of cities" rather than a city:

There is no alley to which I am not bound by some memory, but those are recollections of moments absurdly distant one from the other: houses in different districts inhabited by different people, working places, meetings, entertainment. I was trying to unify these spaces, looking for places situated at some height, from which it would be possible to embrace them all: the Aventin Hill, the astronomic observatory on Monte Mario, the Square of the Muses, undulations of the meandering rivers. Most of all, I was searching for the sea in Ostia, Castelfusano, Fiumicino, down to Sabaudia, in the Circeo, and Civitavecchia, in Tarquinia: and after having found it in the south, I found at last, even though much diluted and weakened, the primordial world's order. The antique city, the city of the Popes, the modern metropolis, attracted me very little. For many years I walked practically only where I should not have walked, where circumstances attracted me.¹²

Once in Rome, Quinzio applied to the Faculty of Engineering. Almost immediately he realized that his choice was wrong. He did not attend classes and consequently he passed only five exams. Later he applied to the Faculty of Philosophy, where he passed no exams at all:

Before I changed—uselessly—the faculty, I had took classes in mathematics, philosophy, literature. I remember the ones suggestively intoned by the poet Ungaretti; I remember those given by Paolo Carabellese, who used to first clean his spectacles for a long time with a handkerchief he always kept in his pocket, and then to begin talking pompously about the "pure being

¹⁰ Quinzio, Lestingi, *La tenerezza di Dio*, 24-27.

¹¹ A. Scottini, *Sergio Quinzio: Il profeta deluso* (Milan: Ancora, 2006), 21. Angelo Scottini is the author of the only biography of Quinzio. His book is an indispensable source for every scholar of Quinzio's life and thought.

¹² S. Quinzio, *La croce e il nulla*, 12-13.

of conscience"; I remember those of Luigi Scaravelli, which concerned Kant's inauguration discourse of 1770 (but he committed suicide almost immediately after). I have found nothing and nobody who would answer my questions, to which, by the way, there were no answers to be found.¹³

Quinzio's father, who worked as a concierge, did not allow his son to take over his job. For this reason Quinzio, like his brother Patrizio Flavio, eventually applied to the Academy of Financial Police (*Accademia della Guardia di Finanza*).

SERVICE IN FINANCE GUARD AND FIRST WRITINGS

Immediately after graduating from the Academy of Financial Police in 1951, Quinzio was sent to serve in Gaeta (province of Latina), south of Rome: "The Angevin-Aragon castle in Gaeta [on the seaside] overhanging the sea is a military prison, but I used to live in a wing of the building which, although it had bars and railings, had been turned into barracks. I spent there almost a year; as solitary as you can be among people brought together only by chance. The bay, not polluted by petrol yet, was too similar to my Ligurian one. I could not stand the agonizing nostalgia."¹⁴

Quinzio would look back at this period as a time of exile, which, though brief, has profoundly marked his personality, thoughts and writings. Whenever he had some free time, he used it to write letters to his brother. The latter kept the correspondence. In the mid Fifties, he sent the correspondence back to Quinzio, encouraging him to do something with these pages full of reflections upon the condition of the Christian prophetic spirit in the modern age. Quinzio compiled a book by transforming the epistolary form into aphoristic one and sent it to Ugo Guanda, an important Italian publisher from Parma. These are the roots of *Prophetic Diary* (*Diario profetico*),¹⁵ Quinzio's first book. After many years Quinzio explained why he had chosen the fragmentary form:

I do believe that the fragmentary form is the one and only form in which I can express my way of feeling and thinking. It is definitely not a systematic form, because such a form presumes faith in rationality, in mediation. There has always been in me, and still is, tension, laceration, hope and disappointment; and I would say that, in this sense, the fragment contrasts the systematic work exactly in the same way as the Hebraic modality of expression contrasts with the typically Greek modality of expression.¹⁶

In his second book, *Religion and Future*, he added:

The fragmentary nature of the text certainly complicates its reading. On the other hand, an organic and finished text is Kingdom's monkey, a parody of

¹³ S. Quinzio, *Diario profetico*, 15-16.

¹⁴ S. Quinzio, *La croce e il nulla*, 13.

¹⁵ The first Quinzio's book was republished by Adelphi in 1996, so that the author's preface to the second edition of his first book is the last text he composed.

¹⁶ Quinzio, Lestingi, *La tenerezza di Dio*, 12.

the real order and actual unity, it is a falsity, counterfeiting harmony that we do not possess. Order and unity, in fragments, establish themselves step by step and are not formally pre-established. Just as it occurs in our manner of understanding. The difficulty in a fragmentary text (a real fragment is concise, lacking any connective tissue), is a difficulty of intensity, rather than the extended difficulty of systematic diluted texts.¹⁷

When *Prophetic Diary* was published in 1958, Quinzio was quite excited, as he explained in an interview from 1991:

I remember exactly that day (...) of March 1958 (...), I went to Parma to receive from the publishing house Guanda the first copies of my first book. I remember the return trip to Rome, as I sat on the train, next to the window with a fresh book in my hands: quite a triumph for a young and prematurely disappointed second lieutenant of the Guardia di Finanza. Frankly, the publication story was not exactly triumphant. I had sent the manuscript—which contained passages from letters to my brother and some other notes—to Ugo Guanda, who was publishing authors that I felt close to, such as, for instance, Buonaiuti, Rensi, Maritain, Solovyov, Martinetti, Capitini. I did not send it to anybody else because I felt that this publisher was the right one. Guanda, that is to say professor Guandalini, accepted and included it in a book series *Today's Problems*, which I found very flattering. He asked me though, for a subsidy, such as he usually requested from other debuting authors, an exorbitant sum, which I collected among my ambitious aunts. Some months after the publication I communicated to him that, being on a trip to Parma, I would happy to greet him. In an answer I received a short letter from his secretary announcing professor's absence. Except that, evidently by mistake, it was signed personally by professor Guanda, and not, as would be normal, only stamped with his initials. Therefore—I was young!—I wrote to him to express my disappointment and he knew how to recover his humanity by writing a long and noble letter of the 5th of September 1958 which I keep and from which I copy out some phrases: “Dear Quinzio, (...) I believe I owe You an explanation which, for me, is a cause of some distress. When I wrote to You that I was not in Parma I did so for reasons I have to explain to You (...). At some age one tends to become much more conformist and tolerant than previously and this will explain to You why, deep inside, I was afraid of meeting You (...). Therefore, do come when I will be present, but remember that Guanda the publisher has become quite a bourgeois.”¹⁸

When Quinzio's first book was published, the Second Vatican Council was taking place in Rome. Quinzio approached this event with:

¹⁷ S. Quinzio, *Religione e futuro* (Milan: Adelphi, 2001), 155.

¹⁸ Quinzio, *Diario profetico*, 12-14.

absolute scepticism, for the reason (...) that this Council was actually an attempt to “adapt” contents of the faith to worldly requirements, to allign it with some modernistic tendencies. I was expecting the Church to go toward the eschatological perspective; and instead! (...) The Council operation was a preamble to the gradual adjustment of the Church to the world. It seemed to me that this Church—that merely a century ago had proclaimed a firm ‘anathema’ for everybody who had ever, within its bounds, thought of a reconciliation with the world, or of liberty and secular values—the very same Church was beginning to adjust its goals little by little, realizing that it was no longer possible to preach the unaltered Christian message in all its literality, and therefore that the Church was itself becoming an antichristic form.¹⁹

Initially, as trainee officer and afterward as captain, Quinzio worked for the Financial Guard until 1967. As he explained, he served without enthusiasm: “In practical matters I felt like a fish without water; my pessimism helped me: I have never tried to do anything that could change the environment around me, I have always attempted to adjust myself to it and to honestly do what I was obliged to do, without taking any special interest in it.”²⁰ At the same time, some years before *Prophetic Diary* was published, Quinzio started to collaborate with some newspapers and reviews (*Il Gallo*, *L’Ultima*, *L’Ordine civile*). He used to sign his first papers with the pseudonym of Giosuè Gorinzi because in those times officers were not allowed to publish without their superiors’ permission. The same necessity of being unidentifiable led him to slightly modify his last name into Quinzio.²¹ In 1960 Quinzio started to collaborate with *Tempo Presente*, an important and ideologically independent review directed by Ignazio Silone and Nicola Chiaromonte, which also published Czesław Miłosz, Raymond Aron, Gustaw Herling-Grudziński. Quinzio’s articles appeared regularly on the pages of *Tempo Presente*, until the review suspended its publication in 1968. This was the time when Quinzio the aphorist transformed into a polemic writer.

ENCOUNTER WITH TARTAGLIA

In 1962 Quinzio published his second book *Religion and Future* (*Religione e futuro*) for the *Realtà Nuova*, the publishing house created and directed by Ferdinando Tartaglia. As a priest, theologian, and a writer, Tartaglia had been forbidden by the Church authorities to celebrate the Holy Mass because of his social activity and leftist sympathies. His excommunication—revoked by John Paul II only in 1987—was due, in particular, to his heretic ideas concerning the ahistorical God. Quinzio met him in 1948 in Mantova, during a conference dedicated to the end of Catholicism. He described Tartaglia as: “a volcano during eruption, an explosion of uncontrollable intellectual energy that nobody was able to resist: sensible, lucid in sustaining his thesis, ‘Christianity yes, Catholicism no.’ (...)”

¹⁹ Quinzio, Lestingi, *La tenerezza di Dio*, 18-19.

²⁰ Caramore, “Una conversazione con Sergio Quinzio,” 169.

²¹ Scottini, *Sergio Quinzio*, 28.

His God, the new God, the Pure One, the God 'of the hereafter' (*del dopo*), as an alternative to the God of evil and theologies. In other words, an alternative to the noxious God bound to the old world of necessity."²² Quinzio refers frequently to Tartaglia's thought in *Prophetic Diary*. Indeed, after having been relocated to Rome, Quinzio attended meetings organized by the Roman Research Centre upon the "problem of God" (Centro Romano di Studi sul "problema di Dio"), where he learned about Tartaglia's text *Thesis on the End of the Problem of God (Tesi per la fine del problema di Dio)*.

Over the years Quinzio distanced himself intellectually from Tartaglia. The eventual conflict of these two radical religious visioners concerned the expectations of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Quinzio believed the Kingdom to be concrete and tangible, and expected it to be realized in the future of the world. Tartaglia saw it as an abstract reality. Nevertheless, some echoes of Tartaglia's thoughts can still be found in Quinzio's later books: for instance, in *Judgment on History (Giudizio sulla storia)* dating from 1964 and *Christianity of the Beginning and of the End (Cristianesimo dell'inizio e della fine)* dating from 1967.²³

In the Sixties Quinzio's talent as a polemic writer was widely recognized, therefore he began collaboration with some of the most important Italian national daily newspapers, such as *La Stampa*, *Il Giornale*, *Il Messaggero*, *Il Corriere della Sera*. He also strengthened his belief that theology should be reserved to laymen, and not to clergymen.

ENCOUNTER WITH STEFANIA

The encounter with Stefania and the tragedy of her premature death occupy the central place in Quinzio's life and thought. Quinzio got married to Stefania Barbareschi on the 31st of July 1963. When they first met in Rome, immediately after the war, she was twelve years younger than him: "she was a girl—Quinzio remembered—who lived very differently from the modern young people. Nowadays, the youngsters think they have a right to everything. On the contrary, Stefania believed that being in the world is a tremendous gift in itself, she was grateful for everything, she used to thank for everything."²⁴ She was the daughter of Gaetano Barbareschi, a Socialist politician who was the Minister of labour in the Ferruccio Parri's first government, established on 21st June 1945, as well as in the subsequent one chaired by Alcide de Gasperi. The Italian people remembered the humility that characterized Barbareschi's public life. He used to travel from Genoa to Rome by train, after asking his wife to prepare him a sandwich, since he could not imagine himself eating in the restaurant wagon.

A second meeting between Stefania and Sergio took place in Genoa in 1959. On that occasion Stefania, well aware of the age difference and of the fact that Sergio was already involved with another woman, confessed to be willing to become his wife even on that very day. Quinzio was surprised by her self-confidence: "You have judged me with extreme kindness. No, on the contrary, You have not judged me at all: You came toward me from

²² G. Martucci, *Tesi per la fine del problema di Dio e la Nuova Realtà del puro "dopo": Un ricordo ed un confronto di un genio poetico inascoltato* (Milan: Artecultura, 2000), 1.

²³ Scottini, *Sergio Quinzio*, 32.

²⁴ S. Quinzio, *L'incoronazione: Lettera a Stefania* (Rome: Armando, 1981), 7.

a very distant place and I do not know how to make a step toward You.”²⁵ A cautionary tone resounds from first the letters that Quinzio sent to his *fiancee*:

You are very young, and I am asking of You some very difficult things. Question yourself once again with extreme sincerity, up to the point of being cruel to yourself. I am not like the others, Stefania, even if I also desire the things other people crave for (...), You still have time to tell me “no” (...). We will do everything together, but You have to be resolute to follow—with all Your heart—a path less comfortable and less peaceful than the one You have probably seen Your friends undertake (...). You are starting to live right now and the main choice, believe me, regards always and only the following dilemma: on one hand, there is a banal life, without great delights or tragedies, the life of people who close themselves up in their shells and try to stay there in the best possible way; on the other hand, there is an intense life, rich in delights and sufferings, absorbing and focused, the life of people who participate in the suffering of the world and put questions to themselves, and do not want to be useless to God and men.²⁶

The engagement of Sergio and Stefania was difficult due to territorial distance. However, they were brought together by their attitude to religion.

As time went by, Stefania started to better comprehend Sergio’s way of being. In the letter Sergio sent to Stefania on 18 May 1963, he observed:

You have already discerned one of my key features. Let’s call it a capability to suffer, or incapability to resign, forget, ignore, deny importance to things (...). We can say that I am a tragic character. But no comedy character is able to love. I live always on the edge, to the point of perceiving myself disoriented among everyday things. I live a difficult life, I am an easy prey to anguish (...). I embrace the joy as a desperate man who sees it for the first time. I will not make your life easy (...). If I were able to become a thoughtless and cheerful man, I would no longer be myself: and You have proved that You want me. If You were not able to love me as I am, then it would be like hell to You; but if You are able, and I know You are, it will be like heaven, to which, as we often say, one walks through a path strewn with thorns.²⁷

Immediately after the wedding Quinzio was transferred to Turin. Stefania started to suffer from liquid in the knee. This health problem was the renewal of an illness she went through for the first time in her student days. At the same time Sergio and Stefania had to endure the deaths of their relatives. The first to die was Stefania’s father. Only

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

three days later Sergio's father died, too. Stefania also had a miscarriage, but in 1966 their daughter was born. They gave her the name Pia, meaning "devout," "pious."

Still in 1966 Quinzio was moved back to Rome, where he worked until resigning in 1967. A couple of months before resigning, Quinzio started to collaborate with the recently established publishing house from Milan, Adelphi, whose editor in chief was Roberto Calasso. The cooperation lasted until the author's death. The first book Quinzio published with Adelphi was *Christianity of the Beginning and of the End* (*Cristianesimo dell'inizio e della fine*, 1967), in which he stated that the basic characteristic of Christianity is the apocalyptic tension that was present at its historical beginnings and will appear once more, or has already appeared, at its historical end, which coincides with the advent of the Kingdom.

Quinzio was seriously meditating whether to leave the service in the Finance Guard and embrace living by writing. Stefania even proposed to take the economic responsibility for the family upon her own shoulders (she wanted to resume working as an accountant, as she had before marriage). However, such a change turned out to be impossible: that same year a tumour in her breast was discovered. At first, medical consultations were reassuring. Doctors did not insist that Stefania should undergo medical treatment and the couple spent summer holidays in Torre Annunziata, in the province of Naples. However, in autumn Stefania had to be urgently operated. In order to stay closer to his young wife, Quinzio resigned from the Finance Guard. Continuous peregrinations from one hospital to another impressed him so much, that, a few years later, he declared: "I am afraid of the hospital more than of illness itself, and the cemetery scares me more than death."²⁸

The last years of the Sixties were marked by Stefania's illness. She had undergone a surgery in February 1968 in Rome, at the Gemelli Clinic. This is how Quinzio recalls those moments: "a doctor called me because the chief doctor wanted to talk to me: the histological test was as bad as possible. The chief told me then that there was nothing left to do: it was necessary to excise everything, ovaries, left breast with all the muscles up to the arm. Stefania and I were keeping up hope, but panic (...) was paralyzing me."²⁹

Stefania's condition deteriorated after the operation, when metastasis appeared in her bones. Until her death in 1970 Stefania never left her bed. Quinzio recalls:

Humiliation of being delicate and frequently ill, in this world which proudly boasts of strength and efficiency, weighted heavily on Your heart (...). Cancer, however, is a sign of infamy. An illness that the world has not manage to find a remedy for excludes one from the world, and You were becoming aware of it moment after moment. Acquaintances, as well as the less brutal doctors, suddenly fell silent. Among relatives there was somebody who, afraid of infection, did not pay You a visit anymore and did not want to touch things Your hands had touched. Some others strove to avoid the embarrassment of the obligation to talk to You or to write to You a few words (...). Humiliations and delusions were closing up on You (...). Even

²⁸ S. Quinzio, *La speranza nell'Apocalisse* (Rome: Ed. Paoline, 1984), 168.

²⁹ Quinzio, Lestingi, *La tenerezza di Dio*, 28.

the people who loved You, unintentionally caused you pain. (...) I remember Your mother, since 22 January, next to Your deathbed; when she wanted to leave You on 2 February to be with Graziella [Stefania's younger sister] on her birthday, she kept saying that there was nothing we could do for You anymore: "Can't you see? She has no calves anymore! Don't you see that she no longer feels the injections? There's no sense in feeding her, don't you see that she cannot swallow anymore?" (...) She went to sleep in a hotel; she had not wasted a single hour of sleep on You, my love.³⁰

On the 20th of February, on the first Lenten Friday, at 3 pm, at the age of 30, Stefania died: "Now You are, for me, united with God's Kingdom, because only the Kingdom can give us back everything we lose, and return us the years of our engagement in the desert (...). You have revealed to me the mystery of God's tenderness and pain, the meaning of these two thousand years. You have suffered for me and You have atoned for my sins. You have become perfect."³¹

The summer after Stefania's death, Quinzio and his daughter Pia went on holiday to Isola del Piano. This little town is still to reveal its importance in Quinzio's life just a few years later.

A year after his wife's death Quinzio wrote *The Coronation: A Letter to Stefania* (*L'Incoronazione: Lettera a Stefania*), a book inspired by St. Augustine's *Confessions*. Initially he did not plan to publish it. Quinzio wrote it as a gift to Stefania, addressing it to some close friends, so the book had a limited circulation. Ten years later he decided to edit and publish it: "On these pages I did not intend to glorify good sentiments, or to accomplish an edifying work, but, almost to the contrary, I wanted to witness and shout at God the horror of a world, proclaimed as redeemed, in which anything that is good and full of tenderness can expect nothing except for crucifixion and ruin."³² Quinzio put the following prayer at the conclusion of *The Coronation*: "Sweet Jesus Christ, for love of Stefania, make finally a great miracle that we have been waiting for thousands of years, shape the universe according to the measure of the tenderness which You have put into her heart. Amen! Amen! Amen!"³³

ISOLA DEL PIANO AND A COMMENTARY

In 1973, due to increasing costs of the apartment rent in Rome, Quinzio decided to move to Isola del Piano. Thanks to a sum of money earned from the sale of the apartment inherited from his father, he managed to buy a house there. After having resigned from service, for a living Quinzio relied on his regular collaboration with newspapers, reviews and radio stations. At first, the inhabitants of Isola del Piano welcomed Quinzio and his family (daughter, mother and aunt). As time passed by, though, the writer encountered great difficulties: he was unable to speak the local dialect and remained marginalized

³⁰ Quinzio, *L'incoronazione*, 104-106.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 126-127.

³² Quinzio, Lestingi, *La tenerezza di Dio*, 29.

³³ Quinzio, *L'incoronazione*, 129.

from community life. "In those years only one man would seek me out: the tobacconist, who wanted to get some explanation on fiscal matters."³⁴ The parish priest saw in him a Jehovah's Witness and made sure his parishioners stayed away from the danger. This is how some years later Quinzio described his earlier decision to move to Isola del Piano:

I settled in that small village in August 1973: it was a poorly inhabited area and Isola del Piano had nothing that would make it particularly pleasant. Neither did I go there with any desire for an idyllic life. I went there because of my friendship with a youngster living there, Gino Girolomoni, who has also been the village's mayor for two consecutive terms, elected from an independent slate, alternative to the Christian Democratic one. Its symbol was composed of sheaves of wheat. I must admit that I also ran in the same slate and held the chair in town council at the time Girolomoni was mayor: those were the only two times I ever voted. (...) I went to Isola del Piano hoping that something would happen. But the village life condemned me to a tremendous solitude (...), my situation was rather sad. I lived there without any recognizable role; no one could understand why had I moved there, therefore I appeared strange, to a point of suspicion.³⁵

In *The Cross and the Nothing* (*La Croce e il nulla*, 1984) Quinzio included a note concerning his moving from the capital to the provincial village:

One could only explain how I ended up there, if the things that happen to us had some recognizable causes. My life turned to its decline. Who knows whether I am destined to remain here, to be buried in this cemetery where, on the headstones, I read, next to my mother's name, the names of strangers. (...) Here, the space is inverted: the sea, distant some fifteen or twenty kilometres, is on the North. The mountains are on the South. And I feel inverted as well, like a beginning nomad who in a few hour flight, keeps switching continents, time and again.³⁶

Quinzio spent in Isola del Piano fourteen years. He dedicated the first years there to his *opus magnum*, *A Commentary to the Bible* (*Un Commento alla Bibbia*). The author himself described his work as "a monk's, not a contemporary man's endeavour." The book was written between 1972 and 1976. It first appeared in four volumes edition and subsequently, in 1991, in one volume edition. Quinzio was barely going out during the composition of the *Commentary*. He had the habit to wake up many times during the night, and to take notes.³⁷ Reviews published after the first volume was printed were not favourable. Expectations were high. Moreover, critics had been waiting for a theological or philosophical work. The *Commentary*, dedicated to Stefania, was instead a solitary,

³⁴ Garota, *Sergio Quinzio: testimone e maestro*, 185.

³⁵ Quinzio, Lestingi, *La tenerezza di Dio*, 52-53.

³⁶ Quinzio, *La croce e il nulla*, 14-15.

³⁷ Scottini, *Sergio Quinzio*, 48.

personal, untimely reading of the Bible that did not obey to any pre-established and traditional hermeneutic criteria. Quinzio was pleased to read the negative opinions of the critics:

Paradoxically, Gozzini's article, which appeared a few days ago on *La Stampa*, made me happy. We can read in it about the first volume, that it lacks "theological profundity," that it is not a commentary but a "paraphrase," that the verses' matching is "arbitrary" and that one cannot understand what is the criterion of selection, that the "intimate visionary force" is missing, etc. It makes me happy, because I know this is not true. And the fact that the Lord does not give me worldly "gratification" makes me hope that He wants to uplift my efforts and give me as a "gratification" the possibility of being with Stefania as soon as possible, in her light, waiting for the redemption of the Kingdom we have dreamed about.³⁸

After several years Quinzio explained his hermeneutic perspective, that is, if God is alive, He is still fighting to save us—otherwise, we would already be all either saved or damned. But it is not so, or God would be a pure metaphysical abstraction that did not incarnate in Jesus. Christians do not believe in such a deity. God's word is a prophecy of what will happen in the last days of the world history, that is, at the time in which God is unable to keep his word, to turn it into reality:

I have always felt—and the events I have experienced in those years confirmed it in all burning vividness, so to speak,—that the reading of the word of God and his actions in a providential, didactic or pedagogical sense is deficient. And in the Bible I found once again the signs of terrible, unresolvable tensions between the promise of redemption and the perpetual delaying of that promise. If the Scriptures is read, not to say without preconceptions, but with a minimal intellectual honesty in regards to the immediate transparency of the text, in every verse there are to be found stumbling stones, contradictions, lacerations, fulfilled and unfulfilled prophecies. Above all, one keeps seeing the continuous failure of God's work. We often forget about it, but the Torah ends with Moses's death. Historical books end with the fall of Samaria and Jerusalem. The Messiah is crucified and this crucifixion cannot be understood in terms of a prearranged plan. The New Testament ends with the Apocalypse and there is also a continuous increase of anxiety. And then there are the epistles of Jude, James, John and the second epistle of Peter. This is how I read the Scriptures. I cannot tell to what extent this way of reading is merged with my life, or to what extent is my life merged with this hermeneutic possibility.³⁹

³⁸ S. Quinzio, *Lettere agli amici di Montebello* (Isola del Piano: Fondazione Alce Nero, 1997), 37-38.

³⁹ Quinzio, Lestingi, *La tenerezza di Dio*, 36-37.

ANNA AND THE SECOND WEDDING

In 1976 Quinzio married Anna Giannatiempo. They had met through the Italian Catholic priest Cornelio Fabro, the most important Italian scholar of Kierkegaard's philosophy and translator of his works. Fabro was also professor of philosophy at the University of Perugia and Quinzio had sent him a copy of *The Coronation*. At that time Anna was Fabro's assistant. Having read Quinzio's lamentation, Fabro told her about "an extraordinary book." After some time, when the professor had to move his personal library from one wing of the convent in which he lived to another, Anna supervised the operations and found *The Coronation*. She took it with her and read it immediately. Afterwards she sent a letter to the author and thus their correspondence begun. At first the letters did not involve feelings. A few years later Quinzio compiled a book under the title *Out of the Mouth of the Lion* (*Dalla gola del leone*, 1980), partially composed of fragments of his letters to Anna. In this work there are some reflections upon the problem of the second marriage:

As his personal advice—which was forgotten—Paul tells widows not to get married again (I Cor 7:8). This advice is reversed in the First Epistle to Timothy, where he advises the younger widows to marry for a second time in order to avoid something worse (5:14). (...) As the Old Testament could not refuse the possibility of divorce to our misery (Mt. 19:8), so the New, as proved by Paul's cancelled advice, cannot but allow for a second marriage to our enduring destiny of loneliness and death.⁴⁰

LAST YEARS: THE WRITING AND THE WAITING

Quinzio dedicated the last twenty years of his life to the impossible waiting of the Kingdom and to his literary activities. In 1978 Adelphi published *The Buried Faith* (*La fede sepolta*), in which Quinzio analyses a number of important religious themes that the Christian conscience has suppressed. Even though themes such as body and spirit, revelation and mystery, prophecy and dogma, incarnation and cross, *sacrum* and *profanum* still occupy a central place in Christian discourse, they still need to be unearthed and understood in the light of the promised but still delaying coming of the Kingdom.

Two years later, in 1980, Adelphi published *Out of the Mouth of the Lion*, in which Quinzio turns back to his characteristic fragmentary form. The title is taken from the Book of Amos (3:12): "Thus saith the Lord; As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus in a couch." This is the way Quinzio imagines the redemption: only the "little remains" of Israel, a piece of an ear, shall be redeemed and such a small remainder shall be snatched out the mouth of hell and nothingness.

In 1982 Quinzio published *Silence of God* (*Silenzio di Dio*, by the publishing house Mondadori), and in 1984 he published *The Hope in Apocalypse* (*La speranza nell'apocalisse*, Edizioni Paoline), and *The Cross and the Nothing* (*La croce e il nulla*). As all other texts published after *The Commentary*, these books develop themes, approaches and ideas Quinzio had already presented and explored. Particularly significant is *The*

⁴⁰ S. Quinzio, *Dalla gola del leone*, 4th ed. (Milan: Adelphi, 2013), 150-151.

Cross and the Nothing, published by Adelphi, a collection of essays and fragments that according to critics represents the philosophical peak of Quinzio's thought:

The Cross and the Nothing was born out of the attempt to transfer my reflection from *Revelation* to its history, by trying to bring the faith to a confrontation with the reality of modernity. It is an interpretation of what happened from the *Revelation* onwards, of the sense of history, of modernity and its categories. Of course, I have not simply opened white sheets and started to write *ex novo*: I gathered and used some remarks, I elaborated papers and notes I had written for newspapers and reviews with which I had collaborated. Essentially, I wanted to bring the faith to a confrontation with the nihilism. And I thought that it was not difficult or incongruous to figure out the basic aspects of nihilism by connecting it to the experience of the cross: what is, indeed, the cross, if not the very idea of a God who somehow empties and lowers himself? My conviction was and still is that, if the faith is true, all history has to be understood within the context of faith itself. It is modernity that has to enter into the horizon of faith, and not the other way round (...). I tried to understand contemporary nihilism as a logical evolution of the cross. The announcement of eschatological fullness given by Jesus has not been historically accomplished, but it kept troubling, distressing, and constricting in hope the hearts of men, even when they became unbelievers. And it was what actually brought us to desperation. As long as we have celestial, symbolic, sublime compensations, we practically have no radical conflict with the denial of our hopes. But when something is announced that has to be accomplished visibly, and this something does not happen, then the contradiction is terrible, because the desire remains. According to my interpretation of history, nihilism is born out of the accumulation of historical denials, which calls for the proposition of still new aims of redemption, through the secularization, the reliance on the new monotheism of science and technology, the political revolution.⁴¹

In 1990 *Hebraic Roots of Modernity* (*Radici ebraiche del moderno*) was published by Adelphi. The main idea of the book, namely, that modernity derives from the Jewish and Christian disappointed messianism, had already appeared in the second chapter of *The Cross and the Nothing*.

In 1992 the most controversial Quinzio's book, *The Defeat of God* (*La sconfitta di Dio*) was published. The official press organ of the Italian Jesuits, *Civiltà Cattolica*, accused Quinzio of heresy. According to father Giandomenico Mucci, who wrote the review (and, according to the Catholic newspaper *Il Sabato*, all the articles of *Civiltà Cattolica* were, at least at that time, carefully reviewed by the Vatican), if there the Index of Prohibited Books still existed today (the last having been released in 1948), all the previously listed books could be removed and replaced by all Quinzio's writings alone. The Jesuit

⁴¹ Quinzio, Lestingi, *La tenerezza di Dio*, 54-56.

journal did not appreciate the fact in *The Defeat of God* there was no contrast between the flesh and the spirit, and that according to Quinzio the horizon of the promised salvation is the one of flesh and earth.⁴² Indeed, Quinzio interprets the Holy Scripture through the perspective that claims: “the life without end is promised to the flesh.”⁴³ “If God’s promises are made to the flesh, it cannot but require their immediate fulfilment. The desire of the flesh is for now, and not for the future, the flesh is mortal and cannot wait, it needs mercy and consolation now, as it needs to see right now God’s justice ruling over the world.”⁴⁴ According to the Jesuit reviewer such an eschatological vision was incompatible with Catholic tradition and it derived from autobiographical experience of the author, who thus promoted a faith without hope.

In 1995 Adelphi published Quinzio’s last work, entitled *Mysterium iniquitatis: The Encyclicals of the Last Pope* (*Mysterium iniquitatis. Le encicliche dell’ultimo papa*), in which he declared, using the historically impossible Pope Peter II as his mouthpiece that the experience of Christendom has ended.

Quinzio worked hard during the last years of his life: he participated in conferences, gave radio and television interviews, frequently published articles in important Italian daily newspapers. Nevertheless, in a letter dated 3 April 1995 addressed to Daniele Garota, he expressed fatigue and listlessness: “I meet many people, I talk to many, I write a lot, but—the age is surely a burden—I feel overwhelmed with this muddle. The promise sounds: ‘these days’ are shortening. Are they not becoming longer instead? All the time the same agony, after the pattern set long ago in the Lord’s suffering. And when we compare ourselves to him, everything seems deprived of sense.”⁴⁵

Quinzio repeatedly thought about death and seemed to strive for it: “If we do not want to die, it is so because we do not love enough those who died, it is so because we prefer to keep our life and reject the dead. We should be ashamed at least of this.”⁴⁶

THE LAST WORDS

Sergio Quinzio died on the 22nd of March 1996, at the age of 68, of a heart failure. On the 15th of March he had written his last note: “Man’s life is life only right before he dies. The same goes for history.”⁴⁷

⁴² D. Messina, “I gesuiti censurano i libri di Quinzio: vanno messi all’ indice,” *Il Corriere della sera*, November 13, 1992: 5.

⁴³ S. Quinzio, *La sconfitta di Dio* (Milan: Adelphi, 1992), 26.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁵ Quinzio, *Lettere agli amici di Montebello*, 87.

⁴⁶ Garota, *Sergio Quinzio: testimone e maestro*, 189.

⁴⁷ Scottini, *Sergio Quinzio*, 50.

JUSTICE AND MERCY

1

And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it in the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

(Rev. 14:19-20)¹

God does not go along with the people of Israel in their passage to the Promised Land because the sight of their misdeeds would compel him to destroy them: “if I came up in the midst of thee in a moment I would consume you” (Ex. 33:5). The abyss that separates God’s sanctity from creation—which is nonetheless good (Gen. 1:31)—is such that no man and no thing can stand His presence (Ex. 33:20). Man is, indeed, already sinful in his mother’s womb (Ps. 51:5) and if God were to apply his absolute justice, he would crush the world in a second.

Leaving this extreme outcome aside, the application of divine justice in the world cannot but turn into injustice. When the innocent is punished together with the guilty, due to the bond of solidarity that unites one blood and one people, injustice is evidently done. This is the reproach Abraham dares to direct at God: how could he remain just if, destroying Sodom, he put the innocent and the guilty alike to die (Gen. 18:23-24)? But a breach of justice would occur, too, if, in order to spare the innocent, the guilty went unpunished. God is “the God merciful and gracious, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousand, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation” (Ex. 34:6-7). To the participation of the innocent and the guilty alike in the same punishment, Ezekiel opposes the concept of personal retribution: if there lived some just people in the country of the guilty, they should be spared from punishment, although “they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters, they only shall be delivered” (Ezek. 14:16). This conception is usually represented as the overcoming of the idea of responsibility sanctioned by the Pentateuch, which is first of all a collective responsibility. And yet a serious impoverishment is here implicated: the solidarity in one blood and one people, which is necessary for one and the same brotherly life to circulate through the borders between individuals, was broken.

¹ S. Quinzio, *La fede sepolta*, 2nd ed. (Milan: Adelphi, 1997), 83-90. All references in parenthesis are to The King James Version Bible.

Furthermore, the just punishment inflicted upon the guilty for their misdeed cannot affect only them exclusively: the heavy load of having a murderer as father automatically weighs upon a murderer's child, or upon the orphan of an executed murderer.

The Judaic tradition, being aware of the aporias of justice, enumerates the worlds God had created before this one we live in, and, compelled by justice, subsequently crushed; until he created ours after having buried the truth, so that men's deeds should nevermore stand before him as they really are, and thus preventing his absolute justice to roll. The subsistence of the world hinges on the fact that God abstains from applying his justice. This renunciation has a beautiful name: mercy. The Judaic tradition teaches that God has two thrones, one of rigor, one of mercy, and what the faithful does when praying is actually to pray God to leave the first seat and to go on the second, to consider him generously: for it is only in mercy that he has a chance to be saved.

If God's justice is impossible in the world, all the more men's justice is: men, were it possible for them to be just, should but crush everything in their turn. History after Christ gives all too ample proof—from the Inquisition to Robespierre and beyond—that the outcome of the will to justice is terror. If it is impossible to ground the world on justice, is it possible to ground it on mercy, then? No, it is not either, not for God, nor for men, even when they were enabled to. The dispensation of mercy abolishes justice, that is, that separation between good and evil on which any possibility to create something stable out of chaos is premised (Gen. 1:4,6; Lev. 11:47, 20:25). If misdeeds were not punished, injustice would overflow everywhere without limit. If God or men cancelled, through forgiveness or indifference, the guilt in those misdeeds immediately after they had been committed, there would not be good or evil anymore, all dispositions and all behaviours would be equal. Finally, if the attempt to ground the world on justice leads to terror and destruction, the attempt to ground it on mercy leads into chaos and confusion. We see that not to sanction injustice, not to distinguish between good and evil—and this constitutes the other pole of the modern experience, the libertarian pole going from Luther to Sade and beyond (the first one being the utopia of justice)—leads to the consummation of society and of the world.

Outside Judaism the inquiry into justice and mercy has hardly been brought far, but Jewish piety has only rarely taken a look behind those two thrones of God and asked itself whether fluctuations between judgments of rigor and judgments of forgiveness is, rather than a further perfection in comparison to the perfection of either sheer justice or sheer mercy, a tragic failure of both justice and mercy. Only a chassidic rabbi of the last century, rabbi Mendel of Kotzk (known as “the Kotzker”), has apparently suffered to the extreme of desperation and death this impossibility of justice and also of the weakness and shamefulness of mercy as a means to mitigate justice in its catastrophic, absurd development. In truth, the merciful act is an unjust act. Mercy is not a tender completion that softens the hardness of justice, it is justice's negation, it is yielding the distinction between good and evil, it is their chaotic being confused. The covenant that binds God and men requires fidelity, and infidelity, according to justice, breaks it; still, through mercy the covenant is kept in spite of man's infidelity, which means: kept at the cost of lowering man beneath the level of a responsible contracting party of a covenant. Mercy accepts man in its irredeemable incapacity for justice (Gen. 8:21): he is the crippled brought in from the streets, with no entitlement to enter the wedding supper, which he spoils with his saddening presence

(Luke 14:21). If mercy is positive, well that is a paradox, just like the being positive of the cross is, of the cross marking the definitive passage from justice, which dominates the perspective in the Old Testament, to mercy, which dominates in the New.

Up to this point, however, our discourse does not adhere to Scriptures enough, and emphasizes oppositions in abstract terms too much. In the Bible, acts are just or merciful not because they conform to an abstract idea of justice or mercy, but because it is God who acts, or it is a man in conformity to God, inspired by a punishing wrath or by a forgiving tenderness. Woe to him who spares the enemy God has commanded to kill (Deut. 13:13-19), and to him who inflicts just punishment upon whom God has forgiven. God's scale knows not the impartial equilibrium of anything that obeys to a rational necessity, but the imbalance and the abrupt shifts of anything that obeys to reasons of heart. God says to Jerusalem: "for a small moment I have forsaken thee; but with great mercy I will gather thee; in a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on thee" (Isa. 54:7-8). Justice becomes less and less a fair retribution and turns into a manifestation of wrath. Judgment comes to be identical with condemnation. Justice and vengeance come to coincide in total extermination (Rev. 6:10). Mercy goes beyond a mere non-execution of the punishment to turn into unspeakable tenderness for the lost sheep, superabundant forgiveness that anticipates the repentance and abolishes it (Luke 7:47 and 15:20), humiliation of God who beseeches the unfaithful Spouse to come back (Hos. 12) and becomes a servant to men (Luke 12:37).

Man must not obey justice, and not mercy either, but his hope in salvation only. Be merciful, judge not, in order not to be judged and to receive mercy (Luke 6. 36-38): justice and mercy are reduced here into means one has to employ for the salvation of his life, a salvation which is one and the same with the life of those we hold close (Josh. 2:12-13). This was and still is a scandal to many, who in the name of reason want virtue to be the reward to itself. But man has but his poor life, of which God's love only is better (Ps. 63:3). To the man who loses his life, the noblest virtues are no more useful than barns full of wheat (Luke 12:16-20). "Be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16): it is from this teaching that parables draw inspiration, the one where the cunning of the unjust steward is praised, even if it is unjust (Luke 16:8, where the same Greek term *φρονιμίς*, *φρόνιμος* meaning "wise," "cunning," occurs), and the one about the treasure buried in the field (Matt. 13:44). What kind of justice, or, for that matter, of mercy is in selling everything one possesses in order to buy the field where one happens to have discovered, and hastily and cunningly buried again, a treasure unknown to the legitimate owner of the field? And where is the justice, or the mercy, in paying the workers who came in late, and worked little or nothing, just as much as those who toiled in the sun all day (Matt. 20:1-15)? And is it just or merciful—or, rather: bold—after midnight to annoy the friend who has already laid himself and his children to bed to ask him what we need (Luke 11:5-9)? More important than justice, and more than mercy—both being, in any case, worldly impossible—is having one's life saved in the promised kingdom: justice and mercy, like the *shabbath*, were made for man, and not the other way round (Mark 2:27).

After the failure of justice and the failure of mercy, we are left with only waiting for that day when God in his apocalyptic vengeance shall crush the world and, with desperate tenderness, take out of his mouth the torn pieces of his devoured lamb (Amos 3:12).

2

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you
(Matt. 5:44).²

The Law must be perfectly fulfilled (Matt. 5:17), even “one of the least of these commandments” (Matt. 5:19; 14:36; Jas. 2:10), therefore also without (what would be “devilish” or “pharisaic”) separating “moral” precepts from “ritual” ones (Acts 2:45-46; Matt. 23:23, 24:20, 18:16). This distinction is unknown to the Scriptures, to the point that the commandment not to kill stands next to the commandment not to make images, with no distinction being drawn between them (Ex. 20:2-17; Deut. 5:6-21). No distinction is drawn in Jesus’ words, either, between the commandment not to kill and the commandment not to make oaths (Matt. 5:21-22; 5:33-37; Acts 15:19-20; 15:28-29). If, however, one perseveres in drawing such a distinction between the “moral” and the “ritual,” one shall find out that everywhere in the Scriptures, both in the Old and in the New Testament, the observance of “ritual” fulfilment, like the *shabbath* or baptism, is given priority over the observance of “moral” ones.

Since it has been commanded to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48), the fulfilment of the precept must be superabundant, to the point of making unnecessary the codification—be it moral or ritual—which, by delimiting the precept, makes it possible to observe it according to a minimum legal standard. This observance is not enough, says the Messiah: compared to God’s perfect tenderness, to call another “fool” is the same as to kill him and, therefore, anyone who does it deserves to die (Matt. 5:21-22); and he who sets to take the woman of another, even he who takes a repudiated spouse or repudiates his own, is guilty of adultery and shall be put to death (Matt. 5:30-32). The Messiah shall establish his kingdom and inexorably uproot anything that does not conform to God’s perfect tenderness (Ex. 34:6). No one shall hear one single word spoken without tenderness, nor fear the profanation of the intimacy of his home, nor ever have to leave it, nor have to swear in order to be trusted (Matt. 5:33-37). This is what Prophets had foretold, and the Law itself contained from the beginning the possibility of its self-negation through perfect fulfilment. Before Jesus (Matt. 19:7-9) Malachi had already opposed the mosaic law permitting repudiation (Mal. 2:14-16; Deut. 24:1). The Law, which prescribes revenge by the “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” rule (Ex. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:17-20; Deut. 19:21), also prescribes not to get revenge at all: “you shall not get revenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev. 19:18; Ex. 23:4-5). (This precept of the Law, which was imperative even for the foreign peoples inhabiting land of Israel, Lev. 19:34, shall appear to be the same as the one from the Sermon of the Mount, Matt. 5:38-42; Mark 12:32-34—so that one realizes that Jesus’ preaching was directed exclusively to Israel, Matt. 15:24). Bills of divorcement and “eye for eye” punishment—as well as prohibitions to kill, commit adultery, swear upon the false—are but restraints imposed to the hardness of hearts (Matt. 19:8), minimal observances which the Messiah, who came to make perfect the fulfilment of the Law (Matt. 5:17), declares insufficient (Matt. 5:20; 5:48; 22:36-40; Rom. 13:10).

² S. Quinzio, *Un commento alla Bibbia*, 4th ed. (Milan: Adelphi, 2008), 413-417.

The language of the Messiah is often paradoxical (Matt. 5:22, 29-30, 39-41), but it is paradoxical because its contents are so. Perfect justice, which “shall exceed that of the Scribes and the Pharisees” (Matt. 5:20), becomes identical with its opposite, with the leaving everything to the injustice of the unrighteous: “but I say to you: resist not the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:39). In Jesus’ mouth, these words have an infinitely distant meaning from the one they have according to modern, “nonviolent” humanitarianism or to ancient, exotic traditions. Jesus mistrusts man because he knows what is in his heart (John 2:24-25; Matt. 10:17), and to let the unrighteous do evil simply means, as it already meant for the prophets, to let injustice overflow (Isa. 26:10; Ps. 125:3; Matt. 24:12). To turn the other cheek after the first blow, to give up any defence before the courts, to bear every offense looking kindly in the eyes of and praying for those who persecute you (Matt. 5:39-44; Isa. 50: 6; 53): this is evidently not the condition in the messianic kingdom. If we recall, however, that already in the account of the Nativity the episode of the adoring Three Kings stands next to the humiliating flight to Egypt and to the massacre of the innocents, it is not surprising that the Sermon of the Mount, which is conventionally framed as an idyll, actually comes out to be obscure, problematic, incongruous. The meek who welcome the Messiah are about to inherit dominion over the earth from him (Matt. 5:5; 5:16), and yet they must expect offenses and persecutions (Matt. 5:11; 10:17-22). A speech culminating in the invitation not to resist the unrighteous and to forgive everything (Matt. 5:38-45) starts with a warning of inexorable justice and of hell fire (Matt. 5:22-30). The invitation to be like the city on the top of a hill and like the light on a lampstand, so that everybody could see the works of the righteous (Matt. 5:14-16), is followed by the invitation to do good deeds in secret, so that no one but God sees them (Matt. 6:1-6; 6:16-18). In truth, two different images of the messianic advent come together in the Sermon of the Mount, and overlap one with the other: the one of a collective conversion (Matt. 23:37), with the powerful and glorious establishment of the Kingdom, and the other of the humiliation of the Messiah and his followers, until the monstrosity of this extreme iniquity shall force the irruption of divine judgment with its fearful violence (Matt. 23:38). That is the double image that, already in the books of the Prophets and in ancient tropes of the Law, juxtaposes the powerful Messiah of the tribe of Judah, the king son of David, to the humiliated Messiah son of Joseph, the *Ebed*, the suffering servant.

The paradoxical feature of many of Jesus’ statements, in the Sermon of the Mount as well as in other speeches, has been noted often: eyes taken out, hands cut off and thrown away (Matt. 5:29-30), left cheeks offered to those who have hit the right ones, coats added to the tunics the adversary already wants to take (Matt. 5:39-40). But what goes unnoticed is the greatest paradox: the invitation to love one’s enemies and pray for one’s persecutors (Matt. 5:44). Its paradoxical nature violently emerges from these words of Saint Paul: “if your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he is thirsty, give him drink; for in so doing you shall heap coals of fire on his head” (Rom. 12:20; 1 Pet. 2:23). Here the traditional wisdom teaching (Prov. 25:21-22; Ps. 140:10; 37:8-9) is expressed in all its strength and is tightened up to its utmost degree toward the messianic fulfilment, that is, to give one’s cause up to the Lord, who said: “to me belongs the punishment, to me the reward” (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30) (the fact that the evangelical precept of love does not in itself diverge

from traditional teaching in any respect is here confirmed by the fact that no contrast is known to have arisen on this issue between Jesus and the chief rabbis of Israel). The love with which it is commanded to love one's enemies forces them to choose between having pity for our defenceless tenderness and being condemned to destruction. It does not merely consist in passive abstention from fighting them, but—in imitation of God who cannot bear the sight of evil—it is a desperate willingness not to see the hatred surrounding us, a tragic need to forget it in hopes that it shall be eventually erased. The teaching to love one's enemies and to pray for one's persecutors—and the same is true, too, for the one not to judge (Matt. 7:1; John 7:24; 8:15-16; 9:39)—is not a disclosure of a superior morality that makes the reign of peace and brotherhood among men possible; it is, rather, the announcement of the extreme degree of persecution the servants of the Lord must undergo until their humility is so humiliated that the fabric of the world is torn, thus provoking God to strike his vengeance (Jas. 5:1-6; Rev. 6:9-11). The faithful must be perfect like the Father, who “makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45); but wheat is nurtured by sun and rain in order to be gathered in the barn, tares in order to be burnt (Matt. 13:24-30).

But is it possible to man to become perfect like the Father (Matt. 5:48; John 17:2; Lev. 19:2)? To man, who is not even able to change the colour of one single hair (Matt. 5:36), and cannot increase his lifetime by the shortest span (Matt. 6:27)? To man, who is unable to observe the precepts of the Law, not even according to the strict legal observance (Acts 15:10; Gal. 3:10), declared insufficient by Jesus? It is certainly impossible, and two thousand years of history are there to prove it, because a historical possibility that, pursued for centuries, cannot be realized, is not a possibility at all. But man, if enlightened by God, is enabled to suffer and die comparing his misery to God's perfection, measuring himself against the perfect reality of His Kingdom. Faithful is the one who feels this hunger and this thirst, faithful are the eyes longing for this light (Matt. 6. 22-23); because of that, prophets have prophesized: those who mourn and bear the mark of the cross, they shall be saved only (Ezek. 9:4-6; Rev. 7:3; Gen. 4:12-15).

3

For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Matt. 9. 13)³

To be more righteous than the most zealous observers of the Law (Matt. 5:20), to be “perfect as the Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48), Jesus calls those who are not righteous at all, not even according to the insufficient standard of strictly legal justice. In the eyes of the Lord, the perfectly righteous is not set in opposition to the wholly unrighteous, but to the ordinarily righteous (Rev. 3:15-16; Ezek. 5:7). The misery of the one who lies at the bottom of sin-pain invokes salvation; salvation is not invoked by the prayer of the observer of the Law who already receives his reward from the feeling of being faithful in observance (Matt. 6:5). There is no continuity, there is no graduality between worldly reality and the one and only God. One is drawn to him through *metànoia*, “change,” “overturning” (Matt. 3:2): the forgiveness the humiliated gives to his offender is the closest thing

³ Quinzio, *Un commento alla Bibbia*, 421-423.

to God's terrible vengeance, it is this cry that provokes it, thus overturning violently the world into Kingdom.

The publicans Jesus surrounds himself with (Matt. 9:9-11; 11:19) are real public sinners who are sought out and called as such (Matt. 5:46), just like harlots are exemplary sinners, as the female equivalent Jesus puts next to publicans (Matt. 21:31; Luke 7:36-38). The publicans' function as tax collectors on behalf of idolatrous enemy and the comparison made by the Messiah between them and heathens (Matt. 18:17; 5:46-47) point at their being excluded from the people, which feel chosen by God (Luke 19:9). That is, in Jesus' words the contrast is between the publicans and those who, belonging to God's people, feel already saved (Jer. 7:4; Matt. 3:9; II Tim. 2:18). The sin, at which the Messiah points in publicans and harlots, is something very different from the sin as is it described in modern rationalizations, which confine it within the limits of a "moral" responsibility or guilt. In all of the Scriptures, the guilt of the sinner is inseparable from consequences, which make him a bringer of contagion, the contact with and the presence of whom are avoided out of fear to catch impurity (Lev. 13-14; Matt. 9:11). The sinner and the sick are indistinguishable (Matt. 9:11-12; John 5:14); just like sickness, sin can be caught through unintentional contact (Lev. 15:6, 19), or inherited from parents (John 9:34, 2); the sinner is excluded from the community of God's people for the same reason the sick is therefrom excluded (Mark 5:25-33; Luke 8:47; Lev. 21:17-23; II Sa. 5:8; Isa. 35:5-6; Matt. 11:5). To heal sickness is, in its truest sense, to remit sin: if the Messiah can make the paralytic walk, all the more can he forgive his sins (Matt. 9:2-8). The condition of the possessed—so frequent in the Gospels and so strangely uncertain to modern eyes, which see the possession standing between mental sickness and sin—is a good example of the essential indistinguishability between different manifestations of evil (Matt. 8:16; Mark 1:32-34; Acts 5:16). Evil spirits as well as sicknesses are ousted by the Messiah's direful voice (Luke 4:41; 4:38-39). In publicans and prostitutes the Lord sees and points at those excluded and rejected by the others who feel safe in their possession of the blessing promised to the righteous and for whom messianic salvation, finally imminent (Matt. 4:17), is actually meaningless, as the presence of the doctor is meaningless for those who are not sick (Matt. 9:12). They who believe themselves already saved do not need salvation, and therefore the first evangelist is Matthew the publican (Matt. 9:9). This is how the sinner, in the overturning effected by Jesus and made possible by such a non-"moral" conception of sin, becomes a figure of poorness, like the sick, the heathen, the child (Matt. 19:13-15; Mark 10:15), the dead (Isa. 53; Phil. 2:6-8): he is the excluded from life, the one who is aware of his own misery, the helpless, the one who cannot take refuge in anywhere, not even in God (Matt. 27:46; II Cor. 5:21).

This overturning is, however, the disconcerting overturning of the Law and of the entire sacred order itself. Life, health, wealth, power—which are God's blessing given to the righteous (Deut. 4:40; 28:3-4; 7:14-15)—have become the obstacle that prevents the righteous from truly desiring (Matt. 11:12) the perfect life, joy, and power God promised to Israel (Deut. 6:10-11; 11:8; 28:1; 11:10-12), from having a desperate need of salvation, and therefore from being in a position to recognize it when it comes. Sin becomes, then, *felix culpa*. The observance of the Law hinders salvation, the Law gives death (Ezek.

20:25-26; Rom. 4:15; Gal. 3:10). The Law has become the old garment that is not worthy patching, the old wineskin that cannot hold new wine (Matt. 9:16-17; Luke 5:39). But this is horribly absurd, it is the very death of God in his work; and yet this is what gives life (Amos 5:8; Rom. 6:3-4). By nearing sinners, the Messiah nears death.

Selected and translated by Giuseppe Perconte Licatese and Ivan Dimitrijević

THE BIRTH OF POLITICAL REALISM FROM THE SPIRIT OF ESCHATOLOGY: A PASSAGE FROM SERGIO QUINZIO'S EARLY REFLECTIONS

EDITORIAL NOTE 1

The first of the following excerpts comes from Quinzio's first book, *Diario Profetico* [Prophetic Diary] (1958).¹ In his twenties, Quinzio was serving as an officer in the Italian fiscal police: evidently not his vocation, but an employment that a young man with some education could do for a living. During his stay in the division located in the castle of Gaeta, not far from Rome, Quinzio began a correspondence with his brother, with whom he often shared the reflections occasioned by his solitary engagement with the Bible. Fragments from this correspondence and other private notes, conceived between 1952 and 1956, eventually came to be published in 1958 in what was Quinzio's first bid at some recognition, with funds he had collected among his aunts.² Quinzio framed this first step into public life rather allusively: those writings, conceived "up until the entrance of their author in his thirtieth year," had "the meaning of a preparation for a vocation which is not that of a writer."³

The following passage from *Diario Profetico* is exceptional among the other fragments in that it has a question-answer structure. It is was originally the question form a niche journal, prompted by the outbreak of the Korean War in 1951, submitted to his contributors to solicit a round of opinions.⁴ In addition to the paradigmatic quality of Quinzio's answers,

¹ S. Quinzio, *Diario Profetico* (Parma: Editore Guanda, 1958); a second edition of this diary, with minor modifications and a few passages dropped due to their dependence on the contingent historical and political context, would appear by editor Adelphi (Milano) in 1996, with a new foreword Quinzio wrote just shortly before his death.

² The story is told by Quinzio in his "Foreword" to *Diario profetico* (Milano: Adelphi, 1996), 11-14.

³ Lines by the author on the front flap of *Diario profetico* (Parma: Guanda, 1958).

⁴ The exchange appeared under the title "Sulla guerra, per la pace" [On war, for peace] in *L'Ultima*, 66 (1951-1952): 32-35, a Florence-based journal which, in the aftermath of the war, tried to keep for some time alive the cultural legacy of some experiences of the Twenties, where *renouveau catholique* motives and metaphysical traditionalism converged. The journal appealed to Quinzio, as its name suggests, for its eschatological quality. Then a public officer, to avoid troubles with his superiors, Quinzio contributed to it under the pseudonym of "Giosué Gorinzi," which is an anagram of his name (I gather this information from P. Zanini, "In margine al *Diario profetico*. Il rapporto tra Sergio Quinzio e le 'avanguardie cattoliche' degli anni '50" [Notes to *Diario profetico*. Sergio Quinzio and the 'Catholic vanguards' of the Fifties], *Humanitas. Rivista bimestrale di cultura*, 2013, no. 3: 408-428; 412-413). For a more mature rejection of this Christian progressivism cf. Quinzio's foreword (dated 1971)

the fact that in the later collection any reference to the original, contingent context is omitted makes this piece stand out, even more and unexpectedly, as a statement of what students of political thought call the “eternal wisdom” of political realism. In those years, not a few among the Catholic intelligentsia and clergy inclined to place their hopes in the newly founded United Nations Organization, in international law and in democracy to progressively establish the conditions of justice and peace among nations. International organization and domestic political reform were believed to be an opportunity, even a vocation for Christians to help build a better society. In that same year 1951 Jacques Maritain was lecturing and writing that the political possibilities of the time were to be seized by “human reason and virtue” to advance the evolution of mankind up to the *civitas maxima* already envisioned by St. Thomas Aquinas, and belittled those “frowning realists” of a different persuasion.⁵

It was against this intellectual and spiritual climate that a 25 years old Quinzio made his statements in the following interview. What he already strongly opposed was the reduction of Christianity into a practical philosophy, a political activism, an “integral humanism” that made the originary position “John the Evangelist had in the isle of Patmos” pale in the distance.⁶ But leaving aside the meaning of these lines in Quinzio’s intellectual path, they deserve to be read in their own right as a testimony of an underestimated intellectual possibility: that Christian faith and theology may lead into political realism. Evil as the permanent, if not metaphysical, root of war in the nature of man; the conflictual essence of law and legality itself and the only apparent “neutrality” of international institutions; the insight in man’s psyche and motivations; the rejection of any progressive philosophy of history, are all classical “realist” variations here explicitly derived from theological dogmas and from an inquiry that judges everything by the demanding standard of the ultimate. To the eschatologist, after all, the *novissimi* being expected only for the end of times, history is, with all its moral ambiguity and more or less apparent conflicts, bound to look like “the realm of recurrence and repetition,” as it looked like to Thucydides, Machiavelli or Martin Wight.

FROM PROPHETIC DIARY (FRAGMENT)

I. DO YOU HOLD WAR TO HAVE A PHYSICAL OR METAPHYSICAL ORIGIN OR NECESSITY, OR NOT?⁷

It seems evident to me that if men always did or had done good, war would not exist; therefore, war would not exist if evil did not exist. The problem of war is then, at least in part, the problem of evil and, as everybody knows, that has not been an easy problem to solve for some thousand years.

Following Augustine, I hold evil to be a non-being, a not-doing, so the question is rather if it is necessary for men to do evil. That necessity, due to original sin, stood until

to *Un commento alla Bibbia* (Milano: Adelphi, 2008), 20.

⁵ J. Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951). See especially 196-200. For a more mature rejection of this Christian progressivism cf. Quinzio’s “Foreword” (dated 1971) to *Un commento alla Bibbia* (Milano: Adelphi, 2008), 20.

⁶ Cf. the letter by Quinzio to the editor of one of the Catholic journals he contributed to, Jan. 1, 1954, quoted in Zanini, “In margine al *Diario profetico*. Il rapporto tra Sergio Quinzio e le ‘avanguardie cattoliche’ degli anni ’50,” 415.

⁷ The following is fragment no. 75 in *Diario profetico*, 1996, p. 77-82 (no. 78, p. 66-71 in the 1958 edition).

redemption, which, restoring us into grace and opening up the gates of the Kingdom, made it possible to win every law and every necessity. Still, that everything goes on just about the way it used to be before, two thousand years since that day when it was heard "*Ecce venio cito (...) tempus enim prope est*,"⁸ is the most absurd thing ever, so much absurd that not even an explanation can be attempted. Scriptures give this image of the historical time between redemption and the end of days.

II. LET'S STICK TO MAN AND HISTORY: BY "WAR," DO YOU MEAN ARMED CONFLICTS AMONG STATES ONLY, OR OTHER FORMS AND SITUATIONS TOO?

We have to reach a shared meaning of the word. Even if we limit "war" to mean armed conflict among States, from the moral point of view it is clear that other conflicts do not substantially differ: revolutions, quarrels, duels, vengeance, and even, perhaps especially, the legal, bloodless war of lawsuits and judicial proceedings.

III. DO YOU THINK IT POSSIBLE TO MORALLY DISCRIMINATE BETWEEN WARS?

A moral discrimination is possible and meaningful between the intentions of the combatants only. One can go to war out of humble obedience, without questioning its reasons; one can go to war, as I would have when I was eighteen, because that halo of sacrifice and sublimity looks better than a tasteless, aimless everyday life leading to nowhere; one can go to war dreaming of unity and glory; one can go to war out of a rude but generous desire to right a wrong, or out of desperation; and one can go to war, too, for a blind hatred, to make riches or prey, to bring an emulating rival down, for sadism, out of folly, or merely as one's profession. It is possible to concede that on the whole, acceptable or even good intentions were to be found (especially in times when forgiveness had not yet been revealed to man, and also in future times when the last war of Apocalypse is waged) in the humble more often than in the great.

Since facts lack a moral meaning in themselves and men can only be called to account for their intentions, war is not good nor evil in itself. As Augustine said in his *City of God*, man, out of his love for temporal goods, life, security, is brought to deem worst those misdeeds endangering them, like murder and theft, while at the same time thinking less of other faults like hypocrisy, egoism, envy, etc. So it happened that war, the bloodiest occurrence of all, came to be deemed the worst of all. Yet again, in itself, the fact of war is not evil nor good.

IV. WAR IS A GIVEN, THEN; BUT DO YOU BELIEVE THAT "INSTRUMENTS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW" COULD POSSIBLY BE EFFECTIVE IN LIMITING ITS WORST FORMS AND CONSEQUENCES?

No, I don't believe that it is within the power of "instruments of international law" to achieve what in two thousand years redemption could not achieve.

Treaties and conventions, even if they managed to restrain war, to make it less cruel and less clamorous, could not eliminate it. Nonetheless, that part of hatred that would be prevented from breaking out violently would translate into hypocrisy and increase.

⁸ "Here I come (...) time is nigh" (Rev. 22:10-12).

V. DO YOU THINK IT IS POSSIBLE TO LEGALLY DEFINE THE AGGRESSOR?

It depends on who is in the position to define. If it is a tribunal or some other “instrument of international law” appointed by the power who has won the war, or by some so-called neutral, well, I think it is impossible to find out the truth. If it were a true Christian, that is, someone free from partisan passions and thirsty for true justice, maybe we could get closer to the truth, which in almost all cases would probably be some sort of reciprocal aggression. I’m thinking here about the war of 1914-1918 or the French revolution, for example. Very often the one that attacks first is actually reacting against a long train of wrongs by the other side.

VI. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WAR CRIMES?

As I already said in my answer to point III, I think that in war men can act more or less honorably, but in any case I fear it is impossible to scrutinize with criminal law’s “Diogenes’ lamp” the intentions of millions of men killing each other. Anyway, it seems to me that reckless violence, when combatants are excited in battle, or resort to extremely ruthless means to strike the enemy down, like guerrilla or hostages, are still less reprehensible than a colonel who hopes to wage war to get a promotion.

This matter has to do with the very possibility of human justice.

VII. DO YOU CONSIDER ANY ASPIRATION TO OR ATTEMPT AT “PERPETUAL PEACE” UTOPIAN? ARE THERE TODAY, OR WILL THERE BE IN THE NEXT FUTURE, IN YOUR OPINION, BETTER CHANCES THAN IN THE PAST FOR WAR TO BE REALLY ABOLISHED AMONG STATES? IF THERE ARE, UNDER WHICH CONDITIONS?

To the first question I answer: yes. Unless it is the aspiration to the destruction of evil, the root of all conflict: that will happen when the Kingdom arrives, but it will only be at the end of times.

I believe that today we are closer than yesterday to that end, but only because more time has passed; the ways of the world, though, are today farther from that end than those of yesterday. An ideologically united world, as that of the Middle Ages, was certainly closer than an ideologically divided one, like ours, which is only unified by technological means and by a false desire of peace, which is really but a fear of the worse and a desire for comfort and material satisfaction.

VIII. HOW MUCH CREDIT DO YOU GIVE TO INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS CLAIMING “TO FOSTER PEACE AMONG STATES?” HOW MUCH TO MOVEMENTS CAMPAIGNING TO THE SAME END?

No credit at all. Not in the least. Save for the good faith and humility of some who join in there.

IX. WHAT’S THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL MORALITY AND THE FACT OF WAR? HOW DO YOU SEE CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS?

It is much too clear to me that impending wars are not, unfortunately, the war for the establishment of the Kingdom, which is the only war that should be waged. Conscientious

objectors have the most diverse motives and any judgment depends on those. Anyway, objection much too often can hide quite mean interests.

X. HOW DO YOU SEE PEOPLE AND MOVEMENTS WHO CLAIM THAT EVEN IN TIMES OF PEACE THEY MUST EXEMPT THEMSELVES FROM OBEDIENCE TO THE STATE THEY ARE CITIZENS OF?

Same answer as above.

EDITORIAL NOTE 2

With his 1984 book, *La croce e il nulla* [The cross and the nothing], Quinzio gave a Christian estimation of the slide of Western philosophy into nihilism, this time from the dim perspective of a man whose beard “has almost turned white.” Quinzio says he has finally come to see what he calls “*il meccanismo del mondo*,” an inner law of development in history pushing toward a brink where contradictions are heightened, and the gravest danger paradoxically goes with the greatest opportunity for redemption.

At one point of his train of thought, the theme of war resurfaces when Quinzio gives his idea of the lineage of the classical, European conception of war (Clausewitz is clearly the one hinted at), full of the irony of unintended consequences. But the author soon turns his mind to the extreme case of nuclear annihilation, and tests the strength of the concept the Catholic doctrine has been grappling with until today, that of “just war.” Here Quinzio’s radicality comes into play. He knows the commandment in Mt 5:44 and is uneasy about the historical record of conflicting Christian views on the resort to violence, and about the institutional Church, who never said a final “yes” or “no.” However, Quinzio knows that the Christian faith is no ingenuous faith, and this leads to an unexpected turn. The concept of just war, though insufficient according to the perfection of love, always slippery and often hypocritical, has been a morally responsible effort. And if it has become impossible under modern conditions, still the choice of non-violence is so unacceptable, in its counterfeiting of a Kingdom not yet come, that the Christian would better turn to Hobbes.

FROM THE CROSS AND THE NOTHING (FRAGMENT)⁹

War was, in antiquity, the outburst of a mythic sacred violence. Under Christian influence, this outburst was felt as absurd and malign, so that modern minds rather thought of war, in contractualistic terms, as of a gradual, controlled pressure to be exerted—a “continuation of political intercourse by other means”—in order to win concessions from the opponent. Behold the instrumentally rational slaughter, the decisive increase in cynicism that came as the result of a Christian rejection of sacred violence.

Just war. If, according to a traditional Catholic doctrine that reaches back to Augustine, the defensive character is what in the last instance makes a war morally just, and if this also obviously implies some proportionality between the good which is threatened and the offence inflicted to defend it, how can a nuclear war that would cause a catastrophe of unimaginable proportions, and even the end of humanity itself, ever be

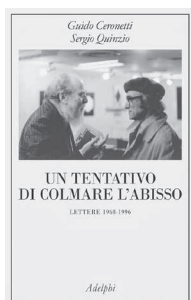
⁹ The following excerpt comes from S. Quinzio, *La croce e il nulla* (Milan: Adelphi, 1984), 144-146.

legitimate? When military expenses rise to astronomically large numbers, and meanwhile famine deaths amount to tens of millions, is it still legitimate to speak of self-defense?

That the religion of the humiliated and crucified God, which goes as far as to command to offer the other cheek to the offender, did elaborate on a theory of just war, and one that, as history shows, served to justify several unjust wars, is already in itself perplexing. It has always been so. If saint Ambrose said “the courage to defend one’s fatherland against the barbarians conforms to justice” (in his book *On the duties of the clergy*), saint Maximilian, the martyr, said: “I cannot serve as a soldier, I cannot do harm, because I’m a Christian” (*The Passion of Saint Maximilian*). This last pacifist stance, always of minorities, was never encouraged by the Church, but neither was it ever disapproved of. It is hard to deny that there is contradiction between the precept to love even one’s enemies and preparing and using weapons to kill them. It is also difficult, however, not to justify the man who kills to forcefully take the innocent from the hands of the murderer. The ambiguity has never been wanting, but today it explodes because of the huge destructive power attained by technology.

The Second Vatican Council, in its constitution on the Church in the modern world, *Gaudium et spes*, has condemned “any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas along with their population,” calling this “a crime against God.” It further declared arms race a “scandal,” since it also “damages the poor to an intolerable degree.” Therefore, as today an effective war and its preparation cannot but imply such consequences, “just war” becomes, according to the very principles which made it such, impossible. But with the fall of the millenary edifice that has always strived to establish a middle ground of moral and juridical certainty on the slippery concept of just war, we are left to the naked alternative between *homo homini lupus* and absolute non-violence. The Christian logic is a paradoxical one, against all appearances leading to Hobbes rather than to Tolstoj and Gandhi. It indeed rejects, as delusive and anti-christical, the ideal of achieving a total elimination of war from the history of the world, as much as the ideal of a total elimination of poverty (“the poor you will have always with you,” Mt 26:11); although this does not exempt us from the duty to make peace (Mt 5:9) and to help our neighbor. When, praising the faith of the Roman centurion (Mt 8:5-13), Jesus did not ask him to give up the military profession, he did so within the perspective of the imminent “day of the Lord” announced by ancient prophets, when swords and spears would be transformed into pruning hooks and plowshares. The Christian faith, in its awareness of the unhealable evil of the world, comes close to the most radical historical pessimism; indeed, it is *the* most radical historical pessimism.

Editorial notes and translation by Giuseppe Perconte Licatese



Giuseppe Perconte Licatese

“AN ATTEMPT TO BRIDGE THE ABYSS”: CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN SERGIO QUINZIO AND GUIDO CERONETTI

[Sergio Quinzio, Guido Ceronetti, *Un tentativo di colmare l'abisso. Lettere 1968-1996*. Edited by Giovanni Marinangeli, foreword by Guido Ceronetti. Milano: Adelphi, 2014]

“Dear Quinzio, at last I have finished your book, while on train and in Turin. I have been underlining a lot throughout, following your arguments with full attention. With many of your analyses I agree, they helped me see things clear, and I don’t have to stress our agreement when we already share a common ground. The fundamental difference, though, remains: I am not a Christian.”¹ With these words, sparked by his reading of Sergio Quinzio’s first theological tract *Cristianesimo dell’inizio e della fine* (1967), Guido Ceronetti invited his interlocutor to join in the intense and ultimately three decades long correspondence that has been recently published by the almost lifelong publisher of the two men, Adelphi (Milano), for which the correspondence itself is a remarkable document of its own cultural and editorial history.²

¹ Ceronetti to Quinzio, December 26, 1968, in Guido Ceronetti–Sergio Quinzio, *Un tentativo di colmare l'abisso. Lettere 1968-1996*, ed. G. Marinangeli, foreword G. Ceronetti (Milano: Adelphi, 2014), 19. Hereafter, references to letters and pages without other indication belong to the book under review.

² The *carteggio* is furnished with a wealth of biographical and bibliographical information in the appendix of notes (373-444) by editor Giovanni Marinangeli. Since the end of the 1960s, Adelphi has published most of Ceronetti’s

No courtesy formulas but the seriousness of a question was the first move in this conversation: Ceronetti, doubtfully but respectfully, challenges Quinzio to justify his messianic hope and is keen to put his alternative position in sharp relief from the beginning: “on this matter there is no use in arguing, one has to believe. Like you I see the final catastrophe too, but I cannot see the Kingdom that should follow next (...) what I see is not the Kingdom, what would mean a prosecution, after a break, of historical time, but the terrible and divine and absolute and inexorable restart, without any memory, of this dim tragedy of time.” “Anyway, Ceronetti adds, “it is wonderful to have found someone out there who *really* waits for the Kingdom and does not just think about running the household or making history,”³ and as he would later write, for all his “natural un-Christianity,” in Quinzio he had found “a *nabi* to listen to,” and to hold dear.⁴ Quinzio humbly reasserted the nakedness of his faith, framing the opposition between the two as that between the Greek who pursues wisdom and the Jew who asks for a miracle (Saint Paul),⁵ and forewarned that the answers that would pile up in the dialogue would amount to “an attempt to bridge the abyss”⁶ (later to become the title of the edited correspondence). Indeed, although affection and perceptiveness into one another would grow, up until the bitter and abrupt end of the *carteggio*—Quinzio’s death in 1996—the two men kept staring at each other from the opposite edges of a rift. But before anything, some words about Guido Ceronetti are in order.

A HEATHEN REWAKENED: GUIDO CERONETTI

If Quinzio rather clearly stands here as the self-styled “*lector unius Libri*,”⁷ a man of one single commitment to one single book, it is more difficult to approach his most unusual interlocutor with defining intent.⁸ A tiny, lean man whose countenance one is tempted to see as

translating efforts and some of his poetry and prose. It has held an exclusive grasp on Quinzio’s theological essays, which it keeps re-issuing to this day. A discussion of the history and the editorial policy of this eclectic and esoteric, though at the same time commercially successful, Italian publisher would need an article in his own right. Through the correspondence Ceronetti and Quinzio sometimes refer to their mentors at the publisher in Milan with an un-capitalized *gli adelphi* (Greek: the brothers), hinting at their posture of mysteriousness and elitarianism. If the unconventional and *maudit* Ceronetti somehow fell naturally in the ranks of Adelphi, the story for Quinzio went a bit differently: “I came back home in the afternoon one day and my mother said an old lad was waiting for me in the room there (...) he said to me: *we*—he used this ‘*we*’ that could mean nothing to me at that time—have been following what you write for *Tempo presente* and for the publisher Guanda and would like to know if you have anything to publish with us” — Quinzio, *Mi ostino a credere. Autobiografia in forma di dialogo* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2006), quoted by Marinangeli, *Un tentativo di colmare l’abisso*, 373–374. Quinzio was pleased by his recruitment but remained uneasy about the possibility that his Christian testimony be swallowed up in what he deemed the relativistic literary catalogue of the publisher: “An odd craving, that of Roberto [Calasso, main editor at Adelphi]. We have been taken in, too, only because he had a taste of us and found we met his appetite for the unusual. Thanks to his folly Adelphi is the most unique publisher in Italy, sure, but still I dislike being one dish among the others on Apicius’ table” (Quinzio to Ceronetti, August 10, 1974, 132; Apicius was a Roman, probably Epicurean, *bon vivant*).

³ Ceronetti to Quinzio, December 26, 1968, 20.

⁴ Ceronetti to Quinzio, February 19, 1972, 83.

⁵ Quinzio to Ceronetti, December 30, 1968, 21.

⁶ Quinzio to Ceronetti, March 15, 1969, 24. A literal translation of “un tentativo di colmare l’abisso” is “an attempt to fill the abyss”: an expression consistent with Quinzio’s idea that the abyss of un-belief and non-redemption is to be filled by the flood of God’s grace at the end of times.

⁷ Quinzio to Ceronetti, July 15, 1975, 168.

⁸ A very brief and effective portrait is C. Langone, “Guido Ceronetti,” in *Cari italiani vi invidio* (Rome: Fazi Editore, 2001), 38–43. For a more comprehensive treatment, outlining more of a philosophy of this writer, see the dissertation written by the already mentioned editor of the *carteggio*, and close student of Ceronetti, G. Marinangeli, *Guido*

the result of intellectual discipline as much as of his strict vegetarianism, Ceronetti (born 1927, like Quinzio) has over the years given (and inspired others to give) multiple definitions of himself—he's always had a *penchant* for witty definitions: "defamed philologist," "desperate Cireneus," "an expert in healthy mistrusts and revulsions," "integral gnostic," "daily commuter between paganism and prophetism," "wreckologist," "non-believer in Man."⁹ Since the 1970s Ceronetti has carved for himself a niche on the fringe of Italian culture, as an external critic of its hegemonic strands: the secular, progressivist ones, either marxist or liberal, and democratic, optimistic Catholicism. Cherished, in spite of an indomitable pessimism and anti-modernism, by mainstream households of Italian cultural industry (publisher Einaudi, and major national newspapers *La Stampa* and *Repubblica*) he still occasionally lends himself to writing nonconformist and perplexing columns with statements on current affairs that, it has been noticed, "the first day go sanitized as *attempts to stir controversy* and the next are buried as *literature*."¹⁰ But the man is dead serious.

Once wanderer on the move to unearth the traces of an "*Italia abscondita e pneumatica*" (gnostic vocabulary for "a hidden and spiritual Italy"), vestiges of art and history and landscape heavily offended by urbanization,¹¹ Ceronetti is especially a defender of Italian language, which he is afraid will "in half a century retreat in protected areas of jargonists and erudites able to decipher texts that are hardly understood already today."¹² He is himself a writer in a unique Italian prose, one inclined to condensate into sharp aforisms and rich in virtuosities and idiosyncracies that are bound to get lost in any translation.¹³ Poet, essayist, Ceronetti is also director of his own itinerant theatre (where he often made use of puppets, "symbols of a freedom denied to man by He who holds the threads"¹⁴), with which he, aged 87, has just lately, upon the centennial of World War I, toured Italy

Ceronetti. *Il veggente di Cetona* (Isola del Piano: Fondazione Alce Nero, 1996). Emil Cioran, Parisian acquaintance of Ceronetti, also wrote a portrait of him in his *Esercizi di ammirazione* (Milano: Adelphi, 1988), 199-205.

⁹ Definitions of this kind are scattered everywhere in the literature concerning Ceronetti. Marinangeli, *Guido Ceronetti*, provides an appendix where a lot of them are collected.

¹⁰ Langone, "Guido Ceronetti," 40. One of his early polemical pieces was his feverish reaction to the first moon landing and the ensuing, intolerable wave of enthusiasm: Ceronetti scorned "the populace" who, "after having seen the two cautious, pale figures defile the surface of the other world, left the TV screens to rejoice, like a nocturnal gang of lewd voyeurs, in the feeling of having took part in the celestial rape," and the intellectuals "who write about 'Man', the power of 'Man' and his Future, swelling for 'the possibilities opened up', gloating for 'the triumph of intelligence' (...) aiming to spread through an insane mechanical diaspora the incurable human evils on surfaces not in the least eager to be infected" (Ceronetti, *Difesa della Luna e altri argomenti di miseria terrestre* (Milano: Rusconi 1972); I have taken the passages from the quotations by Marinangeli in his notes to the correspondence, p. 380 and in his *Guido Ceronetti. Il veggente di Cetona*, p. 63). Another episode was when in 1999, alone in breaking an almost universal reprobation, Ceronetti went to pay a visit in jail to Erich Priebke, the Nazi military officer belatedly prosecuted by Italian criminal courts for his role in the bloody reprisals on civilians during the war, denouncing what he saw as a scapegoat case and calling to a nobler tradition of *pietas* and amnesty for the defeated ("Priebke. Alcune domande intorno a un ergastolo," *La Stampa*, February 23, 1999: 25).

¹¹ Ceronetti, *Viaggio in Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 2004 [1983]).

¹² Langone, "Guido Ceronetti," 42.

¹³ To the knowledge of this writer, among a few other translations in European languages a Polish translation of Ceronetti does exist: *Drzewa bez bogów* (Krakow: Oficyna Literacka 1995); original: *Il silenzio del corpo. Materiali per uno studio di medicina* (Milano: Adelphi, 1979), a book which Quinzio felt close to him and deemed to be Ceronetti's truer testimony (cf. Quinzio to Ceronetti, February 13, 1979 and Ceronetti to Quinzio, March 18, 1979, 218-221, about Quinzio's review of the book, "Guido, io vorrei che tu, Orazio e io," *Il Giornale*, February 25, 1979).

¹⁴ Langone, "Guido Ceronetti," 41.

with a poetical recollection of the combatants in the trenches, drawing on texts of Bloy, Céline, Jünger, Ungaretti, the Bible.¹⁵ Above all, however, Ceronetti has earned his reputation as an original translator of classical texts: much more than his beloved heathens, like Sophocles and Juvenal, he extensively engaged the Old Testament: *Isaiah*, *Job*, *Qohélet*, *The Psalms*, *The Song of Songs* (all published by Adelphi), with a view to unfolding an eternal, and not necessarily always orthodox, wisdom in them.

What does Ceronetti believe in? One is certainly struck by the sincretism of someone who once claimed “that the little girl in Lourdes did not see Virgin Mary but Atman-Brahman [the Hindu divine principle].”¹⁶ Of Christianity, after all, he always picked the heresies and the mystics. The vanishing point of his endorsement of the Veil of Maya, as well as of the Fate of the Greek tragedians, and also of his idea of redemption through *good* writing is, evidently, some kind of gnostic dualism. Ceronetti himself avowed to Quinzio his allegiance to “glimpses of gnostic-cathar-manichaean metaphysics, for which creation is essentially evil”¹⁷ and later bluntly confirmed: “the theology of the resurrection of the bodies,” Quinzio’s overarching dogma, “made me shrink back as from the gallows.”¹⁸ If we are to follow Marinangeli, however, his dualism is less the proper Manichean one envisaging two equal contending forces, than one contemplating an ambiguous god, silent (perhaps powerless) observer of human affairs: a conception were it is not wrong to recognise some influence from Quinzio’s theology about a God “that, with his stubborn silence, frustrates twenty centuries of history.”¹⁹

Ceronetti is basically a seeker of wisdom and beauty in a world that he sees becoming more and more hostile to them, in a life that, under modern conditions, “falls under the cleaver of an accelerating temporality that promises to leave nothing intact.”²⁰ From time to time his reaction can be that of an enraged cathar, or of an esthetic escapist, but also of a compassionate friend of the suffering. In his eyes, the human condition (due to technocracy, to the rise of new religious wars, or to the loss of meaning and entropy of modernity pure and simple) is basically tragic: “Laocoon, that man strangled and poisoned to death by two giant sea snakes impellingly sent by the gods, is worth pondering as an image of mankind today.”²¹

READING THE SIGNS OF TIMES

One rewarding way to appreciate the *carteggio* is to read it as a rare document of Italian intellectual history, and an example of the engagement of two unusual minds with the

¹⁵ 1914, Ceronetti remarked, was an ominous date, a trigger: “I don’t call it the first world war, to me it looks like the matrix of all wars. It has shattered any possibility of peace on earth. There was no such thing as a first, second, cold, third war, it is just one and the same slaughter. It was a metaphysical, eschatological break-up” (Simona Spaventa, “Ceronetti battagliero va alla guerra,” *Repubblica-Milano*, October 3, 2014).

¹⁶ Langone, “Guido Ceronetti,” 39.

¹⁷ Ceronetti to Quinzio, June 29 1971, 70.

¹⁸ Ceronetti, “Incolmabile è l’abisso” (December 2013, foreword to the correspondence; hereafter: Foreword), 13.

¹⁹ Marinangeli, *Il veggente di Cetona*, 56.

²⁰ Ceronetti, *Viaggio in Italia*, xii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 329. The reference here is to the sculpture of *Laocoon and his sons* displayed in the Vatican Museums, Rome.

issues of their society, of the relationship between thought as a vocation and public writing.²² The unrelenting critical spirit of Ceronetti prompted Quinzio to make statements about politics, culture and contemporary personalities and to refine the ideas he would later voice in newspapers articles—a part of his *oeuvre* to which scholars more acquainted with his biblical exegesis will be introduced by this correspondence. It must be said that, for both men, journalism was the least favorite way of expression. It was a distraction from their main projects, but a necessary income for two students of forgotten books with no academic position, that would never rise above the economical status of “poorest scribes.”²³ It was also a matter of continuous uncertainty and negotiation with editorial boards, of articles long “detained in quarantine,” as Quinzio used to say, before publication.²⁴ Above all, although they both were in part flattened to have such means of expression as a monthly column or to be featured on radio programs,²⁵ there is ample evidence throughout the letters that they ultimately doubted their take on events and ideas would have any impact on a deaf public—but unlike Ceronetti, Quinzio’s feeling was less that of an elitist than that of a biblical prophet lamenting the estrangement of his people.

Ceronetti recalls that the judgement of the historical present through an eschatological frame was a crucial point of convergence between the two.²⁶ The absence of constraints with which the two could exchange ideas by mail make a case for an often arresting reading—although it is true that neither of them refrained from straightforward, honest formulations in public writing as well. Questioned, for example, by his friend about an allegedly impending ecological catastrophe, Quinzio downplayed what he sensed was for the most part a false surrogate of authentic eschatology, a talk “too modernly mechanistic and scientifically predictive,” but only to hit harder with his eschatological impatience: “I don’t believe the ecological catastrophe could be fatal—how I wish it could! More than any ecological catastrophe, I fear that the catastrophe does not come, that a remedy is found (that Satan finds it), which can only mean a further step downward in the decay of man.”²⁷ The fact that in Italy, too, abortion—just to pick the gravest issue in a conversation that often fell, without any political correctness, on modern sex, feminism, homosexuality, the death penalty—was on its way to legalization and medical-technical

²² As such the book has been welcomed: see, among the relatively few reviews that have appeared in the last months on newspapers, C. Langone, “Gli eretici Quinzio e Ceronetti. Ecco i padri della destra divina,” *Il Giornale*, May 15, 2014 and S. Givone, “Sul ring metafisico tra Quinzio e Ceronetti,” *Il Manifesto*, June 29, 2014, also easily retrievable online.

²³ *Scribi poverissimi*, wrote Quinzio upon expressing his gratitude to Ceronetti, who had just sent him some money out of the sum received for a literary prize, to help him in a time of financial straits (October 4, 1973, 105).

²⁴ See *inter multa alia* Quinzio to Ceronetti, December 26, 1974, 145-147. *La Stampa*—a leading national newspaper based in Turin, read by the liberal, enlightened *bourgeoise*—after having recruited Quinzio as a columnist thanks to Ceronetti’s good offices, would at some point end his collaboration due to his uncanny religiosity, only to bring him back years later.

²⁵ Quinzio was occasionally heard on the third national radio station (*Rai3*) in the 1970-80s, daring to speak about such themes as the religious meaning of disease or the eschatology of Rozanov (cf. pp. 50, 201, 314 and related notes by Marinangeli).

²⁶ “That this age it was our lot to live in be a messianic age, crowned with meaningful catastrophes, and that its wars be eschatological, no less that its peaces deceitful, was a shared assumption. I fear this key point of authentic historiographical gnosis might not clearly emerge among the whirlwind of the relatively little personal anxieties that keep the correspondence going” (Foreword, “Incolmabile è l’abisso” (December 2013), 13)

²⁷ Quinzio to Ceronetti, May 1, 1974, 119.

routinization was a more serious matter: “it seems to me plain clear that, when abortion is allowed, infanticide, but also euthanasia of the sick and the crippled and the retarded cannot be at the same time forbidden for much too long, not to mention the elimination of the old and the industrial exploitation of corpses. Either one logic or the other;” and modern hospitalization, “pushing the blood and the stink out of the sight of men, makes them numb, and makes the horror invisible, thus allowing it to overflow.”²⁸

Unsurprisingly for two men who couldn’t bear electoral campaigns and shun from voting, domestic politics had only a residual role. Ceronetti and Quinzio felt threatened by the marxist cultural and political hegemony, but after all would not buy into any alternative on the right. The State of Israel is instead a frequently visited theme. Ceronetti, who leans heavily towards the Israeli and against the Arabs, dares to say that “one can have an Israel-centric idea of world political problems, since they all intertwine there,”²⁹ and often invites his interlocutor to disclose his position—readers here will have much to learn on Quinzio’s disposition to Judaism—only to obtain, at least provisionally, that his friend is basically not far from the *Neturei Karta*.³⁰ Catholicism, the Church and political theology run as another cluster of themes throughout, and the correspondence will yield further elements to assess Quinzio’s standing in this respect, with him, however, seemingly eluding conservative-progressive, left-right divides. The reader will be allowed, for instance, to measure the depth of his reservations about Pope Paul VI: his rhetorics of a peaceful settlement between Christianity and the world are held to betray a deep theological confusion through which a secularized faith in earthly progress had sneaked in the place of an authentic (Quinzio would say: *kenotic*) Christology of history.³¹ But, if Quinzio was wary of any leftist adulteration of his religion, the correspondence almost equally proves his distance—a Catholic who had dropped all idea of the *katéchon* Quinzio was—from those who, like don Gianni Baget Bozzo and don Luigi Giussani,³² embodied a Catholic conservative engagement in culture and politics. A lack of clarity that, for the lone exegete of the Bible, did not always have only intellectual, unpractical consequences: “here in town many look askance at us and are unfair to us, especially since the priest singled us out as heretics and *brigatisti rossi*.”³³

A PASSIONATE, BUT INCONCLUSIVE ROUND

An almost fraternal bond soon develops. Quinzio and Ceronetti evidently find in the correspondence a source of great consolation. They follow and timely comment upon the writings of each other, and are eager to ask for the opinion of one another on many issues.

²⁸ Quinzio to Ceronetti, September 27, 1972, 94, and November 30, 1972, 95.

²⁹ Ceronetti to Quinzio, November 22, 1975, 181.

³⁰ *Neturei Karta* is a fringe ultra-orthodox group in contemporary Judaism that rejects sionism and the State of Israel as blasphemy and a failure to wait faithfully for God to accomplish the messianic promise.

³¹ See especially Quinzio to Ceronetti, December 20, 1972, 96, and January 10, 1973, 97.

³² Gianni Baget Bozzo (1925-2009) was a remarkable and also controversial figure of priest, prolific writer and a politician himself, enemy of marxism and especially of the peculiarly Italian, postwar convergence between progressive Catholicism and marxist activism (the so called *cattocomunismo*). Luigi Giussani (1922-2005) was the charismatic priest whose commitment with the youth since the Fifties inspired the birth of *Comunione e Liberazione*, a religious movement which is almost synonymous with a culturally and intellectually aware, militant Catholicism.

³³ Quinzio to Ceronetti, November 5, 1981, p. 249. *Brigatisti rossi* (members of the communist terrorist group *Brigate Rosse*) was definitely the more dubious allegation.

They also share dietary advice, housing problems, and other everyday needs: Ceronetti often submitted to Quinzio his orders of honey and other organic farming products that a common friend made in the countryside to where the latter had retreated.³⁴ But the conversation is dim most of the time: in what is a slightly obsessive sidetrack to it, health problems, aging and family troubles are discussed, not to mention the worst sorrows like the death of Quinzio's first wife, Stefania,³⁵ that remains present throughout the dialogue until the end.

Yet, neither is changed by the dialogue in his core beliefs. Perhaps, from Quinzio's point of view, his death would mark the only possible, authentic progress in the confrontation, making it transcend into the difference between the living and the dead, between he who has still time to entertain philosophy and poetry, to hope and to talk with others, and he who, being now entirely at the mercy of the God from whom he expected salvation, has left those delusive means behind once and for all. Ceronetti regretted that the "abyss" between them was all along consciously "excavated and widened by Quinzio himself"³⁶. In those days, he soon realized that "along the direction from you to me, the dialogue is possible, though difficult; the opposite is impossible. I would not blame this lack of reciprocity on your Christianity, it is a matter of individual temper. You can't deny a defensiveness on your part, like some sort of self-cloistering within invisible walls, which I must respect."³⁷ Quinzio was a constant source of advice and often the one who inspired Ceronetti to go on with his translation work of ever new books of the Old Testament. Their exchange on the *Qohélet* – which Ceronetti played against his friend as "your Enemy, since it fiercely opposes the apocalyptic tradition" – and on the *Song of songs* are one of the most telling in the correspondence.³⁸ But, in turn, he evaded the eclectic suggestions of his friend. Jünger? "It's but a name to me." Bloy? "I would rather pass on an author whom I forgot to have once read." Sufism? "I know, but it's a far off road where I am easily led astray."³⁹ Philology, Ceronetti's pride, is repeatedly dismissed as a prophane dismembering of sacred texts, at best a self-delusion. Quinzio often reads into his friend an authentic struggle with "the semitic One God," but for the most part of the dialogue remains painfully aware that the all-decisive question (to put it in Kierkegaardian terms) goes unheeded: "Guido, you probably think you are giving me the most generous acceptance, but in truth you welcome all but the one and only thing that matters to me, that is, the exclusivist character of my intention, as you welcome it as one additional element among the others in your world of poetic forms (...) [you solve my] hope in the Lord in the ocean where all conceivable and more or less mythical or symbolical figures of religious hope are made equal."⁴⁰

³⁴ Isola del Piano, a small town in the ragged interior of the Italian peninsula (exactly in the region Marche), is where after his wife's death Quinzio and his daughter Pia dwelt most of the time, and where he attended his *Commento alla Bibbia* in 4 volumes.

³⁵ Stefania Barbareschi, first wife of Quinzio, died of breast cancer on February 20, 1970. In 1976 Quinzio marries Anna Giannatiempo, lecturer of philosophy in Perugia, who will survive him (notes by Marinangeli, pp. 389, 417).

³⁶ Ceronetti, Foreword, 11.

³⁷ Ceronetti to Quinzio, July 9, 1972, 89.

³⁸ See 26-27, 61-63, 159-162.

³⁹ See 58, 85, 167.

⁴⁰ Quinzio to Ceronetti, February 22, 1972, 84.

Quinzio's estimate of art and literature with respect to religion is, among other themes, intriguingly to be distilled from these pages. On the whole, a mind untouched by relativistic correctness emerges: "Dear Guido (...) I hope you eventually come to try religion,"⁴¹ Quinzio stated from the outset, and always felt compelled to never water things down in the face of differences: "I must tell you what I know, that before God it is me who is right because I want to adore him as the one and only true God and serve him faithfully (...) I pray for you to convert and to live (...) forgive me, or at least, bear with me: if I did not speak to you this way I would not act as a friend to you."⁴² Forty years later, Ceronetti employs the metaphor of *boxe* (the only "extrabiblical interest" they really shared) to describe their passionate but inconclusive round together.⁴³

WAITING TO CHALLENGE THE WORLD IN THE LAST JUDGMENT

In the last five or six years the letters attest Quinzio's steady decline in physical and moral energies, and a sense of doom also somehow alerts his interlocutor, who rather prematurely arranges things to transfer the correspondence to a public archive in Lugano (Switzerland).⁴⁴ The life trajectory of an aging, and intellectually defeated, Quinzio appears to reproduce the one he prefigured for historical Christianity itself: "after all, I have long since accepted and yielded to the advance of a world that is ever more a stranger to my thought patterns and innermost questions. I keep waiting to challenge it in the final judgment at the end of times."⁴⁵ Those talks about a personal failure and a universal (perhaps providential) exhaustion of Christianity have stayed with Ceronetti, and just recently surfaced in a perplexing meditation over the receding of the Christian testimony in the world and the fate of the Roman Church.⁴⁶ How to deal with the suffering of the world without Christ? Over compassion for the suffering implied in the human condition, it is Ceronetti's final remark, the two men reconciled, although Quinzio, in one of his last bouts of *dolorismo implacabile* (Ceronettianism for Quinzio's "unyielding adherence to pain," to the Cross), rejected every possible joy or consolation less than the final, divine one: "I am not frightened by the suffering that life may inflict upon me, since it has already inflicted much upon who was infinitely better and frailer than me. I am frightened above all else by the suffering that keeps moving forward across the globe like a steamroller. I care little of guilt, little of justice, little of truth, little of beauty: I care about suffering."⁴⁷ To the readers of the correspondence it is now left to explore further the existential sources of what Quinzio late in life termed a "religiously daring thinking."⁴⁸

⁴¹ Quinzio to Ceronetti, April 28, 1969, 25.

⁴² Quinzio to Ceronetti, May 18, 1974, 122-123.

⁴³ Ceronetti, Foreword, 12.

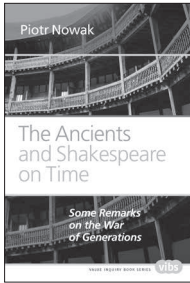
⁴⁴ Ceronetti to Quinzio, January 2, 1994, 355 ff.

⁴⁵ Quinzio to Ceronetti, July 28, 1989, 322.

⁴⁶ Ceronetti, "Se muore il cristianesimo," *La Repubblica*, September 10, 2014: 1, 31. "What I have to say is that I mourn a dying Christianity. An amputation of vast proportions is going on, in deep anesthesia, so that nobody is wakened (...) When Quinzio wrote or spoke to me about it in advance, I was indifferent. I don't believe I have changed in the while, nor have I returned in my old age to my childhood devotions; the fact, however, is so imposing everywhere, and so many are the signs of the end, that I too can now feel it personally as a wound."

⁴⁷ Cf. Quinzio to Ceronetti, May 2, 1991, 345, and Ceronetti's comments in Foreword, 13-14.

⁴⁸ S. Quinzio, *Diario profetico* (Milano: Adelphi), 20.



TIME, THE OLD AND THE YOUNG, OR CHAOS CONTROLLED

[Piotr Nowak, *The Ancients and Shakespeare on Time. Some remarks on the War of Generations*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014]

Piotr Nowak has chosen Aristophanes and Shakespeare, both great though different observers of life and both playwrights, who in their own ways try to tell us something about ourselves, as his chief interlocutors in a conversation concerning a theme which, as he confesses, has teased him for a long time.

The matter at hand is a ceaseless struggle of generations, and Nowak's questions have weight and enforce reflection: what is at stake in that struggle? Who participates in it? Do the Young race for power or do the Old defend their positions?

From the very beginning Nowak defines carefully his stance; for him conflict and tension between generations are not only inevitable, but also creative, especially in their political and moral dimensions. They are inevitable because each generation adopts its own perspective from many possible vantages from which reality may be observed; and they are creative because the adopted perspective enforces a new definition of identity against the future. Particularly interesting for Nowak is the process of defining the past in order to establish the present against the fundamental parameters of human existence: the here and now must be related to a scale of values—which one?

It has to be stressed that Nowak does not side either with the Old or with the Young, but places himself as if in between them. He is an observer who tries to keep distance; he knows he prefers the Young because he himself rejects the despotism of the Old, yet he admits the necessity of defense against the storming Young, finishing the introductory essay with a moving quotation about the loneliness in old age from Rozanov's *The Apocalypse of Our Time*. The position of an objective observer is an understandable choice: Nowak is in his forties, in the time exactly 'between'. After Heidegger one might say that he, too, belongs to the generation understood as a society of fate, and the choice of his own perspective is the result of maturity, i.e. the experience of youth and the fear of the inescapable defence of the weakening stronghold of old age.

The book contains three essays on three ancient Greek Texts, Plato's *The Republic*, and Aristophanes' *Clouds* and *The Assembly Women*; three further essays take the

reader to Shakespeare's *King Lear*, *Measure for Measure* and *The Tempest*. The reading list is idiosyncratic, but decidedly impressive, not to say provocative. It invites the reader to enter the dialogue with the author, and though Nowak leads his discussion in a strong voice backed up by a thorough knowledge of his texts and by most consistent argumentation, the reader by no means would end by nodding in agreement. Evidently the reading list is selected carefully to document Nowak's own ideas, but at the same time each text carries its own specific structure of meaning which challenges those ideas and so forces the author to look at them from different angles. The reader, too, is forced to define his/her position and experience, and rethink them in the course of this specific *colloquium*.

I do not intend to fight my own battle with Piotr Nowak in this review. My aim is to make prospective readers interested in this unusual book. The essence of humanities lies in open and numerous debates. The way Nowak develops his reflections on the problem of generation gap and generation struggle, the way he uses his texts to illustrate his points and to argue his views opens the opportunity for interesting and complex discussion exactly in the Socratic spirit.

The discussion on Book I of Plato's *Republic* introduces the perspective of senility and of a special perspective on youth and justice. The latter which dominates the dialogue of Socrates and Cephalos apparently joins moral and political elements. Justice is difficult to define and inevitably leads towards the problem of state and of the relationship between those in power and their subjects. Nowak is interested in the way the dialogue opens various levels on which further disquisitions concerning the conflict of generations will take place.

Clouds are read in the context of Swift's and Gogol's piercing satire sparing nobody and nothing. Comedy does not need to offer entertainment or a comfortable self-congratulatory feeling that life is beautiful, just the opposite, it may discover existential horror and shake one with the depth of human stupidity. Nowak tries to find a thread in the maze of burlesque, obscenity and vulgarity, the thread which would allow him to comprehend the object of Aristophanes' ridicule and find the ways to refer it to our contemporary experience. The thread turns out to be the theme of the generational conflict rather than the traditionally accepted "defeat" of Socrates and the sophists. The conflict is placed in the oppositions father-son and the agon of Just and Unjust Arguments. The clever son catches the opportunity to learn the art of manipulation from the Unjust Argument, and following the lesson of *phrontesterion* he decides to do as his father does rather than obey him. The defeat of the father is partly due to his stupidity, partly due to the false and dishonest values embraced by the son. Even if the son's final victory in the conflict with his father seems just to a point, for Nowak the end of Strepsiades' world is tragic; he does not find the world of Pheidippides inviting and attractive. More, the belief that one can begin from scratch, rejecting the help of the Old appears to be nothing more than an illusion. So one has to find the means of defence which in the end may defeat the Young: Strepsiades sets *phrontesterion* ablaze, and Socrates dies in the flames. The final interpretation of the wisdom that *Clouds* offer is a grim rational conclusion that the conflict of generations is unavoidable and irreversible, and sooner or later will change life into nightmare.

Can the Young ever accept the truth that their Vision of the Brave New Word is an illusion? Nowak, from his position in between, seems to lean towards the party of the Old.

His reading of *The Assembly Women* moves the conflict onto a wider plane of the social conflict between men and women, not only between the parties of the Old and Young. The women who by trick usurp the rule of Athens are young, full of energy and belief that they can improve the state. Men are old, decrepit and effeminate. The new law is supposed to eliminate the social evil due to men's government, the particular aim being to make the Young and the Old of equal rights. In the satirical vision of Aristophanes the women introduce absolute equality of men and women, and total communal possession of everybody and everything, which leads to grotesque inequality in view of the absolutely privileged position of women, particularly old women in matters of sex. The general chaos which ensues brings in effect the end of the utopia of an ideal state. *The Assembly Women* is definitely a political satire which warns us against the idea of new justice and happiness for everyone. Aristophanes was not a fan of democracy. The contemporary reader may read into the play a criticism of enthusiastic utopias which brought into practice in the 20th century yielded a particularly harrowing experience of political evil. Nowak finds that Aristophanes' vision is persuasively true for us on three counts: first, as criticism of dysfunctional democracy; second, as criticism of feminism; third, as criticism of absolute sexual freedom. The first one does not bring in the problem of the conflict of generations. The second illustrates the conflict of male and female social functions, again, not necessarily bringing the age difference into play. The third one stresses the conflict of ethical and biological divisions and here one senses the disapproval of the new world by the Old. What other defence is left, but the whip of satire proposed by Aristophanes? The sharp and bitter satire remains the only way in which sexual freedom will not be confused with absolute liberty. Discussion is opened, there is no closure. We can go on talking fruitfully about dimensions of freedom and the need to propose its limitations on various levels of social and political life. Yet *The Assembly Women* does not really move us towards the problematic of the conflict of generations.

Shakespeare's texts are discussed in the second part of the book. The first essay draws on *King Lear*. Indeed, this vast play relies on two plots in which the conflict of generations is fundamental: the daughters oppose Lear and Gloucester has to face disloyalty of his sons. The tragic tensions, suffering and death are all encompassed within the family bonds. And yet, the critical reception of *King Lear* has not seen the play as domestic tragedy and conflict of generations has not been seen as the essence of the tragic flaw and punishment, not to mention Aristotelian *catharsis*. Nowak is, of course, alert to this, but he follows his main argument nevertheless. The parties in conflict are not defined just by age, but, first of all, by the values which they embrace. Lear, Kent and Gloucester are grouped together (though the gap between Lear and Kent is at least forty years) because they cling to the same old fashioned ethics. Lear's daughters and their husbands represent the generation who think in a new way and who believe they can create a future which answers their ideas. Edgar and the Fool are a separate entity, beyond the generational and political divisions. The political division is clear; Goneril and Regan indeed strive to take over the country, Edmund wants the money and power. Naturally, the political order of Lear and his loyal followers must be the object of annihilation. There is also the division of ethics and pragmatics: the values which serve the old order cannot be of use to those who want to destroy it, while the new order demands a change of political action. In

this sense *King Lear* is a universal tragedy. But the sheer generational division is for me problematic. Kent cannot be much older than Goneril or Regan. Kent takes Cordelia's side in the initial conflict with Lear. Edgar is not much older than Edmund, and yet he saves the father who earlier cursed him, and whom Edmund wants to destroy. Add to this an intertextual dimension which is difficult to ignore: the popular folk tale motif of sons or daughters of whom the youngest is most loyal to the ethical code of the parent. I believe that a reading of *King Lear* through the prism of the generational conflict is somewhat reductionist.

Nevertheless, Nowak's interpretations are interesting and discover new possibilities, especially in the conception of the main hero whom Nowak does not seem to like, yet whose melodramatic and sentimental image of the battered old man who displays deep wisdom at the end (I think here of, e.g., Lawrence Olivier's television film) he rejects. Nowak finds in Lear the truth of old age which is not necessarily wise, or beautiful, or noble. Demonstrating the logic of the pragmatic actions of the Young, Nowak points out to their arguments which do not fall far from those of the politically oppressed, and deprived of vote, the arguments of rebels against all regimes, rebels who must accept violence as their priority in order to achieve their aims. All in all, for Nowak this is an ideological conflict which shifts the load of tragic catastrophe onto political defeat: for both sides of the conflict defeat means the end of their world.

The Duke of Vienna In *Measure for Measure* is another old man whom Nowak dissects. Leaving the country in the hands of Angelo the Duke has fun at the expense of the Young, of their ideals and ambitions. He plays a false game and has evil intentions towards all. He is a hypocrite and moralizer who has forgotten his own youth. Hard law, difficult to exact, is left in the hands of an inexperienced and naïve reformer who will become the object of general opprobrium, while the Duke will manipulate his subjects in order to gain their appreciation and gratitude. Thus, the Duke grows to the dimension of a Machiavellian character who in the perspective of the conflict of generations fights for his hegemony and his order of the world.

But in Nowak's reading there is no sympathy for Isabella either. He finds her clever and apt in manipulating others in the name of mercy, justice and forgiveness. Angelo against whom play both the Duke and Isabella becomes their victim. Before he begins to desire her and test her saintliness, he wants naively to learn from her. His youth, naivety, and idealism are destroyed only when his highly idealized order of the world falls into ruin: when Isabella on Duke's suggestion will agree to sex and draw him into a trap.

A deep dislike of the Duke is not a novelty in the critical reception of the play. Nowak calls here on the opinions of W.H. Auden, Harold Bloom and Jan Kott. Yet in his reading Nowak is able to pinpoint the essence of the Duke's abomination: under the cover of being busy in the interest of the Young, he prepares a comfortable position of power for himself. He adopts the role of a sage, apolitical and amoral, in which nobody can threaten him. *Measure for Measure* has always chilled critics and audiences alike because it discovers the tawdriness of man taking a peculiarly hard line and offering no anaesthetic. In Nowak's interpretation it becomes an exceptionally dark story because the change of generations and an attempt at improving the world—a natural order of history—is impossible, and *status quo* means tyranny. In such world there is no chance to look towards

any scale of values. In such world the Young become the Old before they taste youth. It is a world without Time.

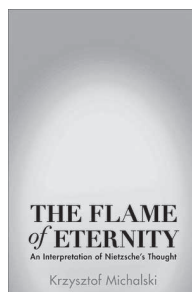
The last text is *The Tempest* in which Nowak sees the statement about the dominating position of man over all creatures, of man who is free, who is not subject to any astral influence, or to fate, or to providence. Man can himself recognize his limitations and decide about himself, he can create himself. Shakespeare earlier made Hamlet admire the perfection of man in spite of the evil which the same man spreads around and to which he succumbs. Hamlet, like many other Shakespearean characters “makes himself,” to the very end staying a free agent, though recognition of limitations and external obstacles is not easy.

The Fortune, Fate, Stars, whether good or bad, are rhetorical figures which appear at the moments of a tragic mistake, of false apprehension of a situation. Magic, fortune telling, witches, ghosts and wonderful coincidences are dramatic devices of a similar function: they are metaphors carrying the mistaken notion of oneself and of the world around, they make visible the limitations of the eye and of the brain. This is also true of *The Tempest*. Prospero by studying magic lost power and his country, and became a castaway. While on the island he practices white magic and recognizes his limitations and becomes an “excellent creature.” Nowak sees in him and anti-Faustian character whose magic has a political and aesthetic dimension. The spectacular tempest is a metaphor of power, but also of change exerted upon the people who become subject to that power. Prospero himself learns what he did not understand in Milan: the essence of power and the right way to exert it when the subjects demand freedom. At the same time he directs a spectacle in which Miranda, the shipwrecked party and the inhabitants of the island have to play their parts. He plays the ruler, good-humoured or irate and threatening, but always effective. He holds power well, controls his world, and, without ever losing authority, he precisely hands over his power. He does not play hide and seek, but thoroughly educates the Young for their future which he equally thoroughly plans. His wisdom is his excellence: he does not kill political opponents, understanding that any power is limited. Such Prospero is indeed an idealized renaissance project, an amalgamate of wisdom and power which saves the world from war and moral disintegration. Such reading of Prospero and *The Tempest* is, I believe, an equally idealized project equal to any utopia.

To sum up: the essays contained in this slim volume are an excellent reading, offering material for thought without forcing the reader into agreement or violent protest. It invites reflection and sends to the texts discussed by Nowak for fresh reading. The whole is written with energy, in a lively, yet precise style. Serious philosophical background of the essays ensures a highly intellectual quality to the interpretations leading to reflections on important issues and values. The essays are clearly personal, and yet the voice of the author inscribes itself right in the centre of the current debates on what defines us as individuals, and our responsibility towards society and state.

THE CHILD OF WAR

[Krzysztof Michalski, *The Flame of Eternity: An Interpretation of Nietzsche's Thought*. Translated by Benjamin Paloff. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012]



And Zarathustra stopped and considered. At length he said sadly. 'Everything has become smaller!

'Everywhere I see lower doors: anyone like me can still pass through them, but—he has to stoop!

Friedrich Nietzsche¹

(Ethics and aesthetics are one.)

Ludwig Wittgenstein²

I
Krzysztof Michalski's *The Flame of Eternity* is a book which I devoured alternately with great pleasure and growing irritation. Congrats! Here's an opportunity to read about Nietzsche, so I won't be fussy, I thought. A sea of nonsense devoted to this author, the ideologization of his thought, patronizing attitude of professional philosophers who live in the tombs of their own speculations—all this puts one in a mood to reach for anything (a book, a lecture, a broadcast) that departs from such trends. In this sense *The Flame of Eternity* is not confined by the crowd of Nietzschean acolytes. Quite the contrary, it shines against their background, it absorbs rather well. Then what is the reason for my irritation? The same: a careful reading of *The Flame of Eternity*, a discovery that it is not free (especially its final section) of longueurs and repetitions; that while nearly Nietzschean at times, the language tends to get bogged down in "descriptions of nature" which are hard to skim, though.

In the first part of the following essay I would like to take a closer look at the "arguments" included in the *Flame*, and then, in the second part, to somewhat "criticize" them. As for the "descriptions of nature," particularly the passages which look like something straight out of a textbook on existentialism (apparently Sartre's slogan "existence precedes essence" has just swapped the owner), I will simply skip them.

¹ F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003), 187.

² L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden, available at: <http://people.umass.edu/klement/tlp>.

NIHILISM

It is not a state of inner exhaustion, or an individual's "mental" emptiness. Nihilism is above all an event, but not one which can be grasped and explained historically. It is a situation when the highest values inexplicably lose their value. But what is this thing which loses its value? What is a value itself? Well, it is all that which signifies the chaos of phenomena with law and order. Let me illustrate it: in the times when people such as the Shakespearean Hotspur lived, the idea of honor was given priority over health or one's will to live. Honor was not a handy word to be placed on battle flags. It was not yet another slogan drawing the nosy masses towards the barricades (for a better view). Nor was it a "sublime" word which a "moral blackmailer" would turn to, whether he was a politician or an old auntie whose childhood days went by blissfully in the Kresy. In the world of Earl Hotspur honor was the overwhelming force that kept the world of phenomena on a tight rein of organization, order, and systematic approach. It was inherent in reality and in people. Being itself a value, it derived its power from "outside," from the value that is even higher, or indeed the highest—from God. In a world where God lived, people loved, died, held offices on "someone's" behalf; they acted in the name of other, mostly "external" (I suppose I cannot say "imposed") values: homeland, honor, Christ. But God died. It has turned out that the foundation upon which man used to build his life is quicksand, and that his perfectly built house is in fact a house of cards. Nihilism is thus a situation when God's death is brought to light, which is further followed by the disintegration of values that are like cooled-down stars—still shining here and there, although long gone (Heidegger's metaphor).

Therefore nihilism is not yet another stereotype which we develop about the nature of our experiences. Nor is it a historical "event" like the Uhlans' charge at Somosierra: it has no date of birth and no author. Nihilism is a process, or shall we call it an "occurrence" (*Ereignis*), that is, something which we cannot escape, something which is our own destiny, written in the cool-down stars.

How to get away from this oppression? Is there a way? Yes, there is—it is in the "(...) 'revaluation of values' (...) possible only if it is a possibility of your life or mine. It is not an intellectual operation. Philosophy can cure the world's sickness and point the way out of crisis only insofar as the 'life' in the phrase 'philosophy of life' is not just the object but the subject as well—only insofar as a 'life philosophy' is itself life and not just a theory of life. Which also means that one cannot first understand it in order to apply it to life later. Here, the action of understanding and the action of application cannot be separated from one another."³ Therefore it is not the case that a value like honor has faded or lost its effect. Rather, it is ourselves who are not able to adopt it and acknowledge as a value. There is no room for it in ourselves any more because "the *need* for values in their former shape [and in their previous place]"⁴ has been uprooted from us. We have reached the point when it is no longer possible to organize our lives (unless we want to lapse into some shocking naivety or "bad faith" according to the rules which are dead. Growing out of that is the postulate

³ K. Michalski, *The Flame of Eternity*, trans. B. Paloff (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012) 10–11. The numerals in the parentheses correspond to the page numbers of this edition.

⁴ M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*. Vol. 4, trans. D. F. Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 6.

to create life anew—a new life, based on brand new values which are “evaluations of how and to what extent something is valuable for the life” (11). Revaluation is not only about revealing the helplessness of the past values, but also about “putting” new, *real* values into the world. Understanding is always identified with acting. It is not relativism—a belief that there exists a multitude of tantamount, equally real truths—but an attempt at forcing one’s own axiological stance: related to my own power, truth is indeed a process of shaping the world by the rules which I can impose on it, as a child does, chopping thistles, breaking the shrubs, creating a reality which is totally new and unique.

Epictetus argued⁵ that the beginning of all philosophy is a consciousness of our own weakness. Nonsense, replies Nietzsche. The beginning of all philosophy is a consciousness of our own strength.

CHILD

The finest pages of the *Flame* are devoted to the figure of the child whom Michalski simply—and clearly—“envies.” He “envies” the child as well as he “envies” the cows, their ignorance which *per se* nullifies any record, rationality, self-knowledge. He “envies” the child all its lightness in dealing with time for he sees in this carefree manner the lost dimension of humanity. “When I look at a child, I become aware that that happiness of the grazing herd, the happiness of forgetting the world, is also something close to me, something my own, something that I once had and then lost, perhaps of necessity, and certainly irretrievably” (17). The child is innocent, the child is beautiful. It lives in a “garden” which is overlooked by time. The child does not remember that it did something “wrong” last Tuesday because the idea of guilt presupposes memory which the child does not possess. It does not have a history, it does not know the concept of either a past moment or a future moment. The child reduces its existence to the activity experienced at this particular moment: peeing under the tree, scribbling with chalk, scuffling for a swing. “This is why in child’s play each move is the first, each move is the beginning and the end at the same time” (18).

Adults arrange their lives in a certain sequence of events: yesterday—birthday, today—headache, the day after tomorrow—weekend. They can assign sense to their biographies (usually by means of the Sabbath). The rationalization of events and the memory of them constitute a highly moral act which is driven by self-examination and examination of others. The child is incapable of it, does not remember anything—of neither itself, nor others. Its existence is located beyond morality, beyond good and evil. One might say that the child experiences reality beyond time; that the quality of this experience is ahistorical. But even a grown-up is not always a camel and he, too, tastes happiness at times. When? Whenever he forgets about the humps on his back and starts kicking like a puppy. It turns out that life requires a certain dose of ignorance or—in Nietzsche’s words—“affirmative memory” which means that we should absorb only as much from life as we *want*. To achieve it we need strength and energy derived from the intensity

⁵ Epictetus, *The Works of Epictetus: Consisting of His Discourses, in Four Books, the Enchiridion, and Fragments*, trans. T. W. Higginson (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1865), 124.

of happiness that bind what has passed with what is to come into one moment to which we will say, “yes.”

It is the force of my life, and thus it makes no sense to speak of it as removed from my life. It is a force that cannot be measured from outside, the way one can measure the physical strength of a person or animal. (...) I rely only on the capacity of my life to assimilate, on its *force*. There are differences (...) that cannot be overcome through mutual understanding, differences whose overcoming signifies domination or subordination.

(30-31)

We put an excess of energy into *every* situation. An immoralism of a kind, some spontaneity, irresponsibility, forgetting about the storm, about Italian cuisine or another person—these are the things we should learn from children, this is what we should adopt from them. A historical life is a life of automata. It is just as predictable as it is easy to design. It leaves no room for coincidence. Every moment is domesticated. The child’s behavior alone reveals the fundamental discontinuity of existence: the child tears it up into pieces which it then cannot—and does not want to—put them all together again. And it was only the child who was given the fate of the Phoenix that struggles every day to pull out its own happiness from underneath this pile of past moments burnt to ashes.

WAR

It serves the purpose of defining a hierarchy of values. We can learn what they are capable of, how strong they are. War is a total war in the sense it is not limited by any external boundaries, rules or conventions. It is precisely the latter that values originate in. “In this context, *war* is another way of describing differences in the face of which our reason is helpless” (49). One must not identify it with evil, because any form of valuation introduces an external measure, that is, it imposes an *a priori* judgment about what is good and what is bad. Meanwhile, war is always a war over values. It is a situation the result of which is difficult to predict: “(...) all of our values, are comprehensible only in the context of *war*, only when we uncover their function in the confrontation between my world and that other (“at war”), which waits around every corner. Only when we confront our concepts and our values with something that is radically different from them will we know what they are worth” (49-50). War is thus an existential “test,” an examination of what we really know about ourselves and whether we have possessed the required amount of civics knowledge to pass it. Thanks to it we learn something certain about ourselves and the world, namely, we learn how strong we are, while defining and creating—both ourselves and others.

War is a precarious situation, a radically unpredictable one, something like Pascal’s wager in which you either gain everything or lose everything. This is so because, as the poet says: “What we fight is so small! / What struggles with us is so great!” It is precisely this disproportion (and not the war itself) that we sense and that strikes terror into our hearts, fuels our anxiety, keeps us awake at night. What fights with us and what seems to be unyielding to our resolutions is chance, a “sky chance,” something alien, not mine, incomprehensible, which wrecks the balance of gains and losses. That is how I understand

Michalski's point when he writes: "Only then, when my life will not surrender to the rules I encounter—actually, to any rules at all (because, constantly overcoming itself, it must go on creating them anew)—only then *will I manage to create something that surpasses me* [emphasis added], only then will I become a place where a new form of the world can come to light" (58).

War is not evil. In the end, it depends on us. A fight can be beautiful, just as a difference between two people can be beautiful. But one might just as well sow misery and total destruction. Its source is always "the other"—someone other than myself, someone who introduces into my world the difference which gives rise to existential anxiety. "The other" may turn out to be a woman ("some fucking Jane"), a Gypsy, a Jew, a Catholic or a faggot—take your pick. Each one of them, in any order, can become an easy target, a whipping boy (girl), "the evil one, whose ultimate elimination is both desirable and just. There is only one way, claims Michalski, to avoid the trap of total destruction: to begin with yourself. What does it mean?

I am always "good" in my own eyes. This expresses self-affirmation that we need in order to live. However, the fact that I am "good" does not imply that others are "evil." It is just that they are worse than me—they know less or they are weaker, or less pretty. My self-acceptance does not stem from a comparison with others, but is a spontaneous effort to constitute a criterion (an idea) which others have to meet if they want to be good—as good as me. "Good, in this usage, is, as we see, a designation applied not to others but to myself; it is a positive, not a negative, determination. Accordingly, one who is *good* in this sense is also necessarily active, not passive: he sets the standard of *goodness* that he has accepted himself; he does not need to let someone else do it for him" (37). It may be said that whenever we begin with ourselves, each time we do not pose a threat to others, or more precisely—the only threat they are under is they will be worse than us, but not evil. And thus war turns into an agon, a bloody duel becomes an emulation, an opportunity to manifest one's health, swordplay for show. Therefore an agon proves the efficiency of my organism—it is neither anger, nor a desire to lay into others (who are better than me). Then how does evil permeate into the world to constitute, along with good, a moral difference. *Unde malum?* It stems from the temptation to invert the scale of values so that "the good" suddenly turn out to be bad egotists, while "the evil" (scil. worse than "the good") turn out to be those who love their neighbor, create the world anew, according to the law which guarantees "eternal peace," love (*ἀγάπη*) and stillness. That is how the worse ones are trying to become good, yet in a perverse way, namely, by changing the rules of the game, constituting *morality* which changes the meaning of deeds to date. And soon the good ones cease to command respect and instead become the object of desire for the hungry prey, the aggressive mob. The final, universal triumph, without historical precedent, turns out to be the triumph of the "slave" (Hegel), the victory of "the last man" (Nietzsche), the win of "the shoemakers" (Witkacy).

In the passages devoted to "the last man" Michalski brings back my old obsessions⁶ when (after Nietzsche) he spins a tale of "the man" recreated anew in his maximum

⁶ Which I expressed in my book titled *Ontologia sukcesu. Esej przy filozofii Alexandre'a Kojève'a* [Ontology of Success. An Essay on the Philosophy of Alexandre Kojève] (Gdańsk: słowo / obraz terytoria, 2006).

culminations—a flawless one, without deficiencies or any pathology. “The last man” is a picture of vigor, a proof of immortality because—like animals—he never dies (i.e. he *does not know* that he will die). He finds his happiness in “drugs,” and modern civilization supplies him with an abundance of these—be it Prozac, a beer garden, or entertainment defined even more broadly. “He does not love, if love means risking everything one has, if it is a fire in which all virtue and all reason, every happiness known till now, are lost (though he gladly loves if love is just pleasure, without pain)” (158). He shuns differences and divisions; he is satisfied with any form of compromise and simplification. He himself is an ideal of perfection and consistency while at the same time he imposes the standards of his own upon his antecedents: he is better than them, meaning, he is *good* in the extra-moral sense of the word. Finally, it is within him, and not within the knights of the round table, that history finds its bloodless end. In this way, by means of a well-gnawed bone, we form a view on human nature.

TRANSFORMATION

There is a moving scene in *King Lear*—a transformation of man into superman. The Earl of Gloucester is defending Lear against a pack of his wicked daughters and gets severely punished by them. He has his eyes gouged out and is then disinherited and banished. On his “way of the cross” he is joined by his elder son, Edgar, hiding from the world behind a beggarly cloak of madness. It is him who is to carry his blind father towards the edge of the world through the grim lands of Britain. The old man remembers a precipice which now he would like to use as his “Tarpeian rock” to throw off its top the tortured remnants of his own humanity. As they finally reach the hill, Gloucester makes sure for this one last time whether he really stands at the very top and whether the fall will be fatal. He orders Edgar to carefully describe the place which will soon see him crashing to the ground together with the truth about this world. He wants to take one last look at life with the eyes of the “beggar,” making him paint before his senile eyes the images hitherto unknown to him. They are at once beautiful and fearsome. Edgar tells him about the birds flying *under* his feet, about a weary gatherer of samphire who reaches for his daily ration, climbing dangerously high, or about the sea, with its murmur inaudible from the cliff. But the old man rejects the truth of these images as for him they are not distorted enough!

O you mighty gods!

He kneels.

This world I renounce, and in your sights
Shake patiently my great affliction off:
If I could bear it longer and not fall
To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,
My snuff and loathed part of nature should
Burn itself out.

The verge of the precipice where Edgar has led the blind old man is—as with all things touched by nihilism—nearly half a meter deep. Gloucester does not realize that and therefore he falls head down dozens of miles, though according to human measurements,

his jump might be compared to sliding down a chair. “But have I fall’n, or no?” he asks with disbelief. Let us ask the same question: has Gloucester really fallen? Well, yes and no. He fell down a hillock, but he *rose as a man who survived a fall*. What is more, his jump has also changed Edgar who was standing nearby. Towards the end of this scene, the latter acts as midwife for the *survivor*, briefly speaking—for the “arch” or “super-humanity.”

Edgar. Give me your arm.
Up, so. How is ’t? Feel you your legs? You stand.
Gloucester. Too well, too well.
Edgar. This is above all strangeness.
Upon the crown o’ th’ cliff, what thing was that
Which parted from you?
Gloucester. A poor unfortunate beggar.

On that summit Gloucester has left both himself and the “beggar,” who, being his own alienation—not merely the son he disowned, but also the symbol for misery, madness, pain, and the old, past world—brought him to the edge of humanity by pushing him into the abyss. One can use Nietzsche’s terminology here to say that while on the verge of the precipice, Gloucester parted with the beings limited by the values of *that* world, irreversibly dead and gone: “the last man” and “the higher man” (“beggar”). It is only from the perspective of this vale he has crashed into, that he can now see with his eye sockets how—at the very end—he is *above* human form. The shock experienced by the old blind earl bears all the hallmarks of a religious *nominosum*—when a man is visited by the sacred. Edgar understood it perfectly well, consistently guiding his *father* into a new life. For where values are no longer in force, where they are no longer the organizing force, one is at a loss as to who is whose father, who is the son and who leads whom through life.

(...) therefore, thou happy father,
Think that the clearest gods, who make them honors
Of men’s impossibilities, have preserved thee.⁷

The superhuman metamorphosis above all affected Gloucester. The moment he rises from the bottom, where he has slid down, is a moment when he learns “that the abyss belongs to the heights. To overcome outrage is not to put it out of action but to acknowledge its necessity.”⁸ This knowledge enables him to become an overman, to rise over man, both over his “higher” and his “last” form. Gloucester’s transformation, like any other critical situation, is accompanied by pain and uncertainty, for its result is not known in advance. To rise over man and to endure this super-human condition—these two things, being separate after all, do not always go hand in hand. But it is already too late for the Shakespearean old men (their sun long set), therefore Gloucester and Lear die in a human way. The Nietzschean experiment proved to be too difficult, too dangerous.

⁷ W. Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear* (New York: The New American Library, 1963), 147-149.

⁸ M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*. Vol. 4, trans. D. F. Krell (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 60.

DEATH

It arrives from the future. Or to be more precise: the impetus with which the future invades the present can destroy what is human. It is a radical exteriority that we cannot say anything definite about. In this respect, any form of anticipation is a futile effort, and prophecy is just a clown's gesture. "The future—claims Levinas, one of the authors cited by Michalski—is what is in no way grasped. The exteriority of the future is totally different from spatial exteriority precisely through the fact that the future is absolutely surprising."⁹ There is no future for the instant which I am experiencing right now; there can be only a "future now." It is relatively easy to design, and the conditions for its emergence can be easily specified. The "future now" is a guarantee of life's continuity, enables planning life as well as taming it. Thanks to it we do not fear the future, for we imagine our future life to be simply an extension of the current existence. Meanwhile, the future comes (as in the old adage) as a bolt from the blue. "When one deprives the present of all anticipation, the future loses all co-naturalness with it. The future is not buried in the bowels of a preexistent eternity, where we would come to lay hold of it. It is absolutely other and new. And it is thus that one can understand the very reality of time, the absolute impossibility of finding in the present the equivalent of the future, the lack of any hold upon the future."¹⁰

Michalski's starting point is this: man is "sick with death." His existence is underlain with uncertainty, threatened by the Apocalypse ("future"). It slips through his fingers and in this sense—it flees. One can try to deceive time in many ways—by means of studying, shopping, kicking the ball—but the end remains inevitable, invariably bloody. "And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*" (to recall one of the most celebrated lines in the seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry).¹¹ There is no point in waiting for the Apocalypse which is yet to come (with the convenience of home delivery) because the Apocalypse happens every day: the bell tolls the end of every hour, knocking it out of its state of bliss and oblivion. It weans the living from life just like a baby is weaned from breast milk (to evoke a line from Różewicz). For the future—and not the "future now"—is as related to the fragility of the human world as it is linked with its radical unpredictability and discontinuity.

Witchcraft is helpless when it comes to taming the future. And so are any other tools—the latest medical inventions or the oldest philosophical arguments. Even if the latter happens to appeal to us, even if at times we yield to Socrates's persuasion (a few moments before his death he still argued that there is nothing to be afraid of; that death is like leaving one apartment for another, a bigger one perhaps or maybe brighter), the child within us is scared of darkness and can never be lulled to sleep. It is pointless, claims Michalski, to act all big in before death, even if one is actually one of the big guys (or, like Socrates, the biggest of them all). One does not play dice with death nor looks death in the eye. But eventually it is not the philosopher who dies, and it is not the God (Christ) either. What dies in them is always the child who—at the very end, in despair—hopefully asks his *father* for help; asking him to hold his hand, if only for a little while longer.

⁹ E. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 76.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹¹ J. Donne, "Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions" (XVII. Meditation), *The Works of John Donne* (London: John W. Parker, 1839), 575.

LOVE

Only love is stronger than death. Love alone can blunt its poisonous sting. But how? In what way? Well, it opens us to eternity. Let us imagine someone who has never loved. How will he ever learn about the irretrievable loss? From the bitterness of life, says Michalski, the bitterness that no kind of sugar icing and no ambrosia can sweeten: "(...) this bitterness is a symptom of being sick with eternity, of the stinging awareness of a wound that will never heal" (139). Its opposite is "totality," the sweetness that comes from love. But what does it mean that it is *stronger than death*? Poetry seems to provide the answer to this question, Michalski points out, "Bolesław Leśmian's poem about a girl who steps out of dream (...) A tiny bit of a page—and he wrote everything I wanted to but so much better than I ever could!"¹² This poem—as does Leśmian's poetry in general—shows death that is not related to physical disintegration, or at least, not only to it. Its characters live many times and they die many times. The poem *Girl* features brave brothers who are trying to break down the wall beyond which a girl's voice is crying. And they die three times: as brothers, as their shadows and ultimately—as hammers. What, then, does not die? What is eternal? The love for the voice is eternal, action, common endeavor; the desire is eternal, the desire for love. One dies a couple of times, *ad infinitum*, sometimes before one's very eyes (as it happens in a line from a poem about Don Juan), but one never dies forever.

Like death, love eludes all prediction. It comes from the future, remaining something undeserved; one cannot strive for it or attain it through prayer. Perhaps it is an instance of grace? Certainly a gift. It comes to us always from *the other side*. And like death, love is an "illness" which "doesn't have any particular characteristics; it takes on the characteristics of the people it attacks."¹³ Therefore a beloved one cannot be mistaken for someone else, some stranger, even though the fire of love annihilates all the distinctive features defining who I was before I loved. Like death, it storms into the room, bringing "catastrophe" (from Greek "an overturning"); it is an absolute exteriority unknown in advance. "Shuddering bodies struggling with something inhuman, alien, new, mysterious, desired. The convulsions, the scream. Ecstasy? Agony? Who can tell them apart?" (139). If love is stronger than death, then corpse—that decomposed corporeality—may still shiver with caress. This is what happens in Leśmian's poetry: "Shiver with posthumous love, if its charms are within reach" ("The Year of Non-existence"). Eternity, as we read in the *Flame*, enters the world along with love and by means of love. Or strictly speaking: by means of the body which is—the body, the shadow, and then the hammer and the corpse—the vehicle for love (eternity). Eternity is thus unambiguously corporeal in nature. That is why it must hurt.

The body is always "on the way," that is, it can be both a place of disintegration and a place of "transformation." "The body is not a thing, destructible, in which we are enclosed. It is an effort to move out beyond ourselves, beyond what is" (144). On one hand, it opens us to eternity, the eternity of love; on the other—"alas! alas!"—it relates us to life, to reality which—like a woman—is whimsical and mercurial, prone to disintegration and breakdown.

¹² Krzysztof Michalski in an interview with Paweł Dybel. "Płomień Nietzschego" [The Flame of Nietzsche], *Nowe Książki*, 5 (2007): 5.

¹³ R. M. Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 62.

TRUTH

According to the classical definition, truth consists in correspondence, in the “congruity” between things and sentences; when we say how things *really* are. Here is its classical formula, beautiful in its simplicity: “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true.” A person who seeks truth strives for stability, wishes to get rid of uncertainty which is the source of suffering and which underlies existential anxiety. He craves for warmth that truth can undoubtedly give, he feeds on its bread, only let life not hurt him so much nor happiness procrastinate on coming. Nietzsche argues that this kind of truth does not exist, and if it existed, it would remain unknowable. Even if we chose to ignore this statement and presupposed that truth is knowable, it would certainly be impossible to express. And besides, *es gibt keine Wahrheit*—man is left to speculations, interpretations, an “army of metaphors.” One needs a bit of falsehood and lie in order to live—deception often contributes to a better understanding of life far more than a blind obedience to truth. For life is a game of appearances. There is no truth as such, truth is in the making, unveiling—as a woman unveils—only as much as she wishes to. “[I]t requires the rarest, good chance for the veil of clouds to move for once from the summits, and for the sun to shine on them. We must not only stand at precisely the right place to see this, our very soul itself must have pulled away the veil from its heights.” Each time truth is surrounded by an aura of something unrepeatable. It is to be associated with the beauty of the original (truth), but not with its repetition. An aura wafts over beauty, just as the spirit of Providence wafts over man. It appears whenever beauty (truth) fuses with the place and time of its origin as well as its future existence. To put it yet another way, an aura refers to the relationship between beauty (truth) and man—not necessarily with his creator alone, but also with the audience, for example, a wide historical audience. Thus understood, the concept of aura relates to the concept of *Jetztzeit*—the time when what has passed is revived and actualized as “present.” It is a phenomenon of the imperishable, current past that is constantly renewing itself within a single moment. For Nietzsche, however, the philosopher who contains within himself many contradictions and puzzles that ever accumulate with his work, nothing important happens twice in one’s life. In order to carry this important argument to its conclusion, in the last paragraph of *The Joyful Wisdom*, Nietzsche underlines that truth “*unveils itself to us but once*,”¹⁴ that it happens to us very rarely. It is ephemeral, inevitably doomed to its momentary, one-day life. Truth’s death is thus inscribed in its birth certificate. Therefore, those maintaining that they enjoy constant communion with the Absolute, the durable, the only truth, are braggarts and bastards.

THE ETERNAL RECURRENCE OF THE SAME

We all remember Julian Tuwim’s *Locomotive* which we both read about and hear it coming.¹⁵ We deal with something similar in the last chapter of *The Flame of Eternity*, devoted

¹⁴ F. Nietzsche, *Joyful Wisdom*, trans. T. Common (New York: F. Ungar Pub., 1960), 269.

¹⁵ English translation by Walter Whipple available at: <http://allpoetry.com/poem/8537691-The-Locomotive-by-Julian-Tuwim>.

to the eternal recurrence of the same. One and the same thought keeps recurring in it, is recycled time and time over in many different ways. The subsequent paragraphs sound alike, they are almost identical. The “arguments” sufficiently and fully developed in the previous chapters are now developed anew. Tuwim’s words imitate the toot of a choo-choo and Michalski seems to achieve the same effect when at the end of his book he writes about the eternal recurrence: everything returns in the act of continuous repetition.

The eternal recurrence of the same identical with the toil we associate with self-recreation of life. It is not about autumn being followed by winter, or July being followed by August. Michalski does not linger on these obvious things. For him, the meaning of life consists in a radical discontinuity, *unrepeatability*. The natural repeatability of phenomena has nothing to do with the Nietzschean “thought of thoughts,” the thought which liberates the human spirit from the constraints imposed on it by time. What is its sense?

Let us imagine, claims Michalski (after Heidegger), a gate or, better still, a swinging door that leads to the bar. It is the place where the past and the future bump into each other. As a result of this encounter the *kairos* is born—a timeless moment, one that is worth being reinforced by one’s effort. This moment cannot be snapped from a distance; it requires it to participate. It is very difficult to determine how we “enter” it—from the side of the future or the past—because, as with the swinging door, it is impossible to tell whether someone has just used it to come in or go out. What, then, constitutes its past and its future? This we never know. The nature of every instant is that it can be both its own beginning and end—the “future,” Apocalypse—getting ready for a leap or this leap’s history. Caught in the frame of eternal recurrence of the same things, life turns out to be their becoming, unrestrained frolic of free spirits, children’s play. It is through and within their inexhaustible creativity that a certain form of the world comes to light, if only to be negated—at the same time—from the “other” side. And so it moves in circles. The structure of the reality in the making is itself immutable. Hence the impression that everything returns, that things are constantly—“structurally”—the same.

Children, the real “artists of life,” do not know the past, do not know what the future is. Their existence is enclosed within this very moment. They neither care for it nor try to keep it. For this the way things are: they come to life and pass away *at the same time*, they expire in the motion of becoming, their existence is “momentary” by nature (“torn between the past and the future”). Thinking his “thought of thoughts,” Nietzsche did not want to say that as a result of some strange apocatastasis, the same matters keep returning to the world (these precisely are *unrepeatable* and *do not* return) but that the structure of being itself consists in eternal becoming, in repetition which—at the moment of happiness—kindles the “flame of eternity” within time.

“While wondering whether or not to send out the laundry, I am like an arc stretching from there, from the primal beginning, to its latest realizations in what is before me. Not losing a most everyday train of thought for even a second, I am the Mystery of being and its pride, its malady and torment”¹⁶ (this is Gombrowicz on the “eternal recurrence of the same”).

¹⁶ W. Gombrowicz, *Diary*. Vol. 2, trans. L. Vallee (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989), 155.

“Check it out,” says one to the other, “now there’s a wheel! Think that wheel, if it had to, could make it to Moscow, or not?” “Yeah,” answers the other. “And to Kazan, it probably couldn’t make it?” “Not to Kazan, no.”¹⁷

To sum up: The burden of tradition manifests itself in the fact that one sees things as they are not—from behind the cover of foreign, borrowed concepts and notions. Meanwhile, “our heritage”—as René Char once put it—“is not preceded by any testament,” we are not limited by any verities inherited from our ancestors. The old truth is like Baubo—the old hag, toothless and cackling, which one should stay away from. Each of us should constantly enact ourselves anew and for our own use—one does not need to know who one is; the intuition alone as to where one is heading to will suffice. Let us then create new, momentary, one-off, unrepeatable truths: this is our state of emergency we are doomed to; this is our “Tarpeian rock” which serves the purpose of renewing the “human” condition. Nietzsche-Michalski’s aim is not to discredit truth as such. Nietzsche-Michalski explores truth in terms of its quantum of power, its usefulness for life. “So much mistrust, so much philosophy!” he repeats. And the dictum on man’s death should be considered in this light. The statement is not a mere provocation; it does not contribute to the repertoire of academic tricks and disarmaments. Rather, it is a necessary need, a super-human task. Man is something that should be finally surpassed, “overcome” along with his world—a world he yielded to and where he lived. This postulate has nothing to do with the old mania that haunts the dreams of virtually every revolutionary. It contains the “negative anthropology” project which, in turn, is not satisfied with any of the past forms of human reality.

Man’s God has to pass away together. And thus two Gods get on board of Charon’s boat: the vindictive and preposterous God of the Old Testament, for whom humanity is only a keyboard, and the merciful God of the Christians. Both of them determined the meaning of human life—the meaning which has long been lost though. Therefore man gets rid of the powerful idols who have been tormenting him for ages. What remains? There remains within him an inextinguishable “religious” desire, a longing for God *whom* (rather than: in whom) one believes. This God has no name—or all things are His names, if we prefer to follow Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. One can try to discover this God in every creature one happens to encounter.

(...) in a low-pitched wooden church, [t]he slim wax candles gleamed, spots of red, before the old pictures of the saints (...) some man came up from behind and stood beside me. I did not turn towards him; but at once I felt that this man was Christ. Emotion, curiosity, awe overmastered me suddenly. I made an effort... and looked at my neighbour. A face like every one’s, a face like all men’s faces. (...) And suddenly my heart sank, and I came

¹⁷ M. Gogol, *Dead Souls*. Cited after: A. Bely, *Gogol’s Artistry*, trans. C. Colbath (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 99-100.

to myself. Only then I realised that just such a face—a face like all men's faces—is the face of Christ.¹⁸

II

GOMBROWICZ

It is by no means a coincidence that my reflections on “the eternal recurrence of the same” include a quote from Witold Gombrowicz's *Diary*. My aim was to show to what extent Michalski's essays are permeated with Gombrowicz's idiom; how much he derives (benefits) from Gombrowicz's prose (not so much the content itself, but more of his phrase, manner of expression, his flow of thoughts and associations, his temperament and atmosphere). Let me illustrate it with a couple of examples:

He is wholly easy himself, he does not swell like a river at an obstacle, he flows rapidly in secret understanding with his bed, he does not shatter, he pervades, he filters through, he shapes himself to the obstacles (Gombrowicz).¹⁹

(...) life grows into each of its successive forms and adapts to them, is rooted in them, it nests there—and at the same time it obliterates them, it must abandon them, it must move on (Michalski, 162).

Do you want to know who you are? Don't ask. Act. Action will delineate and define you. You will find out from your actions. But you must act as an “I,” as an individual (...) To be someone is to inquire incessantly about who I am and not to know in advance (Gombrowicz).

We are who we are dependent on what we do.
[T]hese concepts—like all concepts, like everything we know—cannot be divorced from what we do (...) What has happened in this story [e.g. the story of my life] can therefore never be settled completely: there is no one, ultimate answer to the question of the ‘meaning of life.’ And if ‘to understand’ means ‘to find the ultimate answer,’ then life cannot be understood. (...) the ‘I’ in this context is not a known quantity. How could it be? It's not just that I don't know but that I cannot know completely who I am (Michalski, 32, 100, 103, 106; *passim*).

Oh! I am mortally in love with the body! The body I almost my only touchstone. No spirit can redeem corporeal ugliness, and a man physically unattractive will always hail from a race of monsters even though he may be

¹⁸ I. Turgenev, “Christ,” *Dream Tales and Prose Poems*, trans. C. Garnett, available at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/8935>.

¹⁹ W. Gombrowicz, cited after: G. Herling-Grudziński, *Volcano and Miracle. A Selection from the Journal Written at Night*, trans. R. Storm (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 127.

Socrates himself! (...) I take more pride in the fact that I am sensual than in the fact that I am knowledgeable about the Spirit. My passion, my sinfulness and darkness, are more valuable to me than my light (Gombrowicz).²⁰

And here is how Michalski elaborates on the above thought:

The corporeality of human life is expressed in the pain smoldering in each moment—for in every moment of my life, in my every gesture, in my every movement, a child is born in whom the world begins all over again. Every moment of one's life is the birthplace of something that had not been there before. It hurts (146).

The pain of existence (also the physical one), immaturity, puerility, strong perspectivism, the hierarchization of reality according to the quantum of power ("the superior and the inferior"), relentless critique of science (as in the chapter "The Time Is at Hand")—all those motifs were already laid out half a century ago, with equal verve, by the greatest Polish Nietzschean, Witold Gombrowicz. He developed his philosophical creed in dispute with existentialism. He chose to undertake anew only those of its issues that particularly annoyed him, disavowing, for instance, the right of existentialism to determine what is authentic and conducive to life, and what is artificial and out of use (while proving at the same time that degraded forms, all sorts of deformities and pathologies may also be of use). He accused existentialism—and rightly so, I suppose—of the excess of concepts which were to lure the less sophisticated, timid minds into the circle of its influence. Michalski's writing did not originate in a vacuum either. He does not argue—as Gombrowicz does—with the corpse of existentialism (though his wording is no less drastic at times). Instead, he tries to inscribe Nietzsche's thought in the lineage of American pragmatism which has always been interested in the "practical" side of the Nietzschean philosophy.²¹

PAIN

The Flame of Eternity does not bring comfort, nor does it promise any easy solution. Quite the contrary. Supposedly it is going to be even harder. "(...) there can be no illusion that concepts, whatever they are, allow us to relieve the pain of our lives, that they will cure us of our eternity-disease. They won't. They themselves contain traces of this disease. Knowledge is not a treatment for this pain. It affords no real consolation. No logic or dialectic provides an answer to this pain" (148). Not to mention the fact that at times Michalski's book reads like a handbook for nurses (there is always something that he finds painful). I, on the other hand, am concerned more with something greater than occupying others with my pain. In *The Flame of Eternity* Michalski points to the circumstances under which his own pain cuts him off from the outer world. This pain makes him center around himself

²⁰ The two quotations come from: Gombrowicz, *Diary*. Vol. 2, 99, 130.

²¹ I allude to the pioneering book by Arthur C. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York and London: Macmillan, 1965). It should be pointed out here that the Nietzschean pragmatism of Danto (and to some extent also of Michalski) derives as much from the American philosophical tradition as directly from Nietzsche and Heidegger who highlight the inextricable relationship between acting and thinking.

to such an extent that he is unable to focus on anything else. If it hurts me—he claims—if it hurts so much that I cannot stand it any longer, then what do I care about other people's pain! The utter immersion in his own pain, and thus in his own weakness, his own corporeality, in his "I myself," leads him to the desert of "solipsism," the attitude excluding from one's environment the presence of other people: "(...) for there is no 'outside'" (40), if I myself bicker with pain and with death. Such a perspective gives rise to antinomies. Does not this mutual, loving "lighting of each other's faces" only intensify and fuel the feeling of uncertainty and pain that inevitably reduces me to my own experience, to myself alone? To what extent, then, does love open us to another person, and to what extent does it compel us to escape for fear of pain that gradually grows—as love keeps growing—more intense within me? Michalski is inconsistent whenever he questions exteriority and at the same time calls for the other. For example, when he wants to differ beautifully. On the one hand, he argues, he is "good," because he "overflows," because he affirms the world from the perspective of a superman submerged in his own perfection. Yet on the other hand, how can he differ (let alone beautifully), having previously negated the possibility of difference as such when he reduced the image of the world to the resultant of forces flowing from him? Would not variety and diversity in this strange "solipsistic" world be only an act of arbitrary constitution And lastly—if he wants to differ beautifully, then why does he reject the very first, that is the instinctive and physical manifestation of difference by comparing the athletic efforts of "the fitness nuts" (128) to the monastic "fashion" for the emaciation of the body by feeding it on roots and prayers?

ANECDOTE

But this is all academic baloney, chutzpah and folly, pure fuss in the face of doubts that have been troubling me since I read *The Flame of Eternity* (for the second time). But first—a recollection, a souvenir, a postcard from the "other world." In 1996 I worked on my dissertation on the "death of man" at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna. Krzysztof Michalski was its founding father and Rector at that time. One June afternoon, and I remember it very clearly, Michalski's secretary called me, saying that the Rector would like to meet me after five, downstairs, in the hallway, by the elevator. Having arrived there at the given time I came upon Darek Gawin, Barry Gilbert and Alejandro Vallega who had been invited, too. "That may turn out to be not that bad after all," I thought and felt distinctly relieved. We got into his car which drove us to an outdoor restaurant in Grinzing. Appetizers, a few decanters of young wine emptied, an anecdote. Michalski: "I'm very much into the idea of intrigue, playing with people. They can be bought, sold, exchanged, in brief, they can be played with. It is a question of price, tactics, approach. In fact, my administration of the Institute comes down to this. One can get everything—except for the things one can't afford. But there are still people who can't be bought for yet another reason—they don't understand the game itself, its rules or rates. *They would prefer not to.*" (A voice from the audience) "Who are they?" Rector: "I'll enumerate their names for you: Cardinal König, Professor Ricoeur, Father Tischner. To wit: a couple of days ago I received a letter from Paul Ricoeur, in which he asked me if he could come to Castel Gandolfo if he had not prepared his paper in due advance.—Sir, I answered, shall we send a plane for you? Gentlemen! It was Paul Ricoeur!" Eventually the evening became more and more

“Polish,” with the anecdote seeming more and more Greek to the Americans (they didn’t get a thing) while Darek and I kept indulging ourselves. Rector: “Late 1970s. Warsaw. I’m walking down Krakowskie Przedmieście when I bump into Dzidek Jankowski. And he goes: listen, Wolniewicz informed on me, he wrote I didn’t like the Soviet Union. Man...me, of all people? I mean, I’m the one that doesn’t like the Soviet Union?!” On my way to the toilet Michalski says to me: “What, it’s got colder?” Me: “Your tone was so entertaining that I guess I didn’t notice.” Michalski: “Yeah, it has got colder.” At the end of our meeting he turned to Darek Gawin and me, and said, in Polish: “Gentlemen, we have to bring this fucking university down, and I have a way.” He waved and drove off.

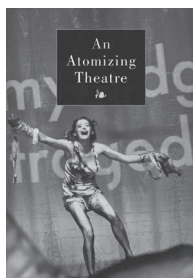
There is no point pretending one does not know who wrote this book; that one is not aware of its author’s creative as well as causative possibilities. *The Flame of Eternity* should be read twice: first as “an interpretation of Nietzsche’s thought” and then as a kind of *autobiography* where “the facts of life” are unimportant, inessential, for they may be always guessed or pictured. However, with Michalski’s books in general, they need not be detached from the person, from the reality they originated in, where they were conceived—these two things are strongly related. Krzysztof Michalski was an excellent writer, a wonderful teacher, Rector of one of the most important institutions on the map of philosophical life in Europe (it’s not puff, but facts). He was also—or maybe above all—a child who played with people because they move; because he delighted in poking them with a stick, as if some of them were half-dead moles, brimstone or cabbage butterflies. Traditional ethics, Michalski echoes Nietzsche, is no longer possible, because the principles (i.e. “values”) it has been based on to date have lost their legitimacy, their binding force. Still in Kant’s times everything had a price *or* a dignity. “Whatever has a price—Kant argues—can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price, and therefore admits of no equivalent, has a dignity.”²² Today everything has its price and at the same time everyone is stripped bare of dignity (“values”). The code of ethics must therefore be of a temporary nature. Like the road traffic law, it is in force and effect in order for us not to kill one another. Thus reduced to a mere procedure, ethics becomes law—the ability to resolve practical problems. There is no room in it for all this spiritual ado: “the purity of conscience,” “the imperative of not hurting others” or “the responsibility for the other” (responsibility tends to be identified with one’s reliability in business). Proceduralism is not to Michalski’s liking, he is unwilling to accept this solution. Instead, he suggests something else, namely, a sort of *aestheticization* of ethics. If unquestionable differences exist between us, he claims, then let us at least try to differ *beautifully*. As expressed by Michalski, ethics—along with responsibility—remains a question of taste and arbitrary decision, a “will to power.” It is not the ethics of submissiveness, but of decision: “This is what I want!” This was once lectured on at the Institute for Human Sciences by a professor of moral philosophy “paid off” by Michalski; it was done openly and without beating about the bush (as indeed one does not know whether it is a description of social reality or part of its critique). “The development of inequalities is closely related to the detachment of certain individuals from the common run of mankind

²² I. Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals. On a Supposed Right to Lie because of Philanthropic Concerns*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 40.

and to the legitimation of their right to distinguish themselves from others.”²³ In other words, the greater the *formal* equality of opportunities guaranteed by the law, the deeper the *actual* stratification and diversification of people, which in fact is hard to deal with and which cannot be changed.

On the descriptive level, *The Flame of Eternity* is a fascinating book. Reading it can be compared to looking up at the Sistine Chapel ceiling. It induces in us the “super-human” effort in self-creation from scratch, beginning with first principles—that is for sure. On the postulative level, however—and I am writing this with caution—the *Flame* is as daring and dangerous as fire. It constitutes an additional smokescreen for “the children of war” who cause us to veer off course; who start the day—like Gide’s Lafcadio—with tossing an old man out of a train window, simply because it suits their taste or whim at the moment. “Eeny, meeny, miny, moe, catch a tiger by the toe” (18).

²³ P. Rosanvallon, “Rethinking Equality in an Age of Inequalities” (Jan Patočka Memorial Lecture), *IWM Post*, 108, September–December 2011: 5.



AN ATOMIZING THEATRE, ED. J. LIMON, A. ŻUKOWSKA

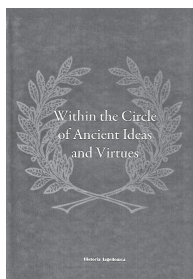
Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, Gdańsk 2014

Coriolanus touches upon many tender spots. It deals with confused corporeality, the craving for fame, rightful pride, and a disdain for the masses and their democratic habits which is born somewhere in the recesses of the heart. It touches upon, I believe, everything but the class struggle in its schematic and narrow understanding. This was foreseen by Leon Schiller; while the famous theatre and literary critic Jan Kott

made class struggle the very fabric of the Shakespearean tragedy. What nonsense! It is easy to disagree with Kott's statement if one takes into consideration those moments when every one of us, momentarily dropping our guard, can mix with the crowd, falling prey to our own frustrations, resentment, or passions.

Generally speaking, Shakespeare does not care about "social issues." Shakespeare tells a story of the forging of hierarchy in combat and, in this respect, of the timeless nature of combat and hierarchy. He also deals with what happens to a city which deprives itself of leadership, while "the warrior (...) changes from a docile watchdog at the gate to a lion in the streets" (Alvis). As fortitude is placed in the forefront of other virtues, there has to come a man who will step on the city and try to subjugate it. The point is that the city "cannot live peaceably with him, but it may not be able to live at all without him." Consequently, if people don't want a war, if they refrain from it, they do so partly out of fear for their own lives, and partly because they fear the emergence of new distinctions forcing them to take some position. And if they want it, they want it for the same reasons. History is not written by destiny—a mystification that the belly metaphor was meant to substantiate—but by people.¹

¹ From the essay by Piotr Nowak, "Rightful Pride or Rightful Disdain." The volume includes essays of Patrice Pavis, Manfred Pfister, Artur Blaim, Małgorzata Grzegorzewska, Marius Stan, Nicoleta Cinpoes, Jan Tokarski, Maria Shevtsova.



***WITHIN THE CIRCLE OF ANCIENT IDEAS AND VIRTUES. STUDIES
IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR DZIELSKA, ED. BY K. TWARDOWSKA,
M. SALAMON, S. SPRAWSKI, M. STACHURA, S. TURLEJ***

Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Historia Iagellonia," Kraków 2014

This volume, which we dedicate to Professor Maria Dzielska, expresses not only our respect and admiration for the outstanding scholar, but also our appreciation of the conception of research on ancient culture that she elected years ago and has methodically developed. The conception was born at a time when, under the influence of ideological guidelines imposed on science, it was preferred that history should be viewed through the socio-economic lens and that less than original models of political history should be replicated. The fact that the Professor undertook studies of political and religious ideas, and evoked the significance of tradition and moral virtues, did not meet with general understanding at the time. Having chosen this path, she sought contacts with Polish scholars whose convictions were close to hers, and with the best research centres in Western Europe and America, where she found appreciation, moral support, and inspiration for research work. An in-depth knowledge of history and philology, as well as a proficiency in classical languages and philosophy, enabled the Professor to adopt a fresh outlook on ancient culture, which has brought her a devoted following of students and readers, disciples and continuators. Her original works, reflecting her scholarly *akribeia*, have gained recognition in many countries, not only in the academic community but also in literary and artistic milieus. We present this anniversary volume, created with the help of a group of authors from various generations and academic circles, to Professor Maria Dzielska with our best wishes for continued success. *Ad plurimos annos!*

(From the Editors)

To these expressions of appreciation we would like to add our own best wishes: for success in all the endeavours, the best of health and new creative achievements! We would also like to express our gratitude to Prof. Dzielska for her continuous support – both through a word of encouragement and the words of her texts!

(Kronos Editorial Board)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

EWA ATANASSOW

Teaches at Bard College Berlin, a Liberal Arts University. Her articles and reviews have appeared in *Journal of Democracy*, *Kronos*, *Nations and Nationalism*, *Perspectives on Political Science*, *Przegląd Polityczny*. She is the co-editor of *Tocqueville and the Frontiers of Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

MAREK ALEKSANDER CICHOCKI

Since 2004 is the Research Director of the Natolin European Centre in Warsaw as well as Editor-in-chief of the magazine *New Europe. Natolin Review*. Since 2003 he is also publisher and Editor-in-chief of the *Teologia Polityczna* philosophical annual. Permanent professor in the Institute of Applied Social Sciences of the University of Warsaw. He translated and edited Carl Schmitt's main works in Polish. Mr. Cichocki is the author of many books, essays, articles and dissertations on politics, history of ideas and international relations—i.e., *Poland–European Union, halfway* (2002), *Europe Kidnapped* (2004), *Power and Remembrance* (2006), *Institutional Design and Voting Power in the European Union* (2010), *Problem of Political Unity in Europe* (2012).

IVAN DIMITRIJEVIĆ

Teaches philosophy at the Faculty of Artes Liberales at the University of Warsaw. Born in Belgrade, Serbia, he grew up and studied in Italy. He is the author of several essays concerning political philosophy and history of concepts. In 2014 he co-published *Come la teoria finì per diventare realtà. Sulla politica come geometria della socializzazione*.

MARTA GIBIŃSKA

Until 2012 worked as a professor at the Jagiellonian University; at present, a professor at the Jozef Tischner European University in Cracow, Poland. Her special fields are Shakespeare studies and translation studies. Her publications include among others *Functioning of Language in Shakespeare's Plays. A Pragma-dramatic Approach* (1989), and *Polish Poets Read Shakespeare* (2000). She is a member of the Polish Shakespeare Society, Deutsche Shakespearegesellschaft, International Shakespeare Association, and European Shakespeare Research Association.

HENRYK GŁĘBOCKI

A historian specializing in the Eastern Europe and Russian Imperium; teaches at the Faculty of History, Jagiellonian University; a member of the editorial board of Cracowian *Arcana* bimonthly. Authored and co-authored many books, including: *"Diabeł Asmodeusz" w niebieskich binoklach i kraj przyszłości. Hr. Adam Gurowski i Rosja* ["The Devil Asmodeus" in blue binoculars and the land of the future: Count Adam de Gurowski and Russia] (Cracow, 2012). Currently he is preparing a book on the American period in the life and work of Count Adam de Gurowski, as well as an edition of his political writings, and an English edition of the book *Fatalna sprawa. Kwestia polska w rosyjskiej myśli politycznej 1856-1866* [The Hopeless Cause: The Polish issues in Russian political thought] (Cracow, 2000). Lives in Cracow.

IRENA KSIĘŻOPOLSKA

Ph.D., a graduate of University of Warsaw. Currently teaches at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities. Has published the book *The Web of Sense: Patterns of Involution in Selected Fictions of Virginia Woolf and Vladimir Nabokov*

(2012), as well as essays on Woolf, Nabokov, Ondaatje, Spark, Calvino and McEwan. Interests include: Russian and British modernism, postmodernism, comparative literature and cross-cultural studies.

ANDRZEJ KSIEŻOPOLSKI

A graduate of the Institute of History, University of Warsaw, where he was researching the Russian emigration in the aftermath of World War I and the October Revolution. Currently, he is a doctoral student at the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw and his dissertation topic is *The Journey Not The Destination: (Re)Definitions Of History In Julian Barnes' Fiction*. He is interested in artistic representation of the idea of history, particularly in contemporary English literature.

BARTOSZ KUŹNIARZ

Assistant Professor in the Department of Contemporary and Social Philosophy at the University of Białystok. His works include *Pieniądz i system. O diable w gospodarce* [The Money and the System: On the Devil in the Economy] (Cracow 2006), *Goodbye Mr. Postmodernism: Teorie społeczne myślicieli późnej lewicy* [Farewell Postmodernism. Social Theories of the Late Left] (Cracow, 2011), as well as a number of articles and essays published in scholarly journals, cultural magazines and the daily press. His main interests include the philosophical, social and theological aspects of the capitalist economy.

GIUSEPPE PERCONTE LICATESE

Obtained a MA in International Relations and European Studies from Florence University with a dissertation on Carl Schmitt just before engaging Sergio Quinzio for this issue of *Kronos*, and the irony of having dealt with a theological hastener after a theological restrainer did not escape him. Political realism is his theoretical home.

JOSEPH C. MACFARLAND

A tutor at St. John's College, Annapolis, MD, noted for its undergraduate program in the "Great Books." He is co-editor with Joshua Parens (University of Dallas) of the revised edition of *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook* (2011). In 2014 he served as co-director, with Joshua Parens and Douglas Kries (Gonzaga University), of a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute on "Medieval Political Philosophy: Islamic, Jewish, and Christian." He has also published on Machiavelli's life of Castruccio Castracani.

PIOTR NOWAK

Teaches philosophy at the Białystok University in Poland. He is one of the co-founders and editors of the philosophical journal *Kronos*. His most recent books are: *The Prince's Signature* (Warsaw 2013), *The Ancients and Shakespeare on Time. Some Remarks on the War of Generations* (New York 2014, in English), *Troglodyte Breeding* (Warsaw 2014, reprint).

PAULINA ORŁOWSKA

Teaches contemporary culture at the Faculty of Journalism and Political Sciences at the University of Warsaw. She holds an MA in Italian philology and a Ph.D. in Political Sciences. Interested in essay writing and political aspects of literature, in 2014 she co-published *Come la teoria fini per diventare realtà. Sulla politica come geometria della socializzazione*.

THOMAS L. PANGLE

Holds the Joe R. Long Chair in Democratic Studies in the Department of Government, and is the Co-Director of the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Study of Core Texts and Ideas, at the University of Texas at Austin.

GABRIEL PINAS

Studied Italian literature at Yale University and at the University of Chicago's Committee on Social Thought, and was a fellow at the American Academy of Rome. He went on to teach at the European College of Liberal Arts in Berlin and at St. John's College (Annapolis). He currently teaches in the Integral Program in Liberal Arts at St. Mary's College of California.

ANDRZEJ SERAFIN

Philosopher and philologist. Editor of *Kronos* quarterly. Translator of Plato (*Symposium*, *Epinomis*) and Jacob Taubes (*Occidental Eschatology*) into Polish. He is currently working on the reconstruction of Heidegger's unwritten book on Aristotle.

PAULINA SOSNOWSKA

Lecturer in The Philosophical Foundations of Education Unit, Faculty of Education, University of Warsaw. The Author of *Philosophy of Education in the Perspective of Heideggerian Ontological Difference* (Warsaw, 2008). Translator of philosophical literature from English and German.

ARNOLD TOCZYSKI

Ph.D. student on the History and Sociology Department of University in Białystok.

HALSZKA WITKOWSKA

Ph.D. student at Artes Liberales, Warsaw University. She received her MA at Polish Culture Institute, Warsaw University. Her Ph.D. thesis concerns the analysis of the phenomenon of suicide in the contemporary culture and of the structure of a suicide note.

CATHERINE ZUCKERT

Editor-in-Chief of *The Review of Politics*. Zuckert's book on Natural Right and the American Imagination: *Political Philosophy in Novel Form* won the Professional and Scholarly Publishing Award for the best book written in philosophy and religion by the American Association of Publishers in 1990. *Understanding the Political Spirit: From Socrates to Nietzsche*, edited by Zuckert, received a Choice award as one of the best books published in political theory in 1989. Professor Zuckert's most recent book is, *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of Dialogues* (University of Chicago Press, May 2009).

“Kronos” quarterly was established in 2007 as a project of a particular generation of philosophers all of whom started their studies around the transitional year 1989. “Kronos” soon became the largest philosophical journal in Poland. It is a new voice in Polish philosophy.

Poland at the turn of the 21st century was and is an inspiring place for thinkers; it is an interesting vantage point for observing and studying human nature. It is a place which saw genocide and two murderous experiments – the Nazi and the Soviet – the aim of which was to create a new type of human being. A philosopher brought up in Warsaw is living in a city destroyed by Hitler and rebuilt by Stalin.

The place and the time when we started studying philosophy influenced our choices and interests. Perhaps a philosopher is nothing but an emanation of the place and time which shaped him. These factors no doubt explain our interest in Hegel and Marx whom we have read through the lenses provided by religious messianists (Fyodorov) or 20th century prophets of the apocalypse (Kojève and Witkacy). The spirit of time and place prompted us also to study the Classics, to return in thought to Greece where – influenced by Heidegger and Nietzsche – we saw the eternally recurring point, where all history ends and every history begins.