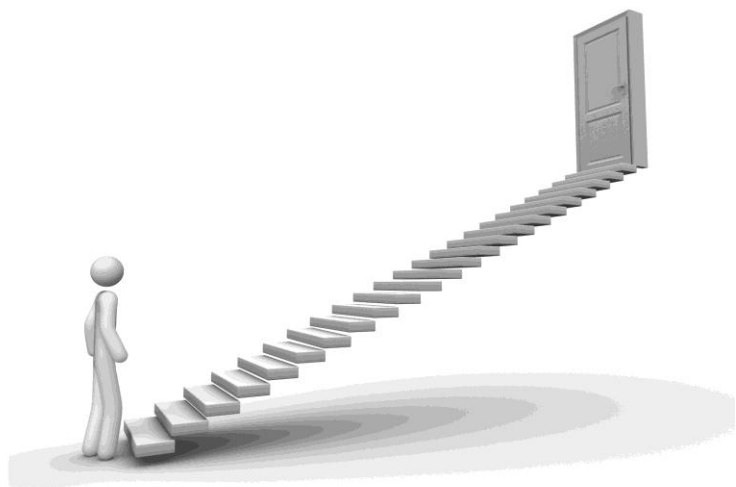


# CODGITO

Student Journal of Philosophy



Volume 4 2007

Volume 5 2008

# Department of Philosophy

Memorial University  
of  
Newfoundland

# CODGITO

Volume 4, 2007

The following papers were assembled for a revival of *Codgito* originally planned for the 2006-2007 academic year. Papers were originally written for courses the authors themselves took as students in 2005 and 2006. The purpose of this edition is to bring back to life what was once a vibrant element in the intellectual growth of young philosophers at Memorial University.

All those who have contributed:

Morgan Blakely  
William Kennedy  
Lynn Panting  
Adam Riggio

Special thanks to the professors for whose courses these papers were originally written, and for their guidance:

Dr Suma Rajiva  
Dr John Scott  
Dr Evan Simpson  
Dr Peter Trnka

And to the head of Memorial's department of Philosophy:  
Dr James Bradley

Editor: Adam Riggio  
Design: Morgan Blakely

*Codgito* is published by the Memorial University of Newfoundland Philosophy Society. The purpose of the journal is to foster philosophical inquiry and discussion among students of philosophy. The journal accepts philosophically oriented papers on most topics. Article submissions should be no more than 6000 words and accompanied by an abstract and bibliography. They should be either consistently formatted or provide an explanation for deliberate inconsistent formatting.

Please submit all documents using an opensource file format.

Submissions should be sent to the Memorial University Philosophy Society at [munphilosophy@gmail.com](mailto:munphilosophy@gmail.com) or delivered in person to a member of the society. Hard copies can be sent to the Philosophy Society at:

Codgito  
Department of Philosophy  
Memorial University of Newfoundland  
St. John's Newfoundland  
Canada  
A1C 5S7

## Table of Contents

Dialectics and Dramatic: Platonic Play in Marcel.....	1
Lynn Panting	
Hume and the Problem of Induction.....	13
Morgan Blakley	
Foucault and the Origins of Human Knowledge.....	18
Adam Riggio	
Has it Happened? The Event in Deleuze and Guattari.....	31
William Kennedy	



# Dialectic and Dramatic: the Evolution Platonic Play in Marcel

Lynn Panting

Marcel's place in the scheme of the Platonic echo may be one of the more unique contributions to philosophical discourse, as Marcel's voice does not reverberate metaphysical assertions, or wax political; instead Marcel echoes the essentiality of play within the philosophical. 'Play', in Marcel's manner, can be interpreted both literally and figuratively as the embodiment of Marcel's philosophical work comes about through his *plays*, or dramatic writings, and through the interplay of two opposing voices within these works. In this way, I intend to delve into the playful nature of dialogue and dialectic in order to ascertain the nature of the relationship between medium and message. So too, it is key to uncover the nature of the difference between dialogue and dialectic, in order to unwrap Marcel's contribution to neo-Platonism.

*Form*<sup>1</sup>, or medium, is at the forefront for both Plato and Marcel, as they both choose to spread the word through dialogue. In Plato's case employment of this particular device appears fairly evident, as the best way to shout the praises of the dialectic method is to make use of it. That is, Plato expounds the generative essence of the dialectic by allowing his audience to sit in on it: experience it. So too, Plato invites the audience to be a part of the dialectic by leaving issues unresolved. The *Symposium* may be a particularly useful example in this regard, as although few of Plato's dialogues provide its audience with some kind of closure, the *Symposium* peters out in ample disarray.

After Socrates' tribute to Eros as mediator in the *Symposium*, Alcibiades bursts in and offers his own speech: in praise of

---

<sup>1</sup> "Form" here is to be understood as little 'f' 'form', as oppose to some great metaphysical manufacturing plant.

Socrates. To this point in the plot of the dialogue, all speeches have been made in praise of Eros. This event does two things: first it leaves Socrates' speech absent of rebuttal: although it is not rare for Socrates to have the last word, this particular lack of opposition is dubious, and necessarily so. Necessarily so, so long as it is taken that Plato aims to engage his audience by presenting them with the unresolved and the inconsistent. Secondly, it illuminates the fact that Socrates is not the rambling man of pleasure that he is often presumed to be<sup>2</sup>. Here too Plato offers up a contradiction: Socrates, the great lover, prefers discourse to sex.

To further the concept of *form* it may be useful to examine Sallis' tri-part analysis of the Platonic dialectic: or the Play-tonic<sup>3</sup> dialectic. In *Being and Logos the Way of the Platonic Dialogue*, Sallis determines that the Platonic dialogue consists of three parts: *logos, mythos, and playfulness*<sup>4</sup>. Sallis paints this depiction in order to offer a portrait of the character of a dialogue; this is in contrast to a strict structural analysis.

Logos is identified as the "theoretic [al]", or the "reasonable discourse"<sup>5</sup> in Plato's texts, which largely pertain to the larger speeches, or the philosophical meat of Plato's arguments. Logos is, however, not delivered in a straightforward manner and is often infused with irony, comedy, or imagery<sup>6</sup>; as in the infusion of Diotima in the *Symposium*. In this way, logos is only one aspect of Platonic dialogue and plays the necessary counterpart to mythos; this dialectical relationship may be understood in the terms that: logos is the day to mythos' night.

Mythos, or plot, is the embodiment of Plato's artistic flourish, and refers to the secondary speeches within the dialogues that suggest setting, or recall history. Although Sallis characterizes

---

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 1952

<sup>3</sup> The 'tonic' note of a chord refers the root note: the note that grounds, or the note to which the harmony notes correspond. Picking up on Sallis' notion play within the dialogues, 'Play-tonic' is meant to express the way in which Plato plays with fundamental, or foundational, beliefs.

<sup>4</sup> John Sallis, *Being and Logos the Way of the Platonic Dialogue*, 1975.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*



mythos as 'dark' to logos' light<sup>7</sup>, the relation of the two must be thought of as two sides of the same coin, rather than warring opposites. In this way, separating one from the other in a specific speech, or within the dialogue as a whole, is not always advisable, nor possible. Furthermore, it is the juxtaposition of logos and mythos that drive the plot of the dialogue.

The dialectic is such that at least two viewpoints are required in order to make any kind of headway: it is only through combination that generation occurs. As such, the combination of logos and mythos is required to produce, as well as to keep the other in check. In this way, logos and mythos must be considered as the two *tonic* characters that underlie each of Plato's dialogues. It is through the *play*<sup>8</sup> of logos and mythos that the word, or lack thereof, comes to light.

Play, for Marcel, is not the background mediator expressed in Plato, but the primary mediator. The role of 'audience' is comparatively more central to Marcel's plays; where Plato's dialogues are to be read, Marcel's dramatic work is to be performed<sup>9</sup>. In this way, Marcel's words are mediated by the genre in which they are written, and demand a relationship with Marcel, his players, and the audience. In this way, the medium of

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Sallis depicts *play* in a more sinister light than is expressed here. He employs two separate quotations from the *Republic* to display such. In Book VII of the *Republic* Socrates, speaking to Glaucon, offers that the education of children and other beginners should not come about through force, but through lawful play. So too does Socrates in the *Republic* offer that man is a "puppet made by the gods, a play-thing..." . Sallis interprets this statement to mean that through play, one becomes a plaything of the gods. Or rather that it is only through play that one becomes aware that they are a plaything of the gods, singing dancing, and living in order to please. Play becomes a source of awareness, much like doubt, whereby man may begin to recognize what keeps him in the dark. This sinister treatment of play, however does not account for the humor within Plato's dialogues and therefore I only note it here out of courtesy to Mr. Sallis.

<sup>9</sup> 'Drama', *History of Ideas*, 1973

drama allows Marcel to deliver his message through the actors<sup>10</sup> on stage. Here it is of benefit to explore the tenets of Marcel's philosophy, as well as the relationship between his philosophical and dramatic work.

Marcel has the illustrious honor of coining the term *existentialism*, and as such has been referred to, by Sartre no less, as a *Christian existentialist*. Although Marcel converted to Christianity in 1929 and proudly takes up the Christian line in his writing, he preferred to fall under the heading: *neo-Socratic*. Marcel's philosophical legacy includes lectures, journal entries and dramatic works in addition to more orthodox philosophical writings. It is of note however that Marcel's biography, as well as commentators Treanor and Hanley, point to Marcel's frustration at the success of his philosophical discourse in comparison to the relative obscurity of his dramatic works<sup>11</sup>.

Marcel chooses to employ common language in his work as "ordinary language distort[s] our experience far less than the elaborate expressions in which philosophical language is crystallized"<sup>12</sup>. In keeping with his movement away from distortion, Marcel begins his description of reality with the immediate: with sense; not mere sense experience, but sense that is common. It is the common sense of being: a sense of the ontological, that Marcel holds to be most primary. On the other hand, it is the loss of this sense that Marcel dreads.

The 'broken world' is a comment on the loss of sense: of human essence, through technology, or function, and is discussed in *The Philosophy of Existentialism (1995)*, and more subtly in the dramatic work *The Broken World (1973)*.

It must be noted that the "broken" in "broken world" does not imply that the world was ever whole, or that a philosophical band-aid might unify the globe. Rather, the "broken world" is

---

<sup>10</sup> Although it is certain that actors are actively involved in the process, it must be noted that they are the middle term between the written work and the audience.

<sup>11</sup>Brian Treanor, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2004

<sup>12</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, 1995

broken in essence, and stands in wait to be fractured by the events of history. In this way, Marcel does not endeavor to heal the world, in fact he aims to preserve its brokenness; as such brokenness constitutes the shape of humanity and is indeed the threshold of human experience. It is the unwilling nature of man, who fails to reflect and transcend, preferring instead to bask in the particularity of menial tasks or functions, that contributes to this fissure and fragmentation: *ontological exigence* is stilled by an unconscious relativism or by a monism that discounts the personal, “ignores the tragic and denies the transcendent”<sup>13</sup>. Here Marcel is aiming at transcendence through experience: a lived trans-ascendance<sup>14</sup>. In this way, deed solidifies the unity of being and transcending: the surpassing of threshold through action: Socrates’ actions in the *Phaedo*<sup>15</sup>, for example, correspond with this notion of transcendence.

Just as the unity of being and transcending culminates in the deed, the unity of *being* and *having* is located in the body<sup>16</sup>. Marcel’s *Being and Having*, part of his *existential diary*, is an extension of the contention that everything comes down to the distinction between what we have and what we are<sup>17</sup>. There is a firm difference between having a house and being hospitable; conversely, when we believe, we do not have a belief: we are a belief<sup>18</sup>. A body however; more specifically my body, straddles both realms, as my body is both something that I have and something that I am. In this way the relationship between the body and being and having must be understood as a both/and, as oppose to an either/or relation.

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> The *Phaedo* recounts the hours leading up to Socrates’ death and centers on a discussion of boundary and passage. In this dialogue Socrates argues for the immortality of the soul and demands that death should not be feared; through willingly drinking the hemlock that kills him, Socrates unites theory and practice through the medium of action.

<sup>16</sup> It must be noted that this relationship is not exclusive; however body’s status as unifier is paramount in Marcel’s writing and the writing of his commentators.

<sup>17</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 1949

<sup>18</sup> Brian Treanor, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2004

My relation to my body is not satisfied by the lone phrase: I have a body. This is the case as this statement makes possible a disassociation between me and my body. In this way, I now stand in relation to my body, thus becoming a force apart from it. In this instance of alienation, the body in question ceases to be my body and must be viewed as a body in general. The problem here is the problem of the ghost in the machine, whereby I stand over and against some sort of shell. Marcel contends that this view is incomplete as there exists a necessary connection between me and my body.

Conversely, the statement: I am my body, lacks fullness as well. This is the case as once I connect myself to a body, the body ceases to be something that I have; my body is me: my body is what I am. The difficulty here is that if one is their body, then that is all they are. Losing a limb, or other appendage, would thus mean that one was less than whole. The Tom Stoppard play *Rock 'N' Roll* explores this concept through the relationship between an aging, materialist, philosopher and his wife, who is dying with terminal cancer:

Eleanor:           *(breaks)* I don't care! I don't care about it! Stay in- get out- I don't care, Max!

Max:                What is it? What's happened?

Eleanor:           It's you. My body is telling me I'm nothing without it, and you're telling me the same.

Max:                No...No.

Eleanor:           You are, Max! It's as if you're in cahoots, you and my cancer

Max:                Oh God- Nell.

*He tries to hold her. Weeping, she won't be held.*

Eleanor:           They've cut, cauterized and zapped away my breasts, my ovaries, my womb, half my bowel, and a nutmeg out of my brain, and I am undiminished. I'm exactly who I've always been.

I am not my body. My body is nothing without me, that's the truth of it.

*She tears open her dress*

Look at it, what's left of it. It does classics. It does half-arsed feminism, it does love, desire, jealousy and fear- Christ, does it do fear!- So who's the me who's still in one piece?

Max: I know that- I know your mind is everything.

Eleanor: (*furiously*) Don't you dare, Max- don't you dare reclaim that word now. I don't want your 'mind' which you can make out of beer cans. Don't bring it to my funeral. I want your grieving soul or nothing. I do not want your amazing biological machine- I want what you love me with.

*She hits bottom and stays there. Max waits, not comforting her. Then he crouches close to her.*

Max: But that's what I love you with. That's it. There's nothing else.<sup>19</sup>

Through his careful dialogue, Stoppard points to crux of what being body alone suggests: that being body amounts to being the sum of parts and nothing greater. Being without having rules out the possibility of transcendence; transcendence is the essential element to human life according to Marcel, not so that we may heal the *broken world* but so that we may recognize brokenness. Likewise having without being entails disconnect, where body is alienated from self. To avoid emptiness, the statement: 'I am body' must share the same breath as 'I have a body' in order to express what the experience of my body is<sup>20</sup>. In this way, the combination of being and having through embodiment in the human form is the path to transcendence. As

---

<sup>19</sup> Tom Stoppard, *Rock 'N' Roll*, 2006

<sup>20</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, 1949

such, the further incarnation of this contention lies in Marcel's status as a playwright.

The broken world is explored in Marcel's *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, however so too is it probed in his play *The Broken World*. The genre of theatre allows Marcel to take his philosophy from the theoretical to the practical: from paper to body. In this way, the lead character Christiane embodies the broken world theme, as she, like Kierkegaard's aesthete, ultimately finds no satisfaction in the simulacrum that is polite society<sup>21</sup>. The dialogue between Christiane and Denise has more effect than any of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms however, as Christiane's conclusions only come about through her discourse with Denise: Denise's place as a critic and confidant allows for Christiane's growth and development. The dialectic proves itself to be generative; where as the single standpoint is limited. The question now becomes what is the nature of the difference between dialectic and dramatic work?

The straightforward answer to this question is that the nature of the difference between dialectic and dramatic work is a matter of embodiment: dialogues are to be read and drama is to be performed. However, within performance's two distinct elements relevant to this particular discourse emerge: risk and engagement.

In *The Idea of the Good in Platonic- Aristotelian Philosophy* Gadamer develops the concept of courage stating: "Above all, courage is needed in response to conformism- courage, that is, which does not allow itself to be misled but *knows*."<sup>22</sup> Here Gadamer points to courage, or risk, which is the weapon of choice in the fight against conformity. Plato aims to engage his audience by presenting them with the unresolved and the inconsistent: Plato has the courage to displace his reader. In this way, Socrates' death in the *Phaedo* has more impact than any circumstance that would allow Socrates to live. Furthermore, Socrates' willing act of taking the hemlock carries more weight than if someone were to force it on him, as Socrates' bold act solidifies his philosophical contention through action.

---

<sup>21</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Broken World*, 1998

<sup>22</sup> Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic- Aristotelian Philosophy*, 1986

Pushing Gadamer further, would it not be more courageous for Plato to allow his audience to take in and actually physically engage with the death of Socrates? Is not the embodiment of Socrates' death more powerful than a written account of it? That is, a certain level of comfort and safety is removed once the written word is replaced by human bodies, even if they are just playing. Performance carries with it a unique quality of risk; as such Marcel takes up Plato's ballsy dialectic and moves beyond it; thus Plato's original risk is amplified once medium is transformed from the written word to the stage.

Actors are literally the embodiment of the word, thus the locatedness of concept created in a phenomenological body. The word is now accessible through the medium of body: an audience can stare the message in the face: the word is communion passed through the players onto their audience.

In this way, the nature of the engagement has a profound impact on the audience, as the solitary act of reading a dialogue differs from the social act of attending a performance. It is not what happens to me when I utter my lines, but the collective engagement of an audience of individuals that is key<sup>23</sup>.

Gadamer contends that text must be read critically and the role one plays while reading Plato is the role of questioner<sup>24</sup>. As such, writing that draws the audience in permits said audience to better fulfill their role. Plato thus uses the unresolved and the contradictory to ensure the engagement of his reader. The importance of inquiry in Gadamer may also be transferred over to the theatrical as Marcel's discussion of *problem* and *mystery* suggests that in order for his work to be successful, the audience must question and internalize the drama presented to them.

Problem and mystery are closely associated with the broken world as Marcel states that the broken world is such that "on the one hand [it is] riddled with problems and, on the other,

---

<sup>23</sup> The post-modern account contends that art is in the response of the audience, as such the audience may have a bigger role to play in the area of the arts in comparison to literature.

<sup>24</sup> Gadamer *The Idea of the Good in Platonic- Aristotelian Philosophy*, 1986

determined to allow no room for mystery”<sup>25</sup>. The broken world is instead the realm of problems which do not depend on participation for solution. Problems are stock inquiries that have no specific connection to any particular individual, but may be solved by any individual through following a process. Mystery, the preferred avenue of query, on the other hand takes up the engagement of the individual and depends on the individual's participation. In mystery the individual is the most important aspect; as to change the questioner would be to alter the question<sup>26</sup>: mystery depends very much on who it is that is asking the question.

Translate this contention to the stage and it is evident that Marcel seeks to call his audience into mystery by presenting them with the corporeal: Marcel's use of the dramatic thus entices his audience and demands their engagement. The original enticement rests within the erotic nature of dialectic and its physical manifestation in the dramatic. As such Marcel's plays are successful in capturing an audience not only because they have physical presence, but because theatre contains within it an essential eroticism. It is Eros that Plato and Marcel aid the play between the author and his audience.

For Plato Eros, the generative, sustaining, passionate aspect of the dialectic provides for activity within the individual reader. Plato's dialogues are *playful*, and are in fact *foreplay* for the audience. The heat and fever of the dialectic is not created by Plato and abandoned: the audience takes up the passion and lets it in. The building tension after each speech in the *Symposium* is non-existent without someone to feel it<sup>27</sup>.

So too, the audience that sits in wait of dimming lights engages with Marcel's plays, prepared to be gripped and invested. This is

---

<sup>25</sup> Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, 1995, p. 12

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Surely the copy of Socrates, who has been through the speeches infinitely, no longer cares.



not Agape. I do not watch unselfishly: I watch to be stimulated: to be satisfied<sup>28</sup>.

There is a communion between the authors, their fictional characters, well as the audience. As such, there a shared eroticism that spans above and beyond a simple coupling. Gilles Deleuze expounds on the complexity of the erotic by offering the image of “many- colored fields unfolding”<sup>29</sup> along with the illustration of a “harlequin’s cloak”<sup>30</sup> to express the infinitude of possible sexual connections. One must not think of Eros in terms of pairs, as Aristophanes’ depiction of the soul mates<sup>31</sup>, but as an endless quilted field of possibilities.

In this way, the medium of drama shatters the intimacy of a two in a way that the written text does not: the triad contained in the reading of a text is the connection of author and audience through the medium of written dialectic: a ratio of one to one through one. The dramatic offers the possibility of multiple connections and thus the ratio of script to players to audience is impossible to calculate. In this way, Marcel adopts the play of the dialectic and expands it so that his philosophy is a group activity wherein the limits of solitary play are removed.

---

<sup>28</sup> Likewise, Marcel writes selfishly to preserve: to preserve himself, his broken world.

<sup>29</sup> Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 1990

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 1952

## Bibliography

- Cain, Seymour, *Gabriel Marcel*, Regnery/Gateway Inc.: Indiana, 1979.
- Deleuze, Gilles, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, Columbia University Press: New York, 1990.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. P. Christopher Smith, Yale University Press: New Haven; London, 1986.
- Marcel, Gabriel, *Being and Having an Existential Diary*, trans. Katherine Farrer, Harper & Row: New York, 1965.
- Marcel, Gabriel, *The Broken World*, trans. Katarine Rose Hanley, Marquette University Press: Milwaukee, 1998.
- Marcel, Gabriel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, trans. Manya Harari, Carol Publishing Group: New York, 1995.
- Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.
- Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.
- Sallis, John, *Being and Logos the Way of the Platonic Dialogue*, Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1975.
- Stoppard, Tom, *Rock 'N' Roll*, Faber and Faber: London, 2006.

# Hume and the Problem of Induction

Morgan Blakley

According to David Hume, the problem of induction is that there is no philosophical justification for extrapolating from past experiences to future events. Hume contends that all of our ideas come from either sensory or reflective impressions. The association of ideas is limited to “three principles of connexion...namely, Resemblance, contiguity in time or place, and *Cause or effect*.” (359) Hume divides reasoning into two sorts: reasoning considering matters of fact and reasoning considering relations of ideas. Matters of fact pertain to the external world and relations of ideas are internal. The problem of induction occurs when empiricism is taken to its limit; Hume is reacting against Locke's illicit move from the constant conjunction of ideas to a supposed knowledge of the corpuscular world. Hume argues that empiricism cannot justify truth claims about the laws of nature, as they occur at an insensible level. Since we cannot have a philosophical knowledge of causal relations, Hume contends that custom is what guides us through life, and the “most perfect philosophy of the natural kind only staves off our ignorance a little longer.” (362) Although Hume does not find a solution to the problem of induction, his promotion of custom helps lay the groundwork for pragmatic philosophy.

Hume's problem of induction begins with how he differentiates between matters of fact and relations of ideas. For Hume, relations of ideas represent “every affirmation which is either intuitively or demonstratively certain.” (359) These relations are “discoverable by the mere operation of thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe.” (359) Furthermore, these relations are not subject to intelligible contradiction and “[t]hough there never were a circle or a triangle in nature, the truths demonstrated by Euclid would for ever retain their certainty and evidence.” (359) According to Hume, it would be unintelligible to suggest that there could be a square circle, or that two and two is both four and not four. Matters of fact are, in contrast, open to contradiction. Hume posits that “*the sun will not*

*rise tomorrow* is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction than the affirmation, *that it will rise.*" (359) Hume seems to be creating an artificial distinction between matters of fact and relations of ideas based on contradiction. He claims that matters of fact are subject to contradiction while relations of ideas are not. Yet, according to Hume, all relations of ideas derive from matters of fact, from impressions. If the basis of a relationship is open to contradiction, then it would seem odd to suppose that the relationship itself is not open to such a contradiction; even if we distinguish between concept empiricism and knowledge empiricism.

Hume might argue that once we have ideas, the work we can do with them is conceptual. This concept empiricism is not assailable on the grounds that matters of fact are subject to contradiction. This difference is perceptible in the difference between the law of non-contradiction and its DeMorgan equivalent. Suggesting the contradiction of  $\sim(P\&\sim P)$  is unintelligible, whereas the contradiction of  $P\vee\sim P$  is intelligible: We can have a possible world where there are no married or unmarried men, we cannot however, have a world were there is an unmarried man who is also married. Thus for Hume, the distinction is between the following: A concept, although it originally derives from the real world, can, with the help of a priori faculties of mind, create knowledge. Concepts have a causal relation in the world, whereas knowledge has no necessary relation to the external world. The knowledge of married and unmarried people is free from real world constraints, as we could have a real world in which neither exists. The concept of a married of unmarried person is dependent on real world existence; we cannot have a concept of married and unmarried people without there being married or unmarried people, or at the very least, concepts of marriage and people. The a priori faculties of mind that can create knowledge seems, systematically, to be capable of change, just as the system that seems to guide matters of fact is.

Within a logically intelligible conceptual framework, intelligible contradictions can occur. That two and two is four, holds for a limited system: For example, the traditional system of addition. I could define a set theoretical system in which two and two is not four, because addition **need** not be defined in the tradition way. For example, I can change my addition operator so that "+" changes from  $(x+y)$  to  $(x+y+3)$ . Thus with two plus two, the

concept of two does not change, nor does our knowledge of it. It is the same concept, the same knowledge, with two equally valid, yet different answers, two different concepts emerging from the same concept,  $P$  and  $\sim P$ , four and seven. Although the system of mathematics, the addition operator, has changed, the concepts have not.

The possibility of a system change is why Hume does not tolerate induction in rigorous philosophy. Hume believes that all reasoning concerning matters of fact, is “founded of the relation of *cause* and *effect*” (360) and thus, there is a problem with induction. Empirical induction is the method by which we extrapolate from previous events to future events. Given that the test of validity in empiricism is the ability to trace all ideas back to experience, we cannot justify a conjunction between a causal event and an effect. This is because that which binds a cause to an effect, is insensible. It is a mysterious something that we cannot detect with the senses. Take for example a man born into the world with a rational mind, but no experiences. It would be arbitrary for him to state whether a rock which is thrown in the air, will float away, or fall to the ground. Nor would he be capable, through sensory observation, to determine that striking a flame to gunpowder would *cause* the powder to explode. For Hume, there is no a priori knowledge of the specific relationship between individual causes and their effects. The argument that Hume is advancing is that we cannot know with logical certainty, what an event in the future will elicit, no matter how many times we have seen a similar event in the past. Since we can conceive of intelligible contradictions to matters of fact, a future in which the past system is different, we cannot claim to know of any necessary relation between causes and effects. Given the ability to change the laws, or system, that governs relations of ideas, it seems to me as though the problem of induction also extends to the relation of ideas. We cannot claim that these relations are not subject to contradiction, nor that they will hold forever. We can only claim that, like matters of fact, logical laws have held to date, within the contexts in which they have occurred.

1

---

1 Consider for example fuzzy logic, where the law of non-contradiction does not occur. I cannot find any more of a necessity in relations of ideas than in matters of fact.

The distinction between concept and knowledge empiricism attempts, but seemingly fails, to justify any sense of necessity. Knowledge empiricists are stuck within the problem of induction, they have no justification to extrapolate from past events to future ones, as the binding force between causes and effects are insensible. Concept empiricism attempts to obviate this problem by separating a concept, from the knowledge it can provide. They suggest that once we have concepts, even if they are open to intelligible contradiction, we can gain knowledge based on necessarily laws, or a necessary system. But these laws are not necessary, they are open to contextual changes, just as mathematical laws are. The a priori operators of logic seem no different than the operators of mathematics. If the context of a logical system is not necessary, then neither is the knowledge that we base on them. If neither concept nor knowledge empiricism solves the problem of induction, then rigorous philosophy of the natural kind seems only capable of displacing our ignorance. If this is the case, then such philosophy should evolve to accept laws based on convention over necessary and eternal laws.

Hume suggests that custom is the basis for our belief in the validity of causal relations. Yet, even logic, when its operators are changed, is susceptible to intelligible contradiction. There is no more of a necessary relation that two and two equals four, than there is that the sun will rise tomorrow. Both statements, one regarding matters of fact and one regarding relations of ideas, hold a necessity only within a specific system; intelligible contradiction is possible in both instances. Hume suggests that "philosophy of the natural kind" (362) can only stave of our ignorance for a little longer. That is, if we accept Hume's proposition that "[i]f there be any suspicion that the course of nature may change, and that the past may be no rule for the future, all experience becomes useless, and can give rise to no inference of conclusion." (365) If reason is "incapable of any such variation" (369) in context, then philosophy, and not induction, would seem to be the problem. Custom, which uses induction, "is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone which renders our experience useful to us..." (369) and it is here that pragmatism goes boldly where no philosophy has gone before.

## Bibliography

Baird, Forrest and Walter Kaufmann. Modern Philosophy 4<sup>th</sup> ed.  
Prentice Hall, New Jersey 2003.

# Foucault and the Origins of Human Knowledge

Adam Riggio

The important aspect of Michel Foucault's work is his perspective on the origins of human knowledge. At the foundation of knowledge is the choice of the individual person as to what to learn, what is important for their life and life in general – basically, what is worth learning. Our choices are not made in isolation from each other, but exist in a colossal context of other decisions made by other people in other places and times. Just as each individual is autonomous, so are we linked. People have just as much power to choose their beliefs and the course of their lives just as the distant forces of history have the power to choose for them. It is understanding this paradox that we see the greatest insights Foucault offers us, an insight into the deep flaws now written into Western morality revealed through his analysis of our culture's history.

Morals are the centrepiece of politics. Without a moral foundation politics becomes nothing more than bureaucratic management. We can identify commonalities throughout the various moral values of a society, and these commonalities unite the different prescriptions and rules of any particular society into what we can call a moral set. Foucault, in his *Two Lectures on Power/Knowledge*, analyses the morality of modern Western society and identifies not just one, but two moral sets, one that he labels 'sovereignty' and one labelled 'disciplinary.' Unfortunately for Westerners, these two moral sets are contradictory in almost every sense of the term, leading to a kind of societal moral schizophrenia. Also, upon analysing both these moral sets, we discover some rather disturbing aspects of our own history and development in the world.

But just as important as his conclusions on the political and moral state of the West is the method by which he arrived there. Foucault's major intellectual quest was to understand the dynamics of power relations in human society, and how those dynamics change through a civilization's history. This at first sounds like simply a slight shift in focus from a long tradition of



academic historians. But Foucault's masterstroke was what he called the "ascending analysis of power." He looked for expressions of domination and subjugation in "its ultimate destinations, with those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions." Instead of looking for expressions of power, he looked for expressions of those subjugated by the powerful. Where most historians began their analysis at the origins of institutions and practices of domination, he examined the lives of the powerless.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning an analysis from the cause of a human-initiated process, we are drawn most towards its intended effects. Start at the court of the emperor, and you see the armies, the bureaucracy, the legislature, and all the typical trappings of what we think of as political power. Start with the poor factory worker or fisherman, we discover a myriad of ways in which their choices of life are restricted, how they are subjugated by systems, institutions, and people who they cannot themselves influence at all. And these agents of domination may have power over people without their creators and leaders even realizing it. In his historical analysis of the role of the insane in the West, *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault examines expressions of madness in the obvious place of the hospital and medical sciences. But he also finds in visual art and literature reflections of the role of the insane in society. It is through these colloquial expressions of dominating and being dominated that we understand the evolution of our treatment of the mentally ill in this early work.<sup>2</sup> In *Power/Knowledge*, it is with the same everyday behaviour in mind that we analyse our relations with other members of society, and other societies alien to us. This bottom-up approach to power structures reveals far more than previous methods ever did.

Sovereignty morality is the oldest of the two moral sets dominant in Western culture, and the one that has come to incorporate the values that today we call democratic. This system of morality arose from the principle of the divine right of kings. Of definite

---

<sup>1</sup>Foucault, Michel. "Two Lectures: Power/Knowledge." *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts*. Pp. 518-519. Steven M. Cahn, ed. Oxford University Press. 2005.

<sup>2</sup>Foucault, Michel. (1965) *Madness and Civilization*. Richard Howard, trans. Random House Inc. 1988.

importance in contemporary society is the idea that, at least in terms of conscious expression, there is a limit to the exercise of power.<sup>3</sup> This limit is the concept of inalienable human rights.

As regards the general principle involved in a study of the relations between right and power, it seems to me that in Western societies since Medieval times it has been royal power that has provided the essential focus around which legal thought as been elaborated. It is in response to the demands of royal power, for its profit and to serve as its instrument or justification, that the juridical edifice of our own society has been developed. Right in the West is the King's right.<sup>4</sup>

Western society before Medieval times – the true Dark Ages – was organized on a system of indentured servitude and serfdom. The transformation of this, so goes the standard historical instruction, into our modern liberal democratic system of free citizens before an elected accountable government, was due to the rule of law becoming universal. That is, the law of the land was no longer merely the momentary whim of the ruler of that particular fiefdom. The writers of law, starting in the twelfth century, gave a new dimension to the direct power of monarchs. Prior to this for several centuries in Europe, the ruler of a territory became so by force of superior arms, and maintained his position solely through such violent means. He who could murder the king and his loyalists would become the new king, and succession would usually continue in this way. But that group of people Foucault refers to as “jurists” adapted to the feudal monarchy the new systems of law that they were developing all over Europe. He calls this event “the resurrection of Roman Law.” Fiefdoms became countries and castles became capitols. The law was written to reflect one basic principle – that the king was the only free actor in the kingdom. Prior to this event, the murderer of the king could easily become the new king. But as society grew to respect law and the jurists who

---

<sup>3</sup>We must be aware, however, that it was the hidden, barely noticeable power relations in society where Foucault made his most critical breakthroughs in understanding.

<sup>4</sup>Foucault, Michel. “Two Lectures: Power/Knowledge.” Pp. 516-517.

administered it, the killer of the king was a criminal meant to be prosecuted. Political power was now not simply a matter of arms, but a matter of respect for the laws of the land.<sup>5</sup>

In effect, this created a way in which the monarch was subjugated, and in my view a starting point for the modern democratic movement. The idea of modern democracy, inspired by the direct democracies of the town assemblies in some ancient Greek cities,<sup>6</sup> saw this subjugation of the monarch to the jurists as a devolution of political power to the people. Focussing on the conscious, intentional application of direct institutions of power, the first democratic activists in the eighteenth century could see the introduction of the rule of law as the jurist gaining authority over the king. The king retained his personal freedom under the law, but if the king was one person under the law, why would all other citizens not be people under the law? Even while the first centuries of the sovereignty moral set saw the establishment of extremely hierarchical absolute monarchies, this morality provided the seed of modern democracy. Where the king was sovereign master of his political kingdom, the individual person in a democratic society was the sovereign master of his personal kingdom.

Regarding the disciplinary moral set, Foucault finds himself regarding the same structures of society as Karl Marx, as the origins of this morality lies in the evolution of the capitalist order in the factories of the industrial revolution. What this morality values is efficiency to maximize material production. It is based on a social order of workers and controllers of the workers, and people are controlled through surveillance. "It is a mechanism of power which permits time and labour, rather than wealth and commodities, to be extracted from bodies. It is a type of power which is constantly exercised by means of surveillance rather than in a discontinuous manner by means of a system of levies

---

<sup>5</sup>Foucault, Michel. "Two Lectures: Power/Knowledge." Pg. 517.

<sup>6</sup>Madison, James. "The Federalist Papers: Number 10." *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts*. Pp. 354-358. Steven M. Cahn, ed. Oxford University Press. 2005. This essay on the infeasibility of direct democracy in a republic as large as the United States may not seek to emulate the ancient Greek democrats, but it does show the influence of that ideal.

or obligations distributed over time.”<sup>7</sup> We can think of a morality as a system which justifies the exercise of power. Direct conscious control legitimate to a sovereignty morality is control through such means as taxation. The territorial sovereign authority mandates the maximum control the law allows at all times.

Disciplinary power is that authority that exists on the factory floors, in the discount goods stores, and in bureaucracies. It is that domination of employees by managers, of managers by executives, of executives by owners. Indeed, the factory was the centre of the new kind of socializing out of which disciplinary morals grew. It is a more diverse version of the Marxist division of bourgeoisie and proletariat. Sovereignty power is meant to be exercised in the open, to impose the spectre of the king – or of the state, depending on the governmental setup – on all parts of society at the same time. This equal subjugation of everyone to the rule of law is the democratic principle in sovereignty morality. Disciplinary power adds the equation of profits against loss to the exercise of domination. This way of ordering society grew out of eighteenth and nineteenth century factory management and ownership, and has since grown to dominate the entire Western economic and bureaucratic model.<sup>8</sup> A disciplinary dominator works best from behind the scenes, a mysterious presence who is only occasionally seen but who could be seen at any time. This hidden omniscience is the heart of the surveillance method that disciplinary power employs. It is not the act of watching that inspires obedience in the dominated, but the fear of being watched. Those at the bottom of the hierarchy of disciplinary power follow orders from their superiors because to disobey

---

<sup>7</sup>Foucault, Michel. “Two Lectures: Power/Knowledge.” Pg. 522.

<sup>8</sup>Saul, John Ralston. *Voltaire’s Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in The West*. Pp. 108-140. Penguin Group. 1992. This has today created an interesting power dynamic not only between the different levels of the modern business and bureaucratic hierarchy, but also between the individuals in the system and the system itself. Saul’s point is that the majority of business school education trains people to operate only within the premises of the rationally-designed economic model. So they are unable to question their premises. As Foucault would describe it, the administrators, by their intimate knowledge of the system, dominate the laypeople who must work within the system. But because they are incapable of criticism, the system dominates them.

them is possible, but continually risky since it is impossible to be sure they will go unpunished. Where this differs from sovereignty morality is that if you act outside the view of the law, you are certain to be free. Disciplinary law is never seen, but is always present. A disciplinary regime establishes a set of rules and a hierarchical order to enforce them and punish dissenters.<sup>9</sup> So it seems natural that the work describing the most detail of the origin of disciplinary power would be *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

People are punished under a disciplinary moral set more often for what they do not do, than for any direct actions. There is a set of rules to follow, and deviation from those rules, even by inaction, is somehow punished. The punishment may not perhaps be as graphic or blatant as a prison, but there is punishment nonetheless. People are continually examined to judge their adherence to the rules, usually by their immediate superior in the hierarchy structure. Foucault sees this relationship between students and teachers in schools; between patients, nurses, doctors, and administrators in hospitals.<sup>10</sup> The comparison with Marx enters the picture because this relationship is most evident between employees and managers, managers and executives, executives and owners. Disciplinary morals applied to society organizes humanity as a single organism, where each piece – each individual human – has a function within the system, and where deviation from that function – from that social role – is detrimental to the whole. This disciplinary dimension is why modern society is so intolerant of rebels; in Foucault's particular case, criminals, the insane, and those of non-hetero sexualities.<sup>11</sup> Rebellious ways of life – those that go against the system of rules established in the disciplinary society – must go underground to survive, to the places where the enforcers of the rules are least likely to venture. Sovereignty is the morality of the nation-state and the king. Discipline is the morality of the factory and the business. When these moralities are fully merged, we find the disciplined nation, the state as factory – in short, totalitarianism.

---

<sup>9</sup>Foucault, Michel. "Two Lectures: Power/Knowledge." Pg. 522.

<sup>10</sup>Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Alan Sheridan, trans. Vintage Books. 1979.

<sup>11</sup>Foucault, Michel. "Two Lectures: Power/Knowledge." Pp. 520-521.

This was just the organization of the state under Hitler, Stalin, Pinochet and others like them. The citizens are part of a sovereign community, a nation-state. Within the state, they are bound by a set of rules enforced by discipline. The secret police are the authorities who could be watching the citizen at any time. And they have the authority to punish dissenters from the rules that the state has established, usually through nefarious means. The Stalin and Hitler regimes would send the rebel to isolated concentration camps to be worked to death. Augusto Pinochet and other Latin American dictators would kidnap rebels of any sort deemed particularly dangerous at the time who would simply never be seen again. The secret police were feared not because they actually did watch the actions of every citizen, but their public image was such that they could always be watching. You never knew they were there, which is why we describe them with the term *secret* police. If they were not secret, you could wait until they were looking in another direction to commit some criminal act. That they could not be seen meant that they could have been everywhere at once.<sup>12</sup> The secret police is the textbook enforcer of disciplinary morality. As the enforcer of state-sanctioned law, it fits the requirements of sovereignty morality. Rule of law is respected through secret surveillance and secret punishment. Secret police is a logical conclusion to the blending of these very different morality, and it also happens to be considered one of the most vile institutions throughout democratic societies, especially those that until recently had a thriving secret police structure.

Foucault's description of disciplinary power systems appear rather insidious and unnerving, without the possibility for democratic reform that was a potential within sovereignty morality. Governments with secret police institutions have not democratized by reforming the secret police. Instead they have disbanded their secret police and sometimes put its leaders and members on trial for actions that were perfectly legal before democratic reforms. Given the birth of disciplinary morality in the factories and businesses of the industrial revolution, one would think Foucault would follow somewhat the Marxist prescription for curing society's ills. But his view is more complex than that.

---

<sup>12</sup>Prevost, Gary; Harry E. Vanden. *Politics of Latin America: The Power Game*. Oxford University Press. New York. 2002.

Marxism as we know it is a system of assumptions and rules of interpretation that impose themselves on the free process of human understanding. And in imposing themselves, these existing systems, these isms, stunt and restrict human understanding without our even realizing it. Foucault makes a special case of Marxism, saying, “anything can be deduced from the general phenomenon of the domination of the bourgeois class.”<sup>13</sup> He followed this statement by logically deducing several contradictory scenarios from this phenomenon. So it goes as well with Kantianism, Platonism, Spinozism, and any other similar systemic philosophy. When such a philosophy is no longer a way of interpreting the world, but *the* way of interpreting the world, we are faced with nothing less than the realization that all ideologies are necessarily totalitarian.

One ideology can become dominant over another just as one person or group of people can. These subjugated systems of understanding can often be radically different from those ideologies that have supplanted them and become dominant. And it is through discovering these subjugated knowledges that we can discover an outsider’s view of our own understanding. Through this, we can see the mistakes and misconceptions to which our assumptions and rules of interpretation have blinded us. But in admitting that there are multiple ideologies, no one of which is necessarily better than the other,<sup>14</sup> we can see a common feature to ideology itself – its broadly disciplinary character.

Thinking ideologically is to constrain your thought with a system of rules which is enforced by your faith in the ideology itself. An ideology is a set of rules for thinking and interpreting events. If you are raised a Christian fundamentalist, for example, your society will have raised you to think and act in ways acceptable to strict evangelical Christianity. You will have been raised to feel guilty for thinking differently. Thinking outside your ideology, if you believe in it, is considered morally wrong. The guilt you feel from your period of non-traditional thought is self-punishment. Moments of ideological doubt come when you are not being

---

<sup>13</sup>Foucault, Michel. “Two Lectures: Power/Knowledge.” Pg. 520.

<sup>14</sup>Indeed, how do we set our standards of what is better for us other than through ideology?

careful of your thoughts – when you are not watching what you think. Thinking within an ideology is to police your own thoughts. Your self-discipline to the rule of your ideology and your guilt at breaking its boundaries are the surveillance and punishment of your own personal metaphorical secret police. In this way, the structures and rules of your ideology come to dominate you as an individual. You become subjugated to the ideology of your culture.

Relations of domination and subjugation are present in all human society. There is always someone who gives orders and someone who follows orders, whether it is as obvious as the head of a household and his servant, or as subtle as a corporate CEO and a well-paid middle manager. And when those in subjugated positions do not follow orders – when they stray from what is expected of them, when they rebel – they receive punishment from those in dominant positions. These are modern Western positions, however, and their behaviours have been formed along the lines of the disciplinary moral set. Yet a Mughal lord or ancient Chinese royal would treat their servants and commoners the same way. Rebellion is feared and punished in all cultures, not just those influenced by the contemporary Western disciplinary morality.<sup>15</sup>

We can understand how important it becomes to discourage rebellion when we examine what happens when two cultures meet. Each of these cultures has a different general ideology – a different way of understanding the world. When two ideologies meet, they conflict, and the response is a kind of war. It may not be an obvious war, but it will be war nonetheless, as both cultures seek the dominant position over the other. Such a war is inevitably violent, whether it be outright physical aggression, or any other means of doing harm to another for your own goal.<sup>16</sup> And when one culture wins the war, it subsumes the loser.

---

<sup>15</sup>Zizek, Slavoj. *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion*. Verso, New Left Books. 2002. The pressure to conform to an apparent consensus is totalitarian action, since it actively discourages free debate by restricting dissenting perspectives to an already-defined limit.

<sup>16</sup>Foucault, Michel. "Two Lectures: Power/Knowledge." Pp. 514-515. Power dynamics in general, according to Foucault, are always warlike in nature.



By subjugated knowledges I mean two things: on the one hand, I am referring to the historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherent or formal systematisation . . . because only the historical contents allow us to rediscover the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle that the order imposed by functionalist or systematising thought is designed to mask.<sup>17</sup>

When there is a war for dominance between individual people, one person becomes a kind of servant to the other, though the subjugated one may not be aware of her status. When cultures go to war, the loser is annihilated by the most complete means. Their entire history, ideology, and way of life is explained by the foreign culture that now dominates them. A subjugated culture is no longer independent, no longer worthy of respect and dignity. Instead, it is only ever understood as others understand it, described with words that are not its own, is explained away instead of having the opportunity to explain itself. Foucault's mission, in many ways, was to overcome this totalitarianism of cross-cultural interpretation.

Because the domination is not a matter of any natural general superiority of one culture over another, a victory in such a collision of cultures is largely a matter of luck in historical circumstance combined with physical strength. The wars between cultures ultimately are settled by "a contest of strength, to be decided in the last analyses by recourse to arms. The political battle would cease with this final battle."<sup>18</sup> Each culture's way of understanding is a lens of interpretation, no knowledge fully perfect. Different ways of knowing are useful – that is, a betterment to the human condition overall – in different situations. One obvious example is the conflict between First Nations American cultures and Europeans in the colonising period of the Western hemisphere. It was not through any superiority of European culture that the First Nations found themselves subjugated. The American tribes fell from disease and their defeats in a series of critical wars. Yet the contributions

---

<sup>17</sup>Foucault, Michel. "Two Lectures: Power/Knowledge." Pp. 511-512.

<sup>18</sup>Foucault, Michel. "Two Lectures: Power/Knowledge." Pg. 515.

of their environment-centric value system would be invaluable in the current period of environmental degradation. With each culture destroyed goes an approach to the world that could save humanity from destroying itself. It is not just cultures we would call ethnic that carry a peculiar way of understanding. Foucault counts homosexuals as having a particular kind of knowledge as well. A knowledge, in this sense, is a way of engaging with the world. This is why resurrecting and understanding subjugated knowledges is important. If we can engage the world in a new way, then an enormous number of possibilities of life are opened before us. In seeking out and allowing dead manners of thought to explain themselves on their own terms, Foucault aims at an expansion of the human experience.

This cycle of cultural collision and violence appears to be an inescapable element of human experience. Ways of understanding will meet, conflict, descend into war, and one will come to dominate the other, practically destroying it. Yet we may be coming to a critical point in human history. The disciplinary moral set is growing prevalent not only among the West, but is spreading throughout the cultures of the Far East, India, and more technologically advanced regions of Africa as the Western business model becomes the global standard. Discipline is becoming a dominant way of moral understanding throughout the world, even as it grows in a hybrid form with sovereignty morality in the West, and other more ancient moral sets in other parts of the world. We are reaching a point where all humans will be able to understand disciplinary morality on its own terms – where we will all speak the language of discipline.

This has the potential for a revolution in cross-cultural relations because the war between different ways of understanding has a broadly disciplinary framework. The key division of those societies with disciplinary moralities is between those few who enforce the rules and the many who follow them – the oppressors and oppressed. Cultural struggles – like those between European Christians and American tribalists, or between mainstream Western society and homosexuals before the gay liberation movements of the late twentieth century – always result in an oppressor and an oppressed. Not only that, but within societies at war, there is some greater measure of internal repression as well – pressure to conform, to solidarity facing the possibility of destruction. Rebellion is always frowned upon, but especially so in a cultural war. This pressure to

conform is present in all cultures, accentuated when that culture is under risk from war with a foreign culture, and is a central feature of the disciplinary morality so prevalent in contemporary society. So by understanding our disciplinary moral set, we can understand the higher levels of conflict prevalent to the entire human condition.

Our increased familiarity with disciplinary morality – the morals of conformity to hierarchy, surveillance by a pyramid of elites, and punishment of rebellion – lets us better understand these impulses as they exist in all societies. Our more intimate knowledge of disciplinary morality helps us understand the inherent violence in discipline. For other cultures, moralities, and ways of understanding, discipline is only tangential to their experience, emerging in circumstances of extreme danger to the society, or as a deep subtext to the punishment of someone the society deems rebellious. Through violence in cultural meetings, there is inevitably death, with ways of life lost possibly forever. Foucault cannot abide this loss, which is why he spent his life searching for such lost knowledges. Understanding the source of violence puts us closer on the path to ending it, and potentially setting the stage for an era of genuine peace among humanity, and opens up an avenue for choices free from those people and systems who dominate us, whether or not we know of our subjugation.

## Bibliography

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Alan Sheridan, trans. Vintage Books. 1979.

Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization*. Richard Howard, trans. Random House Inc. (1988 Orig. 1965)

Foucault, Michel "Power/Knowledge: Two Lectures." *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts*. Steven M. Cahn, ed. Oxford University Press. (2005 Orig. 1970/1)

Prevost, Gary; Harry E. Vanden. *Politics of Latin America: The Power Game*. Oxford University Press. New York. 2002.

Saul, John Ralston. *Voltaire's Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in The West*. Penguin Group. (1992)

Zizek, Slavoj. *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion*. Verso, New Left Books. (2002)

# Has It Happened? The Event, Becomings and Thought: Confronting Chaos in Deleuze's and Guattari's Quest for the Lived through Philosophy, Science, and Language in *What is Philosophy?*

William Kennedy

## Introduction

Since the core of my studies on this topic have covered *What is Philosophy?*, the issues from that text form the bulk of this essay, yet I will also draw upon the single authored work by Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, in order to show some other issues surrounding the event. To achieve a substantial level of analysis of the concept of Event in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, it has been necessary to examine how they use their terminology, and to relate this to the context within which they use Event. How the event connects to chaos, and to our becomings in and with the world, is made clear through an examination of their treatment of philosophy, science, concepts, states of affairs, consistency, reference, the virtual, and the actual. An explication of these concepts helps demonstrate the crucial role of the event, not only in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, but also in how they view the progression of human life, and the development of our thoughts, or indeed of thought itself. "Thought . . . does not depend upon a brain made up of organic connections and integrations: according to phenomenology, thought depends on man's relations with the world."<sup>1</sup> What our "relations with the world" are, how they are formed, and what role the event has in this is are central questions that are applicable to both *What is Philosophy?*, and *The Logic of Sense*: philosophy and science represent relations we have with the world and are key in *What is Philosophy?*, language and sense

---

<sup>1</sup> *What is Philosophy?*, p.209

also play a fundamental part in our relating to the world and to others and comprise the central themes in *The Logic of Sense*.

To answer these questions more clearly, and illuminate the issues more distinctly, this essay is divided into two sections; the first looks at the event in *What is Philosophy?*, the second is an analysis of the event in *The Logic of Sense* as it pertains to sense, language, and the proposition, as well as providing some systematic criticism and examines any possible contradictions in their work or between these two texts for the purpose of pointing out any problems in clarity or logic, as well as to show any development that was made between *The Logic of Sense* and *What is Philosophy?*. There will also be examples throughout – some from Lewis Carroll’s work and some from myself – that will situate the event - if not always in a more practical or concrete manner – in relation to something that is conceivable and thinkable. I have found that trying to conceive of the event in and of itself has brought me much confusion: the fleeting wisps of a passing “meanwhile” do not seem to be able to be grasped in structured thought. They forever face chaos and as soon as they are felt they are gone, only to be taken over by more and more which are not grasped in and of themselves, but, only in relation to the product of the process in which they are engaged. If the process is philosophy, the products are concepts, if it is science they are functions. The difficult issue here – as shall be shown – is in what way the event relates to sense and sense to language; this will show different aspects of the event given in *The Logic of Sense* and possible discrepancies between it and the notion of the event in *What is Philosophy?*.

## §1: Happenings in Philosophy and Science: the Event, Chaos, and Everything in Between

In my initial title I said “Quest for the Lived” because this is essentially how I see Deleuze’s and Guattari’s project: the event as lived experience. A reversal of Platonic philosophy<sup>2</sup> posits a shift from essence to the event<sup>3</sup>, from discovery to creation, from being to becoming. How would we discover anything if we have not first created the means whereby the discoveries can be made? Or, perhaps there are no discoveries in the strict sense:

---

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Peter Trnka, *Memorial University Lectures*, 2004

<sup>3</sup> *The Logic of Sense*, p.53

this is an issue of access, or the degree to which we have access to the world in and of itself. The process of our becoming in the world is not so much one of objective access to the world as it is in its essence; rather, all that we are comes from interaction and conjunction with the world. And for Deleuze and Guattari our role in this process points toward an element of creation in the relationship we have with our surroundings and dealings. One that takes the entire world as complete chaos, an unformed reality, a pre-reality, and forms or creates reality as that which we bring about through this process.

Creation is the product of our confrontation with chaos, a product that moves us through life in the world. For what is life but a movement, a becoming in the finite which faces the infinite, which confronts both death and chaos. Chaos - the non-thought of thought, the non-world of the world, this non-reality that has yet to become reality, but is the pure potential of all reality because it is from it that all events originate. "The virtual is no longer the chaotic virtual but rather virtuality that has become consistent, that has become an entity formed on a plane of immanence that sections the chaos. This is what we call the Event, or the part that eludes its own actualization in everything that happens."<sup>4</sup> The relation between Event and Chaos illustrates the role the event plays in the forming of thought. The process of creation whereby chaos becomes cosmos, chaotic virtuality becomes consistent virtuality, and states of affairs are taken from the chaos, which through reference actualize virtual events in their co-ordinates<sup>5</sup>, are all aspects of our becoming, of our lived experience. There are two aspects of the event here; first, an entity formed on the plane of immanence that sections chaos, gives consistency to the virtual and eludes its own actualization, second, the aspect of the event that is related to actualization, or undergoes actualization.

### Example 1

At one point in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* Carroll has the Mad Hatter ask Alice a riddle with no answer, only Alice does not know it has no answer and she rigorously attempts to grasp the answer. When – three pages later – she is told there is no answer she accuses the Mad Hatter of wasting time attempting

---

<sup>4</sup> *What is Philosophy?*, p.156

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.161

to answer riddles with no answers.

Being asked a riddle with no answer is an interesting mental experience if you do not know it has no answer. Your mind will race through the chaos attempting to grasp an event. Since the riddle has no answer this process of attempting to grasp chaos will continue. But once Alice is told the riddle has no answer, the resulting mental process is similar to her having grasped the answer. This is so in that the complete non-connection to anything while battling with a riddle is at once given connection. The answer to the riddle becomes that the riddle has no answer: the event is extracted in the realization of the answer and actualized in Alice's response to the Hatter.

This places us within key issues in *What is Philosophy?*, as they say, "Chaos has three daughters, depending on the plane that cuts through it: these are Chaoids – art, science, and philosophy – as forms of thought or creation. We call Chaoids the realities produced on the plane that cuts through the chaos in different ways."<sup>6</sup> Philosophy, science, and art thus confront chaos through creation in thought; it is the event that sections chaos, that allows for consistency or reference to be formed on a plane of thought. Yet there is a distinction between them. The event has a particular relation or role in philosophy, science, and art; one which, when explained, clarifies much regarding its nature and significance to Deleuze's and Guattari's philosophy. As to not risk broadening the scope of this essay too much, and keeping it to a reasonable length, I only discuss philosophy and science, not art.

The relationship between philosophy, science, and the event, is summarised by Deleuze and Guattari often; they say that "through concepts, philosophy continually extracts a consistent event from the state of affairs . . . whereas through functions, science continually actualizes the event in a state of affairs, thing, or body that can be referred to."<sup>7</sup> If the event is that which sections chaos, and philosophy extracts a consistent event from states of affairs, then prior to the event there was only chaos. Our participation in the world presents an event, whether or not it is actualized by science through functions for reference, or given consistency in the concept by philosophy, is only a matter of what you do with the event. It comes as an incorporeal entity that

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 208

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.126



is between the confrontation with chaos and the result in the mind. "The event is not the state of affairs . . . It is the virtual that is distinct from the actual, but a virtual that is no longer chaotic, that has become consistent or real on a plane of immanence that wrests it from the chaos."<sup>8</sup>

This passage sharply distinguishes between the event as virtual and states of affairs as actual. Actualizing is the process whereby the event is "linked," or "connected" to states of affairs through functions on a plane of reference of thought. Consistency is the extraction of a virtual event from chaos on a plane of immanence of thought. Chaos is non-referential, non-consistent; it is thought with no connections, and states of affairs with no reference.

## Example 2

I walk out of my house and onto the street. I'm not really thinking about much, nothing in fact, simply walking with a faint hum in my head. Then, as I cross the street, I am in such a daze that I don't look. A horn blows, tires screech, and all in the same instant I look to see a truck coming straight at me.

In a situation such as this there is a process that occurs in the mind. When all the sensations spontaneously occur there is an event. A period of transition between the point where it is all just chaos, to a mental process which allows for the further development of – in this case – action. To get out of the way of the truck, or I will be dead.

To instantaneously realize all the factors bearing on this scenario, to extract an event from chaos, this is the becoming of reality, of understandable reality. It is possible to conceive that the instant I look at the truck I continue my daze and do not actually realize that it is happening, there would be no development of the truck as an understandable reality, no result except getting hit. "In the one case, we move from the cosmic present to the not-yet actualized event; in the other, we go from the pure event to its most limited present actualization."<sup>9</sup> When the daze is broken by an event, the chaos becomes reality and action is possible. This would be the moving from the event to a

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 156

<sup>9</sup> *The Logic of Sense*, p.145

“limited present actualization in states of affairs,” the taking of the event and doing something with it in reference to states of affairs: actually getting out of the way of the truck. The other movement is from this “cosmic present,” to a pure event as the realization or consistency that allows for the chaos to become reality: the initial mental process, or totalization of elements in a consistent way to allow for understanding in the mind. The event is the hinge upon which the door of our reality swings, opening and closing to the chaos and the cosmos, to non-understanding and understanding, to non-thought and thought, to actual world and virtual chaos.

## § 2: Event, Sense, and Language: *The Logic of Sense* and *What is Philosophy?*

The event in *The Logic of Sense* has more to do with language, and the role it plays in our moving from the incorporeal to the corporeal. “It is by following the border, by striking the surface that one passes from bodies to the incorporeal.”<sup>10</sup> What is the border? How do we pass through it? The relationship between language, our getting along in the world, and the event raises the question of what role sense plays in our becoming. The event is presented as having an essential connection to sense and language. Sense “is an ‘event’: on the condition that the event is not confused with its spatio-temporal realization in a state of affairs. We will not ask therefore what is the sense of the event: the event is sense itself. The event belongs essentially to language: it has an essential relationship to language.”<sup>11</sup> Here Deleuze places the event in a direct connection to language, thus presenting an issue of consistency with his collaboration with Guattari. In *What is Philosophy?* they write, “the concept is not a proposition at all; it is not propositional . . . Propositions are defined by their reference, which concerns not the Event but rather a relationship with states of affairs or body and with the conditions of this relationship.”<sup>12</sup> This inconsistency shows, on one side, the event as belonging to language, and on the other side, the proposition as not concerning an event. This however does not need to be taken as presenting a crucial contradiction that would take away from what Deleuze is saying in *The Logic*

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid p.10

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.22

<sup>12</sup> *What is Philosophy?* p. 22

of *Sense*, or in *What is Philosophy?*; it can be taken as a development, or a shift in perspective as the later work *What is Philosophy?* moves away from issues of sense and focuses more upon the process of creation through philosophy, science, and art.

In *The Logic of Sense* corporeal causes bridge the gap between world and mind through sensation; incorporeal event-effects are the result in the mind. The proposition expresses sense as an event. This points towards an issue of duality: "The first important duality was that of causes and effects, of corporeal things and incorporeal events. But insofar as event-effects do not exist outside the propositions which express them, this duality is prolonged in the duality of things and propositions, bodies and language."<sup>13</sup> There are a few issues here that need to be resolved. If corporeal causes between things and bodies produce incorporeal event-effects in the mind, and these event-effects do not exist outside the propositions that express them, then are all event-effects propositional or necessarily connected to propositions? Is the event-effect as it initially appears in the mind propositional, or is there a distinction between the event as it appears in the mind, and when it is expressed in the proposition through language? The above passage says that events are propositional, and propositions point to a duality between bodies and language. Propositions expressing sense as an event seems to be a move from mind to world: using language to denote things, or to express an event of sense. The incorporeal event-effects are one side, corporeal causes are the other side of what appears to be a different process: a movement from world to mind.

*What is Philosophy?* makes a development in that the event is discussed not only in terms of sense, language and the proposition; but through philosophy, science, and art we engage in a process of creation within which the event is utilized in different ways to allow for reality to be formed and continuity to be built: the event as lived experience. Thought depends upon our relations with the world that are manifested as events in the mind. These events can be given consistency in concepts, or can be actualized in states of affairs through functions for reference. Action solely depends upon our ability to create an operable reality within which we can work. As was seen in my

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.23

example of the truck, if no process is realized then chaos remains and nothing happens. The event in *The Logic of Sense* – at least the sections studied for this essay – focuses primarily upon the relation between sense, the event, and language. At certain points it equates the event with sense and the proposition, which would separate the event from its role in thought as a non-linguistic virtual entity which is extracted from chaos and distinct from actualization, or, link the propositional mode of thinking to the event in all cases. This – as has been shown – is not the case in *What is Philosophy?* where the concept as event is not a proposition and is non-propositional. This difference most likely represents a shift of focus from language to philosophy on the whole. A shift that moved Deleuze and Guattari to examine the event and the varying ways in which it is put to use in the mind through philosophy, science, and art.

## Bibliography

- Deleuze, Gilles; Felix Guattari. *What is Philosophy?* H. Tomlinson and G. Gurchell, trans. Columbia University Press. New York. (1994)
- Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense*. Mark Lester, Charles Stivale. Columbia University Press. New York. (1990)
- Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. (NY: Random House 1992)



# Department of Philosophy

Memorial University  
of  
Newfoundland

# CODGITO

Volume 5, 2008

*Codgito* is published by the Memorial University of Newfoundland Philosophy Society. The purpose of the journal is to foster philosophical inquiry and discussion among students of philosophy. The journal accepts philosophically oriented papers on most topics. Article submissions should be no more than 6000 words and accompanied by an abstract, bibliography. They should be either consistently formatted or provide an explanation for deliberate inconsistent formatting.

Please submit all documents using an opensource file format.

Submissions should be sent to the Memorial University Philosophy Society at [munphilosophy@gmail.com](mailto:munphilosophy@gmail.com) or delivered in person to a member of the society. Hard copies can be sent to the Philosophy Society at:

Codgito  
Department of Philosophy  
Memorial University of Newfoundland  
St. John's Newfoundland  
Canada  
A1C 5S7



Many of the essays in this edition were originally presentations given during the 2008 Student Colloquium on Ethics. Some of the essays have been modified to fit a more traditional academic standard while others have been left alone by request of the authors.

The articles and ideas contained in this journal may be freely distributed, used, and modified for non-commercial purposes by anyone.

The Student Philosophy society would like to thank the following for their contribution to the journal and the success of the Student Colloquium on Ethics:

All those who have contributed to the human dialogue  
The Memorial University Department of Philosophy  
Morgan Blakley  
Joseph Carew  
Levin Mejia  
Kyle Rees  
Adam Riggio  
Danielle Sullivan

Editor: Morgan Blakley  
Design: Morgan Blakley

The body text of all the articles has been converted to Helvetica size 10 font and all titles are written in Bitstream Vera Serif to maintain a unified textual presentation.



## Table of Contents

Amorality and the Good.....	1
Adam Riggio	
Plato and the Risk of Language.....	10
Morgan Blakley	
The Morality game.....	23
Kyle Rees	
Heidegger and Modernity.....	33
Joseph Carew	



# Amorality and the Good

Adam Riggio

This essay examines what I think is the most radical idea in the moral philosophy of the past century: that the good, considered in itself, is an empty concept. There is no totally universal definition of the good that is eternal, standing for all times in all situations. The description 'good' is a label fixed to situations that meet our approval. For example, the following events are the subject of dispute about whether they should be called good: the destruction of the World Trade Centre, the rise of Boris Yeltsin as president of Russia, the assassination of Ché Guevara, the legalization of abortion. I will not consider these examples in particular, but the real-world application of the concept of 'good' should be in mind throughout this presentation. I will focus this essay on a single work of philosophy that considered seriously and with sobriety the non-eternal nature of 'good,' G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (PE). After my analysis of Moore, I will indicate what I think is a fruitful direction for moral philosophy after PE. This direction is based in the understanding of an individual life as a narrative, and involves a differentiation between the understanding of a morality and the judgment of right and wrong.

Moore calls his central criticism of the moral philosophy that was contemporary to him, the naturalistic fallacy. This fallacy is present in "ethical theories which declare that no intrinsic value is to be found except in the possession of some one *natural* property . . . and which declare this because it is supposed that to be 'good' means to possess the property in question."<sup>1</sup> But what is the good if it is not a property? Moore's point here is to show that one does not talk about the good if you talk about some property or a thing, such as its propensity to give pleasure, its internal consistency, or its harmonious relationship with the universe. You instead talk about your approval of the property of

---

<sup>1</sup> Moore, G. E. *Principia Ethica*. §26 Pg 39-40. Dover Publications Inc. Mineloa, New York. (2004 Orig. 1903)

## Amorality and the Good

facilitating pleasure, the property of internal consistency, or the properties that constitute a harmonious relationship with the universe as the thing intertwines with its environment.

'Good,' then, if we mean by it that quality which we assert to belong to a thing, when we say that the thing is good, is incapable of any definition . . . We cannot define anything except by an analysis, which, when carried as far as it will go, refers us to something, which is simply different from anything else, and which by that ultimate difference explains the peculiarity of the whole which we are defining.<sup>2</sup>

Moore uses the example of our concept of 'yellow' to illustrate what he means to do when he asks his readers to focus on the thing itself, 'good.' We are able to define yellow as a particular range of wavelengths of electromagnetic energy, but we would never have had this definition if we were not able to identify the colour yellow and isolate it linguistically.

Indeed, we should not have been able to discover [this wavelength of electromagnetic energy's] existence unless we had first been struck by the patent difference of quality between the different colours. The most we can be entitled to say of those vibrations is that they are what corresponds in space to the yellow which we actually perceive. Yet a mistake of this simple kind has commonly been made about 'good' . . . Ethics aims at discovering what are those other properties belonging to all things which are good. But far too many philosophers have thought that when they named those other properties they were actually defining good; that these properties, in fact, were simply not 'other,' but absolutely and entirely the same with goodness.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Moore, G. E. *Principia Ethica*. §10 Pg 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> Moore, G. E. *Principia Ethica*. §10 Pg 10.

This defines the naturalistic fallacy, which Moore discovers implicit in all moral philosophies that were his contemporaries.

The first doctrine of 1900s moral philosophy to come under fire is the definition of the good as the harmonious relation of a thing with all else in the universe, a kind of conformity to natural order. However, many elements of the natural order, says Moore, are not what we call 'good.' Quite often, people have acted to impose 'good' situations on the natural order of things, and these disruptions of the natural order are often held to be good. If one defines the natural order or a more generally defined normality as the normal course of events, one meets even greater problems. "Was the excellence of Socrates or of Shakespeare normal? Was it not rather abnormal, extraordinary?"<sup>4</sup> These counter-examples go to show that the adequation of 'good' with that which is normal or natural is not a universal definition of 'good,' and that such adequation is an instance of the naturalistic fallacy.

Moore's next target is utilitarianism, the idea that the greatest good is the greatest happiness – or at least the greatest opportunity for happiness – for the greatest number of people. The central instance of the naturalistic fallacy here is the adequation of 'good' with happiness, that happiness is itself the good. Moore identifies this fallacy as central to utilitarian philosophy. He analyses the utilitarian doctrine as it was articulated most clearly and influentially in the work of John Stuart Mill. The goal is to understand the relation between desire and pleasure, which is a more complicated dynamic than depicted in straight utilitarian thinking. Moore describes the utilitarian view of a desire for a glass of wine, "When I desire the wine, it is not the wine which I desire but the pleasure which I expect to get from it."<sup>5</sup> Yet the pleasure is not the focus of desire – the focus is the wine itself. This, for Moore, is a severe confusion at the heart of utilitarian thinking: that happiness is constituted in the pleasure of humans, and that all desiring has happiness (the highest state of pleasure) as its ultimate aim. As for Moore's focus on the good, the utilitarian philosophy takes this matrix of desire, pleasure, and happiness as constituting the good. This definition of the good is not only naturalistic, but

---

<sup>4</sup> Moore, G. E. *Principia Ethica*. §27 Pg 43.

<sup>5</sup> Moore, G. E. *Principia Ethica*. §42 Pg 70.

needlessly anthropocentric. 'Good' is used as a term of universal scope, not to be adequated to a matrix of human desire.<sup>6</sup> Moore identifies here the naturalistic fallacy, as utilitarian philosophers of ethics analyse the matrix of desire, pleasure, and happiness; but this does not constitute the good.

Moore next examines what he calls metaphysical philosophies of ethics. He says that "A 'Metaphysical Ethics' is marked by the fact that it makes the assertion: That which would be perfectly good is something which exists, but is not natural; that which has some characteristic possessed by a supersensible reality."<sup>7</sup> He lists as examples of metaphysical ethics, in this sense, the Greek Stoics, Spinoza, and Kant. The only system he actively engages with in detail is the Kantian, but such a specific engagement with Kantianism would distract from the main thrust of this paper. The basic idea is that the definition of the 'good' is found in some non-empirical reality. The problem with this kind of foundation is that there are many different philosophies that present a variety of non-empirical realities, all of which seem mutually exclusive. To take Moore's examples: the metaphysics of Greek Stoicism, Spinozism, and Kantianism are so incredibly different that they could not possibly all be the case for the supersensible reality backing empirical reality. Yet because of their supersensible nature, it is impossible to make an empirical inquiry into these metaphysical systems, other than to analyse the concepts themselves for internal consistency and conceptual comparison. Human inquiry into the truth and falsity of reality is empirical. Any philosophy purporting to be a system of non-empirical reality cannot be shown true or false – one can only analyse it. So a non-empirical foundation for any understanding of one's definition of 'good' will not lend a conclusive answer to the question of what the 'good' is. One can construct many such

---

<sup>6</sup> Moore, G. E. *Principia Ethica*. §50 Pg 81-5. He illustrates how the concept of 'good' is not necessarily connected to direct human experience by his example here in which he asks us to imagine a world of immense beauty, and consider whether one could call this beautiful world good, even though no human would ever set foot on it or experience it in any way. Moore concludes that one would approve of this beautiful alien world as good, indicating that our understanding of the concept 'good' is not anthropocentric, and that all anthropocentric definitions of 'good' were incomplete and flawed. Moore will return to the adequation of beauty and 'good' later.

<sup>7</sup> Moore, G. E. *Principia Ethica*. §67 Pg 113.



foundations for the meaning of the 'good,' and one could never choose between any of them, other than on the internal coherence of the concepts of the system.

Having illustrated what the 'good' is not, Moore at the end of PE turns to what 'good' actually is in itself, giving two answers: aesthetic enjoyments, meaning the appreciation of beauty;<sup>8</sup> and personal affection.<sup>9</sup> The former was foreshadowed in Moore's disconnection of the good from anthropocentric purposes in his example of the beautiful alien world. The centrepiece of his analysis of these two as the definition of 'good' in itself is the presence of strong emotion when one labels a thing as good. Great beauty and great affection rouse powerful emotions, and it is this emotional state intertwined with the empirical situation that brought those emotions which constitute the best possible definition of 'good.' Essentially, Moore has not moved from his position at the beginning of PE, which I earlier quoted from §10. 'Good' is a label given to situations that merit one's approval. This approval is manifested in powerful emotion as well as the linguistic utterances that indicate the presence of 'good.'

Moore attempts to use these situations, the appreciation of beauty and personal affection or love, to give some positive content to one's application of 'good' which has universal scope. But any definition of good with some positive content veers towards the naturalistic fallacy. Moore's own examples here are no exception. 'Aesthetic enjoyment' breaks down like so: 'Enjoyment' is a pleasure, which Moore has shown improper to link to the good; 'Aesthetic' he describes as a matter of internal consistency to a system—harmony; which he has also shown improper to link to the good. Personal affection gives pleasure to another, and begins a cycle of pleasure. Consider the anger and bitterness that arises when you express affection for someone and they are indifferent, or wrathful. The cycle of mutual pleasure is broken. So we have a concept, 'good,' which is meaningful in its particular applications, but which can have no conclusively universal meaning. So a philosophical inquiry that seeks to give universal meanings to 'good' will continually run into a dead end. Such a philosophy will either end up talking about the relations of various concepts related to pleasure, or create concepts

---

<sup>8</sup> Moore, G. E. *Principia Ethica*. §114-6 Pg 189-94.

<sup>9</sup> Moore, G. E. *Principia Ethica*. §122 Pg 203-5.

## Amorality and the Good

constituting some understanding of a supersensible reality that amounts to an intellectual exercise.

In philosophy, there is still a way to engage directly with the concept of 'good.' The way forward for philosophy is to confront moral quandaries and puzzle over them, instead of seeking to solve them. However, at the moment (to my knowledge), this is not done in philosophy but in literature. To clarify, I do not mean the field of literary criticism, but in literature itself. And it is not only narrative literature, but in any artwork that involves confrontation with moral quandaries. Here is a list, with some of the most difficult moral quandaries dealt with in artworks that I know of: Cormac McCarthy's novel *Blood Meridian*, Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's graphic novel *From Hell*, Stephen Sondheim's play *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, Pablo Picasso's painting *Guernica*, Slayer's song *Angel of Death*, Stanley Kubrick's film *A Clockwork Orange*, James Manos Jr.'s television serial *Dexter*. I chose these as illustrating a particularly stark moral quandary, the spectator's confrontation with an ethical system where the most brutal violence is considered good. Because the morality of central figures in these works is contrary to most members of the current audience, this list allows one to see the potential of what I call here the philosophy of the moral quandary. Even apparently repugnant moralities must be understood, not refuted. It is possible that in understanding how such moralities can be articulated most clearly, they may refute themselves.<sup>10</sup>

I can indicate the only signpost I myself have found in post-PE Western philosophy that indicates how the philosophy of the

---

<sup>10</sup> The representative figures of this moral quandary in these works I interpret as follows: *Blood Meridian's* Judge Holden the leader of a gang traveling around the American West scalping Indians; *From Hell's* William Withey Gull a.k.a Jack the Ripper; the title character of *Sweeney Todd* the serial killer barber and cannibal; the willful destruction of the title city of *Guernica* in the Spanish Civil War; Auschwitz's Dr Josef Mengele in *Angel of Death*; *A Clockwork Orange's* Alex DeLarge the happy-go-lucky rapist; and the title character of *Dexter*, the serial killer who hunts only other serial killers and uses his job as an FBI crime scene analyst to destroy all evidence implicating him. See also Sudhir Venkatesh's sociology / journalism study of Chicago gang culture in the mid-1990s, *Gang Leader for a Day*, as an example of the philosophy of the moral quandary in the study of non-fictional events.

moral quandary can be carried out in this discipline: the concepts of the spectator and enlarged thought that occur throughout the work of Hannah Arendt.<sup>11</sup> She developed these concepts as a means of dealing with the political problem of understanding the other as a being equally valid as the self, while still different. One enlarges one's thought by incorporating what was once foreign into one's own understanding of the world. In Arendt scholarship, enlarged thought is sometimes referred to by the cliché of putting oneself in the other's shoes. But Arendt's concept is more nuanced than this. If one attempts literally to transpose your own perspective and life with that of another person, there is always the danger that the subtler prejudices and background assumptions of one's own life will colour and distort one's understanding of the other. One will very likely deceive oneself about the other's motivations, or miss some subtle yet important detail.<sup>12</sup>

To enlarge one's thought is not to embody perfectly the life of another in oneself. Enlarged thought is the result of being a fully attentive spectator of the life of another. By listening to the narrative of another individual's life, one understands the context of how that life came to be as it is now displayed before the spectator. In a strictly political context, this is done through the journalistic process of visiting people and observing their lives, including the cultural context supplied by the whole society of the person in question, as well as having the person in question explain her history, her family's history, and any other narrative that has shaped her. In the context of the philosophy of the moral quandary, one can think of a moral question, and then construct a narrative which displays this moral question and brings the question to a point of crisis. Alan Moore, author of the above-cited *From Hell*, described his initial approach to the project as a means of understanding Jack the Ripper along the lines that I have described. He approached the crimes in history around

---

<sup>11</sup> Much of this conceptual analysis is based on work in Arendt's *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. The essay by Ronald Beiner that closes her *Lectures* is also key to understanding the enlarged thought concept.

<sup>12</sup> Young, Iris Marion. *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy*. Princeton University Press. (1997) Young mentions Seyla Benhabib as misinterpreting enlarged thought as I described.

## Amorality and the Good

which *From Hell* revolved such that one could not solve the crimes without understanding the entire society in which those crimes arose.<sup>13</sup>

Enlarged thought is this holistic understanding of the other at which one arrives by becoming an attentive spectator of every aspect of the other. In the context of moral philosophy, the philosophy of the moral quandary, which I have only loosely defined here, is enlarging one's thought so as to understand how a person can arrive at a particular moral question, and how that person formulates his answer. The arrival at the question, the posing of the question, and answer to the question articulate the moral quandary as a whole – the narrative of the moral quandary. For the philosopher of the moral quandary, her work begins when the whole narrative under examination becomes a question which sets off philosophical exploration. This is the beginning of a new narrative in which the moral quandary is re-articulated and renewed.

---

<sup>13</sup> Lawley, Guy; Jenni Scott; Dave Windett. "Writer From Hell: The Alan Moore Experience." *Comics Forum* 4. Pg 46. (1993) Moore's own inspiration was Douglas Adams' *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*, the story of a detective who solves cases by investigating the fundamental interconnectedness of all things.

## Bibliography

- Arendt, Hannah. *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. ed. Ronald Beiner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Lawley, Guy; Jenni Scott; Dave Windett. "Writer From Hell: The Alan Moore Experience." *Comics Forum* 4. p. 46, 1993.
- Moore, G. E. *Principia Ethica*. §26 Pg 39-40. New York : Dover Publications Inc, 2004.
- Young, Iris Marion. *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

# Plato and Language

Morgan Blakley

In the Protagoras, Socrates and Protagoras, the dialectician and the sophist, discuss whether or not virtue is teachable. Like many, if not all of Plato's dialogues, this one ends without a clear answer. I believe that in looking at the trees within the arguments, many people fail to see the forest. People get caught up in whether or not Plato believes that virtue is in fact teachable and this misses a crucial aspect of the Platonic project. Plato acknowledges throughout his dialogues that T-ruth<sup>1</sup> is not attainable in the mortal realm. He also points out that when people live by such an idealism without questioning it, it can have severe and unintended consequences. Although I am going to focus on the Protagoras, the ideas I employ are transferable to other dialogues. Hopefully it will help shed light on how ethics needs to be rethought in order to address the contemporary world.

The Protagoras, like other of Plato's dialogues, has two primary plots, a Socratic plot and a Platonic plot: Plato's plot is the structural plot of the dialogue, and the Socratic plot refers the actual contents of the dialogue. The Platonic plot elucidates the ambiguity of language through the course that the dialogue follows; as we will see, the plot is a circular straight line, or a straight circle. At first, Protagoras insists that virtue is teachable and Socrates counters that teaching virtue is impossible. By the end of the dialogue they have switched sides, Protagoras is trying to defend that virtue is not knowledge and Socrates that it is. The Platonic plot thus elucidates the ambi-guity of language. I.e. through a linear and logical argument, Socrates is able to argue that virtue is teachable, and later, that virtue is not teachable. In contrast, Protagoras argues through a myth about the creation of man, that virtue is teachable, but by the end of the argument, he has inadvertently switched positions. In a distinct but symbiotic relationship, the Socratic plot—the internal workings of the dialogue and the actual points of discussion—help reinforce the need for an adequate understanding of language. Although for the purposes of this presentation, this plot will be relegated to a secondary position, it is important to note that these two plots reinforce one another.

---

<sup>1</sup> T-ruth refers to the idea of transcendental truth—immutable and eternal.

**As I delve into the Protagoras, I would like you to at least provisionally accept that “sophist” is synonymous with “scientist.”** With the limitations on time, I would like to point out here that Plato also creates this association; although with a different lexicon. The difference between the dialectic method that Plato advocates, and the sophistic method, can be characterized by the difference between Anaxagoras and Socrates in the Phaedo. In this dialogue, Socrates points out that he is dying for his beliefs, not because of the conditions necessary for the possibility of his physical death; limbs, motor-neurons etc.. The scientist creates singular empirical descriptions of what does occur, but fails to WHY things occur. As I will continue to argue, the scientist and the sophist both mistakenly use language as a tool of power. They affix “irrefutable” empirical evidence to their arguments and try to persuade through language, about the singular “Truth” of things. Towards the end of this presentation I will delve into some of the problems that have arisen out of this mistake.

At the Platonic level of the Protagoras, the inversion of the arguments (their circularity), points to the dyadic or ambi-guous structure of language. One point of discussion, in this case virtue, can be reached through diametrically opposed arguments. Take for example a point on any enclosed shape, such as a circle, you can leave from opposite directions and travel on a continuous path and doing so will result in reaching the same point facing the opposite direction. This is the crux of Plato’s articulation of language that will help us understand some of the ethical failures of contemporary society.

Within the Socratic plot, Socrates ~~deconstructs~~<sup>2</sup> all of the sophist’s (Protagoras) answers. Through these ~~deconstructions~~ Plato hints at the perniciousness of the sophistic method. Sophistry is dangerous because it refuses to acknowledge the ambiguity of language. Protagoras wants to prove the Truth of the matter to all present. The reason Protagoras and many readers of Plato get frustrated by a supposed lack of progress, is because they fail to realize that our language does not allow for T-ruth in the sense of absolute realities of any form. For Plato, to understand language, one must acknowledge both its ambiguity and its power. Protagoras’ failure to do so leads to his constant frustration at the hands of Socrates (as well in many cases, the constant frustration of those who

---

<sup>2</sup> By ~~deconstruct~~, I mean literary to un-build, without trying to tie it to its contemporary baggage; but also, I am suggesting that this baggage is not beyond the horizon of this discussion.

read the dialogues), and ultimately, his inability to differentiate between two diametrically opposed arguments. The power-ambiguity dyad of language is extremely dangerous; without a close examination of what one says, it can lead to the destruction of civilizations; or in this case, the inversion of virtue's teachability. This could be extrapolated into other areas, such as 'good' and 'evil' where it could be argued that good could shift into evil without it being acknowledged by those directly engaged with it.

In order to justify this claim, let us again return to the example of the sophist/scientist. The scientist uses language as a technique of power; something to prove that this or that theory is THE right one, or to write down forever, the correct equations and proofs of an experiment. The scientist (a definite straw man, but one who will hopefully make people think about the topic) sees progress and truth as singular facts. There is ONE right answer, and perhaps ONE form of progress, and there is ONE knowledge of the ONE reality. The scientist here believes that in gaining objective knowledge about the world, we can properly understand reality. So our scientist begins to expound a very defensible (read sophistic) view of the world, (this is by contemporary standards of course. To some in the ancient world, Newtonian physics, or quantum mechanics, or string theory would likely seem far more absurd than the idea of gods) and can substantiate this with plenty of empirical evidence. So what is the problem? The problem is that when the objects of reality are coupled with human thought/language<sup>3</sup>, they can produce dramatic and multiple effects. A paradigmatic example of the failure of science to adequately consider its projects is the development of nuclear energy. Plutonium, once coupled with language, can be good (it can produce nuclear power), but it can also be very destructive (whether in the sense of weapons or environment). When science set out to unmask and determine the world according to objective fact, it often fails to consider whether or not such a project is a good idea.

This is why, for Plato, it is crucial to constantly reexamine and discuss how we label and interpret reality. The temporal order of this world is constantly changing and the failure to acknowledge and work with this flux can and has led to many calamities: the nuclear holocaust of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for example. (Holocaust etymology: wholly burnt...from ancient Greek)

---

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the necessary relation between thought and language in human discourse, see Émile Benveniste's *Problems in General Linguistics* (Miami UP, 1971), specifically chapter four, "The Nature of the Linguistic Sign."



So far I have laid out the Platonic plot very generally: Socrates argues that virtue is not teachable, and Protagoras argues the opposite. Through a logically tenable argument, Socrates brings the argument around full circle, arguing that virtue is teachable and *vice versa* for Protagoras. This inversion passes by Protagoras until the end of the dialogue, where Socrates points it out to him. Let us now dig deeper.

After a brief exordium, the Protagoras opens in darkness, the banging on Socrates' door by some body:

Last night, a little before daybreak, Hippocrates, son of Apollodorus, Phason's brother, knocked violently on my door with his stick, and when it was opened, came straight in and in a great hurry and shouted out, Socrates, are you awake or asleep?

I recognized his voice... (310.1)

The knocking noise is contrasted with articulate speech; the knocking does not identify any recognizable reality. It is only when Socrates hears a voice that identity is confirmed; the voice identifies Hippocrates. It is the voice<sup>4</sup> that first illuminates the body as being that of a friend; it is not just a noise. This is crucial in both the Socratic and the Platonic plot. In the Socratic plot, Protagoras considers speech to be an appurtenance to the human-political condition. It is prior, but still inferior, because it is not action; yet as Plato shows here, the voice is more of a meaningful action than the mere noise. Plato refutes Protagoras' belief through the power of language; dialogue is THE action which allows for a meaningful reality. Speech is prior to and more fundamental in the identification and justification of the world, than any simply physical action (such as knocking). Without articulate speech, there would only be noise.

The violence which noise commits can only convey a flash, an instantaneous meaningless physicality which cannot be elaborated or explained, it is violence without direction—force without significance. We must take note: The voice is meaningful because it occurs between Socrates and Hippocrates, the noise generated by the stick cannot convey meaning because its author, the stick, is not capable of speech (except maybe in a secondary sense, in which case, the sequence of knocks would be caused not by the stick, but by the stick wielder). Language requires both a listener and a speaker. The dynamic of speaker and listener is dual; a listener without a responding speaker

---

<sup>4</sup> The use of 'voice' is here done for consistency with Plato's texts and not to affirm or reinforce logocentrism.

cannot determine anything more than a speaker talking to a wall. This is precisely what Plato attacks in the Phaedrus through the myth of Theuth. Writing cannot respond and instead of helping it leads to the decay of active memory. Derrida picks up on this in "Plato's Pharmacy" and in an elaboration of the myth of Theuth shows the incredible violence that a value judgement unleashes. In the case of this myth; the judgement about the negativity of writing leads to the violent death of several gods and strange extra-natural conceptions. Let us return to the dialogue at hand.

It is between two active (in speaking) and passive (in listening) people that meaning is constituted. The stick crashing violently on a door can just as likely be an army or a thief coming to ransack the house as a good friend. What is required in order to adequately assess the situation is language, something far beyond mere noise. Language allows Socrates to assess what is entering his house, and most importantly, WHY. Just as science cannot adequately tell us why Socrates chose to die, it cannot tell us why there is a banging on Socrates' door; in order to answer WHY something is the case, we need to discuss, and discussion occurs in language. For Plato, the more one understands language, the more capable one is of dealing with its potent effects. Instead of becoming a misologist, Socrates uses the dialectic method to protect the soul from the risks in life; and to protect life from the complacency that language can instill (such complacency as is found in deeply held beliefs).

This is why Socrates states that "[he] should be surprised if [Hippocrates] know[s] just what a sophist is" (312.c). Hippocrates is a virgin to sophistry and has admitted his weakness at the beginning of the dialogue. His ignorance of sophistry leaves his vulnerable to its potent drugs. So, although Hippocrates knows the noise "sophist" he does not know the best meaning and hence what effects it can produce. Again, if we return to the nuclear example, it is one thing to say what Plutonium is and how it works on a mechanical level, and another to formulate the best way of understanding this element.

This is why Socrates tells Hippocrates that what nourishes the soul is what it learns (313.c). Through language we take in what is told to us and let it move us and settle in us as we may. Ideas about reality build up and become terms we use complacently in our lives. Furthermore, for Plato, knowledge is received straight into the soul and its harm or benefit can only be learned after the drug has been ingested, or as Socrates puts it, "knowledge cannot be taken away in a parcel. When you have paid for it you must receive it straight into the soul. You go away having

learned it and are benefited or harmed accordingly” (314.b). This is again where dialectics comes into play, by discussing in bits and pieces, as opposed to learning by wholes, the effects of the drug (language) can be determined before the soul is lost. It is in sharing weaknesses that friends can discuss the effects of language and ideas. The sophists in contrast, sell their wisdom whole, without telling, and perhaps without even knowing of its potentially deadly effects. Now we can perhaps understand why Socrates is so strongly against the recital of memorized speeches, and in this dialogue, against the long answers that Protagoras wishes to give.

In this dialogue, the risk of language that sophists either ignore or remain ignorant of is hinted at but dismissed by Protagoras. He states early on that:

A man has to be careful when he visits powerful cities as a foreigner, and induces their most promising young men to forsake the company of others, relatives or acquaintances, younger or older, and consort with him on the grounds that his conversation will improve him. (316.c)<sup>5</sup>

But why should a sophist (a foreign idea-logy) fear a powerful city (or nation) and vice versa? The issue lies in the maintenance of powerful cities and the capacity of foreigners; the threat of an ‘other,’ to induce, or drug the city’s future, its most promising youth, into leaving. The sophist can argue a memorized point beautifully, without considering the potential harm of what is argued for or against. But since the future is always approaching, and the present is always changing, trying to argue for an absolutely correct answer is a dangerous and misguided thing to do. As Derrida suggests, the “future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, *presented*, as a sort of monstrosity” because the future has not yet had its exergue (Derrida 4). The sophist, whose ~~wisdom~~ is supposed to guide in the future cannot actually do so. His orations—since they do not require bonds of friendship and a continual process of conception between the speaker and the listener—can only be seen by a powerful and thus stably balanced city, as a monstrous perversion. That which maintains a city is

---

<sup>5</sup> This is what Socrates is condemned for, and is one of very few articulations that Protagoras makes which is not attacked by Socrates. Language is truly a powerful process.

its ability to maintain the dynamic of creation and death; it needs its youth to bear children and ideas towards a future that cannot be known. If the youth forsake the city, their family, and their friends, then the polis will collapse. [Without bringing new ideas to bear on the constantly new world, old ideas will fail and the polis will die.] We could deepen this analysis by comparing the sophist/scientist with writing. E.G. a book can articulate an idea, but it cannot fix itself in the future, nor can it flesh out and improve itself and the readers' ideas. This is also perceivable in the difference between the United States' legal system and that of Canada. Canada embraces a living tree theory while the U.S. has adopted a dead hand approach, and we can see the difference this has created in each nation.

The problem for Plato is the monstrosity that such an ossified meaning holds (any term which claims to some sort of transcendental Truth). It is monstrous because both the world and language change and adapt; the signs we use change and adapt and to attempt to solidify them is to attempt to destroy human nature. As Derrida lucidly points out: for "that future world and for that within it which will have put into question the value of the sign, word, and writing, for that which guides our future anterior, there is as yet no exergue" (Derrida 5). As such, the value of the sign "sophist" or "Plutonium" has no guarantees for the future. This is because the exergue of the future, the meaning of the terms cannot be known until the future is presented to us, which of course, cannot be the case until it is too late.

Protagoras in contrast, holds that being an admitted sophist "[is] a better precaution than the other—admission rather than denial" (317.b). For Protagoras admitting to sophistry is a better method to ensure one's safety because he does not consider speeches to be significant actions. He states shortly hereafter that he teaches his followers the "proper care of his personal affairs, and also of the state's affairs, so as to become a real power in the city, both as a **speaker** and a man of **action**" (318.e). To be a man of action is distinguished from being a speaker. The only significance of speaking is to help one gain power in the city. The idea of the admission of sophistry is something he seems to believe will be the best method indefinitely. It is, if you will, the ONE Truth for the ONE reality. In order to better understand the sophistic understanding of actions as distinct from speech, we need to delve into the Socratic plot and Protagoras' myth of creation. In so doing, Plato also unveils the fundamental misconception of language as technique.

For Protagoras, man is created naked in world. His myth begins with a description of the equipmentation of the mortal realm by Epimetheus and

Prometheus. Epimetheus, in his over-zealousness, leaves no equipment for man. As a result Prometheus steals the skill of arts and fire from the gods in order to save man.

Prometheus therefore, being at a loss to provide any means of salvation for man, stole from Hephaestus and Athena the gift of skill in the arts, together with fire—for without fire it was impossible for anyone to possess or use this skill—and bestowed it upon man. (321.c)

Here we see man as essentially naked in the world, with only a gift for technical arts. As the myth is furthered, Protagoras contends that “by the art which they possessed, men soon discovered articulated speech and names” (322.a). Speech is an appurtenance to art; it is a technique to communicate safety, food, and comfort. We again see the weakness of technical language according to Protagoras. He states that with these technical skills, man:

lived at first in scattered groups; there were no cities. Consequently they were devoured by wild beasts, since they were in every respect the weaker, and their technical skill, though a sufficient aid to their nurture, did not extend to making war on the beasts, for they had not the art of politics, of which the art of war is a part. (322.b)

Language is for Protagoras, a skill that is not intrinsically a part of human nature. Furthermore, language is not the possibility of the political in itself; it is at most a technical art. The language that Protagoras creates does not allow for a polis because it is an unambiguous tool, it is not seen as the condition for the possibility of the polis. For Plato, strong friendships are the only thing that transcends the physical reality for mortal man, and these friendships can only be developed through dedicated and thoroughly mutual intercourse. Language is the condition of the possibility of the polis and the political because it requires both a listener and a speaker. Furthermore, since it is not just noise, it requires a balance between the listener and speaker; both parties must be capable of switching roles in order to listen to the *logos* and not just the noise. In order to understand the meaning of something said, we must also know how to speak. Thus for Plato, stimulus-response would not constitute language. (This is also the belief of some contemporary linguists such as Benveniste). The sophistic method does not posit mutuality within language; it seeks a pure Truth within a pure language. This is why Protagoras feels safe calling himself a sophist. If the sophist is truly an educator in virtue, then he would have nothing to fear, but as

is mentioned earlier, the drugging effect of language does leave a lot to fear, whether or not one admits it.

What we are shown in each case is that language defines our reality. It is only through totalitarian—totalizing—action that the ambiguity of language can be reduced and controlled. In a less repressive state, the ambiguity of language serves to maintain a process of renewal through the birth of new ideas.

Since language is the bearer of the future, it can be deadly; and as such, for Socrates, there should be no concessional ‘if’ about any discussion between political animals. Protagoras, believing in the unity of language states at one point that he cannot admit that “justice is holy and holiness just...However, he said, what does it matter? If you like, let us assume that justice is holy and holiness just” (331.c). Socrates, who understands language to be a potent and possibly pernicious drug, responds:

Excuse me, I said. It isn't this ‘if you like’ and ‘if that’s what you think’ that I want us to examine, but you and me ourselves. What I mean is, I think the argument will be most fairly tested, if we take the ‘if’ out of it. (331.c)

For Socrates, dialogue is a method to test and examine one another, so as to navigate through the mortal realm as best as possible. The question in every case is what is best, and the empirical answer—the one which cannot answer WHY—is not acceptable. Articulate speech is speech which has a joint, which requires at least two things to meet and move in relation to one another (the past and present, present and future, self and other). The ‘if you like’ of sophistry, portrays speech as being a singular technique; Socrates, ‘if he likes,’ can determine the meaning by himself; but this is totalitarianism and not humanitarianism (only the gods can know the Truth, so to attempt such a project as a mortal is a dangerous affair). What Socrates wants to do when arguing, is test the argument, and concomitantly, to test one another. The only way to test one another is by both speaking and listening as best as possible; to tell the truth, to say only what is meaningful, what is worth defending. (Rodin’s “Thinker” would be a horrible philosopher)

To briefly recap before moving on to WHY this is important for contemporary ethics and politics: Plato argues throughout his dialogues that the dialectic method is a second best method which allows us mere mortals to try to discover WHY things are the way they are (the Truth). Since all discussion is done in language we need to try and understand the ambiguity and power of language when we label reality. Without

doing so, we risk destroying the polis and possibility that which constitutes the human condition.

I am now going to try to ground this abstract argument in the contemporary reality by looking at some of our beliefs, constituted through language, which have or could have deadly effects. But to begin with, I will use a classic example of the problem of sophistry and science. If someone were to ask “why did Socrates die?” We could come up with plenty of correct empirical answers: He died because he drank poison; he died because he was a mortal; he died because his organs were overwhelmed by a poison et cetera. In this light, what Plato wants to point out is this: There are plenty of right answers but what is the Best answer? For Socrates, it was something along the lines that he believed it more honourable and true to his values to die by the order of Athens, than flee to Megara.

**In the contemporary situation the need to be careful with language is all too often missed.** People tacitly accept various definitions and statements by reputable sources, and their own beliefs, without questioning the implications of their assent.

The first example I wish to use is that of “objective knowledge in science.” Scientists often claim that they are working for progress, for the advancement of the genome project, or for the benefit of humanity. One this we ought to ask, is towards what end, or what’s the good of it? Failure to do so can lead to catastrophe. Take for example the scientific revolution: Science has developed and improved our understanding of the world: through physics, chemistry, biology and so forth. But to what end? Perhaps we could argue that we now have the ability to cure cancer with certain nuclear isotopes, and can harness nuclear energy for the benefit of everyone. But what about nuclear weapons proliferation, and as some critics have pointed out, with the increase in “stuff” and technology, it seems that people are no happier and are not working shorter hours. So what exactly is science selling us? This progress sounds good, but often, it fails to acknowledge the negative side of its developments and ideas.

Before I run out of time I would like to look into two other examples: The first is the situation surrounding the US and Guantanamo bay; and the second is the UN’s treatment of refugees.

In the case of ~~terrorists~~ held at **Guantanamo bay**, the state power used a previous court ruling to obviate political obligations. First, the administration decided to use the term “terrorist” in order to avoid having to (among other things) abide by the Geneva conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war. What is at stake in this new term is the ethical treatment of humans. The US would like to torture and perhaps kill these people without any fair trial (or for that matter, without a trial at all). To do so they have used this term, arguing that ~~terrorists~~ are not prisoners of war and therefore are not protected by the Geneva conventions; and as non-citizens are not protected by US law.

With specific regard to language and the monstrosity of the future: The US administration used the ruling in “**Johnson v. Eisentrager**” in order to argue that:

although [Guantanamo bay] is under the de facto control of the United States administration, it is not a sovereign territory of the United States and a previous Supreme Court ruling Johnson v. Eisentrager in 1950 had ruled that U.S. courts had no jurisdiction over enemy aliens held outside the USA.” (Wikipedia, Unlawful combatant)

If the US courts had upheld the previous ruling, the prisoners at Guantanamo bay would likely have less protection than they do now. When we look at this in relation to Plato’s theory of language we see an important issue: the ossification of Truth. When a court ruling is meant to be absolute, or a charter or constitution is meant to lay out permanent rules, it cannot adequately address the future. In this case, an old court ruling was used to facilitate torture.

The last example I would like to look at is an empirical fact that the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** states:

In an encouraging trend, the number of refugees—people who have fled persecution in their own countries so seek safety in neighbouring states and who comprise UNHCR’s core ‘constituency’—fell 12 percent in 2005 to 8.4 million. Over the past five years the global refugee population has fallen by one third and now stands at the lowest level since 1980. One reason for this is that a total of 1.1 million refugees went home voluntarily in 2005, including 753,000 to Afghanistan and 70,000 to Liberia. Another reason for the sharp drop in the global total is that only 136,000 new refugees fled to



neighbouring states in 2005—the smallest number for 29 years. (n. pag.)

This sure sounds like a nice trend, but what's the good of it? Reducing the number of refugees seems like a great thing, however, when we look deeper into it, we find on the UN site the following:

There was a large increase in the number of civilians uprooted by violence who remained within their own countries—the group known as internally displaced persons (IDPs)—and better data also resulted in a big increase in the number of stateless people. The 22 percent rise in the number of IDPs of concern to UNHCR was largely explained by the inclusion of 1.2 million Iraqi and 400,000 Somali IDPs. The number of stateless people on the agency's books went up by over one third to 2.4 million. (n. pag.)

We see here how complacency in language can lead to very distorted and dangerous perceptions about the world. People tend to have a vague idea of what a refugee is, yet it likely differs from what the UNHCR calls a refugee. Without looking into what a refugee constitutes for those who are using it; the above situation could look encouraging: a 12 percent decrease in numbers. However, this seems to just displace the issue. The IDP population seems to be exploding, and without looking into the information more carefully, you could end up assuming that the situation is improving – leaving 2.4 million people without a voice.

## Bibliography

The beginnings and ends of a text is an arbitrary determination that tends to focus on the idea of singular author-irity and author-ship. For these reasons I chose not to publish bibliography.

I have quoted from the UNHCR and from certain sections of works of supposedly ancient Greek origins. Please look around and find discuss information which best brings doubt on what I have presented to you here.

# The Morality Game

Kyle Rees

When I was a child, I was told whenever I went out in public to 'be good'. As any child is apt to do at 5 or 6 years of age, I would ask: Why? Each time my mother would reply with the same frustratingly circular justification: 'Because good is good to do'. And now, 15 years later I'm only beginning to formulate a response to the question "Exactly why is Good good to do?" And more importantly, provided I know how to act in a moral way, why should I even bother doing what is right when I can lie, cheat, and steal to give myself an edge over others? The beginning of an answer to this last question draws on the works of David Hume, Richard Dawkins, biologists Matt Ridley and Marc Hauser, various apostles of Game Theory and psychologist/moral philosopher Carol Gilligan. But first, this essay will examine arguments in favour of individualism and selfishness as seen by skeptics and economists.

In the words of Lord Justice Bowen: "The rain it fallest on the just/ And also on the unjust fella/ But chiefly on the just because/ the unjust hath the just's umbrella" (Dawkins, 343). This is the take on human nature held by Adam Smith and Thomas Hobbes and their ilk, a belief that humans are selfish and competitive, and that society has been constructed in such a way as to minimize the harmful effects of one another's selfishness. Fuel was added to this fire with the publishing and the mass misinterpretation of Richard Dawkins' pop science book *The Selfish Gene*. The principle idea of *The Selfish Gene* follows from our current understanding of natural selection: the viability of genetic information is determined by how successful it is in getting passed on from one generation to the next. If genes do not excel at getting passed along, they are generally left behind in the evolutionary dust. As such, these genes are 'selfish' in the respect that their primary (and maybe even only) purpose is to enable the person to whom they belong to survive long enough and reproduce successfully, or help their replications pass along in some other way (such as aiding in the survival

of offspring or kin who share these genes.<sup>1</sup> From the proposition that these genes exist in order to replicate, many people have incorrectly extrapolated a sort of life philosophy wherein selfishness and disregard for other human beings is permitted because of control exerted by selfish genes. This is of course an unwarranted assumption, something Dawkins attempts to clarify in his more controversial book *The God Delusion*.<sup>2</sup> But all of this aside, the point remains that there must be an element of competition and self-interest necessary for our genes to prevail over those of others.

Economists have been claiming this sort of thing for centuries, and illustrated this darker, individualistic side of human nature in the 50's with a scenario known as the prisoner's dilemma. The prisoner's dilemma finds two bank robbers in separate cells, unable to communicate or see one another. A detective goes to each prisoner individually and makes this same speech: 'OK, we don't have enough evidence to convict you for robbing that bank, but we do have enough to put you both away for one year on a lesser charge. But I'll cut you a deal. If you confess that your partner robbed the bank, he will go to jail for 20 years, and you can go free. But if he confesses on you and you stay silent, he'll go free and you'll spend 20 years in the slammer. Meanwhile, if you both confess on each other, you'll both spend five years in jail, and if you both stay silent, you'll both be convicted of that lesser charge, and get a one year sentence. So will you talk, or not?' (Summarized from Barash, 68) Any rational person can see that the best choice for an individual would be to testify against your partner, since you lose nothing by doing so no matter what your partner chooses, and stand to gain a lot should he choose to remain silent.

So it would seem that nice guys truly finish last. Altruists are taken advantage of by cheaters, and selfish genes prevail over all others. But from this bleak outlook come a couple of key questions. As Matt Ridley inquires "If life is a competitive struggle, why is there so much

---

<sup>1</sup> I should mention here that this investigation relies on the accuracy of Dawkins' notion of the Selfish Gene. It is a premise that this paper takes as given, although admittedly, the selfish gene is still a controversial proposition within many academic circles.

<sup>2</sup> It seems that Dawkins' use of the word 'Selfish' to describe genes has caused many people to jump to inaccurate conclusions. When I presented this paper to an audience of professors and philosophy students of February 14, 2008, even after making it explicitly clear that selfish genes do not presuppose selfish behaviours, much of the criticism of my presentation was based on such a misunderstanding. Indeed, even the Dali Lama is guilty of such a misinterpretation, having criticized the idea that genes make people selfish on a couple of occasions. Perhaps if Dawkins had chosen a different title, this confusion could have been avoided.

cooperation about it?" (Ridley, 5). After all, bees, vampire bats, termites, Portuguese man-of-war, ant colonies, as well as huge chunks of the animal kingdom have come together without any sort of rationality-based Hobbesian social contract to convince them all that it is in their best interest to come together into a collective whole. Cooperation has allowed humans to flourish in the way we have, creating space flight and Facebook, or as George Carlin would have it, Napalm and Silly Putty.<sup>3</sup> It would seem that there's something to this cooperation thing—but how can one reconcile it with selfish genes and the prisoner's dilemma-style success of the wicked? The path to an answer might lay in the beehive.

Honey bees work together for the benefit of the hive. Despite the erroneous popular conception, the queen bee does not rule over the others with a honey-clad fist, the hive is this nice little cooperative society wherein the queen herself is as much a slave as any worker or drone, except that the queen has the monopoly on the reproductive market: she's the only one that exists to lay eggs and pass on her genes. Now, you would think that the motivations coming from these bee's selfish genes would compel them not to cooperate with the queen's reproductive regime and instead produce a line of their own. This indeed does happen. Occasionally, a worker bee (all of which are female) will lay an egg sharing half of her genes. Clearly, in service to her selfish genes, she would want this egg to survive more than she would any egg belonging to the queen. This is because the eggs of the queen are only related to her on one side; they are her half-sisters since the queen mates with multiple males during her mating stage. So what stops workers from caring for their own eggs in a nurturing free-for-all instead of working together with other workers to care for the eggs of the queen, as is the case in nature? The answer has to do with relatedness. As Matt Ridley puts it: "A worker bee shares half her genes with her own son, a quarter of the genes with the queen's sons, and less than a quarter with the sons of most other workers who are her half-sisters. Each worker prefers its won sons to the queen's, but equally each worker prefers the queen's sons to the sons on any other worker." (Ridley, 25). If a worker comes across an egg that is neither her own nor the queen's, she promptly eats it, and that's the end of that. The survival rate of a worker's egg are next to nothing. In this way, cooperation is the only game in town, a forced majoritarianism, if you like.

---

<sup>3</sup> I include these contrasting notions of uselessness and destruction in human innovation partly as an homage to Carlin, but mostly to allude to the fact that we have contrasting notions of progress, which is overrated anyhow.

You may be thinking—but these bees do not have a choice to be selfish, even if they want, their eggs are eaten, selfishness is impossible. There's no way to cheat the system. This is an accurate picture of beehive life, which is why this essay will illustrate life in a society of critters wherein it's possible to lie, cheat, steal and never pay back your IOU's: the society of vampire bats. Vampire bats feed on the blood of the living during the night. If the bats go three nights in a row without a blood-meal, they can starve to death. To deal with such circumstances, vampire bats come equipped with the ability to drink more than they need, and can regurgitate blood and donate it to another bat in need. Herein lays the rub: "Bats who feed each other are better off than bats that do not; however, bats that take food but do not give it are best off and bats that give food but do not receive it are the worst off" (Ridley, 62). Echoes of the prisoner's dilemma can be heard here. So, why should a bat bother to donate to others (these bats are not usually related, nepotism and selfish genes are not to blame) when it could keep the blood for itself and still take advantage of other bats who offer? The answer is reciprocity, a relationship that tends to occur in all social animals. As David Hume observed:

I learn to do service to another, without bearing him any real kindness: because I foresee, that he will return my service, in expectation of another of the same kind, and in order to maintain the same correspondence of good offices with me or others. And accordingly, after I have serv'd him and he is in possession of the advantage arising from my action, he is induc'd to perform his part, as foreseeing the consequences of his refusal. (Hume, 334-335)

In effect, you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. These bats remember who has donated to them in the past, and more often than not return the favour at some point within the next few days. Those who drink their fill and do not donate are easily detected through mutual grooming, where a protruding belly indicating a decent meal is easily visible. The defectors are punished through ostracism, and are usually never donated to again, to the point where occasionally detected cheaters can starve to death in a time of need.

When the prisoner's dilemma is played only once, or anonymously, the defect option seems to be the best one. But as soon as the game introduces some element of reputation, cooperation becomes the best policy. When the game is played against the same opponent, be it

computer vs. computer, computer vs. human, or human vs. human, as the number of rounds go on, cooperation occurs for often, seemingly without a good reason. The importance of reputation is modeled in a program that excels at the prisoner's dilemma when played in large groups, called Tit-for-Tat. In 1979, a political scientist by the name of Robert Axelrod held a competition among scientists to see who could create the best computer program for the prisoner's dilemma situation. 15 programs entered, and one program would play the prisoners' dilemma against another program 200 times in a row, before moving on and playing against another program. If both programs cooperated, each got 3 points. If one defected while the other cooperated, the defector got 5 points while the poor altruist got nothing. Finally, if both defected, they each got one point. This scoring system, I believe, stays true to the payoffs of the prisoner's dilemma, only instead of punishing with jail-time, they are given a quantifiable positive score. Nonetheless, it is still seemingly advantageous to defect. Everyone was surprised to see that the winning program (that with the most accrued points after 3000 total games) was the reciprocal 'tit-for-tat' which followed two very simple rules: start by being nice – cooperating, and thereafter doing whatever its opponent did in the previous round; punishing defectors with more defection, rewarding like-minded altruists, and forgiving bad deeds if the program tries to cooperate later on. (Moral Calculations, 39-40).

There have been many variations on the tit-for-tat theme over the past few years, but most of them tell the same story: those who pay back their debts and do not take advantage of others have better survival rates (represented by point accumulation) and tend to form the majority of communities. The evolutionary effect of all this is that organisms that are part of social groups come equipped to function in tit-for-tat fashion. The point of all this game-theory-speak is to be able to apply it to the survival of the fittest. Provided that there are ways of finding out and punishing cheaters and getting along with co-operators (such as we see in almost all cooperative societies from vampire bats to Portuguese man-of-war jellyfish<sup>4</sup>), then our selfish genes will have a better chance of getting passed on if their host organism cooperates with others. In such societies, good is good to do because it has a quantifiable payoff for our own selfish little replicators. Selfish genes become cooperative genes in such societies. We like to think that we do good deeds because we are

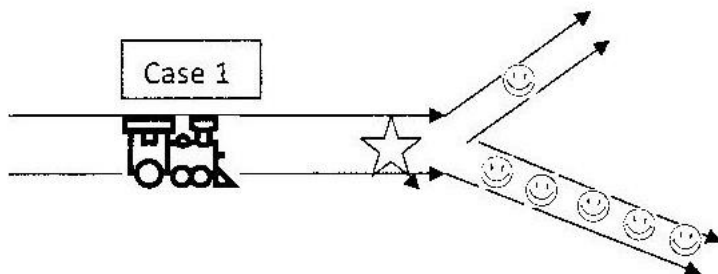
---

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly enough, these huge jellyfish are not one single organism, but a collective of different function-oriented organisms, much like an ant colony. For example, a different organism is found in the tentacles (similar to a soldier ant) than those found in the main 'sail' of the body.

## The Morality Game

capable of moral choice—that it makes us good people. It's a beautiful illusion, one that I'm not planning to throw away just yet. It's hard to conceive that in terms of morality we may all be clockwork oranges, subject to a morality laid down by natural selection, one we are compelled to obey in the name of a genetic ultimatum. But these genes make themselves heard very clearly through our emotions, passions, and our moral instincts, which is what I will be discussing next.

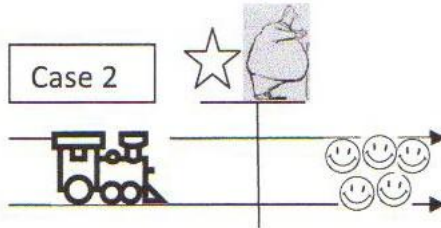
Imagine the following hypothetical situation proposed by Phillipa Foot. You are standing beside a railroad track at the point where the track diverges in two separate directions, in the place of the star in the diagram as follows:



The track is set so that any incoming trains take the track on the right. It comes to your attention that further up the track, there is a train hurtling down the rails, completely out of control, and unable to be stopped. You also notice to your horror that there are 5 unaware students (plugged into their iPods, perhaps) standing in the middle of the track on the right, the one which, under the current setting, the train will take. Luckily, you are standing next to the lever that switches the train from the right track to the left one, which you can pull to divert the train, thereby saving the 5 unaware students. But there's a catch: on the other track, the left track, there is one unaware, iPod-adsorbed student. The question: is it morally permissible for you to throw the switch, diverting the train from killing five people, but killing one other in the process? My immediate gut reaction is that not only is it morally permissible, but you have a duty to do so. Indeed, a large-sample study of several thousand subjects across all sorts of cultural backgrounds by Marc Hauser reveals that a whopping 90% of people agree with me in this instance. It seems that the gut reaction of most human beings is that it is permissible to sacrifice the life of one in order to spare five.



But the utilitarians should not pat themselves on the back just yet. Consider the following diagram:



This time, there is only one railway track, no split. Instead of standing beside the track, you are 30 feet about it on a sort of footbridge overlooking the track, again, where the star is. Like the last situation there is an out-of-control train hurtling down the tracks towards our eternally unaware, iPod fixated 5 students, who are again throwing caution to the wind and walking down the middle of the track. So there's no switch to heroically throw this time. Instead there is an incredibly obese stranger standing next to you on the bridge, let's say he's 500 pounds. Now with your expert knowledge of kinetics, you know that a 500 pound weight is enough to stop that train. You also know (you're an expert in ballistics too) that someone hit by a train, no matter what their size, will be killed. Is it morally permissible for you to push this obese stranger into the path of the train in order to save the 5 students? The gut reaction of most people, again 90% was that it was NOT permissible to push the fat man. But in principle, at least in utilitarian principle, the cases are exactly the same: you are sacrificing the life of one in order to save 5. So what is different about the cases that makes our gut moral instincts so pro one and con another?

In the first situation, case 1, the one person is killed as a by-product of the impersonal action of throwing a switch. In the second, the obese man is killed as a means to the end of saving five others. He's being used directly, whereas the student on the other fork of the track is just in the wrong place at the wrong time. But here's the interesting bit: if you ask people to give a rational account for their decisions in both cases, most people have difficulty formulating reasons that do not contradict one another. Given the time to think about it, some could come up with reasons, but most were unable to do so as quickly as they could decide on a course of action. David Hume was right: "Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason itself is utterly impotent in this

particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason” (Hume, 294). According to Hauser, “We evolved a moral instinct, a capacity that naturally grows within each child, designed to generate rapid judgments about what is morally right or wrong based on an unconscious grammar of action.” (Hauser, 24). In fact, Hauser even labels us as a ‘Humean creature’ that is “equipped with an innate moral sense that provides the engine for reasoned judgments without conscious reasoning” (Hauser, 24). It is as social animals, not as rational beings, that we have developed this moral sense to ensure we are all on the same moral page, to lubricate social relationships, to know what we can expect from others, and ensure that reciprocity is the norm and cheaters are punished.

This leads me to my final point; the role of emotion in ethical decisions. I should make it clear as of this moment that I do not want to down-play the importance of rationality in important decisions. But as Carol Gilligan points out, emotion and consideration of emotional attachments to others often figures prominently in what actions we consider to be the right ones. In her work *In A Different Voice*, Gilligan poses moral dilemmas to male and female subjects and evaluates the differences between predominantly male duty-based answers and predominantly female relationship-based responses. Gilligan describes the world view of one female participant as “seeing a world comprised of relationships rather than of people standing alone, a world that coheres through human connection rather than through systems of rules.” (Gilligan, 29). The ability to see the world in such a way is a benefit of natural selection. As Matt Ridley observes “our minds have been built by selfish genes, but they have been built to be social, trustworthy, and cooperative” (Ridley, 249). Hauser adds that “emotions play a central role in the maintenance and guidance of certain social norms” (Hauser, 331). For example, we as members of the human race have a nearly universal sense of disgust concerning incest, common fears of snakes and spiders, and an adoration towards newborns. Aristotle understood this: “Neither by nature, the, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit”. (Hauser, 297)

So these are the ideas I’ve read about and formulated myself concerning the roots of morality. I’ve examined traditional arguments, such as shown by the prisoner’s dilemma and misinterpretation of selfish genes, and shown how in nature, namely in bees and bats selfishness cannot thrive. I’ve shown how new work in game theory has refuted the arguments of the prisoners’ dilemma, and replaced it with the more accurate explanation of tit-for-tat, which works on the levels of societies of social

units. Finally, I've highlighted how most humans are gifted with an innate moral sense, which uses emotions as a way of helping us arrive at certain moral conclusions.

The final thought I'd like to articulate is the possible impact such an understanding of our moral faculty could have on the way we judge actions of others, in both a legal and social way. We have to understand that in moments of split-second decision or high-tension, we are prone to acting based on a set of emotions instead of on calculated rationality. It is also important to construct society and its laws to incorporate the better aspects of our shared emotional reactivity. Finally, there is the knowledge that, as social animals, we have a universal Darwinian basis of our morality. Perhaps it would be easier than we previously thought to reconcile the laws of different nations and cultures in the form of some sort of cosmopolitan human rights. After all, in the Morality Game, we all started on the same square, and we all subscribe to the same set of rules.

## Bibliography

Barash, David. *The Survival Game: How Game Theory Explains the Biology of Cooperation and Competition*. New York: Times Books, 2003.

Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2006.

Dawkins, Richard. *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Gilligan, Carol. *In A Different Voice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Hauser, Marc. *Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong*. New York: Ecco, 2006.

Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1740.

Ridley, Matt. *The Origins of Virtue: Human Instincts and the Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Viking, 1997.

# Heidegger and Modernity

Joseph Carew

It is incredibly difficult to situate Heidegger within the ever-ongoing discourse of modernity. Not only does his thought self-consciously try to radically break from virtually every classical philosophical tradition, but also the style, approach and manner of his thinking make the terms of any tradition as normally conceived incommensurable with it. This causes a predicament for any serious attempt to comprehend the vigor of Heidegger's thinking. He forces you to struggle with every word, every sentence; he forces you to travel with him on his own way. Consequently, to appreciate Heidegger, you have to speak Heideggerian; to understand his thinking, you have to meet him on his way, live and breathe in his air, and move within the element which guides and preserves his thought. Similarly, the only way to criticize Heidegger is from within the framework of his own language (and let this word carry the specifically Heideggerian connotations he wishes it to give). This is the only way Heidegger can hear you. One has to push his language to the point it begins to shake and tremble by virtue of itself.

Yet, even if we do take Heidegger at face value when he proclaims that his fundamental ontology has moved beyond the subjectivity which he thinks is so characteristic of the modern tradition, nevertheless there are several common thematic concerns which exist between his thinking and the discourse of modernity. Both, ultimately, are concerned with what freedom is, what it is to be human and how to preserve the essence of humanity, and with the meaning of radical self-legislating autonomy. In this sense, although there appears to be a desperate attempt by Heidegger to separate himself from the tradition, at least historically his philosophy can only be understood and fully grasped as a response to it. Yet, this claim would not be contended even by Heidegger himself, a thinker who obviously realized the importance and value of history not only for philosophy, but also for life itself (just think of the importance of natality for the *Dasein* in *Being and Time*); it is the obvious implication of this claim that would be problematic. It, to a certain extent, seems to place Heidegger himself within the tradition of modernity as a new voice articulating genuine human freedom, although this is not to deny the

radical nature of his position. This is, however, only a preliminary suggestion which will have to be returned to after the Heideggerian position itself has been characterized. Only then can it be understood what Heidegger means when he thinks that he is *breaking* from the tradition and pass judgment on the validity and meaningfulness of this claim.

### Metaphysics and the History of Subjectivity

Heidegger's philosophy displays a keen, penetrating yet patient eye. It is driven by a seemingly unending reservoir of energy, all of which is directed towards the *Seinsfrage*, the question of the meaning of Being. Yet it is the significance of the question itself which he wants to raise; his point is not just that Being is not something which can be exhaustively comprehended or described, but that the question itself has been lost, made senseless, it falls deafly upon our open ears. We have *forgotten* Being, but this is not to be understood as a deliberate, conscious or moral (or, to use Heidegger's language in *Being and Time*, *existentiell*) error by man, but as part of the destining or dispensation of Being. Thus, in order to raise the significance of the question of Being, to bestow a specific sense and meaningfulness upon it, Heidegger therefore has to rethink the history of Western metaphysics and its relation to the forgetting of Being which he claims is evident in the tradition itself. One of Heidegger's fundamental contributions to the discourse of modernity is his attempt to think the unthought that guides the essential unfolding of the discourse itself, which he thinks will in turn shed light on the problem of the *Seinsfrage* and put us in a position to be able to adequately thematize Being and our relation to it. Thus, Heidegger says, "the thinking that thinks into the truth of Being is, as thinking, historical" ("Letter on Humanism," 238). Being is epochal: Being comes to destiny only insofar as it gives itself historically, temporally, but every giving of itself is at the same time its most extreme withdrawal. It nihilates itself in order to give; the oblivion of Being, therefore, is necessary for the gift of Being. Thus all thinking of Being must be a recollection of Being.

Heidegger's claim is that the modern quest for radical, self-grounding autonomous freedom is misconceived insofar as it does not think Being and man's relation to Being as ek-sistence. But he makes the further claim that the project is not something which is distinctly new or original to the modern era; rather, it represents the culmination of a tendency already implicit, yet not developed, in Greek thinking. Their notion of nature as *physis*, the place of the rising of beings to self-presence, the place where beings come to self-manifestedness, lets or allows Being to

be in the presencing of particular entities. This is an immediate, spontaneous and responsive relation to Being of what is, but there is still a forgetting of Being as the operate element in the presencing of beings as present entities and man as the clearing where this presencing happens.<sup>1</sup> Beings are the *hypokeimenon* for the Greeks, that which lies before; they are the *subiectum*, that which has value in itself as they show themselves in themselves in their self-reliant power and self-justifying security. They confront and meet man and man is confident in them.

In modernity, however, there is a turn away from or unraveling of this “naïve” confidence in beings. A doubt is instilled and man seeks “the unconditionally indubitable, the certain and assured, certainty” (“The Word of Nietzsche,” 82). Through the *ego cogito*, the immediate and undeniable self-presence of the “I” to itself, a security, a firmness, is found within ourselves, within our self-conscious subjectivity. Although this is performed primarily through an epistemological move, the theory of knowledge betrays a hidden ontology. A fundamental shift occurs in the destining of Being as the *ego* becomes the *subiectum*: we find a self-justifying security within our subjectivity, a self-grounding activity which is apparently lacking in that which shows itself as other, as an object. The emphasis is no longer on a reality beyond ourselves, but on that which is present in our own consciousness. Man does not relate spontaneously and openly to that which shows itself in itself in nature but instead *represents* reality, grabs it, objectifies it and secures it as a content of consciousness. Through this, Heidegger wants to say, we lose a sense of divinity or holiness, of the presence of the gods and the unfamiliar everywhere that was characteristic of pre-Socratic Greece. The fragments of Heraclitus and Parmenides “think *physis* in a depth and breadth that no subsequent ‘physics’ was ever again able to attain” (*LH*, 256). But when the subject alone is self-positing, the value of everything that presents itself as other in itself dissipates and appears to depend for its manner of being in the subject. The emphasis on rightly conducting

---

<sup>1</sup> Although it may be objected that there must have been an original, primordial *wakefulness* or *remembrance* of Being at the beginning of the tradition in order for there to be a subsequent *forgetfulness* of it, this claim must be qualified. For Heidegger time is “the horizon for the understanding of Being and for any way of interpreting it” (*Being and Time*, 39). Therefore, insofar as the Greeks did *not* have an authentic sense of temporality – time for them was circular, non-eschatological; there was no genuine openness to the unknown future, no anticipation of the unforeseeable epochal gifts of Being – they *could not* in principle display a truly, fully developed relation to the presencing of Being. Although they did spontaneously dwell in *physis*, there is something authentically lacking in their appropriation of the essential *humanitas* of *homo humanus*.

reason and the strict methodological directives that have to be followed to arrive at genuine knowledge of reality precludes the possibility of a more authentic responsiveness to the presencing of beings as seen in the early Greeks.

In this context, the meaning of Being depends on us. There is no independent spontaneity of Being (independent in the sense of its capacity to manifest *itself* continually new) recognized or apprehended, honored or made sacred. This, Heidegger proclaims, reaches its culmination in the consummate meaninglessness of Being articulated in Nietzsche's metaphysics of the will-to-power. Being is no longer able to come into its open self-manifestation (self-giving), but is now self-consciously recognized as being reduced to a value for the preservation-enhancement condition of a will willing itself, which asserts its extreme subject-dependency. The will, which secures its re-presentations as certain, objectively real, significant and valuable in and through itself, declares the primacy of the valuator instead of the natural unfolding spontaneity of that which is. But in this sense what is valued is devalued insofar as it becomes a mere affirmation of the human ego, an adjunct to the goals and projects of human subjectivity, and is therefore denied any value or self-assurance in and through itself. The objectivity of objects is a mere means; the Being of beings has been forgotten. For Heidegger man must not be understood as "the tyrant of Being" who "release[s] the beingness of beings" as the self-grounding justifier and bestower of meaning (*LH*, 234). Crucially, however, we have to understand that Heidegger is *not* affirming the object over the subject insofar as this is just a reformulation of the problematic caused by metaphysics. Being is not something in-itself over and above man: "man and Being have already reached each other in their active nature, since both are mutually appropriated, extended as a gift, one to the other" ("The Principle of Identity," 33). What he is saying, however, is unclear.

One has to realize that the implications of Heidegger's main criticism of this entire philosophical history are twofold. Not only has Being been forgotten, but, by making man the centre of reality, the locus through which meaning is bestowed and given to Being, the original essence of man is also lost. The dignity of man as the shepherd of Being, as one who is called upon by Being and thus needed by Being to come into open manifestation, has to be retrieved. Man, for Heidegger, is claimed by Being to accomplish Being through thinking, that is, to bring Being to fullness and fruition, but by thinking he does not mean ratiocination. Genuine thinking is something which comes before theoretical or representational-conceptual scientific rationalization; it is a primordial mode of relating, interacting with Being in such a manner that it lets



beings be as they are in themselves, without intruding upon the open presencing of whatever is or denying it its spontaneity. Thinking is not an activity which effectuates a result and it does not *cause* Being; Heidegger is very clear that “thinking never creates the house of Being” (*LH*, 260) and that “only what already is can really be accomplished” (*LH*, 217). Thinking calls *Dasein* to its “*Da*,” to the “there” or “openness” of Being as the passive receptacle for the presencing of beings. This not only deflates man’s self-grounding autonomy, but also dramatically asserts that this autonomy itself degrades man’s essence. Man is free, for Heidegger, only insofar as he is called upon Being to dwell in the truth (unconcealment, revealing) of Being as the clearing. The modern subject is decentered insofar as it is called upon by something infinitely greater and other than it, a call that always precedes it and brings it forth as its guardian and its servant. It destabilizes the indubitable self-presence of subjectivity by declaring its complete dependence upon a radical absence. Tearing apart the transcendental I, man is interlocuted and opens the world through his ek-sistence.

### Reclaiming the Essence of Man

Perhaps now the difficulty of reconciling the Heideggerian position within the self-developmental, unfolding discourse of modernity is becoming clearer. Heidegger’s thought, critical of any conceptual framework which proclaims the self-grounding autonomy of the human subject – whether it be the immediate unity of being and thought in the Cartesian *cogito*, Nietzsche’s will-to-power as will willing itself, or latter existentialist approaches such as Sartre’s self-consciousness of radical freedom – appears highly critical of the modern project. But it must be emphasized that his approach is not merely negative or deconstructive in the sense of a ruinous de-structuring resulting in absolute indeterminacy and undecidability of meaning (Heidegger’s theory of language always allows recourse to a more original experience, a retrieving of primordial revelatory truth). He claims that “the same thinking that has led us to this insight of the questionable essence of humanism,” by characterizing the hitherto philosophical tradition as forgetful of Being,

has likewise compelled us to think the essence of man more primordially. With regard to this more essential *humanitas* of *homo humanus* there arises the possibility of restoring to the word “humanism” a historical sense that is older than its oldest meaning chronologically reckoned (*LH*, 247).

But with this statement, it becomes clear that the concern of Heidegger's thinking, just like Descartes, Hegel or Nietzsche, is to bring man back to himself, to distill a sense of homelessness by calling man back to his ownmost abode and has distinctively modern feel when put in these words. However, what is peculiar to Heidegger's approach (according, at least, to his own understanding of himself and the tradition) is that the abode of man is not "within" himself, is not located in the infinite inwardness of his subjectivity as a self-legislating centre of autonomous activity.

Heidegger's notion of the freedom of man at this stage of his thinking is unique. In relation to this piece, it is very difficult to even speak of things such as personal agency, creativity or free choice. The way the whole discourse is constructed makes such language incommensurable with it. This is not, of course, to assert the ultimate meaninglessness of these concepts: rather, it proclaims that this kind of thinking is more primordial, more basic, more simple. "[S]uch thinking," Heidegger says, "is neither theoretical nor practical. It comes to pass before this distinction. Such thinking is, insofar as it is, recollection of Being and nothing else" (*LH*, 259). Its whole function, the entirety of its activity, is to let Being be. In this regard the "Letter on Humanism," just like many of Heidegger's latter writings, represents a departure from and immanent critique of *Being and Time*, particularly the Second Division. There we see a great effort to describe and interpret the phenomenon of time and the *Dasein's* appropriation of it, both in terms of its death and its birth. The heart or core of the *Dasein's* Being is placed outside of itself in death (the ultimately nonpresent, nonphenomenal event of not-Being, which exists beyond the horizon of all human existence yet is paradoxically the omnipresent condition of the possibility of it). Interestingly *Being and Time* then proclaims that it is death itself that calls us to ourselves as the anxious silent voice of conscience, the authentic call to the non-relationality of our selfhood. It is only by resolutely anticipating death that the moment of vision, the Situation for authentic ontic, existentiell free choice emerges. It is only by realizing our powerlessness that we can have power over it – it is only by embracing our radical finitude that we can have *freedom*.

Clearly, *this* kind of discourse is unmistakably still to some extent or other within the tradition of modernity and it is obvious why Heidegger feels as if he has to separate himself from it. He does not want the focus of his thinking to be on the *Dasein* because to a certain extent this would give it an one-sidedness similar to that which he perceives to be a limiting factor of the tradition. He wants to shift his attention from human

existence to the development of a fundamental ontology, that is, to how *anything* can have Being at all. Therefore he has to move away from the thematization of the *Dasein* because it precludes the possibility of a genuinely and fully articulated fundamental ontology: it, to use the language of "Letter on Humanism," has a tendency to downplay the essential nature of man as the ek-sistent clearing for the presencing of Being, to overlook the fact that man is called upon by Being to be the guardian of Being.<sup>2</sup> The major criticism of *Being and Time* implicit in this essay is the fact that it is still too caught up in "subjectivity," in the inwardness of the personality or selfhood of man as a non-relational centre of personal agency which is to be developed or cultivated in order to be free. Thus, we see Heidegger struggling to reinterpret the crucial terms of *Being and Time* such as authenticity in relation to his now more mature attempts at a fundamental ontology. Authenticity, he describes, as not "a moral-existential or an 'anthropological' distinction, but rather a relation which ... has yet to be thought for the first time, an 'ecstatic' relation of the essence of man to the truth of Being" (*LH*, 236).

Heidegger's reinterpretation of authenticity is very much warranted: he is not, in other words, pushing a term from *Being and Time* into a mold which is wholly other than it. Authenticity as the genuine relation to Being as the openly embraced ecstatic clearing of ek-sistence is implicitly contained within the phenomenological descriptions of *Being and Time*. What Heidegger does do, however, is completely drop any existential import that it may have, but if he is warranted or ought to do this is an entirely other question. Insofar as every utterance of the "truth of Being" *implies* that being for whom Being is an issue, that being who alone exists as the clearing for the unconcealment or revealing of Being, the Being of that being is *still* at stake. Of course Being calls us to be its guardians, to accomplish Being by bringing it into fullness, but it is very unclear how the accomplishing of Being through genuine thinking can thus be completely separated from the existentialist problem of selfhood, insofar as Being cannot be characterized as some sort radically

---

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Luc Marion says it so clearly, so cleverly: "In fact, the reflexive characteristics of *Dasein* – to resolve *itself*, to put *itself* at stake, to proceed *itself*, to agonize over *itself*, and each time for nothing other than itself (for the nothing and the Self) – are such good imitations of the transcendental subject's reflexivity that they should also suggest the character of subsisting ground for *Dasein*. The aporia of solipsism implies that of subsistence.... *Dasein*'s 'mineness' defines it so intrinsically that *Dasein* can neither multiply it nor individuate it. The aporias of the 'subject' forever haunt *Dasein*. It could be that *Dasein* does not designate what succeeds the 'subject' so much as its last heir, such that it offers less an overcoming than the path toward possibly overcoming it" (*Being Given*, 261).

independent in-itself (naturally the self would take on a new shape, a new figure; traditional subjectivity would no longer suffice). In order for man to let Being be, man has to come to himself – man has to reclaim his essence, he has to ek-sist authentically. The “Letter on Humanism” is, on this point, very clear, although it deliberately tries to remove this essence from any ethical, social or political dimension, but surely there is a great tension herein within the Heideggerian position. Here Heidegger’s language, it seems, begins to conflict with itself, to fall into self-diremption.

## The Turn

The alleged turn in Heidegger’s thinking is a notorious problem in Heideggerian scholarship, but it is something which he himself denied. It haunts the way of his thinking. However, it seems to be a natural development of his philosophy motivated by internal concerns which unfold its discourse. After the preliminary, preparatory characterization of the *Dasein* as an attempt to create a foothold from which to approach Being qua Being, it is only logical that Being itself as presencing become the focal point of his thinking. But it has to be remembered that to speak of Being *is* to speak of man: the both are held together in a reciprocal relation, both *belong* together, both need one another to come into fullness. What strongly differentiates Heidegger from the tradition is that insofar as man is called by Being and *given* his essence by the gift of Being, man is not at the centre of reality or even self-creating in any existentialist sense. He is in utter opposition to the Sartrean position which proclaims that “[t]here is no universe other than a human universe, the universe of human subjectivity” (“The Humanism of Existentialism,” 308). But although for Heidegger man still has a privileged position as the guardian of whatever is, his position is simultaneously the poorest: “[t]he descent leads to the poverty of the ek-sistence of *homo humanus*” (*LH*, 254).

Turning his philosophic interests from Being (the Being of the *Dasein*) to Time (as the ecstatic temporal horizon in which the presencing of Being can occur) is thus more than a methodological move. But what appears to be missing is the final and needed return to Being as the clearing where presencing occurs. Heidegger’s basic philosophical principles never allow for a complete system of thought insofar as it declares the radical, unsurpassable finitude of human existence. Each new way, each new phase of thought, each new turn around the hermeneutic circle is completely non-coincidental with the last. But the metaphor of the circle is misleading. It makes it seem as if each new turn is just

developing implicit claims in what has already been said, as if one is just refining and developing previous ideas and concepts. It seems to assert that nothing “new” is accomplished or brought to light; it claims we are just unpacking what is already logically contained in what has been previously said. But this is exactly *not* what is occurring. The circle is actually a spiral: each new turn unlocks new significations, new never before possible meanings, which force the thinker to reexamine what has been said. The spiral is never-ending and self-perpetuating; it does not linearly or progressively self-unfold according to some teleological trajectory of dialectical reason. Each new thought is always non-coincident and heterogeneous with the past thought and thus they have to play off one another in a dance that mutually develops each other.

Thus Division Two of *Being and Time* recasts the structures of *Dasein* in terms of time or temporality. This opens the significance of the question of Being, the *Seinsfrage*. But the descriptions of the *Dasein* have to be left aside in order to develop and thematize the underlying concerns of the *Seinsfrage*, but the *Dasein* is always implicitly recognized within this new discourse. But, by perforce, thinking ought to return to the *Dasein* in order to understand more adequately the Being of man in terms of the *Seinsfrage*, which in turn will create new areas of signification never before possible for it. Man *is* the accomplisher, the guardian of Being; and, in these terms, Heidegger’s ambivalence toward the ethical, social and political may be inconsistent with his own thinking. Surely, man has to bring these spheres into their own fullness also. But it appears that he does not think that thinking is ready for this: it has forgotten Being and needs first to place itself in a face-to-face relation with it before it can return to the *Dasein* in a more primordial and authentic manner. If man and Being are mutually appropriated, Heidegger’s overdrawn emphasis on Being is problematic insofar as his language seems to reify Being as something in-itself radically separate from man and structures of being-in-the-world.

### Heidegger and the Tradition Revisited

Following the model of the hermeneutic spiral outlined above, now we must return to the question of situating Heidegger within the tradition of modernity. It is clear that his thinking is not as incommensurable with it as perhaps he would lead us to believe. As a matter of fact, from an internal necessity or driving force, it seems as if it must, if it is to follow the logic of its own unfolding, return to these questions which it claims conflict with the simplicity of its position. It must pave the way. Perhaps Heidegger himself believes that his thinking cannot address the

fundamental problems of human being, or to put it more accurately, that it *should* not; it has to think the unthought as the new vista of signification which has been opened through the unfolding of thinking, the unthought which is the origin of all thought. But it seems consistent to then say that the task of his thinking should build a way that can appropriately address these more particularly “modern” matters in a more explicit manner. It seems as if he does have to go back to *Being and Time* since every utterance of Being necessary implies that being for whom Being reveals itself, which can never be adequately thematized until Being itself is thematized and vice versa. If Being and man need each other, both have to be addressed in order for either to be accomplished in Heidegger’s very unique usage of that word. It would have to address man from within the origin of all metaphysical determinations or interpretations of man, address man in a more primordial sense. His ontology has to return to the ontic. There can be no ontology without the ontic.

One of the tensions within the “Letter on Humanism” is Heidegger admitted radical humanism. He is a humanist at heart, but he struggles with giving himself such an appellation partly because he knows using a term from a tradition with a new meaning can pose problems. Indeed, Heidegger says toward the conclusion of the work that there is a tendency for terms to be “not rethought by the readers from the matter particularly to be thought” but for “the matter [to be] conceived according to the established terminology in its customary meaning” (*LH*, 259). Here is he speaking as a trained teacher, one who wants to help others as much as possible to guide them on their way of thinking using his thinking as a guide. To be a good teacher, therefore, you often have to make obstacles and display a studied and deliberate method of obstruction to force thinking to its peculiar element.

Therefore, although the question of Being is intimately tied with the question of man, Heidegger constructs his discourse to make his radical humanism incommensurable with what he brands metaphysical humanism. He places himself in opposition to how they view the essence of humanity. One could say that he does not want his discourse to be tainted by a misunderstanding of his thinking as in any way tied up with the traditional concerns, but to express the Heideggerian position in these words is very misleading. By opposing the tradition he very strongly appropriates its underlying themes and develops them further by placing them in a new thinking. He is still concerned with what it means to be human, what it means to be free and with the meaning (and, in this sense, the *problem*) of self-legislating autonomy. He calls us to be in an openly authentic relation to our own essence, to what it means to be

human – and in this sense, he *is* a modern. The only thing that differentiates him from modernity is how his characterization of human freedom differs from that of the tradition. To regain our essence, he asks us, he tells us, that we have to sacrifice our autarchy and self-sufficiency, but he is still perpetuating the modern question.

But it is unclear how Heidegger's contribution to the problem of modernity cashes out. He seems to be advocating a return to some sort of pre-Socratic immediacy with the spontaneous presencing of whatever is, but it is both unclear what this means and how it is possible. It is hard to not see him as advocating a return to naïve realism or a Romantic intuitionism. We have lost that kind of responsiveness; how can we regain it? In a typically Heideggerian manner, his thinking calls us to repeat Eden without reiteration, to go back but not to return. For Heidegger, there is an fundamental insight in this paradoxical coinage of terms – an insight which he himself seems to believe thinking itself is perhaps not yet prepared for. It is only through falling from Being and by returning to it by the “grace” of Being that we can for the first time authentically own ourselves and ek-sist in a full, genuine relation to Being as the accomplisher of Being. It is hard not to hear a religious, theological tone in these words. It is through the grace of Being that “[t]hinking conducts historical ek-sistence, that is, the *humanitas* of *homo humanus*, into the realm of the upsurge of healing” (*LH*, 260). But *how* are we to understand the “grace” of Being insofar as “Being itself, however, belongs to us; for only with us can Being be present as Being, that is, become present” (*Pr. Iden.*, 33)?

## Bibliography

- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Letter on Humanism." *Basic Writings*. Ed. D. F. Krell. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. 221-65
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Principle of Identity." *Identity and Difference*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969. 23-41.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Word of Nietzsche: God is Dead." *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Trans. William Lovitt. Toronto: Harper Perennial, 1977. [FIND SOURCE]
- Marion, Jean-Luc. *Being Given*. Trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. "The Humanism of Existentialism." *Existentialism: Basic Writings*. Ed. Charles Guignon & Derk Pereboom. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001.



