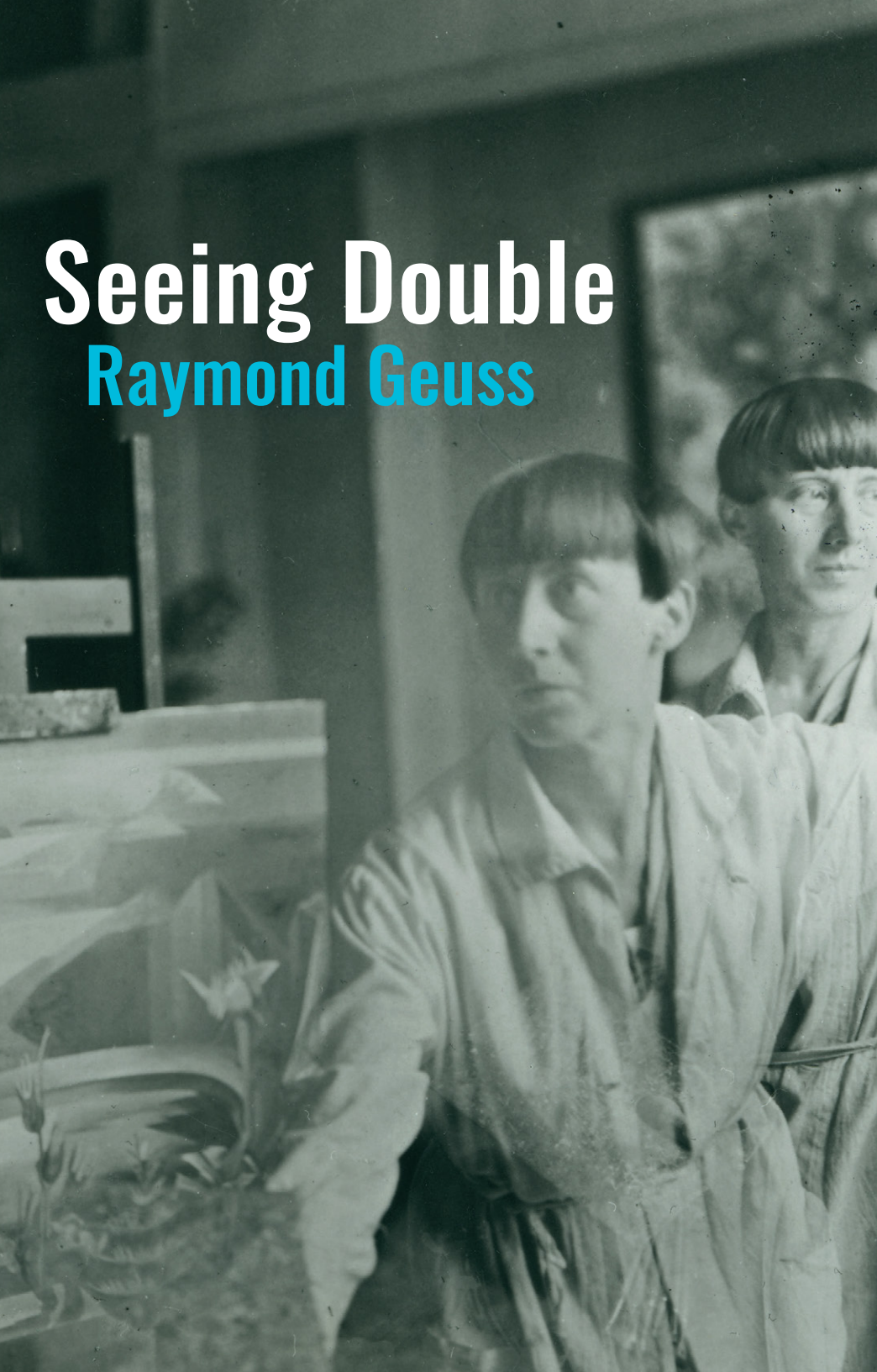
Seeing Double

Raymond Geuss



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Preface

The city of Kyoto is surrounded by gentle hills and temples. There are about 2,000 temples and shrines of various kinds in the city and the immediate environs. In the hills just west of the central part of the city stands the Ryoanji Temple which has a famous rock garden, a dry landscape of gravel that contains fifteen boulders which have been artfully placed so that from no single vantage point can they all be seen at the same time. From any vantage point on the wooden viewing platform at least one boulder is hidden behind some other. To see them all, then, one has to look at the garden at least twice, from two different positions, and somehow integrate the two images in one's mind or imagination. So to see everything I must see double. Presumably the monks who designed the garden wished to express what they thought was a deep negative truth about the world, that vision always operates from a particular limited perspective and that human knowledge is like that, too, and can never encompass the world as a whole (certainly not in a single synoptic view). The particular necessity for double vision when looking at this garden can in fact be overcome in the modern world by the use of some technological tools we have developed: we could fly a drone equipped with a camera over the garden,

and see it from a perspective that was inaccessible to generations of visitors. Perhaps from that perspective, we could see all the stones. The question is whether this invalidates the original point. Even from this new perspective we won't see *everything* about the garden. We can get the 'wider' synoptic view from the air only because we happened to invent something new and unknown in the past, actually two things: the drone and the camera. These two inventions are accidents of our history.

It is endemic to the philosophical tradition to find the contingency which might be thought to manifest itself in this story intolerable. Virtually all philosophers worth their salt have tried to prove (or generally, not even tried, but simply assumed) that the aerial view is not *merely* the result of an accidental human creation. Of course, the creation of the tools was contingent, but the aerial view they provide was in some sense not created, but discovered; it was already there to be revealed. Furthermore, this conclusion can be generalized absolutely in that there is (and must be) such a thing as a final view of the world which includes everything – although it would have the form of a mathematical theory rather than a photo. But still it would be all-encompassing, and although *in fact* we might never discover this theory, *in principle* it would have to be something that at any rate sufficiently gifted and supremely lucky humans *could* – again 'in principle' – eventually discover.

This is a very cosy view of the universe that it would be natural then to extend from nature to the social world. When Wittgenstein criticized his colleague Ramsey for being a 'bourgeois' thinker,[1] he did not mean just that Ramsey had an especially tidy mind, but that he thought the world was a tidy place, a potentially comfortable habitation for humanity where everything could 'eventually' be expected to fit together neatly. We don't actually see how all our beliefs, hopes, and aspirations can be made compatible now, but 'eventually' we could (in principle) get true beliefs and realistic hopes and aspirations, and they would have to be consistent. Here the word

'eventually' carries an enormous amount of weight; it means *mañana* – the 'tomorrow' which as often as not never comes. Or perhaps a better analogy would be the Pope's wedding. If I say 'I'll pay you, eventually, on the day of the Pope's wedding', you would be rash to start banking on this, although it is perfectly possible that one day a Pope will marry, given that the rules of celibacy are mere matters of Church discipline, not doctrine.

What if things don't finally all hang or fit together? What if plurality of vision and conflict of desire are permanent states? These essays explore various aspects of that possibility.

Chapter 1 of this collection discusses Montaigne, his scepticism about the necessary uniformity and fixity of human nature, and his invention of the essay as a vehicle to explore the self-knowledge that is possible for us, given that we are creatures whose inner lives are a constantly shifting sequence of mutable beliefs and contradictory desires.

Rabelais' books, which are the subject of Chapter 2, are all about incongruity: they tell stories of people who encounter a size-14 world and try repeatedly, desperately, but with a complete lack of success, to force its feet into a series of size-6 shoes.

The Nietzsche of Chapter 3 is a comparative ethnologist who studies a variety of very different, culturally specific ways of looking at the world and tries to determine what a recognition of this plurality might tell us about how we think of ourselves.

The eye and the ear give us access to the world in very different ways. Chapter 4 ('Autopsy and Polyphony') deals with some of the ways in which the visual and the auditory structuring of cognition might not overlap.

We are often tempted to apply standards of correctness or incorrectness to speech, but it turns out to be more difficult than we think to say anything concrete and plausible about the kind of normativity we are imaginatively invoking. This is the topic of Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 deals with an issue that was much discussed in the mid-twentieth century by the existentialists, but seems to me to have been somewhat neglected during the past fifty years or so. This is the issue of the conditions of applicability of concepts like success and failure to human actions, and potentially to a human life as a whole. In the absence of a fixed external criterion for what an action is and the standards by which it is to be evaluated, it seems clear that ascriptions of success and failure cannot be based on anything more than contextually shifting judgements. What is more, while my life is ongoing I can never see it all as part of one single closed process, so the idea of evaluating it as a whole seems particularly problematic. Yet, it seems impossible not to succumb occasionally at least to the temptation to try to do just that.

The final chapter offers a brief discussion of the roles of hope and realism in human life.

Two of the essays in this collection have appeared in print before in English: 'Rabelais and the Low Road to Modernity' was published as a chapter in *A History of Modern French Literature*, ed. C. Prendergast (Princeton University Press, 2017), and is reprinted here with permission; 'Nietzsche's Philosophical Ethnology' appeared in *Arion*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2017). I have made some tiny changes to these essays for this volume. Three other essays were written in German and published in that language, but have not previously appeared in English. These are 'Autopsy and Polyphony', which appeared as 'Autopsie und Polyphonie' in the internet journal *Soziopolis* (5 April 2023); 'Succeed, Fail, Fail Better', which will appear in *Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie* but no exact date has yet been set; and Chapter 7, which appeared as 'Die Hoffnung' in *Auf Nietzsches Balkon III*, ed. S. Bianchi (Bauhaus Universitätsverlag, 2018). I have translated these myself and taken the opportunity to make some small changes.

I am very grateful to Martin Bauer for commissioning Chapter 3; he has a knack of inviting me to write on topics I

would never have thought of approaching, and then helping me out in ways that always make the resulting text better than anything I could have produced myself. I wish to thank Sonia Felger, Lorna Finlayson, Peter Garnsey, Gérald Garutti, Brian O'Connor, and Richard Raatzsch for discussions of the topics treated in this volume. All the texts I have written during the past twenty-five years have benefited enormously from Hilary Gaskin's sharp eye, her excellent judgement, and her constructive suggestions.

Ancient works are cited by standard pagination (thus for Plato by Stephanus page, or otherwise following the most recent OCT). Nietzsche's works are cited from the *Kritische Studien-Ausgabe*, ed. Colli and Montinari (Der Gruyter, 1981), by volume and page number (abbreviated KSA).

und die findigen Tiere merken es schon
daß wir nicht sehr verläßlich zu Haus sind
in der gedeuteten Welt

Rilke

(animals are clever enough to have noticed
that we aren't very securely at home in this world
we've interpreted)

1

Montaigne and the Essay

It is very unusual to get a glimpse of the very moment when a new literary genre comes into being.[1] For us, Western literature begins, on the traditional view, with the Homeric epics, but one of the first things one is told when one studies the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* is that although 'Homer', if he existed, is the first epic poet whose work has survived, 'he' stands at the *end* of a long tradition of similar poetry which has not survived. And, in fact, in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* themselves there are references to older singers of heroic songs. Thus Achilles in *Iliad* IX, 182ff is described as sitting outside his tent singing songs of the mighty deeds of heroes of old, and in the *Odyssey* there are two bards, Phemius and Demodokos, who occur as figures in the narrative. In Book VIII, Demodokos is described as singing a song about Odysseus himself (who is represented as being present at the performance). Humans in general seem fascinated by the purported origins of things, and the Greeks went to some length to investigate how the things around them originally came to be as they are; in the case of very many human artefacts, institutions, and practices that were clearly not there 'by nature', they tried to find or, if necessary, invent a single inventor. Thus, for the drama, the Athenians made

up a mythical originator, 'Thespis'. At the very latest since the time of Nietzsche we have become very sceptical about stories concerning social practices that posit a clear, singular act of creation, invention, or initiation for them, and prefer accounts that emphasize the accidental confluence of a variety of different, mostly anonymous, factors. Multifarious origins go back as far as we care to trace them, and the search stops only when the evidence gives out, not when an absolute initial point is reached. Individual actors may, indeed must, play a role in the process, but it is the interactions between people and between groups of people and institutions over long periods of time that constitute the basic matrix for understanding, not the foundational act of some single individual.

So it is worthy of note that at least in the case of one literary genre – the essay – we can specify its origin in the work of a particular individual. Michel de Montaigne invented the essay in the works that he published between 1571 and 1592.

Montaigne was a wealthy landowner whose estate lay in the south-west of France near the city of Bordeaux. He was a member of the so-called *noblesse de robe*, that is, the legal, diplomatic, and administrative wing of the French aristocracy (as opposed to the *noblesse d'épée*, the military wing). He was in fact very active in the political and administrative life of the city of Bordeaux during the first half of his life, and he seems also to have been very successful as a high-level diplomat who intervened in a number of very delicate negotiations. The general political situation was in any case tricky because this was a time of bitter and bloody civil war between Catholics and Huguenots (Calvinists). It was a not insignificant achievement to have negotiated a safe path, even for himself and his family, through the repeated bouts of systematic, religiously motivated killing while occupying a position of some prominence in the politics of Bordeaux. In 1571, however, at the age of thirty-eight, Montaigne retired from public life, and withdrew to his chateau outside the city. He had a room at the top of a tower

transformed into a library where he spent a large amount of his time, devoting himself to thinking, reading, and (eventually) writing. The writing took the form of a series of prose works, the first volumes of which he published in 1580. He gave these works the name *essais*, which at the time was not used to describe pieces of writing, and was certainly not the name of an established literary genre, but just the ordinary, everyday word for 'attempts, trials, experiments'. They were short prose works in which he tried something out. The name 'essay' stuck as the proper designation of the kind of prose text he wrote.

Montaigne was himself aware of the novelty of what he was doing and often reflected on it. What exactly were his intentions in writing these unusual prose-pieces which were different from anything that went before? What did he himself take to be the major distinguishing characteristics of one of his essays? How did he think they differed from other kinds of writing?

To try to get a preliminary answer to this, I suggest looking at one of the short, early essays, entitled 'Of Idleness', that is, 'De l'oisiveté'.[2] In this essay Montaigne tries to give a preliminary account of what he is trying to do. 'Idleness' in English often has a hint of disapproval about it, and the pejorative coloration has perhaps been intensified by the influence of Puritanism. Think of the proverb 'An idle mind is the devil's workshop', or common expressions like 'idle gossip', 'idle speculation', 'an idle fellow'. One must first of all put aside the negative connotations, and not jump to the conclusion that Montaigne is announcing his intention to write a traditional Christian treatise, or yet another one of the many medieval and early modern scholastic treatments of some individual vice. These traditional tracts were either primarily analytic in their treatment, trying to understand a particular moral failing – usually in terms of some pre-existing scheme which categorized other virtues and vices – or they were homiletic and hortatory, that is, they were rhetorical exercises intended to motivate the reader to avoid

the vice in question. In one way or another they demonstrated a tacitly expressed disapproval of the activity (or in this case, the form of inactivity) being discussed.

Otium/negotium

The term Montaigne uses for this essay, *oisiveté*, comes etymologically from the Latin word *otium* ('leisure, unoccupied time, time in which no urgent business is pressing'). This etymological background is not itself just an 'idle' antiquarian fact, because Montaigne was a native speaker of Latin (not of French). His father had the idea of having him raised according to a novel pedagogical plan and hired a native speaker of German who knew no French, but spoke good Latin, to be the young Montaigne's tutor. He also required other members of the family and servants to speak to Montaigne only in Latin (*Essais* I.26). So Montaigne grew up steeped in Roman literature (as in fact even a cursory reading of the *Essays* shows). It is natural to think of the word *otium* as part of a pair of antonyms, its opposite being *neg* + *otium* (not + leisure). It was, in fact, common for members of the Roman upper classes who lived during the late Republic and the Empire – and who, overwhelmingly, wrote the texts which have come down to us in Latin from antiquity – to divide their lives into two spheres:

(a) The realm of *negotium*, that is, of not-being-at-leisure, of having things to do. For a proper Roman aristocrat the two main 'occupations' were war and politics/public affairs.[3]
(b) The realm of *otium*, that is the time when one was not occupied in war or public affairs, a time withdrawn from the public world when one could devote oneself to such private pursuits as conviviality (eating, drinking, and improving conversation with friends), literature, reflection, or other forms of cultivation of the self.

So an idealized upper-class Roman life was a regular sequence of periods of political and military activity (*negotium*) punctuated by times of temporary withdrawal and leisure (*otium*). Eventually, for instance in old age, one might retire permanently into a life of *otium*. If one thinks about it this way, Montaigne's own life follows something like this pattern: participation in politics, administration, diplomacy, public life, and war (*negotium*), then, at age thirty-eight, withdrawal to the privacy provided by the tower-room of his chateau with his books (*otium*). Confronted then with free time, a private life, and his own thoughts, one of the first things he does is to write about what it is he is doing, what 'leisure' means, how it can be filled, what happens when one is not subject to the press of affairs. Seneca wrote an essay, 'De otio',[4] and Montaigne writes his own version of this as 'De l'oisiveté'.

The basic image which Montaigne uses to express the contrast between the two parts of his life is that of a cultivated garden or tilled field, on the one hand (*negotium*), and that of land left fallow or a garden that is untended (*otium*), on the other. This contrast between the tilled and the fallow is actually used to make two comparisons. First of all,

life of public activity (negotium)	≈	an intensely cultivated field
life of private withdrawal, retirement, leisure (otium)	≈	a field or garden left fallow and untended

Making war, conducting diplomacy, or engaging in politics are all relatively teleologically directed activities, activities directed at an external end, just as the ploughing, sowing, weeding, and eventually reaping of a field are all deeply, clearly, and directly 'useful' in achieving something in the world outside the agent who is acting: I sow wheat in order eventually to be able to make bread; I make war in order to defeat or at any rate repel an enemy; I engage in diplomacy in order to advance my

party's interests. There are demands which the world imposes on this kind of teleologically oriented activity, and these must be satisfied if action in the sphere of *negotium* is to be successful. The fields need constant attention and focused human intervention: I won't get barley in the autumn from my patch of land if I simply leave it untilled, but neither will I get a barley crop if I sow it with rye in the spring. In principle one might try to codify these external demands, and even propose some advisable human ways of meeting them. This could eventually take the form of a system of rules: be sure to plant your seed early in spring if you wish to have a good crop in the autumn.

Genuinely private conversation with my friends over a meal, on the other hand, does not have this explicit, vivid teleological structure; it flows and rambles and it is not even necessarily trying to get to some end. Thus it stands at a certain distance from any requirements of external success. Conversation does not, in the appropriate sense, have a goal in the way planting asparagus or besieging a city does, and it isn't really very directly useful in the way agricultural or military activity is.[5] Convivial conversation is, many would say, an end in itself. The sphere of *otium* is a place in which activity is free-wheeling, unstructured, uncontrolled, spontaneous, potentially 'wild'; the things that happen there simply spring up like the changing topics discussed in a relaxed conversation between friends, like the way in which plants sprout in fallow land, or weeds shoot up in an untended garden.

That is the first comparison, between two spheres of activity or kinds of life. On the one hand, there is a life devoted to highly purposeful action subject to the necessity imposed on it by the end pursued – in, for instance, cultivating a well-tended garden. On the other hand, there is a life withdrawn from the instrumental demands of public 'usefulness' – as when a field is left fallow. The second comparison is with two kinds of human attitude or mentality or mental state, each of the two

thought to be especially, and differentially, appropriate to one of the two spheres of activity. The mind of the person devoted to some form of *negotium* is characteristically engaged in sustained, focused, well structured, teleologically directed action. But in *otium* the mind is in one sense at rest; it is released from the need to act or conform. With no need to focus and no need to follow the rules for success in the world of *negotium*, it can be free and spontaneous. Without my own intervention to subject it to rules, it can, and will, please itself; it may run riot, generating the most absurd fantasies, contradicting itself. Its activity is constantly shifting and unstable because it is no longer held firmly in place by the imposed necessity of dealing with the imperatives of the external world.

Just as there are differences between kinds and spheres of activity and between the kinds of psychic attitude appropriate to each sphere, so similarly there are different literary forms that would be particularly suitable for these different types of activity. The realm of *negotium* is one which is oriented toward (successful) action in the world outside me, so it is sensible that discussions of it are centred on clear, focused, consistent recommendations that are immediately actionable. There exist for this domain treatises, textbooks, tracts, handbooks, and guides on how to act in the particular area of action in question. In the ancient world there were lots of treatises about agriculture, architecture, divination, politics, textbooks on the law, and handbooks of military strategy which purported to provide clear, useful advice, often in the form of rules or maxims to follow. They answer questions such as 'How should I intervene and what should I avoid?'

An action is called 'useful' if it is a good means to get something else done. Pruning the plants in the garden is useful if it makes them grow. 'Useful', however, would seem to have no real meaning in the sphere of *otium*, since there I am not trying to get something done in the external world through intervention. The whole tacit array of teleological structures

that govern the world of *negotium* finds no purchase and drops away into insignificance when I am at leisure, so a handbook or manual full of rules for *otium* might seem to be inherently inappropriate. A new literary form, one might think, is needed for the world of *otium*. That is what the *Essays* are supposed to instantiate. In *otium* the mind can range freely, choosing its own path without conforming to, or having imposed on it, any external structure; the essay mirrors this.

There are a number of initial and obvious objections one could make to this general line of thought. First of all, one might have a Puritanical or quasi-moral objection to the very idea of *otium* as time not devoted to useful activity. There shouldn't be such a thing; it is somehow offensive or wrong. At any rate decent people should avoid having nothing to do. Maybe it is necessary for physiological or other reasons not to be active – to rest – but this can only be an unfortunate necessity, which we must perhaps tolerate but should in no sense indulge. Perhaps humans need a period of recuperation after exertion in order to go back refreshed to the life of activity, but we certainly should not glamorize leisure or encourage it by writing about it in a way that is not explicitly disapproving. Or one might have a quasi-cognitive objection to the idea that an essay, if it really did not follow the canons of teleological reason, could give one knowledge of anything. Without the structure provided by teleological activity, and the forms of thinking that are embedded in such activity, there might well be in principle harmless 'other' human states, but we could not say anything sensible about them, because they would be completely unstructured and inarticulable and so they might as well be nothing. Some Kantians might be tempted to say something along those lines; in discussing *otium* they might try to categorize (and discredit) it by appealing to their notion of a 'rhapsody of perceptions',[6] that is, forms of human sensing that do not have enough categorical structure even to be parts of a coherent sequence of thought.

Still, even someone who is not a Puritan or a Kantian might well wonder, if *otium* really is the sphere of the 'useless', what is the point of it, or of developing a literary genre that is particularly appropriate to it? Can something 'useless' *have* a point at all? The word 'useless' to be sure is something one would be ill advised to put much philosophical weight on, because it is so ambiguous. Sometimes 'to be of no use' means

1. To be of no value at all,

but it also sometimes means

2. To be of no specifically *instrumental* value, that is, not to lead to something else of value. The value of the knife lies in its use for something else which is of value, e.g. we use it to chop up the carrots to put in the salad.

Finally,

3. Sometimes 'to be of no use' means in fact 'to be of no value *in directly and reliably making some specific intended change in the external world*'. This seems to be what people have in mind when they say things like 'talking to people about politics is useless', meaning not that talking to people never has any effect whatever on anything, but that I cannot reliably attain my goal of converting them immediately to my position by speech alone.

When we say that *otium* is not the realm of the 'useful', but rather of the 'useless', it is the third of these senses which we have in mind. My leisure activities are not concerned with trying reliably to transform some specific feature of the external world to attain some envisaged end. A business lunch may have an agenda, and I may have a goal I am pursuing in attending it, but this is precisely what makes it potentially part of the

sphere of *negotium*, rather than a form of the free conviviality I pursue when I am at leisure. So the fact that *otium* is 'useless' (in sense 3) does not imply that it is 'useless' (in sense 1 = valueless).

Why *otium*?

If *otium* (and its associated literary genre, the essay) have value, but not the instrumental value which, for instance, medicine (and its associated genre, the medical treatise, manual, or textbook) have, then why exactly is it worthwhile? Montaigne follows the main line of the philosophic tradition in thinking that there is one particular activity which is most appropriately conducted at leisure, when I am withdrawn from engagement in the world, which is the process of coming to know myself.[7] To know myself means to become familiar with the thoughts, attitudes, habits, reactions, that arise in me spontaneously when I am *not* focused on getting something specific done in the external world. It is perhaps a slight exaggeration, but it is the exaggeration of something which is not in itself a complete falsehood to say that every competent dentist fills teeth in one or another of a few, generally accepted, ways. People in the world of *negotium* can be grouped along a single scale of better or worse in terms of attaining recognized goals, but along a single dimension which leaves little room for variety or deviation. I do not want an individualist dentist who wishes either to experiment or to express her unique personality in my mouth. The best dentists should aspire to being interchangeable, because the best dentists will (ideally) all follow the same principles of best practice. What and who the dentist really is as a unique individual emerges most clearly when she is not subject to the demands of attaining certain results in the external world.

Montaigne thinks that if he wishes to come to know himself as he really is, this will most likely take place if in his idleness

he allows his mind to wander, pick its own path, follow its own impulses and inclinations. Withdraw from the public life, put aside all the disciplines of thinking and feeling you have learned – the legal code if you are a lawyer, the basic rules of strategy and tactics if you are a soldier or a politician, the principles and maxims of agriculture if you are a farmer – let your mind go, and run wild. Stop intentionally intervening to produce certain shapes or outcomes. Stop cutting the bushes in the garden into the 'right' forms for topiary, just let things grow of themselves. You will then see what your mind produces *on its own*, rather than as a result of coercion. This is an expression of what you truly are. Much of what the mind will produce will be fleeting, shifting, and contradictory, but even that will tell you what kind of mind and spirit you really have. If I consult two or three different standard handbooks of civil engineering, the discussion of bridge-building in them should contain more or less the same content (even if slightly differently packaged): I will find a discussion of the placement of bridges, of the various materials that can be used, and of construction methods, and there will be mathematical formulae about the distribution of weight needed to maintain stability. A handbook will be highly unlikely to include a passage about why the Romans called certain priests *pontifices* (bridge-builders), speculation about when exactly the piece of wood on certain string instruments came to be called 'the bridge', how one should imagine that the ancient Greek word for bridge, *gephura* (earth-ford), was used (something that has often occupied my thoughts), or reflections on the early twentieth-century artistic movement *die Brücke*. This is not appropriate material for a handbook, because these are particular associations that would occur only to me. An essay is a form of writing that provides the space for this kind of mental wandering, self-exploration, and self-knowledge.

In a sense, then, this is a highly traditionalist project, because at the latest since the time of Socrates self-knowledge has been

one of the goals, if not the unique final goal, of philosophy, and it has been a goal that, it was assumed, could only be pursued if one was unoccupied (with work) or at leisure. Why, though, was self-knowledge thought to be especially valuable? And if ancient philosophers knew that self-knowledge was valuable, why did they not write essays?

To be more exact, traditionally most philosophers held two theses: first, that the pursuit of self-knowledge was self-evidently good in itself, and anyone who once experienced it could not fail to see this; and second, that knowing oneself was the potential locus or source of some kind of ethical insight which would make it clear to us how it was best for us to live in the world. Why should knowing myself be thought also to tell me how I should act 'ethically' in the world?

We might be tempted to think of ethics as essentially concerned with my relation to others: how am I to treat them? What may I do to them, what should I do for them, what may I not do to them? How, in general, should individual human interactions be structured? Philosophers have tried to address these issues, often by giving concrete rules for behaviour. And, of course, this idea that my relation to others is important in any number of different ways, including 'ethically', is not false, and much of what traditional philosophers have said about it is in one way or another illuminating. However, there is also a second focus for ethics, which is perhaps particularly strong in ancient ethics, namely a concern not with my relation to others, but with my relation to myself. Philosophy in general, and ethics in particular, can be seen, as Foucault was at pains to point out, as parts of a project of 'care of the self'.[8] Another, slightly more traditional way of describing the situation is that philosophy is about helping me attain happiness. If I can show that self-knowledge is a precondition, or a necessary component, of taking care of myself (or of being happy), then it would seem that I have a rather straightforward answer to the question about the value of self-knowledge. You need it in order to

care for yourself properly, and, if you value anything at all, one of the things you will have to value and take care of is yourself. If you need (or can use) self-knowledge in that context, then you have a reason to value it. The job of ancient ethics, if we look at it from our modern point of view, is then essentially to show how I can move on from focusing on the care of self and a concern for my own happiness and eventually end up cultivating a concern for others. Plato's *Republic* is essentially an attempt to show that I won't be taking care of myself in an effective way, and thus won't be happy, unless I am also acting in the right way toward others.

It further seems plausible to think that taking care of myself or attaining happiness has something to do with enabling me to get what I really want, or at least facilitating the pursuit of what I really want. One central part of the self-knowledge which philosophy is seeking, however, is precisely knowledge of what I really want. For modern liberals, this seems to be the end of the matter because the question of what anyone really wants has a trivial answer. If you want to know what I want, just ask me; if you want to know what Ms X wants, ask her. No mystery, no need for three thousand years of metaphysical speculation. Each of us – as various nineteenth-century liberal authors, most vividly J.S. Mill, have repeated to us – is the final expert on what we want, and in a liberal society that is the end of the story. Take what each individual says about his or her wants at face value. What any individual says about his or her wants is definitive; it must stand. This assumption that people are the final judges in their own case, that they are the ultimate authorities about what they want, is a firmly fixed dogma in mainstream liberalism, but also one that makes liberalism particularly anaemic, and also completely incompatible with the tradition in ethics that descends from Socrates.[9]

Socratic-style ethics assumes that people do *not* necessarily always know what they want, and certainly they don't know this explicitly in a way that would allow them to articulate

clearly and coherently a set of goals and desires. Furthermore, even if you think you know what you want, you may be mistaken. What you really want and what you (honestly) think, believe, or say you want are not necessarily the same thing at all. This opens up the basic space within which philosophy can operate, that between apparent wants (what I think I want) and real wants. The basic fact about my apparent desires – what I merely *believe* I want – and my real desires is that the former are constantly unstable and shifting (and thus, not really real), whereas the latter are fixed and unchanging. The road that leads from what I think I want to knowledge of what I really want is a long and arduous one. Think of Plato's description of the protracted and difficult journey which the soul must undertake to be able to know what it really wants[10] – something which, on Plato's view, requires knowledge of the Idea of the Good – or think of Augustine's long struggle to discover what he really wanted.[11] Or think, finally, of any course of psychoanalytic treatment.[12]

The literary genre for self-knowledge

Nevertheless, traditional philosophy did not see the need for a new literary genre which would accommodate and facilitate the pursuit of self-knowledge.[13] Philosophers have written using a number of different literary genres. In the early period, some (for instance, Parmenides) wrote didactic poems in hexameters; this was an already existing genre which had been used by poets such as Hesiod. Then Plato took over the dialogue form from the Attic theatre of his time (especially comedy). Eventually philosophers settled on the tract or treatise as the appropriate literary form for writing about what they did. One might see the literary form in each of these cases as 'appropriate' to the status of the philosophic position being formulated. Parmenides' philosophy is presented as a gift given

him by the goddess 'truth'; it is in a very familiar verse form – familiar to the Greeks – which makes it easy to remember, because really the point of philosophy is remembering a revealed truth. The early dialogues of Plato, where the dramatic form is most clearly visible and most gripping, consist of conflictual confrontations between people who have very different views and attitudes, and in most of them this basic conflict is not resolved. This is why they are sometimes called 'aporetic' dialogues, because they end with no one knowing how to proceed any further (*aporia* = absence of means to advance). As has often been pointed out, in the later dialogues the schoolmasterly voice of Plato, preaching his own doctrine through the mouth of his fictional Socrates, gradually drowns everyone else out. Purported representatives of differing views are reduced to the status of auditors, who listen to Socrates talk at great length, while occasionally murmuring: 'Oh yes, indeed, praeternatural Socrates, we most certainly agree.' The dialogue form has become mere literary fancy dress that can be put on or taken off at will.

The treatise or tract is a monologue in which the author is speaking directly, although they generally do not use the first person. Neither Hobbes nor Kant in their major works specifically writes 'I think XYZ', but one could take virtually any sequence of sentences XYZ from *Leviathan* or the *Critique of Pure Reason* and state that Hobbes or Kant 'thinks that XYZ'. It would, however, be an enormous mistake to try the same thing with any of the early dialogues by Plato. When Ion or Polos says ABC, that certainly does not necessarily mean that Plato holds that ABC. Polos and Ion are characters in a literary work, whose expressed views cannot be directly attributed to the author of the work. The text of a tract or treatise, then, characteristically exhibits a particular authorial configuration: the author is ubiquitous in the text, speaking constantly in his or her own name, at least to the extent that anything in the text can be described as the author's opinion. Yet also in another

sense the author is completely unseen, rarely or never speaking in the first person. This constellation seems so familiar to us that we take it for granted. In a way it makes sense for the author to be invisible, because the reader of, for example, a treatise about architecture by Vitruvius could be expected to be more interested in learning principles governing the construction of buildings rather than the inner life of Vitruvius. I merely point out that nothing could be further from the *Essais*, where an 'I' who is explicitly identified as the author, Montaigne, occurs on virtually every page. As he says at the beginning of 'Du repentir' (III.2), he is himself the subject of his book, and who touches one, touches the other.

My suggestion then is that ancient philosophers begin to write *treatises* about philosophy which are formally like treatises in architecture or medicine because the self-knowledge which is their subject matter is oddly *impersonal*. It is not knowledge of me, Raymond, but of 'the human being in general'. To which I am inclined to reply that I am not a 'human being in general', I am *me*. If, but only if, one adopts this oddly depersonalized view, then knowledge of oneself could come to be considered a kind of knowledge very much like the knowledge of how to set a broken bone or build a bridge. There is a serious wobble in the early dialogues of Plato. In these works the kind of self-knowledge to which philosophy aspired was still completely fluid and indeterminate, not yet fixed and well defined as the bloodless thing it came to be thought to be. Individual idiosyncrasies, personal predilections, etc., seemed still to count for something: think of Ion (in *Ion*), Alcibiades (in *Symposium*), or Polos (in *Gorgias*). It was not at all clear what *kind of thing* the philosopher was looking for, and what questions he should be asking. This is a completely different situation from one in which we assume that the questions are more or less agreed on, and all we need to do is find the right answers. There are clear questions that structure books on architecture or medicine: How do I make this temple which

we are building stand up? How do I set a broken bone? Very occasionally, a moment arrives when it suddenly becomes no longer obvious what questions – or even what sort of questions – I should be asking; such a moment arrived at the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the fourth in ancient Greece. Should we even be building a temple to this god? Or to any god? Maybe the god doesn't like temples? Should I set the broken bone of a murderer who is on a violent rampage or lock him up, or further incapacitate him, or preach to him and reform his soul, or teach him stereometry? The dialogue form was appropriate for this stage of polymorphous openness, radical variety, and unresolved conflict between worldviews, doctrines, and people, but the curtain came down on this even before Plato's own death, and by the next generation philosophy had entered the stylistic death-spiral represented by the Aristotelean tracts that have survived.

There is a further assumption which makes this closure of the space of debate and disagreement easier to understand. Suppose one could assume that, in later parlance, there was such a thing as human nature which was uniform, universal, and invariant. In the same way that fire burns in Persia just as it does in Greece, human nature does not vary: what humans really desire and want must, at the basic level, be the same everywhere. Apparent differences are merely superficial, or the result of curable ignorance or perversions. Philosophy studies this uniform human nature just as engineering studies the invariant laws of statics. Just as humans want bridges that will reliably stand up, they also want to satisfy those desires which are part of their basic human nature. So self-knowledge, the knowledge of what I really want, can be discovered and expressed in a philosophical treatise that is structurally like a medical manual or a handbook of architecture.

In principle, then, since we are all fundamentally the same, I can discover by correctly analysing human behaviour, perhaps in my own case, what people – that is, what all people, everyone

– want. Contrary to the later doctrine of liberalism, without specifically consulting you, I can then know better than you do yourself what you want. This is an essential and fundamental constituent part of the ancient philosophical project. As a philosopher I have knowledge that is relevant to you (whoever you are) because I know what you really want; that is, what would *actually* make you happy (whether you know that or not). Most ancient philosophers, then, could easily slip into the role of advisor, teacher, trainer, coach, or soul-doctor, issuing recommendations about mental and emotional well-being, happiness, and morality. The philosopher could give me individual advice about how I should care for my soul, and in some cases also political advice on how 'we' should care for the souls of others.[14]

Yet, as Hegel says, philosophy in the ancient world was a 'free art', not one with coercive power.[15] This would be true even if it was absolutely firmly established that the philosopher certainly and undeniably did know better than the non-philosopher what the non-philosopher 'really wanted'. The ancient philosopher could advise, harangue, advertise, cajole, recommend, flatter, insinuate, try to fascinate, try to provide a model that would inspire others, but that is all. To be sure, not every ancient philosopher was completely happy with allowing philosophy to remain free and non-coercive. Plato himself would have preferred to wield a whip rather than a stylus (see *Republic* or *Laws*). The overwhelming literary power and attractiveness of the Platonic dialogues can be seen as a reflection of this situation: readers needed to be *seduced* (because they could not be compelled). Of course, the situation changes drastically when Christianity comes on the scene, because the Christian God is conceived as having the power to coerce or punish, so his 'prescriptions' have a different force from those of the doctor or music teacher or coach in throwing the javelin (or philosopher). The question then changes from a philosophical one to a hermeneutic one: Which religious sect best interprets what the all-powerful deity requires of us?

There is one further tacit assumption that all ancient philosophers (as far as I am aware) make, which is that the final set of real human desires must be coherent and consistent. I may *seem* to want contradictory things, but when I discover such a contradiction this shows that my state of desire is not rational, and it is taken to follow from this that at least one of my apparent desires cannot be real. Part of the discipline of philosophy is to point out which desires cannot be real, because they are grossly incompatible with what we know about reality or they are contradictory, and to suggest systematic ways in which we can train ourselves to ignore these desires when they announce themselves. One such desire is the human desire to continue to live, which is incompatible with the evident mortality of the human frame, and much time and energy is devoted in the ancient world to trying to find systematic ways to allow humans to face the facts and discipline this desire (I.20).

This then is the model of self-knowledge and literary activity that Montaigne takes to have been handed down to him from antiquity. The philosopher can write a treatise on human nature and our real desires. When I am at leisure and not preoccupied with affairs that engage me in influencing and shaping the external world (natural or social), I can read this treatise. In so doing I am gaining self-knowledge, finding out what is most important and essential to me, and what will truly make me happy. A good philosopher will also be able to derive from this treatise knowledge of essential human desire, and perhaps also some knowledge about the way the world is constituted, a discipline which I can follow which will increase my chances of being happy, and some general rules for my behaviour. This is the pagan variant. The Middle Ages adds a Christian variant which is much the same, except that it is more dogmatic and categorical because enforced by an omnipotent God who is capable of inflicting infinite, unending punishment for violating his precepts.

The instability of desire

The tacit anthropology one finds in Montaigne is completely different from this. To start with, it does not have the clear two-tiered structure of traditional views, which distinguish, on the one hand, a core of stable, consistent, unchanging desires rooted in invariant human nature, and on the other, the phantasmagoria of superficial and insubstantial velleities. In humans you get what you see, and what we see is constant change. My desires are always shifting, mutating, moving on, contradicting each other (II.1, III.2). This is not a deep illusion covering over their natural state; it is their natural state. Some of these desires may be more deeply entrenched in us, some less; some may change quickly, some may not. This is all accident and whatever distinctions exist are merely relative. There are some regularities in human willing, but it is never clear whether these result from some 'natural' connection, or from social custom, or from personal habit and disposition. Montaigne does sometimes suggest that 'nature' could be a rough guide to human action, but he is more usually keen to emphasize that in fact people call 'natural' what is familiar to them. We use a set of overlapping categories – 'natural'/'artificial' or 'civilized'/'barbarous' – but these concepts are applied in incoherent and contradictory ways, and however one tries to unravel the knots in their usage one never comes to anything which has an acontextual, absolute application (I.31). I can use the word 'nature', and in various contexts it makes perfect sense to do that, but when I do so, I should not imagine I am describing something rock-bottom or fixed, and completely beyond the reach of habit, custom, social pressure, or art. I can say I speak English naturally as opposed to speaking French (which I speak by virtue of having been instructed), and this makes perfect sense, but it does not mean that if I had been given for adoption to a family in Mexico or China at the age of six months I would still be speaking English without having

had any formal instruction in the language. Finally, Montaigne in his sceptical mode is most scathing about our ability to tell with certainty what some purported 'law of nature' (assuming it existed) would demand of us (II.12).

This is the source of Montaigne's opposition to living one's life according to the dictates of an imposed doctrine. He was a radical anti-Kantian *avant la lettre*; as he puts it: 'Et n'est train de vie so sot et si débile que celuy qui se conduict par ordonnance et discipline' (III.13). You can't, he thinks, have fixed rules for something that is inherently as shifting and contradictory as our state of desire. His suggestion is rather that I should try out a number of ways of living and discover by direct experience which one suits me, given my inclinations. These ways of living will be partly personal and partly customary, and the customary ones will to a large extent be those of my own particular time and place. However, the best I will ever be able to come up with are a few crude rules of thumb which permit many exceptions, require non-systematizable use of my judgement to apply to individual cases, and are always potentially up for revision.

So to attain self-knowledge, Montaigne thinks, I have no alternative but to enter into the messy, disorganized domain of what traditional philosophers might call my fleeting states of merely apparent desire. I need to get to know the wishes, wants, loves, hates, preferences, needs, and emotions I actually experience, familiarize myself with my own 'subjective reactions' to situations, my habits of thinking and feeling, and the idiosyncratic connections that have been established in my psyche between different items. To know myself is to have become apperceptively familiar with this. Of course, to some extent who I am reveals itself in everything I do, even when I am correctly adding up a column of numbers (just as anyone else would add them up), or following a printed recipe to cook, or assembling a simple arch from three standard building blocks. Nevertheless, Montaigne holds that I can see myself

most easily and most clearly when I am at leisure and allowing my thoughts to wander and choose their own path, not imposing on them the anonymous discipline of the rules of arithmetic, cooking, or architectural statics. That is, I am most visibly myself when I am not forcing myself to focus on an external task, on bringing about some specific result in the world outside. Who I really am in my 'natural' state is the chaos I then find when I withdraw from all those imposed forms of order. The essay is the literary form of a mind wandering in this state (which has more of a right to be called its 'natural' state than was recognized by previous philosophers). The author of an essay is specifically not trying to advance any argument, give good practical instruction to those who are confused, or tell a single coherent story. In the interests of getting to know myself, I follow my mind where it leads when I do not try to impose any of the existing external forms of discipline on it. The structure is exploratory and associative rather than narrative, ratiocinative, pedagogical, deductive, or dogmatic, and the treatment is tentative and sceptical rather than categorical and apodictic.

Let's go back to Montaigne's contrast between the cultivated and the uncultivated plot of land. Suppose I am engaged in the *negotium* of commercial horticulture, and I turn the plot into a vegetable garden. The carefully maintained, geometrically aligned beds are a form imposed on it from the outside (probably to maximize yield) and they require constant intervention to preserve. If I stop intervening, the plot will revert to what we might call 'its natural state', in that weeds will spring up, the exact geometric lines of the beds will be blurred, and wild (unwanted) plants will take over. Just so my mind, at leisure and left to its own devices with the need to intervene in the external world removed, will revert to its natural state, one of shifting and contradictory beliefs and desires.

If, however, I have carefully grown, say, roses in a garden for twenty years, and then stop taking care of them, it is true

that the garden will become overgrown and wild, and in colloquial usage we may well say it has 'returned to nature', but this does not mean, for instance, that this plot of land will go back to the state it was in before I planted the garden. Despite the weeds and wild flowers, even untended the garden will still produce roses for years – certainly there will be more roses on this plot than on some randomly chosen bit of land. For that matter, the rose isn't even indigenous to Western Europe at all. Now the very soil in what was my rose garden is full of rose petals in various stages of decomposition. I could scrape away the top soil, but then that would be intervening, not letting things be, and how far down would I have to go to get to 'nature'?

Something similar is the case for the human soul. If someone is trained as a lawyer and practises at the bar for thirty or forty years, can one expect all their legal habits of mind, forms of conceptualization and reasoning, and patterns of association simply to fall away at a stroke and disappear upon their retirement, so that what is left will suddenly be the pristine stream of consciousness of a fully natural human being, presumably no different in essence from that of a retired circus performer, computer operator, fundamentalist preacher, or *parfumier*? This seems highly unlikely.

This still leaves unanswered the question of why I should want to know myself. Traditional philosophy at least has an answer to this, even if it is one that will not stand up to much scrutiny: only by knowing yourself will you know what you really want. Because of the fixity of human nature, this knowledge can be codified into a systematic doctrine giving you rules not only for how to be happy, but also for how you should treat others. If, however, as Montaigne discovers, human desires are constantly flickering and shifting and there is no way reliably to get to anything more stable, this strategy seems flawed. So what does Montaigne envisage as an alternative? What is supposed to happen when I allow my thoughts to range

unsupervised, and they shoot up of themselves like the weeds in an untended garden?

In 'De l'oisiveté' Montaigne suggests that the process of coming to self-knowledge via reflection at leisure might have a therapeutic effect, even though it does not result in the soul finding its own inner stability. He hopes that allowing his random and unstructured thoughts to emerge freely might 'make them ashamed of themselves'. The suggestion is clearly that by making them ashamed of themselves, I can rid myself of them. How exactly is this supposed to work? The text gives no answer. Presumably Montaigne thinks that everyday experience shows that if I find myself doing something I am ashamed of, I stop doing it. That may or may not be right for everyday life, but will the same mechanism operate when I am at leisure, withdrawn from external affairs, and not subject to the consequences of the public gaze? Certainly Montaigne's own experience would not seem to confirm this, if only because there seems to have been no diminution in the welling up of useless and random thoughts in Montaigne's soul, although he wrote them down (and published the results) until the very end of his life. Or do we all have an inexhaustible, ever renewed supply of nonsense, so that getting rid of even huge swathes of it merely makes room for more to appear?

No prescriptions

The *Essais* contain no advocacy of specific ethical principles, much less of any ethical demands. Montaigne's invention, in addition to a new literary genre, is a new way of thinking about oneself and one's relation to others. Its model for self-knowledge is not the knowledge of the principles of ballistics, military strategy, or biochemistry which one could acquire from reading a textbook on one of these subjects. This is what philosophers of a previous generation would have called 'propositional

knowledge' and was the kind of thing they aspired to provide in their treatises on ethics. Nor was Montaigne's the kind of praxis-centred, but perhaps merely tacit, know-how that a craftsman has. Socrates despised the know-how of the potter precisely because it was possible for a person to acquire it and still not be able to give an exact verbal account of the procedures followed in making a pot, and the reasons for them.[16] So it seems that the self-knowledge Montaigne seeks is a version of the third form of knowledge which philosophers have distinguished: not know-how (skill) or knowing-that (propositional knowledge), but knowing in the sense of direct acquaintance. I 'know myself' in the sense in which I 'know Paris' but 'don't know Sofia' – that is, I have been to Paris frequently and am acquainted with the city, but have never been in Sofia.

This is not completely false, but it does not, it seems to me, tell the most interesting part of the story. When, in the very final essay of the collection ('De l'experience', III.13), Montaigne comes to describe what he seems to have been trying to do during his retirement, he writes that he is his own subject of study ('Je m'estudie plus qu'autre sujet. C'est ma metaphysique, c'est ma physique', III.13). Just as Socrates, according to Plato, abandoned his youthful interest in nature and its order and passed in his maturity to the study of ethics, so Montaigne thinks that one could in principle follow one's curiosity (if it took that direction) and study the natural world, but that this would have no effect on the way one led one's life, so one should simply conform in one's outward behaviour to the general course of things ('la loy generale do monde'). As far as he himself is concerned, he would rather know himself than know Cicero ('J'aymerois mieux m'entendre bien en moy qu'en Cicero'). The word he uses for 'self-knowledge' (*s'entendre*) does (with *en*) mean something like know one's way around or be well versed in, which would suggest acquaintance, but also skill. However, the basic meaning of *s'entendre* is that two people 'listen to and hear' each other. Then by extension they come to an agreement;

they come to be, as it were, 'in tune'. This I think would fit in well with the great emphasis which Montaigne puts on conversation and friendship. I listen to my friends and they to me. That is how we get to know each other, and I thereby become well versed in and comfortable with what they think and feel and how they will act. I overlook and accept some minor disagreements and irritation, because I feel myself to be in agreement with the people who are my friends. This does not mean that I endorse every particular life decision they have made or even that I approve of all their opinions or the ways in which they act, but unless there is some kind of minimal affirmation of them, and some kind of acceptance even of traits they may have which I would not really wish to endorse, there is no friendship.

I want to suggest that the 'knowledge' in Montaigne's 'self-knowledge' is something like what is instantiated in such a conversation-based friendship. When I am looking for self-knowledge I am trying through free reflection – part of which may take place precisely through the writing of an essay, which is the analogue of conversation – to listen to myself and become well versed in my thoughts, feelings, and ways, and eventually to become a friend to myself.

We don't read Montaigne to discover 'his theory of the universal human nature which we all share', nor to hear his prescriptions for how we should live. He is not prescribing becoming a friend to oneself or to anyone else as a goal. Nor is he even setting himself as a model to be emulated. He is merely describing his own case (III.2). To be sure, he is also, as it were, making an offer – offering to expand our domain of experience, giving the reader the chance to relate to him as he himself related to Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch, and to engage with him as a companion in imaginary conversation. Attentive reading is an imaginary conversation; as such, while it is a pale literary shadow of real conversation with a living friend, it may nevertheless come to be important in the process of coming to know oneself and becoming a friend to oneself.

The essay is the form appropriate for this process and also the locus of a new relation between the subject and the activity of writing. Think of the way in which a modern scientist will speak about research and publication: 'I did the experiment (the study) and, when I had digested it, I wrote the results up for publication.' There seem to be three things being distinguished here:

(a) there is a 'me' who is presiding over experiments and eventually publication
(b) there is the process of investigating [if all goes well, I become an expert in the subject matter under investigation]
(c) there is the process of turning the results of the investigation into a literary form that makes them publishable.

To this one could add a fourth dimension:

(d) *other* interested parties may read what 'I' have written and use/apply it in various ways.

This model has analogues in the ancient world in the two opposing schools of Plato and the rhetoricians. For Plato:

(a′) the philosopher
(b′) investigates and finds the truth (say about geometry) and thereby becomes an expert
(c′) as such an expert, the philosopher may then write the truth down (or not, given that Plato is ambiguous about the usefulness of writing)[17]
(d′) finally others apply it (therapy).

For the rhetorician:

(a″ & b″) I have practised and am a master of speaking beautifully and convincingly

(c″) then I can write a treatise on speaking well
(d″) so that others can profit from my knowledge.

In all these cases the authors in question have mastered their brief, they are already experts in their subject matter, and they know their way around the subject *before* they write. The writing is merely the expression of the discovered truth.

Montaigne, however, never tires of repeating that he is not a master of any substantive body of knowledge nor of the art of speaking and writing well – his works are not polished, elaborated, and formally perfect. His essays are always *in statu nascendi*, never complete. Montaigne fiddled with the text of his essays until the end of his life, adding further material and slightly changing the emphasis of the presentation. He becomes an expert in his subject matter (himself) by investigating, and the investigation takes the form of writing the essays. In his case, finding out who he is is not a process that is concluded prior to writing the results down; rather the two are interwoven, which means, of course, that the first three items distinguished above are inherently interwoven. Similarly, any expected therapeutic effect is not a distinct further consequence of the writing but part of the process of writing itself. All there is really is this process, which, of course, one can analyse *post factum* if one wishes, but which actually is continuous.

This is one of the ways in which Montaigne's essays are different from the previous historical text that was structurally most like it, Augustine's *Confessions*. Augustine has a fixed self, a soul which God made. He may not see and know it clearly at any time during this life (because his eyes are obscured as a result of original sin), but he is convinced that it is there, waiting to be uncovered, gradually and partially (if all goes well in reflective prayer and if God wills it), and that it is destined to be revealed completely after death. There is nothing parallel to this in Montaigne.

At home or not at home?

Montaigne was active in the politics and diplomacy of his time, but, impressive and aesthetically engaging as the *Essais* are, isn't the attitude which he describes in this work inappropriately quietistic? Think of Dewey's discussion of the relation between what he called the 'arts of acceptance' and the 'arts of control'.[18] When confronted with a difficulty in the world, Dewey argued, I can adopt one of two attitudes. To say I encounter a 'difficulty' means that the way the world is (at the moment) is incompatible with my wishes. I can respond to this in one of two ways. First of all, I can try to accept the external situation and modify my wishes, so as to escape frustration. An archetypical example would be the fact that I will inevitably die, although I may wish to live on. Ancient philosophers devoted a lot of argumentative energy and attention trying to convince people that *because* death was inevitable it should not be feared, and that we should rather restructure our desires so as to be able to accept this fact. Since, the philosophers then argued, much if not most of what we encounter in life is beyond our control anyway, we should cultivate a general attitude of acceptance of what we cannot change. This was the way of (ancient) wisdom. On the other hand, not every difficulty is one which depends on factors completely beyond our control. If it is very cold in the cave and I have matches and kindling, I can build a fire, rather than simply accept the cold. If the river is so fast-flowing as to be too dangerous to cross, and we have materials at hand and some skills, we can bridge it. We have developed a whole apparatus of control over nature, which means that we don't need to change – that is, abandon or suppress – our desires, as many of the ancients did; instead we can change the world so that it realizes them.[19] Technologies are arts of control, not of acceptance. Dewey's view was that philosophy has been kept inappropriately in thrall to an archaic conception of itself as basically an art of acceptance. In pre-industrial times, it was,

perhaps, perfectly understandable that people needed to cultivate endurance and acceptance of their fate, because they could do so little about anything. Maybe death is still inevitable, but not everything else is. In the modern age, massive, preemptive acceptance is no longer necessary, and the cultivation of acceptance is, Dewey thinks, a politically reactionary project in which philosophy continues to be complicit.

Human society changes and, as it does so, our philosophical attitudes should, too. The cultivation of the art of acceptance isn't just inappropriate in a society in which something could actually be done about many of the difficulties we encounter; it is also something that we, as children of a technological world, cannot even honestly endorse any more. As Brecht puts it:[20]

Ich wäre gerne auch weise.

In alten Büchern steht, was wiese ist:
Sich aus dem Streit der Welt zu halten und die kurze Zeit
Ohne Furcht verbringen.
Aber ohne Gewalt auskommen,
Böses mit Gutem vergelten
Seine Wünsche nicht erfüllen, sondern vergessen,
Gilt für weise.
Alles das kann ich nicht. . . ..

[I'd also like to be wise.

In old books one can read about how
To be wise:
Hold yourself aloof from the struggles of the world
And pass the short time of your life without fear.
Get along without violence
And give back good for evil,
Don't satisfy your wishes, but forget them:
That's what it is to be wise.
I can't do any of that . . .]

It isn't just personally impossible for the lyrical 'I' of Brecht's poem to learn to accept how things are; the advent of the technological world has radically changed the terms of discussion in another way, too. In the Middle Ages a famine or a drought in Northern Spain was a catastrophe for those living there, and if the merchants in Flanders heard about it at all – at the earliest with a significant delay, given the slow speed at which news travelled – it would be a terrible thing that happened far away, but something which they could not remedy, even if they had wanted to. Even if sufficient surplus food was available in Flanders, a non-trivial assumption, there were simply no means for transporting it in sufficient quantities from Flanders to Spain in time to make any difference. The situation is different in a technologically advanced society like ours in which it would in principle be possible to help. What an action is, after all, depends on the context, and now the absence of food in a region subject to famine has become the result of a failure to act.[21] 'Accepting' becomes a much more complicated and high-risk strategy because we could in principle control so much, if we put our minds to it.

Christianity for a long time described every human individual as a *viator* and a *peregrinus*, a traveller and a foreigner on earth whose real home could only be in heaven; Adorno takes over this idea when he says that it is part of morality *not* to feel at home in the world as it now is, and that presumably also means that we stand under a moral demand not to be too comfortable a friend to ourselves.[22] Do we think there is nothing even in the least morally objectionable about someone being comfortable in a reprehensible society? Would we wish to be a friend to such a person? What if I was myself such a person?

Montaigne, of course, does not accept anything like this Christian view and does not believe in all the elements of the wisdom which Brecht describes in his poem;[23] but, if one looks at it from a sufficient distance, he does still subscribe to (a version of) the 'old view' about the need for acceptance: 'Je me

laisse . . . manier à la loy generale du monde . . . Ma science ne luy sçaurait faire changer de route; elle ne se diversera pas pour moi' (III.13).

But what if we could change the 'general law of the world'? We could at any rate, it seems, have more success doing that now than Montaigne could imagine in the sixteenth century. What if we could learn to control society as we can control nature? In fact, one might argue that our consumerist society is based on a peculiar combination of Montaigne and Dewey. We too, like Montaigne, think that no life is more foolish than one conducted by ordonnance and discipline (III.13), and we interpret this as permitting an almost complete unfettering of individual desire; but, like Dewey, we also actively cultivate the development of technical means to control nature and subject it as much as possible to our will.

From the perspective of the early twenty-first century, the ideas of Dewey in the 1920s about radically subordinating acceptance to control seem to have lost their lustre and obvious attractiveness. The undisciplined proliferation of human desires does not seem to have made us very happy. Furthermore, the ecological costs of Dewey's focus on ever greater technological mastery of the world have been enormous. For us to continue on this tack is now clearly suicidal. Some kind of intervention in what has become 'the general law of the world' seems necessary, as does some kind of disciplining of our mode of living. What we need, in short, is the exact reverse of the current situation. We need to find a way of driving a stake through the heart of the current techno-economic system which is despoliating our world, putting an end to it and preventing it from ever again arising, and we need then to learn to accept the massive reduction in our consumption which that will entail. That means limiting our desires.

If this looks like a series of prescriptions then that is because it is, but they are my prescriptions, not Montaigne's. An emergency situation such as the environmental catastrophe which

we face is the ultimate *negotium* and it understandably tends to give the imperatives of action urgency. However, if we wish to remain human, we need something more than that.

The essay does not propose solutions to problems; it gives no directives, not even (really) any recommendations. That is not its point: it is definitely not one of the arts of control. The essay, as I have said, is a vehicle for exploring the shifting and plural ways of seeing the same thing, which are characteristic of any human individual who has not been robotized. It is a medium for self-knowledge. It is hard for us even to imagine a human life completely without the reflective desire for self-knowledge. Montaigne invented the essay as an art of acceptance in two dimensions: first, and primarily, acceptance of oneself as a potential friend, but also, secondarily, acceptance of the 'general law of the world'. Can one extract the essay as a form from its original context, cultivating the first of these goals, while rejecting the second? Why should that be impossible?

2

Rabelais and the Low Road to Modernity

In 1532, or conceivably 1531, a rather old-fashioned looking volume appeared at the booksellers in Lyons with the Title *Pantagruel. Les horribles et espouventables faictz et prouesses du tresrenomé Pantagruel Roy des Dipsodes, filz du grant géant Gargantua* (*Pantagruel. The horrifying and dreadful deeds and prowesses of the most famous Pantagruel, King of the Dipsodes, son of the great giant Gargantua*). It recounts the fantastic adventures of a young giant named Pantagruel and his young friend Panurge in war and peace; the author is given as 'Maître Alcofrybas Nasier', an anagram of 'François Rabelais'. In 1534, or possibly 1535, a kind of prequel to the story of Pantagruel appeared in the form of a narrative of the adventures of his father Gargantua: *La vie inestimable du grand Gargantua, père de Pantagruel* (*The inestimable life of the great Gargantua, father of Pantagruel*). 1546 saw the publication of a third volume, *Le tiers livre des faicts et dicts heroique du bon Pantagruel* (*The third book of the heroic deeds and sayings of the good Pantagruel*), where the author is openly named as 'François Rabelais, Doctor of Medicine'. *Le quart livre des faicts et dicts heroiques du bon Pantagruel* (*The fourth book of the heroic deeds and sayings of the good*

Pantagruel) was published in 1552, the year of Rabelais' death.

What is a contemporary English-speaking reader to make of a series of four books written in an incessantly punning, not yet standardized, sixteenth-century French with lashings of Latin, Greek, Basque, Italian, Gascon, German, Limousin, and several other real – and some imaginary – languages by an absconded monk turned physician, which satirizes archaic social customs, monastic and legal institutions, forms of education and dress, eating habits, and obscure philosophical doctrines and literary genres? Since virtually no one can read these texts unprepared, not even modern Francophones, we are all in one way or another dependent on translations and an appended explanatory apparatus.

Translation-dependence is, of course, a common characteristic of everyone's access to most of world literature. No single individual can be expected to read *The Tale of Genji*, *The Bhagavad Gita*, *The Oresteia*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *Salammbô*, *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, and *Gilgamesh*, to take a few random examples, *all* in the original. There is, however, a striking difference between reading a translation of *Genji* and reading a translation of Rabelais. It is not just that we need a translation of Rabelais' text, but that the text itself depicts a world in which an irreducible variety of languages and dialects – real or imaginary; rustic or polished; fully understood, half-understood, misinterpreted, not understood at all, or inherently incomprehensible – are constantly rubbing up against each other. It is not insignificant that one of the two very first people Pantagruel encounters (in Chapter 9 of *Pantagruel*) when he arrives in Paris is Panurge, who greets him in thirteen different languages, some of which Pantagruel not only does not understand, but cannot even securely identify (unsurprisingly given that some of them are imaginary languages), but who then turns out to be a native of Touraine. So even if someone addresses you in Dutch, Spanish, or Danish,

or all of them successively, you cannot exclude the possibility that he is actually a *landsmann* from the very same region of France. Pantagruel's other early encounter (in Chapter 6 of *Pantagruel*) is with a student who originally speaks to him in a bizarre and barely comprehensible, because hyper-latinate, 'French', but eventually lapses into the almost equally obscure patois of his native Limousin. Even if one encounters a 'known' language one can't be sure it will be spoken in anything like its 'standard' or 'pure' form. In fact the idea of a 'standard French' didn't exist in the sixteenth century, and this episode might be thought to throw some doubt on the well-foundedness of the whole idea of a 'pure' idiom, except to the extent to which this is an artificial sociological construct which is externally imposed on people. 'French' in some sense derives from Latin, but adding ever more Latin does not result in a 'purer' French, rather it produces something neither fish nor fowl and easily comprehended by no one.

Language itself is a central concern of *Pantagruel* and the successor volumes. It is an important fact about our world that *different* languages exist, and that interpreting them is an unavoidable, ceaseless, and difficult task. That our need for translations is universal and that any translation is uncertain and potentially fallacious may seem rather trivial claims, but much of Western literature presents action in a world that is resolutely monoglottal. In the *Aeneid* how are Dido and Aeneas represented as conversing? Surely Dido would speak Punic to her sister, in Book IV, lines 416ff, just as, presumably, Aeneas tells his story in Books II and III in (some dialect of Mycenaean?) Greek, yet Dido's speech to Anna and her *monologue intérieur* at Book IV, lines 534ff are given in the same flawless Latin as Aeneas' tale. For Virgil, speculations about how Dido and Aeneas spoke to each other are as pointless as asking how many children Lady Macbeth had or whether Mrs Dalloway could speak Italian. For the purposes of the *Aeneid* the realities of variation between languages *do not matter*.

Virgil's Latin is to stand as the fully transparent medium for presenting what Dido and Aeneas are conceived to have 'really said and thought'.

Issues of translation and 'interpretation' were especially pressing in a society like that of sixteenth-century France, which was deeply informed by a 'religion of a book'. For a long time, the text of The Book had been effectively beyond question: It was the so-called 'Vulgate', a standardized edition of the Old and New Testaments in Latin produced in the fourth century AD. By Rabelais' time, 'Vulgate' had become a misnomer because although Latin could have been construed, at least notionally, as the 'common tongue' of everyday speech (*sermo uulgatus*) in the West when this translation was originally made, by the sixteenth century this was no longer true. Yet the *ipsissima verba* (the very words themselves) of this text had acquired a veneer of sanctity through long use, and the Catholic Church clung to it tenaciously. In the sixteenth century the standing of the Vulgate came under pressure from two sides. If, it was argued, the Vulgate had come into existence as Scripture in the then common everyday language of the times, why not do the same for the sixteenth century, when Latin had ceased to be the language of everyday speech, and translate Scripture into the various vernaculars? If so, who had the authority and power to say whether or not the translation was 'correct'? Given the role of appeals to the Scriptures in all domains of life, the power to certify a translation or a set of interpretative notes, or (in some cases) to punish those who produced unauthorized or deviant versions, was power indeed, and so, understandably enough, the Catholic Church wished to reserve it for itself. The Church hierarchy was hostile to any project of translating Scripture into a vernacular. That was one side of the story: the issue of turning the Christian Scriptures *into* the vernaculars (or not). The other side of the story was that the Vulgate was itself a translation of an original, so why use *it* as a basis for a rendering of the Scriptures into

the vernaculars (if one decided to do this)? Why not go back to the Greek originals? What then if it turned out that the Vulgate was mistaken in its rendering of the Greek? Or that the Vulgate reading was only one of a number of different possible translations? Suppose that the Greek text itself turned out not to be self-evidently inviolate and uncorrupted, but to exist in different versions which exhibited variations, so that an editorial decision needed to be made about which of these variants to accept? Given the extent to which certain important doctrinal and organizational issues might be seen to depend on accepting the reading of the Vulgate as the definitive one, one can easily see how even studying Greek – an activity to which Rabelais devoted much time and energy – could come to be seen as a potentially subversive act.

In this highly charged atmosphere where power and authority, religion, politics, and issues of translation and interpretation were deeply intertwined, one can see how the pressure to take a position on hermeneutics and to join one party or another became intense. The 'wrong' decision could cause you to end up knifed in the gutter or shackled to the stake awaiting combustion, and there was no safe recognized 'neutral' position one could adopt *hors de la mélée*. Even to suggest that such a position was *possible* was itself to make a highly inflammatory contribution to the struggle, because it could be taken to mean that ideological squabbles either did not matter or could not be settled. Those who were perfectly prepared to exterminate their doctrinal opponents physically would not take kindly to the suggestion that their differences did not matter or were not decidable. Under the circumstances, it is small wonder that language and its proper interpretation loomed so large for Rabelais.

The plurality of human languages, the potential opacity of specifically verbal behaviour, and the need for, but uncertainty of, translation and interpretation are merely further instances of a more general phenomenon which is connected with all

forms of signification. Verbal signs – language – are not the only forms of meaningfulness, nor the only kind of signs that require 'interpretation', and Rabelais explicitly recognizes this. After all, the long Chapter 13 of *Pantagruel* is devoted to the description of a debate which is conducted silently, entirely through gestures, and another chapter of *Gargantua* treats the 'language' of colours. Finally, in the *Tiers livre* even the lolling of a fool's head can be taken as a sign that is to be interpreted as a clue to how one should act and what the future will hold. The realm of that which requires interpretation is much wider than 'language' (in the sense in which we call 'Danish' one language and 'Greek' another). There is a continuity between trying to make sense of what the speaker of Dutch is saying, knowing what the use of a certain colour means, and 'reading' the world of signs around us so as to know how to act in it.

That the difficulty here is an omnipresent one becomes especially clear in the *Tiers livre*, where Panurge is trying to get practical advice about whether or not he should marry. This book illustrates the unfeasibility of getting a useful, authoritative answer to questions like this from any external sources *because of* the impossibility of interpreting any of the proposed answers in a way that is unequivocal. Pantagruel and his friends exhaust all the means at their disposal – sortition, consultation with oracles, interpretation of dreams, advice from purported experts (lawyers, theologians, medical doctors, philosophers) – but to no effect. Panurge is left at the end of the book as confused as he was at the beginning. It is not, that is, that any of the oracles they consult simply fails to respond – as happened at the end of the ancient world when the oracles simply stopped operating; nor is it that anyone raises any particular questions about the authority of the method used, as would increasingly be the case in the period after Descartes; it is simply that no one can decide what the response has actually been, that is, what exactly it means.

The answers to the question about his marriage which Panurge gets fall into three broad categories. First, there are 'responses' that are radical non-answers. We are presented with experts who respond with completely irrelevant remarks, deaf-mutes who produce physical gestures which seem to be responses, but the point and meaning of which is anyone's guess, and philosophers who talk around the question in an even more than usually pointless way without coming to any determinate conclusion at all. Second, there are forms of divination that may seem *prima facie* to give a clear answer, but turn out on investigation to be deeply ambiguous and admit of widely divergent and even contradictory readings. The '*sortes Vergilianae*' operated by opening a copy of Virgil and picking a verse at random. Any given verse by Virgil chosen as a source of advice can be read, however, as it turns out, one way, or another way, often in completely contradictory ways, as Chapter 10 of the *Tiers livre* shows with particular clarity.

The third kind of advice to Panurge is given (twice) by Pantagruel, first when in Chapter 10 of the *Tiers livre* he asks rhetorically whether Panurge does not know his own will, with the implication that knowing his own will would give him the solution to his difficulty. Panurge's problem, however, is not lack of self-knowledge (in anything like the everyday sense of that term). When Pantagruel asks him whether he doesn't know what he wants, the answer to that is that he knows very well what he wants: to get married *while knowing for certain that he won't be cuckolded*. This is on the face of it an odd question in the context of a 'serious' concern with the grounds and authority of 'knowledge', although it is one of the standard themes of some early-modern comedy (in Molière, for instance). Rabelais characteristically blends the comic and the serious. At the level of the 'serious', Panurge knows perfectly well that there is something wrong with this volitional state – the certainty he wants is not available. If he did not know this he would not be tormented. So the real problem is generated

not by Panurge's desire to marry, but by his pathological fear of being cuckolded. In Chapter 29 of the *Tiers livre* Pantagruel states that he stands by the advice he has already given to Panurge, which he now formulates as 'every man must be the arbiter of his own thoughts and seek counsel in himself', and attributes Panurge's problem to his *amour de soi*. His desire to have a wife while retaining a certain conception of himself (as a non-cuckold) clouds his judgement, and blinds him so much that it skews his reading of what the authorities and oracles tell him. So the question shifts from 'Should Panurge marry?' to 'Can Panurge get a grip on himself and *change* his state of will, realizing he cannot have certainty about the future and relaxing about it?'

We are left at the end of the *Tiers livre* in a peculiar situation which will be very uncomfortable for a certain kind of mind. It is hard to read the *Tiers livre* through without forming the opinion that in fact *all* the sources of advice consulted, to the extent to which they give any advice at all, say the same thing: namely that Panurge is fated to be cuckolded. Rabelais goes out of his way to show how Panurge can, and does, take the relevant passages in exactly the opposite way, as recommendations to marry and predictions that his wife will be faithful, loving, and hard-working. Yet it is not at all clear that there is, or could be, a systematic way of proving that Panurge's reading is wrong.

The search for clear, distinct, authoritative answers to questions about how we humans should act is unending. The need for action often imposes on us a binary structure (you either move out of the path of the oncoming lorry or you don't), although human thought is not always organized in this binary way. Given the overwhelming and primary importance of action for humans, though, binary distinctions are salient in all societies. *Divisio* is a fundamental phenomenon. All known human societies make *some* kind of distinction between what may and what may not be said, shown, or done in what

context. We call some of these distinctions those between 'the forbidden' and 'the permitted', 'the sacred' and 'the profane', 'the taboo' and 'the utilitarian', 'the decent' and 'the indecent', 'the polite' and 'the rude', and this crude list does not in any way exhaust human inventiveness. Individual human societies differ from each other in the nature, importance, and function of *divisio* along a number of dimensions.

Since speaking, writing, and publishing are all actions, some categories of the permitted and the forbidden can naturally apply to literature, too. A poem, play, or novel can be judged decent or indecent; in some countries blasphemy is a crime, i.e. subject to potential coercive intervention. In Rabelais' own lifetime the Sorbonne had his books banned; and when, after his death, the Vatican started printing a formal *Index librorum prohibitorum* in 1559, all of his works found a place on it, although we do not know whether this was because they were thought specifically to promote licentiousness, because of some perceived doctrinal deviation, or simply because they exuded an air of unspecified, but general, indecency.

From the idea that there are standards for what may and what may not be published it is but a short step to the idea that there are proper internal standards of appropriateness for particular literary genres. This idea is especially strong in the aesthetic theorizing that was dominant in antiquity, and became exceedingly influential again when resurrected by 'humanist' writers of the Renaissance. Rabelais was in many ways a full-blown and enthusiastic member of the humanist movement. At considerable personal cost, he had himself acquired a firm knowledge of ancient Greek and did extensive reading in 'classical' Greco-Roman literature, and he was an avowed admirer of the prince of humanists, Erasmus, whom he addresses in an elegantly turned Latin letter, shot through with phrases in Greek, as *pater mi humanissime* ('my most humane father', perhaps with the further connotation: 'my father, you who are the greatest of the humanists').

'Renaissance humanism' was as complex and internally differentiated a phenomenon as any of the major intellectual and cultural movements in the West. As the name indicates, one of the central ideas was the (re-)orientation and re-focusing of cultural and spiritual life on 'man'. The humanists found, primarily in Cicero, what they took to be the irresistibly attractive ideal of the *homo humanus*. One can think of this ideal as constituted by three positive elements, which are designated by the three Greek words *to metron*, *paideia*, and *philanthropia*. *To metron*, 'the measure(d)', indicates that humans should in the first place live by an ethic of moderation, rejecting excess of any kind and not aspiring to the impossible. Thus Pindar writes: 'Do not, my soul, strive for eternal life, but exhaust the means at your disposal', and the odes of Horace are a nearly inexhaustible source of admonitions to *aurea mediocritas* ('the golden mean'). Moderation applies also to cognitive claims. People should limit what they claim to 'know' to what they – and any human – can clearly and certainly see and understand. Thus, torturing people is clearly a direct visible evil and one should not embark on it on the basis of opaque, uncertain, or highly controversial religious doctrines. Aesthetically, this implies a preference for what is surveyable by the human senses and well-proportioned, which means commensurate with those human forms of sensation and perception.

Paideia, the second of the three elements, means both 'education' in the sense of the process of formation and the state of being a 'cultivated' person. The cultivation in question is the art of speaking decorously and well, which is taken to mean clearly and in a way appropriate to the situation. The concept of 'clarity' then got connected with notions of purity of diction, avoidance of solecisms, of the dysphonic, the unprecedented or unusual, but also of the demotic, and with a return *ad fontes* ('back to the sources') to the especially 'pure' Latin of Cicero. Gargantua's letter to his son in Chapter 8 of *Pantagruel* formulates some of the goals of the new humanistic education, and

Eudemon's speech in Chapter 14 of *Gargantua* is a concrete instance of results that could be expected. Finally, *philanthropia* refers to a general attitude of benevolence toward all humans, with perhaps a special emphasis on understanding the limitations of human life and compassionate tolerance of human weakness, foibles, even minor deviancy.

As important as these positive ideals are, the features of their world from which the humanists recoiled in horror are at least as important in understanding them. They summed up these negative ideals by calling them 'barbarous', 'Gothic', or (eventually) 'medieval'. The Gothic world was one of obscurantism, immoderate, overheated fantasies, and superstitions, in which people spoke a language full of plebeian usages, grammatical solecisms, and unheard-of neologisms, and indulged in pointless scholastic logic-chopping. Gothic art was in general disproportioned and misshapen, and in it natural forms were grotesquely distorted.

A moment's reflection will suffice to see that there was a basic tension inherent in 'humanism', at any rate as it presented itself to Christians in the early modern period. Protagoras, who first said that man is the measure of all things, is also on record as saying that we can know nothing certain about the gods. This was not a position it was fully comfortable for any sixteenth-century Christian to take without reservation. Rabelais makes fun of many contemporary Christian institutions, including the Papacy, monasticism, the mass, indulgences, fasting, even the Scriptures (through parody), but of course this does not mean that he failed to understand himself as a Christian. Rabelais too, then, could be expected to feel some of the discomfort here, because surely Christianity requires a view that is not anthropocentric, but theocentric. Belief in transcendent 'truths' that are not clearly expressible in human language, and the striving to lead an immortal life, which is so firmly rejected by Pindar, are a constituent part of it. That the Christian Scriptures can lay no claim to literary elegance and are written

not in high-status 'pure' Attic but in a semi-literate *koiné* was a problem for educated Christians from the start, but it becomes a special problem for humanists in the Renaissance.

The Renaissance humanists had their own clear version of *divisio* and this applied also to literary genres. Serious genres, like epic or tragedy, require an appropriately serious form of treatment. They treat 'high matters' (peace and war, the deaths of princes, grand politics) through the actions and speech of 'high' personages (kings and heroes) who address each other in an appropriately polished, formalized, decorous form of speech. The ancient theorists recognized the existence of genres, such as comedy, that treat of the everyday doings of common folk, and here they permit non-polished and non-decorous forms of speech and action. Thus, Athenian comedy treated the concerns not of mythic heroes (Heracles, Agamemnon) but of ordinary Attic citizens, even peasants, and tolerated a looseness in meter, a colloquialism in speech, and an avowed proletarianism in attitude and behaviour that would have been considered impossible in a genre of greater standing and prestige such as, for instance, tragedy. And, of course, comedy did not just tolerate but gloried in the absurd, the inconsequential, the ridiculous in matters of plot and in forms of speech that were intended to cause the audience to laugh – that is exactly the sort of thing which constitutes the very substance of Rabelais' books. A lack of dignity and standing compared to epic and tragedy was the price comedy paid for its relaxation of strict standards of decorum. *Divisio* of an extreme form was assumed to exist between tragedy and comedy: in the ancient world there was no known instance of a poet who had written both comedies and tragedies. So Athenians were used to seeing the god Dionysus in one play (Aristophanes' *Ranae*) as a buffoon who beshits himself in fear on stage, asks for a sponge to clean himself up, and appeals to his own priest (seated on a special throne which is still visible today) for protection against one of the other characters,

and then seeing him in another play (for instance, Euripides' *Bacchae*) as a terrible and vengeful deity inflicting excruciating punishment on those who fail to worship him. These were, however, not just different plays, but plays in different genres. Their *divisio* took, then, a rather different form from that practised at the Court of Louis XIV or in a late eighteenth-century salon.

There are some signal difficulties with the received view about the respective 'seriousness' of tragedy and comedy. 'Serious' is used in two different ways. First it can refer to a sober, deadpan mode of presentation. It can, however, also be used to refer to that which can, or even must, be taken account of, as opposed to that which can be safely ignored. Jokes, slapstick, badinage are virtually by definition not 'serious' in the first of these senses, but it does not follow that they cannot be 'serious' in the second sense. Aristophanes' treatment of the sophistic movement in *Nubes* is exceedingly droll, but it does not follow from that that it has no bearing on actual educational policy, or that it could safely be ignored. If Aristophanes can be construed as having made some 'points' in his comedy that really need to be addressed, the fact that they are presented as, or in the form of, 'jokes' should not disqualify them from consideration. Plato has Socrates say that the play created a prejudice against him which it was hard to overcome, and this, one might think, is another aspect of comedy that should not be brushed off as 'just a joke'. The authors of the *Index* also seem not to have taken all 'comic' works as nugatory and negligible.

In various places, in particular in the Prologue to *Gargantua*, Rabelais specifically discusses how seriously his works should be taken. Like everything else in the human world his book does not, as it were, itself stand in the light of its own transparent intelligibility, but requires an 'interpretation'. He uses an image taken from Alcibiades' account of Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*. Alcibiades compares Socrates to one of the figures

of Silenus which, he says, one can buy in the Athenian market place. These figures were like Russian dolls with a smaller doll inside: the outside was rough and crude, painted 'with frivolous, merry figures', but when one opened it, inside there was an attractive image of the god. Similarly Socrates was (notoriously) physically ugly, gauche, apparently foolish and ridiculous, but, as we would say, his mind or soul or spirit was beautiful, adroit, deeply serious and sublime. This too is a kind of *divisio*: an 'outside' in strict opposition to a contrary 'inside'. The application of this to his own work which Rabelais gives is that the exterior of his books may be grotesque, ridiculous, uncouth, but it conceals within itself something which is the exact opposite: hidden meanings and sublime, serious truths. Scarcely, though, has he made this distinction than he immediately undercuts it by saying that perhaps he was drunk when he wrote the book and did not intend any of the profound hidden meanings one might attribute to his work. But then, Rabelais adds a further twist: Homer did not intend all the sublime hidden truths later interpreters attribute to his work either. This does not, as it were, simply return us to the original point from which we started – namely, that this looks like a trivial and frivolous work, and, in addition, was written while the author was drunk, so it can be ignored. Rabelais is not denying any 'serious meaning' to his own work because it is comic, but rather rendering problematic the whole original set of distinctions between surface appearance and hidden meaning and between 'serious' and 'frivolous'. It is not that nothing is 'really' serious – not even Homer – but that the comic can also be serious.

The above discussion is an instance of the fact that Rabelais is, to say the least, not keen on *divisio* except as a potential object of mockery. In one of the very first chapters of the first book in the series, *Pantagruel*, we are given a list of books in the Library of St Victor. The individual titles, some in (more or less proper) Latin, some in deeply medieval dog-Latin, some in

French, are in themselves mostly absurd and the whole is an incongruous and disordered juxtaposition of works on completely different topics: books on alchemy, military matters, law, the art of living (one volume is entitled *The Art of Farting Discretely in Public*), theology, and cookery all jostle together amicably. Rabelais also takes aim at one of the central religious institutions of the Middle Ages, the monastery. Monastic life was explicitly founded on the division of the day into standardized parts, each with its own assigned task, and on the absolute obedience of each monk to 'the rule' (usually some variant of the *Rule* of St Benedict). These rules are founded in the Christian notion of 'original sin'. If the human will is aboriginally corrupt and thus, to the extent to which it asserts itself independently at all, sinful, then one way forward is blind obedience to a set of pre-given rules. As Benedict himself writes in Chapter 7 of his *Rule*: 'We are prohibited from doing our own will.' The more perfect and more abject my obedience the closer I can hope to get to a state of complete abrogation of my own will: I read the sixty-sixth psalm at Lauds *because* that is what is prescribed by the Rule, not because I have decided on this. By slavishly following the Rule, it is not (really) I who am acting, rather the Rule is acting (through me).

In stark contrast to this, in 'Thélème', the utopian '(anti-) monastic' community described in *Gargantua*, there is no fixed division of the day into parts for antecedently specified activities, but what activities take place are decided 'according to what is fit and opportune'. In fact 'Their whole life was ordered not by laws, rules and regulations, but according to their own volition and free will', and there are no rules. Or rather, the only rule is the anti-rule 'Do as you will' – essentially the advice given by Pantagruel to Panurge in the *Tiers livre*. This trust in the human will *is* perhaps related to certain humanist concerns and themes, but Rabelais' insistence on the inherent indeterminacy of definitive interpretation introduces a sceptical note.

Rabelais, then, shared with the other members of the humanist movement a contempt for scholasticism in all its forms and for medieval educational practices, which he wanted to replace with a new humanist *paideia*; he was deeply suspicious of 'superstitions', and valued very highly 'philanthropic' benevolence, such as that which is increasingly shown by Gargantua and Pantagruel. On the other hand, his works clearly exhibit an attachment to the Gothic world which stood on the other side of the line the humanists wished to draw between themselves and the medieval past. One of the first and most obvious ways in which he differed from the humanists was simply that he did not write *Pantagruel* and its successors in Latin (as his admired models Thomas More and Erasmus would probably have done), but in a language that could not even by any stretch of the imagination be called a 'pure' vernacular. The language is full not only of individual 'neologisms' of the kind the humanists tried to avoid, but of several fully invented (imaginary) languages. *Pantagruel* and its successors display an enthusiastic engagement with the 'medieval' world of wonders, marvels, and fabulous doings, and also with the distorted, disproportioned, and exaggerated. The main story concerns 'giants', who by their very size are out of proportion to the usual human measure. Also their size keeps changing: are they 3 meters tall? 5 meters? 100 meters? Their size seems to change to fit the requirements of the episode in question. If Chapter 22 of *Pantagruel* is right in describing Pantagruel's tongue as over two leagues long, then his 'pissing a full chamber-pot', as he is said to do in Chapter 20 of *Gargantua*, is not only unimpressive, but might suggest that he has some problematic physiological condition.

Nor is the exuberance, energy, and celebration of excess which is such an important and, to modern taste, endearing feature of Gargantua and Pantagruel, a humanist virtue. Although certain central, apparently authoritative figures in the text occasionally *preach* moderation and self-restraint, the

work itself tells a very different story. In fact the occasional praise of self-control or the 'middle way' is presented as just one strand in the polyphonic clatter which constitutes the central reality of the books: sometimes it is more prominent, sometimes less, and sometimes it seems completely absent. Rabelais belongs, then, as much to the 'Gothic' period and sensibility as to what is called the 'high Renaissance'; even this distinction seems to lose its sharpness when applied to him.

If the Gothic period is the past – albeit a past that deserves perhaps in part to be loved and appreciated – and if the Renaissance – in some sense a call for a return to some of the ideals of a yet deeper past – is Rabelais' present, what of the future? The meaning of 'modern' is contextual. The humanism that looked, and was, so 'modern' in the 1520s did not at all look very 'modern' in the second half of the twentieth century. So where does 'proper' modernity begin for us? Perhaps, following Virginia Woolf, 1910? Or 1989? There is of course no absolutely right answer, but for specified purposes some ways of breaking history down can be more useful than others. For the purposes at hand, I wish to suggest that the beginning of 'proper modernity' would be the 1960s, both in what it succeeded in doing (initiating a certain relaxation of previously cultural and social existing norms) and in what it failed to do (achieve any kind of significant economic or political change). If, for the purposes of discussion, one accepts this, there are a number of ways in which Rabelais seems 'properly' modern, especially with respect to some of the developments that characterize Western history during the 400 or so years that separate his age from ours. It is as if he represented an untravelled, but possible, short cut from the 1550s to the post-1960s. It would perhaps have been a somewhat muddy and not always completely salubrious short cut. One need not overlook the dark shadows in Rabelais' work – think of the pervasive misogynist elements in it – but then no one is foolish enough to expect a perfect model for human action in a set of sixteenth-century texts, and many

would think it folly to expect it in *any* individual text or set of texts. In any case, the road we actually took through Wars of Religion, royal absolutism, capitalist original accumulation, colonialism, and our record of treatment of women, the poor, people of colour, etc. was not itself all that edifying.

The main road to modernity diverges from the short cut when the very briefly flourishing world of Thomas More, Erasmus, Rabelais, and Montaigne comes to an end. All four of these figures exhibited an ability to accept a relatively high degree of uncertainty and ambiguity in human affairs. They all seemed to cultivate a mildly sceptical ability to distance themselves from, and laugh at, themselves and their own necessities. They all clearly appreciated forms of play in literature (and elsewhere) which are not resolved into seriousness and a grim acceptance of the status quo, and they were all willing to countenance the possibility of a collective human life not structured by an overwhelming centralized agency for using coercive force.

Crudely speaking, one can call all these traits aspects of what Rabelais calls 'pantagruelism', which he further defines at the end of *Pantagruel* as 'living in peace, joy and health, always enjoying good cheer', in the *Tiers livre* as 'never taking in bad part anything one knows to flow from a good, frank, and loyal heart', and finally in *Quart livre* as 'a certain merriness of mind pickled in contempt for things fortuitous'. As the space within which pantagruelism can flourish is diminished, this whole world gradually withers away. Descartes, the Reformation (and Counter-Reformation), and Hobbes all, each in their own way, mark the transition, and one can see its effects in the more conformist aspects of literary works like Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.

Don Quixote depends on a hearty, down-to-earth, peasant realism. A windmill is a windmill, giants are giants. Windmills are not giants, and anyone who thinks they are is either simply mistaken or mad. Madness, like any defect, is inherently risible. The more persistently someone harms himself

by pursuing mad illusions, the more risible he is. Don Quixote instantiates in an especially vivid way a particularly imperious will-to-power of the imagination. He will impose his imaginary reconstruction on reality, in spite of all resistance and no matter what the world's real constitution is. Cervantes presents this as inherently backward-looking – a return to medieval ways of thinking and acting – as completely out of touch with the world, and as ludicrous. His novel also has one of the most dispiriting and disappointing endings in world literature: Alonso Quijano 'comes to his senses' and is reinserted into the mundane village life it was his great glory to have escaped – as 'Don Quixote' – by the sheer force of his own imagination and will. His reconciliation with and re-submission to the status quo (including the Church) seems a kind of willed conformism imposed from the outside by the author who is eager to impose his own will on a Quixote who seems almost about to escape his control. Cervantes very forcefully re-affirms that sanity is sanity, madness madness, the Church the Church, and Quijano's actions as 'Don Quixote' irredeemably insane. The peasants who laughed were right all along.

Some of Rabelais' humour sometimes approaches this heavy-handed doltishness, but in general he keeps his distance *both* from any glorification of the monomaniacal interventive will *and* from the idea that the only alternative to that is conformity to the status quo. When Pantagruel tells Panurge he should become 'arbiter of his own thoughts' that does not mean he should impose his obsessions on whatever he encounters, as Quixote does, and his admonition to Panurge to know his own will without being deluded by self-love does not mean that he should make up a wholly new identity for himself and expect the world to conform to the will of this new person. Frère Jean's devotion to the pleasures of eating and especially drinking may go 'over the measure', but this excessive vitality is also not anything like the Don's willingness to call a windmill a giant in the interests of inventing a challenge for himself and re-affirming

a completely delusional self-conception. Exuberance is one thing; an almost transcendentally overweening self-will something completely different. Quixote's invented identity is by no means immoral in itself – the knight errant is a defender of the poor, the weak, the helpless – but there is still something about the kind of 'modernity' the Don actually instantiates – the absolute, utterly relentless insistence that the world conform to my will – which cannot help calling to mind Cortez, the desperado who with a mere handful of other ne'er-do-wells obliterated the Aztec Empire in Mexico with exceptionally ruthless brutality.

Rabelais had more recognition and toleration of ambiguity, and of a variety of different points of view between which the choice is not absolutely clear, than anything one can find in Cervantes' novel. Real 'play' is possible for Rabelais within the fluid, flexible, open-ended framework of meanings that constitute our life, and this play is rewarding in itself and can sometimes even be subversive of established structures without madness or the use of overt violence. *Pantagruel* began, as has been mentioned, with hermeneutics, an inexact and uncertain human enterprise if any is – What is the student from Limousin saying? How is one to understand the varying intelligible greetings of Panurge? – and the series of Rabelais' books ends in the fourth volume with Panurge beshitting himself with fear, like Dionysus in *Ranae*. Unlike the perhaps foolish and cowardly, but unembarrassable god – being shameless is one of the advantages of being a Greek god – Panurge tries desperately to deny this evident fact. He lists sixteen different terms for 'shit', only to deny that any one of them correctly describes what covers his breeches and to claim implausibly that the substance in question is actually 'saffron from Ireland'. A heroic (but also pathetic) attempt at 're-interpretation'. Readers will make up their own mind about this, but the work ends, or at any rate peters out, without anyone, whether another character or the author, making an authoritarian gesture that would impose a decision on the issue.

'Road to modernity' is a metaphor. Nothing wrong with that, but it is worth pointing out that it needs interpretation. In particular it does *not* mean that the present is the pre-given end of history, or that the present is 'good', or that the present actually realizes to the full the potentialities of pantagruelism, the acceptance of difference and uncertainty, and the possible ludic relaxation of some of the more authoritarian forms of *divisio*. We have not reached the pre-destined end of any road, but it is now possible perhaps to see that we would all have been – and all would be – better off without the single-mindedly wilful ego, relentlessly imposing itself on a potentially flat monolingual world which is thought to need no interpretation, and which is kept in order mainly by the brute force of Leviathan. But then Rabelais would not have needed to be told that.

3

Nietzsche's Philosophical Ethnology

Many of Nietzsche's works contain long sections that on superficial inspection seem to be just a clutter of random remarks on a variety of social and cultural phenomena, without much unity and without much connection to the standard topics of philosophical reflection. Thus, the eighth of the nine 'major sections' of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, entitled 'Peoples and Fatherlands',[1] contains observations about cultural differences between the various European peoples, some discussion of the ideal of the 'good European' and the role of Jews in European society, and diverse comments about what were, at the time the text was written, particular pieces of almost contemporary music, art, and literature – works by Bizet, Schumann, Wagner, Delacroix, Victor Hugo, Byron, and Jean Paul. From one point of view this might look like the detritus of a planned series of newspaper articles, so one might call these texts 'feuilleton content', but, less condescendingly, and for the sake of simplicity, let us in what follows call them 'ethnographic material'. The seemingly rather odd combination of topics in these ethnographic sections, and the conjunction of ethnographic remarks with some more standard-looking bits of 'philosophy', occurs in Nietzsche's writings more frequently

than one might expect, if one simply perused the secondary literature on Nietzsche's thought. In fact, most of the work of Nietzsche's maturity contains a similar mixture of topics as one finds in this chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*. The placement of this material suggests that Nietzsche considered it to be *philosophically* relevant, but why?

In this essay I suggest that Nietzsche has two related reasons for thinking that the material in these ethnographic chapters – that is, main section eight of *Beyond Good and Evil* and the parallel sections in other works – is 'philosophical'. First of all, in the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche announces its theme as the study of 'dogmatizing in philosophy' (KSA 7.11). Even if it is not fully clear yet what exactly 'dogmatizing' is and why Nietzsche thinks it is to be rejected, it is obviously something having to do with the way in which humans form and hold beliefs, and the way they act on such beliefs. As such, this is clearly a philosophical topic, and if the ethnographic material can be shown to have a connection to 'dogmatizing', that will be enough to clarify why it is included. Roughly speaking, Nietzsche claims that ethnography can help one to overcome dogmatism. The second reason is not explicitly mentioned in the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, but if one looks through the early notebooks, one can discover that Nietzsche makes a close connection between ethnography and the question of self-knowledge, which is also an eminently philosophical issue. In particular he thinks that a certain kind of ethnographic practice and experience is a royal path to a certain important form of self-knowledge.

'Ethnology' is a modern term that derives from the Greek word 'ethnos', which means 'tribe, nation, people'. The discipline of ethnology would, then, be the study of tribes or peoples, and their customs, habits, family structures, and modes of living, dressing, and behaving. This may include a study of their beliefs, their forms of artistic activity, and even their social and political practices and institutions.[2]

In universities until very recently 'ethnology' has effectively meant not just the study of peoples and their customs in general, but the study of 'primitive' (pre-industrial, pre-literate) people, especially of 'tribal people'.[3] The reasons for this highly restricted usage lie in accidental features of the situation in which modern ethnology got established as an academic subject in the nineteenth century. At that point in history several European empires encountered populations and groups whom they began to realize they did not fully understand, but who needed to be managed, controlled, and administered in the interests of imperial peace. How should the British Empire deal with the welter of tribes in the Sudan or with the variety of different groups of different kinds in India? One way to begin was to categorize and classify them, and try to gather as much systematic information as possible about them and their customs, beliefs, and practices. Ethnology – often called 'anthropology' in the English-speaking world – was the discipline that was to discharge this task. There are three features of 'ethnology' as it was understood in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which deserve further comment. First, the epistemological model which was presupposed by the nineteenth-century pioneers of ethnology put great stress on issues of classification. It was thought important to cut the world up into sharply defined groups, each of which had its own unitary identity and each of which had properties that made it distinctive and different from other similar groups. This approach via atemporal classification also devalued the study of history or social change. Colonial administrators were, after all, not academics, and the reconstruction of the history of non-literate societies was in any case an exceptionally difficult task. The ethnographer tended to describe 'his' or 'her' society in a static present, as a *nunc stans* in what has sometimes been called the 'ethnographic present'. Second, the (mainly tribal) groups studied tended to be seen and described as radically 'other', very different indeed from the group to which the

ethnographer himself or herself belonged. Exoticism was the default position. Third, the knowledge gained was acquired in the context of a radical asymmetry of power between the investigating ethnologists (the knowers) and the subjects of investigation (the known Others). British ethnologists in the late nineteenth century did not usually investigate the social customs of *clochards* in France or the kinship conceptions of Imperial Russian civil servants but rather examined aboriginals in Australia, Bushmen in Africa, and members of 'criminal castes' in India. The Others were clearly subordinate, archetypically colonial, populations; the investigators belonged to a dominant group which could coerce (if it chose to), and if that is so, this fact alone would likely be enough to distort or skew at least some of the results of the investigation.

In the later twentieth century, ethnologists became increasingly aware of some of the limitations of the subject matter, epistemology, and approach cited above, and tried to remedy them as best they could. One obvious way to do this was to extend the scope of investigated groups, from subordinate tribes, clans, and village societies to any human group – including First World associations such as villagers in France,[4] middle-class Americans,[5] groups of bankers,[6] medical staff in hospitals, and so on. Connected with this is a focus not on the sharp divergence in customs between purportedly unitary and unchanging cultures located in an ahistorical space, but on phenomena such as creolization, which was often now taken as a paradigm, and the study of the way in which different cultures mix and interact through historical time. There came to be to an understanding of the fact that an ethnographic report was a momentary snapshot of a set of historically changing situations.

Even before this late twentieth-century revolution in thinking, however, the nineteenth-century style of 'imperial' ethnology was not the only kind that existed in the West. Ethnological interest reaches back at least to Herodotus, the

fifth-century Greek author who wrote some of the first extant systematic descriptions of Egyptian, Persian, Scythian, and other non-Greek societies.[7] Herodotus' situation vis-à-vis the peoples, tribes, kingdoms, and Empires he described was completely different from that of a nineteenth-century European in Africa or Asia. These 'other' populations were in no way colonial subjects of the Greeks. There was no unitary Greek political entity at that time, and certainly neither Egypt nor the Persian Empire was in any sense politically 'subject' to 'Greece' (in any possible form). Herodotus could not, then, treat with his 'others' from a position of effective superior power of coercion. What is more, he was criticized by other ancient Greek writers, such as Plutarch,[8] for being *philobarbaros* – which can't really mean that he was an especial 'friend' of barbarians, or even that he was invariably sympathetic to their cause, but only that he was not constantly and unreflectingly condescending toward them. Thus, in the very opening lines of his book he says that his intention is to record the 'great and amazing deeds' of the Greeks *and* the barbarians, so that they will not be forgotten: Ἡροδότου Ἁλικαρνησσέος ἱστορίης ἀπόδεξις ἥδε, ὡς μήτε τὰ γενόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων τῷ χρόνῳ ἐξίτλα γένηται μήτε ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά, τὰ μὲν Ἕλλησιν, τὰ δὲ βαρβάροισι ἀποδεχθέντα, ἀκλεᾶ γένηται (I.1) ('This is the exposition of the results of the investigation by Herodotus of Halicarnassus, which he undertook so that what humans did might not be extinguished by time, and so that the great and remarkable deeds, both those remembered and cherished by the Greeks and those remembered and cherished by the barbarians, might not lose their glory'). Precisely this even-handedness was part of what upset Plutarch. Herodotus, he writes, actually goes as far as accepting the word of Persians about the less than salubrious origins of the Trojan War, so that this greatest and finest achievement of the Greeks (τὸ κάλλιστον ἔργον καὶ μέγιστον τῆς Ἑλλάδος) is reduced to a sordid episode of wife-snatching:[9] Περσῶν δὲ τοὺς λόγους[10] μαρτυρεῖν φήσας,

ὅτι τὴν Ἰοῦν μετ᾽ ἄλλων γυναικῶν οἱ Φοίνικες ἁφαρπάσειαν, εὐθὺς ἀποφαίνεται γνώμην τὸ κάλλιστον ἔργον καὶ μέγιστον τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἀβελτερίᾳ τὸν Τρωικὸν πόλεμον γενέσθαι διὰ γυναῖκα φαύλην ('[Herodotus] says that Persian reports document that the Phoenicians abducted Ion with some other women, [by accepting this Persian version] he shows that in his opinion the finest and biggest achievement of Greece, the Trojan War, was undertaken foolishly because of a worthless woman'). Plutarch makes a great fuss of calling Herodotus a liar and an 'inventor of fictions' (someone who writes ψεύσματα καὶ πλάσματα) and of his own devotion to truth,[11] but what is striking reading passages like this is that he appeals not to truth but to the fact that (a) Herodotus is accepting a barbarian's word as against the common Greek opinion, and (b) he is accepting a view that denigrates Greek achievement.

Furthermore, Plutarch claims that Herodotus pollutes the memory of various great Greek heroes and philosophers (Heracles and Thales) by accepting that they may have had barbarian ancestors,[12] he praises the piety and fair play of the Egyptians,[13] and the count-sheet continues. We might add that Herodotus also reports without comment various things that 'Egyptian priests' say about the ignorance and the infantile behaviour of the Greeks, their Johnny-come-lately culture, and some of their other deficiencies. He is not necessarily endorsing *all* these views, but he clearly does not think they are beyond the pale of consideration just because, if some of them were true, the barbarians would know certain things better than Hellenes did. One could, of course, argue that there is nothing unusual or novel in Herodotus' attitude because even Homer seems perfectly happy to praise the Trojans as well as the Greeks. There is, however, still a difference. Homer never treats the Trojans as 'barbarians' – to all intents and purposes they *are* Greek, that is, Priam and Hector seem to speak the same language, worship the same gods, and have the same customs as Agamemnon and Achilles.[14] Herodotus,

however, goes out of his way to emphasize the difference of the Persians or Egyptians from the Greeks, *and yet* to accept their views when he thinks them worthy of credence, and praise them where he believes that they deserve it. Especially, if one compares him to the opinions Plutarch expresses, Herodotus emerges in a rather good light. One might think of him as having invented the category of 'other, very different from us, but (always) interesting and (sometimes) coherent, comprehensible, and not necessarily contemptible – perhaps even sometimes impressive and admirable'.

Herodotus is an author with whom Nietzsche, as a trained philologist, was very familiar. This philological background is absolutely essential in understanding Nietzsche's thought. Philology is devoted to trying to allow us to understand writings which are antecedently incomprehensible, so one can see ethnology as a kind of enhanced social philology. The specific type of philology in which Nietzsche was trained had a strong historical orientation and was concerned with trying to peel away the centuries of misunderstanding, adventitious addition, and historically specific prejudice and distortion which had disfigured various ancient corpora of texts during the course of their transmission. More importantly still, Nietzsche himself asserts that the philologist is a professional sceptic (KSA 8.38), and so it would be no surprise to discover that he felt a natural affinity for the urbane incredulity of the well-travelled historian from Halicarnassus, who tried to make sense of the strange customs and beliefs he encountered on his trips around the Mediterranean. This might seem an odd claim to make given Herodotus' reputation for being particularly gullible, and one cannot deny that he seems to give credence to some stories which we take to be self-evidently untrue – flying snakes, ants that dig for and accumulate gold, beliefs that 'the gods' did various things and so on.[15] Nietzsche's comment about the philologist being the greatest sceptic occurs in the notebooks he kept when working on his early essay 'Wir Philologen', and

the context is a discussion of the relation between epistemic and cultural scepticism, that is, of the impossibility of belief in the immortality of the soul and the relation of this to concerns about the instability and lack of robustness of 'our' culture. Just as human beliefs have no firm foundation, and can thus shift and slip away almost imperceptibly, so forms of 'culture' are highly variable and transient, as mortal as ancient culture showed itself, finally, to be.

> Mit den Religionen, welche an Götter, an Vorsehungen, an vernünftige Weltordnungen, an Wunder und Sakramente glauben ist es vorbei . . . Wer glaubt noch an die Unsterblichkeit der Seele! . . . In *Betreff der Cultur* heißt dies: Wir kannten bisher nur *eine* vollkommene Form, das ist die Stadtcultur der Griechen, auf ihren mythischen und socialen Fundamenten ruhend . . . Jetzt haben sich nun alle Fundamente, die mythischen und die politisch-socialen verändert; unsere angebliche Cultur hat keinen Bestand, weil sie sich auf unhaltbare, fast verschwundene Zustände und Meinungen aufbaut. – Die griechische Cultur vollständig begreifend sehen wir also ein, daß es vorbei ist. So ist der Philologe *der große Skeptiker* in unseren Zuständen der Bildung und Erziehung; das ist seine Mission. – Glücklich, wenn er, wie Wagner und Schopenhauer, die verheißungsvollen Kräfte ahnt, in denen eine neue Cultur sich regt. (KSA 8.3)

> (The time for religions that teach belief in gods, providences or a rational order of the world is past . . . Who still believes in the immortality of the soul! . . . With respect to culture this means: Up to now we knew only *one* perfect form of it, the urban culture of the Greeks, which rested on its own mythical and social foundations . . . Now all these foundations, the mythical and the socio-political, have changed; what we call our 'culture' has no substance, because it is built on states and opinions that are no longer tenable and have almost completely passed

> away. – If we grasp Greek culture fully, we will see that it is gone. So the philologist is the *grand sceptic* in our educational and cultural condition; that is his mission. – He is very lucky if he can, like Wagner and Schopenhauer, sense the merest trace of the movement of powers that hold out the promise of new cultural activity.)

The word 'sceptic' comes from a root (σκέπτομαι) that means 'observe, look at carefully, examine', and so the sceptic is not necessarily someone who negates or denies some proposition (or every proposition), but rather someone who suspends *real*, true, full-blooded belief while he 'considers' the case. Sometimes the sceptic will be able to come to no definitive conclusion – later, so-called Pyrrhonian sceptics are thinkers who find that they can never come to a satisfactory conclusion and so must continue to suspend their judgement. In any case 'scepticism' is the opposite of fanaticism and of prejudice, and Herodotus is a good early example. He kept an open mind, tried to see everything he could, made enquiries, listened, it seems, to anything anyone had to say to him without prejudice, and reflected carefully before deciding which report or story was more worthy of credence. He certainly did not necessarily believe everything he heard, but subjected even what he was told by 'authorities' to his own scrutiny, and made up his own mind about what was more and what less plausible. Often he simply recorded alternative stories he had been told without comment, leaving the contradictions in the accounts standing. Sometimes he specifically says that he does not know which account is to be believed. Even when he says that he believes one version of a story rather than another, he accepts a particular version on the basis of the balance of the evidence he has and on his own judgement of that. He knows that his knowledge is limited and his judgement highly fallible, and that this is not merely a weakness of his, but a part of the human condition. Equally Herodotus moved through the

rich landscape of ancient cultures, *prima facie* suspending his judgement, but keen to note their variety, and at least incipiently aware of the phenomenon of 'creolization' – the way in which one 'borrowed' traits (habits, beliefs, stories, gods) from the other.[16]

According to Nietzsche, philosophy is a historical phenomenon, and, as such, has no definition and no single absolute origin (KSA 5.313–18), but one moment that is surely of special importance for the further development of the discipline in the West is Plato's set of classificatory distinctions. Philosophy is not sophistry – it does not tell you what you antecedently want to hear,[17] or permit you to argue for *any* position;[18] rather it is committed to some notion of a truth that must be respected. It is not poetry or any form of literature – again some notion of what is true as opposed to what is pleasing must be central to it.[19] It is not rhetoric, that is, not a 'neutral' technique for producing persuasion; as in the previous two cases it seeks not persuasiveness but truth.[20] Finally it is definitely not the kind of thing Herodotus did, that is, it is not in my sense 'ethnology'.[21] There are several reasons for this. First Herodotus tells stories and gives descriptions rather than analysing concepts, arguing discursively for theses, or 'giving an account' of things. Second, he allows differences of opinion to stand without compulsively trying to eradicate them by dialectical investigation, as Socrates and Plato would have done. Herodotus, in contrast, is remarkably non-agonistic, not obsessively concerned to 'refute' the other or 'defend' his own position. This relaxed attitude toward 'truth' and simple acceptance of a plurality of beliefs is highly uncharacteristic of philosophy.

What then does the ancient sceptical observer have to say about '*Völker und Vaterländer*'? Toward the end of Book VIII of his *Histories* Herodotus gives a rough and ready account of what he means when he says that the Greeks, despite being politically divided into a number of distinct (and sometimes mutually hostile) cities, form one 'people' (*Volk*). They are a

population held together by kinship and by linguistic, cultural, and religious ties. The context for this claim is the aftermath of the battle of Salamis. The Persians who had sacked and occupied the city of Athens before the battle offered the Athenians, who had the largest naval contingent in the coalition of Greek cities resisting them, a separate peace. The Athenians rejected this offer, saying that they would never make such a separate peace for a variety of reasons. The last reason they cite is: αὖτις δὲ τὸ ἑλληνικόν ἐὸν ὅμαιμόν τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον, καὶ θεῶν ἱδρύματα τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἤθεά τε ὁμότροπα (Herodotus VIII.144). A literal rendering of this would be 'A further reason is the Greek-thing: being both of like blood and of like speech, and <our all having> both common shrines of the gods and sacrifices, and similarly turned habitual ways of living.' It is perhaps not insignificant that Herodotus does not use any specific word for a 'people' (*Volk*) here which would, for instance, have equal application to Greeks, Egyptians, Persians et al. For us moderns the most natural thing would have been to speak of the 'Greek *ethnos*' (and the 'Persian *ethnos*', etc.). What Herodotus does speak of is the 'Greek-thing' (neuter substantive derived from an adjective).

This immediately gives rise to one observation and two questions. The observation is that belonging to the same political entity is very intentionally *not* part of this definition. One of the striking characteristics of the Greek world is that the Greeks never had such a unified political structure until the nineteenth century.[22] The first of the two questions arises when one notices the recurrence – three times in the short section – of adjectives beginning with the prefix ὁμο-: ὅμαιμόν, ὁμόγλωσσον, ὁμότροπα; ὁμο- means 'like, similar to'. These, however, are relative terms. How close does the similarity in 'blood', 'speech', and 'habits' have to be for a particular population to be covered by this term τὸ ἑλληνικόν? This becomes a serious political issue in the century after Herodotus when the Macedonians become a significant military and political power

– but are they 'really' Greek? Are the primitive and brutal Macedonian customs 'close enough' to that of the other Greeks for them to count as 'Hellenes'? Is their way of speaking really a peculiar dialect of Greek, a *patois* of some kind, or a separate, if perhaps related language? Should the Macedonians be allowed access to pan-Hellenic institutions (e.g. institutions like the Olympic Games, in which any Greek, but only Greeks, could participate)? One aspect of this linguistic question is politically even more explosive. If Macedonian is not a dialect of Greek, it must be a non-Greek language, that is, on the ancient dichotomous view, a 'barbarian' language. For one Greek group to be subject to another was perhaps unfortunate, but it was a fact of life; in the post-Herodotean world, however, for large numbers of Greek cities to be subject to 'barbarians' was another matter altogether. Then being a part of Alexander's Empire would be like being subject to the Persian king.

The second question which this Herodotean account raises is what to do in cases in which all the elements of this definition are not co-instantiated, or not co-instantiated to an equally high degree, so that the application of these various criteria gives different answers. What about groups that have the same speech but different religions (French Catholics, Muslims, and Protestants), or the same religion but different customary modes of life and few kinship ties (Muslims from Morocco and from Indonesia)?

Suppose then, for the sake of argument, we had resolved these difficulties and had determined how we can tell which *Völker* exist in the world to a degree that satisfied us. Perhaps there was some small indeterminacy and there were a few anomalies, but that is life. Which of these *Völker* then had a '*Vaterland*'? What exactly does this question mean? What is it to have a 'fatherland'? One immediate answer is that it is a place where one 'is or feels at home', but then what is it to feel at home? This question of where and under what conditions one could (or should) 'feel at home' was a cultural obsession

in Central Europe at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth.[23]

There are two ways one can investigate this, one connected with the second component of '*Vaterland*' (*Land*) and the other with the first component. Perhaps to ask whether a *Volk* has a *Vaterland* first might mean something about the relation of a group to a particular geographic area of the world or feature. The idea, then, would be that the Magyar people had a 'fatherland' if it had some special relation to the Puszta, or similarly if the Nipponese had a special relation to Mount Fuji or the Serbs to Kosovo Polje. To be a Magyar was to have that relation. Lots of populations have special sites that are collectively sacred or otherwise have special significance. However, the connection between a population and a particular bit of earth can also be highly contingent and unimportant. To return to Herodotus, after the Persians burned Athens and occupied the ruins, one of the other Greeks taunted the Athenian leader Themistocles as 'a man without a fatherland (τῷ μή ἐστι πατρίς) and without a city' (*apolis*), and who therefore had no standing to speak in the assembly of the Greeks (VIII.61). Themistocles is said to have replied that he had a city and land (γῆ), and would continue to have one for as long as the Athenian navy continued to exist, and continued to be manned by Athenian citizens. So the *polis* is the citizens, not the soil itself (γῆ) or the masonry, and clearly in some cases a fatherland can exist without any connection to a specific piece of land. Recall, too, Heinrich Heine's famous phrase about the Jews as a group who have a 'portable fatherland' (*portatives Vaterland*) in the form of their Law.[24] A 'fatherland' is, then, not necessarily a given territory, nor is it a state or even a form of unified political organization, because the Jews had not had that for almost 2,000 years when Heine made his remark. To be sure, we have more recently seen certain forms of Zionism that have tried to return to the idea of a tight connection between a people, a unitary state, and a highly specific mini-tract of land, but

this is clearly a form of cultural regression to a more archaic conception than Heine's.

What then is a fatherland, if it is not a physical bit of real estate or a unitary state and yet is something more than a mere population? I note that the use of the kinship term 'father' might be thought to contrast with a possible parallel use of the term 'mother'. Thus the ancient Greeks used the term 'mother' ('mother-city', metropolis) to designate the city that originally sent out the founder of a colony and usually provided the bulk of the colonists. The specific 'maternal' association was that the mother-city gave birth to and perhaps in some way nurtured the colony. We know of lots of examples of failed colonies, but once a colony showed itself able to maintain itself, it was independent of the mother-city. As the Corcyreans say in Thucydides' history (I.34), when recounting their side of the story of a disagreement with their mother-city Corinth: πᾶσα ἀποικία εὖ μὲν πάσχουσα τιμᾷ τὴν μητρόπολιν, ἀδικουμένη δὲ ἀλλοτριοῦται. οὐ γὰρ ἐπὶ τῷ δοῦλοι, ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ τῷ ὁμοῖοι τοῖς λειπομένοις εἶναι ἐκπέμπονται ('Any colony that is well treated honours its mother-city, but if it is mistreated it becomes estranged. Colonists are not in any case sent out to be the slaves of those left behind, but to be their equals'). So the mother-city has a claim, based on a past relation of origination and nurturing, to conditional honour. It depends, however, upon the good behaviour of the mother-city toward the colony, and both are (in principle) equals. There is no question of 'obedience' or subordination. This is not at all the same kind of association as that designated by the paternal metaphor. Heine gives the clue. The father is in no way the equal of the son or daughter just as the individual Jew is not the equal of God. He is rather the one who lays down the law, requires obedience, and demands that certain things be done. Similarly, one of the highest laudatory titles for a successful Roman Emperor was *pater patriae*, but this was definitely not intended to establish a relation of equality between the Emperor and the individual Roman citizen.

One further possible way of construing the relation between the city and the individuals who constitute it can be found in Pericles' Funeral Speech in Thucydides' *History of the War between Athens and Sparta*, in which he exhorts the Athenians to become 'lovers' of their city. This sounds like an empty formulaic expression of a commonplace, the sort of thing inserted as filler by speakers who cannot think of anything more original to say; but Greek, as is well known, has a rather wide range of words for different kinds of love. Thucydides has Pericles use the word for sexual desire (eros).[25] If the citizens are 'erastai' of the city, the city cannot, except at the price of incest, be either mother or father. Eros in the ancient world, at least as reflected in the writings of the philosophers, is associated with very specific role expectations, including a distinctly pedagogical task: the lover is expected to try to educate and cultivate the beloved, so that he (or she) is *benefited* and becomes a better person. The beloved, in turn, is not supposed to be too easily pleased by the lover, or at any rate not to grant favours too easily, so the lover is held to progressively higher standards of behaviour and achievement. So in the best of possible cases there can be a kind of progressive spiral of ever-increasing excellence.[26] When Pericles says that 'the whole city [of Athens]' is 'an education for Hellas' (II.41) (Ξυνελών τε λέγω τήν τε πᾶσαν πόλιν τῆς Ἑλλάδος παίδευσιν εἶναι) he is proposing this as a model for all cities.

So to return to the term 'fatherland', 'land' in this word can be taken to be a metaphor. It is not a particular geographical region or an area that one's own father and forefathers inhabited – why should *that* be of any importance? – but some kind of ideal code, like the Jewish Law, which one should obey as one obeyed one's father. Through this obedience one comes to feel 'at home'. Zarathustra in Nietzsche's work of that name says that every people has its own table of values, that is, its 'fatherland', with perhaps the suggestion that this is what binds the people together and makes them one (KSA 4.74–6). Still,

each table of values might be different. Not only might each have a different content: for the Persians speaking the truth and shooting the bow, for the Greeks 'being the best at everything', for the Romans *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*. In addition, of course, the kind of code or table of values might be different, as might be the relation of the members of the population in question to that code. It could be a rule book for religious practice; a legal code; a mandatory Hebraic ethical code based on imperatives ('thou shalt not . . .'); a more Hellenic ethical system based not on prohibitions, but containing advice and recommendations of that which is better and encouragement to avoid what is less good; a set of forms of etiquette or artistic and aesthetic principles.[27]

Vaterland has been taken to designate a canon of prohibitions or set of positive ideals or both, but there is a deviant and degenerate variant of it which Nietzsche (using a derogatory suffix) calls '*Vaterländerei*' (parish-pump patriotism). The 'tables of values' mentioned above all have the property that they formulate certain positive general goals for aspiration. The Persian is to try especially hard always to tell the truth; that is a characteristic of theirs. However, one can notice, too, that none of the 'values' cited is inherently exclusive. The Greeks did not especially value telling the truth; in fact they thought this was a rather bizarre obsession of the Persians, but this did not mean that they were completely indifferent to the truth and to truth-telling. Failing to tell the truth for no good reason was not meritorious, and *ceteris paribus* it was better to tell the truth (although this was not of overwhelming significance). If a Greek put his mind to it, there was no reason why he couldn't always tell the truth in the same way a Persian did. Similarly, there was no reason why a Persian couldn't always strive to be the best (*aristuein*) just as a Greek did – that was not part of his cultural patrimony, as it were, but nothing excluded it. *Vaterländerlei* in contrast means formulating the ideals in so excessively and senselessly narrow a way as effectively to

exclude others. So the narrow ideal would be something like 'playing the zither in an authentically Magyar way' or 'speaking French without any discernible trace of a foreign accent', or, to take an example closer to home, 'selling your potatoes or buying your beer in the village market in imperial rather than metric units'. Not everyone can learn to play like a Magyar, and although anyone could learn to use imperial rather than metric measures, what would be the point of doing that? It is a senseless narrowing of horizons resulting from fixation on an old and inherently insignificant object of love and attachment.

The reason why ethnographic study is philosophically important for Nietzsche is that it is connected with self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is certainly a central topic in Western philosophy, starting with Socrates. 'Who/what am I?' and 'What conclusions are to be drawn from knowing who/what I am for the way I should live?' are in some sense the philosophical questions par excellence. The philosophical tradition contains two distinct strands of thinking about this topic, a dominant one and a (largely) suppressed and secondary one. The dominant one, which goes back to Socrates and Plato, emphasizes the absolute centrality of opinion, in particular whether an opinion is argumentatively well supported – in which case it may be called not mere opinion but 'knowledge'. So the way I should proceed as a philosopher in my search for self-knowledge is by determining what opinions I hold, formulating them with care, and investigating them 'dialectically', that is, in discussion with others who test the opinion by bringing up arguments against it, and attacking arguments brought forward in its favour.

The Greek word for opinion is δόξα, whence derive the words 'dogma', dogmatist', 'dogmatic'. A dogma is an important opinion, strongly held and explicitly formulated and affirmed, especially one which plays a key role in a wider position or attitude toward the world; a 'dogmatist' is a person who holds and affirms such an opinion. In the modern world the implication

is that the opinion is held 'inflexibly', but that is not necessarily part of the ancient sense. Finally, there are people who think that the right way to deal with a certain domain of human life (religion, economics, ethnic relations) is by reference to some dogmatically held belief, or that the most important thing is to act in conformity to one's own pre-existing opinions, and thus that the world is amenable to such action. I note that on this usage I can be a dogmatist without always acting dogmatically. Not every individual person who holds a dogmatic belief is a fanatic, but dogmatism has a clear natural affinity to fanaticism, prejudice, and 'faith'.

The second, subordinate, tradition goes back to Augustine and reaches forward to Freud and his followers.[28] Here 'opinions', especially consciously formulated and defended opinions, are not the centre of interest. Rather, what is important is the nature of the soul in its voluntative and affective dimension, that is, what I desire, wish for, hold dear, love, or hate. These may or may not be expressed (and expressible) in the form of beliefs that I have. In fact, some of them that are especially deeply rooted might require exceedingly complex, indirect methods even to become partially visible.

Nietzsche takes a different approach from either of these two. He does not believe that adequate self-knowledge can be acquired through self-observation or knowing what one believes – discovered through dialectical discussion with others – nor through coming to know what one loves (or hates) – discovered originally through prayer, contemplation, introspection, confession, or later in therapeutic activity, especially therapeutic conversation. Rather, to know ourselves we need to know our own history, and to know our own history we need to travel, while carefully observing and processing what we see.

> Die unmittelbare Selbstbeobachtung reicht lange nicht aus, um sich kennen zu lernen: wir brauchen Geschichte, denn die

> Vergangenheit strömt in hundert Wellen in uns fort; wir selbst sind ja Nichts als Das, was wir in jedem Augenblick von diesem Fortströmen empfinden ... [U]m Geschichte zu verstehen, [muß] man die lebendigen Überreste geschichtlicher Epochen aufsuchen ... – [man muß] reisen, wie Altvater Herodot reiste, zu Nationen – diese sind ja nur festgewordene ältere Culturstufen, auf die man sich stellen kann – zu den sogenannten wilden und halbwilden Völkerschaften namentlich, dorthin wo der Mensch das Kleid Europa's ausgezogen oder noch nicht angezogen hat. (KSA 2.477)
>
> (Immediate self-observation is far from sufficient to allow anyone to attain self-knowledge; we need history because the past streams through us in a hundred waves, we are Nothing but what we sense in every moment of this streaming ... To understand history, one needs to seek out the living remains of historical epochs – one must travel like our ancestor Herodotus travelled to [other] nations – these are nothing but previous stages of culture that have rigidified which one can adopt – in particular to the so-called savage and half-savage populations, to places where man has not yet put off the dress of Europe or not yet put it on.)

Herodotus does not engage in introspection; he travels and sees, where possible, with his own eye (αὐτόπτης ἐλθών – 'going to see myself' [II.29.1]). To be sure, he also hears, and, as a matter of fact, he must have been hearing through the medium of a dragoman what some of the alien people (Phoenicians, Persians, Egyptians) say, but what is primary for him is 'autopsy' (seeing for himself). In contrast, recall that Socrates' interlocutors get gradually reduced to the role of colourless patsies who respond to his remarks with stock expressions of agreement, and Augustine's God notoriously never answers him in the *Confessions.* The moment of full, direct interaction with a real, changing Other, who sometimes initiates unexpected action,

is marginalized. If we have a reservation about Herodotus' approach, it is that he still takes it to be essentially theoretical, a matter of seeing, hearing, and interpreting what he sees and hears. This is not wrong, but we inhabitants of the twenty-first century would be inclined to emphasize the element of active practical engagement that is necessary if adequate understanding is to be attained, the element of interaction, participation in the social life of the Other, with the concomitant risk of modifying that life in the course of 'observing' it.

Unfortunately Nietzsche fails to distinguish clearly between two ideas, one of which is arguably true, but the other of which is almost certainly false. The true idea is that there is something special about a real encounter with a radical Other. If I actually travel to Japan, observing and interacting with lots of Japanese, this can have the effect of teaching me something about myself which I could not have learned through dialectical discussion with a friend (who *ex hypothesi* would have to speak the same language I do), through confessing to a purportedly divine entity whom I have myself constructed in imagination, through conversation in a highly controlled therapeutic environment, or through any amount of reading or vicarious cinematic experience. This does not mean that any of these other things is useless, merely that there are some forms of direct experience which they can't replace. To specify what exactly it is that I can learn about myself is also not easy, but that is no objection.

I can learn something about myself through cognitively alert interaction with the Other. This good idea is conflated with the bad idea that what I learn from this encounter is something about a deep-seated stratum of myself, which represents a past which I (and my society) have (more or less) overcome or surmounted, but which has left a stratographic trace in us. The 'other' presents in its full-blown form something I had in the past in this very same form, or a minor variant of this same form, and which has left a trace in my present soul (KSA 2.477).

This assumption was rife in nineteenth-century ethnography. European societies were once hunter-gatherer societies and there are traces of that in our societies and our psyches, so if we want to learn who we are, we can discover what is needed by travelling to, and living in, one of the remaining hunter-gatherer societies that still exist (to the extent that any still does). Or, to take another example, because subsistence agriculture was once widely practised in Europe, we can find out about the part of our psyche that is derived from that experience by studying some remote places in New Guinea where subsistence farming still clings to life.

This approach seems clearly flawed – as much of the anthropological theorizing of the second half of the twentieth century was devoted to demonstrating in detail – and the flaw is one that Nietzsche himself points out in some of the things he wrote after the sketches for *Beyond Good and Evil*. It is a mistake to think of all of history as a single unitary story in which *all* the participants pass through the same set of stages (although at different times). History is much more dispersed, diverse, fragmented, and contingent than that [KSA 5.313–8]. One can (just about) sometimes trace individual sequences and lines of development, and draw some vague analogies, but more one cannot do. In addition, it isn't as if each past epoch (in each different line of development) laid down a determinate and identical stratum in the psyche of current humans, so one should not expect to see one's own exact past externalized in the Other.

Bernard Williams once said[29] that the United States was a basically eighteenth-century society, but this does not imply that a twenty-first-century European visitor would see a stratum of their own past in its fully developed form there. Observing and analysing people and institutions in contemporary San Francisco would not necessarily give one a glimpse of the reality of life in Edinburgh in 1770 or Berlin in 1790 up close. There are different ways to be an eighteenth-century

society, which explains why travellers such as de Tocqueville (and following him many others) made the mistake in the nineteenth century of thinking they were seeing the European future rather than a variant of the European past on the other side of the Atlantic. These differences are no barrier to saying, with the appropriate provisos and caveats, that in important ways people in Berlin in 2024 are living in the twenty-first century, whereas those in San Francisco are living in (a version of) the eighteenth century. It does, however, mean that the metaphor of 'laying down of identical strata in the souls' is misleading.

Nietzsche in fact distinguishes two varieties of philosophical travel.[30] The first is the one just mentioned, real physical displacement, travelling to foreign places as Herodotus did, which has great advantages as compared with any form of merely imaginative construction or conceptual manoeuvring. There is, though, another possibility which Nietzsche admits, namely that the philosopher can come to live as a foreigner in his own society and see it through the eyes of the travelling stranger (KSA 7.548). He mentions Heraclitus as someone who succeeded in doing this:

> Denkt Euch, der Philosoph wanderte und käme zu den Griechen – so steht es mit den Vorplatonikern: sie sind gleichsam Fremde, verwunderte Fremde.
>
> Jeder Philosoph ist es in der Fremde: und muß erst das Nächste als fremd fühlen. Herodot unter den Fremden – Heraklit unter den Griechen. Der Historiker und Geograph unter Fremden, der Philosoph im Heimischen. Kein Prophet gilt im Vaterlande. Im Heimischen versteht man das Außerordentliche unter sich nicht.
>
> (Just imagine that a philosopher was wandering and arrived among the Greeks – that is exactly what happened with the Pre-Socratics; they are, as it were, foreigners, amazed foreigners.

> Every philosopher is like this when outside his home; and every philosopher must learn to feel that which is nearest to him as something foreign. Herodotus among the foreigners – Heraclitus among the Greeks. The historian and geographer among the foreigners, the philosopher among his fellow-natives. No prophet has standing in his own fatherland. No one understands the extraordinary [when it occurs] at home, and when we natives are among ourselves.)

I note that this is an unusual way to interpret Heraclitus. Most commentators put more emphasis on the fragments that seem to position Heraclitus in the pre-history of introspection, for instance by putting together fragments 101 and 45 ('I investigated myself [and] found that the soul has great depth and infinite boundaries'). Or he is a precursor of various later trends in epistemology and metaphysics, such as that of Hegel who held that objects in the world were composed of *contradictory* properties: the river is both 'the same' (flowing along the same course) and yet 'completely different' (because the water that rushes by, constituting the river, is always different). Nietzsche does not deny any of this, but he has his eye on another aspect of Heraclitus' philosophy. Some of the fragments of Heraclitus draw attention to what (from the point of view of a foreigner) might *seem* to be absurd or contradictory forms of behaviour, which, however, his fellow-citizens of Ephesus do not find strange. For instance, we distinguish between soiling and cleansing and take them to be opposites. If mud soils my clothing, I do not generally try to clean them by using mud. However, the Ephesians, like other Greeks, engage in rituals of 'purification' (which is a kind of cleansing) for the shedding of blood that involve bloody sacrifices of animals. So blood in some contexts is a form of defilement, in others a cleansing agent (Fragment 5). Similarly the sacred and the obscene are in some sense opposites, but during the Festival of Dionysus they sing the song of the Phallos as they parade replicas of a

huge male member through the streets, so that which in any other context they would take to be obscene is accepted as a sign of piety because it is part of a traditional religious ritual (Fragment 15). To make these observations, Heraclitus had to have made himself a foreigner in his own home city, to have observed carefully, and to have reasoned. Alienation is a path to self-knowledge. Brecht, of course, is the twentieth-century artist who most deliberately and consistently pursued this goal by developing and deploying special techniques to shock the members of his audience into recognizing themselves in the distorting mirror he held up to them.

One obvious reply to this line of thought about the importance of travel is the one expressed by the ancient proverb *Caelum mutant non animum qui trans mare currunt* (Horace, *Epistulae* 1.11.27; Seneca, *Ep. Mor.* 17.12). This suggests that travel alone will not necessarily have the result Nietzsche claims for it, and there is no doubt that that is true. No one ever escaped himself or herself by travelling, and sheer physical displacement in space *alone* won't make us able to see with eyes different from those we usually use. Still, it seems to me important to note that accepting this does *not* necessarily commit one to accepting another of these ancient proverbs: *Noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi. In interiore homine habitat veritas* (Augustine, *De vera religion* 39.72). Nietzsche was deeply opposed to this kind of introspectivism, opposed to the very ideas of 'depth', 'profundity', 'authenticity' as central and important positive categories. In a way his project is trying to get us to discover a way of accepting the first of these two proverbs while rejecting the second. He thinks there is in fact enough space between these two to find a path. In addition, of course, he is not claiming that no form of self-reflection on our beliefs is of any use whatever in attaining self-knowledge, nor that becoming aware of our desires is in all cases pointless; only that neither of these, nor both together, is sufficient.

It would be a natural reaction for those standing in the tradition of Socrates to ask further questions about the 'self-knowledge' purportedly associated with travel or alienation from one's own society. If it is really 'knowledge', they might argue, it must have some propositional content which would be capable of being formulated in a belief which is true or false. If that is the case, then actually the tradition that goes back to Socrates is in some sense vindicated. Travel might be a method of acquiring new beliefs or of testing received beliefs, but then it has always been acknowledged that there is an unsurveyable variety of methods of acquiring new beliefs, and 'travelling' might be construed as simply a complicated version of the usual empirical or observational methods with which we have become familiar. None of this would require any real change in our epistemology. So what is the belief that is the content of this self-knowledge? If there is no such belief and nothing can be said about this purported form of self-knowledge, then in what sense is it knowledge at all?

To argue in this way is to miss the point completely. First of all it is a mistake to think that all knowledge must be construed as the entertaining of a fixed propositional belief. As Ryle argued half a century ago, to say that Joan knows how to swim is not to say that she entertains any special propositional belief at all. Of course, if she knows how to swim there will most likely be any number of beliefs she has, probably most of them about water and its properties, but holding none of them will be identical with knowing how to swim. One can, of course, simply deny this and claim that by 'knowledge' one *means* or *ought to mean* merely propositional knowledge, and no one can object to such a terminological convention; but adopting it means that one simply transfers the discussion to another place without resolving anything. If 'knowledge' must mean 'propositional knowledge' then all the questions recur about why 'knowledge' in this sense should be supposed to have any kind of priority over other modes of cognitively discriminating

engagement with the world. The swimmer does exhibit such an engagement, responding to changes in the aquatic environment in a way that exhibits something one would be hard pressed to deny was intelligence and discrimination. The same might well be true of Herodotus and of Heraclitus. It is not that one cannot say any number of things about them, their attitudes toward and ways of engaging with the world, although *what* we would say would be a variety of different, contextually specific things in each case. If we knew more about their history, we might also be able to tell an even richer and more complex story about how their attitudes, dispositions, beliefs, and forms of action changed as a result of their experience. This no more means we must be able to state in a single proposition what they learned about themselves, than the absence of a 'moral' to the *Iliad* which could be stated in a single sentence means that that work is insignificant.

A further ancient topos would have it that the philosopher is someone who is at home anywhere (*patria mea totus hic mundus est* [Seneca, *Ep. Mor.* 28.4]). Nietzsche thinks he is someone at home nowhere, not even in his place of birth. The philosopher, on this view, has no fatherland. He sees everything with the eye of the foreigner and he does not accept unquestioningly any of the binding ideals of the imaginary Father.[31] Or rather, it is not that the philosopher has no fatherland – it is that the role of 'philosopher' covers a wide variety of historically distinct functions. 'Philosophy', Nietzsche believes, has no unchanging essence but is a name we employ to designate a variety of historically changing activities, and being a 'philosopher' is being the occupant of one of these shifting social roles (or, in a very few exceptional cases, inventing a new role). Roles philosophers have played include shaman; priest or physician of the body, but more usually of the soul (Empedocles); lawgiver (Solon); prophet who proclaims new values (Isaiah, Zarathustra); political activist (Democritus); contemplative, seer (Heraclitus); ascetic 'Overcomer of the

World' (various Indian examples); advisor to princes (Seneca); scientist (Aristotle); disappointed political leader (Plato); free thinker (Voltaire); experimentalist who tries out new ways of thinking and acting (de Sade); and tempter. I merely note that these roles are not only very different, but some of them are actually incompatible: those looking for a physician usually do not want an experimentalist who will try out interesting and previously unheard-of things on them.

To say that philosophy has been a historically variable activity and that the roles philosophers play have been very different in different times and places, and thus that they could change again, is not to deny the obvious fact that at certain times certain roles are especially important and certain conceptions are dominant – but this is because, Nietzsche thinks, they have imposed themselves as more central and important than others. *How* exactly they have 'imposed themselves' – through charisma, force of arms, force of argument, rhetorical persuasiveness, informal social pressure, responsiveness to the overwhelming needs of a certain population, absence of alternatives, or in some other way – is also something that has varied. Although the philosopher as free thinker has no fatherland, that is only one of the roles a philosopher can play, and another role is that of lawgiver. Such a lawgiver, like Solon in ancient Athens, can to some extent become part of the imaginary apparatus in which a fatherland is constructed.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize two points I have tried to make in this essay, and at least gesture toward one further related but important point, which there is no space here to discuss in detail. First, Nietzsche is keen to break down the walls which have surrounded and were held to defend *Festung Philosophia* from the barbarian disciplines of poetry, rhetoric, history, and ethnology. Dionysus can be both poet and philosopher (KSA 6.377–410) and also god (KSA 5.237–9); Zarathustra can be both rhetorician and philosopher; Nietzsche himself can be at the same time historian (KSA 5.288–9), ethnologist

(KSA 5.105–204), and philosopher. This can be seen as a liberation from dogmatism and an enrichment of intellectual and moral possibilities. Second, if you are interested, as philosophers have traditionally been, in self-knowledge, neither introspection nor dialectical conversation nor some combination of both is a *via regia*. Rather what you should be looking for is a way of locating yourself in your local context and your historically given patchwork of fatherlands and their associated tables of value, and the best way to do that is to look at your home with the eye of the foreign traveller. Herodotus (and then Heraclitus and Brecht) are better models than Socrates. My third and final point is that, as Nietzsche argues, self-knowledge itself may not be as important in all contexts as philosophers have made it out to be. Much more important is creative activity, the invention and production of something new, and this does not necessarily always require a high degree of self-knowledge; in fact it is often associated with a blindness to the self, with delusion about the world and with various forms of divine madness. The relation of this to *any* form of knowledge is certainly as much an open question today as it was in Nietzsche's time, or indeed in the sixth century BC.

4

Autopsy and Polyphony

Ever since antiquity the eye has been considered to be the privileged organ of human perception. Sight is taken to be the most immediate and also most reliable mode of gaining access to reality. We have general statements to this effect from as early as the sixth century BC, when the Ionian philosopher Heraclitus writes that 'the eyes are more exact witnesses than the ears',[1] and the fifth-century researcher into things past and present ('historian') Herodotus[2] makes a clear distinction in the many stories (*logoi*) he recounts between what he himself claims to have seen (*opsis*) and what he has (merely) heard (*akoué*) from others, and gives priority to what he has seen, presumably because it is more accurate and more reliable. This is not, of course, merely an irrelevant ancient prejudice, because even nowadays one might well be asked in a court of law, 'Did you see what you are about to testify to with your own eyes or did you just hear other people talking about it?' 'Hearsay' evidence, as it is called, is usually deemed to be legally inadmissible. So 'autopsy' – seeing it with one's own eyes – is still clearly considered to be one of the most important, if not the most important source of knowledge, and, following on from that, the description, analysis, and explanation of visual

phenomena, of the appearances of things, is still in some sense the model for all cognition.

'Theory' (*theoria*) is originally the Greek word for a delegation officially sent off to travel to a distant sanctuary and attend religious ceremonies there in the name of the city that sent it.[3] So it was thought to be a way in which the people in one community could vicariously participate in sacred acts actually performed somewhere else. The city of Athens gave the members of their delegation an official mission so that the citizens of Athens could in some sense take part in the religious ritual and 'see' (*theorein*) the god in Delos (or wherever) despite the distance; because the city gave the mission their formal endorsement, the official representatives (*theoroi*) of Athens were there in Delos 'seeing' what was happening in the place of the body of citizens as a whole (including those who stayed at home). Since some of the activities which we would classify as sporting or cultural events were, for the Greeks, also religious events, '*theoria*' was also applied to the official delegations sent by a city to watch, for instance, the Olympic Games. This etymological curiosity points, however, in the direction of some questions that have repeatedly arisen about observation, especially in what we now call the social sciences. By observing, the *theoroi* were indirectly participating in the religious activities, ceremonies, and rites being carried out. Seeing was (in some sense) doing. Once philosophy gets properly started, however, *its* practitioners become keen to define '*theoria*' in contrast to any forms of active participation in what is being studied. Can this abstractive process ever be fully successful? Can there be a 'pure' theoretician who merely looks (in no way participating or intervening), or is looking at something in and of itself necessarily a way of joining in? How much distance is there, and can there be, between theory and engagement? Can one make sense of the idea of 'participant observation' and, if so, how exactly? Theorizing seems to be perpetually endangered from two sides. First, who issues the commission to investigate

something 'theoretically', and in whose service does the project stand? Second, is it possible to prevent theoretical activity from shading into active participation or even endorsement of what it is investigating? If it is possible, is it desirable? Under what circumstances? How is this to be secured?

Despite the cognitive privilege that has been accorded historically to visual forms of perception, occasionally it has proved impossible to ignore the fact that human beings have other senses that bring them into contact with reality, apart from the sense of sight. So, it is claimed that experienced sailors in the eighteenth century could smell a slave ship on the high seas even at a great distance, and even if it was completely invisible, because of its unmistakable stench. And in early modern times in Constantinople/Istanbul, even those completely unfamiliar with the layout of the city could find their way to the Quarter of the Genoese with their noses alone, by following the odour of *pesto* which permeated the surrounding area. People in the present generation who are old enough to have travelled through Eastern Europe in the 1960s and '70s will recall the unforgettable Soviet smell of train stations, buses, large buildings, and public spaces in the medium-sized cities, a specific mixture of decayed masonry, sweat, soap, highly astringent ammonia-based cleaning solutions, and coal dust. In everyday parlance we still say that someone has a 'good nose', for instance, for new fashion trends, new commercial possibilities, and original lines of argument. All of these observations could be seen as *preliminaria* to the construction of a special epistemology of smell. To move from smell to taste, it is the delicate flavour of a *petite madeleine*, probably the most significant item of baked goods in the history of literature, which sets Marcel Proust off on his trip into the past which extends over several thousand pages. Putting aside for the moment hearing, which will be treated later, that leaves only one of the usually recognized five senses, touch. But it is hard not to recognize the status of our faculty of touch as a mode of cognitive access

to the world. Every Christian knows the story of the haptophile doubter, Saint Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, who said he would refuse to accept that Jesus had risen from the dead unless he put his finger into the wounds themselves. Touch could not be deceived. And all students of German literature will remember Goethe's paean in the *Roman Elegies* to touch as a way of getting to know the world, when he describes how he explores the body of his Roman paramour ('seeing [her] with a feeling eye and seeing [her] with a seeing hand') while tapping out the meter for his poem on her back.[4]

Among the various human organs of sense, taste is taken to be especially 'subjective', with the implication that this makes it unreliable. We say 'that is just a matter of taste' or quote the old maxim *de gustibus non est disputandum* when what we mean is that no sensible person would try to continue to discuss the point at issue because there is virtually no hope of convincing an opponent to change her mind on it. There have been 'scientific' studies of the human taste, but as far as they have been able to determine 'objectively', taste is a rather crude instrument for gaining knowledge of the world. Empirical research suggests that humans can distinguish only five kinds of taste: sweet, salty, sour, bitter, and *umami*. I further note that English does not even have an indigenous word for the kind of taste which we designate with the Japanese word *umami*. It also seems clear that the cognitive value of the sense of touch is very limited, despite the purportedly greater reliability of what it does reveal. The reason, of course, is its limitation to things that are in touchable distance from the human body. Blind persons might use a short staff or a stick to expand the range within which they can orient themselves, but there are also limits to how far that can be done. If I were blind and had a stick 5 meters long in my hands, would you really be comfortable saying that I have expanded the range of things I can 'feel' in any reasonable or phenomenologically plausible sense?

How about our sense of hearing, though? Surely it should be possible to imagine a form of systematic study of human society that would integrate purely acoustic phenomena as an essential component. One of the things that stands in the way of this is the fact that for us the human voice, and that means speech, seems naturally to attract our primary attention in all human interactions, blotting out or at least dampening down all other sounds. The content of what is being said when anyone speaks is so immediately engaging that other aspects of the situation can seem to disappear into the background. In fact it requires an effort for us to focus on a speaking human voice as a purely acoustic phenomenon, mainly because we need to exert ourselves to abstract from the content of what the voice is saying. A focus on pure noise, though, can sometimes lead to valuable insights. Thus many British political commentators thought it was clear that Boris Johnson's days as Prime Minister were numbered when in January 2022 the members of the Conservative Party in Parliament listened *in silence* as the Leader of the Opposition Keir Starmer read out a long list of some of Johnson's more egregious lies and crimes.[5] That they were quiet indicates that they were too abashed even to make any of their usual noises. A mere spectator who was deaf or otherwise not paying attention to the soundscape, or a scholar sitting in the library reading a written transcript of the speeches given that day in Parliament, would have missed something politically essential – the absence of an expected kind of noise.

We have some rather clear criteria for classifying auditory phenomena. Sounds are defined physiologically as stimulations of the human auditory apparatus, but we distinguish structured and unstructured sounds. Unstructured sounds are ones that exhibit no pattern that a normal human can identify, such as the sound caused by street traffic or by work at a building site. There are some isolated natural acoustic phenomena that have a rhythmical structure – the sound produced by

the regular breaking of waves on the shore or the chirping of cicadas in the summer – but generally the structured sound we encounter in everyday life is artificially produced by humans, for instance music or conversation. In cases like this we also speak of the sound as being 'articulated'. Music is articulated, but not discursively so; human speech is articulated and discursive. 'Noise', as Theodor Lessing rightly pointed out,[6] is a term which carries an inherent normative load, like 'weed' (plant not wanted here) or 'dirt' ('matter in the wrong place' as Mary Douglas calls it).[7] 'Noise' is what we call sounds we don't like, don't want to hear, or find disturbing or distracting.

Whether or not a sound is disturbing is a complicated issue. Different people have a strikingly different ability to distinguish sounds from each other; some of this is learned or the result of training, but there is probably a physiological component to it. This, however, does not seem to be the whole story. It seems empirically undeniable that some people find exceptionally loud, unstructured sounds (like those of a jackhammer) particularly disruptive, while others have a greater tolerance of mere noise, but become distracted and cannot concentrate if any kind of conversation is taking place around them, even one conducted in whispers. Some studies have come to the conclusion that noises which we think could easily be turned off or otherwise silenced count as particularly irritating. So what seems to be crucial is our attitude toward the sound in question, and that is something that depends on the other views, ideas, and theories we hold, and also the wider experiential context.

From the fact that some sounds are unstructured and irritating, it does not follow that they are *ipso facto* unsuited for conveying any information, and are thus meaningless. Even mere noise can be expressive, provided the context is right. The noisy braying of the Tories in Parliament is part of a long tradition of such behaviour which is so firmly established that everyone knows what it means.

The traditional priority accorded to vision should obviously not be taken to mean that what we can know is limited to what we can see directly, to the realm of autopsy. Most of what I think I know – that Beijing is the capital of China, that the bubonic plague is transmitted primarily through infected fleas, that uranium has a higher specific weight than gold – is not the result of direct visual experiences I have had. Rather, if one wishes to use this terminology, most of my knowledge is hearsay – rationally filtered and evaluated hearsay to be sure, but not based on my own direct experience. What I know mostly depends on the testimony of people whom I take to be experts, statements in definitive books, extrapolation from other things I think I know, but not on autopsy. To put it in a slightly paradoxical way, one might say that one of the most important functions of theorizing is to dispense us from the necessity of seeing things directly with our own eyes, thereby undermining autopsy. Anyone who has a *good* theory will also be likely to be in possession of facts that no one has seen, perhaps facts that no one could ever see directly, for instance the fact that the temperature in the interior of our sun is XYZ°. 'What I directly see' can be seriously discredited if it contradicts a well-supported theory or is in conflict with what such a theory requires or predicts. In such cases it is perfectly possible that something which is clearly and distinctly visible to anyone comes to be demoted to the status of a mere appearance. Thus, for those who hold the heliocentric theory, the fact that the sun seems to rise every day is not a reliable report about how the world is, but a kind of optical illusion. In some cases it is possible that the theory takes on the role of the primary school teacher, who, when taking a walk in the woods with the children, does not so much simply record what they see, but trains them in observing things, so that at the end they are able to see what they have been told is relevant. Or a theory is like the Roman Censor, the elderly Senator who could decide who was really a member of the Senate and could therefore speak,

and who was to be excluded. A theory can speak with the internalized, authoritative voice of an ideal teacher discussing and evaluating the purported 'immediate data' of experience. The theory gives us instruction about what is relevant, gives us the context, and may even propose minor corrections. This position can be abused, as when the theory rules out of court things which turn out to be facts, but that does not mean that all correction of the raw data is an abuse, nor that the visible facts simply speak for themselves.

There is no reason, then, for those who hold that the visual has epistemic priority to be particularly complacent. Even the example of court proceedings is not as conclusive as it might at first seem, because in many archaic societies eye-witnesses had to appear in person and speak out their testimony in a loud, clear voice so that all could hear, and decide about the weight that was to be given to what they said. It is as if what they reportedly saw became real only when it was enunciated by the voice of a living human being. As if the Emperor really was naked only when someone said so out loud and publicly, so that it could not be ignored. Before that he merely had no clothes on – which in fact everyone who was not a fool or blind saw already.

Later in history the idea takes hold that the witness must appear in person to testify, so that he or she can be cross-examined. Something similar might be in play in the Catholic sacrament of confession, where penitents must recount their sins in their own voice, and admit their guilt. If necessary, the priest must be able to ask them further questions about the details of what they desired, intended, and did, and about their mode of life in general. Penitents are supposed also to listen to the admonition of the priest, take it to heart, show repentance for what they have done, and do penance. The physical co-presence of the priest and the penitent in the same space is a necessary condition for the validity of the sacrament, although in many cases there will be some kind of barrier or

partition between the two of them, both of them will be sitting in the dark, and neither one can see the other clearly. It is significant that confession by telephone is not permissible. The sacrament, in its external conduct, puts the focus on the living, direct speech of the penitent, the attentive listening of a priest who is physically present, and the priest's words of absolution, which are also spoken out loud.

In everyday life we often speak of wishing to hear the 'living voice' of someone, as if it could be assumed that there was some automatic connection between being alive and having a voice. That is false, of course, because plants have no voice, although they are alive, but the tacit assumption that there is some kind of connection seems deeply rooted in our habits of thought and speech. So Plato rejects book-knowledge with the argument that books are mere collections of mute, dead letters. They have no voice and stay silent when one questions them,[8] and this is taken to be some kind of deep deficiency. The 'knowledge' which was the concern of philosophy could be transmitted only through direct human speech, because only the human voice can penetrate into the innermost part of the soul.

We do not seem to have the same kind of distance to acoustic phenomena that we have to visual impressions. Even when I see my friend *over there*, I hear his voice *here*. I can turn away from him or intentionally close my eyes, and then I will not see him, but if I did not wish to hear him any more I would have to stuff something into my ears to muffle the sounds. Think of the complicated mechanical operations that were necessary to protect the companions of Odysseus from the song of the Sirens; Odysseus has to pour melted wax into their ears so they will not be seduced and go off in pursuit of the Sirens to their doom. The parallel in the case of vision is the Gorgons, who turn to stone anyone who looks directly at them. Perseus is the only one who is able to outwit and then defeat the Gorgon Medusa, and he does so by using his polished shield

as a mirror. Guiding his hand by looking at the image, he cuts her head off. Odysseus, on the other hand, had nothing to fear from the visual appearance of the Sirens. It was the sound they made, their song, that was the danger, and the song was dangerous because it contained a promise of all-encompassing knowledge, knowledge of the past, the present, and the future. This knowledge, though, seems not to have had a particularly optical dimension; what at any rate is presented as being striking about it is that the promise of it takes an auditory form, as a song.

It would seem that it is an auditory phenomenon – the hearing of a voice, whether human or divine – which gives us distance from the whole visual field. This distance is what permits us to distinguish appearance from reality, to criticize the conditions in which we live, and to engage in systematic protest. Thus, the Old Testament prophets occasionally resorted to very histrionic performances in order to pique the spectators' interest. For instance, the prophet Jeremiah appeared in the market square carrying a yoke like the one used for oxen, and he then smashed a pot.[9] However, he also immediately explained what these apparently bizarre actions were meant to represent: the yoke stood for political subjugation to the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, and the broken pot symbolized the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. The performance of a prophet reaches its climax not during this quasi-theatrical performance, but when he raises his voice in the name of the Lord to proclaim the Lord's commandments, explain the Lord's actions, castigate evil-doers, and excoriate social evils. The God of Delphi, too, interacts with humans by means of the voice of the priestesses at his oracular shrine, and even Socrates, that model of a sober man, not generally subject to religious enthusiasms, listens to the inner voice of *daimonion* – a voice no one else hears, and which never recommends a course of action, but which stops him in his tracks when he is about to do something wrong.[10] Later Christianity formally

promotes the 'voice of conscience' to the status of an important guide for judging the morality of action. In general, until very recently the auditory realm has been a favourite source of expressive metaphors used to describe otherwise elusive experiences that lie on the border between the cognitive and the moral. Thus in Beethoven's *Fidelio* Leonora hears 'the voice of humanity' speaking to condemn the cruelty she sees in the world around her, and the prisoners hear hope whispering to them. We know that their much-desired moment of liberation is near when the trumpet call which announces the arrival of the Minister penetrates into the subterranean dungeon where the four main characters are assembled.

It is then a voice which I hear inside me or outside which calls me back from immersion in the visual world.[11] It is an important element in what gives our social reality its normative complexity. There might be a temptation here to connect the development of the inner voice with the general process through which human agents have historically become more highly individualized. The assumption would be that human beings are individuals to the extent to which each has an especially rich and highly differentiated inner life. The metaphor of the human mind or soul as an 'internal theatre' was frequently used in early modern times, and if we imagine the soul of a fully developed individual as a kind of internal auditorium or concert hall, we find that very different pieces of music are being performed on different occasions, not the same old warhorses over and over again. Or, to shift the metaphor slightly, an ever-changing repertory of radio plays is being performed by a variety of different actors assuming different *personae*. The representatives of very different standpoints come to the fore and speak into the microphone, and gradually but with increasing frequency they deviate from the old scripts – which were in any case no more than a large and disparate bunch of scribbled notes. The actors innovate and even perhaps improvise, and behind what we can hear other forces are at work about which

we can only speculate. So the inner life is a hubbub of voices, some of them playing one or another of a large variety of prescripted roles (more or less faithfully), some extemporizing, some perhaps imitating or impersonating others, all of them potentially interrupting the others. In this confused situation, it is no wonder that I might come to ask myself which of these voices, if any, is 'me'. Or am I the whole *dramatis personae*? Or something completely different from all of this? The answer is by no means obvious. It is also by no means clear that I always know which of the inner voices will prevail and determine my action, including what I say.

As a human being, I stand, like all humans, at a place where two worlds intersect.[12] On the one hand, in my soul, various conversations and other interactions that are more or less like conversations are always in progress. These are part of what makes me the subject I am. 'Part of what makes me the subject I am' in fact means 'only a part', because it would be a serious error to overlook the role that non-discursive elements play in my inner life. That is one side of the story. On the other side, there is the fact that I am always in fact embedded and immersed in a social world, in which it is more or less the case that I find myself subject to particular demands made on me. Among these demands is an underlying one that I myself take a position on various other people, their opinions, attitudes, and actions, on institutions, on the plans other people make. In addition, it is also a fact about the social reality I inhabit that any number of institutions may claim, at various times, in various contexts, and for various reasons, to speak in my name. Until the child has come of age, the parents speak in his or her name; in many slave societies slaves may never be able to have a legally recognized voice; and even in our world various governmental agencies claim to speak in the name even of those who did not vote for them. Even if I do have a kind of voice in government by virtue of having a right to vote, that vote is not actually completely articulate. It is more like a black

box than a voice genuinely expressing my opinions, because even if I do happen to vote for a candidate who turns out to win the election, must I thereby be construed as endorsing *all* the positions that candidate takes? Is this the case even if I have voted for the candidate for strategic reasons or as a pure protest? Is there a little box I can tick on the voting form saying 'strategic vote'? Or 'This moron is probably the least pernicious of the listed candidates, but I don't actually agree with most of the nonsense he (or she) spouts'? Is a voting system even conceivable that would make it strictly impossible to vote for strategic reasons? And, finally, what is really wrong with strategic voting, apart from the fact that it does not realize some imaginary ideal of pure democracy based on fully rational and transparent procedures? 'I should get a hearing' and 'my voice should carry some weight' are not in themselves very clear demands. At the very least they require some idea of what concretely 'getting a hearing' means, and that is very much a matter of interpretation.

Humans have a very vivid sense of which areas of their life are potentially dangerous. Ingesting substances, taking what was outside inside the human body, is one such area, so it is not surprising that eating and drinking is so often surrounded by taboos and restrictions. Our cognitive relation to our surroundings is a similar area of possible uncertainty and peril, so by designating one particular mode of perception – whether seeing or hearing – as the one that has cognitive priority, we are thereby also marking it as in principle a locus of especial danger for us. If the mode of our most certain cognitive access to reality – the most reliable human sense – turned out to be fallible, then perhaps nothing in life is certain, and the very ground we walk on could be insecure. This is probably part of the reason for the prohibition on images which is such a notable part of many monotheistic religions.

It is because of its presumed immediacy that we take vision to be particularly reliable. There is a bit of a theological problem

here for certain forms of religious thought. Gods are highly dangerous creatures. Given that they have supernatural powers and are known to be very unpredictable in their behaviour, one should always approach them only with the utmost circumspection and care. Woe betide him who falls into the hands of the 'living' storm-god of the ancient Hebrews, Yahweh.[13] In the Hellenic tradition, too, the story of Semele, the mortal woman who was loved by the god Zeus, had an unfortunate outcome (for Semele). Zeus disguised himself as a mortal man in order to seduce Semele, but she demanded to see him in his true and undisguised form, in all his celestial majesty. However, the full radiance of Zeus in his true form destroyed Semele, burning her to a crisp. So it is perfectly rational to be very afraid indeed in dealing with any god. Fear, however, as we know, is an affect which is easily socially transmissible, especially among humans who are gathered closely together in a crowd, so it is not really surprising that religions, especially in their early stages, often seem particularly concerned with collective ways of limiting and controlling fear of the gods. Psychoanalytically oriented research has frequently pointed out the phenomenon of transference of fear not just from one subject to another (in crowds or groups) but from one object to another, closely related object. Anyone with a fear of spiders will likely try to avoid having to see spider webs, and eventually even, in extreme cases, images of spider webs. So one can understand how, by a process like this, fear of the incandescent anger of an unpredictable god could eventually extend to any visual representations of a god.[14] The more powerful the god, the more terrible its aspect. The monotheistic God who eventually got established in the Near East, however, was omnipotent, and so could be expected to be correspondingly overwhelmingly fearful to behold.

To see gods themselves, then, is not only highly dangerous, but under most circumstances directly fatal. Why would one want to depict something which most people – at any rate

most people who are still alive – have never seen, and which it is perfectly reasonable to be terrified of? I suppose there could be a sophisticated aesthetic enjoyment to be derived from the representation of that which is horrible and an appropriate object of fear. The Athenians were clearly able to manage this, when they devoted significant public resources to staging tragedies, which the citizens flocked to see – indeed couldn't in some sense get enough of. This, however, is a major achievement, not, as it were, the default position in which all human societies automatically find themselves.

Monotheism also has some further theoretical reasons, beyond the one just mentioned, to issue a prohibition on images or at any rate to cultivate an attitude of great scepticism about visual representations of God. It is a central point in many monotheistic theologies that the one true God is in principle Absolute and radically transcendent, certainly utterly different from anything we can immediately experience. So how could one depict visually something the essential nature of which is to be completely different from anything that could be seen? If God is such an absolute, humans will have no adequate means whatever to depict him. Well, what about using *inadequate* means? What is wrong with that? Monotheists suggest that the comparison with non-monotheistic religions which worship gods in the form of animals throws light on their concerns. For monotheists the true, transcendental God is not simply a Human Being writ large (as most Homeric gods were), much less an animal. One of the first Greek monotheists, the late sixth-century BC philosopher Xenophanes, criticized all forms of anthropomorphism in the representation of gods as foolish. If horses sculpted statues of the gods, their gods would look like horses, so it is understandable that gods sculpted by humans look like humans.[15] Understandable, but still silly. The Divine, Xenophanes argues, if it is correctly understood, is beyond human representation. To this one then merely needs to add the further assumption, which Greek thinkers were not

in general disposed to do, that producing and worshipping a false image was not just a mistake – something silly and foolish – but was a form of *lèse majesté* directed against the God who was (purportedly) being depicted. If the omnipotent God took offence at an incorrect image, and took it to be a personal insult, then it was possible that he would take out his anger on the people who had insulted him. The Greeks did not take this tack. For them people who worshipped idols were perhaps fools who knew no better, but they were not criminals or sinners. In any case, for the early Greek monotheists like Xenophanes, the rejection of anthropomorphism and the transcendental nature of the one God excluded the possibility that he could be motivated by such human passions as anger.[16] To think he would be capable of being insulted or taking offence would be just as stupid as worshipping a stone statue. It is, however, exactly this idea of idolatry as crime, offence, and sin which becomes the focus of the theology presented in the Hebrew Bible.

The situation for one main line of monotheistic thought is paradoxical. On the one hand, it is thought both that God is really invisible and that no human can bear to see him. If that is not difficult enough to imagine, the tradition deriving from ancient Hebrew monotheism emphasizes that it is, on the other hand, perfectly possible to hear God's voice and adopt his *ipsissima verba* as a guide to human life. The God of the Old Testament, after all, speaks directly to Moses from a burning bush. Moses hears the voice of this God, understands his commands, and transmits them to the people.[17] For the pious Muslim, too, the text of the Koran is not just a representation or translation of the thoughts of God into human language; rather, the Arabic words of the text *are* God's thoughts.

There are iconoclastic and fundamentalist strands and individual episodes in all the larger monotheistic religions, and occasionally these two things overlap. If the historical circumstances are favourable these tendencies can become dominant.

Monotheistic fundamentalists believe that the authoritative voice of God speaks clearly, can be easily heard by everyone, and is easy to understand. It as it were stands on its own two feet and is its own guarantee. Aniconic theologians attribute to all works of visual art an inherent and dangerous power of seduction. That is why they think that any image of a living thing must be proscribed. It is never made completely clear why prohibition of visual images of God must be considered also to justify forbidding the creation or use of any visual representation of anything. Perhaps this is no more than one further instance of the malleability associated with terror which was mentioned previously: extreme fear seems to seep out from its original objects and infect its surroundings, anything, in fact, that seems to be associated with it or could remind us of it. So fear of the god becomes a fearful prohibition of making any image of him (especially representing him as an animal or other living thing), and then, via a kind of proto-generalization, this mutates into a universal injunction against depicting living things, or even against representing anything.

Plato judged the situation in which he found himself in Athens, and the dangers implicit in that situation, completely differently. Not 'eye-people', visual artists, but 'ear-people', musicians and artists of speech and of the word, are the ones who must be subject to the strictest possible surveillance. Since in Plato's view music works directly on the soul, it is a particularly significant means for engaging in psychagogy, the guidance of the human soul, which is his final aim. Good music, that which uses exclusively well-regulated and 'pure' notes and sequences of notes, fosters and supports psychic equilibrium.[18] So it plays a positive, in fact virtually indispensable, role in education and in the public life of the city. Forms of music-making that employ 'unhealthy' modes, on the other hand, tend to sap the morale and undermine the character of the citizens, so they must be prohibited. Drama, choral poetry, individual lyric poetry, even narrative prose (when it finally

arose) – everything which we nowadays call 'literature' – had a strongly performative aspect in the ancient world. Most of what we would call poetry was sung or at any rate had musical accompaniment. A euphonic, rhythmically well-modulated, oral presentation of a text was not a nice addendum or afterthought, but was essential to the content of the text itself. Dance, theatre, and poetry were all thought to be genres of music, so it was perfectly consistent for Plato to think that all of them needed to be subject to the same strict censorship. Poets who told unedifying stories about the gods or about heroes were by this very fact dangerous enemies of the city. They were spreading morally toxic material which was likely to infect the citizens and thus destroy the ethical substance on which the *polis* itself depended. So Plato concludes that the expulsion of poets from the city is absolutely necessary.

Compared with his reservations about the psychagogic power of the auditory and his consequent restrictions on music and literature, Plato has little objection to the visual arts, and seems very relaxed about them. To be sure, he thinks that a picture is much less good as a source of knowledge than the real thing which is depicted. And it is true that you can learn much more about the physiology of lambs by investigating a real lamb than you can by looking at an illustration, a painting, or a photograph of that lamb. However, the conclusion Plato draws from this epistemological inferiority is that images are not of much value at all. It is true that it is a serious error to confuse an image with the object represented in the image – you can't eat a picture of an apple – but who is so foolish as to make this mistake? Who ever takes a painted fish for a real fish? Magritte's well-known painting *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* plays with this far-fetched possibility by warning the spectator against a deception which in one sense seems to be suggested by our mode of speech, but which really takes no one in. In one sense the painting 'is' clearly a pipe, because we use 'is' in this context to mean 'represents', but then no one is really tempted

to try to stuff the painting with tobacco in order to smoke. A painting, statue, or image is dangerous only through the myth that is associated with it, that is, through a narrative that has currency in the community and is taken to be a commentary on the visual image. So a picture of a man and a woman becomes a moral peril for the community only if it is taken to represent the god Zeus trying to seduce Alkmene, the wife of Amphitryon. It is reprehensible because of the extent to which it is taken to represent a god doing something reprehensible.

Myths like that of Zeus and Alkmene may have anonymous origins, but many poets devoted themselves to the task of placing themselves in the tradition of such narratives, giving them new life, developing them. For Plato the myths in their traditional archaic form were morally bad enough, but it is no less reprehensible for poets to continue to recount and embellish them in their own work, without criticizing them. Without the mythic explanation of the picture of Zeus and Alkmene, which tells the viewer what is happening in the picture and gives it its meaning, there is nothing wrong with the picture: in this particular case, say a bearded, distinguished-looking man and a buxom young woman are caressing each other. What is supposed to be morally objectionable about that?[19] So sculptors and painters are not automatically expelled from Plato's ideal city, and musicians, too, may remain, provided they use the right musical modes. Poets, however, who *ex professo* create works that fail to satisfy the right moral and political norms, must in principle be banned.

The attitude of the *homines auriculares* whom we encounter in the Old Testament is not a simple inversion of that of Plato. Plato recognized that there could be perverted forms of seeing – think of the case of Leontios in the *Republic* (439e). Passing the place of execution one day, Leontios finds that he takes pleasure against his will when he looks at the corpses of executed criminals. He cannot control himself, but even while continuing to look on in fascination, he berates his eyes for

their obsession with this spectacle, and feels disgusted with himself. So this kind of situation is perfectly possible and Plato knew it, but he still thought that simply looking at a work of visual art was in and of itself so innocent that there was no reason to subject it to special supervision. In contrast, though, acoustic phenomena like music or the recitation of poetry or narrative were ethically potentially always dubious, because sounds, notes, and tones could be corrupting and anything recited or narrated could possibly raise questions that might unsettle the political community in a very basic way. The Old Testament is saturated with admonitions to eschew foreign gods, and the latter parts of it contain some radical formulations of the prohibition of graven images. As far as I can discover, there are never any attempts to censor or proscribe, for instance, foreign music, but speaking and narrating were never as unregulated as painting was to be in Plato's ideal society. That is by no means surprising; how in fact could it have been otherwise? The ancient Hebrew monotheists were, for perfectly good reasons, never likely to consider that human narratives had no theological implications and were thus in principle always completely innocent. After all, part of the point of much of their text is precisely that such narratives have a theological significance.

At all times and in all places, as far as we can tell, people have told stories, but the ancient Hebrews seem to have been especially partial to telling a special kind of story, what later theologians have called a 'history of salvation' (*Heilsgeschichte*), which gave a global interpretation of all events, great and small, in the larger context of a more or less unitary scheme dealing with the interactions of the population with their God. This played the same central role for the Hebrew that geometry, the universal mathematical interpretation of space, played for the Greeks.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in his influential essay *Laocoön: On the Limits of Painting and Poetry*[20] tries to argue that it is

impossible to give a visual representation of a process, or in fact anything that develops in time, in a single easel painting, fresco, or statue. Literature, however, can describe the process through which change in time occurs. Lessing's observation points to an inner relation between hearing (and consequently also forms of art that eventually emerge from speaking and hearing, like all forms of literature) and dynamic phenomena that unfold in time.[21] If there is a connection between hearing and the perception and representation of temporal sequences, then that would seem to indicate that hearing has a special relation to the basic phenomena which constitute history.

Whether or not this turns out to be an interesting and fruitful speculation depends in part on what else one can say about the structural principles that seem to be basic to our experience of hearing: dynamics, rhythm, register, harmony, dissonance, polyphony. Can one find anything *outside* the world of sounds that corresponds to them (say, in history)? And if one can find such things, what value can it have to recognize them? Some cognitive value? Or some value of another kind? What kind? Supposing one could find such structural analogues, could they be the objects of cognition, and how might they come to enter into the process of theory-formation? The human voice begins to speak and then ceases, just as music starts to play, then ends. There is nothing like that in the world of images. Images don't even really have edges, if we can trust our everyday experience on this point. Images, say pictures, can come into existence and go out of existence again, but the genesis of the picture is not part of the picture itself, but part of its pre-history; that is, it is a narrative about events that took place at a time at which the picture itself did not exist (but at the end of which the picture was visible). Equally, if the picture disappears, is lost or destroyed, it is just not there any more. In speech, by contrast, the beginning, middle, and end of articulated sound, a process in time, is the speech itself. What counts as the 'frame' of a picture or the 'edge' of an image is something we determine, as

it were, from outside. This is so much the case that playing with where the image ends and the framework begins has become a cliché of a certain kind of modern art. If we say the picture ends here, that is because we stop looking at it there (although there is no reason for that in the content), or because something forces us to turn our gaze away. The end, frame, limit of the image is an effect of our contemplation, of an activity which we can guide one way or the other at will, and thus also which we can limit.

If one takes the above account to be roughly correct, the utopia of optical knowledge would be an all-encompassing, closed, unitary system which provides a complete overview of the domain in question. The human eye is not, of course, limited to registering individual objects; it can also perceive groups or constellations of objects (if they are not too big and are at an appropriate distance), patterns, and shapes. Even sequences would in principle be visible, provided that one construed them simply as configurations that might recur in time, in the way in which one can construe an arpeggio in music as a chord in which the individual notes sound successively rather than together. To do this one must abstract from the tempo, rhythm, and dynamics of the original sequence of notes that constitutes the arpeggio. That, however, means abstracting from elements that many musicians, and listeners, take to be essential for something to be a piece of music. Just as music is not a temporal accumulation or juxtaposition of chordal formulae, history cannot really be understood as a quasi-spatial object, whose components or constituent atoms could be taken apart and then *not* placed next to each other synchronically, but ordered one after the other in time. Real historical processes are accessible to the eye only because of the distance which the eye of the human subject has from the whole of the events it is observing. That distance however is not an optical phenomenon, and it is not something which humans acquire simply through some process in the visual

realm. Human history is not a closed unitary object as long as we continue to write it, read it, hear it, and narrate it; it is still in process. So one cannot unroll it on a table like a huge panorama painted on canvas or a large map, and then study it, looking down on it from above. It does not exist as the determinate object of a possible panoptic theory.

In addition, it is usually possible to group and order any sequence of visually perceived events in a variety of very different ways, so that they make different stories and thus different histories emerge. The 'same' events on board a slave ship sailing from Africa to the New World in the seventeenth century would be likely to be recounted very differently in different sources. Think of comparing the official report written by the accountant hired by the trading company in the metropolis which owned the ship with the original log-book of the captain. Think also of the differences between either of these two stories and an account left by any of the slaves who survived the journey.

The eye can perceive ambiguities and indeterminacies in what it sees, but it has difficulties with certain kinds of plurality, for instance multiple visual fields or multiple perspectives. Repeating sequences are also not in themselves problematic for vision, but repeating sequences are not history. The ear can hear a wide variety of voices, narratives, and stories, and it can potentially hear a history. Listening to the many and various voices one can hear in one's environment, and also to the diverse post-Socratic inner (and internalized) voices within oneself, has not in fact been a virtue that has been particularly intensely cultivated in the modern social scientific disciplines. To give the acoustic, the auditory, listening, and hearing their appropriate legitimate place in the systematic study of society would mean, among other things, to recognize a polyphony of voice in any group. Actually, in our society it would probably be more correct to speak not of 'polyphony' but of 'cacophony'. 'In our society' or in 'all societies known to us'? Can one listen

with concentration without distinguishing each of these voices in its singularity? How then to differentiate them? And how to order them?

The *theoroi* (observers) who were officially sent out by the Greek *polis* were citizens who had a special commission to visit a cult in foreign parts, witness what happened, and return to report on what they had seen, on the exact way the rituals had been performed. To make such a report, they would, of course, have had to be very familiar with a wide spectrum of Greek habits, customs, and usages, especially customs about religious matters. They would have had to know what an 'offering' was, what a god was, what a priest was, which animals were generally offered to which gods (and which were not). If the *theoroi* were not in possession of the appropriate antecedent knowledge beforehand, or if they neglected to pay continual attention to the internalized voice of their commission and perhaps, under the pressure of events, even forgot what they were about, then upon their return to their native city they might well stand before the assembled citizens just as speechless and 'dumb' as the young Parsifal stood at the end of the first Act of Wagner's opera. They would not be able to describe correctly what they had seen and would have failed in their commission.

'Theory' in its post-Platonic form is intimately associated with a tacit claim which gives it much of its persuasive force. This is the claim that a good theory is something that gets beyond all that messy, context-dependent antecedent knowledge and all complicity with a particular mission. It does this in large part by abstraction and by deploying a whole battery of complicated and sophisticated methodological rules, principles, maxims, and procedures governing observation, inference, testing, confirmation and disconfirmation, etc. Which particular mix of these principles and procedures will be appropriate depends on the particular kind of knowledge sought. In the *Republic* Plato describes the path which the theoretician (the 'philosopher') follows to acquire the right

disciplines. Through 'dialectic', apprentices are forced to ascend to ever higher levels of abstraction, freeing themselves gradually but cumulatively from all one-sided opinions or views dependent on a particular perspective. Mastery of the art of dialectics allows theoreticians to see through the illusions of everyday life, so that finally they reach a position from which they can survey the whole world and everything in it, and see it as it really is, not merely as it appears to be. You can adopt this standpoint when, as the *homo ocularis* Plato puts it, you have 'seen the idea of the Good'.[22] The sun shines on all parts of the earth, and it is by virtue of the light which the sun provides that anything at all can be seen as that which it is. In a similar way, so the argument runs, the 'idea of the Good' shines down on everything that is, and renders it intelligible. Just as there is only one sun – here our contemporaries would be likely to interrupt Plato in mid-course, to add: 'only one sun in our solar system, at any rate' – so there can be only one final standpoint from which everything properly makes sense. There *must* be a final unitary theory, even if, at the moment, we have no idea what it might look like. Even philosophers and theoreticians who otherwise have little in common with Plato seem to find it difficult to distance themselves from this thesis and its implications. Perhaps the time has come to wonder about this assumption. Is it really so obvious that everything must finally fit together in one scheme? Why do we think that is necessary? Perhaps in the long run it was one of the most significant contributions of pragmatism that it tried to raise this question at all. Pragmatists thought that there were good reasons *in contexts in which certain forms of action were required* to look for consistency, universality, and unity, but there were others in which this was not the case, and the relation between what we need for action (of a certain kind in certain contexts) and what it is possible and desirable to think is much more complicated than traditional philosophy imagines.

It is in fact absolutely true that abstraction has enormous power as a force for liberation, but it is not *per se* omnipotent. The idea that there must in the end be one privileged point of view for cognition, that there must (at least *idealiter*) be a single final unitary theoretical framework, that there must be a way of escaping context completely, has certainly cast its spell very effectively over us in the West during the past 2,000 years or so. To be sure, the magic is no longer as powerful in the human sciences as it once was. To the extent to which its fascination fades, many find themselves more drawn to Nietzsche's view. What if Nietzsche were right and there is not just *one* sun that illuminates our human world, but irreducibly many?[23]

At this point, though, it seems that an abyss has opened up, a huge chasm that threatens to engulf everything: perspectivism, polyphony, the irreducible context-dependence of knowledge, the absence of a final unifying standpoint. What happened to the dream of a unitary science? Of a position from which one could definitively judge and act? Completely independently of the question of whether or not this is in some sense correct, would it be at all tolerable for humans?

The metaphors of a gulf, an abyss, or a gaping chasm seem correct at least to the extent that they give expression in a pregnant form to what is an understandable reaction which many people in our society would have to the Nietzschean line of argument. Nevertheless one should not allow oneself to be led too far astray by metaphors. It is not at all obvious that in the good old days (from Plato to just before the time of Nietzsche) we really had such firm ground under our feet. Perhaps what seemed to be firm ground was just an artefact we created, the effect of a stubborn adherence to an illusion. Who walks with a firmer tread than the fundamentalist? Why again was it to be the case that we had to believe that there existed a coherent, unitary theoretical framework which gave us knowledge, but dispensed with any perspective? Why did it seem, strangely, that the actual realization of this dream

– the specification of the theory – was never available now, but was always something about to be discovered, formulated, and definitively confirmed? How odd that we forebore to draw what would seem to be the obvious (if radical) philosophical consequences that would flow from the repeated failure of this dream.

The oral tradition in the city I live in, Cambridge, would have it that the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein used repeatedly to criticize the phobia that many of his fellow philosophers had about 'contradiction'. Of course, one ought not to seek out internally contradictory theories, or for that matter even ignore contradictions that emerge during the course of investigation. However, he thought, it was also not useful simply to throw up one's hands in panic, or close one's eyes and look the other way. The question was how one could learn to deal productively with contradiction, and this cause was not advanced by mental *rigor mortis* or headlong flight.

My suggestion is that one could do worse than try to think of ways in which a modified Herodotus might be rehabilitated. This Herodotus would not be an author who was utterly devoted to autopsy and always gave it absolute pride of place – not, that is, the predecessor of Plato – but would rather be the precursor of a very different strand which comes to the fore in some modern ethnography and in some modern literature. This is the Herodotus who did not always ignore, diminish, or suppress the variant narratives he heard, the stories various individuals, groups, and societies told themselves (and others, including him), but rather included them in his work, and thereby passed them on to those who later read his book (or heard it read): 'The Greeks tell the story like *this*; the Persians (or the Egyptians, etc.), on the other hand, say *this* about it . . .'.[24] This Herodotus would contextualize his own autopsy, and include the polyphonic voices of others.

If one thinks that politics is basically about human power, its extent, distribution, and exercise, then it is mostly a matter

of hearing and listening, not of seeing. Of course, direct force plays a role in politics that cannot be overlooked, and force can be deployed silently without saying a word; but the more characteristic way in which sophisticated forms of power are exercised in advanced societies is one that operates in the auditory realm. One person tells another to listen, and the other does what the first has recommended, advised, or ordered. As Lenin put it: Who gets to say 'Do as I say' to whom, and who actually listens and obeys?

In the 1940s, the literary historian Michael Bakhtin wrote about the importance of polyphonic voice-leading in literature, using Rabelais as his main example,[25] and this is a stylistic technique which one finds again and again in experimental works of fiction in the twentieth century, for instance in Proust, Joyce, Musil, Arno Schmidt, and Cixous, to mention only a few of the most distinguished. Obviously, since the texts in this corpus constitute such a large and diverse group, these writers don't all have exactly the same literary intentions, but they do all seem to have in common that they see and recognize the abyss for what it is and try to develop a mode of writing which takes appropriate account of it (and of its consequences). They are trying to write in a way that dispenses with the illusion of an 'a-perspectival' narrative and does not lay claim to present *the* truth with perfect certainty. The writers I have in mind all seek, each in his or her idiosyncratic, aesthetically and cognitively ambitious way, to connect a multiplicity of perspectives, polyphony, essayism, and theory construction. Works are enormous crash-sites, extending indefinitely far in multiple directions, where aesthetic, cognitive, and political forces have collided. This is not simply a return to Wagner's idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* because it is as sceptical of the substantive Romantic idea of 'aesthetic unity' or the 'unity of the work of art' as it is of the unitary Idea of the Good, or the *Einheitswissenschaft*. Clearly there are differences between art, literature, politics, and systematic cognition, differences that

cannot be simply ignored or magically eliminated, but still it ought not to be a badge of honour for those engaged in the systematic pursuit of knowledge that outside their specialized science they are unwashed and unteachable.

5

Speaking Well, Speaking Correctly

In 1898 the architect Adolf Loos published an article in a Viennese newspaper (*Neue Freie Presse*) on men's fashion in which he discussed what it meant to be 'well dressed' (*gut gekleidet*).[1] Some people identified being well dressed with being beautifully arrayed (*schön gekleidet*). It was, however, inherent in the idea of beauty that a beautiful object be striking, and stand out. This, Loos thought, was the German approach to fashion: dressing to be distinctive and make an individual impression. By contrast, Loos himself recommends to his fellow Austrians that they adopt what he calls the 'English' approach, which equates being well dressed with being 'correctly dressed' (*korrekt angezogen*). To be correctly dressed, however, is precisely not to stand out and draw people's attention to oneself (*auffallen*), but to blend in. How I must act in order to blend into the background depends very much on what that background is. Dressing in a way that will permit me to blend into the crowd in the foyer of the Burgtheater on the night of a premiere is not at all the same thing as dressing so as not to draw attention to myself when I am taking a long walk in the country with friends. So Loos's final account is that one is well dressed if correctly dressed for the occasion in question,

and that in turn means that one would not stand out among a crowd of others, 'from the *best* society' in the most important cultural centre, who were taking part in the event in question. The centre of culture (in 1898), Loos says, is London. Whatever one might think about other aspects of this analysis, it is at least clear, sober, and sociologically astute.[2]

Suppose, however, that rather than discussing what counts as dressing correctly, I were to turn the question into one about language use. Suppose I were to ask you 'Qui parle correctement?' Since this is a question I have asked in French it would seem reasonable to understand it as meaning 'Who speaks *French* correctly?' There is nothing strange about a question like this. We are perfectly used to making a distinction in many areas of human life between actions performed correctly and those performed incorrectly: 'You did that wrong; the key turns to the left to lock, but you turned it to the right'; 'She correctly judged the mood of the audience, and pitched her performance accordingly'; 'This child should learn that the correct way to move the rook in chess is straight ahead, back, or to the side, not diagonally.' On the other hand, the distinction is clearly relative to some set of implied standards, and these standards may differ greatly – those of chess are different from those of rhetoric. It is also true that some human activities are not so clearly grouped into two distinct classes: 'correctly performed' or 'incorrectly performed'. Suppose for instance that a young child were simply pushing a piece of wood that had roughly the shape of a chess 'rook' around on a floor, and that floor happened to be covered with white and black tiles in a chess-board pattern. The child is neither playing chess correctly nor incorrectly, but just moving a piece of wood around according to his or her fancy. So to apply the distinction 'correct/incorrect' there has to be an appeal to some kind of potential authority who has the ability to judge cases relative to some standards. In the final analysis this authority has to be a real person or a set of people. To be sure, we sometimes speak as if some action

was correct (or the reverse) simply relative to some abstractly construed set of formal principles – a rule book, a written code, a set of imaginary norms – but this is just a manner of speaking, or an abbreviation, because no rule book interprets itself, and no code enforces itself. It is always someone who says that the rules have (or have not) been followed.

To return, then, to the initial question, everyone knows the answer to it. Jane speaks French correctly if she follows the rules of pronunciation and grammar, and uses recognized words and idioms. For French there is an authority who interprets and enforces the distinction between 'correct' and 'incorrect', who can be consulted in difficult, obscure, or uncertain cases, and who is capable of giving a clear reply, if it chooses to do so. This is the Académie Française, a group of experts who have had a continuous corporate, legally recognized existence since the seventeenth century. This group has the authority to formulate the rules and laws of the French language – for grammar, pronunciation, orthography, and usage – and to give judgement on difficult cases. Since in everyday life one cannot personally consult the members of the Academy, there are dictionaries and books of grammar available, like those of Robert or Bescherelle, which contain relatively high-level *vulgarizations* of the work of the Academy and can give one at least a preliminary ruling.

This remarkably elaborate, well thought through, and excellently organized policing of linguistic usage does not exist in many other languages. For English, there is the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which has a certain authority in the (limited) domain of vocabulary, but its orientation is really historical, that is, it is directed to discovering what words were used in what senses at what time in the past, and it is obsessive in searching for the historically earliest occurrence of a word (in some specific sense). In the US, Noah Webster, a lexicographer of the nineteenth century who wrote one of the standard dictionaries, had a political project in that he specifically intended

to set out the usage of words in Connecticut, give it a sharp profile, and thus make it easier to distinguish from the linguistic practice of the former masters in England. That is still basically the situation with regard to the vocabulary of English. In the domain of English grammar there is not and has never been anything like Bescherelle for French or Duden for German. There have been books like Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, but these were guides to resolving difficult cases in which a native speaker might be unsure, not comprehensive treatments of the language or even of grammar. So in that sense there is no definitive authority for what constitutes 'correct English', as there is for French or German. People sometimes speak of 'the Queen's English' or now again 'the King's English', which presumably implies that one speaks correctly if one speaks as the king (or queen) does. This has always seemed to me bizarre in view of the fact that during the first few centuries after the Norman Conquest, the English kings all spoke exclusively (Norman) French, and even in the eighteenth century George I didn't speak English at all, only German, French, and Latin, and his son George II, a Prince of the Holy Roman Empire despite his birth in Hannover, had French as his mother-tongue. He did learn vernacular German in his youth, but until his death spoke English only imperfectly and with a strong accent. In addition, it would seem very odd nowadays to claim that the customary habits of Queen Elizabeth or King Charles actually provide a rule for 'correct' speech even to people in Norwich, let alone to the majority of English-speakers in South Africa, India, Australia, or California.

The case of Norwegian seems to depart even further from the model of the Académie Française. There are apparently two separate variants of written Norwegian (Bokmál and Nynorsk) which are officially recognized, and there is a third (Riksmál) which is propagated by the Norwegian Academy. On the other hand, there is no standard for spoken Norwegian at all: every individual speaks as he or she wishes and no version

is 'incorrect'. Writing may be fixed according to one of the three official sets of norms, but speech is free.

Despite these complications, we tend in our everyday life to be guided by a certain highly idealized conception of language which contains at least three elements:

1. For each language there exists a specifiable 'correct' form; in most cases this form will be unique; that is, any deviation from it will be 'incorrect'. 'It is' is correct; '*it are', '*it fhrw', '*it phsch' are all incorrect. In some few cases there are alternative acceptable forms ('maxima' and 'maximums', to take the first instance that I found in opening an English dictionary at random), but these are a minority of the cases, and even with them, there are two well-defined acceptable variants, and, say, 'maximizzy' is incorrect. When my father said '*I seed' (rather than 'I saw'), this was clearly and unequivocally incorrect.
2. A form of language is 'correct' by virtue of its conformity to a system of authoritative rules, which has its concrete embodiment either in particular formal institutions, like the Académie Française, or informally in what is called 'consensus', the quasi-unanimity of usage and opinion among the members of a particular community.
3. An essential part of the system which constitutes the language is the 'grammar', containing rules of morphology and syntax.

The model for these ideas in Europe for centuries has been Latin. From the Middle Ages until the nineteenth century (at least), anyone who had gone to school for more than a couple of years would have been assumed to have acquired a knowledge of, or at any rate a passing acquaintance with, Latin, and would have obtained this knowledge from one or another of a relatively small number of handbooks of grammar. There were exceptions to this generalization, of course – a few educated people

such as Galileo, who apparently did not know Latin, and figures like Montaigne whose father had him raised to be a native speaker of the language – but these were exceptions. Overall, an idealized idea of Latin grammar has haunted the West for 2,000 years as the very paradigm of humanistic knowledge, and the concrete vehicles for this nightmarish obsession have been a small number of grammar books that were used again and again, sometimes simplified or epitomized, but always present. To speak correctly was to conform to the rules in one of these handbooks; or, more exactly, to speak, say, French or English correctly was to speak in a way that was sufficiently like the way a person spoke Latin who spoke according to the rules of one of these books. Obviously, one initial question is: What does 'like' mean and how 'like' is 'sufficiently like'?

Speaking well

As in Loos's account of how men should dress, the best way to approach the question of correct speech is via the notion of speaking 'well'. The distinction between doing something well and not doing it well is more general than that between correct and incorrect action. It is easy to observe that some people can run, swim, jump, throw a ball at a target, etc., better than other people can, even if we do not wish to say that there are rules for running which one can follow correctly or incorrectly. Even the very oldest work of Western literature that has survived, the *Iliad*, begins with depictions of people who are specifically described as speaking well (or not). Chryses, priest of Apollo, asks the Greeks to give him back his daughter, whom they seized and enslaved while sacking a city near Troy. He speaks very persuasively because Homer tells us that, when he finishes, 'all the Greeks' expressed their approval (πάντες ἐπευφήμησαν Ἀχαιοί [I.22]) for doing what he requested, but unfortunately this 'all the Greeks' turns out not to include the

one who is uniquely relevant, King Agamemnon, who has been assigned Chryses' daughter as part of his share of the loot. If Agamemnon too had been persuaded, the action of the epic would not have taken place. Achilles soon tries his luck at reasoning with Agamemnon, but without success. Agamemnon says explicitly to Achilles, 'you won't convince me' (οὐδέ με πείσεις [I.132]). At the start of the epic we are given two further instances of speaking well, Nestor and Odysseus, and one of not speaking well, Thersites.

Nestor is originally introduced as someone who speaks pleasantly (ἡδυεπής) and with a clear voice (λιγὺς . . . ἀγορητής [I.248]). Thersites, the villain, is said not to speak in an orderly way (ἔπεα ἄκοσμά τ̓ πολλά . . . μάψ . . . οὐ κατὰ κόσμον [II.213–14]). Actually what he says on this occasion, as Homer recounts it, does not seem any more disorganized than what anyone else is reported as saying, and, as has often been pointed out, what he says is essentially just what Achilles said, although no one dares to assault Achilles for saying it. So presumably, his words are 'out of order' in the sense that he was speaking out of turn.[3] Thersites does not 'speak well' because, not being an aristocrat, his role is not to speak in the assembly at all, but just to join in the general cheering which is expected when his betters agree on what is to be done.

When Odysseus is described as speaking well, the emphasis seems rather to be not on the manner in which he enunciates and formulates what he has to say, but on the quality of the advice it contains. Thus, when Odysseus reproaches Thersites and then beats him up, the Greeks are reported to have said to each other that he had done many fine things, including notably taking the lead in giving good advice (βουλάς τ̓ ἐξάρχων ἀγαθάς [II.273]), but this is the best thing he has done. He 'speaks well' because his advice is good.

So there seem to be four slightly different senses in which someone can speak well, or four different aspects of speaking well:

(a) Rhetorical: you speak well if you convince or persuade people, as Chryses convinced all the Greeks (except Agamemnon).
(b) Aesthetic: you speak well in the sense that, like Nestor, your voice is loud, pleasant, and clear, and what you say is beautifully formulated and expressed.
(c) Practical: you speak well because, like Odysseus, you reliably give what turns out to be good advice.
(d) Moral-political: you speak well because, in contrast to Thersites, you speak only when it is your turn, that is, when custom and decorum permit.

To these we can add a further aspect, which is not really of much interest to those in the *Iliad*, but which later came to fascinate philosophers:

(e) Alethetic: you speak well if you tell the truth.

Obviously these five senses are different. I can speak the truth (e) without convincing anyone (a), like Cassandra; or I can be convincing (a) but give really bad advice (c), like Tony Blair in Parliament before the invasion of Iraq; or I can speak fluently and beautifully (b), and give good advice (c), but do so out of turn (d), as Themistocles is said (Herodotus, VIII. 59–60) to have done in the discussion before the Battle of Salamis.

Keeping track of five different aspects of speech at the same time is taxing, and so there is a natural temptation to try to focus on one of them as the one which is most important and reduce the other four to a subsidiary status. In the Greek world there were two distinct systematic (and incompatible) attempts to perform this simplification. In each case one dimension is promoted to having a quasi-monopolistic hegemony over speech. Each of two distinct schools operated by treating one of the five dimensions of speech as extensively as possible and trying to downplay or subordinate the other

dimensions. The first of these was the sophistic movement, which was centrally focused on the rhetorical aspects of speech. The rhetorician was the person who had been trained to give persuasive advice in a complex world in which no certainty could be attained about anything and action needed to be guided by considerations of what seemed most likely or plausible (*to eikos*). The discipline of rhetoric was to have a spectacularly successful career as an element, even the central element, in many forms of higher education, and it survived into early modern times.

Plato started the second movement as an explicit reaction against rhetoric, essentially claiming that speech should be exclusively focused on discovering and telling the certain truth. Everything else about speech was merely secondary, and focusing on effective persuasiveness was downright dangerous. Seeing the truth about the world as it really is was supposed to be sufficient in itself, automatically providing us with sufficient advice to guide us in life. The idea that even having a completely true account of the world might still leave us at a loss as to how to deal with our problems was never discussed.

Still, none of these five senses of speaking well, different as they all are from each other, is what we have in mind when we ask who speaks correctly. I can speak in a manner that is in every way correct and yet still not be eloquent, persuasive, or truthful, and I can give good advice, tell the full truth, and be convincing even if my use of language is very flawed, i.e. incorrect. Imagine for instance that I am speaking a language of which I have only a very rudimentary command; the quality of the advice may, as it were, shine through all the mistakes of pronunciation, lexis, and grammar.

Where does it come from, the idea that there is such a thing as a set of rules of speech that are relatively abstract and describe the structure of a given language? Why is it thought to possess the peculiar normativity, a normativity *sui generis*, which we are so inclined to ascribe to it? I am going to discuss

this historically by starting with the idea of Latin grammar, and then moving back from that to Greek grammar.

Correct Latin

The story I want to tell starts in Rome in the first century BC. Octavian, later known as Augustus, whom we call the first Roman Emperor, was the military leader who emerged victorious from half a century of civil wars in which the old Republican structures of the city of Rome were destroyed. He concentrated as much power as he could in his own hands, but was vividly conscious of the fate that had befallen his adoptive father, Julius Caesar, who was assassinated because he was thought to be aspiring to make himself king. The Romans dealt with the kings of other people as necessary, but they were in some ways staunchly traditionalist in their own politics, preferring if at all possible to follow what they called the *mos maiorum*, the customs of the ancestors. They had a strongly entrenched and specific taboo on monarchy as a political form for governing the city of Rome itself. Augustus always denied vehemently that he was a king, and did all he could to maintain the pretence of being merely the first man (*princeps*) in a Republican regime. In 27 BC he even claimed to have 're-established' the Republic (*res publica reconstituta*). This was a symbolic act. It was as if after several decades of anarchy and civil war a Generalissimo emerged in the United States who claimed to re-establish the old Republic with all its institutions, while at the same time designating himself President, Head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of the Treasury, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (as well as Archbishop of Baltimore and Head of the Council of Churches), and reserving for himself a veto on all candidates for election to Congress. In a sense all the old offices were there in the Rome of Augustus and they even seemed at first glance to be operating – the Senate and the popular assemblies still

met, tribunes were elected, priests took the auspices – but the network of real power behind the facade was completely different. It is not clear at this distance to what extent any of this really fooled anyone. Augustus seems to have known very well what he was doing: his last words before he died were said to have been 'Clap, everyone, the comedy is over' (Suetonius 99). Perhaps most people, fatigued by the long civil war, were content not to contest, or at any rate not too loudly or too publicly, a regime which, whatever else it was, did at least finally establish a modicum of peace and stability.

Augustus in his youth was notoriously bloodthirsty and his only claim to any form of political legitimacy was the fact that he had been able to assert himself very successfully during the civil wars and was the last warlord standing at the end of them. His only real asset, people had earlier said, was that he had been formally adopted by Julius Caesar as his son late in Caesar's life (*puer qui omnia nomini debes*).[4] At any rate, Augustus thought it advisable to emphasize his commitment to a central component of the moralizing conservatism which was such a large part of established Roman political discourse: to following *mos maiorum*. The maintenance of the appearance of deference to the institutions of the Republic was an important part of this. His regime was not – he needed to assert, contrary to the clear fact – that of a particularly ruthless but successful insurgent, but the work of a pious son forced by others to avenge the murder of his (adoptive) father, as Roman traditions demanded. Augustus would restore the institutions of the Republic, which, as he told the story, his opponents had tried to undermine. In addition to its institutional continuity with the Republic, the Rome of Augustus was to bring back to life the glories of the past, resurrecting the virtues of the ancient Romans. The Romans of old had lived frugally at home, but had been dauntless and almost invariably successful in the wars (which others had unfortunately repeatedly initiated and imposed on them). These simple farmers had

ended up conquering most of the known world, but always in self-defence.

The ideological project of glorifying an idealized past and construing the present as a revival of what made that past so glorious is one that has recurred several times in Western history, and it is usually a fraud.[5] The 'past' to which appeal is made is mostly imaginary, and the measures taken to resurrect ancient virtue never work as intended (or perhaps one should say, 'as advertised'), although they may well have very significant effects of other kinds. Through legislation and in various other ways Augustus tried to advance his announced project of archaizing moral regeneration. One of the other ways was to offer patronage (either directly or through intermediaries) to writers who would contribute to the construction of the new ideology. The poets Horace and Virgil are two of the most notable beneficiaries of this. Praise of the simple rural life (Horace), and the highly mythologized invention of a prehistory of Rome with a focus on its destiny to rule (Virgil), fitted in very well with attempts by the Princeps to legitimize his own rule. It would then be an easy further step from the required vision of a fixed, idealized, virtuous Roman past, embodied in the Republic, to the canonization of the linguistic usage of the greatest writers of the Republic. Who exactly, though, was going to be the pin-up? The choice fell on Cicero. To say that it was a 'choice' is by no means to imply that it was completely arbitrary, and one can cite various good reasons to take Cicero as a model stylist. From henceforth, though, to write (and speak) correct Latin was to write (and speak), within some ill-defined and occasionally changing limits, like Cicero.

That is the first movement of a drama in two acts. There is a defined corpus that illustrates the kind of Latin that conforms to the Princeps' programme: it is the body of literature produced in the late Republic and exemplified in particular in the writings of the master rhetorician, Cicero. That there would exist such a collection of writings that could be seen to

be composed in something like a uniform language was by no means self-evident, but is a fact that calls for some comment. Several languages other than Latin were spoken in Italy in the first century BC, including Etruscan, Oscan, and Greek, but the centralization and hierarchization of political power in the regions of Italy dominated by Rome gave speakers of Latin a single central focal point. There was one centre, the city of Rome, and its dialect had absolute priority. In the late Republic, the great senatorial families formed a more or less surveyable mass and were clearly at the top of the heap socially, economically, and politically. What could be more natural than to think that their Latin was the correct Latin, which had found its most striking and most attractive expression in Cicero?

The second movement of the drama of Latin is not so much political and social as 'scientific' (in a broad sense of 'science'): it is the invention of grammar in the full sense of the term. Assume that to write correct Latin was to write like a Senator of the late Republican period, particularly like the most fluent and eloquent of them, Cicero. But how exactly was one to do that? The science of grammar was to provide a response to this question, at least a preliminary response which described a necessary condition. There were rules of morphology and syntax which could be abstracted from the writings of Cicero (and of certain other authors of the late Republican period) and which one had to follow in writing. Obeying these rules scrupulously would not make you another Cicero, but your Latin would be 'correct'. It is important to see that this science of grammar was a retrospective construct, which attempted to map the practice of authors of a period in what was the recent past. What we call 'Latin grammar' did not exist at the time of Cicero, in the sense that no one at his time had formulated what we have come to know as the accepted rules of morphology and syntax. This does not mean they spoke and wrote in a completely unregulated way, with wild abandon, because the rules of grammar that were later formulated do to a very large

extent describe regularities in the language of the texts that have survived. But it does mean that they themselves would not have been able to formulate those rules clearly, consistently, and in general terms. In that sense 'grammar' did not exist.

The science of grammar

We should not be confused by the fact that the *words* 'grammar' and 'grammarian' existed from a very early period in Greek, and were taken over into Latin a long time before the era of Cicero. These terms originally had a very much wider application in the ancient world than they do now. So a 'grammarian' could be a tutor who instructed children in how to form letters in order to write, and how to read given written texts aloud. (Learning to read was actually in some ways a more complicated thing in the ancient world because of the almost complete absence of punctuation marks.) Or a grammarian could be a scholar who explained obscure mythological or local references, for instance in the poems of Pindar, or gave allegorical interpretations of Homer. So 'grammarian' meant anyone having anything to do with letters, from teaching children the alphabet to writing commentaries on the poets.

It seems that the Stoics were the first in the West to envisage what we would call a 'grammar' of Greek (which they called 'grammar in a technical sense').[6] This would have been in the third to second century BC. There is, however, a big difference between having the general *idea* that there could be such a thing as what we now call 'grammar' – that is, having some notions about how such a grammar could or might be elaborated, organized, and structured – and actually having a comprehensive handbook of the kind with which we are familiar, specifying the declension of nouns, forms of verbs, categorization of types of subordinate clause (and how they

are to be expressed), and so on. Dionysius Thrax is generally credited with writing the first grammar around 100 BC; however, if we take a look at his definition of what he means by 'grammar', it seems from our contemporary perspective to be at best seriously underspecified. He writes: γραμματική ἐστιν ἐμπειρία τῶν παρὰ ποιηταῖς τε καὶ συγγραφεῦσιν ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ λεγομένων[7] ('Grammar is experience-based knowledge of what is said for the most part by poets and prose writers'). There are several things in this definition that are noteworthy. The first is that it is not prescriptive; there is, on the contrary, a complete absence of any form of normativity, even in a very weak sense. Dionysius does not say 'Grammar tells you how you must, should or ought to write' (γραπτέον or with χρή or δεῖ). Rather he states that grammar describes something. One should not perhaps make too much of the use of the term ἐμπειρία, which I translated as 'experience-based knowledge'. It is the etymological origin of our term 'empirical', though one needn't take it as a full-throated opposite of something like 'a priori'; but still it is a kind of knowing that encapsulates what actually happens rather than explicitly giving directions of any kind. Second, one might note that despite the basically descriptive nature of the project, the goal is to describe not the speech actually used in everyday life on the streets of Alexandria or Antioch, but the language of poets and prose writers. We might imagine that the idea here is that the language of literature is 'more correct' than that of everyday life, but Dionysius does not say that. I say 'we *might* imagine', but the temptation is strong, which, however, tells us something about us rather than about Greek-speakers in the second century BC. It is perfectly possible that the reference to writers and poets is just a neutral specification of the kind of speech at issue, or the type of context.

The third point is that studying 'what is said' (τὰ λεγόμενα) seems to miss the point. Putting aside for a moment the prose writers, what the poets say is things like (very roughly):

Muse, tell me a story

or

When I see you with someone else
I go all green and want to puke

or

Today what is needful is to stand beside a dear man

or

Water is best, but *gold* . . .

or

Some bloody foreigner's got my kit, but what the hell
I survived

or

YOUTHERETELLTHEMATHOMETHATWEAREALLDEAD

Studying *what* the poets say returns us to the world of early Plato describing Socrates' encounter with the rhapsode (professional reciter of Homer), Ion. Ion is trying to explain why Homer is a great poet and says that the reason is that he speaks well (εὖ λέγει) about absolutely everything (*Ion* 536–7). He allows Socrates to interpret 'speaks well' to mean 'gives good advice', and then begins talking about the content of what Homer seems to be advising (ignoring the fact that it is a character in one of the poems ascribed to 'Homer' whose advice is being cited). At this point, every literate person nowadays will have, I think, the reaction I had as a sixteen-year-old reading this passage for the first time. I wanted metaphorically to jump into the dialogue, throttle Ion, and shout at him: 'No, no;

pull yourself together. Socrates is conning you. Homer "speaks well" not because of *what* he says (ὅτι λέγεται) but because of *how* (πως λέγεται) he says what he says.' Only if you focus on the *how* do you have a chance to make any progress in distinguishing 'he speaks beautifully', 'he speaks persuasively', 'he speaks correctly' (and any of them from 'he speaks the truth'). So defining grammar simply as the study of τὰ λεγόμενα ('what is said') would seem to leave open the possibility that an evaluation of the advice on chariot racing which can be found in the *Iliad* is part of its remit.

Lastly, one should notice the further qualification contained in ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ ('for the most part'): it isn't even study of strictly and exactly all and only what is said in literary works, but only of the sorts of things that are generally said.

If this is the cutting edge of the scientific study of Greek grammar in the time of Dionysius Thrax (died 90 BC) – a science of 'grammar' envisaged as the experience-based study of the sorts of things writers generally say – then Cicero (born 106 BC) would never have seen anything like what we would call a 'grammar of Greek', much less of Latin. This, of course, in no way means that he could not distinguish between what he and his peers took to be acceptable and unacceptable ways of speaking, and also between acceptable ways of speaking that were better and those that were less good. It is partly a question of how he would have been able to *categorize* these distinctions. How do you move from the intuition that something is wrong which can be expressed in the sociological observation '*That* is something neither I nor any of my colleagues in the Senate would *ever* say' to 'that is grammatically incorrect'? An appeal to intelligibility will not work here, because lots of things that we say are grammatically incorrect are perfectly intelligible, like my father's '*I seed'; that is not what we think is wrong with them.

Although during the late Republican period in Rome the idea of 'grammar' as a science was the philosophical speculation of a

couple of scholars in the Greek East, there *was* an established, elaborate, and highly esteemed technical discipline concerned with language use, and that was rhetoric. Rhetoric had as its goal not the formulation of a set of rules of grammatically correct usage, but the more practical aim of teaching people how to 'speak well' (Plato's εὖ λέγειν above) *in order to* persuade or move others to action. Cicero writes: *optimus est enim orat or qui dicendo animos audientium et docet et delectat et permovet* ('The best orator is one who by speaking instructs, pleases, and moves the souls of the listeners').[8] To have this effect there are certain conditions on the way in which the orator should speak, but these are subordinate. One of these conditions is: *pure et emandate loquentes . . . eloquentiam persequamur* ('Let's aspire to eloquence by speaking in a way that is pure and faultless').[9] This is of no use for our project really because the flaws which an eloquent speaker should avoid could, for all this remark indicates, include speaking too softly to be heard, failing to project the voice, slurring of speech, etc., rather than making a mistake in grammar. Still, one might think that we can find here the kernel of the idea that speaking correctly is speaking in an especially 'pure' way.

There are two very different, in fact diametrically opposed, ways of thinking about purity as a form of linguistic correctness. I'll call these the 'potable water' model and the 'cosmetic surgery' model. To start with the first, think of language developing through history as being like a river running from the mountains to the sea. Take the River Rhine. It has its origin in the highest parts of the Alps, a place where there is virtually no human settlement. Its water then gushes forth and runs down east and then north to Lake Constance, then west again to Basle, before turning resolutely north and flowing into the North Sea through a series of subordinate mouths in a low-lying delta in the Netherlands. At each point in its course, other tributaries enter it and fluids and solids are discharged into it. It gradually, that is, becomes contaminated. Of course,

it is not necessary to categorize the inflows as 'contaminants'; why are they not seen as sources of enrichment? But even asking that question is departing from the assumptions of the model. It is also true that there are restrictions imposed on what is discharged, and some solids will settle on the bottom of the river of their own, if it flows far enough; so to some limited extent some rivers may in some circumstances be self-cleaning. But if your desire is to drink the water, and you had a free choice, you would decide to drink it at its very source, near the Gotthard – where nothing has yet been added, where the water is 'pure' – not near Rotterdam. Depending on how one construes the metaphor, then, the purest usages in a language would be the oldest – the water at the very source. Then some people might want to add to that some pop-historical sociology, such as that densely populated urban centres developed out of relatively isolated farming communities, and population centres were also centres of innovation, so that usages current in the most remote rural areas are likely to be historically older and (on this account) purer than speech in the cities. A further cultural twist would be to associate cities with artifice and decadence and the rural past with spontaneity, directness, absence of hypocrisy, strength, and authenticity.

It is very hard to take this seriously. You clearly do not get what is anyone's idea of the 'purest' French by going back historically to the origin. Maybe Rabelais' French is 'richer' than later French, but is it 'purer'? Going back to the time before Rabelais, it isn't even clear that what was spoken or written was 'French'. For instance, is the oath sworn in Strasbourg in 842 by the armies of two grandsons of Charlemagne – which begins *Pro deo amur et christian poblo et nostro commun salvament* . . . and is recorded in the history of the times by Nidhard – written in an especially pure form of French (because old and near the source), or an especially debased form of Latin, or in something completely different, as Nidhard suggests when he describes it (in his history written in Latin) as an oath in '*lingua*

romana'? Or does one pick an arbitrary date as the pure 'beginning'? Why one date rather than another?

If this approach is a non-starter, then there is another one in which the process of 'purifying language' and the corresponding notion of linguistic 'correctness' is taken to be analogous to cosmetic surgery. On this approach, speech is like the human face. Humans are born with a wide range of facial types; there is a lot of natural random variation. Furthermore, the experiences to which human faces are subjected during the course of a life sometimes leave imprints on them (for instance, scars from accidents). Whatever one's particular conception of beauty, Palaeolithic tribes were no more a natural beauty parade than a random selection of contemporary Londoners would be. However, humans have developed techniques of surgical intervention for removing some naturally occurring features and enhancing others. We decide at some time and for some reason that some facial features which occur in some members of the population are undesirable, and we then call them blemishes. Other properties we think are especially desirable and we intervene to produce or enhance them. Before our decision these facial features were not blemishes or signs of beauty, they were just there, part of the normal variation among different items in the universe. Sometimes exactly the same features are blemishes at one time and beauty-marks at another (such as moles). The techniques for doing cosmetic surgery have improved over time as a result of focused human attempts to make them more effective in producing the idealized facial appearance we value.

Applying this to language, we might tell a just-so story: in the beginning, we might say, people just spoke in one way or another as the other people in their local group spoke, but in some societies people decided that certain of the ways in which people in their society were accustomed to speak were ugly, confusing, unclear, or even ethically dubious. Often it would in fact turn out that forms of speech considered ugly would be

those of subordinated, defeated subgroups, low-status people, or generally the poor. They also might decide that certain other ways of speaking were lovely, attractive, elegant, clear, and ethically sensitive. Not surprisingly, the speech of the powerful would often be taken to be a model of attractive speech. The members of this imaginary society could then set out to suppress the ugly ways of speaking and foster the attractive ones. Gradually they might develop not just positive or negative reactions to individual words, phrases, or turns of speech, but more attitudes and theories, based on theories about speech. Finally they might even develop institutions to explore and reflect on language and to recommend which forms to foster and cultivate and which to suppress. They called this a process of improving or 'purifying' the language. One impressive example of an attempt to do this on a massive scale can be found in France. The Académie Française has a long history of concern for the French language and what counts as good French usage. National institutions in France – schools, universities, ministries, publishing companies, regional and specialist academies, and public broadcasters – work to ensure a high level of real conformity of speech to these ideals of good usage. Increasing self-consciousness about how one speaks and more and more sophisticated ideals are signs of increasing civilization and increasing humanity. Correct speech is speech that can survive the complex process of filtration and surgery which this system of institutions operates, a system in which everything which is considered a blemish is removed and certain features, thought desirable, are enhanced.[10]

We can try systematically to integrate these two approaches, claiming that we have found increasingly effective ways of intervening directed precisely at reconstituting some ideal purity which existed in the past. We can take water from any source whatever, no matter how contaminated and polluted, and filter and treat it to remove all the impurities. In fact, we now have the capacity to bring it to a level of purity which not

even the water first spurting out of the highest Alp can match. It turns out that water that pure is potable but not particularly palatable to humans, but that is a different issue. Whichever of these approaches one favours, or even if one shifts from one to the other or tries to integrate them, there still remains the major difficulty in moving from rhetoric to grammar in that the answer to the grammatical question about correct speech is supposed fundamentally to be binary – it is correct *or* it is incorrect? – whereas answers to the rhetorical question about speaking well are generally not binary but a question of degrees. Cicero himself notes that *alius melius quam alius loquitur* ('one person speaks better than another'),[11] and speech can be more (or less) motivating and pleasing. There are thus gradations; 'speaking well' is not a question that admits of a simple yes or no answer, but rather one that can always be amplified: '*how* well exactly?'

Uniformity or diversity of usage

The specific centralized form which political power took in the Roman Empire gave Latin speech pre-eminence. It helped that, intuitively speaking, there was only one Latin, and the usage of Cicero could become the model for that. One might wonder what the point is in saying that there was only 'one' Latin. What else would one expect? There is an important phenomenon here which it is easy to overlook, but which becomes clearly visible if one compares Latin with Greek. Some recent scholarship, most notably the book by J.N. Adams (2007),[12] claims that there were discernible regional variations between the Latin spoken in different regions of the late Republic and the early Empire, despite the fact that 'the attentive reader of Latin texts written between 200 BC and AD 600 . . . will . . . probably . . . have no sense that the texts could be assigned a place of composition on linguistic evidence alone'.[13] So there

are some variations within a corpus that gives the first impression of uniformity of usage. This in itself is completely different from the case of Greek. What we call 'Ancient Greek' was spoken in literally dozens of local vernacular forms that were sufficiently distinct from one another to be classified as separate dialects. These individual vernacular dialects, however, can be grouped by their similarities into a small number of larger families of related forms of speech. For our purposes three such families of dialects stand out: the Doric, the Aeolic, and the Ionic (a form of which, called 'Attic', was spoken in the city of Athens). The difference between a text written in one of the Doric dialects and one written in one of the Ionic dialects does not require an exceptionally subtle analysis to discern, but leaps out of the page at the reader immediately, and cannot be overlooked. So in that sense, despite the qualifications about regional variations in Latin, it still seems true that *grosso modo* the Latin of the corpus of literature that was available in, say, 100 AD is unitary in a way the Greek of the corresponding corpus was not.

Furthermore, not only were there different dialects of Greek, but different dialects became literary vehicles for different kinds of writing, or different genres. So there is a literature in Doric, a literature in Aeolic, and a literature in Ionic (and in particular in Attic). There is nothing comparable in Latin. Again, this might not seem so surprising in that Latin was the local dialect of the city of Rome, whose control extended gradually from that city to the whole of Italy and beyond. It is not that there were never any civil wars in Rome, rather the contrary, but the central power structures in the West did not enduringly break down until 400 AD or so (by which time something like recognizable handbooks of standard Latin were available). The territories in which Greek was spoken were organized around independent cities, speaking noticeably different dialects, and none of these was ever able to attain stable hegemony. Even the unification under Alexander of Macedon

was, despite his aspirations, completely ephemeral, not surviving his death. The political polycephaly of the Greek world meant that there were always powerful and important people in every locality who spoke in *their own* dialect. This, combined with the fact that there was an established, and well-regarded, written literature in several of the major dialect groups, meant that the situation was very different from one in which a Gaul who wanted to enter the Senate in Rome would certainly aspire to speak in Latin that was as close to Cicero's as possible (even if he did not succeed).

As just mentioned, to simplify greatly a situation that is very complex, the various literary dialects come to be strongly associated with different literary genres. So, roughly speaking, the language used in choral poetry is some form of Doric, that used in prose is Ionic or Attic, and that of individual lyric is Aeolic (or, in some cases, Ionic). This association becomes so close that although writers will have spoken the local dialect in everyday life, the choice of how they wrote would depend on the genre they were writing in. So one wrote in Ionic if one was writing prose, as did Herodotus and Hippocrates, although both of them came from places that were Doric speaking. And Pindar, who came from Thebes and thus spoke a dialect that basically belonged to the Aeolic group, wrote his choral lyrics in Doric. Now magnify this several dozen times, and you get a sense of the situation. The association is so firmly fixed that certain more complex literary forms, like Attic tragedy, combine dialects in complex ways and play with the associations. So in tragedy the speeches by individuals tend to be close to Attic (the local dialect in the city of Athens), but the choral parts often have a more Doric coloration.

To say 'the language of choral poetry is in the Doric dialect' is not incorrect, but it can be confusing because 'Doric' is actually the name of a group or family of specific vernaculars, not a particular form of anyone's speech. Saying 'choral poetry is in Doric' is like saying 'Milton wrote in Indo-European'. English,

whatever else may be true of it, is classed as an Indo-European language, but there is no 'Indo-European' which anyone spoke in the eighteenth century (or possibly ever). One can say 'choral poetry is in Doric' because, in addition to the huge variety of spoken vernaculars, there was a literary language which was constructed (mostly) out of words, forms, and structures used in the closely related, but by no means identical, particular Doric dialects, but which was not the same as any vernacular. The different literary dialects are all artificial creations, not the way anyone would really have spoken. So the poems of Alcman and Sappho are usually said to be in 'Aeolic', but that means 'literary Aeolic', which is slightly different from the native vernacular of Alcman and Sappho. This literary Aeolic is presumably very much closer to the way they would actually have spoken than it is to the way in which someone who was a native speaker of a vernacular that belonged to a different dialect group, say Stesichorus,[14] would have spoken. Nevertheless it is a heavily stylized, relatively unitary construct based on a variety of related vernaculars.

As if this were all not complicated enough, there is a further important twist to the story; namely, that at the beginning of the history of Greek literature there stands the figure of 'Homer'. Whether or not there ever was a single individual person who can be credited with creating the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* (or, implausibly, both), there certainly were associations of singers of epic, and they used a very homogeneous, artificial dialect, 'Homeric Greek'. Oral composition (or even just oral recitation) of verse is rendered more fluent if one has available a wide variety of different forms for expressing the same thing, especially if they have different metrical qualities. Wandering singers who paid attention to their surroundings as they moved from one city to another would come into contact with a number of different dialect forms, and might adopt some of these, if they were metrically convenient. At the most elementary level this means that the proto-Greek word

for 'toward' which occurs as πρός in the Ionic dialects, also occurs as ποτί or ποί in Doric, as πορτί in Cretan, as προτ(ί) in dialects spoken around the city of Argos, and even as πός in inscriptions from the island of Cyprus. In the Homeric poems we find πρός, ποτί, and προτί used, apparently depending on the requirements of the metre. On the other hand, the singer couldn't simply pick and choose *ad libitum*, but had to find something that was comprehensible in different cities in which the populations spoke very different vernaculars. The contact with different dialects provided a potentially large pool of forms, but the singer had explicitly to avoid any forms that were idiosyncratic, peculiar to one dialect, and hard to understand by speakers of another. The result was something that was not really a record of the way anyone spoke, but was both rich and widely comprehensible.

'Homer' became a pan-Hellenic possession, in the sense that the poems were widely recited, listened to, and admired, and eventually became the basis of the education of the young, but there was no unifying political force (like the Roman Empire) behind the Homeric dialect, so it remained a continual possible source of aspiration, but never a mandated norm. Homeric language and forms remained influential in later literature, with later poets adopting particular turns of phrase as they deemed appropriate. So the Greek writer would have a vernacular that he or she would speak, as it were, in the kitchen. For the poet Pindar that was presumably the version of Aeolic spoken in his native city of Thebes; then there would be the artificial 'Doric' which was the dialect associated with and used in the choral poetry which Pindar composed. Then, of course, Pindar and his auditors would all have been keenly aware of Homer and the language of epic, and could for specific aesthetic purposes use (non-Aeolic and non-Doric) forms that occurred in Homer, and, consequently, were familiar and comprehensible.[15]

Writers in the Late Republic might self-aggrandizingly mention the difficulties they had in creating a literary (or

philosophical) language that was clear, flexible, and expressive out of the barbarous idiom used in the city of Rome, and a poet might aspire to write in a Latin that was pure and free of blemishes; but having to choose between different dialect forms was not a problem because, for literary uses at any rate, no dialects – certainly none that were literarily recognized like those in Greek – even existed. Eventually, handbooks for writing correct Latin were produced, but for a Greek writer a non-negligible part of literary activity was creating one's own characteristic language from a huge pool of possible materials, using some very flexible models which admitted of enormous variation. Latin at the basic level is really all about rules: learn them and follow them and you'll be fine. Greek is about taste and insight: there are rules, but aesthetic judgement goes all the way down to the very choice of words and forms. You won't learn Greek just by memorizing some rules.[16]

Even in the fifth and fourth centuries BC (and no doubt also before that), Greeks were perfectly capable of discriminating between those who could speak Greek comprehensibly and those who could not. We know that they distinguished two kinds of weaknesses or defects: barbarism and solecism; or, because the verb had priority over the noun in both cases, to act (and speak) like a barbarian and to act (and speak) like someone from Soli (a remote colony whose inhabitants apparently acted and spoke in ways that were deemed to be particularly deviant and uncouth). In his comedy *The Acharnians*, Aristophanes gives an example. A figure who is described as an emissary of the Great King of Persia steps on stage and says ἰαρταμαν ἐξαρξαν ἀπισσονα σαρτα (l. 100) and then οὐ λῆψι χρυσο, χαυνόπρωκτ᾽ Ἰαοναῦ (l. 104). The first of these is really not comprehensible at all as Greek. The second is just barely intelligible as something like 'Wide-arz Glik, you no get dosh.'

To begin to think about rules of grammar one needed to get beyond the classic Greek fascination with *other* aspects of language use: the beauty of language (aesthetic), the effectiveness

of speech in persuading people to act (rhetoric), and the truth of whatwas said (alethetic). Philosophers in particular had to learn to stop being obsessed with asking 'Is this statement correct (ὀρθός)?', in the sense of 'Is this in fact true?', and instead focus on something else which didn't yet have a name, but which we call 'grammatical correctness'. Eventually they did so, and discovered that they could map large swathes of Greek speech by using a relatively small set of paradigms, rules, and laws. There were difficulties: the existence of dialect forms that violated these paradigms, the mixing of dialects in poetry, and the exceeding flexibility of syntax which was acceptable even in prose writers.

I want then to distinguish between three cases (each one, of course, an idealization). First, the situation of the Greek writer in the classic era who recognized the existence of different (literary) dialects, none of them yet codified in a set of grammatical rules, who also recognized the possibility of mixing dialect forms within a single work, and who was aware of some existing exemplary literary works in artificial dialects using a mixture of forms. Everyone admired Homer, but then everyone also admired Hesiod, Sappho (who wrote in [literary] Aeolic), Stesichorus (who wrote in [literary] Doric with large admixtures of epic [i.e. Homeric] dialect), and several others. Speaking or writing in one dialect rather than another, or for that matter in a mixture, was not a 'blemish', it was just what speakers did. The task of the writer then was to use their aesthetic sensibility to shape their words so that what emerged was something that was euphonious, coherent, and widely comprehensible, and that avoided solecisms, satisfied the demands of a genre, and was in general pleasing. There were lots of resources for doing this (and, of course, a poet or writer could, within limits, invent new modes of expression) and the question was one of taste: how did you use the linguistic means available, what did you add, how did you shape the result?

The second situation was that of a prose writer in the early Roman Empire who had only one literary language available, Latin,[17] and one incontrovertible model, the acknowledged master of prose in that language, Cicero. Language could be freed of impurities or blemishes, perhaps by consulting a senior Senator, especially one who had a reputation for speaking well, but this would not be justified by appeal to general rules (because the idea of codification with reference to general rules was not really present). The vague idea of a grammar was perhaps around, but only as a learned speculation, a project that had been at best sketched out, but was not executed.

Third was the situation, starting in late antiquity, in which there was a system of rules of grammar, which purported to be complete, and was embodied in handbooks and the instructional practice of teachers. 'Correct' usage, then, was the one that ought to be followed, and speaking and writing correctly meant conforming to the paradigms and rules formulated by grammarians (generally in written grammar books).

Two opposing general conceptions

Traditional education in Europe was for a long time in the first instance education in Latin, and it generally took as its model this third case, the (Late Imperial) Roman option. One can see how the idea of mastering a set of grammatical rules and exercising self-control by applying them to one's own speech and writing would appeal to people who thought of humans as naturally subject to wild, crude, and anarchic desires that needed to be tamed, repressed, and controlled. Learning to speak 'correctly', according to the rules, even if (or especially if) this went against one's untutored inclinations, could be seen as a part of the general process of educating and civilizing young people. Order, starting with ordered forms of speaking and writing, was a necessary precondition for any further cultural

or moral development, and it had to be imposed by enforcing rules of speech (including rules of grammar). For a very long historical period these rules would in the first instance have been the rules of Latin, not of any of the various vernaculars, because nobody knew whether these vernaculars had rules and if so what they might be. Becoming educated on anything but the most elementary level meant learning Latin and that meant learning the rules of Latin. The discipline required for learning to write in a language that was not one's mother-tongue, according to a set of pre-given rules, was, generations of school children were taught, in itself a good thing, the first step toward getting their unruly natures under control and advancing toward a civilized life. In the Middle Ages and the early modern period this conception could even be associated with a certain kind of egalitarianism, in that no one was a native speaker of Latin, and so everyone in a way needed equally to learn the rules for writing correctly. Of course, this was egalitarianism in this one respect only, and the equality it introduced actually increased the inequality between those who could afford to go to (Latin) school and those who could not. Peasants, for instance, would usually have had no access to teachers of Latin, but then, as Marx pointed out, any attempt to enforce equality along one dimension of human life will of necessity increase inequality along some other, so this is a feature of the general relation between equality and inequality and has nothing in particular to do with language.[18] Furthermore, following a set of recognized rules tended to ensure uniformity of usage. Priscian's *Institutiones*, a standard text,[19] and its imitators were available in all parts of Western Europe, so that a young boy in southern France and a young boy in Poland might actually learn the same paradigms and rules of grammar. In any case, writers with serious ambition and pretension were expected to write in an especially correct way, following the rules scrupulously. Poets might benefit from a designated range of potential deviations under the name

'poetic licence', but they, too, were supposed to be models of correctness.[20]

Starting at the end of the eighteenth century, there was a revolt against the (Late Imperial) Roman option, when pre-Romantic thinkers like Rousseau and Herder (and then later the familiar properly Romantic figures) began to react against the denigration of nature and spontaneity and to see many of the existing regimes of rules as artificial and, as they would later be called, 'alienating'. What if some specific sets of rules are not, as advertised, conditions for any advanced form of human spiritual development, but rather tools of repression or at least unnecessary burdens humans have been encouraged to bear? Maybe language is not best understood as an ideal code maintaining and propagating itself through time, dependent in this on lazy, fallible, and generally defective human vehicles who need to be whipped into order in each generation to ensure they do not sully its perfection. Perhaps language is the spontaneous, active expression of a human group, and as such should be cultivated as an expression of the free and idiosyncratic individuality of that group. Forms of usage spring up like wild flowers in a field, each one expressive of the particular conditions of the soil and the microclimate of the area in question. This way of thinking is not uncommon in viticultural circles: some subspecies of grape are thought to flourish best in certain areas, and the particular taste of the grapes grown on a very specific plot of land (the *terrain*) is different from that of grapes grown on a different plot, because of the quality of the soil, the microclimate, and the degree of exposure to sun, rain, and wind in each particular field. Authenticity may require that the wine expresses the *terrain* on which it was grown. To be sure, one could simply gather up all the different kinds of grapes one could find, press them all together and make wine from the result, but this wine would be thought to be lacking in character and individuality. In terms of human speech, then, following the linguistic patterns of one's own local group

may be thought to give one a sense of identity. I really belong here in Munich or Edinburgh or Avignon because I speak like a Bavarian, an East Coast Scot, or with the accent of the *midi*. The desire to maintain linguistic distinctiveness can lead to resistance to admixtures to or modifications of the local vernacular which move it closer to other forms of speech. In extreme cases, members of a community can even try to distinguish their speech as much as possible from similar idioms, putting special emphasis on forms of expression that make it unique or at any rate different, resurrecting old constructions, and even inventing *differentia*. One problem is that once one has started down this path it is unclear where to stop. This would be the linguistic equivalent of something that happened when I lived on Gwydir Street in Cambridge. The owner of one of the public houses on the street once displayed a sign on the entrance: 'Freedom from the EU for Britain; self-rule for Northern Ireland; devolution for Scotland; and Gwydir Street?'

If one adopts this second, quasi-Romantic approach, then a given set of grammatical rules is not the precondition for any clear thought or human development whatever; rather it is an afterthought, a pair of secateurs that particular human individuals and groups may wield. We're interested in the roses, not the secateurs, and the burden is on those who wield the secateurs to show that what they are doing is necessary or useful. You want to dead-head the roses, not cut down the bush itself. So the poet should be as close as possible to the sources of language itself, and that was untutored spontaneous vernacular speech. Certainly the poet could only create in his or her mother-tongue.

This is a very odd view indeed. If 'mother-tongue' really means vernacular, then no ancient Greek literature satisfies this standard because, as we have seen, even what look to us like Greeks writing in their own dialect (Sappho) are cases in which what is being used is a literary, that is an artificial, dialect, not vernacular. Historically significant Roman literature

starts with Livius Andronicus, a Greek-speaking slave who translated the *Odyssey* into Latin; and Ennius, the great patriotic poet who composed an epic about the Punic Wars, seems to have spoken Greek and Oscan before Latin. One might have various reasons not to value the huge production of poetry in Latin during the Middle Ages and the early modern period (in fact up to the early poems which Rimbaud composed in Latin as a *lycéen*), but the simple fact that these were works composed by non-native speakers does not seem to be a very good reason to denigrate them.

There seems to be a dichotomy between cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and the narcissism of minimal differences, on the other. Should one prefer enforced conformity with pre-given abstract rules (in the interests of ease, clarity, and security of communication with the widest possible audience), or a cosy, purportedly spontaneous nestling in the 'authentic' identity of one's membership in a small local group? Of course I want to speak so that I can be clearly understood by as many people as possible, and of course I would like to feel at home in my local speech community. Even the existence of a universal mother-tongue for all would not necessarily resolve this, because such an idiom would deprive us of something that is part and parcel of the demand for 'authenticity', namely that I speak as 'we' speak and 'we' speak in a way that is different from the way 'they' speak. The exclusion is not an unfortunate side-effect, but part of the point. This difficulty has no theoretical solution; all one can do is manage it as best one can in the given historical circumstances.

Even I felt a spontaneous urge to tell my father that he 'should not' say '*I seed'. This essay is about that and about the ways in which (one type of) normativity arises. Nietzsche saw that to study normativity is to study how imperatives are issued and how they are enforced. Wittgenstein added to this that enforcement is at least in the first instance something that must be able to be associated with some visible external

process that can in principle be monitored by others, but that is to say that normativity is a public phenomenon. Foucault began the process of trying to study the real historical mechanisms at work here in a few paradigmatic cases. There is a connection, albeit one which is in many cases very complicated and indirect, between 'You ought to stop at that sign' and 'The police will arrest you if you don't.' The 'you ought' is connected here with the authority of those who issue the injunction to stop (say the city government) and with the powers of those who enforce the injunction (the police). These agencies can be studied historically and sociologically: how are they institutionally structured, what real powers do they have, to what do they appeal in making and enforcing their decisions, what technologies do they use, how do they actually operate?

To be sure, 'public enforcement' in the case of incorrect linguistic usage may become very attenuated. 'You ought not to split an infinitive' may be associated only with a vague cloud of public acts – an especially pedantic schoolteacher may mark a violation in your school essay, you may not be invited to speak on formal occasions, your friends may refer in your hearing in an off-hand way to someone else as 'the kind of person who splits infinitives'.[21]

Normative connections do not exist 'out there' (or even 'in here', in the mind) and then enforce themselves. We construct them in complicated ways and then enforce them. This is the essential point about them. Some readers may find this kind of account completely unsatisfactory, not because it is incomplete – which, of course, it is – and not because it is erroneous in some individual points, but because it is the wrong *kind* of account altogether. It is, they might think, just an empirical narrative, but it ought to be something else (what else?). There is, however, only the history.

6

Succeed, Fail, Fail Better

> Try again. Fail again. Fail better.
> Beckett, *Worstward Ho*

Alban Berg's opera *Wozzeck* had its premiere on 14 December 1925 in Berlin; to Berg's own surprise, the performance proceeded without interruption and the work was immediately a great success with the public. The lack of disruption was by no means something that could have been taken for granted, because *Wozzeck* is an atonal composition, which deviates radically from one of the most important traditional elements of music, its harmonic organization into keys. The abandonment of tonality was, in the 1920s, experienced by many people as a basic violation of their auditory expectations and was shocking and revolting to them. So it would not at all have been surprising if the reaction of the audience on that December evening had been riotous rather than rapturous. Art scandals have been a part of Western history for a very long time. For many Greek thinkers, the representation of the gods in epic poetry was something scandalous – the gods depicted by Homer seem to have no compunction about lying, thieving, committing adultery, arbitrarily murdering

anyone who displeases them, and so on. Plato wanted to ban music in the Lydian mode from his ideal city for moral and political reasons, and because he thought it would make the citizens effeminate. The classic age of avant-garde art scandals was, in retrospect, the period between the year of revolution 1848 and the seizure of power by the National Socialists in Germany in 1933. For artists of the 1920s, one can even speak of a kind of 'tradition' of public outrage about new forms and new works of art. An artist like Berg could proudly locate his work as part of a whole historical sequence of scandalous artistic events: the paintings Gustav Courbet exhibited in the 1850s; *Madame Bovary* (the object of a court case in 1857); the Paris premiere of *Tannhäuser* (1861); *Ubu Roi* (1896); the so-called *Skandalkonzert* which Arnold Schönberg organized and directed in Vienna in 1913; and the first performance of the *Sacre du printemps* in Paris (also 1913). We know that Berg was well aware of this historical configuration. Among the other reasons for this is that the *Skandalkonzert* included in its programme works by Schönberg, Zemlinsky, and Webern, but also the premiere of Berg's own composition *Lieder nach Postkarten-Texten von Peter Alterberg*. Rather than be pleased at the public success of *Wozzeck*, however, Berg was so bitterly disappointed that his pupil Adorno had to console him after the premiere. Usually consolation is required when some important project fails. Would Berg perhaps have preferred it if the audience had constantly interrupted the performance with their booing? Adorno does not just report what happened on that evening, he also offers an analysis of the reasons for Berg's reaction:

> In der Nacht nach der Premiere des Wozzecks zeigte er sich, ohne alle Pose, auf tiefste beunruhigt durch den Erfolg, er meinte, wenn heutzutage eine Musik so unmittelbar das Publikum gewinne, könne etwas mit ihr nicht in Ordnung sein.[1]

> Daß ein Werk . . . eines das vor Bergs eigenem Maßstab bestand, einem offiziellen Publikum gefallen sollte, war ihm unverständlich und dünkte ihn ein Argument gegen die Oper.[2]
>
> Es gilt wohl für die beiden die Formel, daß Schönberg Bergs Erfolge beneidete, Berg Schönbergs Mißerfolge.[3]

> ([Berg] was deeply disturbed by the success of the work, and this was not just posturing. He said that if a piece of music nowadays immediately won over the public, something must be the matter with it.
>
> That work that satisfied Berg's own standards should also find favour with the 'official' public, was something he could not understand, and it seemed to him an objection to the work itself.
>
> The same formula could apply to both of them: Schönberg envied Berg Berg's triumphs, and Berg envied Schönberg Schönberg's failures.)

This suggests that it is not really that easy to give a clear, simple, unambiguous answer to the question: 'Was the opera a success?'

Success in what sense?

The French make a distinction between *succès populaire* and *succès d'estime*. In the first case, the performances are all thronged with enthusiastic people trying to get in; in the second case, experts, critics, and people recognized as having especially discriminating taste praise the work, regardless of whether or not crowds of people flock to attend the performances. So, to try to answer the question about whether something (in this case an opera by Berg) was or was not a success, one must at the very least distinguish two rather different

strands of enquiry. First of all, what kind of success does one mean? *Succès d'estime* or *succès populaire*? Success or failure in whose eyes? If the opera is supposed to appeal to the 'official public', who exactly are they? The dignitaries of the city? The bureaucrats in the Ministry of Culture? The professors of composition in the Conservatoires? The critics and reviewers who write about music for newspapers? The friends of contemporary music? The other members of the school around Schönberg? Or would the opera (and the production) have been a success if (or only if, or if and only if) it satisfied Berg himself? This, however, raises the second kind of question: Which criteria should one use to measure success or failure? This is not at all the same as the first kind of question, because each human being has and can use multiple different standards for judging success or failure. So it would not be enough to say: the work must succeed in the eyes of Berg, or Schönberg, or Professor X at the Conservatoire, because each of them should be assumed to be a person who is sufficiently sophisticated to be able to judge the work from more than one point of view, evaluating it along a range of different dimensions, and in the light of very different criteria, all of which are relevant. If I want to buy a new bicycle, I will certainly pay attention to the solidity of its basic construction, and probably also to the price, but depending on the context there may also be other things I am looking for. If I intend to ride the bicycle at night, it will need a light – dynamo or battery? If, however, I am sure I will be using it only during the day, I don't need a lamp at all. If I propose to store it outside, it must be highly rain-resistant, but if I have a shed, that is less important. Depending on the local crime rate, I may or may not be especially concerned with other factors. When I first came to Cambridge in the early 1980s, security was not a major concern, but as the '90s progressed, I tried successively to use more and more elaborate locks, and when this did not work, I began looking for second-hand bicycles that looked like complete wrecks – not worth stealing – but

were actually still usable. Price, solidity of construction, resistance to inclement weather, visible unattractiveness to potential thieves: at no time did I ever have a single consistent set of criteria. So, if one thinks carefully about it, when Adorno says that the opera 'satisfied Berg's standards' this cannot simply be the full and final truth, because if it was, why would Adorno have had to console him? You don't console someone unless something has gone wrong. Berg's reaction to the premiere, then, was deeply ambiguous in that he was disturbed even though the work seemed to him to be artistically successful, and had found an enthusiastic reception with the audience.

To understand this, one must take account of the historical and theoretical background against which Berg composed this opera. He shared with other musicians of his time a number of assumptions about how music should be written, performed, and listened to, for instance that it should be subdivided into a sequence of individual measures or bars, each of which contained a fixed number of beats, that it should use sounds derived from a division of the sonic spectrum into twelve notes, that there should be identifiable sequences of notes that could be repeated or varied, and so on. At the same time, he was a member of a group which considered itself to be part of the avant-garde in that it wished to violate and distance itself radically from *some* established patterns of music making. These, as has been mentioned, related primarily to the received system of tonality.

Let us assume for the sake of argument that all the demands which Berg might have made on the actual internal quality of the music, and all his aesthetic predilections, were completely satisfied by *Wozzeck*. In addition to these, though, Berg also had some further general ideas about the role of the artistic avant-garde in modern times, the historical position and the social relevance of 'new music', and the sociology of music, and he would have expected these to figure in any evaluation of a work. They, too, were part of the standard to which he held

the work, when trying to decide whether or not he thought the premiere was a success. This should not be taken to mean that Berg had a fully elaborated theory of contemporary music; even less does it mean that he consciously applied such a theory as the basis of his own composing or of judging any musical work. It is well known that theorization can and often does come after the fact, and is rarely in any sense complete. However, the fact that he could not understand the public's reaction to his opera, and that this reaction disturbed him, does suggest that he was surprised by what he encountered. But how had he imagined the premiere beforehand? Is it possible he did not at all try to put himself in the place of the audience and anticipate what their reaction would be in any detail? Was he perhaps completely uninterested in the success or failure of the work?

It seems to me more plausible to assume that Berg did indeed have certain expectations that were to some extent guided by the theoretical commitments he had, even if before the premiere he could not have formulated them explicitly. It was only the actual experience of the audience's reaction that made him fully aware of the implications of some of these commitments. His tacit theoretical views will have included the following: Good contemporary art must be 'new' art, and such art is characterized by a technical mastery of all the inherited compositional techniques, but also by great originality. Many of the traditional structural principles, combinations of sounds, modes of organization, and stylistic elements are exhausted and can no longer be revitalized, much less can one simply continue to employ them as composers did in the past. For a variety of reasons, listeners have a tendency to be conservative and traditionalist. It is perfectly understandable that anyone who loves music will be devoted to the established, familiar sound patterns and habits of listening, and will not easily be able to appreciate music that violates these habits, as necessarily happens in new music. This is the price that must be paid for originality, but without originality there is only

fatigue and boredom. On the other hand, novelty always has an attractiveness that it is difficult to resist. So the great mass of music lovers is caught in a bind, in a paradoxical situation: most people want to hear something that *both* sounds familiar in that it follows the usual patterns *and* is also new, fresh, and original. Adorno's piquant conclusion in his *Ästhetische Theorie* – 'Emphatisch [kann] kein Kunstwerk gelingen' ('No work of art can "succeed", if one takes "succeed" in an emphatic sense') – would seem to be particularly fitting here.[4] Every work must, in one way or another, fail because it faced an unwelcome choice. Either it used the familiar language of music – in the 1920s that would have meant tonal music, which *ex hypothesi* was used up and exhausted – and thus it was not original and fresh, as the great music of the past had been; or it broke out of the much-loved old forms, went off in a completely different direction, and ignored or violated the aesthetic canons which were embedded in listeners' very expectations about music.

This is a rather harsh diagnosis, but in the first third of the twentieth century it was also possible to soften its contours slightly by appeal to a kind of rudimentary philosophy of history. It was true that new music, even new music of high quality, would have an exceedingly difficult time gaining a foothold, would have to struggle against the initial resistance of audiences, and would only very gradually acquire a following. However, in the long run it would establish itself if it really was sufficiently good. In the beginning only a few especially gifted connoisseurs who were already predisposed to the avant-garde would be able to recognize the excellence of a new musical master-work, but that would gradually change, and the trajectory would be like that of the works of the late Beethoven: when they were first composed, they were an acquired taste appealing only to certain experts, but then they gradually became part of the established musical canon and appreciated by everyone. On this way of thinking, judgement about success or failure has a historical dimension: *now*

this is not valued, but in two hundred years . . . Originally this shifting of the horizon from the present to the future seems to have been a kind of imaginary compensation for present catastrophe. Wagner would actually have been very pleased if *Tannhäuser* had immediately conquered Paris. That, however, did not happen, and after the riotous first performances, the work seemed to be about to disappear quickly from the repertory. At that point, then, Wagner decided that he was not writing for his contemporaries after all, but for the future: he was writing what was from the beginning intended as 'music of the future'. At the latest by the end of the nineteenth century, though, composers internalized this attitude and turned it into something like a position. Berg, we should assume, had an attitude toward the history of music like that of Proust, who writes about the late Beethoven:

> Ce temps du reste, qu'il faut à un individu . . . pour pénétrer une œuvre un peu profonde, n'est que le raccourci et comme le symbole des années, des siècles parfois qui s'écoulent avant que le public puisse aimer un chef-d'œuvre vraiment nouveau . . . Ce sont les quatours de Beethoven (les quatours XII, XIII, XIV, XV) qui ont mis cinquante ans à faire naître, à grossir le public des quatours de Beethoven, réalisant ainsi comme tous les chefs-d'œuvres un progrès sinon dans la valeur des artistes, au moins dans la société des esprits, largement composée aujourd'hui de ce qui était introuvable quand le chef-d'œuvre parut, c'est-à-dire des êtres capables de l'aimer.
>
> Ce qu'on appelle la posterité, c'est la posterité de l'œuvre. Il faut que l'œuvre . . . crée elle-même sa posterité . . . Aussi faut-il que l'artiste . . . la lance . . . en plein et lointain avenir. Et pourtant ce temps à venire, vraie perspective des chefs-d'œuvres.[5]

> (The time which an individual needs to enter into any work that is even moderately profound is nothing but the abbreviated

> recapitulation, as it were the symbol, of the years, sometimes the centuries that had to pass before the public could genuinely come to love a properly original masterpiece. It took fifty years to create an audience for the quartets of Beethoven, and it was his quartets 12, 13, 14, and 15 that did that. These quartets brought about progress, even if not an increase in the quality of artists, at any rate an expansion in the size of the community of spirits capable of loving the work, something which exists today but did not when the masterpiece originally appeared. What we call posterity is the posterity of the work.
>
> The work must itself create its posterity. So the artist must project the work fully into the distant future. The true perspective of a masterpiece is this time that will come.)

The true 'present' of a work of art *always* lies in the future, in *its* future. A work that is '*vraiment nouveau*' must gradually create its own audience ('elle crée elle-même sa posterité, c'est-à-dire des êtres capables de l'aimer') – that is, it must be through playing the work itself and listening to it that people develop their sensibility in the unique way that is necessary for them to be able to appreciate it. The audience at the State Opera in Berlin on that winter evening should have required repeated hearings of *Wozzeck* in order to have learned properly to love it. If popular success then comes about not in twenty, fifty, or a hundred years, but immediately, this suggests that the work is '*peu profond*'.

So it is perfectly comprehensible that Berg was disappointed and disturbed by the enthusiastic reception of his opera, but the question still remains: what, in his opinion, would the ideal reaction of the audience have been? Absolute rejection can take two forms: riots or complete and utter indifference. In the first case the singers and musicians are shouted down and fist-fights break out in the auditorium; in the second case, no one comes to the performances, or the audience leaves without saying a word, never to return, and the work is killed off with silence.

Berg presumably did not want a repetition of the scandals of 1913, because, given his character and temperament, he was not a confrontational insurrectionist. Adorno, who knew Berg well, writes that 'seiner eigenen Art entsprach es vielmehr, sich immerdar ins Unrecht zu setzen und dadurch die Welt, von deren Übermacht er apriori überzeugt war, stets wieder zu überlisten' ('it was part of his way of living . . . always to act as if he was in the wrong, and by doing that to get the better, again and again, of the world, which he assumed a priori was more powerful than he was, by cunning').[6] He certainly will not have aspired to have his work met with indifference, because who takes the trouble to write an opera and see it through production and performance, if it is clear that there will be no audience? Of course he wished to attain a *succès d'estime* at least among the more knowledgeable critics who were positively disposed toward the new music. As far as the larger public was concerned, the best he could hope for was presumably to put them in a state in which radical incomprehension was conjoined with a reluctant respect, so that the two neutralized each other and a kind of equilibrium was attained. The music was supposed to be an enigma which fascinated the audience – that is, it was supposed at the same time to be something alien with which they could not immediately identify and which disconcerted them (without strongly repelling them) and also to attract them mildly (without pandering to their existing taste). This, however, is not what happened; the members of the audience were very moved by the work and liked it immediately. It did not at all seem that they had to overcome any great inner resistance. If Berg was trying to win over the listeners in the long run in a cunning and indirect way, he failed, because his success was immediate and complete. Was it because the opera was still too close to the sound world of operetta or cabaret? Was it perhaps not as original as he had supposed and hoped? Was it original only in that it was the first horror-operetta?

The preliminary conclusion then is that there is no simple answer to the question of whether the premiere of *Wozzeck* was a success or not; rather there are at least four distinct possible answers, depending on the context and the standards one wishes to apply:

1. Considered simply as a musical composition, the work was a success. It is true that the established rules of harmony were ignored, or rather actively violated, but apart from that, musicologists can find no solecisms in the score, the musical structure is well adapted to the text being set, and, as far as we can judge, Berg succeeded, to his own satisfaction, in making the score expressive in the way he had intended.
2. As far as the production and performance are concerned, it seems also to be the case that everything was in order. The singers and musicians performed the music correctly and expressively; the scenery and stage design were appropriate for the work, the lighting was effective, etc.
3. The work was a *succès d'estime* in that it was publicly attacked only by a few critics who already had a record of great antipathy to the music of Schönberg and his pupils.
4. Only as an avant-garde event did the premiere disappoint Berg's expectations, and it did so because it was immediately received with great enthusiasm.

So in Berg's eyes the opera was a failure because of point 4, because it immediately won over the audience. But since Berg was not the only one involved in the production and performance, why should his opinion alone carry special weight? Why not consider what the musicians, the singers, the prompter, the backstage hands, the director of the theatre thought? For that matter, to the extent to which we read about the premiere aren't we also involved in at least a tenuous and indirect way, and don't we also then have a right to our

opinion? 'Success' and 'failure' always depend on the context, and that context includes both the concrete conditions under which the work was envisaged, written, and performed, and also the viewpoints, values, goals, standards, and criteria of various possible agents who might be called on to evaluate the work. Not all contexts are equally relevant – which ones are relevant in making which kinds of judgements depends on a further decision about context – but the set of *possible* contexts is unbounded and undefined.

The context of human life

For what seem to be deep-seated anthropological reasons, concepts like 'success' and 'failure' can be applied almost anywhere in human life (which does not mean that they must be applied or even that it is a good idea always to apply them). 'Man' is not, as the philosophical tradition would have us believe, really essentially *animal rationale*, nor is 'he' *res cogitans*. Rather, in the final analysis we are living creatures, which means that we are essentially active and teleologically oriented toward interaction with our environment.[7] A living creature must constantly nourish itself, react to stimuli, grow, and in many cases move, if it wishes to continue to live. It is this feature of living things which makes it possible to apply concepts like 'success' and 'failure' to all creatures and their actions. The plant is heliotropic and finally succeeds in producing branches and leaves in the full sunlight; the cat chases the squirrel, but fails to catch it. The plant that fails to reach the sun will die; the cat in the wild who never catches anything will starve. Magda has been trying for a long time to get a well-paid, interesting job in an attractive city: she succeeds because the job she finds is in Paris, but fails because the work is routine and barely pays a living wage. We are, if one wishes to use this expression, 'by nature' oriented toward success; therein lies the importance

of failure for us. The fact that our orientation toward success is so deeply rooted in elementary facts about biology might, however, mislead us into applying a much too simple model of human life to forms of action that are not simply a matter of physiology, but are in fact highly dependent on cultural factors.

If one were to abstract from all other things and consider a human being merely as a biological system which is looking for nourishment – that is, food – then the fact that certain fungi and berries are edible while others are not is especially relevant. If one undertakes this simplification, then one can set up a dichotomy which will give one a 'standard' for success:

(a) the search for food is successful = the human in question has found something edible
(b) the search for food fails = the human has found nothing that is edible

Again, what is of primary importance here is that this dichotomy holds only on condition that one starts from the abstraction in question – that a human is nothing other than a biological system looking for food. However, virtually no humans ever act in a way that would conform to this model, because humans are not just biological systems, but also social animals (*zoa politika*), and no known human society with any kind of complicated organization, as far as we can tell, is completely without taboos, in particular food taboos. For instance, a Buddhist monk who goes to the market and finds only meat for sale will return to his monastery with an empty basket, and if the *charcuterie* is the only shop in town to survive the earthquake, Muslims will go hungry that day. For that matter, if I go to the market square tomorrow and find that the only thing on offer is human corpses, my search for food will fail. Someone might object that I am the one who has been misled by the veneer of civilization and that if I, the Buddhist monk, or the pious Muslim really did live in a state of long-term total

social collapse, we would all violate our taboos, as is seen in the behaviour of groups of people shipwrecked, or stranded in the Andes in the winter. First of all, however, the tacit assumption that emergency situations reveal a reality covered over in normal life is one that would merit discussion, and, second, is it obvious that I would eat human flesh if I were hungry enough? I hope never to find out, but one way or another this is an empirical matter. It does, however, seem beyond doubt that some people have preferred starvation to violation of their food taboos. It is not, I submit, as theoretically illuminating to observe that some people will eat anything in an emergency as it is to notice that some people – even if they are a small minority – refuse to transgress taboos, despite paying a very significant cost, even death, in doing so.

More or fewer abstractions?

Many simplifying abstractions are difficult for us to see through because they have a kind of substantial social reality in most of the societies known to us. This reality blinds us and renders the underlying process of abstraction invisible. Thus in our society many important partial sectors of human life are in fact separated off from the rest and are administered by institutions that follow clear rules and have clear goals. Control of natural resources, for instance, is governed by a system of socially and legally defined and enforced property rights, which prescribe who can use what under which circumstances and to what end. A legally binding and enforced system of property rights is a highly artificial construct. The owner is not necessarily the person who needs the resources in question or the person who can best use them (or even someone who can directly use them at all), but rather that person who has a formally defined legal title to ownership. If it comes to court proceedings, in general the court will abstract from other aspects of the

situation – such as who needs the resource most – and focus on questions concerning the title to ownership. This system only exists and continues to exist because it has been institutionally established, and it will last for as long as it is maintained, if necessary by the use of force. The artifice required becomes visible when one considers how complicated it is to produce judges and advocates in a modern society. They need to engage in a special programme of study that takes years to complete and at the end of which there is a rigorous examination, and only then are they deemed to have the appropriate qualifications. The system also requires a police force, bodies of armed men who keep order in the courts by repressing disturbances, guards to use force on those accused, large armies of guards to run prisons, and so on.

The education of children is not in principle different. It is increasingly segregated from the rest of human life, formalized, and conducted in separate spaces by professional staff. Much of it now takes place in the school system. 'School' is a place of order and rules: there are classes, examinations, grades, certificates, diplomas. From our earliest childhood it is inculcated in us that we must follow the rules and reach the scholastic goals that are imposed on us. So although human beings everywhere and for as long as we can trace their history have classified some actions as 'failed', what used to be called 'modernization' brings with it a huge multiplication of processes of segregation, abstraction, and formalization like the ones described above, and with that a hugely expanded domain of ways in which one can formally fail.[8] In his *Confessions* Saint Augustine tells the story of how, as a child in North Africa, he never succeeded in learning the Greek language, despite all the efforts of his tutors and the punishments they inflicted on him (*saevis terroribus atque poenis*).[9] Nowadays, he would probably not have to fear corporal punishment, but he would get an 'F' in Greek, and possibly fail to be promoted at the end of the year, so that he had to repeat it.

Suppose a partial sector of social life which has been thoroughly formalized. There will then be specific institutions devoted to ensuring that the goals of that sector are (generally) realized, and it will make sense then to assume that any member of the society who is actively participating in these institutions will share their general orientation toward the prescribed goals. Who plays chess without at least trying to checkmate the opponent? Well, there is actually an obvious answer to that question, namely that a professional chess-player who has been bribed and will make a lot of money by throwing the match will not try to checkmate their opponent. Such a chess-player has intentions that are at odds with those of the game itself, which is predicated on each player trying to win. As in the case of Berg, the plans of the corrupt chess-player will fail if he or she succeeds in winning the match. This might happen, for instance, if the opponent's chess skills are so poor that it would be impossible for the professional to lose without it becoming clear that he or she was throwing the game.

Because so many domains of modern social life are thoroughgoingly formalized, a statement like 'Social life is a game with its own rules of play' has a certain plausibility for us. The chess example shows, however, that this statement is at best a metaphor, which is of limited value in giving us understanding of what is going on. In a game, 'winning' and 'losing' are well defined by the rules of the game; 'succeeding' and 'failing', however, are relative to particular human intentions and goals. Humans are not required to follow the rules of any pre-given game, much less the purported 'rules of the game of life'. Even when they participate in social institutions or formal practices, they can simply neglect fully to appropriate to themselves and identify with the goals that are prescribed in those institutions and practices. A chess-player need not be *merely* – that is, 'no more than' – a subject who follows the rules of chess and strives to win. It is always possible to deviate, to have goals of

one's own that are different from the goals of the game (making money, impressing others, satisfying an inner aesthetic need, rather than checkmating the opponent). It is even possible at any time to decide to deviate from the established rules or to fail to accept the traditional criteria for evaluating a game. An example of this last possibility would be if I were to decide that a 'good' game was not one that I won, but one in which the sequence of configurations on the board satisfied my standards of beauty.

If we put aside the abstractions and idealizations on which this simple model rests, and look at actual behaviour of real people, their goals and intentions are not nearly as clear and univocal as the model would require. Neither are the standards and criteria they use for judging the success or failure of an action. Goals, motives, intentions, values, criteria: all are not only complex, but in many cases antecedently indeterminate. It is not at all unusual for people to become aware of some goal they find they have been pursuing only when they attain it, or when their action very signally fails. My criteria for assessing success or failure in action in some domain with which I am not familiar may in the beginning be inchoate and indeterminate and may only gradually crystallize into something that has a particular shape and contour. Thus, it is a well-known phenomenon in learning to play a musical instrument that, as one practises, if the practice goes well, one gains not only proficiency in playing, but also proficiency in noticing and judging. People who practise come, that is, to acquire standards in relation to aspects of music which they perhaps had not noticed and about which they previously had no opinion one way or the other. As humans we seem to have great trouble in general with the very idea of indeterminacy, but it is pervasive in our lives.

Plurality of goals

In addition, apart from any issues about indeterminacy, it is perfectly normal for people to have more than one goal in acting at any given time. If I go to pick mushrooms with some friends one afternoon, the conversations we have along the way may be just as important to me as the mushrooms we collect. The expedition would be a failure in my eyes if we were to find no mushrooms, but also if the conversation dried up completely, or if two of my friends got into an unexpected argument that turned bitter. Most human action is multivalent, characterized by a perpetual internal multiplicity of purpose, intent, and motive.

Even if, exceptionally, I have only one goal I am pursuing at a particular time for a particular course of action, I can still measure it against completely different standards, and the judgements I come to using these different standards will sometimes overlap, but also often contradict each other. In the case of Berg, one can simplify by saying that he wanted to write 'good music', but what he would have counted as 'good music' requires reference to a number of distinct dimensions – voice-leading, dramatic development, expressivity, balance, etc. – and many of these will be associated with very different criteria for what counts as high quality. Again, it would be a mistake to assume that the relevant criteria for judging what is 'good' exist before the work is completed, and they can certainly themselves be refined and clarified during the course of being applied. In general it is natural for our criteria for evaluating anything to change and develop over time.

One kind of action which is of particular importance for human beings is an action with a nested set of intentions and goals. In such cases I pursue a preliminary goal as a precondition for being able to pursue something different which I, in some sense, 'really' want. Suppose I live in Neuenheim in Heidelberg, and propose to walk across the bridge over the

Neckar to the main railway station, and suppose I do that because I plan to take the train to go to Berlin and meet some friends, with whom I am going to spend the evening at a concert. My attempt to cross the bridge may succeed or fail. It fails if I am run over by a car on the way or if the bridge is closed for pedestrian traffic because of repairs. My plan to attend the concert with my friends can misfire, because the concert is sold out and no one booked any tickets beforehand, or because I miss the train, or for an indefinitely large number of other reasons. To hear a concert in Berlin and the walk across a bridge in Heidelberg seem to be two different things, but in this case my main reason for crossing the bridge was that this was a convenient way to get to Berlin. To pick up on a point made earlier, it may not be the case that my *only* reason for wanting to take the train to Berlin is that I want to hear that particular concert or see those particular friends. I may relish the free time for reflection I have while sitting in the train, I may like to look out of the window while travelling, or I may find the train an especially congenial place to take an afternoon nap. Or I might take the train knowing that I could, if I wished, nap, look out of the window or fantasize, even though I do not at the moment know which of these I will feel like doing. So my intentions can be both indeterminate, multiple, and nested at the same time.

Nested intentions often refer to temporally extended sequences of states of the external world, which the agent thinks form a causal chain, in which the earlier members (or one of them) are a precondition for the later ones. Since such a causal chain can unfold only in and through time, this means that the action automatically has an orientation toward the future. This makes evaluation or judgement of the success of an action with nested intentions difficult, because to some extent the future is always likely to be obscure.

To take another example, suppose that John decides to stay at home and work on his Russian rather than go off on holiday,

because he has an examination soon which he would like to pass. He wants to get a high score on the exam so that he can successfully complete his course, because, after he has his degree, he intends to become a teacher of Russian. He thinks he needs to have a proper job as a teacher of Russian because he has no other resources apart from his ability to work, and he would like to earn enough money to buy consumer goods and find a place to live in a salubrious part of town. So his plans contain a nested sequence of intentions that extend for an indefinite time into the future. Now suppose he does get a good result on his exam and is offered a post, but before the end of his probationary period the political situation changes and suddenly Russian teachers are no longer in demand, so he is let go. Does this mean that his original plan – to stay home and work at his Russian, so that he could pass his exam, rather than going on holiday – failed? He passed the exam with room to spare, but it is the larger project which was the framework within which this particular plan was embedded that has suddenly become unrealistic. How long into the future must we think of the consequences of his decision not to go on holiday as extending? How long do we have to wait until we have seen enough to allow us to make a judgement about success or failure?

In the third century BC, King Pyrrhus of Epirus won an unbroken string of battles against the Romans and their allies, but lost the war because each of these victories was too costly for him. He is said to have remarked after one of them: 'One more victory like that and we're done for.' So his first success against the Romans looks very different depending on the context. If one looks at it in its micro-context it appears to be a success: in 280 BC, after they lost the Battle of Heraclea, the Romans were forced to withdraw their defeated troops, leaving Pyrrhus in control. On the other hand, stepping back and looking in retrospect at what happened more globally, this was the first episode in a process that led to the eventual decision by

Pyrrhus to give up and return to Greece with his army, leaving Italy to the Romans.

For as long as our future remains genuinely open, we do not know how history will develop and where, when, or how it will end, nor do we know what value systems, perhaps almost incomprehensible to us now, will in the future provide the standards and criteria for judging what has happened and what we have done. It is perfectly possible that what we call 'modernity' will reveal itself retrospectively as a tiny provincial episode (like Pyrrhus' invasion of Italy) in the epic story of the development of the Middle Kingdom into the universal framework for understanding human life. The collected works of Montesquieu, Locke, J.S. Mill, and de Tocqueville could end up joining those of Paracelsus, Swedenborg, Khalil Gibran, Nostradamus, and Ayn Rand in an adjunct wing of the Library of Anomalies, Curiosities, and Exotica in a small university town in Mongolia or Tibet. This suggestion is now, of course, no more than a speculation, but even apart from this kind of massive re-thinking of our own assumptions about the world, is it obvious that the music of the Second Viennese School will still be admired at all in 200 years? Will Schönberg (and Boulez) be mentioned in the same breath as Haydn or rather classed with C.P.E. Bach and Kuhlau? Schönberg certainly desired that the first of these be the case. Or is 'success' in music (and in history) completely detachable from the vagaries of actual empirical influence and of our changing patterns of admiration, revulsion, and indifference?

If it is in principle reasonable and justified to go beyond the immediate intentions of the actors and to consider further goals which might have been in play, as we have done above in the cases of John and King Pyrrhus, then one might argue, as many traditional philosophers very vigorously have, that the life of each human must be seen as a huge unitary process, as one complex, internally highly differentiated act, and that this act has itself a singular intentionality. Each life is

constituted (in part) by its own process of pursuing a series of highly nested goals that must be construed as if they formed a unity.

If this were true, then it would be conceivable that each human life had one goal to which all the individual intentions of the person whose life it is could be referred. The life of any individual as a whole would be a single project or enterprise that was temporally extended and internally articulated, but also in the final analysis unitary. As such it would be something that could be said to succeed or fail *as a whole*. The whole life, not just various individual segments of it, could be said to be a success or a failure. This assumption, that there is a single, overriding goal of human life, is one that many ancient philosophers seem to have made without really thinking much about it.[10] It is not always clear whether this was supposed to be a simple empirical description of the human condition – everyone's actions are directed at attaining a single goal, *eudaimonia* (happiness, well-being, human flourishing) – or whether it is an ethical ideal; in fact people are different from each other and easily distracted, and there isn't really anything they all consistently pursue, but they ought to pull themselves together and focus on some one goal for their lives. Or, is this claim about the singularity of teleology supposed to be both an empirical observation and an ethical demand?

The tendency to attribute to human life a unitary goal is particularly pronounced in medieval Christianity: every human pursues eternal salvation. After death each of us will stand before the throne of God, the judge from whose verdict there is no appeal, and hear our fate in God's definitive judgement: heaven (eternal salvation) or hell (eternal damnation). The whole of life leads up to and is a preparation for this single moment when one's life is subjected to the definitive scrutiny and judged. For those who accept the correctness of this theological doctrine, it is only sensible to subordinate all individual

plans to the single project of acting in such a way as to attain salvation and avoid damnation.

Whatever else one might want to say about Christianity, it does seem to give a univocal answer to the question of how a human life ought to be led and also how it ought to be evaluated. It seems to put an end, for those who can believe in it, to the indeterminacy, uncertainty, and ambiguity which many humans find difficult to tolerate. Instead of a constantly shifting battery of very different perspectives, points of view, and standards of evaluation, there is only one that really counts. The Christian knows who the final Judge will be, and whose judgement is definitive. 'Success' means surviving his scrutiny. The problem, however, is actually not solved, but just put off, because now one wants to know *how* God will decide, what forms of life really please him and which do not. And this is not at all clear. The history of Christianity is an almost unbroken sequence of disagreements, often bloody, about the principles by which individuals and groups ought to lead their lives. So the same insecurity about the orientation, conduct, and assessment of human life that one wanted to get rid of by appeal to Divine Judgement recurs and is reproduced inside Christianity in a slightly modified form.

The Christian doctrine of eternal damnation means that Christians need to take the idea of failure with special seriousness. In the pagan ancient world, those who were unsuccessful in conducting their lives were perhaps not envied, but they did not have anything particular to fear after death. Even the strictest ancient moralist reserved eternal punishment in the underworld for exemplary human monsters, heroically sacrilegious criminals (Ixion, Tantalus), mass murderers, or particularly sadistic tyrants, not for run-of-the-mill failures. The worst fate that awaited failures after their death was to be forgotten, like the woman in Sappho's poem who is a stranger to art.[11] Christianity represents a democratization of the eternal torments reserved in antiquity for a select few, because

even the perfectly average sinner, who never in his or her life committed even one murder, must need to fear the fires of hell.

The literature of failure

There are some works of Western literature that glorify success, for instance the *Odyssey*, Dante's *Paradiso* or Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* (which, after all, ends with the narrator attaining a vision of how to capture lost time); nevertheless failure is a much more interesting topic. In tragedy the plans of the hero dissolve into nothingness before our eyes, and even great comedy draws its sustenance from our fascination with the shadow-side of human existence. On the lowest comic level, the klutz falls into a puddle and the audience laughs at his unsuccessful attempts to stand up again. Aesthetically and humanly more ambitious forms of comedy operate with increasingly sublimated forms of the same thing. In Athenian 'Old Comedy' the radical unsatisfactoriness of human life which leads to the failure of many important human aspirations is presented to the audience *ex negativo*. The hero attains his or her goals, but only in a completely fictive world and by employing means that are patently absurd and unrealistic. Pisthetairus' 'success' in *The Birds*, for example, must remain in the realm of the imagination, because as any fool would be able to see, reality will not permit him to realize his wishes and projects in Athens or any other actually existing city. And at the beginning of the modern age, we find two comic archetypes who proleptically sum up two important aspects of the world that was at that time just coming into existence. They are Panurge, who spends the third book of Rabelais' great work on the life and times of the giants Gargantua and Pantagruel looking for a source of incontrovertible authority that will give him unambiguous advice about life, and not only repeatedly

fails to find any such thing but makes himself look ridiculous in the process; and Don Quixote, who spends most of the novel deludedly thinking that his prosaic and distinctly unsuccessful life is in fact a series of heroic triumphs.

Samuel Beckett is merely the latest in a string of authors fascinated by failure. Failure in his work becomes a self-reflective, self-intensifying process beyond tragedy and comedy, rooted in the human situation. It develops endogenously without any limit except oblivion. Thus the situation of the modern artist is an impossible one. *Ex professo*, artists try to describe what is there, to depict it, present it, and also to express themselves. Reality, however, does not admit of being depicted, and no one can express themselves adequately. The more artists work, the clearer this will become to them, so their fate is necessarily failure. Is there any way to avoid simply being crushed between these contradictory demands: the need the artist feels for expression and truth, and the insight into the impossibility of these things?[12] Some of us can simply ignore this dilemma, but artists cannot, unless they want to give up the serious pursuit of art altogether. Anyone who *could* give up would thereby indicate a lack of aptitude for the life of the artist, because to be an artist is to experience the vital 'need' (*besoin*) for artistic expression.[13] Since, then, the world eludes the artist's grasp and self-expression can't succeed, anything the artist undertakes will be a failure. All that is left is Beckett's despairing 'Il faut continuer, je ne peux pas continuer, je vais continuer'[14] ['I must continue, I can't continue, I shall continue'], which at any rate is a formula for a certain kind of motion, even if it is a kind of expressive, repetitive marching-in-place, because the artist turns out not even to be able adequately to articulate the impossibility of representing the world and of self-expression. At best the prospect for art is: 'Try again. Fail again. Fail better.'[15] Paradoxically, in a sense, if self-expression is impossible, then a work of art that fails to be expressive is particularly close to a fundamental reality. The worse the failure, the more

realistic: 'Try again. Fail again. Better again. Or better worse: Fail worse again.'[16]

Does this account of literature throw any light on the life real human individuals live? 'Life as a whole' can only be thought to fail or succeed if there is something like the totality of a human life, if it makes sense to think of a whole life as a single unit in some way. Several modern philosophers have pointed out how implausible it is for one to try to perceive one's own life while one is living it as a single surveyable, closed unity. This is implausible if only because as long as I can perceive anything at all (including my life), that means my life is *not* yet closed. I can imagine a future closure, but that is a different thing altogether. If I imagine an external observer of my life, the situation is, of course, completely different. For someone other than me, my life can be seen as a sequence of events, perhaps some of which are decisions I make, but which unfolds in time, like almost everything else. This temporal dimension struck Proust very forcefully, and he draws an analogy between a piece of music and a human life:

> même quand j'eus écouté la Sonate d'un bout à l'autre, elle me resta presque tout entière invisible, comme un monument dont la distance ou la brume ne laissent apercevoir que de faibles parties. De là la mélancholie qui s'attache à la connaissance de tels oeuvrages, comme de tout qui se réalise dans le temps . . . Pour n'avoir pu aimer qu'en temps successifs tout ce que m'apportait cette Sonate, je ne la possédai jamais entière; elle ressemblait à la vie.[17]

> (Even when I had listened to the sonata from beginning to end, it continued to be almost entirely invisible, like a monument only small parts of which can be perceived because of distance or mist. This is the reason for the melancholy associated with knowing works like this, and of anything that is real only in time . . . I never possessed it as a whole, because I could not

> love all that this sonata gave me except at successive moments; it was like life.)

What is never present as a whole can't really very easily be the object of a definitive assessment. 'Her/his/my life is a complete success/failure' can express the momentary elation of a particularly naive winner of the lottery, or the pain of a traumatized creature, or it can be a literary exaggeration. A sentence like this is rarely completely without cognitive content, but to extract and formulate that content more precisely requires reference to the particular context in which the assertion is made, and also to the relevant point of view and system of values that is being presupposed in making the judgement. Any life looks different if it is differently specified and assessed against the background of a different set of values. The perspective of an omnipotent, omniscient God who sees anyone's whole life as the one single unitary sequence which it 'really' is, is not at all accessible to us. We equally don't have a grip on a divinely legislated set of values, standards, and criteria. The best we can do is give a fallible, provisional assessment of partial aspects of a human life. There can be a 'last word' about someone's life ('success' or 'failure'), but only in the temporal sense, as the last word we speak about it. And this 'last word' makes sense only to the evaluative point of view we have taken in pronouncing it, and that is not fixed or even potentially unchangeable. We could always have adopted a different perspective. This does not mean that any judgement is 'arbitrary' or 'random' or that 'anything goes', just that no discussion is ever definitively over. Or is human life perhaps not quite as complex as a piano sonata?

7

Hope

What can one say philosophically about hope? In the ancient world hope was a human weakness or even a vice, which a sensible person would strive to avoid. Thus Thucydides in his *History* repeatedly warns the reader against harkening to the seductive but pernicious voice of hope 'which has deluded so many'.[1] And at the very beginning of Greek literature Hesiod tells the story of Pandora, in which hope is not a benefit or a comfort but a great evil. It is contained in a whole box of evils like labour, care, sickness, and suffering, and is in a sense the worst of the lot. Pandora finds it last in her box, at the very bottom, an evil given to humans as a present from the gods.

> [D]er Mensch . . . weiß nicht, dass jenes Fass, welches Pandora brachte, das Fass der Uebel war, und hält das zurückgebliebene Uebel für das grösste Glücksgut, – es ist die Hoffnung. – Zeus wollte nämlich nicht, dass der Mensch, auch noch so sehr von anderen Uebeln gequält, doch das Leben nicht wegwerfe, sondern fortfahre, sich immer von Neuem quälen zu lassen. Dazu giebt er dem Menschen die Hoffnung; sie ist in Wahrheit das übelste der Uebel, weil sie die Qual der Menschen verlängert.[2]

> Humans know that the container that Pandora brought was full of evils, and [yet] they think that the last evil left in the container is a vehicle of the greatest happiness – it is hope. Zeus, that is, did not want humans, no matter how tormented they were by the other evils, to throw away their lives, but rather he wanted them to continue again and again to allow themselves to be tortured. That is why he gave humans hope; it is in truth the worst of the evils, because it draws out their torment.

Socrates, who confidently assumes that even death cannot be an evil for a good man – he says he is 'full of good hope' (εὔελπις) – on this point is, as in so much else, the paradoxical exception in Hellenic antiquity. His optimism, not the usual Greek view about these things, was what carried the day eventually and became embedded in the basic attitude adopted by later thinkers whom he influenced in what came to be the philosophical tradition. Christianity took a similar course when it transvalued the ancient value system and claimed that what had been considered a foolish weakness, hope, was actually a theological virtue. The transvaluation was complete when, in the Middle Ages, the opposite of 'hope' became not a clear-sighted and realistic view of the world, but 'despair' (which was then categorized as a mortal sin).

So it looks at first glance as if since antiquity two philosophical positions have stood in sharp opposition to each other. There are dry philosophers and wet ones, sober ones and intoxicated ones, down-to-earth ones and edifying ones, critics and panegyricists, malcontents and apologists. Voltaire and Pangloss will never see eye to eye, nor will Diogenes the Dog (Cynic) and the followers of Plato, the Kissers-of-tyrants'-arses (Διονυσοκόλακες);[3] nor for that matter the members of the *comité invisible* and John Rawls. On the one side there are those who think that whatever else might be true it is certainly not the main job of the philosopher to spread 'hope', but rather for instance that philosophers should cultivate a love of truth,

help to develop a sense for reality (in all its forms), speak out to tell things as they are (regardless of the cost), and help to undermine ungrounded claims that people and institutions make. Wishful thinking, a human property that has some family resemblance to hope, today does not even enjoy the reputation of being an especially good counsellor. One might claim that precisely because philosophy is not in any interesting or important sense an empirical science, it is especially susceptible to illusions, and thus needs to be especially careful to distinguish itself as clearly and sharply as possible from all mere beautiful dreams. The historical record has sufficiently demonstrated that philosophy can easily degenerate into a way of producing attractive hallucinations and even deploying them to legitimize dodgy social institutions. If philosophy gives up the idea that it must be an absolutely uncompromising form of critical analysis of human life as it is, it betrays its own highest vocation. So it could not be an objection against a philosopher or a form of philosophy or a given position that it does not give us hope, unless, of course, one knows a priori that we will never under any circumstances find ourselves in a terminally nasty situation from which there is really no way out. A priori optimism of this kind, the idea that every human problem has a solution (at least in principle), and that there is a way out of any situation (suicide, if it comes to that), seems to have its origin not in a sober assessment of the world, but in some kind of religious sensibility: in the Christian version, Our Father in Heaven will take care that no situation stays permanently and truly hopeless. Socrates was perhaps, as some Christians thought, not so far from them after all.

That is one way of looking at it. The other philosophical position takes an almost diametrically opposed view. This 'dry' conception, it asserts, has a seriously and shamefully impoverished conception of 'truth', and of the role of voluntative elements in all forms of cognition. There is no completely pure knowing. Acquiring new forms of knowledge always requires

the deployment of the imagination and the mobilization of human powers to help us stretch beyond what is in any sense 'simply there'. Coming to know anything new requires something like a leap of faith. It seems to be the case that sometimes one needs to believe, contrary to existing evidence, that one can do something in order, then, eventually to do it. Teachers know this phenomenon well: most students don't ever really get this particular, relatively subtle and complex philosophical point (or never learn to produce that particular kind of musical effect on their instrument, or never really come up with a new proof of some theorem or a new way of solving some kind of equation), and this student does not actually seem that gifted, so the existing evidence (which may be extensive) overwhelmingly suggests that this is about as far as he or she will ever get. Occasionally, though, a student has some combination of psychological doggedness, imagination, deviance, and 'hope' which eventually makes it possible for them to do something that no one would have been able to predict. Similarly, it is claimed, sometimes you need to want to see something in order to discover it. That does not mean that what you eventually do see is made up, imaginary, or not there. Once you have discovered it you can document it in all the usual ways; it is just that no one would have discovered it if someone had not had what looked like a completely ungrounded expectation that the effort would pay off – that is, if someone had not had 'hope' (of a kind). A further implication of this is that if one tries to purify the cognitive realm of any admixture of anything that goes beyond what is incontrovertibly there before one's eyes or what is immediately implied by the existing evidence, one plays right into the hands of the politically, economically, and socially established powers-that-be. They are in most cases in an extremely good position to see to it that the immediately accessible 'evidence' does not threaten their position. So excluding such phenomena as 'hope' is a cognitive, moral, and perhaps even political error. The opposite of 'hope' now is not,

as it was for the ancients, a realistic view of the world, or for Christians, 'despair', but 'cynicism'. The cynic has always in the final analysis made an accommodation with the world as it is and with the power relations that hold in it, and, what is worse, he has done this with bad grace and a bad conscience. How is one supposed to try to change the world in a radical way, if one cannot generate the appropriate enormous amount of motivational energy which that requires, and how can one do that if one has no concrete hope? Criticism need not be merely 'reformist' – demanding tiny tinkering with the existing institutions. In fact, given that our social, economic, and political world is so deeply unsatisfactory, it is perfectly right that the critic demand radical changes in those institutions themselves, but still criticism must always remain 'constructive'. The critic must remain focused on some concrete proposed change that can recognizably be implemented, even if the change itself is far-reaching, such as the abolition of the corporation as a legally recognized entity, or the nationalization of all the banks and financial institutions, or the replacement of Parliament with a Council of Bishops, a Council of Experts, or a Council of Delegates of the Labour Unions. Sometimes this is phrased as 'the critic must have a concrete alternative to propose, must tell us how to do things better', because otherwise the fundamental and essential link with action will be lost.

At this point it is possible to turn the argument about cynicism around. It seems clear that people who in our society are particularly well off and powerful have a strong interest in describing their critics as 'cynics' as a way of blackmailing them, just as religious people in the nineteenth century tended to call anyone who did not share their values a 'nihilist' – after all, if she doesn't endorse those self-evidently worthy institutions, Religion, Property, The Family, The Nation, she must believe nothing has value. Or, alternatively, let her expound her alternative value-scheme, which will, of course, have to be as elaborate and well oiled as the theologies we

have been working on, in one way or another, for 2,000 years, because we would need to scrutinize it, and it will also have in all aspects to seem plausible to us in all the assumptions it makes about human beings, who, of course, are everywhere and have always been basically just like us. Calling a critic a cynic for not providing a detailed blueprint for immediate action is a good way of rendering him harmless and what he says irrelevant. Why, in any case, should anyone accept the demand to be positive and propose only constructive criticism? Is saying 'Just don't do *that*' always being negative (for instance 'Don't stop and search people on the street for no reason apart from the colour of their skin')? Who judges what counts as 'constructive'? Elected politicians? Dominant figures on the financial markets? Prominent philosophers? A majority of the (voting?) population? It is perhaps possible that every negation by its very nature is in some bloodless sense a sketch of something 'positive' – if I reject corruption among judges, I am tacitly endorsing integrity – but this does not mean that in legitimately criticizing the corruption of the judiciary I need to have a clear specification of what a society of judges all of whom have integrity would look like, except tautologically that it would be one without corruption. It certainly need not imply that I have a good idea of how we could get from the situation in which we find ourselves to one which would be proof against my criticism. Also, as Adorno points out, a person who is being tortured has a 'right' to scream[4] and 'be negative' without being subject to the demand of proposing some positive alternative to the present (apart from the tautology that this alternative is to be one in which this torture does not take place). None of these – simply screaming, just saying 'no', or criticizing – requires the specification of a non-tautological 'positive alternative' to be legitimate, and the absence of a specified positive alternative is not necessarily a sign of cynicism.

Or is the idea perhaps that we should be able to decide a priori whether or not there is hope? Might it even be the case

that having hope is itself 'a priori' for humans? There is an argument which one could push in this direction. One could claim that the analysis which has just been given depends on a completely incorrect understanding of the way human thinking operates. It assumes that we have a cognitive apparatus which is independent and operates on its own, and then at the end of this operation it dispenses a set of beliefs about the world which it (tacitly at least) claims are well grounded. Once we have those beliefs, we must then adjust our emotional and voluntative reactions, our wishes about how the world might be, and our aspirations, hopes, and fears to them. Let's call this, for convenience, the 'vulgar' view. One might argue that this model in a sense has things exactly reversed. Volition/emotion/attention/expectation are not, one might claim, an afterthought, but a precondition for the operation of the human mind in its engagement with the world. You have to be antecedently attached to the world through a network of affective filaments even to begin to think about it coherently, and what you want and hope for structures your expectations and thus your attention. Only then can cognition begin. It is an old Christian theme, developed with particular clarity by St Augustine, that 'faith' must precede understanding, making it possible. You don't read Scripture, understand it, and thereupon acquire faith; you have to have 'faith' (and a form of hope) to read with any understanding at all and to come to know the truth. Something similar is at work in all human knowing. This Augustinian model is highly convincing: in some sense attitude has priority over ratiocination; that is, some precursors of what will eventually become 'expectations', 'anticipations', 'hopes' would seem to have a kind of developmental and psychological precedence over more strictly rational forms of cognition.

Still, this priority is not what philosophers call 'a prioricity' (in anything like the sense in which that term is generally used). We may need to have had and still to have (some) wishes in order to think, but this does not mean that we cannot

distinguish wishful thinking from other kinds of thinking. We may be convinced that we need 'proto-hope' to begin to know anything at all, even though we are still more or less completely in the dark about how the mechanisms of wishing, hoping, and thinking actually operate. None of this amounts to any kind of justification for a demand that every philosopher must specify for us ground for hope.

Of course, *we*, the living, are always inclined to assume that the world is so constituted that it gives space for hope. The very fact that we are still here and breathing and can even ask this question shows that the world has up to now been particularly propitious *for us*. However, difficult as it is for any of us fully to admit it, our very existence and our continued survival are completely contingent, and in some sense we know very well that we might not have come into existence (and will one day die). Think of the Spartan being shown around a temple to Apollo on a headland which was known for its violent storms. When the priest pointed to the number of statues in the temple dedicated to the god, and said 'See how powerful Apollo is, look at the statues dedicated by all those mariners whom he has saved from drowning', the Spartan asked 'Where are the statues from those who did not survive?'

In the 1930s Herbert Marcuse wrote an essay entitled 'On the Affirmative Character of Culture',[5] which at the time was widely read and in which he argued that the default position of all culture, no matter how apparently deviant and oppositional, was to be 'affirmative' and thus part of the mechanism through which a society legitimizes itself. We are very familiar with a number of ways in which this can take place. Suppose a philosopher presents what he advertises as a scathing critique of existing policies, claiming that in a well-ordered society resources must under certain circumstances, and for reasons which the philosopher expounds at great length, be diverted from the rich to the poor, but this is manifestly not happening here. The highly visible flea – the claim that the poor at the

bottom of the heap should be given better rations – diverts attention from the massive background endorsement of the status quo which is implicit in describing it as a 'well-ordered' society. In slightly more extreme cases expressions of dissent can be isolated in a special box for freaks and this can be turned to advantage: 'See, it is a sign of how open-minded and wonderful our political order is – we even let these creepy creatures disport themselves in public without interference.' Marcuse's (and Adorno's) project was to find or develop forms of cultural activity that would be meaningful yet not constitute ways of tacitly affirming the status quo; that is, forms of art and philosophy that were resistant to assimilation.

Even if one is not prepared to endorse the Marcusean vision, the question still remains: why should it be necessary for philosophy to be optimistic, panegyric or edifying, or to provide an *apologia* for the status quo or some source of hope for the future? Nietzsche thought that this turn toward optimism was an invention of Socrates, an expression of the perversity of his character, his weakness, and his inability to understand (because he would not have been able to tolerate) the 'tragic' view of human life which was common to Greeks in their most culturally productive period (up to the end of the fifth century BC).[6] Plato gave such an absolutely seductive artistic picture of Socrates and his way of life that Socratic conceptual optimism came to be embedded deeply in the structure of the philosophy as a practice. Still, this was a historical development, not a necessity. Nietzsche thought, in fact, that there was no ahistorical 'essence' of philosophy, that there were merely different kinds of people engaged in very different enquiries that turned out to be sufficiently similar to those pursued by others that they could all be collected under a single designation.[7] There is no single 'task' which all philosophers in the past have set themselves and which would provide some kind of common standard for evaluating their performance. So it depends on the particular historical situation what social roles

are available, what activities are possible, what questions can be asked, and what sorts of answers have any chance of being taken seriously. Depending on the historical circumstances, 'the philosopher' can be a physician of culture (trying to diagnose and improve it), a destroyer of culture (someone who tries to 'poison' it),[8] a priest, a prophet, a knower or someone who tries to limit and control the impulse to know, a free spirit, a statesman or advisor of statesmen, a hermit indifferent to what happens in the rest of the world, or finally someone who 'lives in hope'. The corresponding philosophical attitude can thus be optimistic-constructive, negative-critical, pessimistic, engaged or detached.

If this account is on the right track, then the apparently simple question about the role of hope in philosophy dissolves into a series of smaller issues. What possibilities for action do we actually have? What sorts of things can we realistically envisage people in our society as doing? What sorts of things can we expect from philosophers (or from the academic subject 'philosophy')? Is there only *one* kind of philosophy? What kind of philosophy is appropriate for the current state of the world? Do we need hope? In what sense? Can philosophers produce hope? Effective hope? Can they reliably produce effective synthetic hope? Even more importantly, perhaps, do we actually need people who stand aside and think reflectively? People who complain and criticize? People who criticize ruthlessly? Why do we need them? Are they really a luxury? Or are they perhaps the necessary bad consciences of our age? Socrates, who lived in hope, was the father of philosophical optimism, but he was also subject to visits by a small, demonic inner voice which was only negative, never positive: it only ever warned him against doing something he felt tempted to do, and never made any positive suggestions.

Perhaps the real question is the one that concerned Nietzsche for much of his life: how much Truth can we tolerate?[9] Nietzsche had two related nightmares. One was his fear

that the desire to know, or what he called the 'will to truth', would eventually turn out to reveal itself as something that was inimical to life, and that our restless pursuit of systematic knowledge would eviscerate our culture and make us incapable of being creative. This would eventually make our lives meaningless for us. His parallel fear was that the spirit of criticism would break loose from the narrow bounds within which it was usually socially contained and run wild, generating a form of 'nihilism' that would destroy everything in its path. Perhaps it would have been better if he had recognized these two anxieties as personal weaknesses of his, ways in which he was human-all-too-human, and had tried to lay them to rest rather than allowing them to structure so much of his thought. Nietzsche diagnosed the transcendental philosopher as someone lacking theoretical imagination, who 'could not imagine' this or that (such as that space might not have three dimensions) and then turned his own incapacity into part of the a priori structure of the human mind. But perhaps his fear of nihilism was a kind of hysteria, or the result of an excessively active but unhealthy imagination, a fear of his own theoretical vitality in seeing through the absurdities of his age.

It is unlikely that there is an absolute dichotomy: on the one side, constructive suggestions that give hope, and on the other nothing but a cynical refusal to accept any suggestions or take a position. There is an active and energetically engaged form of scepticism, the phenomenon of thinking outside the box, there are warnings that can be given, forms of diversive thinking, insecure groping toward something that is not clearly articulated or perhaps even clearly articulable, action plagued by doubt or by despair, and many diverse forms of intellectual activity that cannot (yet or will not) give an account of themselves or specify their own status.

Hope doesn't deserve the terrible fate of being handed over exclusively to (secular or religious) preachers and prophets, but this also does not mean that philosophers have to turn

themselves into purveyors of edification in order to prevent hope from evaporating. Some philosophers think that life is so miserable that we have a vital need for the compensation which 'hope' can provide. In the words of the old hymn, we spend our lives *gementes et flentes*/*in hac lacrimarum valle* ('groaning and weeping in this valley of tears') and as a consequence call on the Virgin Mary to turn her eyes of compassion upon us (*illos tuos misericordes occulos*/*ad nos converte*). Others think that while it is perhaps unnecessarily cruel to destroy the harmless illusions of those who have nothing else – and some might well be harmless; that depends on the context – it is impossible for those who have come to see through palpable falsity to continue as before, and downright dangerous not to try to prevent politically noxious falsehood from being propagated.

Notes

Preface

1 See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (Suhrkamp, 1977), p. 40.

1 Montaigne and the Essay

1 This, of course, is not at all surprising for anyone familiar with Nietzsche's criticisms of the search for 'origins'. See *Genealogy of Morals* (KSA 5.247–412).

2 For Montaigne I use *Essais*, ed. Alexandre Micha (Garnier-Flammarion, 1969), and cite by volume and essay number: here 'De l'oisiveté' (I.8). I intentionally do not cite specific pages in order to encourage readers to read individual essays *in toto.*

3 One could add to this the administration of agriculture on one's estate (which was presumed to need to be basically self-sufficient), but note that commerce, or anything like what we would call 'business', was definitively not the kind of thing a Roman aristocrat was supposed to be involved in.

4 There is a convenient modern school edition of this work: *Seneca: De otio; De brevitate vitae*, ed. G.D. Williams (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

5 Of course it is possible to disguise what is actually a political conversation aimed at, for instance, enlisting support for some policy, and claim it is 'just a private conversation between friends', but that is a separate issue.

6 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (standard editions *KdrV* B195, cf. B860).

7 Cf. the classic treatment by Josef Piper, *Muße und Kult* (Kösel, 1958).

8 Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité: Le souci de soi* (Gallimard, 1984).

9 The idea that individuals are the best judges of what they want is so patently implausible that an enormous amount of philosophical energy is needed to save it from collapsing under the weight of its own absurdity. The usual tack is to put great emphasis on the notion that people are the final or ultimate judges if, but only if, they are judging under ideal conditions, and then try to elaborate a complex theory of which conditions are ideal. I have criticized this line of argument in other places.

10 *Republic* 514aff.

11 His *Confessiones*, ed. M. Skutella (Teubner, 1996), is his own record of this process.

12 Parmenides fragments 1 and 2 in Diels-Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Weidmann, 1996), pp. 227–31.

13 Actually Augustine's *Confessions* are an exception to this generalization. A fuller account would require a discussion of the religious context in which Augustine's work stands, which is something I do not propose to undertake here.

14 Plato, *Republic*. It should be noted that the Stoic philosopher Seneca was a tutor and advisor of the Emperor Nero.

15 G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. Moldenhauer and Michel, vol. 7 [*Grundlinien zur Philosophie des Rechts*] (Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 21.

16 Plato, *Apologia* 20–4.

17 See Plato, *Phaidros*.

18 John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, in *John Dewey: The Later*

Works 1925–1953, vol. 4: 1929 (Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), pp. 60–86.

19 Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialektik der Aufklärung* has as one of its central themes the historically shifting relation between control directed at the external world of nature, at human society, and finally internally at ourselves.

20 Bertolt Brecht, 'An die Nachgeborenen', in *Die Gedichte* (Suhrkamp, 1981), p. 722 (my translation).

21 T.W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Suhrkamp, 1970), pp. 56–7. See also Brecht from the same poem:

> Was sind das für Zeiten, wo
> Ein Gespräch über Bäume fast ein Verbrechen ist.
> Weil es ein Schweigen über so viele Untaten
> einschließt!

22 T.W. Adorno, *Minima moralia* (Suhrkamp, 1973), pp. 40–2.

23 For instance, the Christian strand of giving back good to those who have done us evil is not a general property of ancient pagan views, and Montaigne, who was only nominally a Catholic, shows little evidence of placing it at the centre of his concerns. Equally, Montaigne does not practise or advocate 'forgetting' rather than satisfying one's wishes. Further discussion of this topic would require more space than is available to me.

3 Nietzsche's Philosophical Ethnology

1 KSA 5.179–204.

2 See Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (Thomas Crowell, 1968); T.H. Eriksen and F.S. Nielsen, *A History of Anthropology* (Pluto Press, 1985); George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (Free Press, 1987).

3 It is notoriously difficult to say what exactly constitutes a 'tribe', but see Morton Fried, *The Notion of a Tribe* (Cummings Publication Co., 1975).

4 Lawrence Wylie, *Village in the Vaucluse* (Harvard University Press, 1957).

5 David Schneider, *American Kinship* (University of Chicago Press, 1968).
6 Joris Luyendijk in *The Guardian*, 14 September 2001 and 1 October 2011.
7 See Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom* (Cambridge University Press, 1971); also François Hartog, *Le miroir de Hérodote* (Gallimard, 1980).
8 *De Herodoti malignitate* 12.
9 Ibid., 11.
10 Others read λογίους, i.e., '[Herodotus] claims that knowledgeable Persians . . .'.
11 Ibid., 1.
12 Ibid., 14–15.
13 Ibid., 12.
14 There are some 'barbarians' mentioned in the *Iliad* but they are marginal. See II.867.
15 Actually there is a long history starting in the ancient world which considered Herodotus not only to be gullible but actively mendacious. (See the essay by Plutarch on this topic cited in footnote 9.)
16 This becomes clearest perhaps in his discussion of the way stories about gods and heroes move from one cultural context to another. Herakles is a figure of note in both Greece and Egypt, and sometimes one group has taken over stories about him from the other.
17 Indeed what you have *paid* to hear. It stands outside the nexus of money-making. See Plato, *Apology*.
18 See Plato, *Protagoras*.
19 See Plato, *Republic*.
20 See Plato, *Gorgias*.
21 See Plato's rejection of μῦθος in favour of λόγος in *Sophista* 242c.
22 See Quentin Skinner, 'The State', in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. T. Ball, J. Farr, and R.L. Hanson (Cambridge University Press, 1989); also Skinner, 'A Genealogy

of the Modern State', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 162 (2008).

23 Hölderlin, Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, and Hegel, among others, were obsessed with this topic.

24 Heinrich Heine, *Geständnisse*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 2 (Munich, 1969), Chapter 7.

25 Gomme in his commentary (*ad locum*) cites a number of parallel passages. See *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* (Oxford, 1945).

26 Plato, *Symposium*.

27 See Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité: L'usage des plaisirs* (Gallimard, 1984).

28 For more on this, see my 'Augustine on Human Nature', in Raymond Guess, *Reality and its Dreams* (Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 261–75.

29 In conversation with the author.

30 Actually at KSA 4.483 he distinguishes five 'degrees' of travelling.

31 To be sure, one can wonder whether these two things are not just different ways of seeing the same phenomenon, such as the description of the glass as half-full or half-empty. The philosophy is equally at home anywhere, and equally not at home anywhere.

4 Autopsy and Polyphony

1 Diels-Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Fragment 101a.

2 For instance, *Historiae*, ed. N.G. Wilson (Oxford, 2015), II.99; but this is a recurrent theme in the work.

3 See also Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2004).

4 *Goethe Gedichte: Sämtliche Gedichte in zeitlicher Folge*, ed. Nicolai (Insel, 1992), pp. 306–7.

5 Johnson, of course, was able to cling to power and stagger on for another five months before he was driven out in disgrace, not resigning until July 2022.

6 Theodor Lessing, *Der Lärm: Eine Kampfschrift gegen die Geräusche unseres Lebens* (1908) (Projekt Gutenberg, 2016).

7 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (Routledge, 1966).
8 Plato, *Phaidros* 275.
9 Jeremiah 27–8.
10 Plato, *Apologia* 31.
11 Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Klostermann, 1963), pp. 270–89.
12 Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Am Kreuzweg deiner Sinne', *Sonette an Orpheus*, Zweiter Teil, XXIX in Rilke, *Die Gedichte* (Insel, 2006), p. 748.
13 Hebrews 10:31.
14 There is another explanation for the origin of the prohibition of graven images in the ancient Hebrew religion, which is that the main recension of the Hebrew scriptures was written after the return from exile in Mesopotamia. No one but a handful of priests had been permitted to enter the *adyton* in the Temple in Jerusalem where the images of gods had stood, and look on them. The images would have been destroyed when Jerusalem fell, and so when the descendants of the original population returned from exile some seventy-odd years later, no could recall what the statues had looked like. See Thomas Römer, *L'invention de dieu* (Seuil, 2014).
15 Diels-Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Fragment 15.
16 A reasonable inference from Diels-Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Fragments 23–6.
17 Exodus 3.
18 *Republic* 398ff.
19 The Greeks thought there was nothing morally objectionable about sexual activity in itself. See Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité: L'usage des plaisirs* for a popular discussion of this by an eminent philosopher. In Christian societies the matter becomes more complicated in ways I can't discuss here, but which are also not directly relevant to the point I am trying to make about Plato.
20 G.E. Lessing, *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und der Poesie* (originally 1767).
21 One might suppose that the invention of the moving image required us to rethink Lessing's view completely, and it is true

that such things as time-lapse photography, for instance of the opening of a flower, seem to represent in a visual medium a process of development. However, it would be premature, I think, to draw the conclusion that such things as cinema, television, and video simply and conclusively refuted Lessing. I simply draw attention to the fact that any visual sequence about a human interaction which is beyond a few minutes in length tends to generate a verbal supplementation of itself. Thus the visual portions of silent films were interrupted by written explanatory panels setting the scene and helping with plot and continuity, and in many countries when silent films were shown, there was even a narrator in the theatre to explain and comment on the action to the spectators. Longer, completely silent segments are embedded in dialogue or spoken or written discourse and get much of their meaning from that, or they turn out often to be collages, juxtaposed images, not representations of processes. Think of Part I of Godard's *Notre musique* (2004). This is a collage of images of war, aggression, and destruction. There is a sequence of just a second or so depicting the charge of Fire from Kurosawa's *Kagemusha*, but then something else comes. Part I of *Notre Musique* does not tell a story or represent *as a whole* any kind of continuous historical movement: it is a mosaic of tiny fragments, some of which are micro-movements. This does not settle the issue, and unfortunately I cannot enter into it more fully here, but it does suggest that there is still something in Lessing's account which can survive in some form.

22 Plato, *Republic* 507–11.

23 Nietzsche, KSA 5.152 [*Beyond Good and Evil* §215].

24 For instance, *Historiae* I.1–5.

25 Michael Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (University of Indiana Press, 1984 [1940]).

5 Speaking Well, Speaking Correctly

1 Reprinted in Adolf Loos, *Ins Leere gesprochen* (Georg Pracherner Verlag, 1981), pp. 51–61.

2 In *Sprüche und Widersprüche*, Karl Kraus makes a point which

depends on a similar distinction (although he has a different distribution of personnel: 'Jeder Wiener ist eine Sehenswürdigkeit, jeder Berliner ein Verkehrsmittel' ['Every Viennese is a sight worth seeing, every Berliner a means of transport']). The point would be made more sharply if he had written 'ein öffentliches Verkehrsmittel', but I suppose he had aesthetic reasons for not doing this. In any case, a 'sight worth seeing' is precisely something that stands out in its unique individuality and which you look at for its own sake; a public means of transport is open to anyone and the more it fades into the background as it carries you to where you are going, the better. The most important original text in this context is Baudelaire's discussion of the dandy in *Peintre de la vie moderne*. Baudelaire and Loos take diametrically opposing positions in that Baudelaire's 'dandy' is precisely seeking to stand out in his dress – seeking, as he does, '*la distinction*'. See Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes* (Gallimard, 1976), vol. 2, pp. 709–12.

3 For parallel discussion see Gérald Garutti, *Il faut voir comment on se parle* (Actes Sud, 2023).

4 Cicero, *Philippic* 13.11.

5 J.G.A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and Feudal Law* (Cambridge University Press, 1957).

6 See Michael Frede, 'The Origins of Traditional Grammar', in *Historical and Philosophical Dimensions of Logic, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. R.E. Butts and J. Hintikka (Springer, 1977), pp. 51–79.

7 Cited from Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 268.

8 Cicero, *De optimo genere oratorum* 1.

9 Ibid., 2.

10 One can think of the first of the above approaches as the Heidegger option and the second as the Mallarmé option.

11 Cicero, *De optimo genere oratorum* 1.

12 J.N. Adams, *The Regional Diversification of Latin* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

13 Ibid., p. 1.

14 In *Stesichorus: The Poems* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), M. Davies and P.J. Finglas say about Stesichorus that 'His everyday dialect was probably Ionic' (p. 40), although the language in which he writes is 'A Doricized epic literary dialect' (p. 40, quoting Russo).

15 The story continues in the Hellenistic period with the development of a 'common' dialect which became the *lingua franca* of much of the Middle East, so-called '*koiné* Greek', and then a reaction against this as a debasement of the language in the form of 'Atticism', the conscious attempt to revive the 'pure' Attic Greek of the late fifth and early fourth centuries BC. These later developments are not directly relevant to the point I am trying to make here.

16 I originally heard this view expressed in my secondary school in the early 1960s. My most important teacher, Béla Krigler, used to say 'The Romans were a bunch of unimaginative lawyers, who usually arrived with a cohort of soldiers: Obey the rules, as we define them, or we'll beat you up, drive you out, and take your farm (and sometimes we'll just do that anyway). The Latin language reflects this. The Greeks, on the other hand, were artists; they inspire and enlighten, but the spirit of the Latin language is to abhor the use of the imagination.' In fact the Romans were self-aware enough to see themselves in this way. As Virgil says: 'The Greeks can sculpt and they know things, we can't and don't. Our job is to give people orders and hit them until they learn to conform and be quiet' (*Aeneid* VI, 847ff).

17 Ignoring such phenomena as Atellan farce. See J.N. Adams, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 117f.

18 See my *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton, 2008).

19 Now easily available in vols. 2 and 3 of *Grammatici latini*, ed. H. Keil and M. Hertz (reprinted Cambridge University Press, 2009).

20 Think of 'learning' Middle High German. In the Middle Ages

there was never a standard German language, only a collection of different dialects, and so one needs to make one's way through a body of sometimes very bizarre-looking texts in different genres and different dialects, written down using different orthographic principles.

21 Writing this sentence makes me aware of the fact that my circle of friends is perhaps not typical.

6 Succeed, Fail, Fail Better

1 T.W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 18 (Suhrkamp, 1984), p. 492.

2 T.W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 13 (Suhrkamp, 1971), p. 336.

3 Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 18, p. 492.

4 T.W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7 (Suhrkamp, 1979), p. 87.

5 Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu* (Gallimard, 1987), vol. 1, p. 522.

6 Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 18, p. 492.

7 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (Minton, Balch & Co., 1934).

8 Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Gallimard, 1975).

9 Augustine, *Confessiones* I.13. Well do I remember the nuns in the 1950s who came up behind unsuspecting children who were idling and smacked them resoundingly with a book on the back of the head, or hit them on the hand with a metal ruler or a backboard eraser, or anything really that came to hand. Luckily they never carried knives, as had been necessary in the Middle Ages (in order to sharpen one's quill).

10 The only attempt I know to argue for it is in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a20–21 – if you want to call what Aristotle does there giving an argument (it consists of exactly one sentence).

11 *Poetarum lesbiorum fragmenta*, ed. E. Lobel and D. Page (Oxford University Press, 1955), Fragment 55, p. 40.

12 Note that this is Nietzsche's analysis of Christianity (in *Genealogy*

of Morals, KSA 5.247–412) all over again. Christianity fosters introspection and truth-telling, and thereby undermines itself because proper Christians feel the need to accept and tell the truth they discover about the unsavoury roots of the Christian synthesis itself.

13 Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta* (John Calder, 1983), pp. 55–7, 138–45.
14 Samuel Beckett, *L'innomable* (Editions de Minuit, 1953), p. 213.
15 Samuel Beckett, *Nohow On* (Grove Press, 1996), p. 77.
16 Ibid., p. 78.
17 Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 1, p. 521.

7 Hope

1 III.45, V.103, VII.77.
2 Hesiod, *Opera et dies* 42–105.
3 Diogenes Laertius 10.8, reporting on the views of Epicurus. See also Nietzsche KSA 5.21.
4 T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Suhrkamp, 1966), p. 353.
5 Herbert Marcuse, 'Über den affirmative Charakter der Kultur', in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1937), pp. 54–94.
6 Nietzsche, KSA 1.81–115.
7 KSA 7, *passim*.
8 KSA 7.545.
9 See KSA 6.259. I merely point out that asking this question is also in my opinion perfectly compatible with claiming that '*the* Truth' as traditionally understood does not exist, although showing that goes beyond what I can undertake here. Just think about the very expression 'how *much* Truth'; the qualification alone shows that something other than the traditional sense of '*the* Truth' is at issue.

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