grasp the latter distinction. This raises the question whether the syntactical markings that Pelletier notes, even supposing they cannot be explained in terms of standard grammatical considerations alone (a possibility Pelletier considers [pp. 136–37]), bear the interpretative weight that Pelletier rests upon them. To have any confidence that Plato grasped the distinction between UNIO- and DK-participation one needs evidence that Plato realized that the one relation is transitive and the other nontransitive. And this evidence seems to be lacking.

This is an exciting book that not only guides the reader through a mountain of secondary literature on the *Sophist* but advances some new and provocative ideas of its own.

Note

[1]"The Mad Craftsman of the *Timaeus*," *The Philosophical Review* 80 (1971), 230–35.

Umberto Eco. *The Limits of Interpretation*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990, 295 pp.

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One of the most fundamental and vexing problems in hermeneutics concerns the limits of interpretation. Is a text open to any interpretation that an interpreter may care to give it? Or is it closed to every interpretation but one? Or is it open to a limited range of interpretations? Literary texts, especially, have always challenged the notion that there is one and only one legitimate interpretation of a text, and some modern theories of interpretation say that no text, even a shopping list or an office memo, has a single correct interpretation. But it is hard to get away from the notion that it makes sense to talk about good and bad interpretations of a text, and thus it seems that interpretative possibilities must be limited in some way.

Eco's book, a collection of fifteen essays that have been published elsewhere and revised for inclusion here, is an attempt to grapple with this issue. For Eco, although it is not the case that there is only one legitimate way to interpret a given text, there are certain constraints that limit the range of interpretations that a text may justifiably be given.

The first three essays address this question head-on. In "Two Models of Interpretation", Eco traces some of the historical roots of the present-day controversy over the limits of interpretation. For Eco, the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance was decisive for the history of hermeneutics. Medieval interpreters were able to control a text's innate potential to be interpreted in any way at all by making use of interpretative rules or guidelines that explained how to discover the correct meanings of the natural objects and events that texts describe. But when Aquinas's Aristotelian naturalism undermined the notion that natural objects have meanings, the traditional hermeneutical procedures were lost, and post-Thomistic interpreters found it difficult to impose limits on interpretation.

For example, Renaissance Neoplatonism, influenced by the Hermetic tradition, adopted a style of interpretation according to which one meaning leads to infinitely many other meanings and eventually to contradictory meanings. Such a theory of interpretation, in Eco's view, prepared the way for modern challenges to the idea that a text has only one correct interpretation.

In "Unlimited Semiosis and Drift: Pragmaticism vs. 'Pragmatism'", Eco distinguishes the Peircean notion of unlimited semiosis from two other views with which it might erroneously be identified: "Hermetic drift" (the kind of interpretation that grew up in Renaissance Neoplatonism) and Deconstruction. The view held by Eco's Peirce, a view favored by Eco himself, is a mean between two extreme views of interpretation. At one extreme is the view that interpretation has no limits, and at the other extreme is the view that there can be only one correct interpretation of a given text. For Eco's Peirce, to put constraints on a text's interpretation is not necessarily to say that it has a single, final meaning that exists apart from any interpretation. Although interpretation can go on indefinitely, the progressive interpretations of a sign make its meaning more determinate, not less determinate.

"*Intentio Lectoris:* The State of the Art" presents more fully Eco's position on the limits of interpretation. Eco does not view Deconstruction as the infinitely radical assault on common sense, truth, and meaning that some consider it to be. Perhaps it is his more benign view of Deconstruction that allows Eco to respond to Deconstruction with a refreshing lack of paranoia: "I do not agree with Searle when he says that 'Derrida has a distressing penchant for saying things that are obviously false'... . On the contrary, Derrida has a fascinating penchant for saying things that are nonobviously true, or true in a nonobvious way... . But frequently Derrida—in order to stress some nonobvious truths—disregards very obvious truths that nobody can reasonably pass over in silence" (p. 36).

Eco begins to lay the groundwork for his contribution to the debate by first delivering an "apology of the literal sense" of a text. Readings can be varied, but they must all begin with a recognition of the literal sense. For instance, we cannot interpret a text about apple-eating as a text about Adam's sin unless we first interpret it as a text about apple-eating.

There is another constraint on interpretation. Although the reader must take the initiative by forming a conjecture as to the text's meaning, this conjecture takes the form of a Peircean abduction, which the reader must verify by checking it against other "results", i.e., by checking it against the rest of the text construed as a coherent whole. According to this Augustinian procedure, an interpretation of one part of a text can be accepted only if it is confirmed by the rest of the text; if it is challenged, it must be rejected.

Eco's response to the challenge of Deconstruction, then, may be put as follows. There is a "Popper-like principle" (p. 60) that tells us how to falsify interpretations, namely the principle of internal textual coherence. In addition, there are the limits imposed by insisting that interpretation start from the literal sense. Eco can respect not only the reader's right to make conjectures about the text's meaning but also the text's right not to be misinterpreted.

Eco provides useful historical insights, and the overall position he adopts is quite sensible. But his discussion is not always as clear as one might wish. Consider the following formula, in which Eco describes the reader's role: "The text intention is not displayed by the Linear Text Manifestation... . One has to decide to 'see' it. Thus it is possible to speak of text intention only as the result of a *conjecture* on the part of the

reader. The initiative of the reader basically consists in making a conjecture about the text intention" (p. 58). Does this mean that the reader's initiative is purely epistemic, devoted to discovering or realizing the text's meaning, or does it mean that is it ontic, creative of meaning? If the former, it is hard to see what all the fuss is about: how can the text's right to be interpreted correctly conflict with the rights of the reader to interpret it? If the latter, then Eco's solution is unclear, because a requirement of consistency does not seem to be enough to rule out illegitimate readings. Could not the reader create some meaning that she was able to impose consistently on the entire text but that nonetheless we ought not allow? Perhaps Eco would return to the notion of the literal sense at this point, but it is far from certain that doing so would solve the problem.

This raises the more fundamental question of the relation between text and meaning. The signs that compose a given text are not naturally meaningful; they are meaningful only because of a conventional association between sign and meaning. And yet, somehow it is not for the reader to decide which set of conventions to use. Many people will agree with Eco's views on how to limit interpretation, but he does not produce arguments to show what it is about texts that forbids unlimited interpretation in the first place. He states, he pleads, he gives (often telling) examples; but he does not argue in a traditional sense.

Perhaps an argument for Eco's conclusion could be constructed along the following lines. Let us use the word 'sign' for the artifact, meaningless in itself, that may be made meaningful by convention, and let us use the word 'Sign' for the artifact once it has been made meaningful by convention. For example, ink blots on a page are signs, but written English words are Signs. Now it seems that a text is composed of Signs (and only derivatively of signs). If we grant this, then it follows that we cannot read a given text unless we agree to interpret it according to the conventions that make its Signs the Signs that they are. Were we to interpret the text according to some other set of conventions, we would not be reading its Signs at all, and therefore we would not be reading the text we thought we were reading; instead, we would be reading some other text that is composed of the same signs (but not of the same Signs). If a text were composed only of signs—if a book were nothing but paper stained with ink—then all interpretations would be equally legitimate, due to the fact that signs are meaningless by nature. But if a text is composed of Signs, then only those interpretations are legitimate that respect the conventions that constitute those Signs and thereby constitute that text. Of course, this argument does not settle the question of which set of conventions the reader should follow; all it means to show is that a text can only be interpreted according to one set of conventions. The argument still leaves room for various interpretations, because there is no reason to suppose that a text's conventions fully determine its meaning. But at the same time, it rules out any interpretation not based on the appropriate set of conventions.

The remaining twelve essays of the book concentrate on specific topics, dealing only indirectly with the question of the limits of interpretation. "Small Worlds" distinguishes the notion of "possible world" from other related notions and shows the relevance of this notion for the study of fiction. "Interpreting Serials" outlines an aesthetics that sees artistic value in repetitive art, such as the (often quite similar) episodes of a TV series. "Interpreting Drama" discusses the complex layering of signs that make up any dramatic performance. "Interpreting Animals" describes the classical and medieval debate over the semiotic status of animal sounds. "A Portrait of the Elder as a Young Pliny" explicates in detail the rhetorical strategies used by Pliny the Younger in his letter to Tacitus concerning the

death of his uncle, Pliny the Elder. "Joyce, Semiosis, and Semiotics" discusses Joyce's punning in *Finnegans Wake* as an example of the "encyclopedia model" of meaning, and furthermore as an example of a work whose interpretations are infinite but not arbitrary. "Abduction in Uqbar" uses Peirce's theory of abduction to make a point about the detective fiction of Borges and Casares. "Pirandello *Ridens*" gives a three-level reading of Pirandello's essay, "Humor". "Fakes and Forgeries" provides a complex typology of fakes and forgeries and argues that what is difficult is not deciding what a forgery is, but rather deciding what an authentic work is. This essay would be of interest to historians and philosophers of history, as well as to students of interpretation. "Semantics, Pragmatics, and Text Semiotics" attempts to show the unavoidable interplay between three sometimes isolated provinces of semiotics. "Presuppositions", written in collaboration with Patrizia Violi, discusses the problem of presuppositions from the viewpoint of an "encyclopedia" theory of semantics and shows the role of presuppositions in certain rhetorical strategies. Finally, "On Truth: A Fiction" recounts the third of three expeditions to Twin Earth and includes a transcript of a dialogue between a computer from Twin Earth and a scientist from Earth who is posing as a computer. This piece is very humorous and pulls together several themes from the book.

Like most of what Eco writes, *The Limits of Interpretation* is fascinating in many ways, full of insights, provocative ideas, *curiosa,* and clever turns. Sometimes cleverness gets the best of Eco, but in general the text is clear and accessible. Moreover, its overall thesis should find a sympathetic audience in those who have been alarmed by what might seem like recent excesses in hermeneutical theory. The book is, without a doubt, an excellent point of departure for those interested in the problems raised by the interpretation of texts.

David O. Brink, *Moral realism and the foundations of ethics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xii + 340 pp.

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Brink defends "moral realism, an externalist moral psychology, a coherentist moral epistemology, a nonreductive form of ethical naturalism, and an objective conception of utilitarianism" (p. 7). "Moral realism" holds that moral judgments make true or false claims about objective "moral facts," facts concerning "real objects and events whose existence and nature are largely independent of our theorizing" (p. 6); "externalism" denies any *conceptual* connection between moral claims and motivation or reasons for action; "coherentism" holds that "the degree of one's justification in holding p varies directly with the degree of coherence exhibited by the belief set of which p is a member" (p. 103); "nonreductive ethical naturalism" contends that moral properties are "constituted by...natural...properties even if moral terms are not definable by natural terms" (p. 9); and "objective utilitarianism" construes welfare "in largely nonsubjective terms" (p. 10).