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Knowledge of the Self

Laird Stevens

A Thesis
in the
Humanities Programme

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

October 1994

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge of the Self

Laird Stevens, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 1994

I contend that a great deal of western philosophical thought is based upon a mistaken assumption, and that is: *there is something real that we can know*. I argue that, on the contrary, insofar as our experience is of a world that has meaning, this experience is not of the world "as it really is," but of the world as we perceive it *through* language. The very process of making the world meaningful, or learning about it, is at the same time a mediation of the world.

Because the self has, for the most part, been conceived as some kind of object, in Part One I discuss the relationship between language and (1) our experience of objects, and (2) our experience of objects in time. In Part Two I examine the two traditional approaches to knowledge, and attempt to show that empiricism yields no knowledge of "reality" and that metaphysics is unmeaningful. I conclude that, while we cannot know what is real, we continue to desire to do so, and so continue to make the world meaningful in various ways.

In Part Three I claim that the self is something that we cannot know--although we try to know ourselves by telling

stories about ourselves to ourselves--and that all attempts to describe the self result in the creation of models. I define 'models' as broad, compelling representations of what the self is, but which are incapable of accommodating one or another obvious feature of human experience.

In Part Four I apply all of the above to the disciplines of psychology and literary criticism. Specifically, I criticize Stanley Fish's notion of the interpretation (the "making meaningful") of texts, and analyze what is called 'dissociative identity disorder' (formerly 'multiple personality disorder')--a disorder that makes sense only on the assumption that many selves can inhabit a single body.

Finally, in Part Five, I admit that this entire thesis is nonsense, insofar as it is an attempt to say: "This is how things are." I conclude, however, that there are greater and lesser pieces of nonsense in the world, and that the value of philosophy resides in being able expose great nonsense as nonsense.

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INTRODUCTION

Western philosophers have tended to regard the self--the essence of what it is to be a human being--as some kind of an entity, or *thing*. When the self is the object of knowledge, it literally becomes an object.

If the self is to be seen as an object, then it must have the same sorts of attributes that we normally expect objects to have. First and foremost, it must have a certain permanence; it cannot just flicker into and out of existence. In short, it must be a unity that persists in time. This is as true of the Platonic eternal soul as it is of the Cartesian 'thinking thing'. Even though Descartes suggests that he might cease to exist were he to stop thinking, he does not doubt that if he continues to think, he will continue to be the same person.

However, if the self is an object, it is certainly a very mysterious one. For one thing, it doesn't seem to have an easily discoverable location. Plato put it one place, and Descartes somewhere else; Hume said he couldn't find it at all. Now, in this regard, the self is very unlike any other object we are likely to encounter. If I claimed to have a pair of shoes, and yet was perpetually unsure as to their whereabouts, one could be forgiven for wondering

whether or not those shoes actually existed at all. One could at least assert that whether they existed or not could really make no difference to me, seeing as I could never find them and put them on.

And yet in spite of this type of difficulty, philosophers have persisted in viewing the self as some kind of object, and this, I think, for a very good reason. That is: it just seems so transparently obvious to us that we are who we are, and the experiences we have are *our* experiences, and we are the ones--the only ones--who have access to these experiences. When we think about ourselves, it is as though we are sitting down in front of a mirror. We are just there, so to speak.

Indeed, I cannot meaningfully use the term 'self' unless I am referring to something that persists through time. My memories, the abilities I have acquired, and so forth, make no sense unless my existence has been a continuous one. (This is not, of course, an argument that I do have an essence that persists through time; this is only to say what I must presuppose if I am to use the word 'self' at all.)

I have structured this work accordingly. Because I am starting from within the tradition of viewing the self as an object, the first four chapters constitute a long but necessary preliminary to my main focus--the study of the self. That is: I begin by analyzing our experience of the

world of objects and the relationship of this world to language. Then I examine the concept of history, or the world of our experience *in time*. I conclude that our experience both of objects and of events are mediated by the language that we speak. Following this, I shift my attention to the concept of knowledge, and discuss the two main approaches to knowledge that exist within the western philosophical tradition: empiricism and metaphysics. I conclude that empiricism yields no knowledge of the world *as it is*, and that metaphysics is the always unsuccessful attempt to know what cannot be known. I contend, however, that the motivation behind both empiricism and metaphysics--the *desire to know*--is what frequently leads us to believe in scientific or metaphysical representations of the world.

Having laid these foundations, as it were, I then begin a study of the self, and our knowledge of it. The key concepts in this analysis are those of language, society and story-telling. I conclude that we can never achieve knowledge of the self proper. However, I also argue that we can and do construct very compelling models of what it is to be a human being, and that our desire for knowledge of the self often leads us to mistake these models for the self *as it is*. In order to demonstrate this, I then look at five of the most famous of these models--those of Plato, Descartes, Hume, Kant and Freud--and show that what these thinkers portray as the self are, in fact, only models.

Finally, I briefly examine the reader-response theory of Stanley Fish and the notion of dissociative identity disorder (until 1994, this was referred to as 'multiple personality disorder') in order to determine what relation they have to the theory of the self.

My goal here has been to lay bare an assumption common to most western philosophical thought. Dilemmas such as the mind/body problem, the problem of induction, the problem of personal identity, and the problem of other minds, all evaporate when this assumption is seen to be false.

PART ONE

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

(THE SELF AS UNITY IN TIME)

CHAPTER 1

LANGUAGE AND THE WORLD

To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life.
Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

Perhaps the greatest mistake in the western philosophical tradition is exemplified by the following sentence: "There is something real that we can know." This claim has been made in a multiplicity of ways since Plato, with varying emphases upon the self, experience or consciousness, and the world. The basic assumption, however, remains the same: that however much appearance we may encounter, there is somewhere a reality; that however many variants we may find, there is somewhere an essence; that however many interpretations we may make, there is somewhere a truth; and that if we search long and hard enough, the truth about this essential reality will somehow become evident to us. In our search for this knowledge, the question asked time and again is the familiar Platonic one: where in the flux can stability be found?

To reveal the core assumption in the above claim, I will restate it as follows: "There exists a meaningful world to which experience gives us immediate access." That is: the world we experience is not only real, but exists in a

particular and meaningful way, and the experience we have of it is sufficient for us to be able to make knowledge claims about it. The world is just there; we see it as it is. This model¹ of the interaction between ourselves and the world is the one seemingly dictated by common sense, the one embedded in the grammar of our language, the subject-verb-object relation. On this model, when I say, "I see the sun," my assumption is that I am here, and the sun is there, and I am seeing it.

This is a very simple model. It is so simple that it seems almost ridiculous to attack it--and when it *is* attacked, it is often because the model is seen as too simple. What, it is asked, of the complicated mechanisms of perception? What of the intervening representations of the world in the brain? What of the peculiarities and obvious limitations of human perception? Locke wondered whether,

by the different structure of our organs, it were so ordered that *the same object should produce in several men's minds different ideas* at the same time; v.g. if the *idea* that a *violet* produced in one man's mind by his eyes were the same that a *marigold* produced in another man's, and *vice versa*.²

What presuppositions, in other words, are being made about the nature of the experiencing *subject*, about the nature of the experienced *world*, if we endorse the subject-verb-object view of experience?

And yet, these questions, however provocative, are ultimately misleading. They are misleading because, in

complicating the issue of what it means to experience the world, they tacitly assume the truth of what has in fact been called into question. The mechanisms of perception may be impossibly intricate, but this only lengthens the chain, as it were, between subject and object. That is: no matter how many analogues are to be found in the process of visual perception between the time light initially impinges on my eye, and my eventual conception of 'sun', the basic presupposition is still that my conception is directly related to some one thing in the world. The same problem remains with respect to our representation of objects and the limited nature of our perceptions. (It also remains if I decide to divide my perceptions in two, and call one half 'sensations' and the other half 'perceptions'. This is why I have not bothered to distinguish between the two here.)

It is true, then, that the subject-verb-object model of experience is a very simplistic one. However, this is also irrelevant to the main issue. However elusive the unity of the self, and however difficult our knowledge of a world in flux, it is still possible to maintain the subject-verb-object model as the general framework within which to view experience. This can be seen by looking at a truly radical version of the self, that contained in Hume's *Treatise*.

The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no *simplicity* in it at

one time, nor *identity* in different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind.³

Even though in this case the very notion of a self is being questioned, the subject-verb-object model is still at work. All that is being questioned is the persistence of the so-called self through time. The individual (and possibly unrelated) perceptions are still representations of isolated bits of the external world to which the access is seen as direct and immediate.

Before going into a detailed explanation of *why* the subject-verb-object model is wrong, why we have no direct access to the world, why we cannot say that there is something real that we can know, I would like to give a few examples of the pervasiveness of this model in western philosophy and culture.⁴

An obvious place to start is with Plato. Plato held, of course, that knowledge of the sensory world is impossible because of this world's ever-changing nature. On the face of it, then, Plato is affirming that we do not have direct access to the world. However, this does not make knowledge itself an impossibility. In the Forms, Plato found what he thought would count as objects of knowledge: things immutable. The Socrates of the *Republic* says:

We are sufficiently assured of this, then, even if we should examine it from every point of view, that that

which entirely *is* is entirely knowable, and that which in no way *is* is in every way unknowable?⁵

This knowledge of the Forms, or of what is real, clearly fits into the model I am examining, which posits a direct access to the object of knowledge. It does not matter that the approach is an intellectual one, or that the experience of the Forms has nothing to do with sensory experience. What matters is that a direct relation between subject and object is assumed possible.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the possibility of direct access to the "real" world is also assumed. Whether this takes the form of God having spoken to Moses, or God currently speaking to the Pope, or God speaking on a one-to-one basis with Protestants, the same premise is always present: in a world of sin, there is still an absolutely guaranteed way of finding out what is *good*, and that is because we have access to the word of God.

Descartes, in his *Meditations*, relies on the notion of direct access to God as well. Although he does not rely on God to prove his own existence, he remains a disembodied 'thinking thing' in a world of possible illusion until he proves God's existence, and more importantly, his *benevolence*. It is only because God would not deceive Descartes, and because Descartes can know this, that he can claim that the way the world appears to be is the way it is. (It can be noted, in passing, that there is no

contradiction between Descartes's saying that, "it is not to be wondered that God does some things I do not understand,"⁶ and his claiming to know that God "cannot be deceitful."⁷ The latter claim rests upon his assertion that "any fraud or deceit depends on some defect,"⁸ meaning that deceit is logically excluded from God's behavioural repertoire by Descartes's definition of God, whereas the former depends upon the fact that "the faculty of right judgment" given him by God does not exist "in an infinite degree."⁹ However, the point is there is nothing mediating between either Descartes's knowledge of God or his knowledge of one of God's attributes, that is, benevolence.)

It is interesting to note that while the above three theories throw either our knowledge or the importance of the empirical world into doubt, they nevertheless rely upon what is perhaps the quintessential assumption of empiricism. The notion of direct access to the world is, as has already been noted, much more readily seen in a philosopher such as Hume, where the assumption becomes explicit. For Hume, people are essentially recording devices with playback capabilities. To continue in this anachronistic analogy, the world is our input, which we originally record in the form of "impressions," and then may play back as "ideas." It goes without saying that the "sense-datum" of later British empiricists posits the same relationship of subject to world.

It will be argued later¹⁰ that many philosophical views of what constitutes the self depend upon the same assumption. However, enough has been said to show the ubiquitous nature of the model under discussion. The question now becomes, "Why, then, does this constitute a philosophical mistake?"

To restate the question more fully: "Why is the belief in direct (unmediated) access to a meaningful reality a mistaken one?" The answer is simple: language stands in our way. Our experience, to the extent that it is meaningful, is always mediated by the language that we speak. The very act of 'making meaningful' is itself an act of mediation. The reality we *know*, therefore, is always something mediated; the reality we seek to know, something unfettered by language, is always and inevitably beyond our grasp, and is put beyond our grasp by the very acts of 'making meaningful' and 'knowing'. To elaborate and fine-tune these assertions will be the business of the bulk of this chapter and the next.

Words and Things

What is the relationship between words and things? This question, however straightforward it looks, yet contains an unwarranted assumption. It assumes that there are two somehow "naturally" divided realms (words on this side, things on the other), and that the basic problem is

how to go about connecting the two. This assumption rests at bottom upon a faulty view of language, that is:

the individual words in language name objects--sentences are combinations of such names.--In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.¹¹

An obvious example of the mistake contained in this assumption may be seen with reference to the word 'primates', coined by the botanist Linnaeus. Amongst the other more commonly accepted members of the primates, Linnaeus included the bats. In other words, under his classificatory system, the bats were experienced *as* primates. Since then, the bats have been given their own order (the chiroptera contain only the bats). Here, at least, it is clear that words and things do not constitute two utterly divisible realms. Clearly, what is experienced (the bats) has a great deal to do with the word used to describe the thing ('primates' or 'chiroptera'). In general, it is therefore better not to *assume* that the two realms can be easily distinguished.

This becomes clearer if we realize that the meaning of a word should in no sense be taken to indicate the *existence* of anything in the world corresponding to the word. The idea that it does so stems from the denotational theory of meaning, and the unholy union this last forged between truth, meaning, and existence. To see this, it is only necessary to examine words like 'history', 'example',

'trustworthiness', or 'unicorn', not to mention 'truth', 'meaning', and 'existence'. It is simply a mistake to assume that because we have a word, we should look for something in the world that corresponds to it. (I am ~~here~~ ignoring an even more obvious set of words, which would include, for instance, 'however', 'of', 'the', etc.) These words all make sense, and yet there is nothing we can point to in the world that would be an instance of any of them. To think that a word has meaning only if it can be used to refer to something, and to think of any sentence that contains a word that cannot be so used as being either meaningless or false, is to implicitly accept that all words function as names do. This is easily shown to be false. Therefore, to talk about *something* is not at all the same as talking about *some thing*.

However, if we cannot separate from the beginning the realms of words and things, and if words do not imply the existence of something they may be used to refer to, then denotationalism reaches an abrupt dead end. How then are we to discuss the meaning that words have?

An effective approach to this question is to simply look at what I am doing when I ask what a particular word means. I am, in fact, asking that the word be defined in words I already know. If someone were to define 'atonal' music for me as "music not having a tonic," I wouldn't be much further ahead unless I knew that a tonic was the base

note of a particular key. A new word must become meaningful to me in terms of the language I already speak.

For this reason, I feel that the meaning of a word must not be seen as a function of all those things it might be used to refer to, but rather in terms of the *other elements of the language which one speaks*. For a word to have a meaning, then, it must be part of a system, a language. This, in fact, is precisely what meaning is: belonging to a system. (This notion of what meaning is can be extended to things beyond language. For instance, I can say that a smile has meaning because it belongs to a certain cultural repertoire of facial expressions that we use to convey pleasure and displeasure. To entirely cover one's top lip with one's bottom lip does not convey anything, because this action does not belong to this repertoire.) The meaning that a word has is the place it has in the language.

But what relevance does this have for the relationship between words and things? Well, there is one aspect of our experience that is sometimes overlooked. When I look down the street, I will see houses and cars, streetlights and shop windows, and so forth. And this is precisely the point. I am not seeing anonymous items which I then match to my language. I look down something I immediately experience as a street, and I see the things on this street *as* houses and cars, streetlights and shop windows. My

immediate experience then, at least when I perceive things which are familiar to me, that I know, that are meaningful, is paradoxically an experience of things mediated by language.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is obvious: as far as language and experience are concerned, the objects of my experience are made meaningful for me--become what they are--in terms of the language that I speak. (This is what I mean by the phrase 'meaningful world'. I mean the world which has been made meaningful to us through our acquiring a language.) That is: insofar as the world is meaningful, insofar as we can talk about it at all, our experience of it is mediated by the language that we speak. I see the meaningful world through the lens of language.

Now although our experience is always mediated by language, this does not mean what we experience is always meaningful to us. That is: language is not to be thought of as a *condition* of the possibility of experience itself. On the contrary, there are many things we experience that are not meaningful to us, many things that we don't know, and many things we want to learn. I may walk down a new street which is not meaningful to me; I may hear music full of strange chord structures. (Other "unmeaningful experiences" would include: the face of a clock before we have learned to tell time, the picture on an American \$5,000 bill before we know it is the fourth president, the activity in one type of

church ceremony before we are aware of the institution of marriage, and so on.) However--and this is the point--if we wish to talk about any of these things that are not meaningful to us, we must make them meaningful through language. We must turn the "something" into some thing.

So, I may look at a herb garden and see: weeds. My knowledge of gardens may be such that I expect only flowers and vegetables to grow in them. My knowledge of plants may be of a very general kind, so that I can distinguish trees, shrubs, flowers, vegetables and weeds. I will then not even see a herb garden *as* a garden, but as a part of the larger garden that has been untended.

On the other hand, someone else might not only see the herb garden for what it is, but see that it contains basil, dill, coriander, and so on. If I want to be able to do this, I must learn the language of herbs and the look of the plants. And then I will no longer be seeing leaves, but coriander leaves, for instance.

The consequences of this are far-reaching, because it can now be seen that the very act of 'making meaningful' (the largest sense of what we mean by "learning") is an act of mediation. In order for something to become meaningful to us, it must find a place in our language. We will subsequently view it *through* the place it has. Our experience of it will therefore be always a mediated one, one mediated by language. Indeed, the very act of trying to

know the world--to make it meaningful, to systematize it--is at the same time an act that mediates it. We therefore never have immediate access to a meaningful world.

This is a crucial point, so I hope it will bear restating. The world is a strange place, and we wish to know what things are and how things are. We wish the things in the world to have a certain order, in fact, a meaning. But as we learn about the world, as we incorporate unmeaningful experience into our language, our experience is increasingly a mediated one. As we stride towards "reality," we are pushing it away.

To revert to the example of the herb garden: surely, we want to say, the person who sees the herbs as weeds is merely ignorant, and the person who sees the coriander as coriander is seeing things *as they really are*. It is simply a *fact* that that plant is coriander.

Here, the assumption that "there is something real that we can know" presents itself in a different guise. We take it for granted that we are all experiencing the *same* world. But if you see coriander and I see weeds, we are certainly not experiencing these plants in the same way. And so what sense does it make to say we are experiencing the *same* plants?

It would make sense to say we are experiencing the *same something*. As long as we don't associate or contrast it with something else, as long as we don't place it in some

sort of a system, as long as it remains without meaning to us, then yes, we can say we are experiencing the same something. However, the moment we begin to experience something as somehow meaningful, then the only justification for saying that we are experiencing the same thing is that we speak the same language, which is to say that we have the same system through which we experience the world.

Otherwise, I don't know what we would mean by saying that we were experiencing the "same" world. How could anyone possibly know this? Even if we were able shed our language and experience the world without it, the world we would experience would be one without meaning. To insist that of course we are all experiencing the same world, even if there are different interpretations of it, is merely to beg the question, to insist that there is a meaningful reality to which we all have immediate access. It is to assume there is a "raw" world, one not conditioned by our language, that we can not only experience but also *talk about*. But that is precisely what we could never do, because to talk about this raw world would be to talk about it in language, and to do this would mean to experience it through language.

The question about the relationship between words and things, then, is not a good question, at least the way it is generally posed. A thing is what it is because a particular language has divided the world up in a particular way, so to

speak. To continue metaphorically: the thing we think we see is there only because our language put it in front of us. The relationship is not between words and things, but between language and the world.

A language, then, represents a particular way of viewing, or of organizing, or ordering the world. It does not represent the world, as a mirror reflecting it. A language does not describe the world, but creates one. A language contains the elements we use in the stories we tell about the world, and defines, at least until new modes of experience force their way into our lives and are again made meaningful in language, the limits and bounds these stories may take.

"Reality"

Clearly, then, when I am talking about the "world," I am not using the word in the way it is most often used, that is, to talk about something that exists quite independently of people and the languages they bring to it. The world, or the reality, that I am talking about is one that is continuously being created as our language grows to accommodate our experience.

But what of that other reality, the more familiar, independently existing one? This, after all, is the thing we really want to talk about. However, quite apart from what has already been said, there are number of very compelling reasons to think that all such talk is actually

unmeaningful. These reasons will be given in later chapters. For the moment, though, I would like to take a roundabout and exploratory approach to the problem. To do this, I will briefly analyze the nature/culture dichotomy. The conclusions drawn from this analysis will be seen to apply equally to distinctions between appearance and reality, (real) essences and attributes, and so on.

For the present purposes, I will only draw the simplest version of the nature/culture dichotomy. The distinction between nature and culture is easy to make when we contrast, say, a garden and an untended forest. We can say that one shows the effect that people can have upon nature, and the other represents nature untouched and pristine. Problems arise, however, when we consider a seemingly analogous situation, that is, the different behaviour of people who live in different cultures. The analogy is strong in the sense that just as human beings have an impact on nature when they create gardens, so the people of a particular culture affect the children who are raised by them. Our behaviour is in some sense conditioned by the culture we live in. And our tendency, then, is to wonder about the "natural" person, the "essential" person--to wonder what generalizations can be made about people, as it were, before they inhabit a particular culture. We want to ask: what are people really like? What is the basic human essence that all these different cultures work upon?

However, the analogy between gardens and cultures can now be seen to be very weak, because our only starting point in the search for "natural" behaviour is the examination of different cultures, or the behaviour of people who have already been culturally conditioned. (This is like trying to determine what nature looks like by examining different gardens.)

Suppose I had a number of painted balls, but I didn't know whether the balls were made of wood, or steel, or plastic, or what have you. If I wanted to find out what the balls were made of, I could scrape off the paint. But I can't do this with people--I cannot scrape off their cultures to see what they look like underneath. How would I even begin to do this?

Imagine the following experiment: I take a newborn from its mother, and place it in an environment where all its needs are taken care of by machines. I make no attempt to teach it any language, and I isolate it from all human contact. That is: I try to exclude all the obvious cultural contaminants. Would the resulting person be a "natural" human being? There would be two problems involved in saying this.

First, the most we would be entitled to claim is the person's behaviour was moulded by the machine environment. And we could, no doubt, devise many different sorts of machine environments, and potentially produce many different

sorts of "machine people." Which of these would we want to say exhibited natural behaviour? Perhaps none of them, because we would soon realize that none of these machine environments was really natural. But then, what would constitute a natural environment?

Secondly, would we want to call a "machine person" a person at all? When we study people, all we have in the way of observable materials are people--all of whom are raised by parents or parent-figures and live within particular cultures--and their behaviour. It would seem reasonable, on the basis of this evidence, that if *anything* is natural behaviour, it is precisely the tendency to congregate, learn a language, and establish cultural norms for behaviour. To eliminate all of these and then claim that the resultant behaviour was "natural" would be a peculiar inference indeed.

Now, this does not mean any use of the word 'natural' leads inevitably to some kind of philosophical quandary. There do seem to be ways in which I can use the word meaningfully. For instance, there is the following question from the social sciences: "Is aggression in people a natural phenomenon?" According to the above, this is precisely the sort of question I *cannot* ask, because it presupposes the nature/culture dichotomy or, more specifically, represents an appeal to unconditioned, "natural" existence which is

available prior to or apart from existence in a particular set of historical circumstances.

However, there still seems something legitimate in the question. It does not deserve to be dismissed. A better reply to the question would be: "What do you mean by the word 'natural'?"¹² Is your question about whether, given an adequate standard of living, a person living in an affluent society will still exhibit violent tendencies?" That is: we seek to establish a *context* in which the original question makes sense. Someone might counter that in *any* context, people are likely to exhibit aggressive behaviour. If so, it is only necessary to point out that this is false. There are, after all, non-violent people. It is only when someone says, "But these people are non-violent because of certain aspects of the culture they inhabit; the natural tendency is towards aggression," that I fail to understand what is meant by the word 'natural'. There is then no context provided through which I can understand what is being said.

I think this is how we escape from the above dilemma. There are certainly ways in which it not only seems valuable but necessary to be able to distinguish between something natural and something which is not so. On a simplistic level, I wish to be able to mean something intelligible when I differentiate between, say, fresh vegetables, and those which are canned with sugar, salt and various other things added. And it is not enough to say that both are somehow

always culturally defined, and that we can never arrive at what is truly natural, a sort of unblemished, directly experienced reality. This last may certainly be true, but it does not answer the question being asked. There may *indeed* be something wrong with the latter assertion, but it strikes me as irresponsible, on that basis, to then claim that the distinction itself is an inherently bad one.

On a less trivial level, the disciplines of psychology and sociology, if they are not to be obliterated along with the nature/culture dichotomy, need an argument such as the above, insofar as they want to discuss forms of deviancy, because for behaviour *to be deviant* there must be something 'natural' against which it stands out. Without such a context, I can no longer even make sense, for instance, of the following sort of claim: "This is what is natural; it is being repressed; the cultural is the result." It is true that the word 'nature' cannot be used to refer to how people really are, outside the context of any culture. However, within the context of a given culture, the word can be used meaningfully. It is legitimate to claim, for instance, that it is natural, in western societies, for people to seek a certain amount of time off from work every year. Someone who works obsessively, on the other hand, is somehow deviant, and is in fact termed a 'workaholic'. (Of course, to export this term to a society where devotion to leisure time does not exist in nearly the same degree is to commit a

fallacy of precisely the type discussed above: it is to derive from a particular context a general rule about how people "naturally" behave.)

I think the difficulty here is quite easily resolved--as I have been hinting above--with reference to the notion of context. A word has meaning within the context of a language. A sentence has its meaning partially determined by its context of utterance. In fact, if anything is to have meaning, it must be defined, and that definition is dependent upon context. Now, the problem in talking about nature when we mean "the way things really are," is just that there is no context that could possibly define what this "nature" would be. As I argue in more depth later on, nature, the world, reality, and so on, are all absolutes that *contain* contexts, but cannot themselves be *within* a context. Hence, when a word like 'nature' is used in a global way, it is unmeaningful; when it is used locally, within a given context, it may be used meaningfully.

Meaningful versus Unmeaningful Experience

To return to the idea that experience is mediated: I have argued that all experience, *insofar as we can talk about it at all*, is meaningful precisely because it is mediated, and mediated by the language we speak. In affirming this, however, I am not in the slightest trying to imply that language is the exclusive lens through which the world is viewed. There are many things I may experience for

which either there *is* no language (or at least no adequate language), or for which *I personally* have no language. So new discoveries necessitate new words; strong emotions sometimes cause us to grope vainly for words suitable to their expression; and a visit to a new city can present me with a whole new vocabulary.

Rather, I am making the lesser claim that our *making sense* of experience is something we do in language, and that therefore what we might term our *meaningful* experience is delimited by the language that we speak. For instance, I may try to make sense of western music by viewing it as first the progress towards, and then the departure from, the concept of 'key', with the work of Bach as the midpoint. In order to do this, I will have to learn words like 'mode', 'polyphony', 'monody', and so on. I will have to learn, to some extent, the language in which people talk about music. Having done this, I will then begin to hear the music quite differently from the way I did before. Something may begin to "sound mediaeval," or "appear to be a discordant precursor to atonal music," and the like. The point: my new experiences with regard to music will result from my having made meaningful--or made sense--of music.

This point is important for three reasons. First, it allows for the distinction between meaningful and unmeaningful experience. To continue the example of music: contrast two people listening to a piece of music, where one

has studied musical theory and the other has not. The first might listen to a fugue, for instance, and hear it as polyphony, identify the subject, countersubject and various motifs in their different voices, be able to explain the modulations, and so forth, whereas the other might simply hear something being played on the piano.

Secondly, distinguishing between meaningful and unmeaningful experience allows me to understand at least one kind of learning. I may learn about a particular subject by mastering its discourse, that is: adding its discourse to the one I already have. (This is a crucial point, although this is not the place to go into it. Suffice it to say that the fact that I *can* learn presupposes the quasi-dualism I am espousing here. (I say quasi-dualism because the two fields are in a constant state of flux; there is a constant interplay between the unmeaningful and the meaningful as the one becomes the other in language; there is no question of being able to isolate one side and oppose it as a sort of permanent *class* to the other.) If I learn geometry, say, or the esoteric names of certain colour shades, or the history and themes of pre-Socratic philosophy, these things must *become* meaningful to me in terms of a language already at my disposal. I must incorporate, as it were, something previously unmeaningful into a body of language I already have.)

And thirdly, I may assert that no matter what I experience, as soon as I begin to talk about it, the nature of my experience has changed and become mediated by language. There is a difference, certainly, between the person who sees the transparently packaged slab of bland, oily white substance in the dairy section of the grocery store for the first time, and the person who regularly eats tofu. For the former, the tofu is merely a *something*, presumably either edible or left on the shelf by mistake. However, if he or she learns that the thing is not only edible but high in protein, cheap, healthy and trendy--in other words, once a context has been established in which to experience it--the tofu will be experienced *as tofu*; the nature of the experience will have changed, will have become, in the sense I am here using the term, meaningful. The experience will then be, as it were, *through* the language of the person experiencing.

To return, finally, to the notion of 'reality': I think the term should properly apply to the world we see so clearly in front of us through the transparent lens of language. However, it can also be used to describe something beyond language, something experienceable but not yet meaningful, something we have not yet shackled with our language, and therefore mediated by it. However, there is nothing else we can say about it.

And, as was the case with the word 'natural', I think that there are legitimate uses of the word 'reality', that is, ones where we can talk about, say, the reality of a given situation. We know the difference between truth and dissimulation, we know that occasionally things in the world are not as they seem. I may say, for instance, that a sound seems to be emanating from a source quite near by, whereas the reality of the situation is that the source is across a large lake. This seems to me a case where it is permissible to talk about the *reality* of the situation. It is only when we apply the notion globally, as though we were referring to something immediately experienceable or somehow beyond language, that we are making an illegitimate move. This happens, for instance, when we speak metaphorically of appearance and reality *as though* the distinction were neatly analogous to lies and truth. And then we think we can get to reality the way we get to the truth, whereas reality is precisely what we, as language speakers, can never get to. In that extended sense then, the word 'reality' purports to describe something which can never be described (because as soon as it is described, it is mediated).

To conclude, western philosophy is obsessed with the desire to make a statement of the following kind: "This is the way things are," or "This is the way things are *in reality, or naturally.*" The notion that there is a reality, that there is a nature, which constantly baffles us in our

attempt to "describe it properly," and yet, if we could only give it all our attention would eventually yield its secrets, is what underwrites the mistaken notion that subjects can have direct access to the world.

It may be added that this may be seen even more simply as our desire for *knowledge*. The whole endeavour of science, in fact, can be seen from this point of view. Science must assume there is a reality to which we can have access (as well as assuming, of course, that this reality is explicable rather than chaotic), because without this assumption, it would never get off the ground at all.¹³

(Why we desire knowledge, of course, is a question we cannot answer, even if various answers do suggest themselves. One might argue, for instance, that people abhor chaos, or that the desire for knowledge yields an evolutionary benefit, or that we "by nature desire to know." However, this is tantamount to saying that we can explain why we are the way we are. And this is to claim we can know how we *really* are, which, I have argued, is precisely what we cannot know.)

The Defence of Common Sense

There is a final problem of a general nature that I want to address before ending this chapter, and that is whether the conclusions I have reached thus far are so counter-intuitive that it would run against common sense to

accept them. That is: is G.E. Moore's argument in "A Defence of Common Sense" (and elsewhere) a convincing rebuttal of these conclusions?

John Passmore cites Moore as follows:

'if Hume's principles were true, I could never know that this pencil exists, but I do know this pencil exists, and therefore Hume's arguments cannot be true'. This, he admits, looks like a mere evasion, a begging of the question; but in fact, he says, it is a perfectly good and conclusive argument. We are much more confident that what confronts us exists than we are that Hume's principles are correct; and we are entitled to use the facts we are confident about as a refutation of his argument.¹⁴

In "Hume's Philosophy," claiming that Hume "does sincerely wish to persuade us that we cannot know of the existence of external material objects,"¹⁵ Moore says,

Philosophers do, in fact, sincerely believe such things as this--things which flatly contradict the vast majority of the things which they believe at other times.¹⁶

The question, then, is this: does my claim that we do not have immediate access to a meaningful world contradict what I can legitimately claim to know about the world? Does the corollary claim, that there is no 'reality' which we can know, make the same mistake?

(In deference to Moore, I should mention that I will not be addressing his own immediate concerns, which were to debunk philosophical debates about the existence of the external world, and the like.¹⁷ I simply wish to examine what claims he makes about common sense, and those things that he claims to know with certainty.)

First, it is not clear to me that Moore's criterion of common sense is ever applicable in an unambiguous way. In the late nineteenth century, the Italian physician Cesare Lombroso claimed to "know" (and know scientifically) that most criminals could be identified by anatomical traits.

Criminals are evolutionary throwbacks in our midst. Germs of an ancestral past lie dormant in our heredity. In some unfortunate individuals, the past comes to life again. These people are innately driven to act as a normal ape or savage would, but such behavior is deemed criminal in our civilized society. Fortunately, we may identify born criminals because they bear anatomical signs of their apishness. Their atavism is both physical and mental, but the physical signs, or stigmata as Lombroso called them, are decisive. Criminal *behavior* can also arise in normal men, but we know the "born criminal" by his anatomy.¹⁸

Certainly, history is full of examples of people *knowing* things--things thought to be common sense--that their children and grandchildren flatly denied and even thought ridiculous. However, this argument is something of a straw man. It might easily be argued that a Lombroso claim such as "the morphology of the prostitute is more abnormal even than that of the criminal, especially for atavistic anomalies, because the prehensile foot is atavistic,"¹⁹ clearly involves an interpretation that goes beyond common sense. Moore's claim to the effect that he *has a hand*²⁰ is much more straightforward and does not. Perhaps.

Consider this, however: we do not normally call a cat's front paws its 'hands', and we often call all four of

its paws 'feet'. We do, on the other hand, talk about a monkey's having hands. Now, this is odd. A monkey can do many things with its feet (such as holding food and grasping branches, for instance) that humans can do only with their hands, and a cat does many things with its front legs (such as killing prey) that we do only with our arms and hands.

While it is clear that we, monkeys and cats, all have appendages, it is unclear why we call the uppermost appendages on people 'arms', and why the end of the appendages are called 'hands'. To state that one knows one has a hand seems little more than to claim that in English, the thing located at the bottom of the arm is called a 'hand', and not a paw or a foot. Clearly, it is only because the English language *does* distinguish so minutely between various parts of the human body that such a claim can be made at all. I can certainly imagine a language which did not distinguish between the various parts of appendages--do spider's have feet?--and in such a language, Moore's claim would in fact be nonsensical. It is only because he speaks a language which has provided him with the wherewithal to experience the bottoms of his arms as hands that his claim can even be made.

However, even if we grant Moore his hands--and his proof, which I am not in least concerned to dispute or even discuss here--there is yet something peculiar about what he calls common sense beliefs. One thing Moore claims to

"*know, with certainty, to be true,*" is that "There exists at present a living human body, which is *my body*."²¹ He contends that a sentence such as this has "some meaning which is the ordinary or popular meaning,"²² and to doubt the truth of this "is as profoundly mistaken as any view can be."²³

The question I want to address is not whether I am sure that I have a body or not, or whether I understand the meaning of the word 'body'. Rather I just want to examine briefly what I consider to be a peculiar phrase, that is, 'my body'. Now, the word 'my' here can really only mean one of two things. It can either suggest ownership (as in 'my car') or direct attention to some aspect of me (as in 'my memories'). If I own my body, then this implies that I am something quite separate from it, or at least can be thought of as separate from it. If on the other hand, the phrase 'my body' is meant merely to direct attention to one aspect of what I am, I am still saying that I am more than, and therefore can be thought of as separate from, my body.

It is easy to imagine a language which would *not* countenance such a phrase as 'my body'. If, in this language, the body were thought to constitute the person, that is, if every reference to the person would also of necessity be a reference to the body, then the phrase 'my body' would make as little sense as 'the building's building'. It is only because personal pronouns have such a

diversity of uses that a phrase like 'my body' can be used successfully. If words like 'I' and 'myself' could only be used in sentences like "I hurt myself," and "I am here" (I cannot hurt my mind, and I cannot be here if I've left my body behind), then I doubt we would ever have a use for the phrase. However, because we can also say, "I am thinking," where it would seem strange to think that our arms and legs participated much in the activity, we can make sense of the phrase. On the other hand, as I said above, it is easy to imagine a language in which Moore's example of a belief of common sense would, in fact, make no sense at all.

Just as was the case when referring to hands, our ability to make any statement whatsoever depends upon our grasp of an inherited language which has divided up the world in a particular way for us. Given that I understand English, for instance, it is of course all right to say that I have a body, or that I have a hand. However, it is merely a fact of the language that something (a hand, say) is perceived as something distinct from other things (an arm).

To stress this point, I will give one final set of examples. When talking of the seats in a car, we habitually refer both to a front seat and a back seat. However, when talking about a three-cushion sofa, do we talk of the left, middle and right seats? Why not? It is not merely that in the case of the car, one seat is placed in front of another and is physically separate from it. If I were to place two

sofas in a room so that one were directly in front of another, I would not refer to them as the 'front sofa' and the 'back sofa' (although I would, no doubt, refer to one as the sofa in the front, and the other as the sofa in the back). And it is not that it doesn't make sense to divide a sofa up into left, middle and right seats. I do, after all, talk of the driver's versus the passenger's seat in a car, and routinely refer to the seats on an airplane as aisle, middle and window seats (or as left, middle and right).

When I look in my filing cabinet, although it is arranged in rows of clearly identified hanging folders, I do not refer to the front folder or the back folder. Yet in a theatre I can differentiate between the front and the back rows. One final example: although this is not the case in all languages, in English and many others, when I am reading, the front of a book is always to my left and the back to my right. However, we never refer to the front of a book as the left part, or the end as the right part. Why not?

We want to say: it just doesn't make sense to do so. And yet, this is hardly good enough. It certainly *could* make sense. Five hundred years ago it made sense to divide the human body into three parts and the fluids contained therein into four.

The four humours created in the liver are the life-giving moisture of the body. They generate a more active life-principle, vital heat, which corresponds to the fires in the centre of the earth, themselves agents

in the slow formation of the metals. This vital heat is mediated to the body through three kinds of spirit, which are the executive of the microcosm. The *natural* spirits are a vapour formed in the liver and carried with the humours along the veins. As such they have to do with the lowest or vegetative side of man and are under the dominion of the liver. But, acted on in the heart by heat and air from the lungs, they assume a higher quality and become *vital* spirits. Accompanied by a nobler kind of blood, also refined in the heart, they carry life and heat through the arteries. The heart is king of the middle portion of the body. It is the seat of the passions and hence corresponds to the sensitive portion of man's nature. Some of the vital spirits are in due course carried through the arteries into the brain, where they are turned into *animal* spirits. The brain rules the top of man's body, and is the seat of the rational and immortal part.²⁴

Just as it is no longer customary to refer to the tripartite body of the liver, heart and brain, it certainly *could* become customary to refer to the left, right and middle seats of sofas. There is nothing intrinsically senseless in this.

What we are left with, I think, is just that there are certain ways in which we habitually *do* refer to things, and the reason for this is to be found in the language we speak. That is: this is just how we do speak of things. And yes, it is common sense to assert with Moore that we have bodies, but it is so only given the language we speak. We cannot, however, understand from this anything at all about how the world is (especially how the world is *in reality*).

Finally, even if we allow Moore his "Common Sense view of the world," I think the crucial point here is that I am not violating any aspect of this view in my argument. In

fact, it is the subject-verb-object model which violates common sense. If my experience were of single, unmediated objects, then it would follow that every differentiated object would have to have an individual name. But this contradicts my experience, because I do not see objects as individual but as typical. Even in such a simple sentence as, "Here is one hand," because the object is not named by a proper noun but by a common one, the reference is only possible because it proceeds, as it were, through the class (things we call 'hands') to the particular (this hand). The class itself only makes sense with respect to other classes ('arms', 'legs', 'feet', etc.), these in turn only make sense with respect to classes of things which do not form part of the human body, and so on and so forth. And this, of course, is precisely what I have been contending: that words do not directly relate to things, but to other words, which words taken together form a language, which language in turn allows those who speak it to inhabit a meaningful world.

This conclusion seems to hold some fairly clear implications about how we should view the self, if the self is considered as an object. However, it would be premature to discuss these here, because I have so far considered objects only in terms of their being unities, and not in terms of their being unities *in time*. The concept of history is therefore the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY

For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings.
(Shakespeare, *Richard II*)

When the schoolmaster in *Hard Times* proclaims that, "In this life, we want nothing but Facts,"¹ he is expounding what E.H. Carr has called "the commonsense view of history. History consists of a corpus of ascertained facts."² Something has happened, and it is the historian's duty to tell us accurately and fully what it is. This view of history is one which is still accepted, at least for practical purposes, by most people. We may not believe everything we read in the papers, and we may even cynically agree with Marshall McLuhan that "our press is in the main a free entertainment service paid for by advertisers who want to buy readers,"³ but we are in a bind. News services provide information concerning subjects to which we would otherwise have no access at all.

The commonsense view of history, then, sees the historian as a sort of journalist: the historian's scope is larger, but the two are essentially doing the same thing. Indeed, the historian and journalist are just doing what we

ourselves do when we report on our day's activities to someone else. Ideally, we try to be honest and objective, as it were; we try to summarize accurately what seem to be the main aspects of the day, and we add such salient details as we deem necessary to the report's completeness.

There is much to criticize in the commonsense view of history, and it has been much criticized in the twentieth century. However, since this criticism is not really germane to what I want to discuss, which is the concept of 'event' (or 'fact'), I will not attempt to discuss it here. I will use Carr's criticism only as a springboard to get to my main points.

Carr's objections to the commonsense view of history are as follows:

The facts are really not at all like fish on the fishmonger's slab. They are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend, partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use--these two factors being, of course, determined by the kind of fish he wants to catch. By and large, the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation.⁴

Carr reasons first that a distinction must be made between ordinary facts, so to speak, and historical facts. Facts of history come into existence because historians have decided to include them (and not other facts) in works of history. As he says, "the fact that you arrived in this building half an hour ago on foot, or on a bicycle, or in a car, is just

as much a fact about the past as the fact that Caesar crossed the Rubicon. But it will probably be ignored by historians."⁵ Historians approach the past selectively. Furthermore, he says, it is impossible for historians to be "objective": they necessarily operate with certain perspectives and biases, they will have a particular attitude towards the period about which they are writing, and when referring to this period, they must employ the language of their own time.⁶

There is something indisputable in all this. But does this mean that history is nothing more than culturally-bound story-telling? Carr considers and rejects this possibility.

It does not follow that, because a mountain appears to take on different shapes from different angles of vision, it has objectively either no shape at all or an infinity of shapes. It does not follow that, because interpretation plays a necessary part in establishing the facts of history, and because no existing interpretation is wholly objective, one interpretation is as good as another, and the facts of history are in principle not amenable to objective interpretation.⁷

I am not here concerned with Carr's attempt to rescue historiography from relativism. I am more interested in the problem he ignores, even though it is quite easily teased from his mountain metaphor. The 'objective shape of a mountain', if that phrase is to mean anything at all, must mean the shape it has when not seen from a particular perspective. But to see just *is* to see from a particular perspective. The mountain's objective shape, therefore,

must be the shape it has when it is seen with closed eyes-- in other words, when it is not seen at all.

Again, Carr distinguishes between ordinary facts and historical facts. He claims that "so-called basic facts, which are the same for all historians, commonly belong to the category of the raw materials of the historian rather than of history itself."⁸ History, then, is not a simple compilation of facts, but rather is a selective compilation of facts. The question that begs to be asked here is: "What exactly is a *fact*?"

Carr admits that it is not only historians who are selective and perspectival vis a vis facts; so are the initial reporters of these facts. Speaking of what he calls the "nineteenth-century fetishism of facts," he says:

If you find it in the documents, it is so. But what, when we get down to it, do these documents--the decrees, the treaties, the rent-rolls, the blue books, the official correspondence, the private letters and diaries--tell us? No document can tell us more than what the author of the document thought--what he thought had happened, what he thought ought to happen or would happen, or perhaps only what he wanted others to think he thought, or even only what he himself thought he thought.⁹

That is: *any* recounting of "events" involves perspective and selection. But if any "fact" is already a reported fact, or becomes a fact in the reporting of it, where are "the raw materials of the historian"?

The assumption that there are such raw materials is similar to one I discussed in the preceding chapter: that

there is a world of "raw" events or raw facts that just happen--and that we may experience. But these facts would be forever beyond our grasp. They would be facts about which we could say nothing at all, these facts beyond our language. If they are to mean anything to us--if we can prepare any sort of answer at all to the question, "What is happening?"--then these facts must be delivered in language.

Here is a "fact": "the train left at exactly 4:10 p.m." But here is a question: "for whom is this a fact?" Is it a fact for a two-year-old child, who has never before seen a train and who has no real concept of clock time? Clearly not. It cannot be fact for this child until he or she has learned about trains and how to tell the time. And the child will learn to do this by mastering a language. So a fact is not a fact at all until it can be expressed in language.

It is true that belief in this paradigm of experience --the one where events occur that I may first witness and then report on--is undoubtedly very strong. However, there are three ways in which it can be shown inadequate. First, there is the argument I have already given, that whatever I experience, I experience through the language I speak; the meaningful world of my experience is already mediated.

Secondly, in the same way that when I learn a new word, I begin to then experience something *as* something that has a meaning in my language, I perceive many familiar

events through my language as well. What is it I experience when I experience the leaves on a tree moving spasmodically up and around? I experience "the wind rustling through the leaves," and would express the experience I was having in this or some similar phrase. When I see a car going through a red light, I experience this as a car going through a red light. When I watch a baseball game, I experience it as a baseball game. That is: much of my experience, the part about which I can talk, at any rate, is already contextualized. Consider the familiar experience of listening to music that is playing so softly you cannot hear it properly. You go to turn it up, and suddenly you recognize it. You say, "Oh that's what it is!" And from that point on, you hear what previously were only random sounds as belonging to just *that* piece of music. If you know it well, you can sing along. If you hear a mistake, you might say, "That's not how that is meant to go." But how could you say this unless you were experiencing the music as the particular piece that it is--hearing the present sounds in the context of the overall piece that you know?

Of course, you might be misremembering, especially if you did not know the music well. It might, perhaps, veer off in some direction you had not anticipated, and you might then be led to say that you didn't know what was being played after all. However, the possibility of being able to

say, "No, I recognize this music, and the chords are all wrong here," is dependent upon your experiencing the individual parts of the music as belonging to a larger musical context.

The case is perhaps easier to see with reference to a baseball game. What would I think if, after a tied ninth inning, the players were all to come onto the field with portable tables and chessboards, in order to determine the game-winner? Since this would not fit in with anything that I know about baseball and how it is played, I would either identify this as a mistake, or would no longer be able to experience what I was experiencing as a baseball game. The context through which I was experiencing the game would have been shattered, and I would have to try to put the chess-playing activity into a new context. I would ask whether the baseball game itself was actually an elaborate joke, or if what was currently going on was a joke, or whether there had been a rule change, of which I was unaware, and so on.

The third thing wrong with the notion that there are raw events that I can experience is based on what was just mentioned. That is: whatever I do not already experience as contextualized, I try to contextualize. At least, I do so if I am interested in understanding it or in talking about it. We contextualize in many ways, but I will mention only two: with single events and with a series of events. First, single events.

Single Events

The first thing to note is that in order to experience something *as* something, to *make meaningful* something which has happened, the minimal requirement is that we do, indeed, experience it. If something is not experienced by anyone, it can never become an event. I am not saying that if I do not (or some else does not) experience something, nothing happens at all. All I am saying is that it is as *if* nothing has happened. Whatever has happened can have no meaning in my (or someone else's) life. However, the possibility is always open that someone, somewhere will experience the something and give it some expression in language, and that it will therefore *become* meaningful, will become, that is, an event. On the other hand, if a tree falls in the forest and no one experiences this, not only does the tree make no noise, but it doesn't even "fall." Not, that is, unless it speaks a language similar to ours, and it knows it is a tree.

Secondly, as I intimated above, nothing can be an event or a fact until it receives expression in language. A simple example will suffice to show this. There is a banging I can hear from outside. What is happening? If I am content to remain with this rather primitive understanding of what is going on, then indeed the event in question will just be, "there is a banging going on outside." On the other hand, I may wish to know the source

of the noise. Going to the window, I see that there is a construction crew in the process of laying the foundation for a new building. Again I may rest content with this much knowledge, but it is clear that the event has changed considerably. The thing I made partially meaningful by using the word 'banging', has now become much more so: I know the source of the noise, and I know what the noise is made of. However, I may go much further than this. I may inquire about the nature of the building under construction. Say it is a new restaurant, even a new seafood restaurant. I may now wonder about the eventual effect on the neighbourhood sidewalk traffic, and I may wonder about the quality of the food the new restaurant will serve. I can also inquire as to how long the restaurant will be under construction. I may even find out that the owner of the restaurant is someone I know. My event, to put an end to all this spinning, may become, "Harry is building a new seafood restaurant across the street. It's opening in July." And although these particular words need not, of course, occur to me as I hear the banging from outside, nevertheless my experience of the banging will be *of* Harry's restaurant being built.

The idea that the world exists in a series of states that succeed one another whether or not we experience them--that a fact is a sort of frozen picture of the world that we may or may not look at--is a deeply ingrained one.

However, it is deeply flawed, as is easily gleaned from common experience. We have all experienced strange noises, learned new games, witnessed bizarre behaviour, seen people mouthing words (we hope they are words) through soundproof glass, been confused by static on a radio or phone line, and so on. Such cases are examples of experiences that are not meaningful to us--or at least are not meaningful in the way we should like them to be.

A fact is not a picture. Unlike a picture, any fact in which a past occurrence receives expression in language, must, in the act of being talked about, have a beginning, middle and end. Unlike a picture, the beginning and end of a fact is a highly arbitrary matter. Consider that fact of history, "Caesar crossed the Rubicon." There is no reason this way of expressing the matter should have come down to us as a fact of history. "Early in 49, by crossing the River Rubicon (Pisciattello?), which formed the northern border of Italy, Caesar committed the first act of war."¹⁰

This beginning seems highly arbitrary. First of all, I don't think Pompey and the Senate would have regarded it as an act of war if Caesar had come almost to the southern shore of the Rubicon--and then retreated back into Cisalpine Gaul. He had to actually get across the river and step into Italy before he was encroaching on Pompey's territory. (In one sense of the word, 'crossing' does mean getting all the way across it; in another sense, however, it also means the

act of getting across, which may be aborted.) On the other hand, if it was the actual crossing that was the first act of war, why not say that it began with Caesar's orders to his army to cross the Rubicon? Or with Caesar massing his troops on the north shore? Only if intention is artificially severed from the act itself can the crossing be seen as beginning the war. And the intention cannot be severed from the act. Caesar knew why he was going, and Pompey why he was coming.

The end of the fact is also highly arbitrary. Caesar could have crossed the Rubicon, and then changed his mind and signalled a retreat. This first act of war, then, really only ended when armies started clashing, and both sides knew for sure that war was a certainty.

The point I am trying to make here is not that events or facts are inherently blurry or have fuzzy edges. That is again to think of facts in terms of their being pictures. No, facts are often exact: that is how we make them. What is arbitrary is our decision to make them *just this way*. How a fact is expressed contributes greatly to what the fact is, and where it begins and ends.

A third crucial component of a fact is the context in which it is seen. Consider this example: someone strikes a chord on a guitar. What has happened? What is the fact here? If we are interested in how sound is produced, we might say that the downward flick of the guitarist's finger

has caused the strings to vibrate, which in turn has produced disturbances in the air. If we are interested in how we hear something, we might say that these disturbances have acted upon the ear in a particular way. Perhaps someone is showing us how to play the guitar; we might focus on the placement of the fingers on the fretboard. We might say that the chord struck was the beginning of a particular piece of music, or that it was an E major chord. We might discuss the appropriateness of the guitarist's striking the chord--was it struck in a room full of sleeping people?--and our fact here would be the guitarist, as a joke, decided to wake everyone up in the middle of the night. What of the volume of the chord, or the quality of the instrument? We would rarely, in fact, simply say that someone had struck a chord on a guitar. Our fact would change depending upon which context we sought to put it in, upon which way we tried to make it meaningful.

Both these things form the crux of what it is to be an "event." An event is something unmeaningful that has happened and that has been made meaningful in a particular way by someone through language. Again, I want to rely on the distinction I have made between what is meaningful and what is not. We want to say: things happen. That is where we want to leave it: there are just things that happen. But the question that keeps coming back is: "What things?" And it is clear that any answer whatsoever must be delivered in

language, and that therefore what has happened is only meaningful in terms of language. Secondly, our event will have an arbitrary beginning and end (if only by virtue of the fact that we will start, and then finish, talking about it). Thirdly, we will try to give the event a context, thereby changing the very event itself depending on how we understand it. The existence of the world and the things that happen in it do not depend upon language, but the existence of events and facts does.

I have been at pains in the above to avoid use of the word, 'describe'. That is because of the connotations so deeply entrenched within any use of the word. When I describe something, after all, my attempt is to describe it *as it is*. However, as I am trying to show, although an event is not a *nothing* until it is described, it is a meaningless "anything" until it receives some description or other in language. What it is depends upon the description it receives. The very act of describing is an act of making meaningful; as soon as we begin to talk about events in the world, those events are mediated by the language we speak. There are no raw events to which we have immediate access. Rather, there are raw events to which we gain access by making them mediated events.

Events in a Series

The conception of facts as frozen pictures not only promotes the idea that history is somehow separate from the

telling of it, but also deflects attention away from events that gain much of their meaning from being part of a series of events. Often, we don't experience particular events as isolated incidents, but rather as being part of some kind of pattern. Present events are seen in terms of past ones, and their relevance and distinctness are a function of their relation to these.

So, if someone should ask where I am going, and I respond by saying that I am going to work, I am indeed talking about an individual event; but this event is in large part made meaningful by the fact that it is not something isolated and unique that I am doing on one particular day, but something I do on a regular basis. Indeed, I don't think we would say my sentence was properly understood unless it was understood in the context of my having a job.

Since a great deal of what I do is in fact of a continuous and repetitive nature, the bulk of the events in my life are mediated not only by language, but by their relation to other events. I have in mind such events as: going shopping, doing laundry, washing oneself, making dinner, taking a walk, in fact, anything we could describe as a routine activity.

Such activities, of course, can only be very loosely defined. Going for a walk can involve a twenty-minute stroll or a three-hour ramble. But they can, in some

sense, be defined. If I were simply to walk to the corner and back, or if I set out on a cross-country trek, I don't think in either case we'd say that I'd gone for a walk.

These activities can also, again loosely, be thought of as culturally-defined ones. I mean this in the following sense: such activities are reasonably common ones in a particular culture. So, for instance, I could say that making tea in England is different from making tea in North America, and that the activity in each place is a culturally-defined one.

However, this line of thought is useful only to point out that many activities gain meaning both from the fact that other people also pursue these activities, and that we ourselves pursue them frequently and repetitiously. And the point of this is to show that we are often wrong to regard facts as isolated events.

Consider the following event: "I stopped at the red light." Now, certainly, I will be talking of a particular light that turned red at a specific time at a certain intersection. In this sense, the event is unique. That is: if all I am interested in are space and time coordinates, then I may say the event is unique. However, to focus only on space and time is to rob the event of just about all of its meaning. The event gains meaning precisely because most people stop at red lights, and I have stopped at red lights countless times, and that is because I know what a red light

is meant to stand for, and so on. It gains meaning because of the (cultural) context through which I experience it.

Similarly, if I run across repeated events that I do not understand, I will seek to find a context in which they may become meaningful. For instance, it is a habit of New York City busses *not* to stop at red lights, or at least to avoid stopping at them whenever possible. To anyone unacquainted with this habit, it would seem that New York's busdrivers are all doggedly intent on breaking the law as often as possible. In fact, the New York police condone busses running red lights in the interest of easing traffic congestion.

History and Story-Telling

Historiography, then, rather than compiling or even selecting facts, creates them. One wants to say: "No. It is just a fact that World War II started in 1939 and ended in 1945. No historian made that up." A partial response to this would be to point out that such a fact demands acceptance of the Christian calendar, and that the phrase 'World War II' is an attempt to make meaningful under one name what a vast number of individuals did, as they fought in smaller and larger groups, in places often very distant from each other. A full response will have to wait until later (chapter 4), when the concept 'system' is discussed more fully.¹¹

Which facts are created will depend, in large measure, upon the context into which the historian wishes to place them. A Marxist approach, starting with the belief in historical progress through class struggle, will create classes and find struggles. A biographical approach, which assumes history is "the essence of innumerable biographies," will create heroes and villains, and find aspects in their lives that bear significantly on what the historian thinks happened. A psychological approach, perhaps beginning with the belief in an unconscious and the mechanism of repression, might focus on someone's childhood experiences, and how these affected the person's subsequent adult behaviour.

All these approaches have one thing in common, and that is that they are telling some kind of *story*. And I think it is important to avoid thinking of this as putting some kind of interpretation upon the facts (the concept 'interpretation' will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter). I think it is important to realize that the same process is involved in both fact-making and story-telling. The first is making something meaningful in language ("making" the event), and the second is making that event meaningful in the context of other events.

To "describe" and contextualize an event--to tell a story about it--is at the same time to limit it or give it

shape. This is similar to what happens when a word is made meaningful to me.

Before a word is defined for me, it can mean anything, which is to say it is not meaningful. Similarly, before I know what a particular object is, it can *be* anything, which is to say that I don't know what it is, or that it does not have a meaning for me. The process of defining, of placing a word or a thing in a context in which it has a certain relationship with other words or things, is the process of making something meaningful. And this making meaningful of something is precisely imposing a limit on what it can mean or what it can be. When I begin to see something *as* what it is in my language, then I can subsequently *not* see it as something else. The way in which I can perceive it has therefore been limited by my language.

This can be seen by examining the way children learn. To an infant, everything is potentially edible. Only by attempting to chew on bars of soap and bits of electric railway track is an infant likely to develop the concept "inedible." To a slightly older child, everything is a potential toy. A cardboard box is a castle, a hiding place, a building block, a missile, a table, and whatever else the child wants it to be. Few adults derive a similar pleasure from cardboard boxes.

Similarly, when I recount something, I am, in the sense I explained above with reference to history, creating

events. If what I say is accepted, the events I recount will be accepted as the events that "really" took place. (It is, of course, open to anyone to say, "No, that's not what really happened." Whoever says this, and then retells the story, will be saying that the events I describe were not in fact events at all, and will replace mine with a whole new--or partially new--series.) So the process of story-telling, in that it defines, puts into focus, creates a context, and makes meaningful, is strongly analogous to what happens when we learn a new word or discover what a new thing is. When I say that story-telling constitutes a limiting of events, I mean that creating an event is at the same time to limit it.

Speaking, in fact, always involves a shaping of events. To talk about what has happened always involves the selection of events and their ordering sequentially--although not necessarily in a chronological sequence--in the presentation. In speaking, we must shape and limit what we are talking about; in speaking, therefore, we fictionalize, we create a text.

If this is true, however, the notion of 'what happens' then shrinks, as did the notion of 'reality' in the last chapter, to the point of non-existence. Since whatever happens is only meaningful when we begin to talk about it, that is, begin to tell a story about it, we must conclude that any presentation of what happens *necessarily* represents

a mediation. The "raw event" is not something that doesn't exist, but is certainly something which is of no use to us.

The facts and stories we create affect each other mutually. A fact can dictate the path a story takes. For instance, if I believed in the divine right of kings to rule, and the history I wrote was underwritten by this belief, then the execution of Charles I would not allow my story to continue with any degree of conviction. (If he had the God-given right to rule, and therefore the implicit right to be *alive* so that he could exercise this right to rule, clearly no mere person could take his life.) Accordingly, whatever I made out of the execution--whether I called it 'murder' or 'justice' or 'execution'--I would not be in any doubt that Charles I was dead, and would therefore have to revise my thinking--my story--with regard to divine right. (It is true that we categorize people according to whether they are living or dead, but this is still just a linguistic way of categorizing things. Some people would argue that it was only Charles's body that was dead, and that the essential Charles--his soul--was still alive.)

The story, of course, will certainly affect how any of the facts it contains should be taken. One of the main things we do when we tell a story is make the claim that all the events contained in it are *relevant* to one another. I will return to this point later, and in the next chapter.

I want to note that there *is* a legitimate use of the word 'fact', and it is exemplified in the sentence above about World War II. If someone, for instance, should say that this war started in 1914, we would say, "No, that was World War I. The fact is, World War II started in 1939." I could say this because *no* story--no history--claims that the second war started in 1914. All the stories agree on this point--that it didn't start in 1914. So one can legitimately say that something is *not* a fact. What *is* a fact, on the other hand, will always depend on the language and perspective of the speaker, and the story that is being told.

The reason for labouring this point is that I want to examine the concept 'story', because I think it is the genus of which history is a species, as it were. (It is not really relevant, but it is perhaps interesting to remember that the word 'fact' has its etymological origin in the Latin verb meaning either 'to do' or 'to *make*', while the word 'drama' derives from the Greek verb meaning not only 'to act', but also 'to do'.) Before going on to see if there is any real way of distinguishing between a history and a story, I would like analyze the concept of 'story'.

Stories and Imitation

For various reasons, I will begin by examining the concept of literature that is developed in Aristotle's *Poetics*. First, it is the root of virtually all treatises

on poetry down to this century. Secondly, it does not commit the error common to many other treatises, that is, it does not confuse the question, "What is literature?" with the question, "What is *good* literature?" (Horace, for instance, claims that literature is something that both delights and instructs. However, this is also to claim that literature that fails either to delight or instruct just is not literature.)¹² Finally, I find Aristotle's analysis wanting in certain ways that are very interesting for my present purposes.

To avoid confusion, I want to specify that when I use the word 'story', I will be referring to the whole of a work of literature, and not merely to the plot. When Aristotle means to refer to the plot (which is often translated as 'fable', 'action' or 'story'), 'plot' is the word I will use. Finally, for the present, I will be referring only to those stories that can be said to contain plots.

For Aristotle, the various forms of literature--in my terminology, 'stories'--"are all, viewed as a whole, modes of imitation."¹³ That is: there is life or reality on the one hand, and a depiction of this life or reality on the other. The depiction is imitative: art copies.

What it copies are actions, things done, and these things are done by people who are either good or bad.¹⁴ The imitation concerns itself therefore with *what happens* in the world. The basic elements of the story are the "Fable, or

Plot, Characters, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Melody."¹⁵ The most important of these elements is the plot, or "the combination of incidents of the story."¹⁶

The main criteria upon which the construction of a plot depend are completeness and coherence. As to completeness, "a whole is that which has beginning, middle, and end."¹⁷ As to coherence, "that which makes no perceptible difference by its presence or absence is no real part of the whole."¹⁸ In fact, the notion of unity comprises both coherence and completeness: a plot should start somewhere, go somewhere, end somewhere, and include nothing that is irrelevant.

The pivotal notion in the above is that of 'imitation'. Since I have already argued against the idea that there is a world of raw events (or actions) that is just there for us to witness, that there are meaningful, prepackaged events that we have only to open our eyes to see, I will repeat only that we can't imitate "what happens," because there is nothing to imitate until events have been made meaningful in the ways specified above. However, there are two other important points to be made against the notion that art is imitative.

First, let's grant that a plot must be complete, that is, have a beginning, middle and end. But, as I tried to point out with reference to events, beginnings and endings of stories are highly arbitrary things. Consider: if I tell

you about how my day has been, I must start somewhere. If I begin by saying that I am tired because I awoke after only four hours sleep, that is a possible beginning; but why not start with the reason for my only getting four hours sleep, for instance, that a friend from out of town had suddenly arrived on my doorstep last night and that we'd talked till very late? Why not start--as I very well might if you were unacquainted with my friend--with the history of the friendship? If I want to speak at all, I must begin somewhere; but as soon as I *do begin*, I have started telling a story, because all such limiting is artificial. The beginning is not, of course, arbitrary to the story: it indicates precisely where I want to begin. What is artificial and arbitrary is where I want to begin the story.

Similarly, the end of my story needn't coincide with the end of the day. It might easily involve what I was going to do tomorrow, or next week, or several years from now.

If art were imitative, there would have to be beginnings and endings "in reality," as it were. We would be able to perceive such-and-such an event as the natural beginning to a series of subsequent events. However, this is tantamount to superstition, a belief in omens. It also presupposes that we can predict the future. I think it is more sensible to say that we make beginnings out of past events once we begin to feel that certain events are

connected, and we want to find out what precipitated them. In fact, we make beginnings out of events when we want to tell a story.

The second major point I wish to make against the notion that art is imitative is already implicit in Aristotle's criterion for the construction of coherent plots: they should contain no incident that is irrelevant. However, this is to say two things. First, it is to say that the story-teller must make a selection, must determine which events to include in the story and which to omit. If this is true, then the story-teller cannot be imitating unless events themselves are transparently relevant, unless we somehow experience them already as relevant. It seems obvious that this is not the case. (The concept of relevance will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.)

Secondly, the activity of story-telling is, in part, the act of making events relevant to one another, of claiming that there is a connection between the events in the story. But which events are made relevant to each other will depend on who is telling the story--on both the bias and perspective of the story-teller.

First, bias. Every story contains a bias. If we do not see it, that simply means that we have the same biases as the author. To see this, let me play with literature a little and reconstruct the plot of *Oedipus Rex*. Let us say

that Oedipus, upon finding out that his lover was his mother and that he had killed his father, decided that things had turned out for the best. His father had, after all, tried to commit premeditated infanticide, and his mother was just a woman he had met and fallen in love with. Having realized this, Oedipus then declares to the people of Thebes that he has committed a crime, but that it is a justifiable one; the Thebans agree, and pestilence and famine are driven from the land (i.e., the gods approve).

What would be the bias behind such a tale? Well, it would be that incest is not inherently wrong, that love could justify even the mating of a mother and her son. It would be that the killing of a father is not wrong, that retaliation in kind is something we should accept. It would be both these things, with the sanction both of the people and, more importantly, the gods.

This is easily seen. But one doesn't have to play with literature to see bias. One has only to read it from the perspective of the late twentieth century. In the *Odyssey*, Penelope is faithful to her husband for twenty years. Odysseus, on the other hand, has a sexual relationship with Calypso that lasts seven years and ends only after he has actually set sail for Ithaca. The concluding sexual episode occurs directly after he tells Calypso of his longing, not for Penelope, but for home.

"My lady goddess, here is no cause for anger.
My quiet Penelope--how well I know--

would seem a shade before your majesty,
 death and old age being unknown to you,
 while she must die. Yet, it is true, each day
 I long for home, long for the sight of home.
 If any god has marked me out again
 for shipwreck, my tough heart can undergo it.
 What hardships have I not long since endured
 at sea, in battle! Let the trial come."

Now as he spoke the sun set, dusk drew on,
 and they retired, this pair, to the inner cave
 to revel and rest softly, side by side.¹⁹

The canon of western literature is many things, of course, but one of the things much of it is, at least from the present perspective, is a chronicle of sexism.²⁰ However, it is clear that western authors either did not think they were being derisive towards women, or thought that they were right to be so derisive. When Schopenhauer wrote the following, he was making a claim with which many people of his time would agree:

Women are directly fitted for acting as the nurses, and teachers of our early childhood by the fact that they are themselves childish, frivolous and short-sighted: in a word, they are big children all their life long--a kind of intermediate stage between the child and the full-grown man, who is man in the strict sense of the word.²¹

In fact, so obvious was the claim that he did not see the contradiction inherent in it: how is it, one wonders, that people who are "childish, frivolous and short-sighted" can be the best teachers of our children?

It is, of course, always more difficult to see the bias behind something we agree with. For instance, it is an article of faith in the west that of all forms of

government, democracy is the best. According to this belief, the great story of the world this century has been the struggle of different peoples toward democracy. In a democracy, it is said, all citizens have the right to their own freedom, as long as they don't contravene the freedom of others.

But is such a society really desirable? Certainly, Plato did not think so. Plato, in the *Republic*, thought that any society ought to be governed by those who are ethically unimpeachable, and who do not, in fact, want the job of governing. It goes without saying, here, that I am not concerned to argue against democracy as a form of government. I am simply pointing out the obvious: Plato makes a very good case for meritocracy. Should not those who deserve to rule, in fact rule? But even to ask such a question today is political heresy.

The second argument against art as imitation with regard to the criterion of coherence is, as mentioned above, the fact that events are always perceived from a particular perspective. If any event that can be included in history must also be a perceived event, then any discussion of an event must also take into account the perspective of the observer. Take a simple every day event: a child is born.

From which perspectives can this be experienced? Among the many possible, these are certainly conceivable:

1. The child's mother is relieved that the pregnancy is finally at an end, is astonished at the amount of pain she is capable of handling, and is looking forward to the business of child-rearing;
2. The child's father is anxious about everything: the welfare of both spouse and child, his ability to acquit himself well in the role of father, etc.;
3. The child's grandparents, having been through all this before, are grateful there were no complications, and find the concerns of the parents endearing but almost comical;
4. The child's godfather, who, for the purposes of this example, has sexist inclinations, is secretly sad the child was a girl;
5. The child's godmother, who knows of this sadness, is concerned to shield the parents from it, and is wondering how to shepherd the godfather off somewhere;
6. The hospital doctor is mechanically performing something very routine and is thinking only of the next childbirth;
7. The nurse is concerned about sanitary conditions;
8. Certain friends are delighted; others wonder about the sagacity of the parents having had the child, given their financial uncertainty; others think merely, "Oh, I didn't even know she was pregnant;" and still others never hear of the event at all.

These perspectives could be multiplied at great length, but the point has been made--even without speculating on what is going on in the mind of the newborn. The "events" will have been extremely different for everyone concerned, and consequently so will be the stories they will tell. This last, of course, is not only because of the differing perspectives, but because in a coherent story each event must be relevant to the others. For instance, since the doctor's concern about his or her next delivery is probably

irrelevant to the mother, it will not figure in her story of the event.

The Other Aristotelian Criteria

If a story is not an imitation, neither is it necessarily about an action. This is not to say that literary works have been written in which *nothing* happens--although Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, for instance, come remarkably close to this--but that literary works have been written in which action is only of marginal importance. The novel is by far the most dominant literary form today, and the novel is often about people, their thoughts, their philosophies, their emotions, and so on. Think of summing up *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in the fashion that Aristotle sums up the *Odyssey*.²² In *Tess*, then: A certain girl becomes pregnant out of wedlock; the child dies. She begins a new life and marries. Her husband finds out about her previous pregnancy and leaves her. After many episodes, she begins to live unlawfully with the man who first seduced her. Her husband returns, but all for nought; the girl kills her seducer and is hanged.

This would seem to miss the point of the novel entirely. The novel is about the "ache of modernism," in Hardy's words; it is about the pain of living in a society that is rapidly losing faith in the values that were once

the foundation stones of its institutions. It cannot be about "a certain girl" and what she does, although there is a girl in the story, and she does do things.

In fact, stories (in my sense of the word) were never exclusively about action. Many Greek myths were about *things* and how these things originated. They range from how the universe came into being, to where people go when they die, to how it happens there are things like echoes and hyacinths and different sorts of trees and birds.

Now, there is a sense in which all stories must include action, in that *something must happen* in a story. This may be an account of what someone has (or some people have) done. However, it can also be an account of what *has* happened to one or more people. One would be hard pressed, for instance, to think of *The Book of Job* in terms of some action Job has performed.²³

If we think of a story simply as an account of "what happened," then much of the rest of Aristotle's analysis of literature is not immediately relevant. If there is no action, there certainly doesn't need to be an agent in a story. This, in fact, is just as well, because there are many famous works of literature in which what happens to the characters is more important than what they do. If the thesis of Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* is even remotely correct, then the new literary direction exhibited by the novel:

is towards the delineation of the domestic life and the private experience of the characters who belong to it: the two go together--we get inside their minds as well as inside their houses.²⁴

And one of the main things readers find inside these minds is the feeling of love. "Dr. Johnson, with the *novella* in mind, defined a 'novel' as a 'smal. tale, generally of love'."²⁵ The feeling of love, at least in its modern usage, is clearly something that happens to one--is a passion rather than an action--so any novel about love will be as much about what happens to people when they fall in love, as about what they do when they fall in love.

Quite apart from this, however, if we are able to tell stories that don't have agents, we can comfortably tell stories about hurricanes and volcanoes, without having to worry about exaggerated personification. "Who did what?" is just a special case, then, of "What happened?"

Furthermore, if we are only concerned with what happened, the characters in our stories don't necessarily have to be located within the ethical domain. Is Bartleby either good or bad? Is Leopold Bloom? King Lear may indeed have been "more sinned against than sinning," but was he a *good* man? Does it not spoil the tragedy to think of him as such?

If the characters are freed from having to be seen within an ethical framework, then neither does a story have to have "thought," or philosophical significance. Of

course, stories often *will* have good and bad characters, and some sort of philosophical import, but these things are not essential to them.

And finally, and briefly, diction, melody, spectacle do not seem necessarily tied to stories. Novels do not use either melody or spectacle, and even the most ineloquent people may tell stories.

Before going on, I should note that my use of the word 'story' is much broader than the various types of poetry mentioned by Aristotle at the beginning of his *Poetics*. However, I think the foregoing analysis can both be narrowly applied to Aristotle's subject matter as well as more broadly applied to any telling of a story.

History: Making the Past Meaningful

We do not imitate in literature; we strive to make meaningful. If we are trying to represent the world in a work of fiction, we strive to create a fictional system which will *seem* to mirror "reality." If our work is good enough, we will think we have succeeded; we will have the illusion of having recorded the essence of what is real, what really happened. If, on the other hand, we are not seeking to represent the world--as is the case with post-modern literature, absurdist drama, fantasy tales, and so on--we are still most likely trying to say *something* about the world (that nothing can be said about it, that it is absurd, that our imaginations are fertile, etc.), that is,

trying to make something meaningful. Finally, even if we are *not* trying to say something about the world, the presupposition is that something meaningful is being said. For without such a presupposition, a work of literature must either be mute or be nonsensical.²⁶

A story is not an interpretation of what happens, but a construction put upon events that makes them comprehensible in a certain way (with reference to other events that have been selected to this purpose).

History and poetry are closely allied in Aristotle's thought. "Poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature of universals, whereas those of history are singulars."²⁷ Aristotle's point would be that both history and poetry are imitations, and so are of the same general nature. My point is that they are alike in that they both make events meaningful, and make them meaningful with respect to other events:

But surely the facts of history are not created! Surely they are not different for every individual! We come back to Carr's mountain: it just seems to be *there* for all to see and describe. The answer is again: yes, something is there; yes, something happened. But until it is experienced, it is as if nothing were there, as if nothing had happened. And until it is described in language in some way, from some perspective, whatever it is and whatever has

happened is not meaningful. There is simply nothing we can do with it. The world and its ways are a vast randomness without edges of any sort.

Proust, in *Remembrance of Things Past*, makes this point poetically. His written remembrances of his childhood home and town are, he argues, an attempt to rescue them from oblivion. And yet, with some pain, he recognizes that his efforts are in vain; they are always impossibly biased. He sees the town which he calls 'Combray':

always at the same evening hour, isolated from all its possible surroundings, detached and solitary against its shadowy background, the bare minimum of scenery necessary...to the drama of my undressing, as though all Combray had consisted of but two floors joined by a slender staircase, and as though there had been no time there but seven o'clock at night.²⁸

But then, what can be the difference between history and fiction? Surely there are differences? The answer to this is: of course there are. But these differences are not traceable to differences between reality and fiction, they are traceable merely to the attitude we have towards those two fictions. Human beings have the capacity to think of the world as it is, and as it *is not*. The point is almost too trivial to make: we can alternate between the actual and the possible.

What is important to understand here is that creating history is not just analogous to story-telling: it is the same thing. There are no differences between the stories of fiction and history, although there are major differences in

how we regard each. I can tell the stories of Santa Claus and Napoleon, and there will nothing in either story that will indicate whether it is fictional or historical. What will differ is the context in which I am asked to take the story. I will be asked to regard the latter as *true*, or as something that *actually* happened. If I am writing a story, as opposed to a history, I will myself be aware that the events of the story never happened. But if I bothered myself with verisimilitude, I could pass my story off as a history.²⁹ That is, the difference between history and fiction resides in one's attitude towards it. Beyond this, there are no differences.

This is why it is so easy for "history" to turn into fiction, why history is so easily revised. New perspectives not only create new interpretations, but also new facts, and what previously passed for history becomes little better than an historical novel. Was classical Athens an explosion of dramatic and philosophical genius, or a culture built upon slave labour, or one of the most misogynistic societies the west has ever seen, or just a place that worshipped false gods? These are just four possibilities amongst many others. And if I choose one story, I will also be choosing the facts that fit that story and be making them "the facts."

History and Philosophy

Just as no sound is meaningful outside the context of a language in which that sound may be a word, so no event is meaningful outside of the context of a history in which what happens may become an event. If I write history, my goal is to create a coherent system out of the past. But it is the writing of history--that is, history as the depiction of what *really* happened, or as the attempt to correctly interpret the past--which is the very thing that makes the activity a self-defeating one. That is because it is the very writing of history that creates coherence, and endows events with meaning. As I write history, I am writing a story, and this story forever mediates between me and the "raw" events of the past I wish to write about. I cannot help but see the past through this story.

No history is written in stone, of course. Just as language evolves, so can history. History can be rewritten and revised as new discoveries are made, discoveries that must be made meaningful by fitting them into the existing system, or reinterpreting it somehow. Or history can be rewritten and revised to accommodate the prejudices of a particular culture or ideology. The point is simply this: as soon as we start to write, we are telling a story, making events meaningful with respect to one another, mediating our view of the past, and hence cutting ourselves off from what *really* happened.

All history, then, is already a philosophy of history, and whether we see it with Carlyle as "the biography of great men," or with Marx as "the history of class struggle," or with Shakespeare as "sad stories of the death of kings," does not in the end matter. Or better: it is not in the end possible to *decide* what we should view as important in history, what we should stress. To decide, we would need access to an immediately meaningful world where events just happened and we just discovered and recorded them. However, we do not have access to this world, and so all histories are simply stories we tell about the world.

Finally, this is why there can be no such thing, in the commonly accepted sense of the phrase, as a philosophy of history, or historicism, in Popper's sense of the term. By historicism, he means:

an approach to the social sciences which assumes that *historical prediction* is their principal aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the 'rhythms' or the 'patterns', the 'laws' or the 'trends' that underlie the evolution of history.³⁰

We have no access to something undiluted and immediate, a series of events unpolluted by perspective or the desire to make them systematic. We would need a bedrock of experienceable facts upon which to build any philosophical interpretation. Without this, speculation is idle, and the philosophy of history impossible.

Preliminary Conclusions

The point of the preceding two chapters was not to show that we have no knowledge of the world or of history, but rather to show that whatever knowledge we *do* have is always within some kind of a context, because learning, in the sense of gaining knowledge, just is contextualization. That is: I am not at all taking a skeptical stance with regard to knowledge. It seems to me that Wittgenstein is correct when he says:

From its *seeming* to me--or to everyone--to be so, it doesn't follow that it *is* so.

What we can ask is whether it can make sense to doubt it.³¹

If the context is sufficiently specified--and often very little specifying is necessary--I can claim to know something, and it will make little sense to doubt that I know it. If I know what happens to water when it boils, and I see steam exploding from my kettle, I may be said to know that the water in the kettle is boiling. If I wish to doubt this, I have to ask whether there has ever been an occasion when I saw steam coming out of the kettle when the water inside was not boiling--it is not sufficient to ask simply, "Have my senses ever deceived me?" The correct question should be, "In what contexts have my senses deceived me?" (This shows how pseudo-questions about my own existence and the existence of the external world may be dealt with. In which context could I doubt my own existence? I can't doubt

if I don't exist. In which context could I doubt the existence of the external world? Only one in which the external world didn't exist, and then I couldn't even ask the question.)

However, this is anticipating somewhat. In the next two chapters, I will be discussing the traditional criteria for knowledge, and so will not go further into the matter here.

If I am not questioning whether, in general, we know the things we claim to know, then there is a sense in which the preceding chapters are trivial. If our knowledge of the world is still knowledge, what difference does it make that it is a mediated knowledge? And if there is no difference, what is the point of talking about it?

On the other hand, I think there is a point, because if our experience of the world is mediated by language, then first of all, there are simply some things we can't talk about, and secondly, we can know exactly what these things are. It is one of the pretensions of science, for instance, to think it is talking about the world *as it really is*. This will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

The main conclusion I wish to draw from the preceding two chapters, however, is just that if objects are mediated by language and the past by historiography, then the self, if it is viewed as an object, must also be mediated. This is perhaps a disturbing conclusion--that we are forever

strangers to ourselves, that what we are "in reality" is something unknown to us--and it will be the business of the fifth and sixth chapters to elaborate with greater precision why this is and what it means.

First, however, because I wish not only to discuss the self, but also the *knowledge* we may be said to have of the self, I want to examine the concept of knowledge. In the next two chapters, then, I will be looking at the two main avenues to knowledge that have dominated western philosophy, experiment and speculation, or empiricism and metaphysics. My argument is that the first yields no knowledge and the second is expressive merely of the desire for knowledge.

PART TWO

KNOWLEDGE

(THE TRADITIONAL METHODOLOGIES)

CHAPTER 3

THE POVERTY OF EMPIRICISM

Empiricism has meant many things to many people, but it can be broadly characterized as a reaction to metaphysical knowledge claims. Metaphysical knowledge claims have two salient features: they are claims about the world that (1) are founded solely on reasoning or thinking about the world, and (2) cannot be either verified or refuted through our perceptions of the world. Sensory experience, therefore, plays no part in either the formulation or evaluation of metaphysical claims.

Historically, it is against metaphysical positions that empiricism has been launched. Aristotle attacks Plato's theory of Forms, and Locke attacks Descartes's theory of innate ideas, for instance.¹ That is, empiricism starts off as a negative statement: I cannot know anything about the world unless I have experienced it in the world. (From inside four walls, I cannot know what the weather is like outside.) For an empiricist, then, experience is seen as a necessary condition of knowledge. If I have knowledge of something, I can infer that I have experience of it. Such a claim is essential to all varieties of empiricism.

Now, from the empiricist's point of view, at least, the claim that knowledge logically implies experience is in one sense a good claim. It eliminates metaphysics; metaphysics is "nothing but sophistry and illusion," in Hume's words. However, there are many senses in which the claim is a bad one.

For one thing, it is really only a declaration of opposition to metaphysics; it does not demonstrate that metaphysical speculation is worthless. The metaphysician may counter by saying that experience is delusory. The empiricist will counter this by saying that all of what commonly passes for knowledge just *is* based on this allegedly delusory experience--and that this experience is all we have to go on. The metaphysician will then counter by saying that those truths we hold most certain--the truths of mathematics and logic, for instance--are known by reason alone. Indeed, if we need to depend on experience to know the propositions of logic and mathematics, they will turn out to be only inductively probable rather than deductively certain. And so on.

This discussion is a function of the empiricist's claim, and helps to delineate what is wrong with it. First of all, the claim itself (for brevity's sake, "knowledge logically implies experience") is hardly an empirical one. Can I make such a claim on the basis of my sensory experience? No; such experience does not tell me anything

about logical implication. Is there any experience I can have that would either verify or refute this claim? Clearly not. Such experience would have to include all that will be known in the future. In fact, the empiricist's claim very neatly fits the definition given above of *metaphysical* knowledge claims. But all this really shows is that the empiricist's claim is not a knowledge claim at all--it is simply a recommendation about what *ought* to count as knowledge.

Secondly, the claim may easily lead to skepticism. It says that if I have knowledge, then there must be some experience from which that knowledge arose, but it doesn't say whether or not I can know anything. And this leaves many empiricists in a very uncomfortable situation, because they are often interested in promoting scientific knowledge at the expense of speculative knowledge. They want there to be knowledge, but it has to be knowledge of the right sort of things, and arrived at in the right sort of way: through experience. However, the sentence, "experience implies knowledge," is, of course, *not* deducible from the sentence, "knowledge implies experience,"² and furthermore, it is just false.

It is not true that my experience of something will yield knowledge of it. I could be standing in a room full of people I knew, and the room could be dark. Here, I would certainly be experiencing *something*, but (for the sake of

the argument) I wouldn't know who was in the room. I can experience countless falling bodies without ever knowing about gravity, inertia, friction or acceleration. A more interesting example: people quite often know what it means to fall in love *before* they fall in love. Or perhaps it would be more cautious to say: they have a list of symptoms --they do not really know what it's like until it happens. However, here it is possible to know the symptoms, and experience sensations that match the symptoms, and yet still be mistaken. We have many words for experiences like this: puppy-love, infatuation, lust, and so on. So here, even knowing what the experience is supposed to be like, people may have experiences that do not lead to knowledge of "what love is." Even more curiously--although not so if one accepts that emotions are learned--it is often the case that the experience of love yields knowledge of what love is *only* if we already know the sort of experience we're meant to be having. Otherwise, the experience may make no sense at all.³

Furthermore, if my claim is that my experience of something allows me to infer that I have knowledge of it, I cannot from this claim infer that if I *don't* experience something, I can have no knowledge of it--the claim that is so much at the core of empiricism. (To do so would involve the fallacy of denying the antecedent.)

There is, of course, a perfectly normal sense in which we can speak of experience yielding knowledge. Take a simple case: I wish to learn how to play a game. Now, there are immediately three contexts that I must invoke in order to play.⁴ First, I must realize it is a game.⁵ Secondly, I must learn the rules that constitute the game, that is, what I am trying to do in the game, or what the goals of the game are. A constitutive rule may be one shared with some other games (as in, "the goal is to win"), or it may be specific to a particular game (as in, "the goal is to kick the ball into the other team's net"). Finally, I must learn what rules regulate me as I pursue the former goal--what I can and cannot do in order to achieve the desired result.

I call these three things 'contexts' because it is only with reference to them that my behaviour during, or my participation in, the game is made meaningful. For instance, say I am playing chess, and really have no interest in the game. When it is my move, I take whatever pawn is handiest and move it one square forward. On every subsequent move, I do the same thing. I mount no strategy, and I defend none of my pieces. Quite soon, I will be accused of "not playing the game." And this is literally correct: I am not playing the game. In fact, I have not identified what I am doing as a game at all; to me, it is a nuisance, and so any "move" is as good as the next, and none has any meaning to me.

It is much more easily seen that the constitutive and regulative rules make my behaviour in a game meaningful. If I smash a ball over a net, and no one else is on the tennis court, then all I have done is smashed a ball; I have not served an ace. If I hop my bishop over a series of pawns and think that by so doing I have captured them, my opponent may well have something to say. I cannot serve an ace when I am not playing tennis; I cannot play checkers when I am playing chess.

It is only after I have "invoked" these contexts that I can start playing the game: only then can I begin to deploy some sort of a strategy--start to plan how I should behave, given the allowable behaviour, to achieve the desired goal of the game. Now, unless the game I am learning is an extremely simple one (a children's game, say), it will take some time before I master the game and how I want to play it. In most cases I will master the constitutive rules first, as they are usually very simple. The first is most often, "Win!" The second is most often, "This counts as winning." The regulative rules, on the other hand, must be assimilated over time, especially if the game is a complicated one. What happens if one reneges in bridge? What happens if a base-runner reaches home plate but fails to touch third base? The more I play the games I am playing, the more I will be familiar with the rules. Once I have mastered the rules, I will, for the most part,

not even think of my behaviour in terms of it being rule-governed. My game-behaviour will seem perfectly meaningful in and of itself. In a given game-situation, I will just "naturally" do what I do. Once I have played the game enough, and have seen how other people play it, I will develop a strategy for playing in terms of other people's game-behaviour. Thus, experience can lead to knowledge: I can learn how to play the game.

But, in the case of games, anyway, it can be said that experience leads to knowledge only--because there is a rule-book! If I am in some doubt about whether I am behaving properly, I can consult the rule-book. I would like to say: the rule-book defines the context in which the game is played, demarcates what behaviour will be thought of as meaningful. On other behaviour, it says nothing at all, and so other behaviour will simply not be meaningful within the context of the game. The rule-books on bridge, for instance, say nothing about sneezing. Whether or not I sneeze during a game of bridge is irrelevant.

What I am driving at is this: what can be known is always known within a particular context. Certainly the widest context for my knowledge is my language: if I know something, and can express this knowledge in language, then what I know is already mediated by language. However, there are clearly much narrower contexts that define much of what I know. If I were asked, for instance, what I knew about

British history, I might respond by asking, "Do you mean from Roman times, or from after the Norman invasion?" Or: "Do you mean my knowledge of kings and queens, or my knowledge of social conditions?" If I were asked to talk about the growth of beer-production, and I responded with a biography of Queen Elizabeth II, what I said would be irrelevant.

"Yes, but there is *some* sense in which you know something about Queen Elizabeth II. It can be relevant, and therefore you can say you know it." This is true, but it is only relevant within the context of kings and queens, and it is only within that context that I can be said to know what I know.

Also, I may certainly know something and not be able to express what I know. I may know "how a clarinet sounds."⁶ But suppose someone were to play a tape-recording of a clarinet for me, and then simply ask, "What is this?" The question would make no sense. I could, of course, *guess* that the person wanted me to name the musical instrument that was playing, could guess that the questioner's intention was more clearly expressed as, "What musical instrument do you think is playing?" That is: I could invoke a context. But what would stop me from focusing on the quality of the instrument or the recording, the piece of music the instrument was playing, what sort of emotional response the music evoked in me, and so on?

"What is this?" "It's Benny Goodman." "It's the opening of Brahms's second piano concerto." "It's the grandfather," meaning the bassoon part in Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. The proper answer to, "What is this?" is just, "What do you mean by *this*? And this is just to say that before I can respond to the question, I must know which context I am meant to be responding within.

Now, if all knowledge is knowledge within a context, what happens when we want to say we know something about the world through our experience of it? Here is a case where there is no rule-book. It is as though we were watching an infinitely complicated game and were forced to guess the rules. Indeed, even to suppose that the players are following rules is an assumption on our part. However, let's for the moment grant this assumption. (I will return to this assumption in the next chapter.) We watch the players and try to determine the rules of the game from what they are doing.

But why not focus on the players' facial expressions? This would tell us a lot if the game happened to be poker. Why not focus on the apparently irrelevant gesticulating and chatter between the players? This tactic has been used to win chess games. Why not examine the social relations between the players? Perhaps one player will deliberately lose in order to please another.

There are two things of especial importance to note here. First, any interpretation of what the players are doing will create, rather than simply interpret, facts. If I am interpreting only the players' moves, then everything else will be irrelevant, and the moves will *become* the facts. Secondly, it is obvious that *many* interpretations are possible, and even that many mutually incompatible but internally coherent interpretations may exist alongside each other.

In his book *Choice and Chance*, Brian Skyrms gives a vivid illustration of the difficulties involved here. He says, "Often intelligence and aptitude tests contain problems where one is given a sequence of numbers and asked to continue the sequence; for example:

i. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, ...;"⁷

We would naturally give our answer as '6'. This, however, would just be to privilege one generating formula over all other possible ones.

Indeed whatever number we wish to predict for the sixth member of the series, there is a generating function that will fit the given members of the series and that will yield the prediction we want. It is a mathematical fact that in general this is true. For any finite string of numbers which begins a series, there are generating functions that fit that string of given numbers and yield whatever next member is desired. Whatever prediction we wish to make, we can find a regularity whose projection will license that prediction.⁸

The reason for mentioning this is that it allows me to elucidate the way I think the word 'interpretation' should

be understood here. The word commonly means, "to explain the meaning of something," "to make something understandable." One sort of interpreter translates from one language to another. Another sort brings out the meaning of a literary text. What is lost in such everyday notions of interpretation is that the interpreter *makes something meaningful* to another person. The reason interpreters can do this is that they already perceive as *meaningful* something that other people do not.

So, to interpret, then, is to establish a context in which to view something, to make it meaningful in some way. Once again, I return to the assumption I mentioned at the beginning, "that there is something real that I can know." Interpretation is too often thought of as putting the correct construction upon something that is already meaningful. And this is certainly what interpretation is when, for instance, I translate from one language to another. But it is not at all what interpretation is when the elements in my interpretation are not already arranged in a system, when it is my interpretation itself that arranges them in a system and so endows them with meaning. Of course, it is this latter situation we find ourselves in when we are doing empirical science. The world does not come equipped with a rule-book.

When I want to talk about the world, then--not some part of the world that has a clearly established context

within which I can talk, but about *how things really are*--all empiricism affords me is knowledge within existing interpretations of the world. It cannot give me knowledge of the world itself.

Interpretive Arguments and Hume's Problem of Induction

It is with reference to this idea of interpretation that Hume's problem of induction may be solved. He says:

All the objects of human reason or inquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, to wit, "Relations of Ideas," and "Matters of Fact."⁹

The fact is, Hume's distinction simply eliminates too much. It eliminates history, psychology, and sociology as "objects of human reason or inquiry," and it eliminates philosophy. Furthermore, it also effectively eliminates science. Carl Hempel says bluntly that "if science were thus to limit itself to the study of observable phenomena, it would hardly be able to formulate any precise and general explanatory laws at all."¹⁰

There is at least one thing that is missing from Hume's two-item list. He eliminates analysis of, or reflection upon, our experience as a possible object of human inquiry.¹¹ That is: he eliminates the very thing I have been focusing on, the fact that we interpret, or make meaningful, the world of our experience.

In a later chapter (chapter six), I will be discussing a number of different philosophical models that purport to

show what constitutes the self. One particular conception of the self dominates them all, however, and that is that human beings are essentially two-sided entities: the one side reasons, while the other side experiences.

This dichotomized version of the self has a long and rich lineage. It is to be found in the Greek distinction between the active and the contemplative life. It is there is Plato's simile of the line.¹² Descartes employs it when he sharply divides sensory experience from thinking. Hume begins his *Inquiry* by distinguishing between two sorts of philosophers, the first considering people "chiefly as born for action," and the second considering us "in the light of a reasonable rather than an active being."¹³ The 'reason and experience' model can be seen working in the distinction between pure and practical reason¹⁴, pure and applied science, deductive and inductive logic, the inner mind and the external world, and so on. It is a deeply-ingrained way of thinking of the self in our culture.

In this model, reason is active, experience is passive. We absorb our sensations of the world, and our reason works on them. The world comes to us scrambled, like a disassembled jigsaw puzzle, and our only job is to put the pieces in the correct order. We assume, then, that there must be a *correct interpretation* of how the world is.

But this sort of interpretation would have to assume that the elements of our experience are already meaningful

to us. It would have to assume that our interpretation of the world were analogous to our interpretation of a foreign language. If I wish to translate, "Il faut qu'on se revoit demain," I can do so if I know how to speak French--to put matters a little simplistically, if I already know what the French words mean. But our experience of the world is not like this: a tree doesn't tell me it is a tree. The world is not a place presented to us by God, already arranged in a predetermined hierarchy of being, that we have simply to *name*. But if it is not, then it is simply wrong to think in terms of one particular interpretation of the world being the *correct* one, because this assumes we could somehow verify this--check the rule-book.

It is only the apparent divorce between reason and experience that has led to questions such as, "Why can I know through unaided reason?" and, "What can I know on the basis of my experience?" both of which are, in one sense anyway, wrong-headed questions. Plato's Forms may be the object of intellectual knowledge only, but our knowledge of them arises from our experience of earthly beauty.¹⁵

Descartes's "thinking thing" begins in the first meditation by thinking about the opinions he has formed about the world, and how they may be mistaken. On the other hand, Hume's concerns about the origin of our causal thinking did not come about through any *experience* he had--indeed, it could not, for this experience would have had to have been

one of an absent cause--but through reasoning about his experience.

"Could we not say that interpretation should be thought of as a form of reasoning? To reason, after all, *is* to make judgments and inferences, and this seems to be exactly what interpretation is." Yes, we could say this, but it would be confusing, because of the traditional association of reason with deductively valid systems. These are the ones mentioned by Glaucon in the *Republic*: "I understand, said he, that you are speaking of what falls under geometry and the kindred arts."¹⁶ Nothing had changed by Hume's time; his examples are, "Geometry, Algebra, and Arithmetic."¹⁷ The dichotomy of deductive versus inductive logic is still seen today as encompassing the sorts of things we can know and the certainty with which we know them.

"Should we think of interpretation of part of the way we experience?" There are two answers. First, if this is meant in the sense that seeing something through one's language as what it is in the language, the answer must be no. My experience of the world as mediated by language is an immediate experience. This may seem like a contradiction, but consider the following: when I put on glasses to correct my vision, I immediately see objects with clear edges rather than blurry ones. Yet, there is no doubt

that my experience of these objects is mediated by the lenses in the glasses I am wearing.

The second answer is that to think of interpretation as being a facet of experience is, again, too confusing for the moment, because the idea that we experience passively is a very tenacious one. Furthermore, there is something quite different about, say, our experience of a tree, and our thinking about this experience. The latter is, in one sense, just another experience. However, it has this peculiarity: if I think about my experience, this is a sort of meta-experience, a step backwards, so to speak, from the experience I am thinking about. If I then want to think about this "thinking about my experience," I once again have to step back. That is: the thing (or thought) I am reflecting about can never be the same as the act of reflecting *about it*. (Might this have been what Hume wanted to express when he said, "I can never catch *myself* at any time without a perception"?)¹⁸

Bearing this in mind, I would like to treat interpretation separately--although the separation is artificial--from both reason and experience.

"All reasonings," says Hume, "may be divided into two kinds, namely, demonstrative reasoning, or that concerning relations of ideas, and moral reasoning, or that concerning matter of fact and existence."¹⁹ I think this is wrong, and

I would like to introduce a third kind of argument, one I will simply call 'interpretive'.

It is interesting that philosophy has historically *ignored* interpretive arguments, because this is the very type of argument most often found in philosophical discussions. Take the argument of section II of Hume's *Inquiry*. He argues first that there is a difference between present sensation and our memories of past sensation. He calls the latter 'ideas', and claims that they are of copies the former, which he calls 'impressions'. The only difference between them is the greater "force and vivacity of the original sentiment."²⁰ He then says that thinking involves no more than "compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience."²¹ He claims to prove this in two ways. First, he claims that when we analyze our ideas, "they resolve themselves into such simple ideas as were copied from a precedent feeling or sentiment."²² Secondly, he claims that if we have never experienced something, we will have no corresponding idea of it. "A blind man can form no notion of colors, a deaf man of sounds."²³ His conclusion is: if we claim to have an idea, but find that this idea is not traceable to any impression, then this idea is meaningless.²⁴

In succinct form, and omitting the first proof (which is just a restatement of the first three premises), the argument reads as follows:

1. The contents of my present experience are impressions;
2. The contents of my memory are ideas;
3. All ideas derive from impressions.
4. Someone physically incapable of receiving a given impression will not have a corresponding idea.
5. Therefore, if a philosophical term is used that we don't understand, we can ask what idea it corresponds to and from what impression the idea derives. If we can't find one, the term is to be declared meaningless.

I find this one of Hume's least convincing arguments, but that is not the point. The point is: what sort of an argument is it? Is it deductively valid? Certainly not. The first mention of philosophical terms is in the conclusion. Is it inductively valid? Is it an inductive argument at all?

It could be construed as one, of course. I could restructure the argument so it read: in the past, all meaningless philosophical terms have been found not to derive from any idea or corresponding impression; so will all meaningless philosophical terms in the future. But this is not how the argument is meant, and put this way, it is obviously false. As Hume coined the word 'impression', it can hardly be the case that philosophical terms were declared meaningless for this reason *before Hume*. So what sort of an argument is it?

It is simpler to ask: what is Hume trying to do in his argument? Well, he is trying to eliminate metaphysical speculation. He thinks that metaphysical philosophy is not about anything at all--it is certainly not about anything in the world that he can experience. Now, given this, is there a way of interpreting experience and knowledge that will show that metaphysics *cannot* be about the world? Yes, there is. If we look at human beings, to speak anachronistically, as *if* they are video-cameras, then whatever is on the tape must be there as a result of the shutter having been open. If we find something on the tape that we are sure was never recorded, then whatever that is must result from a flaw in the tape itself.

This is therefore neither a deductive or inductive argument, but rather an argument about how we should interpret human experience. It is an attempt to explain how it is we experience. It is what I have called an 'interpretive' argument.

Hume's problem of induction, then, confuses inductive with interpretive arguments. The primary example in his inductive argument is the sun, and his concern is the justification for our assertion that it will rise tomorrow. This is well and good. Then, however, he says:

If we be, therefore, engaged by arguments to put trust in past experience and make it the standard of our future judgment, these arguments must be probable only, or such as regard matter of fact and real existence, according to the division above mentioned. But that there is no argument of this kind must appear if our

explication of that species of reasoning be admitted as solid and satisfactory. We have said that all arguments concerning existence are founded on the relation of cause and effect, that our knowledge of that relation is derived entirely from experience, and that all our experimental conclusions proceed upon the supposition that the future will be conformable to the past. To endeavour, therefore, the proof of this last supposition by probable arguments, or arguments regarding existence, must be evidently going in a circle and taking that for granted which is the very point in question.²⁵

I agree that both inductive and interpretive arguments "must be probable only," although they are probable in different ways. An inductive argument may be refuted, whereas an interpretive argument can only be shown to be incoherent (I will discuss this point thoroughly in the next chapter). However, my main point of disagreement with Hume is just this: the argument "that the future will be conformable to the past" is *not* an inductive argument.

On Hume's terms: neither the future nor the past can be ideas that derive from impressions. First, how could any individual idea actually be a copy of an impression unless every present impression also contained some element of "pastness"? If the impression did not, then the idea would contain something not contained in the original impression, and therefore would not be a copy of it. However, Hume cannot allow any "pastness" into his impressions, because they are by definition those things that impinge upon us in the present. Secondly, if it doesn't make sense to talk about the "pastness" inherent in impressions, it makes even

less sense to talk about "the past," an abstraction to which no set of impressions could ever correspond.

This argument, however, is conclusive as far as the future is concerned. It is a logical impossibility that we should ever have any experience of the future.

These difficulties disappear if we realize that Hume is interpreting experience when he talks of the future being conformable to the past. He is telling a story of great conventional weight: it is the story of past, present and future through which we interpret our memories, what we are experiencing now, and what we hope for or expect. As an interpretation, it stands above individual inductive arguments. In fact, it shapes our attitude towards inductive arguments. It says that we should accept that inductive arguments are good arguments. (This is not, of course, to say that we should accept any *particular* inductive argument as a good one. I am talking of inductive reasoning in general.)

But how are we to assess the value of an interpretive argument such as, "The future will be like the past"?²⁶ Is it, in fact, a good argument? These questions can be put in perspective by examining a counterclaim, that is, "The future will not be like the past." What would such a claim involve?

Well, it would not only make systematic inquiry pointless, it would make it *impossible*. All we could

predict would be that if, on the basis of past and present observation we were to predict something, we would be wrong. If the future is not like the past, then anything might occur--except for the very thing we were predicting. That is: we could make no sense at all out of the world.

In other words, if the world is to become meaningful and the stories we tell about it are to be coherent, this can happen only in one way: the world we find *must* be full of regularities--we must be able to make a system out of it. If we cannot, then it will remain unmeaningful to us, and we will have no knowledge of it. The future being like the past is an essential component in our project to make the world meaningful--to learn about, or interpret, the world. It is an assumption that is logically prior to any particular interpretation of the world.

Let me be clear on what I am *not* saying. I am not saying that we can predict the future, and I am certainly not saying that any particular interpretation can be right. What I am saying is that Hume's puzzle amounts to this: he is simply saying that one cannot, without contradiction, both *know the rules of the game* and *believe that every future is possible*. This is easily seen, in fact, with reference to familiar games. There is a rule in chess that says that bishops can move only along diagonals. Clearly, according to the rules, there are quite limited futures for a bishop in chess. If I attempted to move a bishop in a

vertical line up the board, and if a rule existed in chess that also sanctioned this move, the rules would contradict themselves. That is: if we know the rules, we can predict precisely what moves are possible for the bishop. It is not the case that any given future is possible.

However, Hume is clearly right when he says that a sentence such as "the sun will not rise tomorrow" neither contains nor results in a contradiction. What we can infer from this is: we don't know the rules of this particular game, the game being "nature" and the rules being the "laws of nature." Certainly if we *did* know the rules, and one of them was that the sun would rise tomorrow, a contradiction would result from Hume's sentence. But we don't know the rules. In this case, too, there isn't something real that we can know. There is just something real that we can make meaningful in a number of different ways.

In the end, then, my argument with Hume rests solely upon his contention that the justification of inductive reasoning involves question-begging. "That the future should be like the past" is not an inductive argument but an interpretive one, and therefore a presupposition not only of inductive arguments but all other forms of 'making meaningful'.

The Concept of Experience

There remain two related problems concerning empiricism that I want to discuss. The first has to do with

the concept 'experience' itself. The second concerns the theory of truth most often allied to empiricism, the correspondence theory, and the concept 'evidence'. That is, I want to ask the following questions. First, what is the sort of experience that may, in a certain context, lead me to make a knowledge claim? And second, what do I mean when I say such a claim is true, what do I mean when I claim that such-and-such is evidence for it?

The word 'experience' is an umbrella term used to refer to many different sorts of experiences. Let me list some.

1. We may be asleep and not dreaming. Here, it is tempting to say that we are not actually experiencing anything. However, there is at least some sense in which we might be said to be aware. A noise may wake us. How can a noise wake us unless we have heard the noise? And to have heard it is to have been aware of it.
2. We may be awake, but have our eyes closed and be thinking of nothing. I am thinking here of that state where we know we are not going to go back to sleep, but hover on the verge of what we might call consciousness--although it is clear that, in some sense, we are conscious all the while of what we are doing.
3. We may be awake, but tired. Our eyes are closed and we are deliberately shutting out awareness of our immediate surroundings. Our focus may just be on the tiredness; we may be completely unaware of the fact the sun is setting, or has set.
4. We may be simply staring, blindly registering--but what does that mean?--the things around us. If something moves--disturbs our reverie--we will notice it. Otherwise, we are oblivious.
5. We may be staring *alertly*, or paying attention. An example of this might be driving a car, or reading a book. We are paying attention--but not to everything. We will focus on the road, but will tend to ignore the colour of roadside flowers. We will concentrate on the

words on the page, and weed out the background murmur--if the radio is too loud, we may even get up to turn it off.

6. Then, we may be focusing even harder, that is *looking* for something--reading a novel or article for a key passage, searching the files for a particular letter, and so on.
7. On the other hand, sometimes ideas just *occur* to us, break in, as it were, upon our consciousness. We are talking on the phone and it suddenly occurs to us that we were due somewhere an hour ago.
8. The final sort of experience I will list is that where we concentrate on a particular thought, or something someone has said, and absent ourselves somehow from sensory experience. Several minutes ago, for instance, I was mulling over the logic of the present argument. What I was looking at, if I can put it this way, seemed to recede from view. The words on my computer screen became mere landscape, and my experience was full of internal monologue.

What we call 'experience' is not something uniform; it varies greatly, sometimes from moment to moment, as we concentrate, get distracted, let ourselves wander, snap out of it, put on mental blinkers (either deliberately or not), and so on. Think of going to the cinema. The movie has yet to begin, but it's not supposed to begin yet. You glance around at the crowd, think of something to say to the person next to you, look at the screen, wonder how good the quality of the film will be, etc. The film doesn't start on time, and you become impatient, or puzzled or anxious. Then the lights go down and the film starts. The film is interesting. It is typical of this director's work, although not really as good as that of another director, who is addressing the same topic. You think of things you want

to say after the film is over. If it goes on too long you wonder when it will be over. Somebody laughs at the wrong time. You laugh at the right time, but you are alone in thinking so. The movie ends. The credits roll, shattering any illusion you might have had about being transported into another world, and you think about supper, traffic, money, the crowd, the time.

"But can't we mean all of these things by the word 'experience'?" Yes, we can and do, and in one sense we are justified in so doing. That is: in all these cases we were at least experiencing something. We were *there*, as it were. But what the above examples show is that, even if we were to grant the empiricist claim that experience is a necessary condition for knowledge, merely "being there"--even if a context is specified--can hardly be taken as a sufficient condition for it.

So one question is: which sort of experience is it that we wish to base knowledge claims on? And the answer to this is unclear. It would at least have to be one where we were paying attention to whatever we were claiming to know something about. If I had attended a concert, for instance, I would likely not want to make any claims about the length of the intermission. I would probably not be able to say whether it had been fifteen minutes long, or twenty-five. On the other hand, this is precisely the sort of thing that

both performers and concert hall staff would be able to know conclusively, so one would think.

A further question also arises: *how do we know at any given time that the experience we are having is the type to base a knowledge claim on?* And this question appears valid both in practice and in principal. In practice, I can recall occasions where it is important that I remember someone's name upon introduction, and I know this, and I pay particular attention when we are introduced, and I think I have paid sufficient attention--and within seconds, the name is lost to me irretrievably. This sort of occurrence is, unfortunately, a common one. Even when I am sure, I find that I can be mistaken.

The problem can be made to look even worse (and worse than it is). It is true that we can easily rule out which types of experience will not do as the basis for a knowledge claim. However, and because I can make mistakes when I am sure, the only way (in principle) that I could verify that *this* experience, the one I am now having, is the sort on which to base a knowledge claim, would be if I were able to stand outside my own experience, looking in upon myself, so to speak, and compare this present experience with other experiences upon which I had successfully based knowledge claims.

But: there is something very wrong here. There are many things about which it doesn't seem to make any sense to

doubt. Can I really doubt that I am sitting here, in front of a computer screen, typing? Can I doubt that there are books on the right hand side of the desk, and that when I look out of the window I can see trees and houses, and a sky dark with clouds? The fact is, I do not doubt any of these things.²⁷ No: I am absolutely certain about them. There are, however, seemingly powerful arguments against such a position, arguments that even here I may be mistaken, and that I should "doubt my senses." I will briefly try to explain why I should not.

"Could it all be a hallucination?" No, definitely not. I have had hallucinations when ill, and I knew at the time that they were hallucinations. Furthermore, if everything were a hallucination, then how could I differentiate between ordinary experience and experiences I know to be hallucinatory? "But perhaps, those experiences were merely small hallucinations within the larger one." But then there is the question, "what do you mean by 'hallucination'?" I cannot make any sense of the word unless I can oppose it to something that is not a hallucination. If the suggestion is that I am not seeing things the way they really are, then I agree. I see the world through my language, and it helps anything to call this experience a hallucination, I am willing to call it that. But since I am not trying to see things as they really are, and there seems to be no difference between what

I would call my ordinary experience, and what some would like to call a hallucination, I don't see that it does help. At least my concept of 'hallucination' is one that I can define.

"There are people who hallucinate--people we call 'mentally ill'--who believe that their hallucinations are real. How do you know that the world you experience is any more real than their allegedly delusional world?" I don't, and I don't make any such claims. The world of my experience is a world shared by those who speak my language. Within this context, a person who is mentally ill *is* delusional. If I could speak that person's language, his or her experiences would not appear delusional after all.

"But you couldn't have the experiences simply by learning the language. Surely the experiences come first!" Yes, but making sense of the experiences is done in language. And this is precisely what people who are mentally ill cannot do: they cannot make sense of their experiences within my language, the language that most people learn to speak. Therefore, I cannot speak to their experiences. This does not mean my experiences are more "real" than theirs. What it does mean is that they either have failed to learn my language, or their experiences cannot be made meaningful within my language. Either way, I cannot be "delusional" in the way the mentally ill are: I can communicate my experiences to others, whereas the

mentally ill often cannot. So I cannot make an analogy between the apparently delusional experiences of the mentally ill and my experience.

"Have you never dreamt that you were sitting at a computer? Have you never dreamt of books and trees? Weren't you as convinced that you were experiencing these things in your dream as you are now?" Perhaps. I sometimes--even often--think that what is happening in the dream is actually happening to me. But that is a very misleading way of putting things. When I dream, the images I have are often very distinct, and the emotions I experience are sometimes very strong. But that is where the analogy between dreaming and being conscious ends. My waking experience contains far more than just images and emotions. For one thing, waking experience includes thinking and reasoning, from which images and emotions are often absent. And what would a dream be without images? We might even be inclined not to call it a dream.

"But you can think in dreams. For instance, you sometimes know you are dreaming when you are dreaming." That is true. I can also wonder, while I am dreaming, whether what is happening is really happening or whether I am just dreaming it. However, there are certain types of thinking that I do not do when I am dreaming. I do not, for instance, have a sustained philosophical conversation with myself about Descartes's dream argument; I do not consider,

during my dream, the possibility that I am only dreaming that I am awake, and that I may soon wake up, hence proving that my sensation of being awake was an illusion.

"There doesn't seem to be any reason that you couldn't do that in a dream." There also doesn't seem to be any reason--at least one that I know of--that I couldn't dream extremely coherent dreams all the time. But I don't.

If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do."²⁸

I do not think philosophically when I dream. In fact, there are many sorts of thinking I regularly do when I am awake, but which I just never do when I am dreaming. Therefore, dreaming and being awake are not strongly analogous, and although I may sometimes think I am awake when I am dreaming, when I am awake, I know this. Therefore, this is not a dream, and those books really are on the right side of my desk.²⁹

"But still, what makes you so sure? There may be something in front of you, but how do you know it is a desk? Would your cat see it as a desk? How do know what it is really like?" First, as I have said, I don't care what my desk is really like, because this is not something I can know. But because I speak English and inhabit the culture I do, I experience my desk as a desk. I don't know how my cat experiences it, but since she doesn't speak English, she doesn't experience it the way I do. What makes me so sure

it is a desk is that that is how the thing is made meaningful to me in my language. By speaking English and inhabiting the culture I do, I *make it into* a desk. Within these two contexts, it simply cannot be anything else. There is no room for any doubt to creep in.

This argument shows, I think, the mistake in the empiricist's conception of experience, which is the one that leads to the skeptical doubts detailed above. With regard to that conception, one can stare at the world and ask: "What are these things in front of me? Are they really meaningful in the way I think they are?" The point is: they are meaningful in precisely the way we think they are, because we are the ones who have endowed them with the meaning that they have.

The Correspondence Theory of Truth

The second question I want to discuss is what it means to say that a particular sentence is true, and what may be said to constitute evidence for the truth of the sentence. The correspondence theory of truth is an attempt to answer this question. According to this theory, a particular sentence is true if and only if there is a match, or correspondence, between what that sentence says, and a "state of affairs" in the world.³⁰

There are three things wrong this notion of truth. The first is the assumption discussed at length in the last

chapter, that is, the assumption that there is a world of raw events that we can witness. If this raw world is inaccessible to us, then there are no ("objective") states of affairs against which the truth of sentences may be measured. This situation is easily remedied by saying that a sentence will be true if it corresponds to a state of affairs, *as defined within a particular context* (for instance language, chemistry, music). (However, of course, this context-dependent truth is not really what the empiricist is after.)

The second problem with the correspondence theory is that it puts all sentences on a par. The only sentences that can hope to meet its criterion for truth are those that name and describe objects. This type of sentence, indeed, is the one most often used to show the logic behind the theory. How do we know that the sentence, "Snow is white" is true? We look at snow.³¹ Now, however important this type of sentence is, it is certainly not the *only* type of sentence there is. That is because naming and describing are not the only things we do in language. We also make value-judgments, talk about abstract ideas, explain things, and so on. How would we even attempt to apply the theory's criterion for truth to a sentence such as, "The weather is beautiful"? Or: "Inertia is the tendency of matter to remain at rest, if at rest, or to keep moving in the same direction, if already moving." (We could point to any

number of "states of affairs" as instances of this, but we could never find a *general* state of affairs that would exhibit this *tendency*. This is only to state the well-known principle that a universal statement can be refuted by a particular state of affairs, but never confirmed by one. A confirmation of a universal statement would only be possible if all states of affairs had already occurred. Then, perhaps, we could say that the statement "corresponded" to the set of the states. However, this is not only a very peculiar way of putting things, but is also something that, in practice, will never happen.)

I will mention in passing that it is odd that science, which relies so much on empiricist philosophy, actually relies much more heavily on a competing theory of truth (that of coherence) than it does on correspondence, as the latter seems so obviously allied with empiricism. However, I will postpone a discussion of this until the next chapter, where the subject will be taken up in some depth.

The third thing wrong with the correspondence theory can be seen by examining the theory of knowledge it may be said to derive from. This theory was first given by Plato in the *Theaetetus*, where knowledge is characterized as follows: to have knowledge is to have a true belief with an account of how one has come to have that belief.³² A.J. Ayer has given a very similar picture of what he thinks constitutes knowledge.³³ The theory, therefore, is long-

lived. I will summarize it as follows. In order to be able to say I know something, I must:

1. believe that it is true;
2. believe strongly that it is true;
3. have good grounds for this belief.

In addition:

4. other people must be able to know what I know.

And finally:

5. what I believe to be true must also *be true*.

So first, in order to know something, I must also have a belief about it. However, knowledge must be more than just belief. This is for two reasons. First, I may have a belief--and be wrong. Secondly, I may have two beliefs, and be right in one case and wrong in the other. In this case, if knowledge is just belief, there would be no way of distinguishing between the right and wrong beliefs. Therefore, there must be something in addition to my belief before we would call this belief 'knowledge'.

As to the second condition, it seems clear that there is a large difference between what I merely believe and what I believe strongly. If I met someone briefly at a party three weeks ago, and was today asked his name, I might say, "I think his name was Jules. Alfred Jules." However, it would never occur to me to say, "I think my name is..." No, that is something of which I am sure. Again, there doesn't seem to be any problem with this condition for knowledge.

We routinely distinguish between what we merely believe and what we believe strongly.

As to the third condition, that I must have good grounds for my belief, this also seems necessary. I may believe that I have the winning lottery numbers, and that belief may turn out to be true, but few would want to say, on this basis, that I knew what the winning numbers would be. Even if I managed this feat consistently, and won a hundred lotteries in a row, we would still have trouble with the idea that I *knew* what the numbers would be, at least in the normal sense of the word 'know'. We might indeed grant that I had some kind of knack in picking the numbers, we might go so far as to say that I was never wrong, we might even say that I probably *would* never be wrong, but I don't think we would say that I *knew*.

The reason for this is the fourth condition for knowledge: knowledge must be something open to the public; what I can know, you can also know. It is true that people have believed, and will no doubt always believe, that certain human beings have inside information on the secrets of the cosmos. History is well-stocked with oracles, soothsayers, prophets, clairvoyants, and so on. It is because persons such as these claimed to know things that have subsequently been shown false that it is necessary to have a condition like this one. Otherwise, I could strongly believe that the end of the world was at hand, ground my

belief with reference to an inner voice (which, according to me at least, had never been wrong), and then claim to *know* the fate of the world. I could, in fact, claim to know anything I wanted to.

(I should mention parenthetically that, as Plato notes at the end of the *Theaetetus*, having a strong, grounded belief is still not sufficient for claiming that one knows something--even if what one knows happens to be true. Consider the following: I believe that a friend of mine is in Detroit. I believe it, because she told me she was going out of town to speak at a conference. However, what she told me was that she was going to Chicago, not Detroit. In other words, I have misremembered what she said. Meanwhile, the convention, for whatever reason, has been moved from Chicago to Detroit, and so, in fact, she is in Detroit.

Now, I have a belief, and although I am wrong, I am sure of this belief, and I have good grounds for it (she told me). In this case, my belief is even true: she is in Detroit. However, one would not want to say that I knew anything at all. Circumstances happen to have conspired to render me right, but I am right by accident.)

However, the main point I wish to make is about the fifth condition to be met before it is possible to claim that I know something, and that is: what I believe to be true, *must in fact be true*. But there is an obvious question to be asked here: how do I determine this? How do

I go about checking that my belief is true? What is the evidence for it?

In many cases, in fact, it is easy to check on the truth of a particular claim. If my claim is that Beethoven was born in 1770, I can look this up in an encyclopedia. If my claim is that Lima is the capital of Peru, I can consult an atlas. I can substantiate my claim to be a certain age by producing a birth certificate. If someone doubts my fish story, I can ask others to testify on my behalf.

In all such cases, what is important is that I am operating within particular contexts. What those contexts are will be determined by what occasioned my claim about, say, the date of Beethoven's birth. Someone might simply have asked: "When was Beethoven born?" In this case, I assume that the question is about the famous composer, and not about any of the other people or pets that may have been called 'Beethoven;' I assume that an adequate answer involves only the year, and not the month and day of his birth; and I assume that my answer should use the Christian calendar, rather than the Hebrew or Muslim ones. (These are not, of course, conscious assumptions; I would only specify them as my assumptions were I called upon to explain my response.)

On the other hand, my claim might have been part of a response to a child's question, "Who is Beethoven?" Then, after having established the context in which I wished the

rest of my remarks to be taken ("he is famous a German musician"), I might be attempting to place Beethoven in an historical context (i.e., that he is no longer living).

I will not have to resort to evidence for my claim unless I am questioned about it--unless, in fact, someone doubts my claim to know. If someone does doubt, then my evidence will be, for instance, an encyclopedia article on the life of Beethoven. And this is normally where the discussion will end. That is because, at least among moderately-educated adults in a given culture, there is usually a tacit agreement about what is supposed to *count as evidence* in that culture.³⁴ This is at one and the same time a tacit agreement about which people we recognize as *authorities*--an authority being a person we all agree possesses the "truth" on a given subject.

So, in our culture, books count as evidence more than newspapers, and newspapers more than tabloids. This is at the same time to say that we accredit books with more authority than newspapers, and newspapers with more authority than tabloids. This does not mean that if something is written in a book, it *proves* that something is true, if by the word 'prove' we mean to demonstrate how things really are (or were) in the world. It is simply recognition of the fact that people who write books habitually spend a lot more time thinking about their subjects than do newspaper writers. We expect, therefore,

that the way they have made their subject meaningful is more worthy of our attention than a newspaper article is.

In other words, we allow that there are people in our culture who can write rule-books for us. Now a rule-book, like a pope, can change, but during its life-span it will be the final court of appeal. That is: we agree that there *will* be something we call evidence, and we agree on what sort of thing it will be. In order to back up a particular claim, then, we simply look up the appropriate rule in the proper rule-book.

Now, in cases like this--cases where the context can be defined--it most often makes no sense to doubt the evidence. Not that doubting is impossible; histories have been wrong, and history can be made meaningful in alternative ways that are perhaps more compelling. However, to doubt as a skeptic would is a self-defeating proposition. (I am thinking of the case where a skeptic might read a hundred books all claiming that Beethoven was born in 1770, and still doubt this.) That is because what the skeptic is asserting is that nothing should count as evidence, is arguing that a basic societal convention--to agree that something will count as evidence--be abolished. However, if the skeptic's position is that we can't know anything, then it must at the same time be that we can't know that we can't know anything, and so the skeptic, in abolishing evidence, abolishes his or her own position.

However, there are other cases where the skeptic's position is much stronger. These are when we move from saying how things really are--in this context--or how things really happened--in that context--to attempting to say: this is just how the world is. We can often distinguish, for instance, between truth and lying. A person who lies to us may sometimes admit to the lie, and will sometimes weave a mesh of contradictory statements; there are many ways in which we can sort out the truth from the lie. We can also distinguish between appearance and reality, in the sense that we can discover that something we thought of as real has turned out, after all, to be illusory. But it is irresponsible to extrapolate from such local cases to the global one. It seems to us we are doing the same thing; we think that just as we can discover the truth about a situation, we can discover the truth about the world. However, there is a huge difference between the two endeavours.

Language establishes a context by means of which we can talk about the world. In this context, certain words are meaningful and can be used in meaningful ways. When I am doing history, I establish a context; I literally say, "these are the things which are important, and they relate to each other in the following way." Now, since to establish a context is precisely to show how something is to be understood, as opposed to other possible ways of

understanding it, since it is to say that one should focus on *this* rather than on *that*, how is one to create a context out of the world itself? The world is something that can contain contexts, but is not something which can be a context in itself. A context has limits; the world does not.

What is ironic here is that when we wish to talk about the world and how it is in a global way, what we are trying to do is escape the confines of the language we speak. The world seems to beckon and language stands in our way. However, the desire to escape language is actually identical to our desire to encompass that experience which still remains unmeaningful to us *within the scope of our language*. Our desire to "move beyond language to reality" is actually a move to incorporate unmeaningful experience within that through which experience is mediated. That is because the only way we can understand something is in a way which is meaningful to us. To suppose differently is to suppose that the world is naturally meaningful in one particular way, and that if we grope around long enough for the right words in the right language, we will discover this meaning. I have argued against this above, but it is worthwhile pointing out in this context that, whatever language we come up with, it will still be a *language*, a system which mediates the world we experience.

And so, when we are dealing with the world, rather than with a context the world contains, the answer to the question, "How do I go about checking that my belief is true?" is just: "I cannot." Again: there is no rule book I can consult. All I have to guide me is my own experience and the experience of others. But after I have said that I strongly believe something, and that I have grounds for this belief, I have fully described the whole of my experience. There is no experience I could have that could lead me to say, "And it is also true;" I could have only the sort of experience that would lead me to believe more strongly. I cannot "step outside" of my experience and see that things are actually as I suspected them to be (on the basis of my experience).

One way out of this dilemma is to assume a pragmatic attitude towards knowledge about the world. One can say, "This is a convincing way of looking at the world. There are no contradictions here. This way may turn out to be wrong, but it will certainly do for now." However, there is a further and unsettling problem about adopting such an attitude. That is: if the only thing that counts as evidence for my belief is my experience, what are we to do with people who experience the world, or claim to experience the world, in a way radically different from the way we do?

What happens, for instance, when we pit a mystic against an empiricist? How can we decide between the

language of science and the language of religion? Since, in this case, all that counts as evidence for our beliefs is our experience of the world, then it is gratuitous to privilege the experience of the one over that of the other.

It should not be said that the empiricist talks only of the everyday world, the world that can be examined, named, tested, and so on, whereas the mystic talks about things transcendental, about things which everyday experience does not afford the general public. For one thing, the experience of God is a part of the mystic's everyday experience. This experience cannot just be discounted. To discount it, in fact, is to commit a fallacious appeal to ignorance: because the empiricist doesn't experience something, it therefore doesn't exist, or isn't true. Secondly, there are many things which initially seem outlandish and marvelous, and which we nevertheless end up incorporating as perfectly normal into our lives. Hume himself says:

The Indian prince who refused to believe the first relations concerning the effects of frost reasoned justly, and it naturally required very strong testimony to engage his assent to facts that arose from a state of nature with which he was unacquainted, and which bore so little analogy to those events of which he had had constant and uniform experience. Though they were not contrary to his experience, they were not conformable to it.³⁵

Several pages earlier, he says, "A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence."³⁶ But the problem here is that the empiricist has precisely no

evidence that the mystic is wrong, except that the mystic's experiences do not form a part of the empiricist's relative paucity of experiences. One's experience can never be rich enough to refute the existence of something one has not experienced. One may say, "I do not believe..." or, "I feel that it is ridiculous to believe..." but not, "This isn't true."

Finally, it is not possible to rescue the empiricist position with reference to the fourth condition for knowledge listed above. The mystic may just claim that some people are in touch with God, and others not. Therefore, it is absurd to stipulate as a condition for knowledge that everyone else should be able to attain the same "knowledge" the mystic has.

To sum up, then: the correspondence theory of truth is seriously flawed. It assumes there is a reality that we can know; it assumes that all knowledge claims are analogous to claims that merely name objects and describe them; it assumes that there is some way of checking on whether or not there is, indeed, a correspondence between a knowledge claim and the world; and it assumes that everyone will experience the world in the same way, and see the same correspondences.

Finally, then, the poverty of empiricism lies in this. However much we should like it to, it does not fulfil its promise: it does not lead to knowledge of the world as it really is. (This being so, it is futile to hope that it

could ever lead to knowledge of the self as it really is.) It is undeniable, however, that we continue to desire this knowledge. It is this desire that impels us to make metaphysical claims. These are the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE LURE OF METAPHYSICS

Schopenhauer writes:

By *metaphysics* I understand all knowledge that pretends to transcend the possibility of experience, thus to transcend nature or the given phenomenal appearance of things, in order to give an explanation of that by which, in some sense or other, this experience or nature is conditioned; or, to speak in popular language, of that which is behind nature, and makes it possible.¹

Metaphysics seeks to explain how things really are; in fact, it wants to explain how things *must* be in order for us to have the experiences that we do. It seeks to reveal the secrets behind the world--behind the world that we actually *do* experience--and the secrets behind this experience.²

In order to avoid becoming embroiled in arguments with specific metaphysical claims that have been made about the self, I am going to restrict my examples in this chapter to metaphysical claims made about how the world is, the world, in other words, "outside" of the Cartesian ego.

My contention is that metaphysical claims, concerning such matters as "being as such," or first principles, are just not meaningful. This is because they purport to be about something that has not been made meaningful, and, in principle, cannot be made meaningful. That metaphysical

claims are not meaningful can be shown in a perfectly straightforward way. For instance, if someone should claim either that the world consists entirely of material substance or entirely of ideas, it would be appropriate to respond: "as opposed to what?" That is: we would seek to define the words 'material substance' and 'ideas'--we would seek a context in which to make these words meaningful. We might say, "I see what you mean by the word 'idea' when you oppose it to something material. However, to say that *everything* consists of ideas is precisely to remove the claim from any possible context."

The context invoked by such a metaphysical claim, then, is really a pseudo-context. That is: a claim about how everything really is can make sense only within the pseudo-context of multiple universes. I would have to suppose that in *this* world, everything consists of ideas, as opposed to some other world, where material substance does indeed exist. This pseudo-context is invoked by the claim, but it is also simultaneously denied by it (because everything consists of ideas). The attempt to make meaningful--to create a context--fails because the claim is about the world, which, as I have noted above, contains contexts, but cannot itself be a context.³ (To be a context, it would have to be part of something larger, which the world by definition cannot be.) Hence the claim is just

not meaningful. As such, of course, it makes no sense at all to say that we "know" it.⁴

To "eliminate" metaphysics, then, is easy. What is often more difficult is to identify metaphysics *as* metaphysics. That is because the line between metaphysical and interpretive claims is often blurry. An interpretive claim, one that makes the world meaningful in a particular way, may easily become a metaphysical one, one that claims that this is how the world is. A scientific interpretive claim, for instance, may seem so obviously right--and our desire that it *be* right is such--that we take it to be the "correct interpretation" of the world. That is the point at which we step out of science and into metaphysics.

There are three things I want to do in this chapter, then. First, I will attempt to show the difference between interpretive and metaphysical claims. Secondly, I will expand upon claims I have made cursorily in previous chapters about our desire for knowledge, the desire that impels us to break the bonds of language in our attempt to know something about the world. Thirdly, I will consider the extent to which science may be regarded as metaphysical.

Interpretive versus Metaphysical Claims

To illustrate how easily interpretation may become metaphysics, I want to look briefly at Leibniz's *Monadology*, and specifically at three central claims he makes there. First, he makes the claim that the universe is explicable. "There is nothing uncultured, sterile or dead in the universe, no chaos, no disorder."⁵ What I want to focus on in this sentence is the idea that the universe is *ordered*. If something is ordered, then we can at least try to explain it.

Secondly, he claims that everything in the universe is connected:

This *connection* of all created things with every single one of them and their adaptation to every single one, as well as the connection and adaptation of every single thing to all others, has the result that every single substance stands in relations which express all the others. Whence every single substance is a perpetual living mirror of the universe.⁶

Finally, he claims that all the interconnected monads in the universe constitute a harmonious whole. In the following passage, he is talking specifically about the union of body and soul, but, as he says, his claim pertains to the universe as a whole:

These principles have enabled me to propose a natural explanation for the union or conformity of the soul and the organized body. The soul follows its own laws, and so does the body. They meet by virtue of the *pre-established harmony* prevailing among all substances, since they all are representations of one and the same universe.

In other words, Leibniz's proposal is that we regard the world as consisting of ordered, harmoniously interconnected elements. There is a reason for these distinctions in Leibniz, but for my purposes, they are a little redundant. If something is ordered, then it must contain elements, and these must be connected to each other. Furthermore, if something is ordered, then the connections must persist through time. In the following few pages, therefore, I will be paying much more attention to the notion of 'order' than to those of 'interconnectedness' and 'pre-established harmony'.

"The universe is ordered." There is a context within which this sentence, as an interpretive claim, makes sense. It makes sense if I am not talking about the world, but only about my strategy in trying to gain knowledge of it. The possibility is then open that my assumption of order will fail, and that I will not be able to make sense of some part of the world.⁸ My strategy in the pursuit of knowledge--to shape and define and contextualize the world--will remain my strategy, but may not work.

To claim that the universe is ordered, in this sense, seems fundamental to the whole enterprise of making the world meaningful. (It is the genus of which "The future will be like the past" is a species.) It seems, to be blunt, that such a claim is the *sine qua non* of systematic inquiry, of coherent knowledge. It is, by definition,

impossible to systematize chaos: if chaos is found to be anything other than completely random, it is no longer chaos. The basic premise of systematic inquiry is that whatever is being investigated must be found to be ordered in some way.

To return to an example used in the last chapter, if I am watching a game and trying to guess what the rules are, I must assume that the game actually does have rules, or there will be no point to my guessing. Central aspects of the activity of interpreting, then, are finding an order, making systematic, and making coherent. Before trying to show how the claim, "The universe is ordered," fails as a metaphysical claim, I will therefore briefly discuss both the coherence theory of truth and the notion of 'systems'.

A simple statement of the coherence theory of truth is all that is required here: a sentence is true if it is consistent with a set of other sentences known to be true. It is false when holding it to be true would result in a contradiction within this set. Now, what is striking about the coherence theory is the way in which it is commonly criticized: the concept of 'truth' it leaves us with is just too distant from the way we normally think about truth. So: it is argued that a set of sentences can be consistent but false; or that more than one set of consistent sentences can explain the same facts, but that the sets can be mutually inconsistent; or that what makes the sentence, "The sun is

hot," *true* is not that it is consistent with any particular set of sentences, but that *the sun is hot*.

These ways of arguing are interesting in that they tacitly assume the correctness of the correspondence theory of truth. So, a story may be consistent, but not correspond with what really happened (and so be false); different theories may explain the facts, but only one theory can draw a correct picture of how the world is (and so the others are wrong); and what makes my observation sentence "true" is a particular state of affairs in the world.⁹

There is certainly a sense in which all these criticisms are good ones. Part of what we mean when we use the word 'true' is that there is some sort of connection between what we say and how the world is. But, as I mentioned earlier, this connection makes sense only on two conditions: first, it makes sense only within the context of a language, and second, it makes sense only with reference to sentences that name and describe. For sentences that explain or evaluate, on the other hand, the coherence theory of truth may be the more appropriate one.¹⁰

What is immediately obvious about the coherence theory in this regard is that it divorces a system of "true" sentences from the world. Whether they are true (in the correspondence sense of the term) is just irrelevant. It is also irrelevant that two (or many) different systems of

sentences can account for the same facts. All that matters is the internal consistency of the system.

Now, if it is true that for something to have meaning, it must be part of a system, then any attempt to make the world meaningful must also be an attempt to experience it through some kind of a system, or to systematize it. Our most common approach to the world is through ordinary language, but there are many other languages (systems) through which we can approach it. And just as ordinary language gives us the illusion that we are talking about how the world actually is--that it just is divided into houses and trees and giraffes--so do other systems give us this illusion, especially if they are internally consistent systems.

Arithmetic, for everyday purposes anyway, is an internally consistent system that we apply to the world in certain contexts.¹¹ If what I am concerned to do is add, subtract, multiply and divide numbers, I will always get the same answer when I do so (provided I have followed the rules properly). But outside of the context of arithmetic, there are no numbers in the world--there are just things that, from within the arithmetical context, we can count. Also, in order for my arithmetic mediation of the world to work, these things must be counted in an abstract way. The only way to add one pen and one pencil is to convert them both into "writing instruments," or something similar.

To adopt a system such as arithmetic is to give a shape to the world. To show the extent to which we see the world through the system of arithmetic, it is necessary only to consider a culture that does not contain an extensive number system. The Brazilian Yanomami Indians, for instance, have a number system that "does not go beyond two."¹² Now: I just see a triangle as having three sides and a square as having four. But if my number system didn't include these numbers, obviously I wouldn't experience triangles and squares in the same way. Triangles and squares are become meaningful to me through that part of the language of mathematics that I know.

Now arithmetic, like logic, can be described as being devoid of empirical content, as being neither falsifiable nor verifiable with reference to experience. Therefore, it is a system that can survive its divorce from the world and be proclaimed true simply with regard to its coherence. However, other sorts of systems, like physics, suffer when their only claim to truth is coherence. Physics would like to be able to say something about the world.

This shows the main danger in the coherence theory of truth. It is very difficult to rid oneself of the notion that truth involves some sort of correspondence. Observation sentences in physics are thought to be true if they correspond with some state of affairs in the world. Explanations are true if they cohere with other explanations

(and observation sentences). However, it is very easy to slip into thinking of explanations as being true in the sense that observation sentences are. It is easy to think of explanations or hypotheses as being confirmable or refutable with reference to observation sentences. However, this is only correct if one thinks of confirmation as "not yet incoherent," and refutation as "shown to be incoherent." As was mentioned last chapter, there is no way in principle that an explanatory sentence could ever be confirmed or refuted--shown to be true or false, in the correspondence sense of the term.

I am not, of course, saying that any scientist would claim that a particular explanation was "true" in this sense. Too many scientific theories have failed for anyone to seriously claim that. What I am saying is that insofar as science pretends to discover an ordered universe, instead of conceding that it is simply ordering it; insofar as it pretends to discover meaning rather than admit it is making meaning; insofar as it tries to move beyond coherence into correspondence--to that extent is it metaphysical.

To demonstrate the problem with the notion that there is, in a metaphysical sense, order in the universe, I will give a second example from Brian Skyrms's *Choice and Chance*:

To illustrate, suppose a certain small country takes a census every 10 years, and has taken three so far. The population was 11 million at the time of the first census, 12 million at the second census, and 13 million at the third...

Suppose now you are asked to predict the population of this country at the time of the fourth census, that is, in the year 30. You would have to look for a regularity that could be projected into the future. In the absence of any further information, you would probably proceed as follows: First you would notice that the points representing the first three census all fall on [a] straight line [on a graph]...

This projection would lead you to the prediction that the population at the time of the fourth census will be 14 million...

But it is obvious that there are quite a few other regularities to be found in the data which you did not choose to project... There are indeed an infinite number of curves that pass through all the points and thus an infinite number of regularities in the data. Whatever prediction you wish to make, a regularity can be found whose projection will license that prediction.¹³

There are many different "orders" that can be found in (assigned to) the world. The metaphysical presumption is that we may be able to find the "right" order.¹⁴

The impossibility of doing so is easily seen with reference, say, to the differences between the language of physics and the language of literary criticism. In the language of physics, it is impossible to talk about the nobility of a tragic heroine, for instance. In the language of literary criticism, there is no such thing as a quark. And yet, at least in the context of physics, the word 'quark' means something, as does the nobility of tragic heroines in literature. But the latter does not even exist in the world of physics, and the former is similarly absent from the world of drama. Shall I say that one language correctly describes what order there is in the world, and

that the other misses the mark? If so, on what basis would I choose between them?¹⁵

Leibniz saw this dilemma clearly.

If we had some exact *language* (like the one called *Adamitic* by some) or at least a kind of *truly philosophical writing*, in which the ideas were reduced to a kind of *alphabet of human thought*, then all that follows rationally from what is given could be found by a *kind of calculus*, just as arithmetical or geometrical problems are solved.

Such a language would amount to a *Cabala* of mystical vocables or to the *arithmetic* of Pythagorean numbers or to the *Characteristic* language of magi, that is, of the wise.¹⁶

One might with some justice claim that this is the dream that has driven western philosophy, as well as many other disciplines. It is something I mentioned briefly in the last chapter, that is, the dream of finding the "right" language, the one which truly describes how the world really is. We tend to forget how foreign the world of the past is to us: the world has been a place where gods mated with mortals, where angels populated each of the planetary spheres above the moon. It has been a place--and to some, still is--where divine justice is seen on a daily basis. But perhaps beliefs such as these can be dismissed out of hand as "unscientific."

For two centuries, from Newton onward, it had been a well entrenched tenet that something called the ether pervaded all of what we think of as empty space. The great physicist Lorentz (1853-1928) had hypothesized that the ether itself was stationary.¹⁷

For two centuries, there was a scientific story about ether. Today, the universe is place that began fifteen billion years ago, at which time it was no bigger than the size of a pea. To assume that one has finally "gotten it right"--or that one _ at least making progress--seems to be the ever-attendant presumption of modernity.

The problem with the idea of a universal language is just: as a *language*, it would forever frustrate our attempts to go beyond it and get to the world it purported to describe. The idea behind a universal language contains the vital mistake of supposing that language is something separate from our experience, and is a tool we use in describing what this experience is.

Another way of seeing the mistake in the metaphysical assumption that the universe is ordered is with reference to a distinction I made in the last chapter, that of local versus global contexts. We are always free to talk about order, provided we give our claims a particular context. I can talk about the order in a garden, and contrast this with the seeming chaos of a forest. I can talk about the order exhibited in a new suburb, contrasting this with the twisting, seemingly incoherent streets in the city's core. There are orderly thoughts, and those which are too tangled to make sense.

What is important in all these cases is that I can ask the question: "What would a state of *disorder* be?" What

would count, that is, as a breakdown in the order I perceive. (It goes without saying that this "perceived" order is experienced from within language.) But this is precisely a question I can never ask about the world. Just as I cannot go from my experience of the world to a position where I claim that things could not be the way they are without a divine orderer, so I cannot from my experience of the world deduce that it is indeed ordered. That is: I cannot, from my experience of order in particular contexts, make a blind leap to the position that the world, which now exists in no context whatsoever, is in "reality" an orderly and systematic place. For what would I contrast this orderly world with in order to make such an assertion? "Universes", as C.S. Peirce remarked, 'are not as plentiful as blackberries.'"¹⁸

It is easy to see how such arguments apply to the claims that all the elements of the world are interconnected and exist in a pre-established harmony. We can demonstrate interconnectedness and harmoniousness in particular contexts, but once we try to apply the same notions to the universe, once we try to escape the contexts our language provides us with and talk about "reality," we inevitably fail. We either fail to make any sense at all, because we are trying to talk, in language, about something which is beyond language, or in our very act of talking, we mediate the world again, mistakenly thinking that we have gotten to

the core of things, whereas we have just dressed the world up in a different disguise.

The Desire to Know

The idea now absorbs us, that the ideal 'must' be found in reality. Meanwhile we do not as yet see *how* it occurs there, nor do we understand the nature of this "must". We think it must be in reality; for we think we already see it there.¹⁹

Although we cannot know the world as it really is, we nevertheless retain our *desire* to know. Ethical inquiry is a particularly good example of this. G.E. Moore, in his preface to *Principia Ethica*, says that ethics tries to answer two questions. "These two questions may be expressed, the first in the form: What kind of things ought to exist for their own sakes? the second in the form: What kind of actions ought we to perform?"²⁰

That is: we try to establish rules for our behaviour, and we try to give the reasons that underwrite these rules.²¹ However, ethics cannot end there. If it is concerned with what we should value and what we should do, since we never do anything outside of a particular context, ethics must also concern itself with individual actions. The rules must be applied.

This is where the ethical project often runs into trouble. The rules it establishes are not up to the task of regulating everyday life in any adequate way. Why is this? It is because the rules reflect the artificially simple

world in which they were constructed, a world where circumstances do not mitigate against generalization. The certainty available to the ethical inquirer is not available to the judge.

The result is what is called 'situational ethics', an ethics where it is thought that each situation should be judged on its own merit, and where the general rules are regarded simply as guidelines. But to admit that the rules are merely guidelines is to allow that in any individual case, they may be broken. And a rule that may be broken, given the circumstances, is no rule at all. (This can be seen from the example of obsolete laws, which are in *no case* enforced.) Situational ethics is in fact the destruction of the ethical project.

Even if we recognize the dilemma that ethical inquiry involves us in, even if we see that we are constructing an abstract system of rules which is doomed to failure as soon as we begin to apply it to particular circumstances in the world, we still continue to do ethics. Why is this? My contention is that, even though we find it impossible to construct an ethical system, we still strongly *desire* to construct one.

I think the same may be said concerning our knowledge of the world. We are often frustrated in our attempt to gain knowledge, but we still think the truth is there somewhere, even if we haven't found it yet. We still want

access to reality. And so we are very open to whatever possibility science affords us to know the world.

When science makes a "discovery," we want to believe that it has at last found out how the world really is. We start to make the world meaningful through the systems of science, and then mistake the systems for the world itself. We feel as though someone has switched on a light in a dark room. We forget that there are many different sorts of lighting, and that lightbulbs eventually burn out.

This process is identical to what happens when we learn how to name things in language. The process of naming deludes us into thinking we have knowledge of the world--it encourages a sort of naive realism. As we grow up, we learn the names of things: this is what they are. And there is a certain magic in being able to *name* something--the magic of discovery. We visit a zoo and say: "Oh, *this* is a giraffe!" Before we had only heard the word; now we have seen the real thing. Or we ask, "What is this?" and someone says, "It's called a marmoset," as though marmosets really did occupy a permanent rung on the great chain of being. We learn names like novices at a vast buffet dinner: a chef has meticulously prepared each dish for us, but has forgotten to put out name-tags.

Wittgenstein says, "Naming is so far not a move in the language-game--any more than putting a piece in its place on the board is a move in chess."²² However, naming is already

a very good indication of what directions a possible language-game can take. To name something is already to declare that "naming" makes sense, that giving a name is a possible activity. If I put a piece on a chessboard, I have not yet made a move in a chess game, but I have declared this is a legitimate piece--as can be seen if I try to place an orange on the chessboard. To name is to legitimize the function of naming, which is to talk about a changing world with unchanging nouns.

Science just another language through which the world becomes transparently what it is. The stories it tells are ones we find very easy to believe.

Science and Metaphysics

"To explain the phenomena of the physical world is one of the primary objectives of the natural sciences."²³

Science "is concerned to develop a conception of the world that has a clear, logical bearing on our experience and is thus capable of objective test."²⁴ Science seeks to know what is, and how this changes into something else. We should accept its findings because they are "objective."

"Scientific explanations must, for this reason, meet two systematic requirements, which will be called the requirement of explanatory relevance and the requirement of testability."²⁵ They will be deemed "objective" if they meet these two criteria, that is, if the scientific theory is

relevant to what it purports to explain, and if experiments can be done to see whether its predictions in fact come true. These, says Carl Hempel, the author of the above quotes, are "only minimal conditions a scientific theory must satisfy; a system that meets these requirements may yet afford little illumination and may lack scientific interest."²⁶

What I will question here is whether any scientific theory can meet even these minimal requirements. The main problem revolves around the word 'relevance'. To claim that a scientific explanation *has* explanatory relevance is clearly the same as saying that there *is* a bridge between the system of science, on the one hand, and the world, on the other. The system not only coheres, but corresponds (in some sense).

The word 'relevance' is glossed over by many as though its meaning were obvious. Wesley Salmon, for instance, says in his book *Logic* that "The premises of a logically incorrect argument do not have the proper relevance to the conclusion."²⁷ The term 'relevance' remains undefined throughout the entire book. Salmon clearly does not think it needs to be defined.

Trudy Govier, to whose definition of 'relevance' I will return later, makes a similar sort of assumption in her book, *A Practical Study of Argument*:

Suppose that B is the statement that plump people are as healthy as thin people. Now let A be the statement that most plump people's hearts are as healthy as the hearts of thin people. Here we can see that A is positively relevant to B.²⁸

I think this is the reason that the word 'relevance' is so seldom defined. We can see that something is relevant; we just somehow understand it as relevant. It seems that we have no more difficulty in assessing relevance than we do perceiving a contradiction. In both cases, we just see it--this contradicts that, that is relevant to this--and there doesn't seem to be any further back to go, so to speak. However, there are problems.

To cite but two examples: there are many people to whom the movement of the heavenly bodies is relevant to what sort of a person they are, and to what is likely to happen to them during the day. It was once commonly thought that each of the known planets (including the moon and the sun) "presided" over particular hours in the day, and that if one were going to start a war, for instance, it would be most propitious to do so during the hour ruled by the planet Mars.

To call notions such as these superstitions is at once evasive and dismissive. It is dismissive because it privileges our own current prejudices without warrant; why should what is obvious to us today be more accurate than that which was obvious in other centuries? It is evasive because to call such notions superstitions is to do nothing

more than claim that there *is* no relevance between planetary movement and human behaviour.

The second example concerns mediaeval law:

Every object had its *ordo*, its own legal status, defended its own honour and was answerable for its own actions. Thus a sword which fell from the wall could be brought to account in court, so could cockshafer grubs which ravaged the fields (as in a trial at Basel as late as 1478), so could rats (there was a great rat trial at Autun around the middle of the sixteenth century), so could toads, witches and bad neighbours.²⁹

From our present perspective, it would seem preposterous to put either a toad or a sword on trial. Some of the reasons for this are as follows. First, we think of crime as something that contravenes human law--law devised by humans to regulate human behaviour. Under this law, the only thing that can qualify as an agent---and therefore be capable of perpetrating a crime--is a human being. This is, in part, because only human beings are capable of knowing what the law is. In other words, in the current legal context, terms such as 'agency' and 'knowledge' are relevant only to people, and irrelevant to toads and swords.

However, if we look at the world from within the context of interconnectedness, that is, if we assume that every part of the world may cause something to happen in another part of the world, as long as there are sufficient parts intervening between the two; if we further assume that every object, living or not, occupies a particular place in this interconnected world, and that if it upsets the pre-

established harmony in the world, *it is the thing* accountable; if we assume both these things, then it makes sense to put toads on the witness stand. It is relevant to do so.

On the other hand, it is relatively common in today's courts for a lawyer to enter an insanity plea for a client accused of a serious crime such as murder. A verdict of insanity effectively absolves the person of guilt, the reasoning being that only people who can be deemed responsible for their actions can be punished for them. In other words, insanity, in today's courts, is relevant to innocence.

During the witch trials of the late middle ages, on the other hand, a witch's insanity would have been seen as relevant to her guilt. A witch was thought mad precisely because she had, of her own free will, succumbed to the devil; her madness was a sign of her evil and her guilt.

(If it seems absurd either to put toads on trial or condemn a witch because of her madness, reconsider our contemporary plea of insanity. First, if the plea is successful, there is a peculiar result: a crime has been committed, but there is, at least for legal purposes, no agent. It is not too much to say that--for legal purposes--no one committed the crime (which nevertheless did occur). Secondly, the arbiters of insanity, who are no longer priests but doctors, are in many cases seriously divided

over what does and does not constitute a mental disorder or disease. This makes it very difficult to know what is meant by the very word 'insanity'. Now, if someone doesn't know what a word means, and yet persists in using this word, wouldn't we be tempted to dismiss whatever this person said as irrelevant to the issue?)

The point I am trying to make here is that the difference between what is and is not relevant is at least problematic. Seeing relevance is not like seeing that two sentences contradict each other. What is seen as relevant can often be traced to cultural idiosyncrasies.

What then is relevance? Trudy Govier attempts to define it--with reference to statements--as follows:

"Statement A is positively relevant to statement B if and only if the truth of A counts in favor of the truth of B."³⁰ This, I think, begs the question. I have to know whether one statement is relevant to another before I can say whether it counts in favour of the truth of the latter statement.³¹

Consider the two sentences, "I haven't eaten all day," and "I am hungry." Is the first relevant to the second? This is something we would need to know before we could say that the first counted in favour of the truth of the second. I might be the sort of person who never eats during the day, and gets hungry only late at night. My being hungry right now might be an odd occurrence. I might say, "It's totally

irrelevant that I haven't eaten all day. I wonder why I'm hungry now?" On the other hand, I might be the sort of person who eats three regular meals a day. Knowing this, we might say that the first sentence was relevant to the second, and therefore also counted in favour of the truth of the second.

Again, what is relevance? The problem is in the phrasing of the question. Relevance is not an absolute: something that is relevant to you may not be relevant to me. You could, for instance, be saying something in a language I don't understand. Or you could be talking, in my language, about a subject I am unfamiliar with. A precondition of relevance then, of my being able to see two things as relevant, is that they are meaningful to me.

To see something as relevant, then, is to see it as somehow connected to something else in terms of the meaning that both have. Something can be relevant, therefore, only within the context of a given language, and only within the context of a given culture. Our language is the foundation of the possibility of relevance, and our culture tells us what is currently thought to be relevant. And here, I think, is a better definition of relevance: something is relevant if we perceive it as standing in a meaningful relationship to something else. A belief is relevant if we see it as meaningfully related to something other belief we have, and which makes us either more or less likely to hold

this belief. (I think this tallies with what we often mean by saying something is *irrelevant*; we mean that it *should not* make us more likely to hold a view contrary to the one we do hold.)

The relationship between relevance and meaning is more clearly seen if we examine relevance with respect to context. Something someone says can be described as irrelevant if it does not pertain to the rest of what is being talked about. So if we are talking about freedom and determinism, and someone says, "Freedom is a fundamental human right," I will be right to say that this comment is irrelevant. But it is only irrelevant given the context of our discussion. Similarly, a sentence is only made relevant by a particular context. The sentence, "The mind is not a ghost enclosed in a machine," is made relevant by a discussion of the mind/body problem, but is a completely inappropriate response to someone who has just said, "I can't make up my mind what I should do."

A stronger example: suppose I were reading a mystery, and was to ask, "Do you think it's relevant that the dog did nothing in the night-time?" Your response would depend entirely on whether you had read the story or not. If you hadn't, you would have no context into which to place my question. Another precondition, therefore, of two things being relevant to each other is that we know the context in which they either are, or are not, potentially relevant.

I have been loosely alternating between relevance between sentences and relevance between things or events. That is because I don't see any substantial difference between the two. You may say that what I am now saying is irrelevant to what I have said before, or you may say that a particular event (which I am making an event) is irrelevant to other events I have described before. Speaking is making meaningful, and what is spoken about is made meaningful. Therefore I feel that the same concept of relevance is applicable to both sentences and things or events.

However, the main point I want to make about relevance is this: if, for something to be relevant, it must be experienced as meaningfully connected to something else within a particular context--to make meaningful is to place within a system, to create a context--then what can we mean when we ask, in a general way, whether something in the world is relevant to something else?

This question, in the context of physics, is as follows: are "the phenomena of the physical world" meaningful? If they are not--if they are not meaningful--then not only will our explanation of them not be relevant, but we won't be able to explain them at all. If they are meaningful, on the other hand, they will only be so for physicists within the language of physics, and given the context in which they are being studied. Science may then claim explanatory relevance, but not of the

"phenomena of the physical world," in the sense used above by Hempel.

However, if science cannot make the sort of global claims it wishes to make about relevance, it must at least be conceded that the second condition for scientific theories, that they be testable, is one that is easily met. On the other hand, it is good to remember what the word 'testable' means. It certainly never means 'confirmable'. It does mean 'refutable' (in the sense mentioned above--of being shown to be incoherent) and if we are lucky, it means, 'it works for now'. This is, of course, sometimes to say a great deal. Theories are things we can make predictions upon.

However, and again, this falls well short of the knowledge claims that science wants to make. The position is made worse by the fact that there is no reason, in principle, why an indefinite number of scientific theories may not all receive confirming evidence at the same time. This is:

often illustrated by reference to the Copernican heliocentric conception of the solar system, which was considerably simpler than the geocentric one it came to supersede, namely, Ptolemy's ingenious and accurate, but "gorgeously complicated system of main circles and sub-circles, with different radii, speeds, tilts, and different amounts and directions of eccentricity."³²

Strictly speaking, then, classical physics should not claim that the earth revolves around the sun; it should really make only the lesser claim that the paradigm of the earth

revolving around the sun is more *elegant* or *simpler* than the Ptolemaic system.³³ However, classical physics does want to say that yes, the earth really goes round the sun.

But the fact remains that many competing systems *may* all receive "confirming" evidence at the same time.

The gradual elimination of some among the conceivable alternative hypotheses or theories can never, it is true, narrow the field of competitors to the point where only one of them is left; hence we can never establish *with certainty* that a given theory is true, that the entities it posits are real. But to say that is not to disclose a peculiar flaw in our claims about theoretical entities, but to note a pervasive characteristic of *all* empirical knowledge.³⁴

To sum up: science, insofar as it pretends to unlock the secrets of the real world, is metaphysics. A self-conscious science should realize that its claims are interpretive, and that its knowledge claims are acceptable only from a pragmatic point of view. Any pretense science has to ultimate knowledge is mystification, not illumination.

Conclusion

It is not at all the purpose of the above to argue that we should stop doing science, or refrain from any other type of systematic thinking. It is simply to put the project of systematic thought in perspective. In short, it never delivers what it promises. It promises the truth about the real world, and it delivers only a version of the

world--one, certainly, that can have positive, practical implications.

The matter can be said simply: systematizing is indeed a way to acquire knowledge, but this knowledge is always knowledge within the context of the system. To say the same thing a little differently: to affirm that things in the universe are interconnected--to say that there is a system--is to do nothing more than reaffirm our *desire* to know. It is this desire that fools us; we feel we are making progress towards knowledge of the world, and yet every step we take in that direction constitutes a further mediation of it. We mistake the system we construct for the world itself (confusing *explanans* with *explanandum*).

What we wish above all to do is to stand outside the systems we have inherited and those we have built. We want to ask the physicist: are we "really" just collections of atoms? Our desire to know is such that we don't see the simplistic nature of the question. Of course we are more than just atoms--but only if the context is something other than physics. (We have moral precepts, political inclinations, personal tastes in music and literature, and so on.) We then want to ask: isn't there some *ultimate* context where we can say what we *really* are? But this is clearly impossible, because a context limits. In order to live in this "ultimate context" we would have to exist acontextually. But this would be a place outside of

language and meaning, the first of which creates contexts, and the second of which is dependent upon them.

In philosophy in particular, we wish to stand outside contexts and systems--this defines the progress of philosophical thought. Each new thought is like a new skin on an onion. What has gone before is compromised and rejected, or incorporated and superseded. The new thought thinks of itself as the final thought, the thought which stands outside the systems it can clearly identify as faulty metaphysics. It finds the ways in which these systems are faulty.

The desire for knowledge is always with us. That is the lure of metaphysics. We want to see the world as explicable, the things in it as interconnected and harmoniously interacting. And we continue to search for a system until we find one that satisfies us.

But being satisfied, we will also be deluded. We cannot determine what the world and the self look like outside of a system or language that gives them meaning, even if it is our ultimate desire to do so. We desire to stand outside, but we can never stand outside. Because to stand outside a system would be to stare vacantly at a vast and unmeaningful space.

PART THREE

THE SELF

(THE OBJECT OF KNOWLEDGE)

CHAPTER 5

THE SELF: LANGUAGE, SOCIETY AND MEMORY

The inevitable conclusion of the foregoing must be this: the self, as an object of knowledge, must be mediated the way the world is--by my language. This is not to say that the self does not exist, or even that we are not in immediate contact with ourselves. However, when we try to make ourselves meaningful to ourselves, interpret the self--talk about the self--we do so in language. Whatever the self is *beyond* this is something we cannot talk about.

"But this is very paradoxical! You seem to want to talk about the self--the word is in the title of this chapter, after all. Not only that, but you seem to want to talk about it *as it really is*. At the very least, you want to talk about how things really are: we only have access to our selves by making them meaningful in language. But doesn't everything you have said so far contradict this?"

There is indeed a paradox, and it is one from which it is impossible to escape. I desire to know about the self, and yet I know that I can only interpret it in a particular way, and that this interpretation will be only one of many, none of which can be said to correspond to what the self really is. My desire to know impels me to inquire as to

what sort of a thing the self is--will impel me to the point where, in fact, I am satisfied that I do know how the self is. However, I also know that, in the end, the self I create will be an illusion.

"But, knowing this, is there any real point in going on?" Yes, there is a point. First, my interpretation of the self may prove to be more coherent than other interpretations. Secondly, it may show the way in which some other interpretations are incoherent. And finally, perhaps what is true is not so important as what is believed to be true.

Before returning to the self, however, I should ask another question: if my meaningful experience is of a mediated world, one mediated by language, then is my experience of language also a mediated one? As odd as this may at first sound, I have to answer that our experience of language is indeed mediated by language. How else, in fact, could my language become meaningful?

The main way in which my language gains meaning for me is with reference to other words. That is, a new word is introduced to me in terms of a more elementary language I already speak. I may learn the word 'sofa' because someone tells me it means 'couch'. This learning may take place in many ways: looking up a word in a dictionary, listening to others talk, being corrected in my usage by someone,

guessing or reasoning given the context of the word, and so on.

Learning a language is not a simple single process of building upon previously learned blocks; we approach language from as many perspectives as we approach the world with our various languages of science, art, philosophy, and so on. I would like to say, language becomes meaningful in a language, which again becomes meaningful in a language, and so forth.

But this poses a problem. Should there not be some *basic* language? If I learn the meaning of some words with reference to previously learned ones, I must first *know* what the latter words mean. How else would the cycle of meaning begin? Dictionaries are notoriously circular in their definitions. If we did not know the meaning of a single word in a language, we could read a dictionary through and be none the wiser. We seem to need the notion of ostensive definition--how else could language become meaningful in the first place if it were not for the possibility of *showing* what it was one meant by something? If you want to know what a table is, I will simply get a table and show it to you.

If this were the case, then it would represent a tremendous counterexample to what I have been claiming so far. Ostensive definition would, after all, make some aspect of the world meaningful with reference to the world

itself. If ostensive definition were possible--if I could show you the meaning of a word by pointing to something in the world--then it would be arguable that in some sense the meaning of an ostensively defined word would have to be the thing it named.

What is wrong with this idea, with the whole notion of ostensive definition? As Wittgenstein says, "the *meaning* of a name is sometimes explained by pointing to its *bearer*."¹ However, it is important to note what is implied in the word 'explained'. It is not that the bearer *is* the meaning of the word, or that the meaning of a word *will* be clear once we have pointed to the bearer. "When Mr. N.N. dies one says that the bearer of the name dies, not that the meaning dies. And it would be nonsensical to say that, for if the name ceased to have meaning it would make no sense to say 'Mr. N.N. is dead.'"²

How then is the meaning of a word sometimes *explained* by ostensive definition? Suppose that I want to illustrate the difference between a mug and a cup to some children. I might place the two side by side, and say, "Look, a mug is much bigger than a cup." But in order to understand the difference, they will already have to understand a lot. They will have to understand that I am using a common noun (i.e., that this is not the only mug in the world), and that by using the word 'a', what I am showing them is only an example of what mugs look like--that they may come in many

different shapes, sizes, colours, and so forth. Only if they already understand this will my ostensive definition help explain to them what a mug is.

That is: all I can do is *give an example*--and my example must be understood as an example, or else my pointing will have failed.³ But I cannot *demonstrate* the meaning of a particular word by pointing to anything. In the example above, I might have been contrasting a mug with a fork, and I might then have said, "This is a dish, and this is a utensil." Or I might have been trying to show why a mug should not be used as a paintpot: "This is tableware, and this jar is better as a paintpot." Whenever I say, "This is a..." I am doing so in some context, and that context must be recognized before my definition can be understood.

Finally, we say that people know the meaning of a name-word when they can successfully identify other objects of the same name. All I can do, in giving my example, is point to this or that; I cannot show them how to go on.

Ostensive definition, then, if we mean by this the giving of the meaning of a word, is impossible. It may help to define a word, it may help to explain the meaning, but it cannot *give* us the meaning. And this means that we cannot talk about a basic, ostensively defined language upon which the rest of our language is founded, and in terms of which it is defined.

"But mustn't there be a foundation? We can't define words in terms of other words unless we already know what the latter mean. Logically, there has to be something to base these definitions on."

It is important to understand what is being asked here. We certainly *want* there to be a foundation, and we do not see how there could *not* be a foundation--but we do not know what it is. That is because we are in effect asking how meaning originates. But this is an impossible question, and any attempt to make the prelinguistic mind meaningful will undermine itself. The question about the origin of meaning amounts to this: we are asking that the *something* that is prior to meaning be made meaningful--be made into *some thing*--and at the same time continue to be an unmeaningful *something*. We are asking that it be included in a system and stand outside that system. We can have it either way, but not both. It is as if we were staring into a dark tunnel, and trying to see what the tunnel looked like inside. We could shine a light in to examine it, but we wouldn't get what we wanted. What we want is to see what the tunnel looks like in the dark. (Another way of putting this is as follows: those who are developing a language are as yet incapable of telling us how they are doing it, and when they have enough grasp of language to do so, they must do so *in* language.)

If we abandon the attempt to find out how meaning originates, it is much easier to view our knowledge of language as one mediated by language. The concept of 'definition' includes the sort of mediation I have in mind. When I define a word, I not only say (explicitly) what the word means, but also (implicitly) what it doesn't mean. If I say, "Blue is a colour," I am also saying that I cannot use the word 'blue' to refer to either an object or a sound, for instance. But this is only to say that the meaning a word has depends on the meaning of other words in the system of language.

"You persist in talking about language as though it is a system." That is something forced upon me by grammar and considerations of style. I do not, of course, know that language is a system. However, I must assume it is, in that if I attempt to analyze language, I must be systematic in my endeavour. It may be worthwhile to pursue this line of thought a little further.

The philosophy of language is a dramatic demonstration of how language can be mediated by language. When I begin to talk about language, I must do so *in* language. However, this can be confusing, and so it is common to introduce notions such as 'hierarchy of languages' or 'metalanguages'. These are words that are still part of language, although in our attempt to make language systematic--see it as a system

--we see them as somehow standing outside language. (Or we believe that we do.)⁴

The vocabularies of grammar and semantics, and the other branches of linguistics, give us a particular way of looking at language, for instance. And although words such as 'language', 'sentence', 'word', 'meaning', and so on, are so commonly used as to seem inextricably part of language, insofar as they are used to refer to language, it can seem better to think of them as belonging to a metalanguage, a sort of second language through which first language becomes explicable.

"But this metalanguage, this pseudo-language--is it *also* mediated for us?" Insofar as it is described in language, yes it is. The language with which I examine language will still be mediated for me. I can stand back to look at language, but I cannot stand outside language.

"But where then do we stop? Does not the logic of this argument imply that this language, too, is mediated by something, and do we not then get involved in an infinite, and infinitely mediated, regress? It seems that we can then construct another language, a third language, to talk about the second one that is purportedly talking about the first. Might not these languages multiply to infinity? Mustn't we stop somewhere?"

We stop constructing languages to talk about other languages precisely at the point when we have created the

illusion that the language we are now using is the one which gives us direct access to language as it is. We stop when we have so thoroughly made sense that it no longer occurs to us to doubt. We stop when we feel the language we are speaking is the *right* language, when there seems nowhere else to go.

Although it is true this could involve an infinite regress, in practice, because we are so prone to thinking that we have understood things correctly, we rapidly create the illusion that the language we are using is the "correct" one. It is so much our desire to get there that it is quite easy to think we have already arrived.

However, no matter how far we were to perform a regression, we would never in fact get to this correct language. "Our language," writes Wittgenstein,

can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.⁵

It can be seen this way, certainly, and this even seems to me a *good* way of seeing it. But language has also been seen as a collection of names, and there are many other ways in which language can be viewed. The better one will be that which can account for more--but that does not mean that it is the *proper* way of looking at language. There is no proper way, because to admit that there was would be to admit that one could see language as it is.

Thought and Language

How is it, then, that our knowledge of the self is knowledge of a mediated object? One approach to this is through the traditional opposition of thought and language. What is the relationship between thinking and speaking?

The British economist John Maynard Keynes was once asked whether he thought in words or pictures. "I think in thoughts," was his reply. He was right to resist the suggestion that the "things we think in" are either words or pictures, for as we have seen, "mental images are not *just* like pictures in the head, and "verbal" thinking is not *just* like talking to yourself. But saying one thinks in thoughts is really no improvement. It just postpones the question, for a thought is just *whatever happens when we think*--a topic about which there is no settled agreement.⁶

There is no doubt that we think, and no doubt that we talk, but the relationship between these two things is fuzzy. (I should add that by 'thought' here, I mean to include 'emotion'. I do not mean that the two are the same, but only that what is said of the one, in this context, can also be said of the other. I also mean the term 'emotion' to include such things as Plato's 'spirit', Hume's 'passion', Freud's 'libido', and so on.)

The following example will, I hope, clarify this relationship. I open the front door of my house, and as I step outside, I notice it is raining. I step back inside, grab an umbrella, and then proceed out. Now, when I did this I evidently thought something; this something prompted me to go back into the house and get an umbrella. There was some sort of reasoning going on in my head. If you asked me

what I was thinking, I might respond, "Well, I noticed it was raining and decided to get an umbrella." If you then said, "No that's not what I mean. Try to tell me what the thoughts were--exactly as you had them," I might represent them in the following way: "Oh--it's raining--I'll get an umbrella." But I certainly did not think the *words*, "Oh--it's raining--I'll get an umbrella." My thought was not a sort of high-speed sentence. In fact, I didn't think any words at all.

Indeed, I can't say what the thought was. What I *can* do is represent my thoughts to myself in my language. I can try to make them meaningful, as I do the rest of the things in the world, by framing them in words. And this seems to be the key to understanding the relationship between thoughts and words or sentences: the things I feel and think are *somethings* to me until I can organize them in my language and make them meaningful to me. I do indeed have thoughts--and whether these occur in words or images is, for the moment, just beside the point--but until I can express them, they can have no meaning for me.

This may seem a very odd claim: my own thoughts, those things with which I think myself most intimately acquainted, are not meaningful to me until I represent them in language. I hope a few examples will make it sound less odd.

Hume says:

when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other,

of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.⁷

I would like to take this one step further. I would like to "catch" that perception, that thing I am thinking and that I refer to as a thought. Think of a cat. Is it not already a cat in your mind? Think of what you did yesterday: are you not already making it into a story?

Perhaps more convincing is what happens when I blank my mind and try to see what is there. I close my eyes and try not to think of anything--I wait for something to "appear." I will see fleeting images--I may try to make even *these* images meaningful by calling them 'patterns', or 'stars', or 'patches of colour'. However, I might just as easily characterize these images as being random, or unmeaningful. It is a little like trying to pick out objects in a dimly lit room. I can certainly see *something* in the half-light, but if I try to say what that something is, I am really only guessing.

Then, perhaps, I will begin to see something I recognize, something I see *as* a street, with trees and lawns and people walking. It is as if I had been waiting for whatever was going on in my mind to make sense. When it does start to make sense, I seize upon what I am thinking, and I say, "That's it! That's what that is!" I am again seeing it and making it meaningful through my language--

mediating the thought, in fact. Again, this is somewhat like what happens when my eyes adjust to the darkness, and what had previously been intractable shapes suddenly *become* chairs and tables, and so on. Both types of visual experience, then, are mediated by language.

There are many common experiences that are not meaningful, in the sense that we either cannot or do not make them meaningful in language. Sometimes we have emotions that we think no language can mediate for us. The grief is excessive, the love is too strong: we feel there are no words that can capture what we are feeling. For instance, when King Lear comes onto the stage carrying Cordelia's dead body, he shouts (wails, intones, speaks): "Howl, howl, howl, howl." On one interpretation, at least, this can be seen as Shakespeare's admission that there is no language that can adequately express the grief Lear feels at this point in the play. There is nothing within language which can make Lear's grief meaningful.

Artistic inspiration is another thing that is difficult to put into words. What is the experience of a painter who is inspired to "see" what the final painting should look like?

She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done: it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.⁸

What, though, is a vision? It is perhaps a grand version of much more common occurrences called 'flashes of insight', or 'sudden realizations', or what have you. But how can we characterize these things in words? We say, "It suddenly *came* to me," as though it was a letter in the mail. We resort to obvious metaphor. This is only to say, however, that things happen to us that we don't really understand--or, at least, that we have the greatest of difficulty making them meaningful in language.

One very common example of experiencing something unmeaningful has to do with music. When we listen to someone talk in our language, we experience the words *as* the words they are, that is, we experience them as being meaningful. However, people who have not studied music don't experience a note, a chord, a melody or a rhythm as being meaningful.⁹

Of course, a *piece of music* can become meaningful. If we come to know the piece, we will, as I mentioned in chapter two, come to hear the piece *as* the particular piece it is. (We may, and often do, associate such a piece with others we know, but this is not necessary.)¹⁰

What the above examples show is that I can have all kinds of experiences where there is nothing mediating between me and the experience I am having. What these experiences have in common is that they all somehow elude definition. I want to say, "You have to have the experience

yourself. I cannot tell you about it." (And often, when someone is trying to tell us about such an experience--love, terror, exhilaration--we say, "I know what you mean," although this is an odd sort of knowledge, this knowledge that can't be put into words.) The thoughts that I have while I have these experiences are somehow beyond my grasp, beyond language.

On the other hand, many of the thoughts we have can be made meaningful in language. One way of seeing this is by looking at what happens when other people speak our minds, as it were. It often happens, for instance, that someone may give expression to something I am "thinking." Say I am sitting at a table. I am slightly uncomfortable without realizing why, and someone says, "I didn't think it would be quite so noisy in here." This may crystallize for me what it is I was "thinking." Before, I was aware only of being vaguely uncomfortable; now, I can identify the reason I am feeling uncomfortable; now I realize what my thought is. In fact, I might say that this sense of the word 'realize', that is, to suddenly understand, is better understood with reference to another sense of the word, which is 'to make real'.

Again: perhaps I am listening to someone talk, and am being progressively more and more swayed by the argument. In the end, I am convinced, and I say to myself, "That is what I've always thought." Of course, since I have only

just heard these thoughts expressed, I cannot have "always thought" them. However, *something* I was thinking about has now been expressed adequately, and I confuse my thoughts with the expression of them I have just heard. In fact, my thoughts have been made meaningful to me by the person speaking.

A similar example: I say something that makes little sense, someone corrects me, and I exclaim, "But that's exactly what I meant!" What I ought to say is, "If I had been clear on what I meant to say, I wouldn't have said it the way I did." I was trying to make some thought meaningful, but I failed to do so. Someone else has now done the job for me, clarified my thoughts and expressed them. But I feel that all along this is what I meant.

This is all well and good, but there remains a problem, that is: in order to represent something--a thought--meaningfully, mustn't I somehow already know what the thought "means"? Surely I must know what I am thinking before I can express this in some way!

Why, though? I am not saying that we cannot "speak" silently to ourselves; we can and often do think in words. I would say: these are thoughts that are already mediated for me by my language. The point is that often our thinking does *not* occur in words. And what am I to make of these thoughts? They are not nothing, and yet I cannot say *what* they are. I can say that *something* occurred to me, and I

can try to "put it in words." But until I do put it in words, what is it that I have? When I experience something as a particular thing, it is because that thing is mediated by language; therefore, it seems legitimate to suggest that this too is what happens when we recognize our thoughts.

What, in any case, would it mean to know what thought I was having? If I could not put it into words, what meaning could it have for me? And if I must put it into words, I don't see what objection there could be to saying that my thoughts are mediated by my language, and that they are therefore unmeaningful before they are so mediated.

However, if this is accepted, then we must conclude that our knowledge of ourselves is also mediated. It is certainly our desire to know ourselves; but the more we try to get beyond the mediating influence of language, the more we become defined in terms of our language. Our very desire has this result: what we most desire to be (knowledgeable about ourselves) is what we can never be, and that is because the effort itself alienates us from ourselves.

The Publicness of Language

Another, and perhaps easier way of showing that our experience of ourselves is a mediated one is to look at one very important aspect of language, that is, that it is public.

This is not to say that a private language, in one sense anyway, is impossible. A particular group--teenagers,

physicists--may indeed speak a language that at times seems very private to that group. Two people may develop a language understood only by each other. (Parents may spell words in front of their children.) One person may have a private code. Also, languages are invented (I am thinking of computer languages), and may be invented by a single person.

It is important to note, however, that in all the cases just mentioned the private language in question would be definable in terms of an ordinary or public language. The words of this language are available to all; there is no word so erudite that I can't learn it, no word so esoteric as to baffle definition.¹¹

This is, in fact, a basic presupposition we all make when we use language: that any word, in principle at least, is capable of being understood. Imagine if I were to say, "This word will never have any meaning for you--only I can understand it." How could I distinguish between this word and some other that I held to be nonsensical? (Obviously I couldn't, since the only way to show the difference would be to show that *my* word had meaning, whereas the nonsense word didn't. But this is precisely what I have claimed I cannot do.) Since I cannot distinguish between the two, my word must also be nonsensical.

This argument is also an answer of sorts to another notion of "private" language, the "language which describes

my inner experiences and which only I myself can understand."¹² This type of private language is an impossibility, not only for the reasons noted by Wittgenstein, but because it presupposes that a language can exist that is meaningful only to one person, and the meanings of which can never be understood by anyone else. That is: this language would be wholly constituted by words that were indistinguishable from nonsense.

The idea of this sort of private language stems from an assumption about the self that is common in western philosophy: that there is a private world to which I, and only I, have access, and that is the world of my own experience. If, however, these experiences and thoughts are not meaningful outside of the context of a language in which they are made meaningful, this private world is *not* something we can say anything about.

This sheds light on the problem of whether the "contents" of my experience can ever be known to be the same as the contents of someone else's experience.

The essential thing about private experience is really not that each person possesses his own exemplar, but that nobody knows whether other people also have *this* or something else. The assumption would thus be possible--though unverifiable--that one section of mankind had one sensation of red and another section another.¹³

Or, as Locke said, "this could never be known, because one man's mind could not pass into another man's body to perceive what appearances were produced by those organs."¹⁴

According to the present argument, the contents of my experience are unmeaningful until they are expressed in language, and so I could not in principle ever compare them with the contents of anyone else's experience. However, if these contents become meaningful in a public language, I see no reason to deny that our experiences are the same, provided we both speak the same language. (For the extent to which this is possible, see chapter one.)

It is not too much to say, in fact, that those things which are considered most private, a person's emotions, are learned. I learn what it is I am feeling when I learn language. "You learned the *concept* 'pain' when you learned language."¹⁵ Again, it is not that before I learned language, I felt *nothing*, but I could not understand (or say) what these feelings were. Furthermore, those emotions which are not *named* in a language, whose existence is not ratified by language, remain confused and intractable.

This is not to say that the name of any particular feeling is more than a convenient tag for what is often a complex of feelings, or that such feelings are univalent. There are many different feelings that I can identify, for instance, as part of the feeling of pride. I might feel elation, determination, light-headedness, rebelliousness, and so on. Furthermore, a feeling such as pride may have both positive and negative overtones. However, since the word exists, I may at least learn to identify a cluster of

feelings *as* something I may refer to as 'pride'. I am not so lucky when it comes to other sorts of feelings. So, if a person has won a competition, say, he or she might feel proud at having won, but realize that a certain amount of what we call 'luck' was also present in the win. The person may feel proud and humble at the same time. This is a common enough occurrence, and yet there is no word in English to reflect this mixture of feelings.

To avoid confusion, from now on I will refer to these "feelings" as 'reactions'. There are many reactions we have, but for which we simply have no outlet, because there is no means of expressing them. I would like to say: a *reaction* (or set of reactions) becomes an *emotion* once it is given a place in a language. However, this is itself highly problematic, because then I would have given a name ('reaction') to something which is not in itself meaningful, and I might easily slip into thinking that, by examining people minutely, I might come up with some sort of logic of reactions. But in the sense in which I am using the term, 'reactions' are something about which I can say nothing. To talk about them at all would be to make them meaningful *in a particular way*--make them into emotions.

It is perhaps trivial to note that emotional systems also change, and may vary from society to society. The word 'love', for instance, has enjoyed a multitude of different meanings. There are the love of wisdom in Plato's

Symposium, the love of God (Judaism), the love of humanity (Christianity), the love of humans (the court of love), the love of sex (libertinism), and the love of love (G.E. Moore), to mention just a few. One may say the same thing about honour, pity, and so on. This is really only to say that different languages reflect the values held by different societies.

There is an important conclusion to be drawn from this, that is: different languages, different "forms of life," do indeed divide up our emotional spectrum differently, and what we feel, what is meaningful to us emotionally, will be a function of which language we speak. There is no set of emotions which is endemic to human beings. Our very emotions, those things most private, are only possible because of we speak a public language.

What I am driving towards is the idea that our private selves--if what is meant by this is the private selves of our "private experience"--are in fact publicly constituted selves. This follows as an immediate consequence of language both being public and mediating between my "experience" and my view of myself. The type of self we have is therefore dependent both upon living with a language and living within a society.¹⁶

This idea may go some way towards solving the problem as to whether animals have souls, or are automata, or in more modern terms, have any sense of self. There is an

almost trivial sense in which animals often appear to have a sense of self. A cat, a dog, a monkey--even a rat--will respond to a name and will look into a person's eyes when addressed. I want to say: just as we look into a person's eyes (rather than at the mouth, which seems an equally obvious place to look) when we are addressed. However, I cannot even say that something so natural as looking into another's eyes is "natural," because in some cultures this is construed as a sign of disrespect and in others, if it is a woman looking into a man's eyes, a sign of sexual aggressiveness and impropriety.

Animals often do seem to have a sense of self: they respond to being petted, for instance. However, to go further than this--to say they like, or enjoy, being petted--is irresponsibly anthropomorphic. We have no idea at all what sorts of things animals feel. We may of course say that animals have pseudo-emotional *reactions* (in the sense of the term I mentioned above), but to call these *emotions* would be tacitly to assert that these reactions had been organized and codified in a language, which is clearly incorrect. To "like" or "enjoy" something, to understand your feelings in these terms and express them in this way, you must be human, equipped with the full range of emotions in which your language has organized your reactions. Words such as 'like' and 'enjoy' make sense only with reference to all the other emotional categories we use to describe our

reactions to things. (To say that animals have "negative" and "positive" reactions achieves nothing. How would we define these terms if not with reference to the emotional system we know?)

However, if our sense of self depends upon our living with a language and within a society, if these are the ways in which my sense of self is constituted, then it is clear that to attribute selfhood to animals is itself an anthropomorphic act. We cannot experience what it would be like to live without language and without society. (We can experience other beings who live without language, or appear to socialize with each other, but we can do no more than guess at what sort of experiences they have, or what this "socializing" means to them.) Therefore, we can say *nothing at all* about what an animal's "self" might be like. The very question as to whether animals have a soul or are merely automata contains a hidden anthropomorphic assumption. (Could animals think about themselves in these terms?)

To say that the selves we have are publicly constituted is not in any sense to claim that we are purely public beings; although the only way we can describe our experiences is through language, what happens to each of us (*what we describe*) is different. The result of this is what can be called 'personality'.

The growth of a personality can be seen as a process of self-definition. (This is not to say that a personality is the same as a self. However, it is customary to speak of the development of personality as "self-definition," and that is the usage I am adopting here.)

Self-definition is essentially the project of placing ourselves in a particular relation to the world. This project of self-definition is one in which we make ourselves meaningful to ourselves.

At birth, we are not *nothing*; we are not *tabulae rasae*. At least we may claim to have certain capacities, or a certain potential which distinguishes us from other animals.¹⁷ On the other hand, although there are many things we can become, we are not yet *any* of them. It is as pointless to wonder whether there are certain things which we *innately* are (or know), as it is to ask for the origin of meaning (see above, p. 164). At birth, we are not nothing; we are *something*, but this something is as yet undefined, unmeaningful. We are not born with language.

From birth, our behaviour is manipulated. Without a doubt, the grandest manipulation is that we are encouraged to adopt a language. To be taught a language is to be taught that the world is to be seen in a particular way, that some things are important and some not. When we are taught a language, we are taught, "This is the way things are."

As children learn language, and as they become progressively more involved in complex social relationships, they learn that, in most situations, there is a certain form of behaviour which is expected of them, and they learn what this behaviour is. Some of what they do is praised, some ignored, some punished. They also discover that they have particular wishes and needs, and these complicate their social interactions. They adopt a multiplicity of different roles. They learn to see themselves in a wide variety of ways. In fact, they learn to tell many different stories about who they are.

These stories do not at first have to overlap or connect. It is quite common, for instance, for parents to discover that their children behave utterly "out of character" when they are in school or on the playground. The adult requirements of candor and consistency are often not met by children who, new to a social environment, first try only to master the rules, and leave understanding them for a later date. Furthermore, stories can easily be abandoned. Every child has the experience of discarding an old story--perhaps pretending to be a mother or a father in a game--as childish. The formulation and revision, the adopting, discarding and reshaping of the many stories we tell--and are told--about who we are, is what is referred to as 'growing up'.

I noted before that personality is not the same as the self. However, what the self is will not be meaningful until it is placed into a story--until it becomes a personality. (Nevertheless, there have been many attempts to talk about the self; some of these will be discussed in the next chapter.) And because personality is then *all we ever have*, it is worthwhile comparing the notion of 'personality' described here to the 'self' with which I originally began.

What I would like to suggest is that, instead of viewing the self as a sort of object, we think of it *as a story*. It is a story that we tell ourselves about ourselves, and that others tell about us. There are, I think, advantages in this approach. First, we do not think of stories as having physical locations. Secondly, we may continue to think of the self as a "unity in time." The unity will lie in the varying degrees of coherence we bring to the aggregate of stories we tell about ourselves. We will almost always achieve *some* coherence; rarely will we achieve total coherence. But this doesn't matter, as far as the notion of 'unity' is concerned. What matters is that we will perceive all these stories as *relevant* to one another--as being meaningfully connected. Finally, we can solve (or dissolve) the problem of personal identity by claiming that what we are--our "immutable essence"--can

never be known, because when it is made meaningful, it is mediated through a story.

Memory

Before going on to consider some philosophical attempts to describe what a self is, I want to examine briefly what has always been a key concept in the theory of the self, that is, memory. I will criticize the notion of memory that Hume made explicit in his distinction between impressions and ideas, that is, that our memories are in some sense copies of what we experience. I will then suggest that memory be viewed as something which is in large part narrative.

When we reflect on our past sentiments, our thought is a faithful mirror and copies its object truly, but the colors which it employs are faint and dull in comparison of those in which our original perceptions were clothed.¹⁸

I take this to represent in brief the basic model of what memory is for western philosophy. It might also be called the common sense view of memory. The human mind is like a videotape recorder; it may play back what has been perceived. It is like a computer; it may store data for subsequent recall. There is first the experience, and then there is the memory of it. Experiences and memories have a one-to-one relationship.

This model of memory is so ingrained in our thought that, even when memory is studied--which is not all that

often, except in psychology--the model is assumed.¹⁹ The only difference between remembering an experience and having the experience itself, says Hume, lies in the relatively larger degree of vividness of the latter over the former.

Quite simply, this model of memory is a bad model. First, it cannot account for a number of legitimate ways in which we use the word 'remember'. Secondly, even if we apply the model only to visual memories--and these memories are clearly the paradigm around which the model was built--it can be shown to be inadequate. I will look at visual memories first.

"Do you remember what the waterfall looked like?" What is being asked here? Evidently, we are being asked if we can "bring to mind" a mental image of a given waterfall. This strikes me as about the simplest sort of memory the video-camera model can be asked to accommodate. Yet there are great problems in trying to tie a mental image of the waterfall to our experience of it. Unless we saw it for only a split second, in one sort of light, and from a single perspective, what part of our experience shall we associate with our mental image? I can close my eyes and picture a waterfall, but will the water falling in this picture bear any relation to the water I actually saw falling?

The case gets worse: "Do you remember her face?" Is my mental image here from a particular angle, or several, or

all angles? Are the eyes open or closed, is the face smiling, talking, listening, crying?

At the very least, in both these cases we would want to say that the mental image we had was not tied to any particular experience, but was sort of an amalgam. This can be seen by the sort of test we might devise in order to ascertain that someone was remembering correctly (which is to say, remembering). If I wanted to see if you really did remember what someone's face looked like, I might present you with a selection of photographs, and see if you picked out the right one. Here, the question, "Do you remember her face?" is equivalent to, "Do you recognize her face?"

It is clearly not equivalent to, "Can you reproduce her face?" whether this means "in your mind" or on paper. That is because, if you did indeed pick the right photograph, I would be inclined to say that you *did* remember, whether you had a mental image or not.

So right away there are two problems with the video-camera model of memory. Evidently, many of our memories have been constructed from a number of different experiences, and therefore cannot be said to mirror any one of them. Secondly, even when it is not possible to conjure up a visual memory, we still may be said to remember something.

However, there are also many other types of visual memories that it would make no sense to tie to individual

experiences. For instance, there is the type of visual memory I will provisionally term 'block' or 'diachronic image' memory. This type of memory, I think, constitutes a large proportion of what we normally think of as visual memories.

A block memory is something like the memory I have of a house I have lived in, buildings I have worked in, familiar parks, and so forth. I will use a house as my example. My memory of the house will not be related to any particular time, as though one day I had toured my house paying very close attention to its contents so that I might have a memory of them. Rather, my memory of this house will be a rich and composite picture built over time. The house will go from being an alien environment to an utterly familiar one. When I eventually leave the house, my memory of it will be a very complex one.

Of course, even to call this a visual memory is a little simplistic. My visual memory will be inextricably intertwined with my narrative memory of the house (of which, more later). Remembering a particular room will trigger the memory of an event, which in turn will cause me to remember a detail of the room I had forgotten. But my visual memory in this case is certainly not tied to any particular and single experience.

Another type of memory may trigger visual memory, but cannot be tied to any particular experience: this is

something I will call *genre* memory.²⁰ Memories of similar events often seem to cluster together, and so when we "remember" them, we are actually uniting a variety of experiences in a single memory. An example of this would be teaching or attending a particular course over a period of months. The various classes tend to blend together into a single memory, which is of "that class." Discounted in this composite memory would be absent students, different seating arrangements of students, different weather, different subject matter from class to class, and a host of other things. Included in the memory might be unusual events--someone bringing a dog to class as part of its training programme--but *typical* events would probably constitute a large part of the memory: the student who was doggedly unclear and tangential; the group of students who worked well together; the students who dressed theatrically, and so on. Such assessments would evolve during the term, and in the end, my memory would be full of typical, rather than actual, behaviour.

Another example would be: going for similar walks every night during one summer, where every individual walk might contribute to, and then become, part of the generic walk. There will, no doubt, be particular instances which stand out, but these will only make sense within the context of the *genre* memory itself.

A final example: ask someone to think of a mountain, or lake, or what have you. Which mountain or lake will the person think of? Will it be a particular mountain that was seen on a particular day, a certain lake that one brings to mind? Isn't it more likely that the image is a timeless composite, a genre image?

Enough has been said to at least cast into doubt the video-camera model of memory. However, as I said above, there are many types of memory that don't fit the model at all. It is a legitimate question to ask, "Do you remember when the Magna Carta was signed?" Or, "Do you remember what foods Martin won't eat?" Here, the test described above won't work as a test of memory. In the case of the Magna Carta, someone with a knowledge of British history could remember, for instance, that the document was signed in the early thirteenth century, but not remember the exact date. If I were to give this person a set of five dates (1215, 1315, 1415, 1515, and 1615), he or she would inevitably get the right answer. On the other hand, if the dates read: 1207, 1212, 1215, 1229, and 1242, the answer would be a simple guess. In either case, we wouldn't want to claim that the person remembered the date.

Similarly, if I know that a number of my friends do not eat red meat, and that some don't eat seafood, and that some won't touch an idiosyncratic collection of vegetables, and I don't know which category Martin fits into, I can't be

said to remember what Martin doesn't eat. I may guess, and my guess may be an educated one, and I may even be right-- but we don't, on that account, want to say I remembered.

The test for this type of memory seems to involve being able to produce an answer. "What date was the Magna Carta signed?" "1215." "What foods doesn't Martin like?" "Peas, turnips, scallops and pork." Here, if I can say the answer, then I may be said to remember. If not, I am guessing.

The point is this: here, we are not even interested in tracing a memory to a visual experience. In the case of the Magna Carta, many school children, or highschool children have read that the year they are to associate with its signing is 1215. But is their memory directly tied to this first reading of the date? The second? No, the experience on which their ability is based will have been forgotten. (Indeed, until one has some sense of history, there is very little to choose from between the dates 1215 and 1512.) But the date will be repeated over and over again, until 1215 is just seen as the date the document was signed.

Still less is the video-camera model of memory able to accommodate a question such as, "Do you remember how to get there?" I mean in the case where someone has memorized a set of instructions. "Do you remember how to operate the computer system?" Here, the concern is whether or not someone can remember a procedure. In both cases, we are

asking whether the person can remember an ordered sequence. Now, it is clear that the person's ability to remember the sequence may be related, amongst other things, to *how* that sequence was initially presented. In giving a set of instructions, I might present them orally, or write them vertically--or horizontally--on a piece of paper, or prepare a stack of index cards, each containing a single instruction. That is: I can make it harder or easier for the person to remember. However, the method of presentation doesn't seem to have anything to do with the eventual memory. The person is trying to remember the elements of the sequence ('left', 'up the hill', 'turn right at the light', and so on) and the order in which they occur.

It is the same when someone is trying to memorize a procedure, except that now the person will assume that the instructions are relevantly ordered (meaningfully connected in *just this way*). In presenting the instructions, I assume that the person will pay attention to the meaning of the instructions, and try to see how they are related to each other. The *last* thing I would want the person to do is pay attention to the tone of my voice, or the font in which the instructions were printed, and so on.²¹

Many other examples could be adduced to show that memory is not just a hugely complex video-recording of sensory experience. However, I want to skip to the main point. "Do you remember the time we went to Mexico?" Here

we are being asked to tell a story (recount a history). That is: we are being asked to select the salient events from the trip (by being salient, they became events), and arrange them into a coherent whole. Both our ability and our propensity to do this (that we can make some things meaningful, and desire to do so), I will call *narrative memory*.

I think this is probably the most important type of memory we have. Simply put, narrative memory produces the stories people tell themselves about themselves. Consider a simple story, the story of what I have done so far today: "I got up early, went to the bank, met Jennifer for lunch, read a little at the library in the afternoon, and then went home." I have singled out what I think are the key events of the day, and put them in a coherent form. I could flesh it out and make it a longer story. I might have to make it more coherent--if the person I am talking to doesn't know who Jennifer is, say--but it generally meets certain expectations of coherence. If, on the other hand, I had ended this sentence with the phrase, "and then I tried to get home," my story would become incoherent. "Go on," one would want to say, "finish the story."

We do not only tell stories about individual days, but about our lives: who we are and what we have done. These stories are attempts to render our lives coherent in a way which is meaningful to our present. I think it very

unlikely that we should remember *anything* about what happened ten years ago, if ten years ago we had not encapsulated our days in a story, and related that story to what at *that* point was our present. And if we did remember something, in the sense of having a visual image of it, how would we tell if that memory was of something that happened ten years ago, or eleven, or eight? Often, it is only because we can relate such an image to a story in which some events come before others, and which form a semi-coherent whole, that we can make sense of the visual image. (We may do the same thing with old and unlabelled photographs. "What is this?" we ask, unable to understand what the picture is of. "Oh, that's when we went to Vancouver three years ago. We were stuck in a horrendous traffic jam, and you decided to take snapshots of the buildings around us while we waited for traffic to clear. Charles was with us. Don't you remember?" Often, the answer to such a question will be, "Yes, now I remember.")

Narrative memory not only organizes visual memory--it can also *trigger* it. I may draw a blank, so to speak, when asked to remember something. "Don't you remember how beautiful the mountains were? Remember, we had left the car and were hiking. John and Virginia were with us. It was late afternoon, the sun was setting, and the mist was rolling in." And then there it is, that lost visual image, prodded back into existence by a short story.

However, a narrative memory need not have any visual memories attached to it, nor need it trigger any. Often, if the story is an old one, or if it had a negative impact on us, or if it is mundane, or for a host of other psychological reasons which I needn't elucidate, it will persist in memory just as a particular story. Our memory will then just be that such-and-such happened in a particular way, before some things and after others.

I am not trying to say that we don't have visual memories which are related to particular incidents. Indeed, these count amongst our most vivid memories, and this is perhaps why they occupy the place they do in the common sense model of memory. These seem to be associated with incidents in our lives which are unusual, which stand out. However, and more importantly, this notion of narrative memory goes some way towards explaining how it is possible to forget certain events in our lives. From our present perspective, some incidents are not deemed important, they are not included in the current story, they become irrelevant, and are finally without meaning and hence forgotten.

Memory is a difficult subject, and I have only touched on it here. However, I hope to have shown the inadequacy of the idea that memory is somehow a copy of experience. The reason for wanting to do so is that I want to promote a very different idea of memory, and that is, as I said above, that

it has an important narrative function. We create of ourselves a particular self constituted by language and society: we continually are in the act of creating a history of who we are. We add what is important, discard what ceases to be so. And the resultant history, although it creates a self twice mediated (seeing ourselves in a role and in a story), is what we come to believe we really are. It is the way in which we create of ourselves a unity that persists through time. We do not know our "selves;" we know only the story. However, the story can seem so real to us that we end up accepting it as real.

Conclusion

In western philosophy, religion and culture, there has been a succession of different attempts to talk about what it is to be a human being. Many are so compelling--they so thoroughly create the illusion that this is indeed what the self really is--that we readily accept them as being descriptive of people, rather than seeing that they are simply models with relatively greater and lesser explanatory power, given particular contexts. That these different models are compelling can be seen from the fact that it is quite easy for people to identify themselves with a number of different models, even though there are vast differences, and sometimes even contradictions, between them.

It is quite easy to believe, for instance, in Plato's tripartite soul²² which is divided into rational, spirited and appetitive elements. Although it is harder, I can also make sense of the soul of the *Phaedo*, which, except for the fact that it is reincarnated, is quite similar to the Christian version of what a soul is.²³

Every seeker after wisdom knows that up to the time when philosophy takes it over his soul is a helpless prisoner, chained hand and foot in the body, compelled to view reality not directly but only through its prison bars, and wallowing in utter ignorance.²⁴

The soul, upon the death of the body, escapes to "a place that is, like itself, glorious, pure, and invisible--the true Hades or unseen world--into the presence of the good and wise God."²⁵ What is this body which the soul is imprisoned in? "Nothing seems real to it but those physical things which can be touched and seen and eaten and drunk and used for sexual enjoyment."²⁶

Here are two quite different and contradictory versions of what a soul is. With regard to the first, Plato insists that all three parts of the soul must remain balanced and in harmony for the soul to be just. That, of course, must include the appetites. However, in the second, it is clear that the appetites belong to the body and will disappear after the death of the body, leaving the soul in a purer state. The appetites do not belong to the soul in the *Phaedo* model.

The point, however, is that it is very easy to believe in both the one and the other at the same time, because both seem to describe and explain a large chunk of human experience. The first pictures the soul as inhabiting an organic machine which needs an internal driver without whom it won't operate at all. This notion seems amply argued for by the fact that, when my soul is not functioning (if I am asleep or otherwise unconscious), my body doesn't seem to do anything (at best, it breathes on its own).

The *Phaedo* version of the soul, on the other hand, pictures it as being trapped in a den of iniquity. This notion can make sense with reference to ethical concerns. I talk about not being able to control my desires, as though these desires were somehow alien to *me*, as though my body were a disease infecting my mind.

What I want to discuss in the following chapter is a number of such dominant theories of what it is to be a human being, to have a self. I will first discuss the theory, and then show what aspects of experience it is meant to account for, and what aspects of experience it leaves out entirely. Having performed this last task will demonstrate convincingly that what we are dealing with is not the self itself, but only a model.

CHAPTER 6

MODELLING: HISTORICAL MODELS OF THE SELF

In western thought, there have been many, many models of what it is to be a human being. In this chapter I look at five of the more important ones, found in the writings of Plato, Descartes, Hume, Kant and Freud. Each claims to be a description of the self as it really is; I will try to show that each is in fact no more than a model.¹

There are many other models it would be possible to discuss. There is, for instance, the Christian model of soul and body. There is the model I discussed above (in chapter three, pp. 94-95) that sees a person as an amalgam of reason and experience. There is the medieval conception of human beings as entities situated midway between angels and animals. There is the popular division of human beings into "a head and a heart," a division mirrored in distinctions between reason and emotion, and thinking and feeling.²

I do not plan to investigate any of these other models in this chapter, but will concentrate only on the five mentioned above. It is not my desire to write a comprehensive history; I only want to illustrate the sorts of things that go wrong when we try to talk about the self.

Neither shall any of the individual sections below deal comprehensively with the philosophies under discussion. In fact, I will pursue matters as briefly as possible, because my only purpose is to show that these ways of viewing the self do not describe *how we are*, but only create highly compelling *models of how we are*. That is: it is very easy to mistake these models for the thing we desire to be knowledgeable about--the self.

There is, I believe, a general reason why these versions of the self are only models: when we make something meaningful, we see it from a particular perspective; when we know what an object is, we have shaped it in a particular way, within some context. Given this, any attempt to describe the self will always see it in one way, place it in one context rather than another. It will therefore always *leave something out* (fail to account for part of our experience, and so render it meaningless), and hence be a model rather than a "description." If this is true, then all other versions of the self can be criticized in a similar way.

Of the five models described below, the first four come from philosophy and the fifth from psychology. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first four tend to regard human beings in the context of their ability to know, while the last regards human beings in the context of their emotional processes.

Models

Plato

I have already briefly mentioned Plato's description of the "soul" as tripartite; here I will try to show that, rather than describing a soul, he is creating only a model of one. In Book IV of the *Republic*, Socrates³ defines the soul as having three components. The first is the class of desires, and the "most conspicuous members of that class are what we call thirst and hunger."⁴ However, this part of the soul is more fully defined as that with which a person "loves, hungers, thirsts, and feels the flutter and titillation of other desires, the irrational and appetitive."⁵

The second component is reason. It is instructive that Socrates introduces reason as the faculty by which we *regulate* desires. It is true that he claims that this part of the soul also "reckons and reasons the rational,"⁶ and, later in the *Republic*--and in the other dialogues--reason is seen as the means of gaining wisdom; however, its function vis a vis the appetites is restricted to controlling desire.

Finally, there is the third part of the soul, "the *thumos*, or principle of high spirit, that with which we feel anger."⁷ This is operative "when his desires constrain a man contrary to his reason [so] that he reviles himself and is angry with that within which masters him."⁸ The *thumos* is that which engenders nobility of soul, that which enables

people to be brave. In part it is willpower, or that which enables (or forces) us to do what we don't want to do, and helps us refrain from doing what we do want to do. In part it is like conscience, in part like pride. In part it is what makes us feel joyful and vital and exuberant. It has been translated many ways, as 'spirit' and 'heart' and 'soul'. To avoid confusion, I will use the untranslated word "*thumos*."

Reason and *thumos*:

will preside over the appetitive part which is the mass of the soul in each of us and the most insatiate by nature of wealth. They will keep watch upon it, lest, by being filled and infected with the so-called pleasures associated with the body and so waxing big and strong, it may not keep to its own work but may undertake to enslave and rule over the classes which it is not fitting that it should, and so overturn the entire life of all.'

This, then is Plato's picture of the self in Book IV of the *Republic*. First, the self *is* the soul, and it is a soul in conflict, resident in an alien body. Secondly, the body feels pleasure and pain, and the largest part of the soul, the appetitive part, seeks to give the body pleasure and avoid bodily pain. Reason and *thumos*, on the other hand, seek to control the appetites and pursue "true" pleasure, that is, knowledge of the true, the good and the beautiful.

In many ways, this is a persuasive notion of what the self is, in that it accounts for so much. First, I do have certain experiences that I can make meaningful as needs (or

desires, lacks, or appetites). It is possible to question whether all these experiences should be included within a single group--whether they are similar enough to all be called 'appetites'. However, when they are considered as a group, the group is sufficiently different from the other two parts of the soul Plato mentions; therefore, it is easy to gloss over the differences between different appetites, and affirm that one part of the soul is, indeed, appetitive.

Secondly, once I have identified appetites in the way Plato does, I can also say that I sometimes experience a conflict between what I want (my appetites) and something I don't want but foresee as a *consequence* of my actions, or between what I want and what I think I *should* want. Again, it is possible to question whether this sort of abstract thinking--'abstract' in that I am either thinking beyond the present, or thinking *about* the appetite, rather than just acting on it--is sufficiently similar to what I do when I construct a mathematical proof, or weigh an argument, to warrant grouping these things together. However, all such activities are fairly easily distinguishable from appetitive desire, and so we can reach the conclusion that this second part of the soul can be called 'rational'. (It should be pointed out, however, that under a different interpretation, sexual desire and the desire for knowledge might easily be grouped together. In fact, it is arguable that Plato does precisely this in the *Symposium*.)

Finally, there are experiences where, in the "battle" between reason and appetite, a third force seems to come into play--a sort of determination or will to stick to one's principles rather than be swayed by one's appetites. It is probably not quite so obvious to us now as it was to Plato that this should count as a distinct, third part of the soul. However, there are clearly experiences that can be made meaningful with reference to *'thumos'*.

If there were not much to be said for this model, it would not have received the attention it has. However, there are obvious things wrong with it. What is wrong is that it accounts for only some of our experience. That is what makes it a model.

The first thing wrong with this version of the self is that, in order for it to make sense, we must perceive ourselves and our actions as being firmly embedded in an ethical context. What we are, and what we do, must always be either good or bad. (My appetites are in constant play, and reason must determine whether to accommodate them or not.) There is, of course, ample evidence that Plato not only thought just that, but also thought that the whole universe was ethically ordered.¹⁰

To make the latter claim is evidently to invoke the sort of pseudo-context I mentioned in chapter four (see pp. 129-130). I would have to suppose that there was another universe I could experience that was not ethically ordered,

and that I could compare this other universe with our one, in order to see that ours was, indeed, ethically ordered. However, there is only one universe, and so the claim fails to make sense.

The former claim, that human beings must always be perceived as within an ethical context, fails for similar reasons. That is: the use of the value judgments "this is good" and "this is bad" presupposes the existence of an ethically neutral context, or a context in which value judgments are not made. To think pictorially: imagine arranging all possible actions on a line, with those we judged the worst at the extreme left. Moving right along the line, the actions would gradually become less blameworthy. At the far right of the line would be those actions we judged the best. The point is: with respect to what would we judge any action either good or bad? Clearly, I wouldn't consider murder bad on the grounds that saving another person's life was good. That is: I wouldn't declare something bad with reference to something else that was good, or vice versa. To return to the line: I would consider everything to the left of the line bad with reference to the mid-point in the line. The mid-point would be ethically neutral; it would be neither good nor bad. And it would be with reference to this that the good and the bad were defined.

There are, of course, many cases where this analogy will not work. If the country I live in guarantees me the right of free speech, then either I can speak freely (which is good), or I can be deprived of my right (which is bad)--and there is no third alternative. However, this paradigm ought not to be extended to all cases. Often, good and evil are defined in terms of a norm, a sort of standard behaviour. Good and evil are deviations from this norm, one being better than, and the other worse than whatever the standard behaviour is. So if one is nursing another person back to health, one may do a good job of nursing (perhaps bringing more compassion to the job than is normal) or a bad job (perhaps doing what is required but handling the patient roughly). To say that nursing someone is *itself* good is confuse contexts. To nurse someone is, of course, good if we are contrasting this with neglecting the person entirely. However, within the original context, nursing is neither good nor bad. (Otherwise, how could one nurse badly?)

Because so many of our concerns are ethical ones, it is tempting to see all actions as fitting somehow within an ethical framework.¹¹ However, once that assumption is abandoned, it is easy to find types of actions that are ethically neutral. A concrete--if one-sided--example of this is the law. The law defines what is to count as a crime in a particular society. For instance, the law may dictate that I should drive within a certain speed limit.

If I drive either too slowly or too fast, I am breaking the law, doing something bad. What the law does *not* say is that if I drive within the speed limit I am doing something good. As well, there are a great many things about which the law says nothing at all. For instance, the law does not say anything about how fast I should *walk*.

There are also actions about which ethics says nothing: singing a song, eating dinner, taking a walk, and so on. But if there are actions that are ethically neutral, then it does not make sense to accept *as the self* a model that relies on the notion that we are, willingly or not, moral agents in all our actions. Much of what we are will simply not be reflected in the model.¹² What place is there in Plato's model for our ability to imagine, for instance? And yet we do imagine things.¹³

The second thing wrong with Plato's model is that it unjustifiably places more importance on knowledge than it does on desire--it values the soul and denigrates the body. "True" pleasures are intellectual pleasures; the only consequence of bodily pleasures is that they distract us, lead us astray in our search for true pleasures.¹⁴ And because bodily pleasures are so strong, they often lead us to mistake them for true pleasures.¹⁵

Why are the pleasures of the soul--knowledge of truth, beauty, goodness--more to be valued than those of the body?¹⁶ Plato never directly answers this question: he does

not say why knowledge is important, but merely assumes that it is. (This is not a difficult assumption to make, especially in philosophy.) He does, however, have an elaborate, indirect answer. The world consists of the eternal and the temporal, the invisible and the visible. Only the eternal, invisible world can be known, because it does not change. The temporal, visible world is in a constant state of flux, and about this world we may have only opinions.¹⁷

Because knowledge is assumed to be valuable, and because we can have knowledge only of the eternal, the eternal is seen as more valuable than the temporal. That is why love is described in the *Symposium* as "a lover of wisdom"¹⁸ and a "passion for immortality."¹⁹ Our longing is for knowledge, and our knowledge can be only of something that lasts forever. This is why the character Diotima can say:

Those whose procreancy is of the body turn to woman as the object of their love, and raise a family, in the blessed hope that by doing so they will keep their memory green, 'through time and through eternity.' But those whose procreancy is of the spirit rather than of the flesh--and they are not unknown, Socrates--conceive and bear the things of the spirit. And what are they? you ask. Wisdom and all her sister virtues.²⁰

This is also why Diotima says that the lover "must grasp that the beauties of the body are nothing to the beauties of the soul."²¹ Reason, that which is capable of knowing all

of this, is clearly more to be valued than the appetitive part of the soul.

The question, of course, is: "How can Plato know any of this? On what grounds do his claims rest?" There is only one answer to these questions: Plato must know the good. If he knows the good, that which gives "the power of knowing to the knower,"²² he will know that the eternal is more valuable than the temporal, that soul is more valuable than body, that reason is more valuable than desire. However, to be the object Plato wants it to be, the good must stand beyond any possible attempt to make it meaningful, and so must remain essentially meaningless for him. He cannot know it.

If he cannot know the good, then he cannot know that the soul is composed the way he thinks it is, and in particular cannot say that reason is the faculty by means of which we understand goodness. And this is the point I have been driving towards: I find it very difficult to think of ethical judgments that are devoid of any sort of emotional content. How is it possible to value something, and yet not find it desirable? In the myth of the charioteer in the *Phaedrus*, reason and *thumos* at least cooperate,²³ but in the tripartite soul, it is reason alone that comes to "know" the good. This, I think, does not fit most of our experience of what it means to distinguish between what is good and what is not.

Therefore, by banishing love, desire and "the irrational" to the appetitive part of the soul, and by restricting our knowledge of goodness to the rational part, Plato constructs a soul that cannot account for the emotional content of ethical judgments. Here again, we must conclude that what Plato presents is not the soul itself, but only a model of it.

Descartes

My aim here is not to discuss the mind/body problem, but to show that the mind/body picture of human beings is just one model amongst many. In many ways it is a good model, tallying with what we experience--in fact, unlike the tripartite soul, the mind/body distinction is so deeply ingrained in our culture that it seems absurd even to question it. "Of course, I have a mind and a body; the distinction between the mental and the physical--between the mind and the body--is just *basic*." This version of the self is indeed a compelling one. Nevertheless, the mind/body picture is in some ways a bad model: no one, for instance, has ever satisfactorily shown how the two communicate. The point is this, though: if it is simply a model, it can be rejected *as such*, insofar as it claims to describe the reality of how human beings are constituted.

Descartes's aim in the *Meditations* can be summarized as follows: he wants to demonstrate that the world is as it appears to be, and he wants to account for the possibility

of error in experience. It is this possibility of error which motivates the entire *Meditations*.²⁴ First, he resolves to doubt everything, but finds he cannot doubt his own existence. Then he claims to have proven the existence of God. Because God is incapable of deceit, Descartes can then claim that the world he perceives not only exists, but exists as he perceives it to exist, provided he can show how he is sometimes capable of being mistaken about the world, which he does. The world, at the end of Descartes's writings then, is the same as he found it before his meditations began. The cost of all this is the mind/body problem.

Because it is so well-known, I will not go into the problem in detail. It originates this way in Descartes:

I will reject, that is, whatever admits of the least doubt... I suppose, therefore, that whatever things I see are illusions; I believe that none of the things my lying memory represents to have happened really did so; I have no senses; body, shape, extension, motion, place are chimeras. What then is true? Perhaps only this one thing, that nothing is certain.²⁵

Having doubted this much, Descartes can at least prove one thing to himself:

Thus I have now weighed all considerations enough and more than enough; and must conclude that this proposition 'I am', 'I exist', whenever I utter it or conceive it in my mind, is necessarily true.²⁶

But if he exists, what sort of being is he? He is "a conscious being (*cogitans*),"²⁷ or, in better-known

terminology, he is "a thing which thinks."²⁸ This is what leads to the division of a person into a mind and a body.

However, there is a major and unstated assumption in all of this: that people should be regarded, not as *thinking* things, but as *knowing* things. Descartes's main questions all concern knowledge. My opinions have been wrong in the past, he says. Can I know that the world is as it appears? What can I know about this world? What can I know with certainty about myself? Can I know that God exists?

That these are good questions, there is no doubt. But Descartes is taking one particular aspect of what it is to be human and seeing the whole person in that context. Clearly, the context in which he wishes to discuss people's experience is the context of epistemology. And equally clearly, this gives a very limited view of human beings.

Say I wish to talk not about the mechanism of knowing, but concentrate on our capacity for feeling. I want to talk about people as 'feeling things'. First, there is not much room in the mind/body dichotomy for feelings.

What then am I? A conscious being (*res cogitans*). What is that? A being that doubts, understands, asserts, denies, is willing, is unwilling; further that has sense and imagination.²⁹

That is: a being that either does or does not see something clearly and distinctly (doubts and understands); a being that makes judgments (asserts and denies); a being that *can* either assert or deny (is willing or is unwilling);³⁰ and a

being that perceives the world, and can rearrange these perceptions in its head (has sense and imagination).

What, one wants to ask, of emotion, passion, desire, sexual desire, and so on? To fasten on the first term, there seems nothing Descartes can do with our various emotions. They cannot belong to the body: the body is "a machine fitted together and made up of bones, sinews, muscles, veins, blood, and skin."³¹ To see emotions as belonging to the body would trivialize, for instance, something like the love of God. Can emotions belong to the mind, though?³²

The connection between emotions and bodily reactions is almost too obvious to mention. I cannot become enraged, or cry, or love, without also experiencing something in my body. If I see someone in despair, the way he or she looks to me is part and parcel of what I *mean* by despair. Imagine looking at someone who appeared bright and lively, and who said, "Actually, I'm in the depths of despair." The point is that I cannot imagine separating a bodily reaction from a particular emotion, because making this connection is how I learned the meaning of words associated with emotions in the first place. I cannot laugh if I have no lips, and do we really want to say that I can find something deliriously funny, and not laugh? How, therefore, can we legitimately separate mind and body?

Furthermore, let's say I wished to view people as "feeling things." What sense would it then make to have only mind and body as categories? In this case, if I wanted to categorize, to systematize, to make sense out of "feeling things," I think I would at least want the categories of mind, body, and "heart." I might even want to say that this heart ruled both mind and body, and that only when the heart was not active was the mind left to its own devices--to do philosophy, for instance--while the body continued as usual.

It might be said at this juncture that knowing is a great part of what we are concerned to do, but it is only a part. I might also say that, for many people, especially for those who do not do philosophy, feeling is more important than knowing. The point, though, is that in dividing a person into a mind and a body, Descartes creates a model that satisfies certain epistemological cravings (while creating a few epistemological problems). However, that it is nothing more than a model is shown by the fact that it cannot properly account for the emotional side of human existence. In other words, we are not just "naturally" divided into minds and bodies; minds and bodies are simply the product of one attempt to make the self meaningful. There is, therefore, no mind/body problem.³³

Hume

Since I have already argued fairly extensively against Hume's model of the self (the mind as video-camera, p. 186 ff.), I will be brief here. Hume claims:

We may divide all the perceptions of the mind into two classes or species, which are distinguished by their different degrees of force and vivacity. The less forcible are commonly denominated "thoughts" or "ideas." The other species want a name in our language, and in most others; I suppose, because it was not requisite for any but philosophical purposes to rank them under a general term or appellation. Let us, therefore, use a little freedom and call them "impressions," employing that word in a sense somewhat different from the usual. By the term "impression," then, I mean all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will.³⁴

The relationship between impressions and ideas is that "all our ideas or more feeble perceptions are copies of our impressions, or more lively sorts."³⁵ The contents of our minds, then, comprise (or *ought* to comprise) present experience and memories, memories being pale copies of past present-experiences, so to speak.

As with other models of the self that have gained philosophical and popular currency, Hume's model does have a great deal of plausibility. It depends on a basic distinction between past and present: here are my present impressions; there are my past ideas. Furthermore, because we can distinguish between accurate and inaccurate memories, the idea that memory is a copy of experience is an attractive one (it is as though an accurate memory were an overlay that one could place over reality and see the congruency of the fit). And certainly, the Humean model is

one we regularly use. The reason for according special status to eyewitness testimony in court cases, for example, can be traced to the Humean model of the video-camera mind.³⁶

I will show that this version of the mind is a model by looking at what Hume was trying to accomplish when he restricted thought to impressions and ideas, that is, cut the metaphysics out of philosophy:

If we take in our hand any volume--of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance--lets us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.³⁷

However, as I mentioned in chapter three, Hume's knife is too broad. The mechanism of experience he introduces cuts out not only metaphysics, but a great deal else as well.

Under the Humean model, for instance, what would my thinking consist of? If we restrict the range of "ideas" or memories to those which are best accommodated by Hume's mechanism--*visual memories*--thinking would have to occur in pictures, or at least in copies of impressions. But what would this thinking in pictures be like?

It would be like looking at a picture of something, while at the same time trying not to think of *what* the thing in the picture was. This is a worthwhile experiment: "Look at a picture. Stare at it, but don't think. Don't make it into anything. Don't see it *as* something. Surrender

yourself to the picture." For instance, try to imagine the look of happiness on a face. Now: try not to see a face; try not to see the smile we associate with happiness. Concentrate on the picture--let it absorb you so that other thought is excluded. And then ask yourself: *what* am I looking at? (It is like snapping out of a daydream.)

This seems to be the point. The picture doesn't mean anything by itself. The picture, no matter how vivid, just is what it is--a picture--until I make it meaningful *as* something, and relate it (perhaps) to other pictures. A picture is not something *already* meaningful, and it is not something that can establish its own meaning. A picture may transfix us, but it cannot tell us what it is or how it relates to anything else. For this, we need language.

As soon as we answer the question, "What is this picture a picture of?" we have moved beyond the picture. And we must move beyond the picture or else it simply won't mean anything to us. It could be anything, but it is not yet any *thing*, and so we can't say anything about it. (This is what happens when the answer to the question, "What is this picture a picture of?" is, "I don't know.")

"But perhaps we think pictorially and make the pictures meaningful in language?" This is again trying to say what a thought is like before it is made meaningful. We can't know what it is before it is meaningful, and once it

is meaningful, it is no longer *what it is* (in the sense that we want it to be: the thing itself).

This, then, is the problem at the heart of Hume's model of the mind. Thinking in pictures would be meaningless thought; it wouldn't be what we normally identified as thought at all. And this is true even if we were to allow, for the sake of the argument, that all memories are like pictures, and that these pictures are copies of experience, both of which notions I have argued against.

Kant

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant constructs what is, more clearly than any of the other notions of the self discussed in this chapter, a diagrammatic model of human beings. However, it is clear that Kant does not think of what he is doing as creating a model (in the sense of one amongst many); rather, he is constructing *the* model of what it is to be human.

That all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt. For how should the faculty of knowledge be called into activity, if not by objects which affect our senses, and which either produce representations by themselves, or rouse the activity of our understanding to compare, to connect, or to separate them; and thus to convert the raw material of our sensuous impressions into a knowledge of objects, which we call experience? In respect of time, therefore, no knowledge within us is antecedent to experience, but all knowledge begins with it.

But although all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it arises from experience. For it is quite possible that even our

empirical experience is a compound of that which we receive through impressions, and of that which our own faculty of knowledge (incited by sensuous impressions), supplies from itself, a supplement which we do not distinguish from that raw material, until long practice has roused our attention and rendered us capable of separating one from the other.³⁸

The problem can be stated in more contemporary terms.

How do we see, and what do we see?

Light passes through the lens to the retina at the back of the eyeball... Two distinct types of photoreceptors have been identified: rods and cones... Rods, which in the primate retina number about 120 to 130 million, are heavily concentrated in the peripheral region of the retina. Cones, which number about 6 to 8 million, are primarily concentrated in a small pit or indentation less than 1 mm across called the fovea.³⁹

But this is not our experience; we do not experience millions of separate rays of light--we experience objects. The question for Kant is, "How does this happen?" How does one get from the sensory input to an experience of objects? "The spontaneity of our thought requires that what is manifold in the pure intuition should first be in a certain way examined, received, and connected, in order to produce a knowledge of it. This act I call *synthesis*."⁴⁰

The understanding, Kant says, is an active participant in our experience. "There arise exactly so many pure concepts of the understanding which refer *a priori* to objects of intuition in general, as there were in our table logical functions in all possible judgments, because those functions completely exhaust the understanding, and

comprehend every one of its faculties."⁴¹ After giving his table of the categories of the understanding, Kant says:

This then is a list of all original pure concepts of synthesis, which belong to the understanding *a priori*, and for which alone it is called pure understanding; for it is by them alone that it can understand something in the manifold of intuition, that is, think an object in it.⁴²

Kant extends this analysis to his notion of the self. Consciousness is unified, he claims.

No knowledge can take place in us, no conjunction or unity of one kind of knowledge with another, without that unity of consciousness which precedes all data of intuition, and without reference to which no representation of objects is possible. This pure, original, and unchangeable consciousness I shall call *transcendental apperception*.⁴³

However, this self is not something we can have any intuition of. *"I, as intelligence and thinking subject, know myself as an object thought so far as being given to myself in intuition also, but like other phenomena, not as I am to the understanding, but only as I appear to myself."*⁴⁴ Unity of consciousness is logically necessary to account for the unity of our experience, but we can never experience this unity.

Here, there is evidently a problem. If my experience of myself is only ever phenomenal--as I present myself to myself, or am presented to myself--how is it possible to say, for instance:

General logic is built up on a plan that coincides accurately with the division of the higher faculties of knowledge. These are, *Understanding, Judgment, and Reason*.⁴⁵

The question needs asking: what are these higher faculties of knowledge? If "we know our own self as a phenomenon only, and not as it is by itself,"⁴⁶ the faculties of understanding, judgment and reason must belong to the phenomenal presentation, and not to the self itself, which is unknown. However, if this is true, what does Kant mean when he claims there is a faculty of understanding to which the phenomenal self is presented? Must not this faculty belong to the noumenal self, about which nothing can be known?

I am not trying to demean the Kantian analysis, to which I obviously owe a great deal--though my debt to the other philosophers mentioned here is undoubtedly equally great. However, I think that Kant was convinced that his model of human beings was the correct model. It is only this conviction--based on the conviction that there is something real that we can know--that could have led him ignore this apparent contradiction in his theorizing. If Kant can know himself only insofar as he is "*given to [himself] in intuition*," what is he referring to when he says he cannot know himself "*as [he is] to the understanding*"? Again: what is this "understanding"? Must it not belong to a system that both stands outside and conditions what it is possible to know? But how, then, can we know anything about it? Kant seems to be saying both,

"this is how we are," and, "because this is how we are, we cannot know how we are."

However, all of this is only to suggest that there is something wrong with Kant's model, and not to show that it *is* a model. To show this, I will use basically the same argument I used above with reference to Descartes. For Kant, human beings are "knowing things." He is concerned in the *Critique of Pure Reason* to know the world and the self. In the other two Critiques, he is concerned to know what is good and what is beautiful, or whether it is possible to make valid ethical and aesthetic judgments. Under Kant's model, emotions are reduced, more or less, to pleasure and displeasure.⁴⁷ There is no way to distinguish, for instance, between anger and terror. It is difficult to see how the Kantian person could be the hero in a love story.

This is just to say that there are things we do that fall outside the contexts of epistemology, ethics and aesthetics. So while Kant may have constructed a tremendously elaborate and insightful epistemological model of the self, he did not do more than this. He did not describe the self.

Freud

The Freudian model of the human mind, one composed of an id, an ego, and a super-ego, is one that has had a great deal of influence in the twentieth century. That is my reason for including a discussion of it here. Freud's

model is laid out along these lines. "In each individual there is a coherent organization of mental processes; and we call this his *ego*."⁴⁸ The id, by contrast, is a repository of "unknown and uncontrollable forces."⁴⁹ The relationship between the two is as follows:

The ego is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world... The ego seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavours to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns unrestrictedly in the id. For the ego, perception plays the part which in the id falls to instinct. The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions.⁵⁰

It is clear that the id is the more basic of the two; the ego only exists as a modified part of the id. And Freud affirms this: "We shall now look upon an individual as a psychical id, unknown and unconscious, upon whose surface rests the ego, developed from its nucleus in the *Pcpt.* (sic) system."⁵¹ The idea seems to be that we come into the world already desiring many things, and that we eventually come to learn that we can't have them all.

The super-ego is what adds morality to the mix of ego and id. Not only *cannot* individuals fulfil all their desires, they also *must* not.

Its relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept: 'You *ought* to be like this (like your father).' It also comprises the prohibition: 'You *may not* be like this (like your father)--that is, you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative.'⁵²

So, people develop, "under the influence of authority, religious teaching, schooling and reading,"⁵³ a moral sense. This moral sense manifests itself "in the form of conscience or perhaps of an unconscious sense of guilt."⁵⁴

The whole person, then, is a little like two children taking a large and powerful dog for a walk. One child is concerned only with the dog's safety, and will attempt to rein it in if there is heavy traffic around, but will let it run free if they come to a park. The second child has a rule-book it doesn't understand; but it will scold the first child if the dog does something against the rules.

There are some ways in which Freud's version of the self is an extremely attractive one. "Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life," says Hume, "than to talk of the combat of passion and reason, to give the preference to reason, and to assert that men are only so far virtuous as they conform themselves to its dictates."⁵⁵ Reason, however, "is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them."⁵⁶ Freud's self, in a similar vein, seeks to make meaningful the experience of feeling compelled to do something, being driven by forces one does not understand. It seems to expose the rational self as myth, and this can have the same effect as removing a straight-jacket.

There are many ways, of course, to show this model has faults.⁵⁷ However, my concern is to show that it is a model, that Freud has not finally gotten to the truth about human beings. And this is fairly easily seen. Freud's model contains the opposite prejudice to that contained in the Platonic model discussed above. That is: people are once again being seen as a mixture of appetite and reason. Freud is merely affirming that the appetitive portion is the essential person--that desire, and most importantly sexual desire, is that which defines human beings.

There are, however, contexts other than the sexual one. I may wonder if it is possible to know anything about the self, for instance. I may do epistemology.

The rejoinder that I do philosophy only because I am repressing sexual urges is a self-defeating one on many counts. First, I do not feel the repressed desire. What sort of a desire can this be, this desire that I do not feel? "But that is the nature of repression." Yes, but I can legitimately say I have repressed certain feelings only because later on I discover I *have* been repressing them. Certainly, it is the case that *some* people repress their sexual desire, but to extrapolate from these cases and conclude, on the basis of *no evidence*, that this is a general condition seems irresponsible. "You do not feel the repression, but it is there nonetheless." This is like

saying that you know what's inside a dark room that neither of us can see into.

Secondly, when faced with the claim that all actions are traceable to the pleasure-seeking id, I would be justified in asking for a definition, a context in which to place the claim. I can understand that some of my actions may be motivated by pride, some by pleasure, some by dislike, and so on. But that is only because I may contrast the one with the others. On the other hand, the claim, "All action stems from the id," is the same sort of claim as, "All objects consist of ideas." That is: both are metaphysical claims, and both are unmeaningful.

Thirdly, the argument is a self-guaranteeing one. It is of the following sort: "All children are unintelligent. Children who think they are intelligent are simply deluding themselves, thereby showing how unintelligent they really are." The problem with such arguments is that they are only pseudo-arguments. The "proof" of the argument is simply a more elaborate statement of the original claim.

Finally, if I do philosophy only because of repressed sexual urges, then precisely the same thing may be said of Freud. Why, then, is Freud a special case? Why should anyone say that Freud alone stood outside his repressed sexuality and saw the truth about how human beings are? Wouldn't his theory also be just the result of his repressed sexuality?

It is far easier to say: the epistemological context is different from the sexual one. But if this is true, then there are huge areas of human experience for which the Freudian version of the self is not a good account. It, too, is a model.

Conclusion

As I said in the beginning of this chapter, I think any attempt to describe the self will result only in the construction of a model. The reason for this can be seen most clearly, perhaps, by examining what a theory of the self tries to do. It tries to offer an overall account of human experience. It doesn't want a self that is meaningful in this context or that; it searches for a self that is meaningful in *all* contexts--a self that is beyond context. A theory of the self, then, demands precisely what it cannot have: it demands to know what cannot be known.

It must be admitted, however, that some models of the self are very compelling. They are compelling not only because they can seem to account for so much, but also because contexts are often so transparent. For instance, within the context of our present culture, a week has seven days. This fact about the length of the week seems so obviously true that it is easy to ignore the context. In fact, to add, "within the context of our present culture," seems pedantic and redundant. Pedantic it is; but the week has not always had seven days. (A month for Plato was

divided into three periods of ten days each.) It is when the context has become transparent--as it has for us in the case of the length of the week--that it is possible to assume there is no context. One of the things I have tried to do in this chapter is put the models I have discussed back in their various contexts.

It is also true that some models of the self are very valuable. They help us make sense of our experience, or even create a context in which certain types of experience can become meaningful. My only concern in this chapter has been to show neither the value nor the compelling nature of any particular model should lead us to believe that it represents the self as it really is.

It is interesting to note that, unless we are specifically talking about the self, we never do accept one model as being an accurate representation of how we are. In practice, we hold many models of the self--however contradictory these models may in fact be--and depending on the context, talk about ourselves in terms of one or another of them. We may even represent ourselves to ourselves using many different models at the same time.

Say I am reading a novel. I am sitting in a chair, and I am absorbed in the story. That is: my body is sitting in a chair, and my mind is absorbed in the story. I am reading the page slowly because I am finding it difficult to make out the words in the dim light. That is: I am having

certain sensations, but my understanding is having difficulty organizing these into words. While I am reading, I am suddenly struck by something in the story that is very sad. That is: I am reasoning my way through the story, when suddenly my emotions take over.

How, though, is it possible to put mind and body, sensation and understanding, and reason and emotion into any sort of coherent model? What this example seems to point to is that, far from there being one definitive model of what the self is, the concept of the self seems to be multivalent. Our culture gives us many notions of what it is to be human, and we use those which seems most useful in the particular situation we find ourselves in. Since, as I have argued, a model establishes a context, it is to be expected that there will some contexts where that model is found to be irrelevant. (This has been the main thrust of my argument that the pictures of the self I have discussed are *models*, and not descriptions.) We may then adopt another model which is more suited to the new context. We do this very easily, in fact.

If the self is multivalent, then it is easy to see how some arguments may become ambiguous. For instance, John Stuart Mill claims in *On Liberty* that there is a single principle that should:

govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control... That principle is, that the sole end of which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering

with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection.⁵⁸

Now, this principle will have widely different applications depending upon which model of the self one has in mind. For instance, the self could be conceived of as a soul and a body, the first created by God, and the second being constantly tempted by the devil. If it were possible for the devil to inhabit human beings, any person that the devil had taken over could be regarded as a menace to the community. It would follow that the community had the right to protect itself from this menace. The medieval witch-hunts can be thus be justified, on this interpretation of what a self is.

On the other hand, many arguments can be made clearer by examining what sort of model of human beings we are currently endorsing in our argument. For instance, the argument about whether abortion is ethically defensible sometimes takes the following shape. One side claims that a human being exists from the moment of conception, and the other claims whatever it is that exists doesn't turn into a human being until some time later. If the self is seen as a soul and a body--the soul being the life that God has infused into the body--then it is clear that human beings do, indeed, exist from the moment of their conception. It makes no sense to say that the body grows a soul as it matures physically.

However, if human beings are regarded from a biological perspective, where in order to be human one must have a body, with internal organs and a brain, then it is clear that whatever exists at conception is *not* a human being, and will not become one until some time later.

What this shows is that the argument about abortion, if it is presented in this way, is not capable of solution. To solve it, one would evidently have to know which model to choose, which was the right model. In fact, one would have to *know* what a self is.

I have two final brief comments to make, the first about feminism, and the second about structuralism. First, all the models I have discussed--indeed, all the models in western culture that I could discuss--are the products of male minds situated in patriarchal societies. This, however, does not make them either bad models or sexist models. Those of Plato, Descartes, Hume and Kant seem as easily applicable to women as to men. Even Freud's model, until he describes the development of the super-ego, need not be seen as describing one sex rather than both.

Indeed, the sexism in western societies seems better explained in two ways. First, although each model has been seen as applying to human beings of each sex, the "good" parts of the model (reason, soul, mind) have been seen as more the property of men, while the worse parts (appetites, body) have been seen as the property of women. Secondly,

the models have often been seen as ideals to which both sexes could strive, but that only men would ever reach. This, rather than making women inferior selves, meant that they didn't really have a self at all. They could then be regarded failed men, or as being congenitally incapable of attaining 'true' adulthood. Thus, Schopenhauer:

The nobler and more perfect a thing is, the later and slower it is in arriving at maturity. A man reaches the maturity of his reasoning powers and mental faculties hardly before the age of twenty-eight; a woman at eighteen. And then, too, in the case of woman, it is only reason of a sort--very niggard in its dimensions. That is why women remain children their whole life long; never seeing anything but what is quite close to them, cleaving to the present moment, taking appearance for reality, and preferring trifles to matters of the first importance.⁵⁹

However, even if the models are not in themselves sexist, but only become so in particular societies, it is nevertheless possible that in a *matriarchy*, a different set of models might have been created. I do not, of course, wish to speculate about this, but mention it only to give another reason for viewing the models discussed as models.

My final point is a related one: we should not delude ourselves into thinking that an exhaustive contrasting of models will reveal something "real" about what human beings are. This is the premise of structuralism: that all human behaviour is basically the same, and that differences are traceable to different cultural conditioning. Structuralism then tries to identify cross-culturally similar behaviour, which it terms 'universal', and then, in a giant leap,

'natural'. By 'natural', structuralism means 'pre-cultural', or the way human beings are before they succumb to cultural influences: the way human beings *really are*. However, to revert to an example I gave earlier: this is like comparing a series of gardens, and deducing from these what untended nature would look like. Structuralism may reveal much, but the end result of structuralism, a composite picture, as it were, of what human beings really are, would necessarily remain just another model.

PART FOUR

RELATED CONSIDERATIONS

CHAPTER 7

THE INTERPRETATION OF LITERATURE: REWORKING THE READER-RESPONSE THEORY OF STANLEY FISH

Because I have made such extensive use of the notions 'interpretation' and 'story' in the thesis thus far, I will concentrate in this chapter on what is involved in the interpretation of stories. This is all the more appropriate because many literary theorists have recently taken a parallel but opposite path to the one I have pursued here; that is, they have moved from a theory of literature and interpretation to some sort of theory of meaning, or knowledge, or both. Of these theories, the particular one I will be examining in this chapter is that of Stanley Fish, a contemporary theoretician whose position is in many ways close to my own. Accordingly, I will first outline a general theory of literature which is consistent with what I have said thus far, and then examine Fish's reader-response theory, to show in what ways I think Fish's theory is deficient and how it may be remedied.

The main question I will be trying to answer is the following one: to what extent can any literary interpretation be thought of as correct? That is: can one interpretation be said to have more merit, or be more valid,

than any other? This may seem like an odd question, because our interpretation of texts--like our experience of the world--is often a transparent activity: we don't feel as though we are interpreting at all. Or better: we often act as though there is a simple binary opposition between not understanding a text at all, and interpreting it correctly. If we understand it, then our interpretation is the right one. However, it is also true that our interpretations often conflict with the interpretations of others. I may "understand" a text in a way that is strikingly different from the way someone else understands it. But surely we can't both be right? And if we can't both be right, what am I to say about this transparency of understanding, and how am I to judge between the two interpretations? E.D. Hirsch puts the problem in strong terms:

How can a consensus be reached with regard to a text's meaning when every known interpretation of every text has always been different in some respect from every other interpretation of the text?¹

There is one problem to be dealt with, however, before I can propose any sort of answer to this question. This lies in the definition of the word 'literature' itself--the *thing* that is to be interpreted. In the process of attempting to define what literature is, I will also try to elucidate something that, while implicit in traditional definitions of literature, has only recently been dealt with explicitly, that is, the relationship between authors, the

texts they produce, and the readers who read those texts. So, I will try to answer such questions as these: is the text an object? Is the text an object that, as E.D. Hirsch says, "contains determinate meanings," and that it is the critics' business simply to understand? (Is the text like a cash register: we can all see it contains *some* money, but are there experts who know the currency well and are skilled at counting, and who can tell us precisely how many nickels, dimes and dollars the cash register contains, and thus provide us with an exact total?) To what extent should our interpretation of a text rely on what the author's *point* is in writing the text? Finally, what part, if any, do we as readers play in making the text what it is?

The easiest point of entry into these matters is, in fact, the traditional definitions of literature themselves. The two definitions that have exerted the most influence are those of Aristotle and Horace. We may provisionally view Aristotle's definition as a descriptive one (poetry is the imitation of a possible action), whereas Horace's definition is clearly normative (poetry both pleases and instructs). Now, whether or not we accept that Aristotle's definition is indeed a descriptive one, there is no doubt that in the hands of many subsequent thinkers, it has tended to become normative.² If the poet does not imitate, or does not imitate an action, or imitates an action that isn't "possible," then the result is not poetry.

There is a problem, however, with normative definitions: they are exclusionary. A normative definition, by setting a standard, will exclude literature that doesn't measure up to that standard. The problem with descriptive definitions is that they can only describe whatever types of literature already exist; if new literary forms arise, the definition must either be discarded (as no longer applicable) or become normative (exclude the new forms). The result of this is that part of what we commonly take to be literature will, if we adhere to the definition, be found not to be literature.

We may begin to resolve this problem if we shift our focus away from *why* we refer to certain things as literature, and concentrate instead on what we do, in fact, refer to as literature. That is: I am not going to try to define literature in terms of some quality it seems to possess, but rather in terms of the sorts of things people, in a given society, make meaningful to themselves as literature.

We learn what literature is by listening to how other people--probably our school teachers--use the term. It is possible for most people to grossly divide literature into novels, poems and plays,³ and do so without ever having read either a novel or a poem, and without having either seen or read a play. Indeed, when we first learn the meaning of these words, we are most likely to learn them in contexts

that have nothing to do with literary concerns. Take the novel, for example. Some of the key things we learn about novels--that we use to identify novels *as* novels--are as follows. First, novels are printed in books. Like other books, those containing novels are sold commercially. However, they are generally not sold in pharmacies--unless they are recently published best-sellers--we find them mainly in bookstores. They will generally be of a certain size--easily distinguished from atlases and art books, for instance--and will cost a certain amount (quite a bit less than most other books found in bookstores).

As to the content of works of literature, we learn that most poems are about individual experiences, and the author's impressions of, or feelings and thoughts about, those experiences, whereas plays and novels are most likely to contain a story. We also learn that the word 'literature' often has certain implicit connotations: it is something we are to take seriously. Often, 'literature' means 'good literature'.

On this level, then, literature is something printed in books, something in which an author tells a story or recounts an experience, and something that many people hold in esteem. This is a very bare-bones definition, and put in this way, it seems quite trivial. Nevertheless, I think it is a good place to start, for two reasons. First, I think this is a fair description of the way (in this century) we

learn what the word 'literature' means; knowing only this much, I can distinguish between literature and science, and between literature and athletics, say--although not between literature and history. Secondly, the definition has the advantage of not referring to anything *in* literature that makes it literature.

And I think this is a crucial point, because if we try to define literature with reference to something *in* texts that makes them literature or works of art, we are bound to fail. That is because there is nothing in a text except a certain arrangement of words. There is no "euphony, rhythm, and metre," no imagery, metaphors, symbols or myths.⁴ There is no irony; there is no literariness. There are only: *words*.

(Indeed, even to say that there are words *in* the text is misleading, because it implies that a text is some kind of an object that the words can be in, as lead is in a pencil, or marbles are in a bag. The words, perhaps, are in a book--we can open a book--but we should say that the text *consists* of words.⁵ A text is much more analogous to a piece of music than it is to a statue. We can look at a statue, but we can't look at a text. (We can look at printed words, but this is quite different from reading words. A copy-editor will look at words for broken characters, appropriate fonts, and so on.) If a text were an object, it would be an odd sort of object. Where would

it be? In the book? However, it is difficult to get round speaking of the text as if it were an object, and so I will continue to refer to what can be *in* the text.)

I think we must say there are words in the text. They are not merely printed representations of words. It is true that children will often attempt to read words phonetically, but part of what we call 'knowing how to read' is getting past this, and recognizing words *as* words. The relationship between written and spoken words is not relevant here. What is important is that I both hear (the spoken) and read (the written) words as the words they are. When I see a word included in a painting, I nevertheless recognize it as a word. The apparently random letters optometrists use in measuring vision, however, I see only as letters.

This remains true whether or not a language has a standard orthography. In fact, my ability to correct the spelling of 'recieve' depends upon my ability to recognize the incorrectly spelled word as an incorrect spelling of 'receive'. The word does not become meaningless simply because it is incorrectly spelled. I also have no difficulty in making the adjustment from American to British orthography. I still recognize the words as the words they are.

Furthermore, it doesn't matter if the words are separated from each other when printed. If I read a long series of letters such as 'thmeaningofaword' I will seek to

separate it into words, and once I have done so, the series will become meaningful to me in terms of the words it contains.⁶

The reason for belabouring this point is that I think it is important to stress that some aspect of the text may be said to be meaningful, given that we know the language of the text. In this way, our experience when reading is significantly different from our experience of the world through a language. We do indeed recognize words as the words they are, but we also recognize them as already meaningful. This point will become important when I begin to discuss interpretation later on in this chapter.

However, beyond being able to say that the words in a text are meaningful, I don't see what more we can attribute to the text. This can be seen by what may be called a 'naive reading' of a particular text. By 'naive reading', I mean the reading of a literary text by someone unacquainted with literature and the language of literary criticism, as well as the necessary history and philosophy that critics would consider a backdrop for a good interpretation of the text. (This is not to say that any reader can be *utterly* unacquainted all these things. Children can be aware of things such as rhythm and rhyme long before they have read anything. But the notion of someone who is not *at all* acquainted with literature is not necessary to the point I am making.)

It is possible to read a sonnet without noticing that it has fourteen lines, or knowing whether it is a Petrarchan or Shakespearean sonnet, or dividing it into an octave and a sestet, and so on. It is possible to read:

"You are old, father William," the young man
said,
"And your hair has become very white;
And yet you incessantly stand on your head--
Do you think, at your age, it is right?"

without knowing that Lewis Carroll is parodying a poem by Robert Southey.⁷ We can read Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* without any prior knowledge of the French revolution, and Pope's *An Essay on Man* without ever having thought about the problem of evil. Indeed, if in order to be able to read something, we had to acquire a certain amount of background knowledge, we would never be able to read anything at all, because it is precisely *by* reading that we acquire this knowledge.

"But a naive reading is not a good reading--to read Joyce's *Ulysses* without seeing his allusions to Homer's *Odyssey* is really to misread *Ulysses*. It is as good as not having read the book." Do I have to know what kind of car someone owns to understand the sentence, "I drove my car to work"? Clearly not: I do not have to understand *everything* in order to understand *something*. I may miss a lot if I read *Ulysses* without relating it to the *Odyssey*, but I will still get something out of it.

If a naive reading is possible, I don't see how a text can ever be said to contain more than simply words. This is because, if someone insists that there is, *in a given text*, a particular allusion, or reference, or literary convention, we can always ask: "For whom is it there? Is it there for naive readers, or is it there only for readers who bring their knowledge of *other* texts to their reading of this one?"

"It is the author's intention that I understand the words of a text in a particular way, that is, as allusions and references and so forth." This point has some merit, but I will take it up only later in this chapter. For the moment I will merely remark that, if a text contains only words, then we can try to infer from these words what the author's intentions were, but we can't say that they are somehow *in* the text, between the lines, as it were. There is nothing between the lines.

Now, it is of course true that we can make the text meaningful in a vast assortment of ways. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, in her book *On the Margins of Discourse*, puts the matter in the following way:

It seems clear, for example, that no matter how vague or naive our literary theories, or how problematic our explicit definitions, we do make *functional* discriminations between, say, biographies and novels, and between the transcriptions of actual utterances and the scripts of plays, through the very manner in which we experience and interpret them, and the sort of value and implications they have for us. In other words, we

take them as different *kinds* of things and, accordingly, take them differently.⁸

We see the characteristic printing conventions that govern poetry, plays and novels, and we take the things we are reading to be poetry, plays and novels. We read a poem and notice that in each pair of lines the last words rhyme, and we see this poem as being composed of heroic couplets. We read a story the central character of which is a detective, and we take the novel to be a murder mystery. That is: using the language of literary criticism, we make the words of the text meaningful as a genre, or see them as poetic devices, or as adhering to literary conventions. We see the text *through* this language, and it is accordingly more or less meaningful according to how familiar we are with this language.⁹

However, as I mentioned in chapter two, there is also a more general way in which we approach literature that has nothing to do with the language of literary criticism, and that is: it is not history. Our expectations of history are different from our expectations of literature. We expect the historian to address the question, "What happened?" and make this meaningful in a coherent fashion. (In fact, we expect the resulting story to be so coherent that it convinces us that the historian has answered the question: we take the story as history.)

On the other hand, we expect the poet¹⁰ *not* to answer this question. No matter how realistic or representational the literature is, we expect it *never* to be an answer to the question, "What happened?" But is there something we *do* expect the poet to do, and expect literature to be?

Certainly: we expect the poet to present a text that we can interpret--we expect literature to be readable. We expect, therefore, that what the poet does is to make something meaningful. Further: we expect that the resulting text will be relevant to us (that we will be able to make it meaningful to ourselves--to our own lives.) That is: we expect the text not to be utter nonsense, and we expect that the context that is invoked in us as we read is a context that we can relate to our own experience. Finally, we expect that we will find our reading a valuable experience, that the poet will be addressing those aspects of our lives that we deem important, central, or valuable.¹¹ (It will be noted that this is really only an explication of the naive approach I took to literature above--that literature is in books, about life, and to be taken seriously.)

If these are our expectations, then in order to produce something we perceive as literature, the poet must live up to them. Poets, then, must make meaningful a part of their experience that they consider will be relevant and valuable to those who read the texts they create.

Within this framework, it is possible to accommodate (at least) the two great treatises on which all but twentieth-century poetics are based. Aristotle believed that the distinctive form taken by the poet's endeavour to make meaningful was coherent imitation. He also believed that what would be relevant to people lay exclusively within the realm of the possible. Horace believed that a text would be relevant to us, and that we would (or should) value it, if it were both pleasing and instructive. It is also possible to accommodate Longinus, who believed that the greatest poets were those whose excellence of style made experience meaningful so dramatically that we could not help but see their poetry as relevant, and therefore value it.¹²

However, it is not only possible but essential to avoid the exclusionary nature of the definitions of literature contained within these treatises. It is difficult to see, for instance, how A.A. Milne's poem, "Disobedience" could be accounted sublime:

James James
Morrison Morrison
Weatherby George Dupree
Took great
Care of his mother,
Though he was only three¹³

or how Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" could be thought of as instructive.¹⁴ It is also difficult to see how the opening lines of E.B. White's short story, "The Door," could be viewed as a coherent imitation:

Everything (he kept saying) is something it isn't. And everybody is always somewhere else. Maybe it was the city, being in the city, that made him feel how queer everything was and that it was something else. Maybe (he kept thinking) it was the names of the things. The names were tex and frequently koid. Or they were flex and oid, or they were duroid (sani) or flexsan (duro), but everything was glass (but not quite glass) and the thing that you touched (the surface, washable, crease-resistant) was rubber, only it wasn't quite rubber and you didn't quite touch it but almost.¹⁵

However, it would be strange to conclude that none of the above-mentioned works should be called literature just on the grounds that they didn't meet the classical criteria for what constitutes literature. Longinus says we should value what is sublime, but I can also value what is charmingly childish. Horace thinks we should value what is pleasing and instructive, but quasi-nonsense, while not very instructive, can be relevant and valuable to us as well. It is true that we can make something meaningful by imitating it in a coherent fashion. But we can also try to make chaos meaningful by creating a chaotic text.

Indeed, to specify the way in which something is to be made meaningful, or to say how it should be relevant, or to dictate what we should value, is to do nothing more than make recommendations about what should and should not count as literature, or what literature should be esteemed as good, and what condemned as bad. As such, they belong to the field of literary criticism rather than literary theory, which should concern itself only with what literature

is--one aspect of this being that it is thought of as "good"--and not with which literature *is good*.

To return to what our expectations of poets are: I said that we expect them to make meaningful a part of their experience that will be both relevant and valuable to us. Is this expectation something that should guide us in our interpretation of their texts? Is it not a "sensible belief that a text means what its author meant,"¹⁶ or, to put the matter less ambiguously, that our interpretation of a text should constitute an attempt to infer from the words of the text what the author wanted us to understand by them?

I think the answer to this must be a qualified 'yes'. A large part of what we do when we read is try to figure out what the author's point is, what the author is "getting at." For instance, we begin to read *Death in Venice* by Thomas Mann, and in the third paragraph we find the lead character Aschenbach encountering an unnamed stranger, whose appearance Mann describes as "not quite usual."¹⁷ The fourth paragraph is almost entirely devoted to a description of this stranger's physical appearance, and then in the fifth paragraph, the stranger seems to disappear from the story. A question that may occur to us, then, is: "why does Mann devote so much space to describing a person Aschenbach meets by chance, and who seemingly plays no part in the story?"¹⁸

That is: I suppose either that Thomas Mann is a bad writer, or that there must be a reason for his wanting to include these descriptive details. I don't know why they are included here, but, if I do not think Mann is a bad writer, I suppose that later in the story I will learn both *why* they are, and what *relevance* they have to the other parts of the story. I will suppose that Mann included these descriptive detail with a purpose in mind, and that it is my business to discover that purpose.

I am not trying to say that the appeal to what is called 'authorial intention' will ever result in a valid interpretation of a text. I am saying, however, the idea of authorial intention might be said to *guide* our reading. It is certainly a useful way of refuting outlandish interpretations of a particular text. So, if someone were to interpret *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as an attempt by Hardy to explain the causes of World War I, it would be sufficient to point out that *Tess* was published twenty years before the outbreak of the war, and that Hardy could not possibly have intended us to understand the book in that way. It does seem possible to interpret the book as being, at least in part, about what Hardy calls "the ache of modernism," the incipient recognition by society that its institutions--marriage, the family, the church and so on--were outmoded. It would be possible, as well, to claim that the crumbling of these institutions contributed in some way

to the eventual outbreak of war. However, it would not be possible to claim that Hardy was writing about the causes of the war, because of the anachronism involved. Therefore, if we allow any scope at all to authorial intention, we can say that *Tess* is not about the causes of the war--because Hardy could not have intended it to be--and that any interpretation that says it is, is merely incorrect.¹⁹

There is a better way of arguing in favour of authorial intention as a principle to follow in interpretation. Suppose we were able to sit with the author of a text, and go through it line by line, and ask questions such as, "What was the point of saying this?" and "Are you trying to establish a connection between these things?" and so on. Suppose we could sit with the author until we were entirely satisfied that we understood every point the author was trying to make.

What basis would we then have for saying, "No, you're wrong. The text is actually about something quite different. Don't you see?" The absurdity of this position can be seen from the question, "Don't you see?" If we have understood what the author is trying to say, and the author is satisfied that we have indeed understood, then how could we ever persuade him or her that the text was actually about something else? It would certainly be possible for us to coherently construe the words so they conveyed something the author was not trying to convey. However, the text would

then become *our* text, and the author would be justified in claiming, with Martial:

That book you recite, O Fidentinus, is mine. But your vile recitation begins to make it your own.²⁰

Following this question period with the author, I think we would be able to comment only on whether the words in the text conveyed (to us) either more or less than what the author wanted to convey. The following is an example of an author conveying less than he would have liked:

The most famous incident linking Chandler to the film of *The Big Sleep* is his reply to a telegram sent by [Howard] Hawks asking who killed Owen Taylor, the Sternwood chauffeur who ends up in the family limousine under ten feet of water at the end of a pier. Chandler checked the text, thought about it, and wired back: "I don't know."²¹

One of our expectations of a detective novel is that whatever appears to be mysterious will eventually be explained by the author. In *The Big Sleep*, the death of Owen Taylor remains unexplained. (Would it not be odd if a critic were to exclaim, "I know who killed Owen Taylor"?) In this case, then, we could justifiably fault the author.

However, should we ever say that the text contains *more* than the author thinks it does? This seems to leave the door open to virtually any sort of interpretation. We could then interpret *Alice in Wonderland* as being about the dangers of drug abuse, or the irrational quality of dreams, and so on. But we would be seeing more than Carroll wanted us to see in his text, and it would become *our* text. It is

these sorts of interpretation that can happily be ruled out with regard to authorial intention.²²

Having said this, however, it must be admitted that there are many problems with appealing to what the author wanted to say in a text. First, as is often pointed out, we usually have no record whatsoever of what the author wanted to say. Therefore, in most cases we must remain at the conjectural level when we speak of authorial intention. We will never have the sort of conversation suggested above. (Of course, there are good guesses and bad guesses. I will return to this below.)

Secondly, even if a critic suggests that the author's intention is "displayed" in a particular text, this assertion is shown to be false by the critic's actual practice. No critic ever interprets a text simply with reference to the text itself. Critics read widely, and therefore cannot help but approach an individual text through the many other texts they have read (both literary and non-literary). Indeed, literary criticism presupposes a corpus of literary texts that share family traits. When critics "see" a parody, it is only because they have seen other parodies, and have read whatever the parody is a parody of.

But thirdly, and most importantly, trying to unearth the author's intention in a literary work is made difficult by the sorts of questions that literary texts try to answer.

In historical texts, the question to be answered is, "What happened?" In epistemological texts, the question is, "What can be known?" If the authors of these sorts of texts are clear, then what they intend to say is exactly what they do say: their telling is identical with what they want to say. Or better: to ask about their intentions at all misses the point. (If someone says to me, "I'll be over in five minutes," and the context makes it clear that the person will arrive at my house in five minutes, then I will not ask, "What do you mean?")

But what general question can literary texts be seen as an answer to? And what match is there between what a poet says and what a poet wants to say? I think there is a single answer to both these questions.

I think the question to which literary texts are a response is, "What is a person?" This is, of course, an extremely vague question, but I think that only such a question as this can account for the phantasmagoria of responses that literature proposes. Such a question must include a large family of more specific questions, such as, "What am I experiencing, feeling, wondering, now?", "Is there any pattern to my life?", "What is my relation to others?", "How do others experience the world?", "What has death to do with my life?" and so on.

No other way of making the world meaningful can answer questions like these. There are, indeed, specific reasons

for this. History does not answer these questions, because history strives to see the world as a sequence of unique, rather than typical, events.²³ Philosophy, following Plato, has been more interested in discussing matters abstractly ("What is experiencing?" etc., as opposed to, "What *am I* experiencing?"); the particularities of an individual's experience have had no relevance in a philosophy seeking essences. Science (and, for the purposes of this argument, I am including psychology and sociology) is, like philosophy, more interested in individual traits that can be extrapolated to a general population. For all these disciplines, the concept 'my life' is either too broad or too narrow.

But there is a better and more general reason that these disciplines do not deal with the questions that literature attempts to answer. This can be seen by looking at the themes most often found in literature. The epic is about courage, nobility, fidelity. Tragedy is about loss and despair. Comedy is about hope. Religious literature is about wonder and faith. The novel is about love and sexual desire.

This is, of course, to baldly caricature the literary genres in question. However, the point I want to draw from this is that these literary themes all have a common concern: their concern is *what is irrational*. Now, by 'irrational' I mean only whatever cannot be reasoned about,

which is to say *talked* about, which is to say *made* *meaningful*, in any way that purports to *explain* that thing. I cannot say why I love, or fear, or despair. I can name these feelings, and I can even associate them with other things. But I cannot say why I have the feelings I do. (I can fear heights, and call this 'acrophobia', and even loosely say that being on a high balcony "causes" this fear; but I cannot say why being in a high place should induce fear. In many people, it does not.) Indeed, to be able to say why I have the feelings I do, I would not only have to know myself as I really am--and not simply in the way I make myself meaningful to myself through language--but *why I am the way I am*.²⁴ But this is either a teleological question or it is a question about causes. If it is teleological, then it invokes the pseudo-context of multiple universes: I am this way because I exist in this universe and not another. If it is about causes, it invokes a pseudo-context I will call 'multiple experiences': the question presupposes that I can experience myself from a perspective utterly *not my own*, that I can step outside of myself and experience myself as an alien creature. But this would involve being simultaneously both me and *not* me, having an experience of myself and not having an experiencing of myself. Hence, whether the question is teleological or about causes, it will lead to a meaningless response.

"What am I experiencing, feeling, wondering, now?"

That is: which words can best express this experience--this experience that is beyond words? How can I say this experience in a way that will communicate it in all its fullness to other people? "Is there any pattern to my life?" "What is my relation to others?" "How do others experience the world?" In part, these questions ask whether there is anything outside of my life that will make me more able to put my life in perspective, or give it meaning. (Is there a system into which I fit? Is there a God? Are other lives like mine?) "What has death to do with my life?" This question asks many things, amongst them: "Can life have meaning if it culminates in death?" and "Can death be made meaningful?"

I don't wish to contend that the subject-matter of poetry is exclusively that which is irrational. (An obvious counterexample to this claim would be the work of Alexander Pope.) However, the vast majority of literary texts do concern themselves with the irrational, and this leads me to the following conclusion about poets: in general, they attempt to talk about what cannot be talked about.

This does not mean that poets are either lunatics or liars, although what Plato says about poetry as divine madness is instructive.²⁵ To speak as a poet is to speak as a god. It is to say what human life consists of, amounts to, really is. It is to speak the unspeakable. But this

does not make poets lunatics. It merely demonstrates their desire to make these things meaningful. Neither does it make them liars. Certainly poets do not pretend, the way historians do, that what they are saying is true. But this is to consider the matter trivially. More important is the fact that, as Aristotle noted, poets do not speak of particular love, but love in general, not of individual despair, but of what it is to despair. *King Lear* would not speak to me if Lear's tragedy was exhaustively defined by Edmund and Cordelia. It is Lear's tragedy, but it could be anyone's tragedy. John Donne's love is, assuredly and idiosyncratically, John Donne's love, but it could be anyone's love. No matter how concerned with individual experience poets are, they must also be concerned with making their poetry relevant to other people. Therein lies poetry's apparent "universality."

Because poets are so often trying to say what cannot be said, they regularly employ a trick: they pretend to be telling us something, while they are actually showing us something.²⁶ Of course, poets do sometimes engage in straightforward telling; a poem may be merely descriptive. However, and especially when the text is a story, the vast majority of literary texts involve both telling and showing.

Now, if we want to talk about authorial intention, the points an author wishes to make, clearly we are going to be more concerned with what the author is trying to show us

than what he or she is telling us. It may be interesting to read through the various adventures of Tom Jones and Sophia Western, and to find out at the end that Tom is really Miss Bridget's son, but we don't read *Tom Jones* for *this*. We read it to find out what Fielding "has to say" about love and sex, sincerity and duplicity, justice, and so on. But the extent to which authors merely show us what their point is, and do not explicitly tell us,²⁷ is also the extent to which their intention must be inferred by us. In texts where the author merely tells a story, and nowhere comments on the story, the author's intention is not in the text at all, and must be entirely inferred by the reader.

This brings me to the problem of interpretation. It can be seen from the foregoing that literary interpretation contains its own special problems. Therefore, I will look at interpretation in general, and then at the interpretation of non-literary texts (such as philosophies and histories), and finally at the particular difficulties involved in the interpretation of literary texts.

Interpretation

The problem of interpretation begins with the problem of what is involved in understanding sentences. This is a complex issue, and one that is peripheral to the main epistemological problems I have been discussing, and so I will not attempt to analyze it in depth, but only in a way

that is immediately relevant. Briefly: my understanding a spoken sentence seems to involve three things. First, I must understand the language the sentence is spoken in. That is: I must understand the words, and I must have a grasp of the grammar. Secondly, I must understand, to some extent at least, the context in which the words are spoken. That is: I must not only recognize what contexts are being invoked, but "be familiar" with these contexts myself. Thirdly, I must understand what the speaker intends to say.

There is, admittedly, a certain artificiality in this analysis of understanding sentences, and so I will acknowledge its weaknesses before pointing out its strengths. It seems reasonable to claim that I will not understand a sentence if I do not know the meaning of any of the words in it. However, if I know only some of the words, I may still be able to understand the sentence, and even understand it completely. If I don't know what a dodo is, I may still understand, "The dodo is extinct." Since the word 'extinct' is used mainly to refer to volcanoes and species that have died out, and because we do not use the definite article when referring to particular volcanoes, I can infer that the word 'dodo' probably means some kind of animal. On the other hand, if the sentence had been, "The dodo is an extinct bird," I would have understood it completely, even if I didn't previously know the meaning of the term. (A successful definition always has this effect: we understand

the sentence completely without knowing beforehand what all the words in the sentence mean.)

Furthermore, I may (in some sense) be said to understand a sentence even if I *don't* understand any of the words in it. If someone is yelling at me in a language that I don't understand, has a facial expression I normally associate with anger, and is pointing towards the door, I may "understand" that this person wants me to leave. The context--the person is talking to me, appears angry, is pointing--may allow me to understand what the person wants. However, it should be remembered that this context is also consistent with the person saying, "Why isn't that door painted yet?!" and so my understanding in situations like this is extremely liable to error.

I must have some rudimentary grasp of the grammar of the language, but can often understand sentences that are grammatically incomplete or flawed. To put this another way: we take an extremely elastic approach to grammatical rules. If, instead of, "I want some milk," a child says, "I want milk," or "Want milk," or even, "Milk want," we will understand what the child wishes to convey. If I am speaking in a foreign language I don't know well, I may speak very badly, and yet still make myself understood. In casual conversation, people often do not speak in grammatically well-formed formulae, but we understand them nevertheless.

The term 'context' is a very useful one, but one that has a wide variety of uses, and so to say that sentences are spoken in a context, and that this determines how we are to understand them, is to say something extremely vague. In one sense, the context of a sentence may be said to be what, in a general sense, is being talked about. That is: we understand the sentence to be "about" some subject, or topic. Any word that can stand as the grammatical subject of a sentence can establish a context in this sense. (This is not to say that the grammatical subject *does* establish the context for a sentence. In the sentence, "I think it's going to rain," the context is the weather, not me.) The context is delimited by the number of ways in which the word can be used. So, if I begin a sentence, "The clock...", I can continue in many ways, but there are also many other ways of continuing that are not normally open to me. I would not normally talk about how it tasted, or how fast it could fly, or whether it had a good memory. In this sense, then, the context is just all the possibly relevant things one can say about clocks.

I think it is possible to think of this sort of context as the "general meaning" of particular words, that is, what a word means prior to its use in a sentence.²⁸ This is, of course, a contentious point, and many people would claim that a word has no meaning prior to its being used in a sentence. So, in fact, claims Stanley Fish, whose

poetics I will be discussing shortly: "The obviousness of the utterance's meaning is not a function of the values its words have in a linguistic system that is independent of context."²⁹ However, the very fact that we can ask what a given word means seems to refute this position. So, for instance, suppose someone is doing an American-style crossword puzzle for which one clue is 'crown'. The answer turns out to be 'tiara', a word the person is unfamiliar with. The question, "What is a 'tiara'?" makes sense because of the many different ways in which the word 'crown' can be used. (It might be mentioned that the person here has evidently decided that 'tiara' doesn't sound enough like a verb, and so has asked what a tiara is.) But the word has clearly not been used in a sentence here. Furthermore, an answer to the above question will likely not use the word either, but only mention it: "A 'tiara' is a fancy headdress that resembles a crown; the pope's crown is called a 'tiara'."

As well, if I hear a sentence that contains a word I don't know, and I ask what the word means, I rarely want to know what it means *in this sentence*. For instance, say I am in a shop with someone who points to something and says, "That kimono is expensive." If I ask what a 'kimono' is, it is because I am not satisfied with an ostensive definition--I can see that "that," the thing being pointed to, is called a 'kimono'--and the word 'expensive' does not help in

defining the word for me. The definition I am looking for is one that will allow me to use the word properly in sentences.

In fact, knowing the general meaning of a word is a prerequisite for using it correctly in a sentence. If there were no general meaning, I would have no reason to use one word rather than another, and I would have no criterion for being able to say that someone was misusing a word. If someone were to talk about 'an exhalation of larks', we would be right to point out that a group of larks was called an 'exaltation'.

This first sort of context, then, is analogous to the general meanings of words. It is the first thing we try to establish when we try to understand a sentence. (Most often, of course, we don't consciously "try" either to establish contexts or understand sentences. These are things we just *do*.) We identify *what* is being talked about. So if someone says, "It's lovely!" the first thing we do is place the remark in a context (the person is talking about the weather, the gift, the music, and so on). These might be called 'language contexts'--I determine what is being talked about in terms of the words of my language.

Before continuing, I would like to note that when we are listening to (or reading) sentences, we usually identify these sorts of contexts easily, and shift effortlessly from one context to another, while simultaneously hearing (or

reading) the words as words within the context we have identified. (We may keep two or more contexts in mind at the same time.) The following quote is taken from Katherine Mansfield's short story, "The Garden Party." I have inserted the contextual shifts in square brackets.

And after all the weather [weather] was ideal. They [people] could not have had a more perfect day for a garden-party [party] if they had ordered it. Windless, [weather] warm, the sky without a cloud. Only the blue was veiled with a haze of light gold [beauty], as it is sometimes in early summer [season]. The gardener [gardener] had been up since dawn, mowing the lawns and sweeping them, until the grass [garden] and the dark flat rosettes where the dairy plants had been seemed to shine. As for the roses [roses], you could not help feeling they understood [garden sentient] that roses are the only flowers that impress people [people impressed] at garden-parties [party]; the only flowers [roses] that everybody [people] is certain of knowing. Hundreds [roses], yes, literally hundreds, had come out in a single night; the green bushes [bushes] bowed down as though they had been visited by archangels [heaven].

Breakfast [morning, meal] was not yet over before men [men] came to put up the marquee [preparation].³⁰

A second sort of context might be termed 'artificial' or 'culturally constructed'. If, for instance, I am talking about impressions and ideas, and someone thinks I am talking about opinions and beliefs, I might say, "That is not the context in which I am using the words; I am talking about Hume's philosophy." In one sense, artificial contexts are strongly analogous to language contexts. The word 'Hume'--at least within the similarly artificial context of philosophy--can invoke a context as clearly defined as does the word 'weather'. (This is not to say that either is

clearly defined in that there are sharp divisions between different contexts. However, while it is never easy to say what can be included in a particular context, it is often easy to say what can be excluded. If the context is 'Hume', we may safely claim that comments like, "My impression was that he was very sad," are irrelevant.)

On the other hand, artificial contexts are ones we construct in order to reflect upon the world. When I first tried to define 'literature' above, I invoked a language context: this is what we mean when we use the word 'literature'. Then I attempted to construct an artificial context to put the original context in perspective. Behaviourism, Darwinism, classical physics--in short, any *theory* counts as an artificial context.

A third way in which we use the word is with reference to when and where something was said, who said it, why and how it was said. For instance, someone says, "Quadruplicity drinks procrastination." We might want to put the remark in perspective by saying that this is a philosophical example of a nonsensical sentence--by saying *what* the sentence is: it belongs to an artificial context. But we could then place *this* in a further context by noting that it was said by Bertrand Russell in order to illustrate a particular point, that it was said in *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* which was published in 1940.³¹ The sentence is thus "located" in a later work by Russell, and is thus located at

a particular point within the evolution of Anglo-American philosophy, and so on.

This notion of 'context' is very similar to the common one of "what comes before and goes after" a sentence. This is no doubt what is often meant when it is claimed that the context determines the meaning of a particular piece of text. However, as I have tried to show, context is never as simple a matter as that. 'Within the context of *Hamlet*' could mean: given what happens in the story; given what ideas are being discussed; given that the play was written around 1603; given that it is a Shakespearean play; and so on.

The third thing to be considered in our understanding of sentences, after words and context, is the intention of the speaker. There are two ways in which the word 'intention' is commonly used in this regard, and these are often confused. The first is when we ascribe deliberateness to someone's words. So we might say that someone *intended* to bring up a point at a meeting--and whether or not the person did bring it up, or forgot to mention it, or thought better of it, is to some extent irrelevant. The point is: there was a *plan*. The person could have told us about this intention in advance.

On the other hand, sometimes people are not very clear when they speak. (There may, of course, be other reasons we don't understand them.) Someone says, for instance, "I

thought of you a lot, swimming in the lake." From this sentence, we can't tell who is swimming. Or: "As they say, truth will out." Here, we don't know who "they" are, who is being referred to. Or: "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."³² Here, without further elaboration, it is difficult to know whether God is identical with love, or if loving is the primary thing God does (or feels), and so on.

In cases such as these, we commonly ask the speaker, "What do you mean?" or "What did you intend to say?" However, it is possible that the speaker didn't consciously or deliberately intend *anything*. As I mentioned above, if what someone says is clear, if we understand what is being said, then it usually does not even occur to us to ask what the speaker's intention is. If I say, "G.E. Moore lived in that house on the right when he was teaching at Cambridge," someone might ask, "Who is G.E. Moore?"--thereby showing that he or she had understood the sentence--but the question, "What do you mean?" seems a misplaced one.

"But it must have been your intention to inform me that G.E. Moore lived in that house?" If I were a tour guide in Cambridge, I might not have any such intention. Those might just be the words that I said as we passed that particular house in the tour bus. Indeed, I might not even be able to speak English--I could have memorized the words

without knowing what they meant. Could I then be said to have an intention to inform you of something?

But this misses the point, which is: because it is our habit to ask what a person's intention is when we fail to understand that person, should we, on that basis, impute an intention to everything a person says?

(In the examples above, if we ask what the speaker meant, we are not really asking about the speaker's intention; we are asking that the context be more clearly defined. In the first example, the grammatical construction makes it unclear as to who is doing the swimming. In the second, we don't know who the speaker is referring to. In the third, we don't understand the relationship between God and love. In short, none of these sentences is clear because the context--*what* is being spoken about--is unclear.)

"But if we understand what a speaker says, then we understand what the speaker intended to say." Should we impute an intention to someone who *is not aware* of having that intention? And I think this is a decisive point: if I can distinguish between cases when I deliberately say something, and cases when I am just speaking, it doesn't make sense to dissolve this distinction by saying that I always have some intention or other when I speak.³³

With these provisos, then--specifically with respect to the many ways in which we can use the word 'context' and

the way in which we should not use the word 'intention'--I will reiterate that my understanding a sentence depends on my understanding its words, its context, and the intention of the speaker. Sometimes, the intention of the speaker will not be a factor, and sometimes there will be a complicated hierarchy or cluster of contexts that the speaker invokes, and to which I must respond. However, I do not think anything else needs to be taken into consideration as far as sentence-meaning is concerned.

This is precisely why I have avoided the term 'sentence-meaning' thus far: I do not think there is anything over and above words, contexts and intentions that *is* sentence-meaning. Indeed, to talk about the meaning of a sentence leads directly to some sort of confusion. Is it like word-meaning? Does it mean something prior to its being spoken? Do we use sentences the way we use words? Do sentences belong to a sort of sentence-language by virtue of which they have meaning? Clearly, the answer to all these questions is "no." If a sentence were to mean something prior to its being used, it would have to be some kind of a prefabricated unit. But it is not, because we don't use sentences; what we *do* is fabricate them.³⁴ These may seem like truistically true claims. Nevertheless, there have been philosophical debates that hinge on the idea that sentences have meanings that, like the meaning of words, may remain unchanged through time.³⁵

Unlike a word, a sentence is a unique utterance. This is easily seen with regard to spoken sentences, but there is a certain temptation to regard written sentences, at least, as being *the same* whenever we read them. However, one of the things involved in our understanding a particular sentence is our ability to invoke certain contexts as we respond to it. If this ability can be said to change--if we learn, and the contexts we are able to invoke are therefore different and more numerous--then clearly in one respect, the sentence is different. It is only if we divorce sentences from our understanding of them (ignore one of the factors that goes into determining the "meaning of a sentence") that we are tempted to say that sentences "persist" through time.

On the other hand, neither can we say that a sentence has a meaning the way a speaker has a "meaning" or intention. A sentence is not animate--it cannot intend anything. It is best, then, not to think of sentences as having a meaning, but only of the words they contain being meaningful.

It is now possible to ask: can the words of a sentence have a determinate meaning; is there any validity possible in the interpretation of sentences? And I think the answer must be, "Yes--to understand a sentence just *is* to validly interpret it, and this is often to say that the words have a sufficiently determinate meaning in the context of the

sentence." I can, of course, misunderstand someone, but if I am talking to someone, and we both agree that I do understand what he or she is saying, then this seems tantamount to saying that I am validly interpreting what is being said. What sense would it make to doubt this?

Interpreting Non-Literary Texts

The interpretation of non-literary texts is strongly analogous to what is involved in understanding sentences. It is also, in one sense, quite different from what we do when we try to make the world meaningful. The second point can be quickly argued, and so I will discuss it first.

Before the world is understood in some way, or in some language, it is meaningless for us. Thus, the number of ways in which we can make it meaningful is theoretically infinite, and bounded only by the time, imagination and persistence we devote to the task. However, a text consists of words that are already meaningful, and so this places certain rather obvious limits on our interpretive freedom. For instance:

Three hundred years ago, when the map makers began to ink in details of the North American continent, there seemed no more unlikely place on the face of the earth to establish a new nation than the unwieldy land mass which is now Canada.³⁶

Here, it would be merely incorrect to think that the author was talking about pink lemonade or how much fun it is to ride a bicycle. If our knowledge of English was slight, and

we thought 'face of the earth' referred to some sort of terrestrial equivalent of the "face" we can see on the moon, this would at least be a *possible* misinterpretation. However, we can rule out a vast number of interpretations simply with reference to the meaning of the words in the text. This is something we cannot do when we theorize about the world.

To return to the first point: interpreting a text is analogous to understanding a sentence. There are, however, several major differences between the two. First of all, it is seldom possible to ask the author of a text whether we have understood it the way he or she wanted us to. As I mentioned above, this relegates textual interpretation to the level of guesswork--we can never check that we have interpreted the text correctly. Secondly, there will most often be a linguistic, cultural and historical disparity between readers and the text. (Even today's local newspaper, where it could be argued that author and reader share the same linguistic, cultural and historical contexts, quickly becomes yesterday's newspaper. And yesterday's news often makes sense only if we see it as yesterday's news.)

When we read--and here I mean read *for understanding* and not read *for appreciation*, or *fun*, or what have you--we do a number of things. Some we always do. For instance, we always try to match contexts with those invoked by the words of the text. That is: we always try to determine what is

being talked about. (If we don't know the meaning of a word, we will look it up, or settle for an imperfect understanding of the sentence. The context in question is the first type discussed above.) Secondly, we will always try to determine what is being said, given this context. (If I say, "The boat is large," I am talking about a boat with reference to its size, and I am saying that the boat is large.) Thirdly, I will always try to see the relevance of subsequent sentences to the preceding ones. (If I then say, "The lake is rough today, but we should make it across easily," you will infer that that was *why* I said the boat was large. However, this should not be confused with my intention. My intention might have been to make casual conversation.)

Another thing we may do is notice *how* something is said. I don't think this is an inevitable attendant of reading. I think I can read a newspaper article without noticing how it is written. However, it is certainly a common part of reading, and bears directly on our understanding of the text: I may think of the text as difficult, or facile, or well-written, and so on. Often, the way something is said will strike us because it seems to perfectly formulate something we "already" thought.

I think that this fully describes one sort of reading, or the reading we perform on one sort of text. If I am reading a newspaper account of a disastrous rainfall, say, I

will not seek a further context to put it in--I probably won't be interested in when, where, or why the text was written, or who wrote it. (If I am interested in these things, it will be because I know the author, or because I discover the rainfall now being written about happened two years ago, or because the rainfall occurred in Florida and the text was written in Moscow, and so on. However, in most circumstances, I wouldn't be interested in these further contexts.) I will also not be interested in the intention of the author; that is: I will not try to figure out what point the author is trying to make.

In this sort of reading, then, we don't care about not being able to talk to the author, and we don't worry about any disparity between our language, culture and historical situation, and that of the text.

There are times, of course, when we do care about both these things. Then we will try to infer what the author's point was by examining the text in terms of its own linguistic, cultural and historical context. This will result in a better understanding of how the text is relevant to our present context.

So: we will try to determine if the words in the text still have the meaning they have today. We will acquaint ourselves with unfamiliar grammatical constructions. We will try to determine who the text was written for, and what prevailing philosophies, religions, and ideologies

conditioned their reading. We will read about the life and times of the author. In short, we will study history.³⁷

Having thus placed the text in a number of different contexts, we are in a much better position to interpret it and to infer what the author's point was. Our guess will now be a good guess. However, it is important to remember that our interpretation will be only as good as the history it is based on. Seeing as history itself is not a record of *what happened*, but only a particular way of making this meaningful, an interpretation based on this history depends on our continued acceptance of this history as history. Our interpretation, then, is always a provisional one.

Furthermore, there is one thing our study of history cannot tell us, and that is: how much of what we have studied is relevant to the text? We may see much that is relevant, but what we see as meaningfully related to the text is not the issue. We want to know how much was relevant to the author who wrote the text. We may see "an obvious allusion" to an "important political event," but what if the author was not, in fact, alluding to it at all? Our interpretation is then no better than the interpretation of *Alice in Wonderland* as a story about drug abuse.

However, it is true that an interpretation based on the study of history is much better than one that does not take historical background into consideration. That is because studying history does at least enable one to place a

text in a context. This constitutes an answer to the claim that if "the text can say different things to different readers... one reading is as valid or invalid as another."³⁸ Surely one of the things that makes one interpretation better than another is just its ability to put the text in perspective.

Interpreting Literary Texts

This argument can also be used against the possibility of correctly interpreting literary texts, and therefore any further argument might seem redundant. However, there are some special difficulties attached to literary interpretation, and so I will briefly mention these.

The sort of newspaper-reading I discussed above is often not possible when reading literature.³⁹ One reason for this can be seen by asking first a historian, and then a poet, "Why did you write this?" The historian will answer with some more or less sophisticated version of, "It happened." The fact that something happened is regarded as its own justification for the writing of history. However, this answer is not available to the poet. The poet's answer may be more along the lines of, "This is what is important in (my) life. Let me show you."

If this is the case, then the point of the text will have to be inferred, and will not automatically appear through a reading of the text. If I read about a disastrous

rainfall in a literary text, I will wonder: why is there a rainfall? What, if anything, does it have to do with the rest of the story? This means that there is no straightforward answer to the question, "What does this sentence mean?" because an answer often involves not only understanding the words in the sentence, but the point of the sentence. In literature, sentences will therefore often not submit to a single interpretation, but seem to demand two or more simultaneous interpretations, none of which can be dismissed as peripheral, or secondary, or unimportant.

As well, in many literary texts, the author does not have one point to make, but many. This means a literary text is far more likely to be multi-layered, as it were, than non-literary texts, which are often content to be linear, making one point at a time. A sentence in literature may be important to many of the different points an author is making. If this is the case, then we must attempt to understand it in a multiplicity of ways.

There is also an additional problem related to studying history in order to place literary texts in a context. Literary texts have a much greater tendency toward what has been called 'intertextuality'.

Just as poems are frequently fictional, plays and stories regularly use the linguistic resources of poetry. And all three of these forms regularly enrich their contextual reference by pointing toward other communicative acts, by quoting, alluding, parodying, and otherwise generating a context that is entirely semiotic and intertextual.⁴⁰

To put the matter simplistically: the order in which we read literary texts matters. To a large extent, we may read different history texts out of date order, and to a lesser extent, we may also do so with philosophy texts. However, if we read Dante before we read Virgil, we will miss something. One convention in literature that poets often follow is to make allusions to other literature.

However, by far the greatest additional difficulty attached to literary interpretation involves the importance of the experience we bring to the text. What is relevant to us in a literary text is a much more personal thing than it is either in history or philosophy. These simply declare their relevance (albeit tacitly): it is important to know what has happened, and it is important to care about truth, goodness and beauty. We may either accept or reject these claims, but we don't have very much leeway in *interpreting* them.

In literature, on the other hand, poets try to show us what they consider important, what they hope is valuable to us. As well, by presenting the texts they do, they also hope to persuade us that what they think of as relevant is what we ought to think of as relevant. However, this is often shown, instead of being said. Furthermore, to the extent that literature is multi-layered, it presents us with an array of choices. So literature not only does not

declare *how* it is relevant to us, it may be relevant in a variety of different ways.

Because of this, I may choose some aspect of the text as more relevant to me--because of the personal experience I bring to the text--and ignore other aspects that do not seem as important. What I take from the text--what the text shows *me*--may easily be a function of who I am, of how I make my own life meaningful to myself. Whereas history and philosophy tell me what to think, literature only invites me to sit at the table. I must serve myself. And the menu is not *table d'hôte* but *à la carte*.

The Reader-Response Theory of Stanley Fish

It is possible to draw a line from the New Critics, through E.D. Hirsch, to the literary theory of Stanley Fish. Central to New Critical doctrine was the idea that literary texts were "autonomous": they were to be regarded as complete in themselves, and were to be interpreted, as far as possible, without reference to extrinsic factors.

Students did not require "background" information about the poet's life and times in order to respond to and be articulate about the text. For many students, literary work became vivid and immediate as they engaged "the words on the page," usually the words of a lyric poem or a short passage from a novel or play. But localizing the "literary transaction," making it a matter of the "close reader" and the text, led to a confining and narrowing of the aims of criticism. The New Critics, Brooks in particular, maintained that historical, political, and social materials, though not primary, were relevant to critical understanding. Inevitably, however, as "close reading" lodged itself in the

academy, knowledge about what was "outside" or "external" to the text faded from view altogether.⁴¹

I have already said much against this position, so I will only restate its central problem: what is *in* the text--beyond the words it contains--depends utterly on who is reading the text. However, this is not the way in which the opponents of New Criticism argued against it. Rather, they employed a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* argument.

The New Criticism appeared to say that each reader could interpret the poem as he or she chose; any sincere response to "the words on the page" was valid or at least hard to discredit, even if historical evidence seemed to demonstrate otherwise. The problem this created for classroom practice was obvious: if the literary transaction engaged just the reader and the text, and if other material for interpretation was not required, then how was the teacher to declare that one reading was more correct than others?⁴²

That is: who had the authority to legislate between competing interpretations, and what formed the basis this authority?

E.D. Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation* was an attempt to remedy this situation by focusing on the author, and authorial intention. He argued that "'background' information about the poet's life and times" was essential:

When critics deliberately banished the original author, they themselves usurped his place, and this led unerringly to some of our present-day theoretical confusions. Where before there had been but one author, there now arose a multiplicity of them, each carrying as much authority as the next. To banish the original author as the determiner of meaning was to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to an interpretation.⁴³

Hirsch occupies a curious half-way position between the New Critics and Stanley Fish. He says, for instance:

what had not been noticed in the earliest enthusiasm for going back to "what the text says" was that the text had to represent *somebody's* meaning--if not the author's, then the critic's.⁴⁴

That is: he seems to want to say that the meaning *in the text*--the real meaning--is the *author's* meaning. In this sense, he is close to the New Critics. However, he also says that "a word sequence means nothing particular until somebody either means something by it or understands something from it,"⁴⁵ and that "there is nothing in the nature of the text itself which requires the reader to set up the author's meaning as his normative ideal."⁴⁶ In other words, the text means nothing until I begin to interpret it, and I can interpret it any way I like. In this, he is much closer to Stanley Fish.

Fish, instead of focusing on either the text or the author, makes the reader the centre of his attention. Since it is Fish's theory I want to discuss, I will begin to elaborate upon it here, and not comment further on other theories unless they are relevant to his.

Fish's theory is as follows: a valid interpretation of a text is possible only if that text contains "determinate meanings."⁴⁷ The question Fish asks is this: how do meanings become determinate? The answer: they become determinate within a context. Furthermore, sentences are

never separable from their context: "sentences emerge only in situations."⁴⁸ Even if the meaning of a sentence is "obvious," and its context transparent, we should not on that account claim that its meaning is independent of context:

It is impossible even to think of a sentence independently of a context, and when we are asked to consider a sentence for which no context has been specified, we will automatically hear it in the context in which it has been most often encountered.⁴⁹

What, then, is a context? Sentences are "embedded in... some situation or other."⁵⁰

One hears an utterance within, and not as preliminary to determining, a knowledge of its purposes and concerns, and that to so hear it is already to have assigned it a shape and given it a meaning.⁵¹

The context of a sentence, then, is a situation in which we hear a sentence. Given a particular situation, we already have some knowledge as to why the sentence is being spoken, and what the sentence is about.

It is a mistake, says Fish, to artificially divorce context from meaning. "The identification of context and the making of sense... occur simultaneously."⁵² To hear something as meaningful is at the same time to invoke a context in which that which is heard becomes meaningful.

And for Fish, it is precisely here that the whole notion of validity in interpretation founders. If the meaning of a sentence is inseparable from the context in which it is heard, then because we are bound, as readers, to

hear the sentences of a text *within* the contexts we are capable of invoking, *how* we read a text depends utterly upon what contexts we bring to the text. However, no one reader can bring a better set of contexts than any other reader--and there is no way to get *outside* these contexts to see if this is how one *should* be hearing what is said--and so any interpretation is as valid as the next. The way Fish puts this is as follows:

What I have been arguing is that meanings come already calculated, not because of norms embedded in the language but because language is always perceived, from the very first, within a structure of norms. That structure, however, is not abstract and independent but social; and therefore it is not a single structure with a privileged relationship to the process of communication as it occurs in any situation but a structure that changes when one situation, with its assumed background of practices, purposes, and goals, has given way to another. In other words, the shared basis of agreement sought by Abrams and others is never not already found, although it is not always the same one.⁵³

Clearly, I agree with Fish's conclusions about validity in interpretation; however, the arguments upon which they are based lack a certain amount of force. First, it is never clear what Fish means by "determinate meaning." What is he referring to: words or sentences? I have argued that these are to be viewed differently: a word has meaning if it is to be found in a language; a sentence has meaning if its words have meaning, and if the contexts they invoke can be matched by the speaker, and if the "intention" of the speaker is not problematic.

Fish, as I mentioned above, is inimical to the suggestion that words have meaning independent of "context":

The obviousness of the utterance's meaning is not a function of the values its words have in a linguistic system that is independent of context; rather, it is because the words are already embedded in a context that they have a meaning that Hirsch [or anyone] can then cite as obvious.⁵⁴

I have already given a number of reasons for rejecting this point of view. Some others are suggested by Fish himself. First, even if we always learned the meaning of a word with reference to a particular "situation, with its assumed background of practices, purposes, and goals"--and this, as I have shown, is not true--it would remain true that the meaning of the word would still be something distinct from the situation. This is because the same words, although understood differently in different situations, will nevertheless still be the *same* words. Indeed, it makes no sense at all to say that a word changes meaning according to context unless the word *is* the same word in both situation. Otherwise, it would not change meanings, but simply be a different word; it would be *entirely* defined by its situation.

Now, by virtue of what is it the same word? Clearly, no answer to this can make reference to any particular situation, since situations serve only to modify, or further define the word. What is in question is precisely *that*

which is not modified by the situation. This can only be the meaning of the word. (It is what I have referred to as the "general meaning" of the word.)

Secondly, Fish offers a wonderfully telling example of how sentences are understood only within contexts, even if the context seems transparent--and therefore non-existent.⁵⁵

When E.D. Hirsch offers "The air is crisp" as an example of a "verbal meaning" that is accessible to all speakers of the language... he is counting on his readers to agree so completely with his sense of what that shared and normative verbal meaning is that he does not bother even to specify it.⁵⁶

Fish points out that if one were to say this "in the middle of a discussion of music,"⁵⁷ it would not be understood as a comment on the temperature.

However, Fish's conclusion is as follows:

Neither my colleague nor the reader of Hirsch's sentence is constrained by the meanings words have in a normative linguistic system; and yet neither is free to confer on an utterance any meaning he likes.⁵⁸

Fish's point is that the reason we do not (and cannot) understand a word "any old way" is that we are constrained by context--the situation a sentence is spoken in, and its "assumed background of practices, purposes, and goals." When considered with a certain quantity of academic remove, this theory may indeed work. My position is that we learn words, and then learn how they are used in specific and/or unusual contexts. Fish's position is that we hear words used in a wide variety of contexts, and thereby learn the

meaning of words. Both positions may be seen to amount to the same thing (especially since Fish believes that there are *standard* contexts in which particular words are "most often encountered").

However, concrete examples are sufficient to show the weakness of Fish's position. "Put on your shoes." "Look at those shoes." "Your shoes are muddy." "Do these shoes fit?" Is it not better to say that we learn the meaning of the word 'shoe' than to say we learn the purposes and goals of the four sentences just listed? Is it not better, in fact, to say that we know what these sentences mean (in part) because we know the meaning of the word 'shoe'? It is, of course, true that most of the time we learn the meaning of a word by hearing it used in a particular context. But surely, as I said above, to learn the meaning of a word is to learn how to use it *generally*, to know in which contexts it would be appropriate--to know how it stands with respect to the other words of our language.

Secondly, how would we understand the purposes and goals involved in a particular situation if not through our language? How would these be meaningful to us?

Finally, to claim that "language is always perceived, from the very first, within a structure of norms. That structure, however, is not abstract and independent but social;" to claim this is to claim to know the origin of meaning. It is to claim knowledge of a social structure

that precedes and enables meaning. But such a structure would be meaningless, and hence unknowable.

To be fair, I should say that Fish's theory of word-meaning is not very fleshed out, and most of the time he wants to talk about sentence-meaning. Here there is less to criticize. I would not speak about sentence-meaning, and would argue what the words of a sentence mean *can be* "determinate," if this means simply that the sentence *can be understood*. However, with regard to texts, if we care about what the author wanted us to understand, and are not content with just *a* reading of a text, then it is fair to say that the sentences are not determinate. We can never be sure that the contexts we bring to the sentences of a text are those the author wanted us to invoke. However, I do think Fish is trapped by his metaphor of 'context' as a container, something that "one hears an utterance within,"⁵⁹ and that his point that understanding a sentence is simultaneous with hearing that sentence "in" a context is better explained by saying that the words themselves invoke contexts.

Fish's "Interpretive Communities"

There is--and this goes without saying--a great deal in Fish that I will not touch upon here, because strictly speaking, it is not relevant to my main points.⁶⁰ However, there is one point I should engage, and that is Fish's argument that there are good and bad interpretations--that

in a world where there are only interpretations, some are better than others.

Although it is the most contentious part of Fish's theory, it is also the weakest. To attack it, however, is in no sense to diminish what I regard as Fish's most important conclusion, which is that there is no validity in interpretation.

The aspect of the theory I am referring to has to do with Fish's notion of 'interpretive communities', and how these more or less dictate how we interpret texts. The question he is trying to answer is this: if there is no validity in interpretation, then why is it that we *do* accept certain interpretations as correct, and why, in particular, do I accept my own interpretations as correct?

Fish's first answer to this question is brief and unacceptable. It is essentially: I believe what I believe, and when I change my mind, I will move from one state of certainty to another.⁶¹ His second answer is that we are all members of interpretive communities, and that there is therefore "a core of agreement (although one subject to change) concerning the ways of *producing* a text."⁶²

A particular reading of a text, then, will have currency if it is one that is endorsed by an interpretive community. And:

the fact that it remains easy to think of a reading that most of us would dismiss out of hand does not mean that the text excludes it but that there is as yet no

elaborated interpretive procedure for producing that text.⁶³

Now, whatever else is wrong with this idea,⁶⁴ it will be seen immediately that interpretive communities can never *validate* a particular reading; they can never be used to differentiate between a good and a bad reading. Literary interpretations, under this theory, are simply records or what various communities believe at any one time.

It is therefore extremely instructive that when Fish attempts to move from a merely institutional interpretation to one that can be defended, he begins once again to refer to notions his own theory has banished.

The promotion of reader-response criticism to the category of things that are done (even if it is not being done by everyone) brings with it a whole new set of facts to which its practitioners can now refer. These include patterns of expectation and disappointment, reversal of direction, traps, invitations to premature conclusions, textual gaps, delayed revelations, *all of which are related to a corresponding set of authors' intentions*, of strategies designed to educate the reader or humiliate him or confound him, or, in the more sophisticated versions of the mode, to make him enact in his responses the very subject matter of the poem (*italics mine*).⁶⁵

Furthermore, when he outlines an "off-the-wall" theory of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, he asks what would count in favour of this theory being accepted by an interpretive community.

It would begin with the uncovering of new *evidence* (a letter, a lost manuscript, a contemporary response) and proceed to the conclusion that *Austen's intentions* have been misconstrued by generations of literary critics (*italics mine*).⁶⁶

However, both the appeal to the author and the appeal to evidence are ruled out by Fish's contention that texts do not contain determinate meanings. (Surely a letter must be interpreted?) Fish's theory is just that "the stability of the text is an illusion."⁶⁷ Since Fish's texts do not contain *words*, but only "*meanings*" that are indeterminate, he does not allow himself the latitude I have taken above with regard to authorial intention, and the placing of a text in an historical context.

I have been quite critical of Fish's theory in the above. I think it is important to remember, however, that when he argues against validity in interpretation, he is doing the world of literary criticism a favour. For critics who believe in the validity of their interpretations are simply succumbing to their desire for an ultimate understanding of the text, and merely wind up believing in the illusions they have manufactured.

CHAPTER 8

THE PROBLEM OF MULTIPLE PERSONALITY DISORDER

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

In 1980, a new and rather quixotic disorder was added to the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illness, Third Edition* (DSM-III). It was called 'Multiple Personality Disorder' (MPD). The 1987 revision (DSM-III-R) gives the following as diagnostic criteria for MPD:

- A. The existence within the person of two or more distinct personalities or personality states (each with its own relatively enduring pattern of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and self).
- B. At least two of these personalities or personality states recurrently take full control of the person's behavior.¹

In 1994, the Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illness, Fourth Edition* (DSM-IV) was published, and the name of the disorder was changed to 'Dissociative Identity Disorder' (DID). However, in this chapter I will retain the old terminology, since this is the terminology used in virtually all the literature on the subject.²

Very little is known about MPD, and many even question its diagnosis as legitimate. "Outside North America, where DSM-III and DSM-III-R are used much less, MPD is still rarely diagnosed."³ This is not to say that psychiatrists outside North America would not think there was anything *wrong* with a patient who received a diagnosis of MPD from the small number of the disorder's leading advocates. They would just give a different diagnosis.

The confusion that surrounds the diagnosis of MPD is further contributed to by the fact that there is no agreement amongst those who favour the diagnosis as to the mechanism of MPD. What I mean by 'mechanism' is this: how is it, given the alleged causes of the disorder, that the disorder comes to manifest itself in the way it does?

Because MPD is little known and less understood, I will begin this chapter with a brief exposition of what is agreed upon by those who both diagnose and write about the disorder. I will then discuss some of the more prominent theories about it. Before I do this, however, I should mention the reason for including such a discussion in this thesis.

Some researchers in MPD have made claims that, if true, would throw the whole enterprise of epistemology into doubt. That is: some have claimed that the existence of multiples, as those afflicted with the disorder are called, and "within whom two or more 'entities,' each experiencing

selfhood as if he were a whole person, vie with one another for control,"⁴ dictates that we must rethink the whole notion of the unitary self. "In a very real sense we are all multiple personalities," says John O. Beahrs.⁵

When some act is performed without being experienced by the conscious self as voluntary, it is often said to have been done by the unconscious. Yet what appears "unconscious" to the self proper may actually have been a conscious choice of one of its parts, illustrating the multiplicity inherent in the experience of self-hood.⁶

Eugene Bliss claims the "crux of the problem is whether patients are consciously playing a role or are someone else."⁷

To question the notion of a unitary self is also to question the very activity of epistemology. When I claim to know something, I am assuming that the "I" that knows is something unitary. If I have more than just one self, then it may reasonably be asked not which *part* of me knows, but which *one* of me knows whatever it is that "I" am claiming to know. And if this is a reasonable question, then surely I can conclude the following: either I may both know *and* not know something (one of me does and the other doesn't), or I don't know the very thing I do know.

Not all researchers embrace the idea that people can be many diverse "selves" all inhabiting one body.

Much of the argument [concerning the diagnosis of MPD] is based on assumptions generated in the minds of adherents and skeptics by the term *multiple personality disorder*. The term suggests that it is necessary to debate whether one person can really have more than one personality, or, put more extremely, whether there can

really be more than one person in a single body. Of course there can't. Nevertheless, MPD is a real disorder.⁸

However reassuring such a pronouncement is, it is obviously not much of an argument. What I eventually propose to offer in this chapter is an argument against the notion that many people (personalities, identities) can coexist in one body. First, however, it is necessary to ask what people think multiple personality disorder actually is.

MPD is not a disease, at least not in the conventional sense. No physical difference has been found between people with MPD and healthy people. MPD is a behavioural disorder that in the large majority of cases affects females who were the victims of extensive childhood sexual and/or physical abuse.⁹ Multiples typically forget (or are amnesic about) this abuse--they appear not to remember it at all. However, the memory in some sense survives, and survives vividly.

At some point, multiples begin to have some profoundly disorienting experiences.¹⁰ They begin to experience time loss, for instance: there will be gaps in their memories that they cannot account for. These gaps may last anywhere from only a few minutes to over a year, although year-long gaps are much rarer than those of shorter duration. They may experience psychogenic fugue, a phenomenon similar to time loss, but involving travel: they will suddenly discover themselves in a place to which they have no recollection of travelling. As well, they may find people addressing them

in names not their own. They often begin to hear voices in their heads. They discover items in their bedrooms they do not recognize. They find notes in strange handwriting in their purses. In short, they begin to feel that they do not have the control over their conscious states that other people have. This is a very basic expectation of what we mean by being conscious: we expect that while awake, we will be able to focus our attention on what we will. A multiple seemingly cannot do this.

The basic theory at the current time is as follows. Multiples, pushed to the limit of sanity by their traumatic childhood experiences, have somehow created a "personality" distinct from their own, whose business it is to house the painful memory. In psychiatric terminology, the original personality is now called the 'core' (or 'host') personality. The other, created personalities are called 'alters'. If the extent and scope of the abuse is large, the core personality will create more and more alters to cope with it. Creating alters becomes a method of coping with life.

Once alters are being manufactured, they are created for reasons other than coping with abuse. An abused child may, for instance, create the personality of a *happy* child who is unaware of the abuse. A befuddled core personality may create a managing alter to help get through the rigours of day to day life. It is common for a teenage alter to

appear and take over the entire sexual life of the person (a significant number of multiples have a prostitute personality).

These alters do not quietly sit at the back of the mind, however. At times, they take over the body, as it were. The core personality is amnesic at the time the alter spends in the body. The alters vary in significant ways from the core personality. It is common for the alters to differ from the core personality with regard to age, sex, predispositions, handedness, eyesight, accent, abilities, facial expressions, vocabularies, and so on. In fact, they appear to be different people.

This impression is reinforced by the fact that alters are often amnesic for other alters' experiences. Each alter appears to have a memory system all its own. Speaking to one alter about something in no sense guarantees that any other alter will hear what is being said. Even if you are good friends with the core personality and several of the alters, you must be introduced if a new alter happens to take over the body. Otherwise the new alter will not know who you are. However, sometimes the alters converse amongst themselves, and so there is some overlap to the different memory systems. A new alter may have "heard of you" even if it does not recognize you.

(I will mention in passing that when one personality cedes to another, this process is referred to as

'switching'. Typically, the eyeballs roll up slightly, the body shudders slightly, and a new personality emerges. Switching can take only a fraction of a second. Often it is done so discretely that no one present will notice.)

The alters do not just take over the body; they compete for it. This is the crux of the disorder. The core personality, once coming to understand that there are other personalities besides her or his own, must try to live in a world of disjointed memories. But this world is often terrifying. The core then allows a personality to take over the body, and this in turn leads to more terrifying experiences. (Personalities often behave in ways that the core personality finds abhorrent.)

It is important to understand how different the personalities can be. The vast majority of multiples have child alters, for instance.¹¹ Child alters may have any or all of the following characteristics: they will typically be unable to read or write, and have a limited vocabulary; they will be unable to perform simple tasks, such as the tying of shoelaces; they will speak in a childish tone of voice and their facial expression will be childish as well; they will smear food on their faces when they eat; in fact, they will act remarkably like children.

By contrast, a multiple may have a prostitute personality.¹² This alter is typically the one who takes the brunt of the sexual abuse during the teen years. The

alter will be cynical, use vulgar language, exhibit an aggressive demeanour, as often as not will be anhedonic,¹³ and frequently will be anesthetic to pain. This last quality is something often found in at least one of the alters, even if there is no prostitute personality present. Multiples will often have an alter that is seemingly oblivious to self-inflicted pain. Cutting the arms or genital area with razor blades, and burning the body with cigarettes, without displaying any behaviour consistent with being in pain, is common. (The other alters and the core, however, *will* feel the pain once they assume the body.) The prostitute alter is so named because it actively pursues a career in prostitution, unbeknownst to the core personality.

I have chosen to contrast two alters that are almost polar opposites, but all alters exhibit uniquely identifying characteristics. Some are more unidimensional than others, appearing to have a single function (to run away, to cry, to climb trees, to be carefree), but often the alters are so complex that the illusion is created that one is talking to an entirely different person. That this is so is attested to by the fact that all clinicians warn against being duped into treating the alter as a person. In fact, of all the clinicians I have read, only one (Ross) claims that it is easy to distinguish between alters and "real" people. Ross claims that "alter personalities are highly stylized enactments of inner conflicts, drives, memories, and

feelings."¹⁴ However, this claim is rendered suspect by the fact that alters have been known to assume the body for months and even years.

How many personalities does a multiple have, on average? "Early investigators usually cited only a few, but larger numbers are now being detected in some patients. Kluft... in a series of seventy cases reported a modal range of 8 to 13."¹⁵ Ross found a mean number of 15.7 and Putnam a mean of 13.3.¹⁶

There is only the most general sort of agreement over what sorts of personalities a multiple may have, although many therapists "map" personalities. Bliss does not attempt a real taxonomy. Ross cites child alters, protectors, persecutors, and opposite sex alters as the most common. Putnam attempts a fairly rigorous taxonomy in which opposite sex alters do not figure importantly, but internal self-helpers do. (In Ross, the internal self-helper is a seemingly unimportant subset of the protector personality.)¹⁷

And yet, there is a general agreement and this is expressed most succinctly by Bliss. "A constant struggle is being waged within the patient between preservative forces and destructive powers."¹⁸ What happens is this. "All personalities begin as friends and allies."¹⁹ However, some alters are basically repositories of pain or repeatedly function as receptacles for abuse. They then begin to

resent the core personality, because the core is perceived by the alter as being too weak either to accept the memory or undergo the abuse. Thinking, then, of the core personality as an enemy, they seek either to mutilate its body, or to actually kill it. (All clinicians are agreed that no alter recognizes the fact that destroying the core personality will also destroy it.) They often will also engage in acts of spite: they will abuse drugs, and then "vacate" the body, leaving someone else to experience the aftereffects; they will engage in sexual relations and then "throw out" a personality who will find itself in a horrifying position; and so forth. These alters are normally labelled 'persecutors'.

On the other hand, there are the so-called protectors. These may perform many functions: they may "look after" the child personalities, as a baby sitter would the children; they may emerge to phone the hospital after a persecutor alter has tried to kill the core personality (or, in less peculiar terms, after the multiple has tried to commit suicide); they may assume the body as strong-minded but emotionless creatures who take control to ensure that normal daily routines are followed (so that the anorexic multiple eats, or the dysfunctional multiple gets dressed and goes to work, etc.); they may engage, as Bliss says, in battle with the persecutors.

The remaining personalities usually represent memories, or are used to express moods, or perform some physical function. However, they are weak in the face of the persecutors, and rely on the protectors. Although this is not the time to elaborate on this notion, the main protagonists in a multiple's life may usefully be thought of as allegorical personifications in an ongoing battle between good and evil. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that those who recognize the disorder are so fascinated and enthusiastic about it, and those who don't are so skeptical.

Theories about MPD

There are two main ways in which the legitimacy of the MPD diagnosis is questioned. First, the notion of multiple personalities, with its close resemblance to possession by demons, is deemed by some to be far too extravagant for a serious psychology to embrace. As well, the notions of 'dissociation' and 'hypnosis' are central to most theorizing about MPD. Since dissociation was abandoned as an explanatory concept by Freud, and because, in the minds of many, a hypnotist is nothing more than a lanky wizard in a black cape, psychiatrists often prefer the safer ground of a borderline personality diagnosis, say.

This is, of course, a terrible reason for rejecting the idea of multiple personality disorder. MPD is strange, certainly, but if it exists, psychology must attempt to explain it. The fact that something does not accord well

with current cultural prejudices hardly justifies the denial of its existence.

The second, more substantial, argument against MPD is that since the disorder is typically diagnosed *in therapy*, and before the core personality is *aware* of the alters, MPD may itself be a therapeutic artefact, or iatrogenic, or--in plainer terms--created by the very psychiatrists who diagnose it. There is much merit to this argument. Why should MPD be such a localized disorder, one that occurs almost exclusively in North America? Why should the greatest bulk of MPD patients have been diagnosed by only a very few members of the psychiatric profession? Why is it that multiples should only "know" they are multiples once they have been diagnosed? It is well-documented that multiples score inordinately high on hypnotizability tests, and that a central factor in hypnotizability is suggestibility. (For Bliss, in fact, MPD just *is* self-hypnosis.) So the patient, who is suggestible and suffering from some incomprehensible ailment, is told by the therapist that he or she has MPD and is suddenly then able to display alternate personalities for the benefit of same.

But this argument, though quite strong, is irrelevant (at least the way it has been presented here). The disorder, as it eventually manifests itself, is real enough. We may say that a mob, when following the suggestions of a gifted orator, is deluded. However, the actions a mob may

take, perhaps founded upon the delusion created by the orator, may demand police intervention. That there are people who fully *believe* they are multiples is something that is beyond all doubt. One has only to examine the extent of the self-mutilation of which they are capable to realize that they are troubled individuals who are in dire need of some type of therapeutic intervention. Calling them multiples, and treating them as multiples, does work, at least according to the clinicians who publish on the disorder. Perhaps if the disorder were renamed 'multiple personality delusion' ('dissociative identity delusion'), the skeptics would be appeased.

I am going to assume for the moment that an MPD diagnosis is an adequate way of making meaningful, within the context of psychiatry, the problems that MPD patients manifest. I do not, of course, think that there are multiple selves who inhabit a single body, but I do believe there are people who *think* this is the case.²⁰ This in itself is reason enough to investigate the disorder. A delusion is often enough taken for "reality": witness the mind/body model.

There are not many theories about MPD, and those theories that exist are quite weak. I propose to run through a few of them in order to show this. However, it must be remembered that the problem is not one of etiology: everyone is agreed (pretty much) that MPD is caused by

massive and often incestuous childhood sexual abuse.²¹ The problem is *how* the abuse translates into such a bizarre disorder as MPD (what I have called the mechanism of MPD).

Colin Ross gives a brief but fairly comprehensive review of the current theories about MPD. He does not discuss "purely psychoanalytic models of MPD,"²² and given my conclusions above about the Freudian model of what it is to be human, I do not see the need to do so either (see above, pp. 223-28). He does discuss MPD as autohypnosis, role-playing, neurologically based, culturally based, and state dependent. He also mentions Hilgard's neodissociation theory of divided consciousness, and finally opts for a descriptive clinical model of MPD.²³ However, Ross himself recognizes the poverty of this model in terms of its explanatory power. His own answer to the question "What is MPD?" is anything but theoretical:

What is MPD? MPD is a little girl imagining that the abuse is happening to someone else. This is the core of the disorder, to which all other features are secondary. The imagining is so intense, subjectively compelling and adaptive, that the abused child experiences dissociated aspects of herself as other people.²⁴

He concludes that "we should not lose sight of the basic simplicity of this 'etiological model' of MPD, nor should we cloak it in too much jargon or fancy language."²⁵

There is one theory that Ross doesn't review, and so I will begin with it. This is the view, espoused fully by Beahrs and partly by Crabtree, that multiplicity is, in

fact, the norm.²⁶ That is: *all* people contain many selves, and the idea that people are unitary selves is an illusion.

The temptation is great to dismiss such a claim outright. Researchers on MPD have a tendency to invest too much in its discovery and enshrinement in the DSM-III. Bliss, for instance, in an attempt to normalize MPD symptoms--to claim that they are extreme manifestations of otherwise normal behaviour--cites Socrates, Luther, Hobbes, Descartes, Ben Jonson, Goethe and Oliver Cromwell as being the victims of hallucinations.²⁷ The implication of this is that "many more people than has been suspected spontaneously enter self-hypnotic states."²⁸ Having postulated what is actually a fairly weak theory to account for the phenomenon of MPD (self-hypnosis--see below), a phenomenon that an enthusiast of the disorder estimated had manifested itself 6,000 times in North America,²⁹ Bliss then attempts to rewrite history in terms of self-hypnosis. This is just irresponsible extrapolation. It is tempting, then, just to dismiss the view that we now know something that has eluded philosophers for thousands of years, that is, that we all consist of "multiple selves."

However, the view has been put forward seriously, and so I will give what I think is a cogent argument against it. As I said earlier, a self, if it is to be a self, must at least meet the minimum requirement that it is a unity that persists through time. If we allow that a self can in fact

be *many* selves, then we can in turn legitimately ask of these selves what *they* are composed of. Why should any of those selves in fact be unitary? In fact, on this model, it would make much more sense for each of my multiple selves to be similarly composed of many smaller selves. This process of self-division can theoretically be carried on *ad infinitum*, with the logical result that what I want to call "myself" does not persist through time at all, but exists only on a moment to moment basis. And this clearly is not what I can term a 'self'. Hence, the idea that the self is really a multiplicity of selves is simply an argument that there is no such thing as a self. Such an explanation of MPD, then, is no explanation at all, but rather an abandonment of the problem.

Two other views of MPD may be dealt with quickly as well. The first is that MPD is a disease. Ross says simply, "There is no evidence that MPD is a neurological disease."³⁰ In the absence of such evidence, there is clearly nothing on which to base a theory. The second is what Ross calls the 'feminist analysis', and which contains many strong points.³¹ This has it that MPD is the result of the institutionalized oppression of women in our society. However, this analysis neither explains *why* certain females rather than others begin to manifest MPD symptoms, nor shows *how* the disorder comes about.

It has been suggested that MPD be classified under the heading of role-playing, and that multiples are really only acting out different parts. This does not mean they are malingering, however. Aldridge-Morris writes:

Whilst writing my monograph, talking to my mother, my children, a policeman or my student there will be conspicuous differences in my behaviour. For example, my posture and tone of voice, even my accent may alter. However, I not only behave differently, I feel differently. I reconstrue my world. My self-concept undergoes radical alterations but it is unlikely that I will be aware of these myriad metamorphoses.

Role-taking is not an all-or-nothing affair. Instead we become more or less absorbed in our everyday dramas: just as professional actors, during the long run of a play, will find themselves more "lost" in their role on some occasions than others. Actors report that they sometimes cry "real" tears, or experience "genuine" hatred or affection toward other player (sic) when on stage. To the extent that we are role-involved we lose self-consciousness.³²

On the other hand, however much similarity there is between role-playing and MPD, there would seem to be insurmountable difficulties in holding the MPD just *is* role-playing. If I am playing a role, I may either recognize this fact or not. If I do, I will be conscious that I am playing the role. If I do not, I can be made conscious of this fact. With multiples, this does not happen. In their various roles, they are convinced they are different people. Again, Aldridge-Morris:

The state theorist will surely want to argue for a difference in subjective experience between the "genuine" defendant, or multiple personality patient, or hypnotised subject, and the actor. Given the absence of any objective indices of being a multiple personality...

is one not obliged to seek differences in reported subjective experience?³³

Bliss's theory, the most full-blown theoretical account of MPD, is simple to state. Human beings, to varying degrees, have the ability to hypnotize themselves. In fact, all hypnosis is self-hypnosis.³⁴ This self-hypnosis is a function of:

the reticular activating system, diffusely distributed in the core of the neural axis with radiations to the cortex, [which] is the altering mechanism that functions to focus attention.³⁵

Under hypnosis, we pay attention to a very limited amount of external stimuli. We are very suggestible. (The ideas of hypnosis and suggestibility will be discussed in greater depth later on. I am concerned here only to give the bare bones of Bliss's theory.) We cannot discriminate between fantasy and reality. We tend to heed the voice of the hypnotist: what the hypnotist says *is* real, *becomes* real (that is: we hallucinate).

Accordingly to Bliss, MPD is autohypnosis. Patients hypnotize themselves. An alter is merely posthypnotic suggestion:

It may be useful to describe this paradigm once again since it is so relevant to the clinical process. The hypnotized subject is given a simple suggestion such as "You will forget my instructions, but you will go to the blackboard in five minutes and write your name." Many fine hypnotic subjects will then comply. It may look conspiratorial but it isn't. This same process works in patients, but in the guise of personalities. They have been hidden by self-hypnosis and are the counterpart of the hypnotist's simple suggestion. In both cases, the hypnotic process is terminated with an amnesia--alter

personalities have been programmed by the patient or the hypnotist has planted his instructions. Later, now out of hypnosis--the posthypnotic part--the experimental subject performs the act, whereas the personality assumes the body and performs its function. Neither the experimental subject nor the patient, now "replaced" by a personality, is then in a trance. Both situations are operationally identical, because in both unconscious instructions direct the behavior of the conscious mental apparatus. The experimental subject is fully conscious, but the unconscious suggestion has gained ascendancy. It has acquired control and propels the subject to the requested behavior. By the same token, the unconscious programs in the patient--the personalities--have emerged, assumed control, and then acted. In both, unconscious programs direct behaviors without conscious control.³⁶

There are quite a few points Bliss makes that I disagree with, but I will focus on only two. First, I find the analogy very weak between the behaviour of an alter personality and the behaviour of a hypnotic subject performing a hypnotically suggested act. Typically, the posthypnotic suggestion concerns a very simple task the subject is to perform some time after returning to the normal conscious state. It is felt as an incongruous compulsion by the subject. The subject feels a sudden urge to do something that he or she would not normally do, or feel the desire to do, at that time.³⁷

An alter does not experience this sort of between-behaviour incongruousness in its activities. Neither does it exhibit between-behaviour incongruousness. The behaviour of an alter is usually very consistent. So the element of disjointedness or incongruousness is missing, unless one wants to take into account the behaviour of the patient as a

whole. However, if we do this, the analogy once again breaks down: the hypnotic subject is sometimes fully conscious when responding to posthypnotic suggestion, whereas the core personality is most often unconscious and unaware of the alter's actions.³⁸ This is why the core personality experiences time loss.

The most telling argument against alters being posthypnotic suggestions, however, is their complexity and their ability to learn. Typically, post-hypnotic suggestions are simple and as unambiguous as possible. Indeed, ambiguity may lead to the failure of the subject to respond to the suggestion.³⁹ An example of a simple suggestion would be: "When you hear the word 'head', you will scratch your head." A "harder" response to make is of the nature: "When I ask you to stroke a cat on my lap, you will see a cat on my lap." I find the idea that an alter--with all the differences in vocabulary, handedness, predisposition to certain types of behaviour, and so on, that it manifests--can be explained with reference to posthypnotic suggestion a little hard to swallow.

Furthermore, posthypnotic response is, so to speak, programmed response. A particular response is suggested, and the subject performs it. But how can anyone be programmed to learn anything? Since the information to be learned is new, it cannot be included in any hypnotic suggestion. However, it is possible for an alter to go to

school and take a course for the core personality. This can occur if the core personality is incapable of coping with rigours of academia, for instance.

The second thing I find wrong with Bliss's theory is the notion that the patient, upon switching, is "now 'replaced' by a personality." People are either under hypnosis or they are not. When they awake from hypnosis, they are the same people they were before they were hypnotized. An alter at least seems to be--and claims to be--a different person. To simply state that a person comes back as an alter explains nothing. In sum, then, for Bliss's theory to work, the alter would have to be a unidimensional behavioural function of the patient, who would remain more or less in control of the body. This does not happen.

Dissociation and Hypnosis

Colin Ross suggests that MPD be classified as a subtype of what he terms 'chronic trauma disorder'.⁴⁰ As I have noted earlier, he finds that in 100% of cases where 15 or more personalities manifest themselves, there is a history of sexual, physical and emotional abuse. Although the figures over all are not so conclusive, I am going to take it as granted that MPD may in general be thought of as a reaction to trauma.

My position here is the MPD is real enough--it is not a misdiagnosis--but that it is delusional, and that it is capable of perfectly straightforward explanation. There is no need, on the one hand, to suppose that it is purely iatrogenic, nor, on the other, to delve into the quasi-mystical in order to explain it. I think the key to the disorder lies in a rethinking and melding of all the major ways in which MPD is explained in the literature. It is in part role-playing, but that is not the end of it; it is partially iatrogenic, but not merely so; and it does have something to do with hypnosis, as long as hypnosis is seen in terms of suggestibility and belief.

In a very general way, a traumatic experience may be thought of as comprising two aspects: there is shock, and there is denial. This is just to say that we experience something extremely unpleasant, and we wish it weren't happening.⁴¹

One common response to trauma is dissociation.⁴² However, the concept clearly needs better definition than it generally receives if it is to be of any use. For instance, here is a definition found in an undergraduate psychology textbook: dissociation is the "separation between different aspects of consciousness."⁴³ In the absence of any clear notion about what an "aspect" of consciousness might be, this definition clarifies little. Unfortunately, it is typical.⁴⁴

Some psychologists are highly critical of the notion of dissociation. Charles Rycroft writes: "Hysterical dissociation states, including dissociation of the personality, seem indeed to have more to do with the psychology of deception and self-deception than with any innate or acquired incapacity for integration."⁴⁵ Colin Ross writes that unfortunately:

there is not a good definition of dissociation. Dissociation is defined in DSM-III-R (1987) as "a disturbance or alteration in the normally integrative functions of identity, intuition, or consciousness" (p. 269). This is a rough-and-ready definition that does not have a lot of empirical support.⁴⁶

The situation is further complicated by the fact that many writers on hypnosis and MPD seem to assume that dissociation is a perfectly normal sort of "mechanism" and don't define it at all. This is hardly reassuring to the skeptics.

I think dissociation can be *made* into a useful concept, and one that can account for one of the most problematic aspects of MPD, that is, that multiples seem to *forget* their traumatic experiences. An appropriate place to begin elucidating the concept is with Hilgard, whose book *Divided Consciousness* underlies much of the contemporary theorizing on the subject. I will therefore briefly investigate what Hilgard terms 'neodissociation', and attempt to redefine the term in order to make it more tractable.

The main problem with the concept of dissociation can be stated simply. If a person in fact has a dissociative experience, what is that person *dissociating from*? It is simply nonsense to say that I am dissociating from me: if I dissociate from me, then I can no longer be said to have the experience I am having. If I dissociate from me, I can be said to both have and not have a particular experience. This is a hard ball to run with, this ball that I both have and do not have.

Serious proponents of dissociation theory not only acknowledge this difficulty, they enshrine it. "The unity of consciousness is illusory," says Hilgard in the opening sentence of *Divided Consciousness*.⁴⁷ Beahrs, as I have mentioned above, suggests that multiple personality is the norm, not the peculiar exception.

It seems that for dissociation to make sense, the mind must be composed of different, separable compartments, each of which, under certain circumstances, can act alone and without the knowledge of other compartments. And although I have argued against this, in some ways it is an attractive notion. For one thing, this is at least one possible description of what happens in cases of MPD and psychogenic fugue. In MPD, a "personality" often acts as a coherent agent without the core personality either remembering this personality's actions or (sometimes) even knowing about the existence of this other personality. In a case of

psychogenic fugue, a person may "escape" from her or his personality for a prolonged period, act coherently, and then "return" to the real personality with no memory of the fugue episode. Both facts are easily explicable with reference to the twin notions of a compartmentalized mind and dissociation.

Furthermore, at least at first glance, dissociation appears to be applicable to many aspects of normal life. "We speak of paying attention, implying that some things going on in the present may not be attended to. We do not choose simply to attend to something while neglecting everything else, for our attention may be divided among two or more streams of thought or courses of action."⁴⁸ The example Hilgard gives is that of an ordinary conversation between two people.

They may appear to be taking turns, one talking while the other listens; a little reflection tells us that much more is taking place. Person A, while listening to Person B, is simultaneously planning his reply, and even while replying he may monitor how well he is doing by watching the facial expression of Person B, perhaps changing the direction of his argument if he appears to be unconvincing. At the same time he may be telling himself that the conversation has continued long enough, and some way should be found to end it.⁴⁹

Bliss offers other examples (albeit under the designation 'self-hypnosis') that emphasize the selected rather than the divided nature of attention: "highway trances, ecstasies and trances in mystical and religious rites, the fascination or fixation of aviators,"⁵⁰ and so on. Similarly, it is

possible to speak of being absorbed in a book, or in a sport, or in performing a piece of music, as a sort of dissociation. When we are absorbed in something, we are *seemingly* unaware of other things going on around us--although, in one sense, we are aware of them, because anything from a loud noise to a gentle touch can cause us to "snap out" of this absorption. It seems we are unaware of this awareness, and this might be explicable with reference to our consciousness being divided.

However, this exporting of the concept of dissociation to our daily lives seems to go too far. First, although it is interesting to think of conversations, highway trances, and highly focused activities as "dissociations," it is important to remember that these are also extremely normal types of consciousness, as I pointed out in chapter three (see pp. 104-107). There is nothing very abnormal about daydreaming. And supporters of the concept of dissociation would agree with this. Dissociation, they would say, *is* a normal aspect of everyday life. But something has been lost here. I want to ask, "If dissociation is such a pervasive feature of consciousness, what is the sort of consciousness from which we so regularly dissociate?" If some modes of experience are dissociative in nature, what is the mode that *isn't*? And this is a crucial question. If I wish to call a particular mode of experience 'dissociative', I must be able

to point to another mode of experience that is *not* dissociative, or else the term will lose its meaning.

However, it is impossible to point to something that would qualify as "undissociated" experience. Clearly, if I am aware at all, I am aware of some things and not aware of others. Indeed, implicit in the notion "paying attention" to something is the idea that I am not paying attention, or paying less attention, to something else. This is to say that all of my experience is dissociative in this sense, which is to say that the word cannot be properly used to refer to a distinct type of experience. And this is to say that in Hilgard's sense of "dissociation," the word has no meaning.

This is probably just as well, because embracing a concept that effectively destroys our notion of a unitary self leads to many difficulties. As well, if consciousness is compartmentalized, who is to say how many compartments there are, and how many different sorts of tasks they all handle separately?

Hilgard's theory is somewhat lacking with regard to both of these points. First, he cannot really do without a unitary consciousness. In his model of the mind, there is an executive ego or central planner⁵¹ that has a sort of generalized control over a person. As he says, the idea of a central planner "is a congenial one and is familiar in

everyday experience."⁵² At first glance, this sounds suspiciously like the "I" he has discarded.

Secondly, this is how he addresses the issue of compartments:

A person's life is made up of an almost infinite number of activities, from trivial responses to stimuli (brushing a fly off the face), to those consuming more time, still with definable beginnings and endings (writing a letter, playing a game of golf, listening to a symphony), and on to activities that are enduring over many years and complexly interacting with each other (raising a family, doing the housework, saving for retirement)....

For the purposes of the present discussion, the identifiable activities in which a person can engage are referred to as *subsystems* to distinguish them from the larger control and monitoring functions according to which they are regulated. These subsystems are the visible or reportable happenings when a person is engaged in any definable activity--reading a book, operating a machine, scratching his head, solving a problem.⁵³

To take the second point first: yes, "a person's life is made up of an almost infinite number of activities." However, why stop with "brushing a fly off the face," or "writing a letter," or "playing a game of golf"? I may brush a fly off my face abstractedly, or I may do so abruptly; I may brush it off with a slap, or with a rapid gesture that does not even touch my face; I may lightly tap at it--the list is indefinitely long, but that is not the point. The point is that the various ways I may brush a fly off my face are just as "definable" as the more general category, "brushing a fly off the face." If this is so,

Hilgard must have subsystems for each different type of fly-brushing.

To push matters further, it is obvious that I can be in many different sorts of emotional state when I brush a fly off my face. I may be happily relaxing at a holiday resort; I may be trudging through the woods desperately looking for a gas station because my car has broken down in some remote area. I may be anxious, I may be depressed, I may be laughing at a joke--the possibilities, indeed, are "almost infinite." Because each moment of my life is in some sense unique--each moment I have a unique set of future expectations and past memories which change when that moment goes from present to past--and because, therefore, each moment is (again, in some sense) uniquely "definable," it appears I would need a number of subsystems *equal* to the number of definable activities that make up my life. However, if this is true, then clearly the concept "subsystem" is no longer a viable one.

The problem here is precisely with the word 'definable'. Hilgard is assuming that there are such things as definable activities, and that these activities are adequately and finally defined in terms of "brushing a fly off the face" or "playing a game of golf." The question here should be, "What do you mean by 'definable'?"

Does my visual image of this tree, of this chair, consist of parts? And what are its simple component parts? Multi-colouredness is one kind of complexity; another is, for example, that of a broken outline

composed of straight bits. And a curve can be said to be composed of an ascending and a descending segment.

If I tell someone without any further explanation: "What I see before me now is composite", he will have the right to ask: "What do you mean by 'composite'?" For there are all sorts of things that that can mean!" --The question "Is what you see composite?" makes good sense if it is already established what kind of complexity--that is, which particular use of the word--is in question.⁵⁴

Why should I stop defining my activity when I reach the description "playing a game of golf"? Does not this game consist of swinging a club--a wood, or iron, or putter--and then looking for the golfball in order to swing at it again? Isn't there an activity I call "picking the golfball out of the hole"? Aren't there, in fact, a great many ways I can walk while I'm looking for the golfball? I can walk uphill, downhill, through sand, through wet grass, long grass, short grass, with hope, with frustration, and so on.

The point may perhaps more easily be seen with reference to a specialized field. There are some contexts in which the sentence, "I am studying psychology," would make perfect sense, that is, "studying psychology" would constitute a definable activity. I am thinking, of course, of a case where someone one doesn't know very well asks a question such as, "What are you studying?" However, it is clear that "studying psychology" will in many contexts *not* count as a definable activity. If one graduate student in psychology should ask another, "What are you studying?" the

answer, "I'm studying psychology" would be at best humorous and at worst silly. It would miss the point of the question, which was to ask for the particular area of psychology in which the student was specializing.

Now, as long as I am capable of asking questions, I am capable of redefining, recompartmentalizing my definable activities. That there is a predefined set of activities into which we can divide the world is a gratuitous assumption.

There is a second problem with Hilgard's idea of compartmentalized consciousness, and that is the possibility of progressing from the idea of 'subsystems' to the executive ego. Now, I have been arguing against the viability of Hilgard's notion of subsystems. Let's for a moment assume that there are mental subsystems that can govern "generic" types of behavior. How does Hilgard get from these subsystems to the central planner?

I have quoted this passage from Hume above, but it bears repeating in the present context. Hume says:

When I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.⁵⁵

Hilgard has a similar problem. If his hypothetical people are active, then they are doing *something*, and some subsystem or other is in control. The central planner is

therefore redundant, or at least not available for empirical study. It is not the central planner who solves problems --this is assigned to a subsystem (see above). Is it the central planner who thinks about which problems to solve? Clearly not: this is another problem, and therefore demands another subsystem to solve it. Do we ever get to a central planner? No, because any way of getting there would involve an activity, and this would involve a subsystem. Therefore Hilgard, by his own logic, is forced to Hume's uncomfortable conclusion: "The identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one."⁵⁶

Now, superficially at least, this appears to tally with his opening salvo: "The unity of consciousness is illusory." However, it is clear that Hilgard wants there to be *one* consciousness--he wants a central planner--even if he wants this consciousness to be comprised of a large number of subsystems. I have tried to show both that there is no theoretical limit on the number of subsystems, and that therefore the very notion of 'subsystems' makes no sense, and that if one in fact allows the notion of 'subsystems,' that it is impossible to get back to a unitary self. I am left having "as manifold and various a self as I have representations of which I am conscious."⁵⁷

There is a way round this dilemma, and there is, I think, a way to talk meaningfully about dissociation, and

this is with reference to the concept of self as a *story*.

Sarbin says:

My arguments follow from a postulate, defended elsewhere (Sarbin, 1981), that the flow of experience is made intelligible through the use of narrative structure. The postulate seems reasonable when we are reminded that our dreams, our fantasies, the rituals of daily life, and the pageantry of special occasions are organized as if to tell stories. Our rememberings and our plannings are guided by narrative....

To tell a story is to organize bits and pieces of unorganized experience into a coherent account with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Of the various forms of storytelling, the self-narrative--a story about oneself--is relevant to our present concerns.⁵⁸

This notion of the self as a story has, I believe, a certain explanatory value as far as the concept of dissociation is concerned. It seems both simplistic and truistic to say that I present myself to others as the person I wish to be in their eyes, or as I believe myself to be. However, things get less simple if I take this obvious truism and say that I do the same thing to myself: I present myself to myself as the person I would like to be in my eyes, or as the person I believe myself to be.

If I do this--if the person I am is, in some sense, the person I tell myself I am--then dissociation loses the difficulties I have mentioned above. For instance, it may certainly happen that parts of my experience do not get integrated into the large, multifaceted story of my self that I am continuously constructing; they never get

associated with the story. Secondly, it is also possible that various parts of this story are very context-specific-- I play many roles, and in certain cases, there may be very little overlap between these roles. And thirdly, if this story is of my own construction, given that it is possible for me to make mistakes, it is also possible for me to deceive myself. This, I feel, is important. Under Hilgard's model, there is no real possibility of self-deception. If the central planner is an empty concept, then it seems gratuitous to privilege any one part of the mind and say that it is the self that is being deceived by another part of the mind. The compartmentalized mind is a great democracy with no leader.

However, if the self is regarded as a story that is constantly changing, as it assimilates new experiences, redefines itself, reshapes its past by re-emphasizing certain parts of it and shedding others, attempts to reorient itself constantly towards what it perceives as its future; if this is how the self is regarded, then it is possible to make sense both of the concept of dissociation and the various definitions it has had in the past. We may then, if we like, define dissociation as an "altered state," because any experience that does not tie in directly with our main (but multifaceted) life story could, indeed, be defined as somehow altered. We may then define dissociation as role-playing, because we are perfectly capable of playing

roles which lie outside the main roles we play in our day to day lives. And we may regard dissociation as self-deception, because it is easy to believe in the person we present to ourselves, even if the story we are telling has no real basis in "facts."

Eugene Bliss offers a hypothesis that, in one sense at any rate, may help here. He creates a "simple model of the central nervous system,"⁵⁹ that is really a model of what it means for a human being to be conscious. He divides consciousness into four components: sensation, experience, memory and attention mechanism.⁶⁰ What I wish to retain from this is Bliss's emphasis upon an attention mechanism.

There are many ways in which we may be said to "experience" the world. These all have much to do with how much attention we are paying to what is happening around us, and what aspects of the world we are paying attention to.⁶¹ It is clear that I am capable of experiencing many things at the same time. I can be listening to music, notice the noise from the street outside, eat a sandwich, work on the computer, and be reminding myself of what I have to do tomorrow. These things happen simultaneously.⁶² I can also concentrate or focus on one thing (or several), thereby eliminating other things from consciousness. When I do this, what I will remember best will be precisely those things that were most important to me, the things I was

focusing on, the things I incorporate into my narrative memory.

Dissociation, then, can be thought of as either the deliberate or non-deliberate absence of attention to something. This may seem vague, but it is purposefully so. There are many sorts of things I can ignore: I can ignore virtually all external stimuli, as when I am daydreaming, and I can ignore virtually all internal stimuli, as when I am absorbed in a book or a film. (Is it not common to finish reading a book or watching a film and suddenly realize how hungry or thirsty one is?) Furthermore, this absence of attention can either be deliberate or not. I may be absorbed in a book because I am enjoying reading it, or I may be forcing myself to study, and so be deliberately blocking out the rest of the world. In both cases, I would be dissociating.

The problem with the notion of dissociation traditionally has been that it has been seen as the mind dividing itself. Two components, each of equal importance because equally present, simply don't connect the way they are supposed to. However, this does not properly reflect the way I experience the world. All the thoughts I have are not of equal importance. I may be vaguely aware of the air temperature, and know approximately what time it is, but of much greater importance is that on which I am concentrating,

or to which I am paying attention--and will often be more likely to remember.

Such a notion of dissociation--deliberate or non-deliberate absence of attention--lies at the heart of understanding multiple personal disorder. When something traumatic happens, we are shocked, and we deny that it is happening; we dissociate from it, which is to say that we try very hard not to pay any attention to it. Again, this may be something we do deliberately or not. Many experiences of moderate pain may be managed by concentrating on the pain, analyzing how much it hurts, anticipating the pain going away, and so on. Extreme pain, on the other hand, may cause us to faint spontaneously.

To dissociate oneself from something unpleasant is essentially to say, "This is not happening," and then, if the pain persists, "This is not happening to me." How a traumatic event affects an individual will depend both on the individual and on the nature of the event. It will at least be granted that people who have already undergone a type of traumatic experience that they have handled successfully in the past--driving a car skidding on ice, for instance--will be more able to cope with current traumatic experiences of the same sort. Also, there is a clear difference between being traumatized by a car crash that one has survived without injury, and being traumatized by painful sexual abuse. However, in all cases, it is fair to

say that the person dissociating from the event is essentially saying, "This is not happening."

If the experience is of short duration and stops abruptly, it may well be forgotten: the individual has no desire whatsoever to incorporate this experience into the larger picture of his or her life, and the forgetting is a denial that the experience is in any sense meaningful. It is typical, for instance, that if I am suddenly startled by someone I didn't think was in the room, I will soon forget having been startled, whereas the person who gave me the shock will not (and will sometimes remember the incident as an amusing one).

If, on the other hand, the experience is a prolonged one, I may begin to pretend that it is not happening to me. I may, as it were, stand outside myself and watch the event dispassionately. It is possible to endure much pain simply by telling myself "not to think about it," that is, to focus my attention away from it, to eliminate my conscious reaction towards it. (This replicates a common experience: one of doing something extremely boring that nonetheless must get done. We try not to think of all the various reasons for *not* doing the job, try to dissociate ourselves from all the unpleasant feelings we are experiencing, and simply focus on the matter at hand.)

I pretend that whatever is happening is *not* happening, and I may pretend it is not happening to me. But this is

not only something that happens when individuals are faced with traumatic experiences; this is a central feature of what it means to have a personality. As we grow up, we discover that there are many things in the world that we want but cannot have. We learn that our desires must be tempered to suit other people. We learn that certain types of behaviour, and desire, and aspiration, are socially unacceptable. Because of the exigencies of parental and peer pressure, we pretend to be a certain way, to like a particular thing, to want what others expect and desire us to want. Until we reach maturity, and can begin to dismantle to some degree the definition of ourselves that has been imposed on us by other people, we are defined almost exclusively by the society we live in, its religions, its institutions, and its values. That is: we grow up pretending to be what we think others would like us to be-- learning to play roles. In adulthood, we are often very successful in believing that this is the person we really are.

It is hardly surprising, then, that when we are undergoing a prolonged traumatic experience, we should be disposed towards pretending it is not happening, or not happening to us. People diagnosed with fatal diseases often deny that they have them; they feel that the disease will go away, that they will be able to soon get out of bed. Perhaps someone else has the disease, but not them. Indeed,

in the process of accepting the reality of the disease, they can almost seem to have a dual personality, one that denies and one that accepts.

The idea of a dual personality is not a difficult one to accept. It is in fact common that people's public and private personalities are quite different, and, as was mentioned by Aldridge-Morris, it is not at all unusual that our personalities undergo sometimes dramatic changes, depending on the social role we are playing. It goes without saying that this is significantly different from what multiples suffer, as Aldridge-Morris also noted. Multiples believe that they are in *fact* constituted by different people. How does this come about? How does the pretending to be another person become the believing that one is another person?

The first thing to take into account is that multiples are in fact diagnosed as having multiple personality disorder by someone from whom they are seeking therapy. They enter therapy complaining of internal voices, or of amnesia, or of fugue. As is so often stated in the literature, they exhibit a concatenation of symptoms that are typical of a wide variety of disorders. However, I have never read of a single case where a patient entered therapy complaining about being two or more distinct people, and was subsequently diagnosed as actually having MPD.⁶³ The alters

always surface during therapy. To this extent, at least, MPD *does* seem to be iatrogenic.

A diagnosis of MPD is in many ways a comfort to patients. Here at a single blow is the explanation of memory loss and the exculpation of "sins" they feel they have committed because they were abused. (Abuse victims often feel they have somehow invited the abuse.)⁶⁴ Those other people they pretended to be, and have forgotten about, *really exist*, or so the therapist tells them. (They have forgotten about the other people because they nowhere fit into the story of who they are, and who they want to be. The other people are unfeeling, let horrible things happen, and are imbued with self-hatred.) Suddenly, it is as though the dissociated memories can finally surface, because they are not memories of themselves, but of entirely different people.⁶⁵

When MPD is diagnosed, it is done so typically during hypnotherapy. The patient is hypnotized and the therapist asks if there is "anyone" else inside the patient who wants to say something. This, generally, is when a particular alter comes out for the first time. And this is why I think there is a certain danger in the diagnosis of MPD. I will return to this point later on.

First, however, it is necessary to discuss a subject often linked to dissociation, that is, hypnosis. Roy Udolf,

in his *Handbook of Hypnosis for Professionals*, begins this book as follows:

The logical way to write a book about hypnotism would be to define hypnosis at the beginning, describe its theory and mechanism of operation, and then go on to discuss its practical uses and limitations. Unfortunately, it is not possible to do that because we do not know the essential nature or mechanism of hypnosis, although there is much mutually contradictory theorizing on the subject by many competent professionals in the field.⁶⁶

This is true. There is very little agreement on the nature of hypnosis. However, it is true that the failure of theory to explain a phenomenon does not mean that phenomenon does not exist. People do go into hypnotic trances, whatever they are.

There are currently two main competing theories about the nature of hypnosis, Hilgard's "neodissociation model of hypnosis, and the social-psychological model of hypnosis."⁶⁷

According to Hilgard's model, executive control of thought and behavior is at the top of a control hierarchy, with various subsystems of control ordinarily being subject to executive initiative and monitoring.⁶⁸

For convenience, the neodissociation model can be thought of as an "altered-state" model. When the executive control, for one reason or another, is not controlling, a person experiences an altered state of consciousness. This, of course, is a tremendous simplification of the model.⁶⁹ The problems with the altered-state model are inherent in those just discussed with reference to the concept of dissociation. (If consciousness is indeed "altered," then we can't describe it in terms associated with "normal"

consciousness, and if we do describe it in those terms--make it analogous to normal consciousness--then there is no warrant for calling it 'altered'.)

The social-psychological--or sociocognitive--model, on the other hand wants to account for hypnotic behaviour "without recourse to special psychological states or processes."⁷⁰ Spanos sums up his position succinctly in the following:

Rather than viewing hypnotic subjects as "entranced" or "dissociated," I view them as agents who are attuned to contextual demands and who guide their behavior in terms of their understandings of situational contingencies and in terms of the goals they wish to achieve.⁷¹

According to the sociocognitive view, then, hypnotic behaviour is essentially intense, voluntary role-playing.

The main problem with the sociocognitive view is the subjective experience on the part of many hypnotic subjects that their behaviour under hypnosis is involuntary. If what these subjects feel is accurate, how can their behaviour be described as voluntary and goal-directed? One possible answer to this is that part of the role they are playing involves a subjective experience of involuntariness. However, this is a very convoluted explanation. How is it that conscious, goal-directed behaviour should be reported by honest subjects as being uncontrolled by them? In simpler terms, how can I be aware that I am initiating an action, while my experience is that I didn't actually initiate it? Complicating the problem is the fact that in

the many experiments undertaken by Spanos to show that simulators could duplicate the behaviour of hypnotized subjects, when simulators were asked if their behaviour was voluntary, they said yes, while the "truly" hypnotized subjects said no.⁷²

Furthermore, to claim with Coe and Sarbin that those subjects who remain convinced that their behaviour was involuntary are simply "self-deceived" is really to say nothing. Certainly, it is true that:

self-deception is not an occult process, although it is less familiar than repression, rationalization, and the other "mechanisms of defense." Fingarette... has made it clear that people have reasons for wanting to conceal things about themselves from themselves and that they employ various skills to do so.⁷³

But there are two objections to this. First, what reason would "good" hypnotic subjects have for wishing to conceal the so-called trance they were in? Only that by so doing, they would show themselves to be good hypnotic subjects. However, if the subjects in question know anything at all about Coe and Sarbin's view of hypnosis, being a good hypnotic subject would be precisely to admit that the trance was a sham. Secondly, by what criterion can Coe and Sarbin judge that self-deception is in fact what is occurring? They can do this only by deciding in advance that those subjects who don't admit that the behaviour they manifested was involuntary are, in fact, self-deceivers. Neither researcher has even the logical possibility of entering the

subjects' minds and viewing their contents. But that would be the only real way of ascertaining that self-deception was actually occurring.

Graham Wagstaff goes a long way towards reconciling these two approaches to hypnosis, and ironing out their various inconsistencies. He suggests that the "vocabulary for dealing with the phenomena we usually term 'hypnotic' would include terms such as 'conformity', 'compliance', 'belief', 'attitudes', 'expectations', 'attention', 'concentration', 'relaxation', 'distraction', 'role enactment', and 'imagination'."⁷⁴ He says the two main concepts in his approach are compliance and belief.⁷⁵

The term 'compliance' "refers to overt behavior that becomes like the behavior that others show or expect, and is most usually applied to conforming responses that tend to run counter to private convictions."⁷⁶ That is: compliance is deliberate, volitional role-taking, but with an awareness on the subjects' part that they are, in fact, role-taking. So far, this is very much in line with the sociocognitive approach. Indeed, Wagstaff identifies his views with those of social-psychologists Sarbin, Barber, Coe and Spanos. However, Wagstaff also attempts to account for the subjective experience of involuntary behaviour. "We also need a concept to deal with veridical reports and experiences of hypnotic suggestions. The term 'belief' may be useful for this purpose."⁷⁷

Unfortunately, Wagstaff's sociocognitive roots run too deep for him to take his own words with the seriousness I think they deserve. For instance, he thinks there is "a crucial distinction between the notion of *believing* that one is in a hypnotic state, and actually *being* in one."⁷⁸ There just is no such thing as a hypnotic state, and therefore believing that one is in one is a false belief, making the whole notion of belief is a tarnished one. He concludes that:

hypnotic subjects are best conceived as conscious, decision-making, cognizing agents actively trying to fulfill role-demands; they are just as aware of what they are doing as any of us in nonhypnotic situations. They have not "entered" or "slipped into" a state in which the unconscious-conscious barrier can be manipulated in some special way.⁷⁹

This retreat into the mainstream of the sociocognitive approach to hypnosis is, I think, unfortunate. The concept of belief can account for much.

Braun offers the following story which may be used to illustrate the "power" of belief:

In an experiment using Japanese high school students, Ikemi and Nakagawa (1962) hypnotized five students and told them that their arms and hands were being touched by a leaf from a harmless tree when they were actually being touched by leaves from a poisonous tree. None of the five developed significant rashes. They also hypnotized thirteen subjects and told them that they were being touched by leaves of a poisonous tree when they were actually being touched by leaves of a harmless tree. Twelve subjects developed a dermatitis within ten minutes to one hour after being touched and the one additional subject developed dermatitis six hours later.

This study showed that a dermatitis can be produced by a harmless substance if there is a belief that it is a dangerous substance.⁸⁰

This is indeed a striking example of the power of belief, but only because the belief on the part of the Japanese students produced something uncommon. Certainly a comparable phenomenon, although much less exotic--it is more common and doesn't involve hypnosis--is the placebo-effect.

Now, whatever position is taken on the nature of hypnosis, there is one hypnotic phenomenon which is universally agreed upon. That is that subjects under hypnosis to a large extent lose the ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality.

Hypnosis is characterized by ego receptivity in which critical judgement, strict adherence to reality orientation, and active goal directed thinking are held to a minimum while the individual allows himself freely to let unconscious and preconscious material float into his mind.⁸¹

Brown and Fromm go somewhat further:

Because hypnosis also produces cognitive and perceptual changes in some people... and habitual frames of reference can be altered... it can contribute to changes in one's belief system, as Orne (1977) implied in his definition of hypnosis as "believed in fantasy."⁸²

I think that the notion of 'believed in fantasy', in and of itself, is sufficient to bridge the gulf between state theorists and sociocognitive theorists. Could not the notion of trance be explained by saying that the hypnotic subject comes to believe that the experienced fantasy is indeed reality? Could not the notorious difficulties

surrounding the subjectively reported involuntariness of action also be cleared up with reference to belief?

I can easily enough imagine that I am doing something that I am not, in fact, doing. I can also easily come to believe that I am doing it. Now, if it is possible to hold a false belief, why should it not be possible, in a situation where I cannot readily distinguish between fact and fancy, for me to believe that my imaginings are truly happening to me? My contention here is the concept of trance is too occult, and that of role-playing too mundane. The concept of belief is the missing piece of the puzzle.

When one person hypnotizes another, the results are often quite predictable. Reality testing is minimalized, and belief that a fantasized experience is in fact a real one is common. There is a further complicating factor, however. This is that the belief in the reality of the hypnotic experience is often held quite tenaciously by the hypnotic subject. This has been found in experimental, clinical and forensic environments.

Hypnosis increases confidence for both correct and incorrect material... This is perhaps the most consistent finding in the hypnosis literature on memory.⁸³

Research on hypnosis in the forensic environment tends to concur with this assessment:

A striking feature of the experience of many hypnotized subjects is the degree of subjective conviction that they exhibit regarding the genuineness of their experience.⁸⁴

Clifford and Scott make the following claim: "Little weight can be placed on witnesses' claims of certainty of correctness."⁸⁵ Perry and Laurence are absolutely firm on both the dangers of pseudomemory and the issue of subject confidence in this memory. On the issue of hypnotically retrieved memory, they say:

Unless independent corroboration is obtained, one can never be certain whether what is elicited from a crime victim or witness, from a suspect, from a clinical patient, or from a laboratory subject is fact, falsehood, confabulation, or created pseudo-memory.⁸⁶

And on the confidence of the subject:

The main issue concerns the alleged hypermnesic effect when hypnosis is used for memory enhancement. Data suggest that at times, this use of hypnosis may unwittingly create pseudomemories of crimes which, subsequent to hypnosis, come to be believed as true by the person hypnotized.⁸⁷

As a final caution, Laurence notes that, "Even when our memories are proven erroneous by external sources, subjectively they can remain veridical."⁸⁸

The case of Paul Ingram, as reported by Richard Ofshe, offers a particularly shocking example of pseudomemories held with great conviction. Ingram was accused of repeatedly raping his daughters. During his interrogation by police, he confessed. Ofshe examines the steps that led up to the confession, starting with the police's interviewing techniques.

Modern interrogations cause false confessions of two types: coerced-compliant--conscious compliance responses resulting from an intense desire to escape the stress of the interrogation and coerced-internalized--confessions

based on belief change elicited by the persuasive tactics of the interrogation combined with stress.⁸⁹

Ingram was inadvertently hypnotized by the police during their interrogation of him. His desire to help the investigation (his compliance) and his disorientation led him to falsely "remember" a huge series of events that did not, in fact, occur. He was led to believe, and came to believe strongly, that he was a central figure in a Satanic cult that ritually abused children. It should also be mentioned that Ingram was a member of a fundamentalist religion, in which:

Satanic influence was held to be the cause of physical and mental illness, and fortune, etc. Satan had the power of *deception* (i.e., to take control of a person's mind and render the individual unaware of doing the evil deeds Satan inspired). Beliefs of this sort are not unusual in many fundamentalist congregations.⁹⁰

Ingram "remembered" for five months that he had raped his daughters; about a month after he had confessed and been tried, he recanted the entire story. There is substantial evidence in Ofshe's article that the alleged rapes never took place, and that Ingram's daughters made the whole thing up. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Satanic cults of the type mentioned above even exist:

the exceptional aspect of the belief in an epidemic of child sexual abuse/murder events is the utter lack of evidence supportive of even one such allegation. Lanning (1989), an FBI Supervisory Special Agent, has studied these allegations and the investigations they stimulated. He concluded that in no case has evidence supporting these claims ever been found.⁹¹

To sum up, then: experimental psychologists claim that there are three main aspects to hypnosis. Subjects to a large extent lose the ability to do reality testing; subjects may easily come believe in what they have only fantasized; and subjects may hold these beliefs with great conviction, whether they are true or not.

These experimental findings tally well with the theories of a hypnotist who, though an entertainer and not a psychologist, must be regarded as one of the foremost experts on hypnotism in the world. I am referring to Peter Reveen, who, for more than thirty years, has earned a living hypnotizing people in front of large audiences. He regularly plays to thousands of people at a time, and enlists as many as three hundred volunteers in each show (which rules out the possibility of confederacy). He also offers a view of hypnosis that makes sense. (It is not surprising that Reveen does not figure in academic histories of hypnosis. However, this seems somewhat hypocritical, as such histories make much of Mesmer, who, by all accounts, was more of a magician than a doctor.)

According to Reveen, the hypnotic trance is nothing more than the surrender of the subject to the suggestions of the hypnotist. That is: hypnosis just *is* suggestibility. Suggestibility is not an unusual trait. We are all suggestible to a large extent: if we are told by someone we consider reliable and truthful that such-and-such is the

case, we are inclined to believe him or her unless such a belief jars noticeably with what we already know. That is because we do not know very much, and we desire to know more. Anything new that could possibly count as knowledge is welcome. We show our suggestibility in normal daily activities like reading newspapers and watching the news on television. Propaganda works because we are suggestible.

It will make matters clearer to define the word 'suggestible' as "likely or willing to believe."⁹² It is a commonplace that it is impossible to hypnotize someone who doesn't want to be hypnotized. Reveen holds this to be the key to hypnosis: subjects must be willing to *believe*. For hypnosis to be successful, three things appear to be necessary. Subjects must want to be hypnotized, they must *believe* the hypnotist *can* hypnotize them (or that they can hypnotize themselves), and they must believe in the *reality* of a hypnotic state.

Now, it is clear that, in this sense, a belief may be held by someone who has no good grounds at all for holding it. This is attested to by the fact that there are many competing religions in the world that claim unique and special access to a deity. Since logically, only one can be right, it follows that those which are not have very devoted, but also very deluded, believers.

It is also clear that beliefs held about the self can be so strong that people may in fact *become* what they

believe they are. There are, of course, limitations to this. In general, if I am ill, I cannot make myself well by believing I am well. However:

An interesting finding has been obtained in relation to the phenomenon of placebo analgesia. Here subjects may report relief of pain even when given a dummy tablet. Those reporting analgesia following an inactive placebo show raised opioid concentrations in the circulation. No matter where the opioid is generated, the result suggests that physiological processes may be influenced by the belief of the subject that an analgesic substance has been given.⁹³

Less exotically, if people are encouraged to believe something about themselves, about their relative self-worth, say, they will often respond accordingly. Children who are expected to fail often fail; those who are encouraged to succeed often do. Drawing an analogy between contemporary hypnosis and demon possession, Reveen writes:

Just as a superconscious subject's belief that I (on stage) can render him dormant with an imaginary dart from a non-existent tranquilizer gun enables me to do so, so a medieval peasant girl's belief that a "witch" (usually any woman who had outlived her teeth) could make her ill by casting a "spell" enabled such an illness to occur whenever the victim was informed or imagined that such a spell had been cast. The superconscious nature of such illnesses, clearly revealed by the victim's need to learn of the alleged spell before it could take effect, is further attested by the fact that the symptoms disappeared whenever the victim was assured that the spell had been broken or withdrawn.⁹⁴

In our normal state, we generally have so many checks and guards against false or groundless beliefs that we escape the charge of gullibility. (I say this in full knowledge of the fact that racism, sexism, religious bigotry

and class bigotry are widespread, on the one hand; and on the other, that the belief in the efficacy of astrology, palmistry and Tarot cards to foretell the future is not uncommon.) In hypnosis, as I have said, we are unable to distinguish between what is real and what is merely imaginary. Bliss asks the following poignant question:

What is termed reality testing is essentially the ability to distinguish events in the outside world from events in the inner world of the mind... Under normal circumstances, all people, whether hypnotically gifted or not, have learned to make the distinction between reality and memory or fantasy... But when a subject is asked to enter a trance and find a traumatic experience, let us say one that occurred at age five, why doesn't the subject realize as he or she relives the experience that it is only a hypnotic exercise?⁹⁵

He answers:

Let us recall that at any moment only information at the focus of attention is available to consciousness. Much collateral information can ordinarily be reached with ease, but this is so because attention can flicker back and forth and rapidly retrieve information from memory. When attention is deprived of this mobility and is transfixed on a memory (a form of animal fascination), it has lost this ability. Consequently, all that a person consciously knows at that moment is what is in the forefront of the mind--in this example, the memory of abuse--which is so realistic as to be undeniably happening now.⁹⁶

A subject does not know whether what has happened during the hypnotic state is real or merely imaginary. What the hypnotist *suggests* is real, *may become* real for the subject, unless it contradicts other things the subject believes.

A further fact Reveen mentions about hypnosis is that the hypnotized subject will not necessarily tell the

truth--not, in any case, being able to distinguish between fact and fiction. He claims that answers to questions put to hypnotized subjects "fall into three categories":

- a) true answers, where the information has remained in conscious memory
- b) true answers, where the information has not been consciously remembered but has remained dormant and been retrieved by superconscious memory enhancement
- c) fantasized answers that do not accord with the facts of the subject's past.⁹⁷

He demonstrates this with respect to the seeming ability of subjects to regress to past-lives while under hypnosis.

The most notable inconsistency in past-life regressions is the prevalence of anachronisms. Bloxham's pre-Columbian Indian was familiar with the circulation of the blood and Columbus's equation of Americans with Indians. Bernstein's Bridey Murphy used twentieth-century Americanisms, such as candy, downtown, and school (meaning college) unknown in nineteenth-century Ireland. A subject of Harry Hurst described a past life in the Thebes of Pharaoh Ramses III, long before historians retroactively gave pharaohs numbers to distinguish them from other pharaohs of the same name, and long before the Greeks ever referred to No-Amun as Thebai and English translators rendered Thebai as Thebes.⁹⁸

He more extensively cites the famous case of Virginia Tighe who, "in several hypnotic sessions since 1952, revealed her previous existence and described her life as Bridey Murphy, a woman born in Ireland at the end of the eighteenth century."⁹⁹ In 1956, the hypnotist (Morey Bernstein) wrote a book called *The Search for Bridey Murphy*, detailing this. Six months after the book was published, the *Chicago American* debunked Tighe's claims. She "was

discovered to have had an Irish aunt who had regaled the young Virginia with tales of old Ireland. And when Virginia had lived in Chicago as a child, the house across the street from her was occupied by an Irish woman--named Bridey Murphy!"¹⁰⁰

Reveen then asks the important question, "Why did Virginia Tighe use information from her childhood to pretend that she had lived before in another country as another person in another body?"

Superconscious subjects are highly suggestible. To refuse a trusted operator's instructions, they would need a very strong reason related to their deep-rooted beliefs. When Bernstein ordered Tighe to recount a past life, that order did not in any way conflict with her moral, ethical or religious beliefs. She therefore had no reason to refuse to obey it. There is a further consideration. A hypnotist is very much an authority figure, and commands the same kind of respect and awe (at least in the eyes of persons who choose to become his subjects) as a doctor or a teacher. The subject therefore feels a strong inner compulsion to please the operator--within the limits set by the watchdog. Impelled to obey Bernstein's instruction to *relive* a past life, Virginia complied the only way she was able: by *inventing* a past life, utilizing whatever information was available in the recesses of her memory.¹⁰¹

The final fact about hypnosis I wish to mention is this. Although Virginia Tighe was amnesic after her hypnotic sessions, when she heard the tapes made in those sessions in which she was pretending to be Bridey Murphy, she started to believe that she had, in fact, lived before.

MPD as Delusion

What I believe happens in multiple personality disorder is this. The patient is abused, usually chronically, usually from an early age. The abuse is sexual, physical and emotional (indeed, it is hard to separate the three; all sexual abuse is also physically and emotionally abusing). The patient dissociates from the abuse, pretending it is not happening. Further, the abuse is often at the hands of a caregiver, engendering enormous confusion, as well as guilt and shame, in the patient. For these reasons, the abusive incidents cannot be added to the patient's narrative memory--they are essentially destructive of the self, whereas narrative memory is the progressive construction of the self--and the abuse is forgotten.

However, to say it is forgotten is to put the case too strongly. The memory is simply not integrated with the rest of narrative memory. It is irrelevant to it, not meaningful to the patient's sense of self. However, as in all painful experiences that people undergo and then ignore, certain events may trigger a sudden flashback to the abuse, or engender a fugue, or what have you. Enter the therapist.

The therapist suspects a case of multiple personality disorder and hypnotizes the patient. An alter comes out during hypnosis--during which there is no reality testing by the patient--and "confirms" the therapist's diagnosis. However, it must be remembered that *everything* the patient

says under hypnosis *may* be nothing other than fantasy. This includes not only the very existence of alter personalities, but also details of abusive situations, which may be wildly elaborated upon in order to please the therapist. The therapist, is, after all, in the business of bringing unpleasant memories back to consciousness; the therapist is the patient's friend, and the basis of the friendship is the sickness of the patient. It would be natural for the patient to make the abuse out to be as bad as possible in order to produce the greatest amount of compassion in the therapist.¹⁰²

Once out of hypnosis, the patient is then told of the diagnosis, typically rebels against it, and finally winds up accepting it. The patient, that is, now believes that he or she consists of a multiplicity of different selves. The belief is as strong as the belief most of us have that we are unitary beings.

I said before that there was a certain comfort in this. Patients can now feel that certain of their actions had nothing to do with them. However, there is also a danger in the diagnosis. The patients are *not* collections of multiple selves, but only under the delusion that they are. The more they believe in their multiplicity, with the help of the therapist, the more they will be multiple. The diagnosis of multiple personality disorder is a giant step towards enabling this delusion.

As I have said above, in the process of self-definition, that is, the discovery and subsequent social affirmation of who we are, we all create stories about ourselves. These stories are not linear and simple--there is a "multiplicity" of ways in which we define ourselves--but for "normal" people there is *sufficient* coherence between the stories for us to believe that the illusion (the story) we have created about ourselves in fact reflects reality. The story is so real that we accept the idea that it describes who we really are.

The story a multiple believes is an unreal allegory. A war is being waged between the forces of good and evil, and these forces are personified. The problem seems to be this: multiples realize that they are only living out a grand story of their own creation; there is no sense of "reality" on which they can rest their feet. They wish to escape their multiplicity, to regain that sense of solidity that is smashed every time they experience time loss, but the core personalities are terrified of this reality and so invoke, or surrender themselves to, the personalities.

Multiples, therefore, are unable to make the move that most of us can, that is, they cannot accept as "real" the story they have created about themselves. They are caught in the story, know it to be a fiction, and yet are unable to escape it. This is, after all, the reason they continue in therapy. The story of multiplicity is compelling enough to

be credible, but not compelling enough to believe unequivocally.

There are two additional points to make before concluding this analysis. First, clinicians sometimes comment on the striking honesty of MPD victims.¹⁰³ I think it would be well to remember in this regard that severely deluded people may sincerely and earnestly try to convince others that their delusions are real, but that this does not make those people any the less delusional. Although Peter Reveen puts the matter a little more bluntly than I would like, his opinion is surely worth taking into account:

Just as exorcists cured possession-delusions by talking directly to the non-existent demons, so modern psychotherapists attempt to cure multiple-personality-delusions by addressing their talk-therapy, not to the patient, but to the "other personality" inhabiting the patient's body. "Multiple personality" became the fashionable new "possession" craze with the publication of the book, *The Three Faces of Eve*, written by a therapist (sic) who believed in the reality of the intruding personalities as surely as any exorcist believed in the reality of the intruding demons. The release of a subsequent film triggered an epidemic of copycat cases, and now psychiatrists are rushing into print in a frantic display of psychological one-upmanship to claim the detection of ten, twenty or even more personalities in the one body. I cannot help but notice that the multiplication of personalities increases in direct proportion to the amount of published books, movies and television programs on the subject to which the patients have been exposed. While no doubt some psychiatrists talk directly to a fantasized personality in full awareness that this is the most effective superconscious technique, it seems certain that most persons who talk to non-existent personalities do so for the same reason exorcists talked to non-existent demons: chronic, unquestioning credulity.¹⁰⁴

This opinion is in fact supported by the authors of *The Three Faces of Eve*, Thigpen and Cleckley.

Aldridge-Morris writes:

Even these pre-eminent psychiatrists have expressed extreme disquiet about a so-called "epidemic" of multiple personality cases. In a paper that reeks of professional concern they declare that since Eve they have come across only one other case of multiple personality among the tens of thousands of patients they saw in the ensuing 30 years of professional practice. This was notwithstanding the hundreds of patients, some who travelled thousands of miles, who strenuously sought to be diagnosed as multiple personality disorders. These protestants went to the lengths of speaking down the telephone in different voices, sending photographs supposed to depict their several selves, and writing letters where the handwriting style changed from paragraph to paragraph. Thigpen and Cleckley tell us that such would-be patients travelled from therapist to therapist until they achieved the diagnosis and then competed with other patients to have the most personalities. These writers go on to say that "Unfortunately, there also seems to be a competition among some therapists to see who can have the greatest number of multiple personality cases."¹⁰⁵

In quoting the above, I am not trying to argue that there are two types of MPD, one delusional and the other legitimate. My opinion is that even Thigpen and Cleckley's Eve was delusional.

That this is true seems inevitable from the fact that multiple personality disorder can be cured. If a person were truly comprised of many *distinct* people, integration would be a theoretical impossibility. One might as well ask a family of five to unite within a single body. Only magicians can take two or more distinct entities and make them one.

There is also evidence that MPD patients *know* they are delusional, and this is the second point I wish to make. In his book, *Divided Consciousness*, Ernest Hilgard describes a phenomenon he terms the 'hidden observer'. Crabtree describes the experiment that led to Hilgard coining the phrase:

In a demonstration of hypnotically induced deafness with a young blind man as a subject, the young man showed no sign of response to loud sounds made near him. Then a student in the class asked whether some part of the young man might be aware of what was happening. Hilgard decided to test this by addressing that "part" of the subject in a low voice, suggesting that if it could hear and understand him, it should cause the index finger of the subject to rise. The finger then rose. Realizing that his finger had just lifted, the subject asked to be restored to his waking state to find out why. This done, he was asked what he remembered of the events which had just taken place. He described the induction and ensuing deafness. He said he had felt bored sitting in the silence, and so had started to amuse himself with a statistical problem. Then he felt his finger lift.¹⁰⁶

Although Crabtree takes this as evidence that the student had "a secondary personality with a life of its own,"¹⁰⁷ from which he concludes that "when it comes to consciousness, it seems we are all multiple,"¹⁰⁸ Hilgard himself "did not believe the data justified going that far."¹⁰⁹

Rightly so. There is nothing in the phenomenon that justifies the leap to theories of coconsciousness. Hypnotists have long known that hypnotic subjects cannot be made to perform actions that are strongly opposed to beliefs or values the subjects hold. This is what Peter Reveen has termed the 'watchdog', but there is no need here for

theatrical terminology. If I am watching a film, I may be *almost* completely absorbed by it, I may almost completely dissociate from the fact that I am sitting in an audience watching a screen, but, for the most part, I am *somehow* aware that I am in a theatre and not watching events actually now occurring in front of me. (If I were to think the events were actually happening, I would be called delusional.) And this dissociation is also something I do *deliberately*. It is a version of Coleridge's famous dictum: "That willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith."

Hypnotic subjects willingly enter hypnosis. They experience delusions as real. The important thing here is that they allow themselves to experience these delusions as real. This is no different, qualitatively, from people allowing themselves to daydream. What the hidden observer phenomenon shows is that some part of us is alert when we, for the most part, give the impression of being inattentive. Indeed, it is a common enough occurrence that someone who is actually asleep will awake if another enters the room--no matter how silently--seemingly somehow "detecting" that person's presence.

What the so-called hidden observer phenomenon shows, then, is that multiples are not only deluded, but, at some level anyway, they realize that they are deluded. This realization conflicts dramatically with what they believe

about themselves--that they are multiple--and this results in a profound sense of unreality. They are being asked, after all, to believe in two completely contradictory ideas: that they are one, and that they are many.

I think that most clinicians who diagnose MPD would be inclined to agree with this analysis, given certain practical therapeutic rules they all follow. First and foremost, it is universally believed that there is no therapy if the core personality is not involved. Devoting time exclusively to a particular personality merely enables the disorder (creates a stronger belief in the patient's multiplicity). Secondly, one should not develop favourite personalities. This has the same effect as ignoring the first rule. Thirdly, core personalities should be encouraged to adopt new coping techniques for everyday stresses. I read this to mean that patients should abandon, as far as possible, the story of their multiplicity. Finally, if therapists accept the idea of MPD as essentially delusional, they will no longer have to stumble through the embarrassingly magical aspects involved in personality integration. Bliss offers one technique of personality integration: "One local therapist asks the patient and personality to enter a room through a door. He asks them to integrate, then locks the door so that they cannot leave and separate."¹¹⁰ As integrations go, this is tame. Some involve weddings, and merging in candle flames, and until

quite recently, many personalities were not merged at all, but exorcised. If these techniques worked, then they worked. But the theory on which they were based is certainly open to question. I hope to have provided one that is more coherent, and will perhaps be of some use to therapists involved in the treatment of multiple personality disorder.

PART FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER 9
THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHY

Given my arguments in chapters five and six above, it would be tempting to conclude that what is essential about human beings is that we are story-tellers. This is how things really are: we make both the world and ourselves meaningful through our language and the stories we tell; our attempts to know the world and ourselves beyond language will always fail; we will, however, continue to desire just this sort of knowledge; and we will continue to make up stories until we create the illusion that we have finally reached reality, and that the world is no longer mediated.

And yet, what more would I be doing than creating yet another model of the self? I cannot make any of the above claims, because these claims are about *how we are*. This presupposes an acquaintance with an unmediated reality, which I have steadily argued is an impossibility. I can, of course, make human beings *meaningful* in the way I have just briefly sketched. However, this is something like tinkering with a palimpsest: one scrapes off one text only to reveal another, and what one really wants is the bare page beneath.

One of the last paragraphs of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* reads:

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them--as steps--to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)¹

I feel that the arguments I have been presenting can be viewed in much the same way.

However, I also feel that there is at least some value in these arguments. First, if I have managed to show that the models I discussed in chapter six should be seen as models, if I have made them meaningful as such, then at least my arguments have not been incoherent. These arguments were a little terse, but I hope, given the rest of this work, at least comprehensible.

Secondly, I also think it is interesting to apply these arguments to systematic thought in general. In any lasting philosophy there will be good points--most often the elucidation of the problems involved, say, in talking about the world as it is--and weak points, which are most often the proposed solutions to these problems. Central to Plato, for instance, are the problems posed by Parmenides and Heraclitus. Central to Kant is Hume, and so on.

To present this imagistically: in philosophy, we are telling stories of ever-widening circumference; our stories have to include all the good points that have gone before and avoid as far as possible all the bad ones. I know of no

word that describes this process, so I will call it 'recontextualization', meaning 'placing something in a new context--or back into a context--so that it is seen as a special case of a more general rule'. (Recontextualization takes place in any systematic field. So: Einstein recontextualized Newton's physics; Riemann recontextualized Euclidean geometry; modern logic has recontextualized Aristotelian logic; and so on.) In each case, the new context appears to be transparent--it does not seem to be a context--and it creates the illusion that we are "standing outside" of the old way of thinking, and seeing things as they really are. (We tend to forget that the old way of thinking once existed in a context that was similarly transparent.)

These stories do not progress in a noticeably orderly way. As new cultures emphasize different aspects of experience, some old ways of thinking simply become obsolete. For instance, Aristotle's four causes and Descartes's proofs of the existence of God are of mainly historical interest. They are not debated today as philosophical issues. However, each new philosopher seizes upon those points that are seen as important, and tries to tell a new story about them, tries to recontextualize the old.

Part of what I have tried to do here, then, is tell a story about standing outside, about recontextualization. In

order to do this, I have had to present the story as though I were outside of it, and then recant.

Finally, I think it is true that there has been much greater nonsense written than I am writing here. And there, perhaps, is where the true value of philosophy lies: it can "teach [us] how to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense."² *That there is something real that we can know, is a great piece of nonsense. It is also a claim that is made not only in philosophy, but in religion, science, history, psychology, and so on. Philosophy, however, has this advantage: it is the most self-critical of all systematic inquiry. Its nonsense is likely to be of a lesser and more innocuous kind, and it is more likely to be able to expose what is disguised nonsense as patent nonsense.*

In a sense, to do philosophy is to propagate a lie. It is to suggest that if we search long and hard enough, we will discover the truth about the world. However, to do philosophy is also to discover what is patently false in the opinions of other people--especially those who claim most loudly that *they* know how the world really is. So philosophy is a lie, but it is a noble lie, and far nobler than the one in Plato's *Republic*.

Referring to that lie, which involves the ranking by class of the citizens in his ideal republic, Socrates asks, "Do you see any way of getting them to believe this tale?"³

I would like to ask the same question, and I hope the answer is "yes."

NOTES

Chapter 1

1. Although the term 'model' will only be elaborated upon in the chapter entitled, "Modelling: Historical Models of the Self," I am using the term here, as I use it there, to signify a pervasive, cross-cultural dead metaphor which is commonly taken to mean the thing itself.

2. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. John W. Yolton (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1977, rep. 1988), 195. I should add that Locke dismisses this question in the sentence immediately following the one quoted: "For, since this could never be known, because one man's mind could not pass into another man's body to perceive what appearances were produced by those organs, neither the *ideas* hereby, nor the names, would be at all confounded, or any falsehood be in either."

3. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 253.

4. These examples will, needless to say, be greatly expanded upon in the chapter entitled, "Modelling: Historical Models of the Self."

5. Plato, *Republic*, 477a, trans. Paul Shorey, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), 716.

6. Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *Descartes: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Geach (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 94.

7. Descartes, *Meditations*, 91.

8. Descartes, *Meditations*, 91.

9. Descartes, *Meditations*, 93.

10. In the chapter entitled, "Modelling: Historical Models of the Self."

11. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #1, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), 2.
12. This argument is parallel to one offered against the notion of simples by Wittgenstein. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #47-48, 21-24.
13. This idea will be more fully explored in the chapter entitled "The Lure of Metaphysics."
14. John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), 211.
15. G.E. Moore, "Hume's Philosophy," in *Philosophical Studies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1958), 157.
16. Moore, "Hume's Philosophy," 157.
17. G.E. Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," in *Philosophical Papers*. See p. 39.
18. Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), 124.
19. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 129.
20. See G.E. Moore, "Proof of an External World," in *Philosophical Papers* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1963), 145-6. I am misquoting slightly. The exact words are as follows: "I can prove now, for instance, that two human hands exist. How? By holding up my two hands, and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right hand, 'Here is one hand', and adding, as I make a certain gesture with the left, 'and here is another'."
21. G.E. Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," 33.
22. G.E. Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," 36.
23. G.E. Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," 37.
24. E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1986), 77.

Chapter 2

1. Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (New York: NAL Penguin, 1980), 12.

2. E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), 9.

3. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964), 208.

4. Carr, *What is History?*, 23

5. Carr, *What is History?*, 11.

6. See Carr, *What is History?*, 22-25.

7. Carr, *What is History?*, 26-27.

8. Carr, *What is History?*, 11.

9. Carr, *What is History?*, 16.

10. Michael Grant, *The Founders of the Western World: a history of Greece and Rome* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991), 172.

11. My position here is in some ways analogous to Collingwood's. He says, for instance, that:

since history proper is the history of thought, there are no mere 'events' in history: what is miscalled an 'event' is really an action, and expresses some thought (intention, purpose) of its agent; the historian's business is therefore to identify this thought. (R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* [London: Oxford University Press, 1939, rep. 1970], 127-28.)

However insightful this may be, yet the presupposition is still that there were real thoughts (intentions, purposes) that real people had at particular times, and that although we can only have access to them by inference, they are nonetheless the raw events that the historian should be interested in. That is: his position on events in the quote above is really just an elaboration of his question and answer approach to history:

You cannot find out what a man means by simply studying his spoken or written statements, even though he has spoken or written with perfect command of language and perfectly truthful intention. In order to find out his meaning you must also know what the question was (a question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be in yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer. (Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, 31.)

12. See Horace *On the Art of Poetry*, in *Classical Literary Criticism* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965, rep. 1988), 90. "Poets aim at giving either profit or delight, or at combining the giving of pleasure with some useful precepts for life." It can be argued that this notion is implicit in Aristotle. See Aristotle *Poetics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1448b, 1457. There he says that "to be learning something is the greatest of pleasures not only to the philosopher but to the rest of mankind." However, this is irrelevant to his earlier analysis of what constitutes literature.

13. Aristotle *Poetics*, 1447a, 1455.

14. Aristotle *Poetics*, 1448a, 1456.

15. Aristotle *Poetics*, 1450a, 1461.

16. Aristotle *Poetics*, 1450a, 1461.

17. Aristotle *Poetics*, 1450a, 1462.

18. Aristotle *Poetics*, 1451a, 1463.

19. Homer *Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1963), 87.

20. This is true even when the author is taking conscious pains to present women in a good light. In *Tom Jones*, for instance, Fielding gives what he feels to be a very sympathetic view of women. Sophia Western is not one-dimensional (although she is at best only two-dimensional). Sophia is beautiful first, brainy second, but at least she does have brains. She is courageous, leaving the security of her father's house with only a female companion, and enduring the rigours of travel by horseback in eighteenth century England. She is determined; she will not let her father dictate that she should marry Blifil, a man she abhors. But although Sophia is not one of those stalwart, moral, maidens of steel who yet faint girlishly if the occasion arises (I mean those who would be created a century later by Charles Dickens), she is still lauded by Fielding for not marrying against her father's will, even if the father's irrational drunkenness is such as to justify her running away from home. And there is no question in the novel that Sophia should have extra-marital sexual relations similar to those Tom has. Sophia would not be the wonder she is were she not a virgin.

(In fairness to Fielding, I should add that his attitude towards women was quite forward-thinking. Mrs.

Waters is dealt with sympathetically, and the institution of marriage is on at least two occasions likened to prostitution. "You will easily conceive, my dear Graveairs (I ask you pardon; I really forgot myself), that when a woman makes an imprudent match in the sense of the world, that is, when she is not an arrant prostitute to pecuniary interest, she must necessarily have some inclination and affection for her man." See Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (New York: NAL Penguin Inc., 1979), 499. The second reference is on page 722 of this edition.

21. Arthur Schopenhauer, "Of Women," in *The Will to Live: Selected Writings of Arthur Schopenhauer*, ed. Richard Taylor (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1962, rep. 1988), 296.

22. See Aristotle *Poetics*, 1455b, 1472-1473:

The argument of the *Odyssey* is not a long one. A certain man has been abroad many years; Poseidon is ever on the watch for him, and he is all alone. Matters at home too have come to this, that his substance is being wasted and his son's death plotted by suitors to his wife. Then he arrives there himself after his grievous sufferings; reveals himself, and falls on his enemies; and the end is his salvation and their death. This being all that is proper to the *Odyssey*, everything else in it is episode.

23. A similar distinction is made by Collingwood:

Some 'events' of interest to the historian are not actions but the opposite, for which we have no English word: not *actiones* but *passiones*, instances of being acted upon. Thus the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79 is to the historian a *passio* on the part of the people affected by it. It becomes an 'historical event' in so far as people were not merely affected by it, but reacted to this affection by actions of various kinds. The historian of the eruption is in reality the historian of these actions. (Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, 128, n.)

I agree that an event cannot even become an event unless it is affected by it. However, I do not agree with the final sentence quoted here. Surely, in the case of Job, we are not merely interested in Job's reactions, which are quite limited, but also in Satan's actions and God's compliance?

24. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), 175.

25. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 164.

26. However, even nonsense verse is often an attempt to make something meaningful, that is, it tries to appeal to our sense of the ridiculous, or show the world from a childish, or impish, or humorous perspective.

27. Aristotle *Poetics*, 1451b, 1464.

28. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: Random House, 1932), 53.

29. Although it is not directly to the point, I should mention in passing, perhaps, that to be rid of the idea that literature is imitative is also to free literature from the burden that many literary critics have placed on it, that of verisimilitude. Clearly, if literature is not seen as imitative, the degree to which it imitates accurately is no longer an important question, and cannot even be considered as a criterion for distinguishing good literature from bad. Verisimilitude in literature is, after all, only achieved by creating the illusion that we have reached beyond language to the world itself. (I will elaborate upon this idea in chapter 4.)

It should be noted that it was his followers, rather than Aristotle himself, who developed the notion that verisimilitude was important to good literature (just as they developed the notion of the 'three unities'). In the *Poetics*, Aristotle says: "In Tragedy, however, they still adhere to the historic names; and for this reason: what convinces is the possible." (Aristotle *Poetics*, 1451b, 1464.) However, he defines the possible only as what has already happened. "We are not yet sure of the possibility of that which has not happened," he says. (Aristotle *Poetics*, 1451b, 1464.) Later writers often took this to mean that that which is *improbable*, meaning it did not fit their own prejudices about how the world really was, should be excluded from literature. Dr. Johnson, for instance:

To bring a lover, a lady and a rival into the fable; to entangle them in contradictory obligations, perplex them with oppositions of interest, and harrass (sic) them with violence of desires inconsistent with each other; to make them meet in rapture and part in agony; to fill their mouths with hyperbolical joy and outrageous sorrow; to distress them as nothing human ever was distressed; to deliver them as nothing human ever was delivered, is the business of the modern dramatist. For this probability is violated, life is misrepresented, and language is depraved. (Samuel Johnson, "Preface to

Shakespeare," in *Johnson: Prose and Poetry* [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967], 492.)

But these are merely prejudices, and constitute a misreading of Aristotle, who in fact allows for improbable actions: "The marvellous is certainly required in Tragedy. The Epic, however, affords more opening for the improbable, the chief factor in the marvellous, because in it the agents are not visibly before one." (Aristotle *Poetics*, 1460a, 1482.) What he bemoaned was not the lack of verisimilitude in a literary work, but an absurdity in the plot, or story (in his sense of the term). His example of such an absurdity is Oedipus's being unaware "of the circumstances of Laius' death." (Aristotle *Poetics*, 1460a, 1482.) That is: the plot of *Oedipus* turns upon the fact that Oedipus is unaware of how the former king of the land died. The point is that such an absurdity should not be used to trigger the other incidents of the play. It simply doesn't fit well in the "combination of incidents" that constitute the story.

The reason for dwelling on what is now a dead issue in literary criticism is the following: to be rid of verisimilitude is to be rid of the notion that the "combination of incidents" should have any sort of relation to the way things actually are in the world.

30. Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 3.

31. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), #2, 2. See G.E. Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," and John Wisdom, "Philosophy and Psycho-Analysis," in *Philosophy and Psycho-Analysis* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), for similar arguments.

Chapter 3

1. I am speaking loosely here. For one thing, the attack by Aristotle that I am referring to comes in his untitled work later given named the *Metaphysics*. Secondly, the word 'empiricism' and its cognate forms had, until the nineteenth century, mainly pejorative uses, meaning 'anti-theoretical' or 'anti-scientific'. The word 'empiric', not in common usage anymore, means 'charlatan'.

2. At first, this may seem paradoxical. The formula, "my knowledge implies experience; therefore, my experience implies knowledge," is truth-functionally invalid (in the case where I don't have knowledge but do have experience).

On the other hand, we are not interested in the case where I don't have knowledge, and in the case where I *do* have knowledge, the formula happens to be true. I think the solution to this is as follows: the formula is really of the form, "my knowledge implies experience; I have experience; therefore I have knowledge." So the reasoning involves the fallacy of affirming the consequent.

3. This example, albeit in a whimsical way, points to the main difficulty in Russell's distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. Here, description may be thought of as a condition of acquaintance. (For this distinction, see Bertrand Russell, "Descriptions," in *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* [London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1919], or Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* [London: Oxford University Press, 1967, rep. 1968].)

4. I do not, of course, mean in any sense to reify the word 'context', as though it were a sort of slide clicking into place in the slide-projector of a mind. The word means here, as elsewhere, the collection of tacit assumptions that are possibly relevant to what is being thought or talked about.

5. This is not to say that I can rigorously define the word 'game', or even that the word can be defined at all, if what we mean by 'definition' is some essence that is common to all games. See Wittgenstein's discussion of games in *Philosophical Investigations*, #65, 31 ff. What matters, however, is that we can (usually) quite readily distinguish between what is a game and what is not. One way of doing so is with respect to how we perceive the thing, or the attitude we have towards it. Just as the difference between fiction and history is found in the attitude one brings to a story, the difference between a game and another sort of activity often depends upon how one views the activity. Is chess a game? Yes, to most of us. Is it a game to a chess-champion, though?

6. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #78, 36, from whom I take this example.

7. Brian Skyrms, *Choice and Chance* (Encino, California: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., 1975, 2d ed.), 71.

8. Brian Skyrms, *Choice and Chance*, 72.

9. David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1955), 40.

10. Carl Hempel, *Philosophy of Natural Science* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 81. See also Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961), 106-107:

It will be useful to distinguish three components in a theory: (1) an abstract calculus that is the logical skeleton of the explanatory system, and that "implicitly defines" the basic notions of the system; (2) a set of rules that in effect assign an empirical content to the abstract calculus by relating it to the concrete materials of observation and experiment; and (3) an interpretation or model for the abstract calculus, which supplies some flesh for the skeletal structure in terms of more or less familiar conceptual or visualizable materials.

My point here is that the "basic notions" in (1) will not be observable entities.

11. I have used the words 'analysis' and 'reflection' deliberately. They are in fact words Hume uses in a passage I will discuss shortly. Distinguishing between impressions and ideas, he says:

By the term "impression," then, I mean all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will. And impressions are distinguished from ideas, which are the less lively perceptions of which we are conscious when we *reflect on* any of those sensations or movements above mention (*italics added*). (Hume, *Inquiry*, 27.)

A little later, he says, "When we *analyze* our thoughts or ideas, however compounded or sublime, we always find that they resolve themselves into such simple ideas as were copied from a precedent feeling or sentiment" (*italics added*). (Hume, *Inquiry*, 28.) The point is this: in order to reflect upon, or analyze the contents of our minds, there must be something more in our minds than just impressions and ideas.

12. Plato *Republic*, 509d-511e, 745-747.

13. Hume, *Inquiry*, 15.

14. It is also operative within Kant's discussion of pure reason, in the distinction between phenomena and the categories of the understanding.

15. See Plato *Phaedrus*, 250e, 497 ff. See also, Plato *Symposium*, 206c, 558 ff.

16. Plato *Republic*, 511b, 746. It can be noted that Plato actually refers to this type of reason as 'understanding', while reserving 'reason' for the intellectual activity in which the Forms are apprehended. See Plato *Republic*, 511c, 747.

17. Hume, *Inquiry*, 40.

18. Hume, *Treatise*, 252.

19. Hume, *Inquiry*, 49.

20. Hume, *Inquiry*, 26.

21. Hume, *Inquiry*, 27.

22. Hume, *Inquiry*, 28.

23. Hume, *Inquiry*, 28.

24. Hume, *Inquiry*, 30.

25. Hume, *Inquiry*, 49-50.

26. As it is stated here, this is a claim rather than an argument. I am using this abbreviated form of the argument for the sake of convenience. A possible statement of the full argument is: "Inductive arguments have worked fairly well in the past. Therefore, inductive reasoning is, in general, sound reasoning."

27. This is true with respect to the two main meanings of the word 'doubt', both the ordinary and the philosophical one. I do not doubt, in the sense that I think it is *possible* but *unlikely* that I am sitting here, in front of my computer screen. But I also do not doubt this, in the sense that there is *some possibility* that I may be *miscaken*.

28. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #217, 85.

29. I have deliberately avoided discussion of Hilary Putnam's 'brain in a vat' dilemma, since my emphasis is on whether or not *I* am deceived, and not on whether there could exist someone or something whose job it is to deceive me.

30. I am taking only the most general view of the correspondence theory of truth. That is because it exhibits, in all its manifestations, the problems I mention in what follows. For the specific formulation I am paraphrasing here, see Alfred Tarski, "The Concept of Truth

in Formalized Languages", in *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics*, trans. J.H. Woodger (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1958). He says that he is "concerned exclusively with grasping the intentions which are contained in the so-called *classical* conception of truth ('true--corresponding with reality')." (Tarski, *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics*, 153.) He gives as his preliminary, semantic, definition of truth: "a true sentence is one which says that the state of affairs is so and so, and the state of affairs indeed is so and so." (Tarski, *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics*, 155.)

31. Again: a given language might not contain a word meaning 'snow'. It might only have a word like 'precipitation', or it might have ten different words for snow. In the first case, the sentence "snow is white" would be meaningless; in the second, it would be terribly imprecise. (It is easy to imagine a language that distinguished only between rock and metal, not between different sorts of rocks and metals. In such a language, one could say: "Metal is shiny," but not, "Gold is shiny." The latter sentence would be meaningless. On the other hand, if someone were to say, "Wood is hard," we would want to know which particular types of wood were being talked about.)

Similar remarks may be made about the word 'white'. Clearly, for "snow is white" to be true, the word 'white' must represent a range of colours, because snow does come in a wide variety of whites. In a paintshop, on the other hand, there is only one paint I can get that is white; the rest of the paints in this "white range" will all have distinct names. In the context of paint samples, the sentence "snow is white" will be false.

32. See Plato, *Theaetetus* 201c-d, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, 908. Theaetetus says: "Yes Socrates, I have heard someone make the distinction" between true belief and knowledge. "He said that true belief with the addition of an account (*logos*) was knowledge, while belief without an account was outside its range."

33. "I conclude then that the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowing that something is the case are first that what one is said to know be true, secondly that one be sure of it, and thirdly that one should have the right to be sure." A.J. Ayer, *The Problem of Knowledge* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1956, rep. 1977), 35.

34. I am using the word 'evidence' as follows: it is that which leads us to accept the truth of a particular claim. That is: if I accept such-and-such as evidence for

the claim, I believe the claim to be true. This is, of course, a very narrow usage of the word. In ordinary talk, I may say, "This is evidence for that," and yet still not believe what was being asserted. However, I think that what we mean here is, "This is partial evidence for that." In this case, I think it would be better to say, "This is *relevant* to that," in the sense of the word I discuss in the next chapter.

35. Hume, *Inquiry*, 121.

36. Hume, *Inquiry*, 118.

Chapter 4

1. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Will to Live*, 5-6. I have chosen to cite Schopenhauer because he very explicitly propounds the very position I have been arguing against so far. For instance, he says that, "The task of metaphysics is certainly not the observation of particular experiences, but yet it is the correct explanation of experience as a whole." (Schopenhauer, *The Will to Live*, 24.) Again: "philosophy is nothing but the correct and universal understanding of experience itself, the true exposition of its meaning and content." (Schopenhauer, *The Will to Live*, 26.)

2. Since I intend to talk about metaphysics only very generally, and not examine rigorously any of its particular manifestations, I think I am justified in using Schopenhauer's definition here. It is extremely close in spirit to a definition given by A.J. Ayer, who is concerned to "eliminate" metaphysics: "the metaphysical thesis [is] that philosophy affords us knowledge of a reality transcending the world of science and common sense." (Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1952), 33.)

3. This pseudo-context may look very much like a context. For instance, it looks as though we are saying the same sort of thing when we say, (1) "The population consists entirely of children," and (2) "The world consists entirely of ideas." However, in the first sentence, there are things with which we can contrast both populations and children. Suppose someone was administering a psychological test; I could ask who was being tested. The "population" would then exclude anyone not being tested; the children, of course, could be differentiated from their parents. However, in the second sentence, there is nothing we can contrast with either the world or ideas.

However, since the activity of making meaningful--using language, creating contexts, learning--is second nature to us, we may easily try to contextualize a sentence such as the second. The only context possible, though, is the pseudo-context mentioned above. This can also be seen with reference to the sort of evidence that can be marshalled for metaphysical claims--that is, none. This is for reasons given in the last chapter: if evidence is likened to rules that operate within a given context, then not only does the world not come with a rule-book, but it could never be made to come with one, because this would involve it becoming a context itself, which is impossible.

4. It also follows that we can't verify a metaphysical claim. (See A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* [New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1952], 33-45.) However, the formulation here avoids the difficulties inherent in the principle of verification. For instance, see Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 3d ed., rev. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 37: "One can sum up all this by saying that *the criterion of the scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability, or refutability, or testability.*"

Similarly, this formulation is compatible with William James's argument:

The pragmatic method is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable. Is the world one or many?--fated or free?--material or spiritual?--here are notions either of which may or may not hold good of the world; and disputes over such notions are unending. The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to any one if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. (William James, *Pragmatism* [New York, Meridian Books, 1958], 42.)

A meaningless sentence can of course make no practical difference to anything. However, James's formulation suffers from two facts. First, metaphysical claims can make practical differences. It matters whether a person's aberrant behaviour is accounted for in terms of the mechanism of "repression" or that of "disassociation," for instance. The person will be treated differently. Secondly, two competing but incompatible scientific theories may both yield identical predictions--it may make no practical difference which one we accept. However, we do

not want, on those grounds, to call the theories 'metaphysical'.

5. Gottfried Wilhelm Von Leibniz, *Monadology*, #69, in *Monadology and Other Philosophical Essays*, trans. Paul Schrecker and Anne Martin Schrecker (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988), 159.

6. Leibniz, *Monadology*, #78, 156-157.

7. Leibniz, *Monadology*, #78, 161.

8. This argument points to an easy way in which one version of the argument from design for the existence of God may be refuted. If you were to find a watch, or some other constructed thing, you would "see" the design inherent in it, and you would infer a designer. But you would only "see" design in the watch because you could contrast it with other "undesigned" things, such as a forest, or things that you wouldn't even want to detect a design in, such as a garbage dump. In order for the word 'design' to mean anything, the world must contain both designed and undesigned things. To infer from this that *everything* is designed is just illogical.

(For the original of the "watch" argument, see Bishop William Paley, *Natural Theology*, cited in Clarence Darrow, "The Delusion of Design and Purpose," (from *The Story of my Life* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932]), in *Philosophy and Contemporary Issues*, ed. John R. Burr and Milton Goldinger, 6th ed. [New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992], 123.)

9. These are not the only ways of arguing against the coherence theory of truth. John Hospers asks:

But what kind of a relation among propositions is coherence? Are a group of propositions coherent with one another when they are consistent with one another? No, for this relation is too weak: the propositions '2 plus 2 equals 4,' 'Caesar crossed the Rubicon,' and 'Minks are fur-bearing animals' are all consistent with one another: that is, not one of them contradicts any of the others. But a group of propositions is not coherent unless each of them supports the other ones--they are *mutually supporting*. (John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, 2d ed. [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967], 116-117.)

Bertrand Russell says:

But if the law of contradiction itself were subjected to the test of coherence, we should find that, if we choose to suppose it false, nothing will any longer be incoherent with anything else. Thus the laws of logic supply the skeleton or framework within which the test of coherence applies, and they themselves cannot be established by this test. (Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* [London: Oxford University Press, 1968], 71.)

The examples in the paragraph above the one footnoted are also included in Hospers and Russell, but can be found in almost any discussion of the coherence theory of truth.

10. I will be using the words 'explain' and 'evaluate' as umbrella terms with which to talk about the interpretive claims of science and ethics. There are two points to bear in mind, however. First, they are umbrella terms. There are many other activities that can be thought of as analogous to explanation, for instance, such as analysis, investigation, and so forth. It is impossible to "analyze" anything without either coming to the analysis with pre-established categories into which something is to be analyzed, or creating these categories for the purpose of the analysis. If asked to analyze a sentence, for instance, I must either know what sort of analysis the person has in mind, or I must ask something like, "How do you mean? Do you mean grammatically? Semantically? Do you want me to count the letters and report on the frequency with which each appears?"

The second point is that there is no really clear cut division to be made between explanatory sentences and observation sentences. If I say, "I scalded my hands this morning," there is one sense in which it is possible to say that I am explaining something. I am in pain, and I attribute my pain to the fact that when I washed the dishes this morning, the water was too hot. In another sense (to be discussed later), this is just a straightforward observation. I experienced the heat of the water as the immediate cause of my pain.

11. Commenting on Kurt Godel's paper, "On Formally Undecidable Propositions of Principia Mathematica and Related Systems," Nagel and Newman say:

We must conclude that if arithmetic is consistent its consistency cannot be established by any meta-mathematical reasoning that can be represented within the formalism of arithmetic!

This imposing result of Godel's analysis should not be misunderstood: it does *not* exclude a meta-mathematical proof of the consistency of arithmetic. What it excludes is a proof of consistency that can be mirrored by the formal deductions of arithmetic. Meta-mathematical proofs of the consistency of arithmetic have, in fact, been constructed, notably by Gerhard Gentzen, a member of the Hilbert school, in 1936, and by others since then. (Ernest Nagel and James R. Newman, *Godel's Proof* [New York: New York University Press, 1958], 96-97.)

12. *Gazette* (Montreal), final edition, 23 August 1993, D8.

13. Brian Skyrms, *Choice and Chance*, 69-71.

14. In case I seem to be overstating the case, let me quote the opening line of a recently published university physics textbook: "Physics, the most fundamental physical science, is concerned with the basic principles of the universe." (Raymond A. Serway, *Physics for Scientists and Engineers*, 2d ed. [Philadelphia: Saunders College Publishing, 1986], 1.)

15. Asserting the primacy of the language of science has spawned at least one great absurdity. "'Tis a general maxim in philosophy, that *whatever begins to exist, must have a cause of existence*." (David Hume, *Treatise*, 78.) In simpler terms, everything that happens has a cause. The whole problem of freedom and determinism would never have arisen had this maxim been phrased as a question: "How would it be if we were to examine the world as though everything that happened in it could be explained in terms of cause and effect?" With the problem phrased this way, we would be much less likely to make the mistake of throwing our theoretical terms ('cause' and 'effect') into the very world they are meant to be explaining, thereby confusing the *explanans* with the *explanandum*. And our answer to this question might very well have been, "No, it is clear that the explanatory framework that includes the terms 'cause' and 'effect' is not usefully applicable, universally at least, to the actions of human beings."

16. Gottfried Wilhelm Von Leibniz, *On the Universal Science: Characteristic*, in *Monadology and Other Philosophical Essays*, 12.

17. W.V. Quine and J.S. Ullian, *The Web of Belief* (New York: Random House, 1970), 47.

18. Cited in Flew, *God and Philosophy*, 74.

19. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #101, 45. Wittgenstein is talking about logic in this quote. However, I think it is also applicable to what I am discussing in this section.

20. G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903, rep. 1971), viii.

21. It can be seen here that I am following Moore's rejection of an absolute distinction between ethics and casuistry. He says, "Casuistry is the goal of ethical investigation. It cannot be safely attempted at the beginning of our studies, but only at the end." (Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 5.)

22. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #49, 24.

23. Carl Hempel, *Philosophy of Natural Science*, 47.

24. Hempel, *Philosophy of Natural Science*, 47-48.

25. Hempel, *Philosophy of Natural Science*, 48.

26. Hempel, *Philosophy of Natural Science*, 75.

27. Wesley C. Salmon, *Logic* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), 4.

28. Trudy Govier, *A Practical Study of Argument*, 3d ed. (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992), 145.

29. Friedrich Heer, *The Medieval World*, trans. Janet Sondheimer (New York: New American Library, 1962), 59-60.

30. Govier, *A Practical Study of Argument*, 146.

31. The problem is with the "if," that is: if the truth of A counts in favour of the truth of B, then A is positively relevant to B. But how can we know that the antecedent is true unless we already know that the consequent is?

32. Hempel, *Philosophy of Natural Science*, 41. He is quoting from E. Rogers, *Physics for the Inquiring Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 240.

33. Quine says this about simplicity:

In most hypotheses... the quality of simplicity seems disconcertingly subjective and psychological. One

hypothesis will count as simpler than another if its grammatical structure is the same but its terms are more familiar. Or again perhaps one hypothesis counts as simpler than another if its grammatical structure is simpler, and even here the test is in a way subjective, since grammatical structure is only an accident of one or another language and not a direct reflection of nature. This subjectivity of simplicity is puzzling, if simplicity in hypotheses is to make for plausibility. Why should the subjectively simpler of two hypotheses stand a better chance of predicting objective events? (Quine and Ullian, *The Web of Belief*, 45-46.)

34. Hempel, *Philosophy of Natural Science*, 80-81.

Chapter 5

1. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #43, 21.

2. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #40, 20. I am using the word 'word' rather than 'name' because I find it less awkward. In this context, that of ostensive definition, I do of course mean 'name'.

3. For excellent arguments against the notion of ostensive definition, see Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #28-30, and 33-35, 13-18.

4. I want to mention in passing that something odd occurs when the distinction between meta- and object languages is made in logic. If the object language, that under consideration by the metalanguage, contains only syntactical properties and relations between formulae--that is, if it is said to be devoid of semantic content--can we really call it a 'language'?

5. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #18, 8.

6. Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1991), 298.

7. Hume, *Treatise*, 252. Needless to say, I don't agree with what Hume is saying in this passage with respect to my ability to experience raw perceptions.

8. Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964, rep. 1974), 237.

9. Sounds can be meaningful. A particular note sounding from the kitchen can mean that the kettle is boiling. A diminished triad can mean a train is coming. But these cases are clearly different from hearing notes and chords in the context of a symphony. (To avoid confusion, I should add that I am not in the least trying to contrast words with musical notes, etc. in terms of our being able to talk about something with musical notes.)

10. Music may also be meaningful to us in the following sense. It may remind us of something, or it may just make us feel exuberant, or ferocious, or wistful. But if it reminds us of something, the connection with that thing is what makes it meaningful, and if we associate it purely with some emotion, we are again putting it within some kind of system, this time that of our emotions and what best expresses them. (It may also be meaningful in the sense of being emotionally significant, something we value. However, this sense of the word 'meaningful' is one I am trying to avoid.)

11. Strictly speaking, since I have defined a 'word' as an element in a language, all words have meaning. A meaningless "word" is just not a word. However, it would be too cumbersome to avoid the phrase 'meaningless word', and so I will continue to use it in its ordinary sense.

12. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #256, 91. I consider Wittgenstein's arguments against this notion of private language conclusive and so do not reproduce them here. See pp. 91-96.

13. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #272, 95.

14. John Locke, *Essay*, 195.

15. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #384, 118.

16. To speculate about which came first, language or society, would only satisfy my desire to know "true" history but, given what I said earlier about metaphysics and history, would accomplish no more than this.

17. We are certainly entitled to say that we have certain capacities, on the basis of past history. We know that it is possible for human beings to learn language just because we do learn it. We know that it is possible to compose creditable music at the age of four, because Mozart did it. We know that it is possible to master Latin, Greek and English by the age of ten, because John Stuart Mill did

it. But to say these things are possible is simply to affirm that they have happened, and that therefore it is not impossible that they should happen again. I am following Aristotle's usage here: "whereas we are not yet sure as to the possibility of that which has not happened, that which has happened is manifestly possible, else it would not have come to pass." (Aristotle *Poetics*, 1452, 1464.)

18. Hume, *Inquiry*, 26.

19. Recently, a small number of experimental psychologists have begun to study memory as a reconstructive rather than a reproductive process. In a study often referred to by contemporary researchers, Frederic Bartlett says:

In fact, if we consider evidence rather than presupposition, remembering appears to be far more decisively an affair of construction rather than one of mere reproduction.... As has been shown again and again, condensation, elaboration and invention are common features of ordinary remembering. (Frederic Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932, rep. 1967], 205.)

See, for instance, David C. Rubin, ed., *Autobiographical memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), for an interesting introduction to this perspective on memory.

20. I call this 'genre' memory rather than 'generic' memory because the word 'genre' seems to allow more blurry edges to the memory than does the latter term. However, this type of memory is generally known in the psychological literature on the subject as 'generic' memory. See, for instance, Craig R. Barclay, "Schematization of autobiographical memory," in Rubin, *Autobiographical memory*, 82-99.

21. I will present the instructions as though this is how they are to be understood. A person may certainly learn them by rote, and may be able to operate the computer perfectly well without understanding what he or she is doing. Here, it is unclear as to whether this should count as remembering or not. For instance, say the instructions are: "Open a file, type what you have to type, and save the file." If a person were able to do this once, and then not know how to go on--not know that to open a second file, one had only to repeat the above procedure--would we want to say that the person remembered? Perhaps. This is a grey area.

22. See Plato *Republic*, 435-448, 676-688.

23. See Plato *Phaedo*, 70-84, 53-66.

24. Plato *Phaedo*, 83, 66.

25. Plato *Phaedo*, 80, 64.

26. Plato *Phaedo*, 81, 64. The "it" in this quote actually refers to the soul which has been made "tainted and impure" because of those bodily appetites referred to in the quote.

Chapter 6

1. I will try, as far as possible, to use the term each philosopher employs for the self. So, when discussing Plato, I will use the word 'soul', when discussing Descartes, I will use the word 'mind', and so on.

2. This model can be found in the Bible: "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:13.)

3. I am using the word 'Socrates' to refer to the character of that name in the *Republic*. Whether the character's view of the soul should be attributed to the historical Socrates or the character who is expressing Plato's opinion is not an issue here.

4. Plato *Republic*, 437, 679.

5. Plato *Republic*, 439, 681.

6. Plato *Republic*, 439, 681.

7. Plato *Republic*, 439, 682.

8. Plato *Republic*, 440, 682.

9. Plato *Republic*, 442, 684.

10. Socrates asks: "Do you not also think that there is a specific virtue or excellence of everything for which a specific work or function is appointed?" (Plato *Republic*, 353b, 603.) The specific virtue of the soul is justice. (Plato *Republic*, 353e, 604.) In order to know what justice is, we must know the good, "which every soul pursues and for its sake does all that it does." (Plato *Republic*, 505e, 741.) "This reality, then, that gives their truth to the objects of knowledge and the power of knowing to the knower, you must say is the idea of good." (Plato *Republic*, 508 d-e, 744.)

11. Charles Taylor, in his *Sources of the Self* puts the matter this way: "Selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes." (Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 3.) Taylor also adopts a position that is quite similar to the one I am developing here. He says that my "sense of the good has to be woven into my understanding of my life as an unfolding story. But this is to state another basic condition of making sense of ourselves, that we grasp our lives in a narrative." (Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 47.) Where I differ from Taylor is that he wants to talk--as we all do--about "basic features[s] or human existence" and "inescapable feature[s] of human life." (Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 46-47.) I would agree that it is very difficult to make myself meaningful to myself in a humanistic way that does not include some notion of valuation, or "sense of the good." (If my context is biology, on the other hand, it is almost impossible to include it.) But this is not yet to say anything about the self--it is only to make it meaningful in a particular way. And if my life is a story I tell myself about myself, then the inescapable features of this life are part of the story, and the relationship between selfhood and the good that Taylor wants to talk about is then *just another story*, and not something beyond the story to which I may have access.

12. Aristotle begins the *Nicomachean Ethics* with this sentence: "Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, it thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim." (Aristotle *Ethica Nicomachea*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, 1094, 935.) From this perspective, all actions must fall within an ethical framework. The arguments I have given against Plato are also applicable to Aristotle's dictum. However, I want to add that to make ethics so all-pervasive is really just to trivialize ethics. It does not put caring for one's child on a par with caring for one's garden, but it does put both activities in the same league.

13. Interestingly, with regard to poetic imagination at least, Plato's claim is that our ability to imagine is not part of us. In the *Ion* he says that "poets are nothing but interpreters of the gods." (Plato *Ion*, 534e, 220.)

Herein lies the reason why the deity has bereft them of their senses, and uses them as ministers, along with soothsayers and godly seers; it is in order that we listeners may know that it is not they who utter these precious revelations while their mind is not within them, but that it is the god himself who speaks, and

through them becomes articulate to us. (Plato *Ion*, 534c-d, 220.)

14. Explaining why there shall be no poetry in his republic "save only hymns to the gods and the praises of good men" (Plato *Republic*, 607a, 832), the character Socrates says:

And so in regard to the emotions of sex and anger, and all the appetites and pains and pleasures of the soul which we say accompany all our actions, the effect of poetic imitation is the same. For it waters and fosters these feelings when what we ought to do is to dry them up, and it establishes them as our rulers when they ought to be ruled, to the end that we may be better and happier men instead of worse and more miserable. (Plato *Republic*, 606e, 832.)

See also, Plato *Phaedo*, 79, 62 ff.

15. For instance, the following piece of dialogue takes place in Plato *Phaedo*, 83c-d, 66):

When anyone's soul feels a keen pleasure or pain it cannot help supposing that whatever causes the most violent emotion is the plainest and truest reality, which it is not. It is chiefly visible things that have this effect, isn't it?

Quite so.

Is it not on this sort of occasion that soul passes most completely into the bondage of body?

How do you make that out?

Because every pleasure or pain has a sort of rivet with which it fastens the soul to the body and pins it down and makes it corporeal, accepting as true whatever the body certifies.

16. Kant's argument in this regard is interesting (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1956], 21):

It is astonishing how otherwise acute men believe they can find a difference between the lower and the higher faculty of desire by noting whether the conceptions which are associated with pleasure have their origin in the senses or in the understanding. When one inquires into the determining grounds of desire and finds them in

an expected agreeableness resulting from something or other, it is not a question of where the conception of this enjoyable object comes from, but merely of how much it can be enjoyed.

It is true that Kant refers later on to "the more refined joys," (Ibid., 22) but the entirety of "Remark I" to "Theorem II" may be regarded as supporting my argument here.

17. "That which partakes of both, of to be and not to be... we may justly pronounce it to be the opinable." (Plato *Republic*, 478, 718.)

18. Plato *Symposium*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, 204, 556.

19. Plato *Symposium*, 208, 560.

20. Plato *Symposium*, 208-209, 560.

21. Plato *Symposium*, 210, 562.

22. See note 9 above (this chapter).

23. See Plato *Phaedrus*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, 253c, 499 ff.

24. Speaking, in the first meditation, about an all-powerful God, Descartes asks, "How do I know he has not brought it about that, while in fact there is no earth, no sky, no extended objects, no shape, no size, no place, yet all these things should appear to exist as they do now?" He ends this paragraph but saying:

"But perhaps it was not God's will to deceive me so; he is after all called supremely good." But if it goes against his goodness to have so created me that I am always deceived, it seems no less foreign to it to allow me to be deceived sometimes; and this result cannot be asserted. (René Descartes, *Meditations*, 63-64.)

25. Descartes, *Meditations*, 66.

26. See Descartes, *Meditations*, 67.

27. Descartes, *Meditations*, 69.

28. René Descartes, *Meditations on the First Philosophy in which the Existence of God and the Real Distinction between the Soul and the Body of Man are Demonstrated*, in *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, trans. F.E. Sutcliffe (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin

Books, 1968, rep. 1972), 105. All future references are to the Anscombe and Geach edition, unless otherwise specified.

29. Descartes, *Meditations*, 70.

30. See Descartes, *Meditations*, 96.

31. Descartes, *Meditations*, 120.

32. Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Geach, say the following in their "Translator's Note" (Descartes, *Meditations*, xlvii):

The most important problem of a Descartes translation is the rendering of the verbs *cogitare* and *penser* and their derivatives. Since Locke, the traditional English renderings have been the verb *think* and the noun *thought*. We have decided to abandon this tradition, which seems to us to run the risk of seriously misrepresenting what Descartes says. In everyday XVIIth-century French, *pensée* had a rather wider application than in modern French; it was then natural, as it would not now be, to call an emotion *une pensée*. Similarly, *cogitare* and its derivatives had long been used in a very wide sense in philosophical Latin; for example, *cogitationes cordium* in Aquinas covers all internal states of mind. Descartes himself defines the words as applying not only to intellectual processes but also to acts of will, passions, mental images, and even sensations.... To use *think* and *thought* as the standard rendering for *cogitare* and *penser* and their derivatives gives Descartes's conception an intellectualistic cast that is not there in the original.

The same point is made by Ferdinand Alquié with reference to following sentences in the second meditation: "Mais qu'est-ce donc que je suis? Une chose qui pense. Qu'est-ce qu'une chose qui pense? C'est-à-dire une chose qui doute, qui conçoit, qui affirme, qui nie, qui veut, qui ne veut pas, qui imagine aussi, et qui sent." (René Descartes, *Oeuvres philosophiques de Descartes*; ed. Ferdinand Alquié [Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1967], 421.) Alquié remarks in a footnote:

En cela, la terme *cogitans* est explicité en *dubitans*, *intelligens*, *negans*, *affirmans*, *volens*, *nolens*, *imaginans* et *sentiens*. *Intelligens* se trouvant placé entre d'autres qualifications, aucun privilège ne semble donné à l'*intellectus*. Et la pensée (*cogitatio*) semble bien comprendre la totalité de la conscience

psychologique. (Descartes, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. Alquié, 421n.)

I mention this because I do not want to be seen as misconstruing Descartes in this way. It remains true, however, that Descartes pays scant attention to emotions in the *Meditations*. His use of the word 'sentir' refers exclusively to sensory perception: "Enfin je suis le même qui sens, c'est-à-dire qui reçois et connais les choses comme par les organes des sens." (Descartes, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. Alquié, 421-422.) His use of the word 'désirer' refers exclusively to desiring knowledge. He is a being, "qui veut et désire d'en connaître davantage." (Descartes, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. Ferdinand Alquié, 421.) When he says, "je puisse désirer des choses mauvaises" (Descartes, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. Alquié, 434), this possibility is only open to him because he lacks proper understanding. "Car, si je connaissais toujours clairement ce qui est vrai et ce qui est bon, je ne serais jamais en peine de délibérer quel jugement et quel choix je devrai faire; et ainsi je serais entièrement libre." (Descartes, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, Alquié, 462.) Finally, desire is considered simply as a lack of perfection. "Or, si j'étais indépendant de tout autre, et que je fusse moi-même l'auteur de mon être, certes je ne douterais d'aucune chose, je ne concevrais plus de désirs... et ainsi je serais Dieu." (Descartes, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. Alquié, 449.) It should be noted as well that Descartes uses the word 'affections' only in connection with his capacity for desiring "des choses mauvaises." (Descartes, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. Alquié, 433-434.)

Finally, there is only one occasion in the *Meditations* that Descartes explicitly names any emotions. In the first paragraph of the third meditation, he says:

Je suis une chose que pense, c'est-à-dire qui doute, qui affirme, qui nie, qui connaît peu de choses, qui en ignore beaucoup, *qui aime, qui hait, qui veut, qui ne veut pas, qui imagine aussi, et qui sent* (*italics mine*). (Descartes, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. Alquié, 430.)

It is worthwhile pointing out that while Descartes *did* supervise the 1647 translation of the *Meditations* from which the above is taken (see Descartes, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. Alquié, 379), the italicized words do not appear in the original 1641 Latin edition, which reads simply, "Ego sum res cogitans, id est dubitans, affirmans, negans, pauca intelligens, multa ignorans, volens, nolens, imaginans etiam & sentiens." (Descartes, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. Alquié, 191.)

Therefore, even if the word 'pensée' is taken to include emotions, it still remains true that Descartes's main concerns are epistemological ones. However, this is not really central to the pivotal point I wish to make, which is that it is senseless to speak of emotions without at the same time speaking of bodily sensations (see the next paragraph).

33. It is perhaps worthwhile to point out that this argument bears relevantly upon the modern academic discipline of psychology. A fundamental assumption in psychology is that physical and psychical events are sharply demarcated. As a science, then, it is the child of the Cartesian mind/body problem. As such, it is a science based upon a model of human beings, rather than on how human beings actually are.

34. Hume, *Inquiry*, 27.

35. Hume, *Inquiry*, 28.

36. I should mention that a small number of experimental psychologists have addressed the issue of eyewitness testimony directly, and have found it to be unreliable, in varying degrees. For instance:

Eyewitnesses are often unable to recall accurately and completely what they have seen. This is one of the most extensively documented and uncontroversial conclusions to be drawn from experimental psychology. (Glenn Sanders and Warren Chiu, "Eyewitness Errors in the Free Recall of Actions," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 1988, vol 18[14], 1241.)

For a broad attack on the overall credibility of eyewitnesses and their testimony, see Elizabeth Loftus, *Eyewitness Testimony* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

37. Hume, *Inquiry*, 173.

38. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 2.

39. Harvey Richard Schiffman, *Sensation and Perception*, 3d ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1990), 206.

40. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 60.

41. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 61-62.

42. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 62.

43. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 105.

44. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 91.

45. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 117.

46. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 91. This is, admittedly, a very short and partial adumbration of what Kant has to say about the self. However, it does represent a problem in Kant that never goes away. That is: I do not accept the distinction that Kant makes between the terms 'transcendental' and 'transcendent'. (See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 222-223.) 'Transcendental' is meant to refer to the "conditions *a priori* of all knowledge produced by experience." (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 73.) 'Transcendent', on the other hand, is meant to refer to claims that are not "entirely confined within the limits of possible experience." (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 222.)

Indeed the *transcendent* use of reason leads to what Kant calls 'transcendental illusion'. The greatest part of the *Critique* is given over to a discussion of philosophical mistakes that have resulted from the transcendent use of reason. These are judgments (about the self, the world, God) for which no evidence could possibly exist, because they are judgments about unconditioned "reality," whereas the world of our experience is phenomenal, or conditioned by pure intuition and the categories of the understanding.

Now, given this, it is difficult to see how so-called *transcendental* knowledge is not also *transcendent*. To talk not of the conditions for this or that knowledge claim, but of the conditions of *all knowledge produced by experience*, is surely to go beyond *the limits of possible experience*. It is to talk about the unconditioned, something which Kant labours at length to demonstrate we cannot do. He says:

Concepts of reason served for conceiving or comprehending; concepts of the understanding for understanding (perceptions). If they contain the unconditioned, they refer to something to which all experience may belong, but which itself can never become an object of experience;--something to which reason in its conclusions from experience leads up, and by which it estimates and measures the degree of its own empirical use, but which never forms part of empirical synthesis. (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 231.)

Then, in an apparently face-saving move, he goes on:

If such concepts possess, notwithstanding, objective validity, they may be called *conceptus ratiocinati*

(concepts legitimately formed); if they have only been surreptitiously obtained, by a kind of illusory conclusion, they may be called *conceptus ratiocinantes* (sophistical concepts). (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 231.)

The difficulty here is that Kant wants his "legitimately formed" concepts to have objective validity--to apply to objects of our experience (phenomena)--while at the same time claiming that these concepts refer to something "which itself can never become an object of experience," or a phenomenon.

My argument, as far as Kant is concerned, has been that all talk of the conditions of the possibility of knowledge--of "higher faculties of knowledge," of the categories of the understanding, and so on--is *transcendent*. It is talk of unconditioned things-in-themselves *as though* they were presented to us phenomenally.

47. See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 19 ff. For instance:

the faculty of desire is determined by the sensation of agreeableness which the subject expects from the actual existence of the object. Now a rational being's consciousness of the agreeableness of life which without interruption accompanies his whole existence is happiness, and to make this the supreme ground for the determination of choice constitutes the principle of self-love. Thus all material principles, which place the determining ground of choice in the pleasure or displeasure to be received from the reality of any object whatsoever, are entirely of one kind. Without exception they belong under the principle of self-love or one's own happiness. (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 20-21.)

48. Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. Joan Riviere, ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1962), 7.

49. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 13.

50. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 15.

51. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 14.

52. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 24.

53. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 24.

54. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 25.

55. Hume, *Treatise*, 413.

56. Hume, *Treatise*, 415.

57. Its major fault is undoubtedly the picture it paints of women. On these grounds alone, it is difficult to take Freud seriously. The problem lies in the development of the super-ego. (With regard to this, he says: "The male sex seems to have taken the lead in all these moral acquisitions; and they seem to have then been transmitted to women by cross-inheritance." (Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 27.))

The emergence of the super-ego depends on the destruction of the Oedipus Complex, and this happens because of a fear of castration. However, even if we accept the obvious--that the model applies only to young boys--it is still very weak. Freud says:

Sooner or later the child, who is so proud of his possession of a penis, has a view of the genital region of a little girl, and cannot help being convinced of the absence of a penis in a creature who is so like himself. With this, the loss of his own penis becomes imaginable, and the threat of castration takes its deferred effect. (Sigmund Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay [New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1989], 663.)

This is to say (if I can put the matter a little uncharitably): my moral sense has its origin in a chance encounter with a naked little girl. However, I am perhaps not so uncharitable as Freud, when he paints women as unfortunate amputees who will never be able to glory in the possession of a penis, but must content themselves with a lesser version--and it is a lesser version of the same thing. (Even if Freud's model were a good one, then, it would fail precisely because it would be a model only of how men are.)

58. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, in *Utilitarianism, Liberty, Representative Government*, ed. H.B. Acton (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1910, rep. 1972), 72-73.

59. Arthur Schopenhauer, "Of Women," in *The Will to Live*, 296-97.

Chapter 7

1. E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 128. Perhaps this is the right place to define several terms. First, I will be using the word 'text' to refer to the sequence of words that constitutes a single literary work. I use 'literature' to refer more generally to all texts that can be considered literary texts. I continue to use the word 'meaning' as equivalent to 'belonging to a system'. I will not talk, therefore, about the "meaning of a text," or what the author "means" in the text. Instead, when there is occasion, I will talk about the point of the text, and what the author "intends" to say.

2. As I mentioned in a footnote in chapter two, verisimilitude became for many years a standard against which literary works were judged. So Stendhal describes the novel as a "mirror moving along a highway." (Stendhal, *Red and Black*, trans. Robert M. Adams [New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1969], 289.) Although Henry Fielding takes literary critics to task for presuming to dictate the rules of writing (Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* [New York: NAL Penguin, 1979], 175-177), he nevertheless says:

the theatrical stage is nothing more than a representation, or, as Aristotle calls it, an imitation, of what really exists; and hence, perhaps, we might fairly pay a very high compliment to those who by their writings or actions have been so capable of imitating life as to have their pictures in a manner confounded with or mistaken for the originals. (Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 273.)

3. I am assuming a pre-collegiate level of education here, and hence omit consideration of other genres of literature, as well as oral literature.

4. See chapters thirteen and fifteen, in René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 3d ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1956).

5. It is instructive to read Wellek and Warren's attempt to view a literary work as a thing. The definition they formulate makes it extremely difficult to know what sort of a thing it is:

The work of art, then, appears as an object of knowledge *sui generis* which has a special ontological status. It is neither real (physical, like a statue) nor mental (psychological, like the experience of light or pain) nor ideal (like a triangle). It is a system of norms of

ideal concepts which are intersubjective. They must be assumed to exist in collective ideology, changing with it, accessible only through individual mental experiences, based on the sound-structure of its sentences. (Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 156.)

No doubt both the "system of norms" and the "collective ideology" must also have the same "special ontological status" that the work of art has. However, it is not necessary to argue against this definition. I will simply point out that a few pages earlier on, Wellek and Warren make the following statement:

But this conception of the literary work as a stratified system of norms still leaves undetermined the actual mode of existence of this system. To deal with this matter properly we should have to settle such controversies as those of nominalism versus realism, mentalism versus behaviourism--in short, all the chief problems of epistemology. (Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 153.)

In other words, the definition above stands only if we ignore epistemological problems. This seems a weak reason for accepting it.

6. A relevant question, but not one I wish to dwell on here, is whether or not we see sentences as sentences. We certainly may, but this involves a much more skillful reading, and a much more diplomatic one. Many otherwise competent readers will ignore grammatical errors such as comma splices, run-on and fused sentences, but may still be said to have understood the meaning of the text in which these errors occur. What does and does not constitute a sentence often seems the quite arbitrary decision of the prescriptive grammarian. (When is a sentence fragment unacceptable as a sentence? Here, in this sentence?)

7. See Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, in *The Annotated Alice*, with notes by Martin Gardner (New York: Bramhall House, 1960), 69-71. The poem Alice doesn't quite remember is "The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them."

8. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *On the Margins of Discourse* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978, rep. 1983), 44. In some ways, Smith's arguments are quite close to my own. A few pages further on, for instance, she says: "One's perception of and/or response to an event not only determine but are determined by how one classifies it: what we "see," and how we subsequently behave toward it, will depend on what we see something as. (Herrnstein Smith, *On*

the Margins of Discourse, 48.) I cannot, however, accept her distinction between fictive and natural discourse, drawn for the purposes of demarcating an admittedly blurry boundary between literature and history. "As a mimetic artform, what a poem distinctively and characteristically represents is not images, ideas, feelings, characters, scenes, or worlds, but *discourse*." (Herrnstein Smith, *On the Margins of Discourse*, 25.) History, on the other hand, represents things that really happened. However, if the argument I made in chapter two is correct--an event becomes an event precisely because it is made meaningful in language--then history, too, is about discourse.

9. It goes without saying that if we speak the language the text is written in, then it will be meaningful for us in some way, whether or not we are familiar with the language of literary criticism.

10. I am using the term 'poet' here to mean anyone who writes any sort of literature.

11. I again feel constrained to mention that although the word 'meaningful' can be used as a synonym for 'important', 'central' or 'valuable', this is not the way I am, or have been, using the term.

12. These are, of course, caricatures of the treatises in question. However, the point I am making here is--in the present context--a minor one, and not worth elaborating upon. For references to Horace and Aristotle, see chapter two. Longinus says:

Sublimity consists in a certain excellence and distinction in expression, and... it is from this source alone that the greatest poets and historians have acquired their pre-eminence and won for themselves an eternity of fame.... A well-timed stroke of sublimity scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt, and in a flash reveals the full power of the speaker. (Longinus *On the Sublime*, in *Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. T.S. Dorsch [Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965, rep. 1988], 100.)

13. A.A. Milne, "Disobedience," in *The World of Christopher Robin* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1958), 40.

14. See Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, in *The Annotated Alice*, with notes by Martin Gardner (New York: Bramhall House, 1960), 191. I cite only the famous first stanza:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
 All mimsy were the borogoves,
 And the mome raths outgrabe.

15. E.B. White, "The Door," in *50 Great Short Stories*, ed. Milton Crane (New York: Bantam Books, 1971 [Bantam Literature Edition], rep. 1988), 292.

16. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 1. I do not wish to comment directly on any of the arguments Hirsch advances "in defense of the author" (the title of the first chapter of his book) because of the great ambiguity with which he uses the word 'meaning'. In this short quote alone, taken from the first sentence of the book, he confuses authorial intention (what the author *meant*) with word-meaning (what the text means). Furthermore, he wishes to say that texts "mean" something in the way words do. (See note one above.) Meaning is also defined as "an affair of consciousness" (Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 4); "that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent" (Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 8); he says of visual perceptions that "these perceptions are meanings, which is to say, objects of consciousness" (Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 17); however, "there is a difference between meaning and consciousness of meaning" (Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 22)--so a visual perception must be different from our consciousness of a visual perception. In short, Hirsch's arguments in this chapter are too muddy to warrant further attention. (It may be noted in passing that Hirsch eventually defines "verbal meaning... as a *willed type*" and that "a type is an entity," (Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 49). That is: his theory of meaning becomes firmly Platonic.)

17. Thomas Mann, "Death in Venice," in *Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories*, trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Vintage Books, 1936), 4. I call Aschenbach the lead character, and he is. However, on my first reading of the story I am not entitled to this inference. It is true that it is a literary convention to begin a story by introducing the lead character, but there are many stories that do not abide by this convention. Furthermore, there are stories that parody it. In *Scoop*, by Evelyn Waugh, the story opens with John Courteney Boot, who is introduced as a modestly-accomplished writer, and we soon find one Lord Copper instructing the foreign editor of a newspaper to dispatch Boot to cover a war in Ishmaelia. However, the foreign editor has no idea who Lord Copper is talking about, mistakenly dispatches a staff writer called William Boot

instead, and William turns out to be the main character of the novel.

18. It goes without saying that this question would not occur to every reader. It happens to be a literary convention that authors should not describe in minute detail characters who form no part of the plot. However, I can easily conceive of a literature where this was not the case. And, of course, I can only ask a question like this if I am familiar with the convention, which is to say, I have read other literary texts. The descriptive details include the fact that the stranger was "of medium height, thin, beardless, and strikingly snub-nosed;" he had red hair and was wearing a "straight-brimmed straw hat;" he had a rucksack, a yellow suit and grey cape, and carried an "iron-shod stick." He had red eyelashes, pronounced eyebrows and a turned-up nose, and his lips seemed to curl, so that "his long, white, glistening teeth" were visible "to the gums." (Mann, "Death in Venice," 4-5.)

19. Tess "was expressing in her own native phrases--assisted a little by her sixth-standard training--feelings which might almost have been called those of the age--the ache of modernism." Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, ed. Juliet Grindle and Simon Gatrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 129. The only other way to rule out such an interpretation is with regard to the knowledge that we, as readers, bring to the text. Knowing when World War I began, we know that Hardy could not have been writing about it in *Tess*. However, is this not also just to say that Hardy could not have intended his book to be about the causes of the war?

20. Martial *Epigrams* 1.38. Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1968), 53. The Latin is:

Quem recitas meus est, o Fidentine, libellus:
sed male cum recitas, incipit esse tuus.

21. Frank MacShane, *The Life of Raymond Chandler* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 126.

22. There is one case where it might be said that there is more in the text than the author intended. In any culture, there are beliefs that are so commonly and widely believed that it is heresy--or lunacy--to question them. They are not, in fact, regarded as beliefs at all, but are just thought to be truths about the way the world is. When one culture has given way to another, we often find that we have moved beyond some of these beliefs--they are no longer thought of as truths, and often are not even beliefs any more--and it is then easy to see their cultural rootedness.

An example of such a belief would be the view that the universe is a great chain of being. Authors writing from within this belief--that is, who believe that this is a proper way of viewing the universe--will have their texts informed by this belief. They will not, however, be aware of this. In this sense, one might want to say that there will always be more in the text than an author intended. However, it is important to remember that these beliefs are not actually *in* the text. If they were, in the sense that Descartes's belief in his own existence is in the *Meditations*, then we would know about them. We might not understand how an author could believe such things, but we would know what the beliefs were. So, for instance, it is difficult for people in this century to understand how Lucretius can believe we think with our hearts:

The understanding, which we also call the mind and reason, is, as it were, the head, and lords it over the whole body. It is located in the central region of the breast, and there it remains. (Lucretius *On Nature* 3.138-141, trans. Russel M. Geer. Library of Liberal Arts (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), 83.

However, it is clear that this *is* what he believes. On the other hand, Pope names the great chain of being in the following lines:

See, thro' this air, this ocean, and this earth,
All matter quick, and bursting into birth.
Above, how high progressive life may go!
Around, how wide! how deep extend below!
Vast chain of being, which from God began,
Natures aethereal, human, angel, man,
Beast, bird, fish insect! what no eye can see,
No glass can reach! from Infinite to thee,
From thee to Nothing!--On superior pow'rs
Were we to press, inferior might on ours;
Or in the full creation leave a void,
Where, one step broken, the great scale's destroy'd:
From Nature's chain whatever link you strike,
Tenth or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.
(Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Man," 1.233-246.
Riverside Editions [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969], 127-129.)

However, even though Pope names it, if I have never heard of the great chain of being, there is nothing in these lines that will lead me to the conclusion that it is any more than an imaginative view of the world that originates with Pope. I can understand this as one of Pope's *beliefs* only if I

already know what the great chain of being is meant to refer to.

23. This has not always been the case. There have been times when literature and history have much closer in spirit. The Bible encourages a very different view of history than the one I am mentioning: "The thing that hath been, it *is that* which shall be; and that which is done *is* that which shall be done; and *there is* no new thing under the sun." (Eccl. 1:9.) So, history can be seen as an endless cycle of lives, each repeating (or trying to avoid) the experiences of those who have lived before, who are seen as *examples*. (This view is one that lets us "learn" from history; clearly, if history is simply a sequence of events made meaningful by historians, then it may suggest things to us, but can never "teach" us anything.) History has also, and often, been seen as circular and progressive at the same time:

Otto of Freising... was deeply shocked and distressed at the tragedy of the Holy Roman Empire. The subject of his universal history of *The Two Cities* (*Historia de duabus civitatibus*) is the conflict between the children of light and the children of darkness, as it can be traced through history; underlying the whole is the idea that all that mattered in the history of the world was already a thing of the past. But Otto does not abandon himself completely to pessimism: the Kingdom of God continues to grow slowly, gradually and in secret, amid all temporal disasters. New men, for example, the religious of new Orders, had already come forward to bear aloft the light of the good future that lay ahead, the "new age" of the last days. (Heer, *The Medieval World*, 283-84.)

24. To be perfectly clear: the question concerning present acrophobia would *not* be answered by saying that it could be traced to such and such a childhood experience. The question is about why that childhood experience should have resulted in acrophobia, rather than not. This is the metaphysical, and hence unanswerable, question.

25. For references, see chapter six, notes 13-14.

26. Two points: first, this is not the trick of a cheat, but the trick of a magician. Secondly, this is again analogous to the way history has sometimes been seen in the past. To tell the history of something would simultaneously be to show the moral behind the tale. Indeed, the history would be told for this purpose.

27. Fielding is an interesting example here because he often "steps forward" in the text and tells us explicitly what point he is trying to make. He then retreats behind the scenes and shows us that point. Which device is more successful 'n putting the point across?

28. I am using the singular here, but I am in no sense implying that there is a single general meaning that words have. The word 'star', for instance, has at least two general meanings, 'stellar body' and 'celebrity'.

29. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 309.

30. Katherine Mansfield, "The Garden Party," in *50 Great Short Stories*, 1.

31. Bertrand Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1940, rep. 1961), 177.

32. 1 John 4:8.

33. It can be noted that talk of intention, in this second sense of the term (non-deliberate intention) has its origin in our attempt to explain what it is we are doing when we speak. So, if I say, "When is the vernal equinox?" and you say, "March 21," and I then ask, "What were you doing when you answered me just now?" you might say, "I was trying to inform you as to the date of the vernal equinox. That was what I intended to do." That is: you explain your behaviour as being analogous to other times when you really do have an intention you want to express. However, in this case, while the term 'intention' may make some sense if we leave it in the explanation, it makes no sense once we reify it and ascribe it to a speaker.

34. This is not to say that we cannot use sentences. We use sentences when we quote. But this itself shows the difference between using a sentence and merely speaking.

35. For instance, there was a debate over whether "The king of France is bald," was sometimes true (when there was a bald king of France), and sometimes false (when there was no king of France), or whether in the latter case it represented a failure on the speaker's part to refer to anything (and was therefore neither false nor nonsensical, although not true either). See Bertrand Russell, "Descriptions," in *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1919), and P.F. Strawson, "On Referring," in *Readings in the Philosophy of*

Language, ed. J. Rosenberg and C. Travis (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971). This debate cannot arise unless sentences are thought to have meanings the way words do.

36. G.R. Stevens, *History of the Canadian National Railways* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1973), 1.

37. We may also study texts that are contemporary with that of the text we are interested in. However, if the argument in chapter two holds, these texts should be termed 'history' as well.

38. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 11.

39. It is sometimes possible if the text is a murder mystery, for example.

40. Robert Scholes, *Semiotics and Interpretation*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 33.

41. William E. Cain, *The Crisis in Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 2.

42. Cain, *The Crisis in Criticism*, 3.

43. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 3.

44. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 3.

45. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 4. With regard to this quote and others from Hirsch, I will mention again that he is not very rigorous about using the words 'mean' and 'meaning' in a determinate way.

46. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 24.

47. "There are no determinate meanings and... the stability of the text is an illusion." Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 312. In the next three paragraphs, I am using Fish's terminology. Clarifications follow.

With regard to this discussion of Hirsch and Fish, it should be noted that these authors represent only the two opposing ends of a spectrum that contains much diverse thinking about the role of the reader in the interpretation of texts. See, for instance, Roman Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, trans. Ruth Ann Crowley and Kenneth R. Olsen (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973); Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins

University Press, 1978); Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

However, to discuss any of the above authors here would involve making a lengthy digression from the main point I wish to make, and would mean including much that is irrelevant to it.

48. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 307.

49. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 310.

50. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 307.

51. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 310.

52. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 313.

53. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 318.
Fish's argument does not end here, of course.

54. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 309.

55. I am using the word 'context' here in the first sense elaborated above, that of "what" is being talked about.

56. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 309.

57. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 310.

58. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 310.

59. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 310.

60. Of course, my position with regard to Fish can be inferred from what I have said in previous chapters. For instance, he offers a wonderful example of how to "make" a poem. He recounts how wrote out an assignment for one class on a blackboard, and then got students of a subsequent class to interpret this assignment as a poem. (I have duplicated this experiment, as it were. I have taken a sentence from a textbook on accountancy about the amortization of loans, and convinced students that it was a poem about romantic love. I admit, however, that my authority as a teacher probably had a great deal to do with their acceptance of the sentence as a poem.) From this, however, Fish concludes that "all objects are made and not found." (Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 331.) This, unfortunately, is to conclude much more than is warranted. One should not conclude that because an object is not entirely "found," it is therefore

entirely "made." If we make something meaningful, there has to be *something* we make meaningful. Iser's criticism is therefore well-founded:

Professor Fish professes that "there is no distinction between what the text gives and what the reader supplies; he supplies *everything*; the stars in a literary text are not fixed; they are just as available as the lines that join them." The reader does not supply the name Alworthy. (Wolfgang Iser, "Talk Like Whales: A Reply to Stanley Fish," *Diacritics*, 11 [Spring, 1981]: 84.)

No, the reader does not supply the name 'Alworthy', and, as Iser is implying, it is *in* the text. I make the text meaningful, but I do not create the text out of nothing.

Lest I be seen as misrepresenting Fish, I will mention an argument he makes that parallels the one above. He is disputing that there is any distinction to be made "institutional" and "brute" facts. All are facts simply by virtue of their belonging to what he calls 'the standard story'.

What I am saying is that the facts Searle would cite as "brute," the facts stipulated by the standard story, are also institutional, and that the power of the law to declare a man and woman husband and wife is on a par with the (institutional) power of the standard story to declare that Richard Nixon exists. Moreover, nothing in the theory of speech acts directs us to distinguish these declarations from one another or from the declaration by Iris Murdoch of the existence of Lieutenant Andrew Chase-White. Of course there are distinctions to be made, and we do, in fact, make them, and that is why Searle's argument seems at first so obviously right. But its rightness is a function of the *extra-theoretical* stipulation of the standard story as uniquely true. That is, I am not denying that what will and will not be accepted as true is determined by the standard story. I am only pointing out that its being (or telling; it amounts to the saying thing) the truth is not a matter of a special relationship it bears to the world (the world does not impose it on us) but of a special relationship it bears to its users. (Stanley Fish, "How To Do Things with Austin and Searle," in *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 240-41.

There is very little here that I would take issue with, except Fish's assertion that what he calls 'the standard story' has the power "to declare that Richard Nixon exists."

No: an object must exist before it can be made meaningful in some way.

61. He says:

While relativism is a position one can entertain, it is not a position one can occupy. No one can be a relativist, because no one can achieve the distance from his own beliefs and assumptions which would result in their being no more authoritative for him than the beliefs and assumptions held by others, or, for that matter, the beliefs and assumptions he himself used to hold.... It is in the name of personally held (in fact they are doing the holding) norms and values that the individual acts and argues, and he does so with the full confidence that attends belief. When his beliefs change, the norms and values to which he once gave unthinking assent will have been demoted to the status of opinions and become the objects of an analytical and critical attention; but that attention will itself be enabled by a new set of norms and values that are, for the time being, as unexamined and undoubted as those they displace. The point is that there is never a moment when one believes nothing, when consciousness is innocent of any and all categories of thought, and whatever categories of thought are operative at a given moment will serve as an undoubted ground. (Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 319-20.)

62. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 342.

63. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 345.

64. For instance, one may question, with Hirsch, whether there is enough unanimity between critics for interpretive communities to ever become constituted.

65. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 344-45.

66. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 347.

67. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 312.

Chapter 8

1. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illness, Third Edition, Revised 1987 (DSM-III-R)*, 272.

2. See the American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illness, Fourth*

Edition, 1994 (DSM-IV), 487. The first two diagnostic criteria in DSM-IV read as follows:

- A. The *presence* of two or more distinct *identities* or personality states (each with its own relatively enduring pattern of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and self).
- B. At least two of these *identities* or personality states recurrently take control of the person's behavior.

I have italicized the words that are different from the DSM-III-R criteria.

3. Colin Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder: Diagnosis, Clinical Features, and Treatment* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1989), 77. It should be noted that the DSM-IV also addresses this issue. "It has been suggested that the recent relatively high rates of the disorder reported in the United States might indicate that this [MPD or DID] is a culture-specific syndrome." (American Psychiatric Association, DSM-IV, 1994, 485.)

4. John O. Beahrs, *Unity and Multiplicity: Multilevel Consciousness of Self in Hypnosis, Psychiatric Disorder and Mental Health* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, Publishers, 1982), 4.

5. Beahrs, *Unity and Multiplicity*, 13.

6. Beahrs, *Unity and Multiplicity*, 18.

7. Eugene Bliss, *Multiple Personality, Allied Disorders, and Hypnosis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 122.

8. Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 40.

9. "There is no evidence that there is anything structurally or physiologically wrong with the MPD brain." (Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 39.) This is true in spite of the fact that the different personalities in multiples exhibit different brain wave activity, whereas people who consciously pretend to be multiples and mimic them exhibit no such differences.

Writing in the October, 1982, issue of *Psychology Today*, Frank Putnam, a staff psychiatrist with the Institute [U.S. government's National Institute of Mental Health], describes brain wave measurements performed upon individuals suffering from "multiple personality disorder" and upon healthy individuals who deliberately

created and rehearsed imaginary alternate personalities. While the former showed significant differences in their brain wave configurations from one personality to another, the latter, tested as they switched from role to role, showed no change. (Adam Crabtree, *Multiple Man: Explorations in Possession and Multiple Personality* [New York: Praeger Publishers, 1985], 56.)

Since healthy individuals normally exhibit different brain wave configurations when asleep, all this shows is that MPD is not straightforward malingering, or feigning illness. It does not imply that there is anything structurally different, in Ross's words, about the MPD brain.

Ross further says that "complex MPD with over 15 personalities and complicated amnesia barriers is associated with a 100 percent frequency of childhood physical, sexual, and emotional abuse--I have never met or heard about a complex multiple who had not experienced all three." (Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 101.) He cites two large studies of MPD, one conducted by him and one by Putnam. In the first, 79.2% of his 236 subjects had experienced childhood sexual abuse, and 74.9% childhood physical abuse. These compare with 83.0% and 75.0% in Putnam's study of 100 subjects. Only eight of Putnam's subjects and twenty-nine (12.3%) of Ross's were male. See Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 95.

10. What I am presenting here is a composite picture. No references are given because a casual perusal of any of the books mentioned in these notes, i.e., those by Beahr, Bliss, Crabtree, Kluft, Ross, and so on, will yield the characteristics I am noting here.

11. In the studies mentioned above in note 9, Ross found 86% and Putnam 85% with child personalities.

12. In Ross's study, 19.1% had prostitute personalities.

13. See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: New American Library, 1958), 125. The internal quote is attributed to Theodore Armand Ribot, *Psychologie des sentiments*, 54.

One can distinguish many kinds of pathological depression. Sometimes it is mere passive joylessness and dreariness, discouragement, dejection, lack of taste and zest and spring. Professor Ribot has proposed the name *anhedonia* to designate this condition.

"The state of *anhedonia*, if I may coin a new word to pair off with *analgesia*," he writes, "has been very little studied, but it exists. A young girl was smitten with a liver disease which for some time altered her constitution. She felt no longer any affection for her father and mother. She would have played with her doll, but it was impossible to find the least pleasure in the act. The same things which formerly convulsed her with laughter entirely failed to interest her now. Esquirol observed the case of a very intelligent magistrate who was also a prey to hepatic disease. Every emotion appeared dead within him. He manifested neither perversion nor violence, but complete absence of emotional reaction. If he went to the theatre, which he did out of habit, he could find no pleasure there. The thought of his house, of his home, of his wife, and of his absent children moved him as little, he said, as a theorem of Euclid."

14. Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 109.

15. Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 129. The DSM-IV says, "Females tend to have more identities than do males, averaging 15 or more, whereas males average approximately 8 identities." (American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-IV*, 1994, 486.)

16. Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 95.

17. See Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 114. Ross is almost dismissive of the internal self-helper (which, following Comstock, he calls the 'inner self-helper') because of the fact that some clinicians feel they "have transcendental abilities including healing and psychic powers."

18. Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 135.

19. Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 131.

20. A brief personal note: my experience with MPD is not exclusively through philosophy and the reading of books. For a two and a half month period in 1991, I shared a house with someone who had been diagnosed with multiple personality disorder. I had a very intense introduction to the disorder. I can no more doubt that multiple personality disorder exists than I can that when I am in pain, the pain is real. However, as I argue below, I am equally convinced the multiples are delusional.

21. This does not mean, of course, that this sort of abuse necessarily results in MPD. I have never read anyone

who speculated on what sort of abuse would necessarily lead to MPD. And this is not surprising, because the sexual abuse must be distinctly traumatic, and as resilient as children are, the identical abuse will cause varying degrees of trauma in different individuals.

It should also be mentioned that only rarely do clinicians attempt to corroborate their patients' claims to have been sexually abused. Ross says:

I think that MPD is singled out for the accusation of iatrogenic artifact primarily because of the link between MPD and childhood physical and sexual abuse. Not long ago, incest was thought to be as rare in North America as one in a million families (Weinberg, 1955). That estimate, it is now known, was out by four orders of magnitude. Memories of childhood incest are still assumed to be fantasies by many North American psychiatrists, however. In this social and ideological context, it is not surprising that MPD is singled out for dismissal as an iatrogenic artifact. The charge of artifact is a second line of defense against dealing with the reality of childhood abuse in North America (Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 61).

However, many researchers in hypnosis claim that *no* memory elicited during hypnosis should be accepted, without further corroboration, as accurate. (See p. 331.) It remains possible, therefore, that a hypnotically-elicited memory of sexual abuse may not only be a distortion or exaggeration of abuse that actually occurred, but may in some cases be a pure confabulation. This possibility is not ruled out by the "reality of childhood abuse in North America."

22. Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 63.

23. See Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 63-73.

24. Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 55-56.

25. Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 72-73.

26. See Beahrs, *Unity and Multiplicity*, and Crabtree, *Multiple Man*. To be fair, even though Crabtree claims that "whether we realize it or not, we all experience ourselves as multiple" (Crabtree, *Multiple Man*, 249), he does believe there is "a unifying agent" (Crabtree, *Multiple Man*, 255). Beahrs also posits a "Cohesive Self" (Beahrs, *Unity and Multiplicity*, 182-183), but as Crabtree notes, "the unity of the Cohesive Self in this schema seems rather weak" (Crabtree, *Multiple Man*, 255).

27. See Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 226.

28. Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 229.

29. "By 1986 Coons... estimated that 6000 cases had been diagnosed in North America, but many clinicians believe that this is a gross overestimate." (Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 90.) It should be noted, however, that Ross himself estimates that "MPD has a point prevalence of somewhere between 1 in 50 and 1 in 10,000 persons in urban North America." (Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 90.)

30. Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 67.

31. Ross describes the position as follows:

Women are sexually exploited in advertising, films, locker room jokes, the workplace, the home, and the massage parlor (a short list) in North America. Sexual abuse of girls by men is the earliest and most extreme aspect of the socialization of women into subservient roles. The patriarchal role for women, at least in our society, is a combination of sex object, property, doormat, and punching bag. MPD, then, is caused primarily by a sick social structure. (Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 68.)

There is no doubt that this is true. However, to say this is clearly to provide only the necessary and not the sufficient conditions for MPD. I should add, however, that although diagnosed multiples are primarily female ("the female:male ratio in clinical series of MPD is 9:1;" (Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 68)), it is a common assumption among male clinicians that the real ratio of female to male multiples is one to one, and that the undiagnosed males are "probably in prison." (Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 68.) See also, Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 15. This seems a highly gratuitous assumption, ignoring as it does the high correlation between childhood sexual abuse and the development of MPD. The assumption is made because there is no sexual differentiation as far as the hypnotizability of subjects is concerned, and because hypnosis is seen as having something to do with MPD. MPD should therefore be equally distributed between the sexes in the general population. However, all the evidence to date points to the fact that it is not.

32. Ray Aldridge-Morris, *Multiple Personality: An exercise in deception* (Hove, East Sussex: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1989), 85-86.

33. Aldridge-Morris, *Multiple Personality*, 93.

34. This is something now universally agreed upon by writers on hypnosis.

35. Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 99.

36. Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 148.

37. See Roy Udolf, *Handbook of Hypnosis for Professionals* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1987), 163-172.

38. Udolf feels that the harder it is for a subject to respond to a posthypnotic suggestion, the greater the likelihood that the subject will slip back into a trance state in order to perform the suggested act. He cites Erikson and Erikson's paper ("Concerning the nature and character of post-hypnotic behavior") in which they claim that "close observation disclosed that a special mental state invariably develops when a cue for the performance of a posthypnotic behavior is given, and this special mental state disrupts the subject's ordinary waking behavior." (Udolf, *Handbook of Hypnosis*, 163.) However, this finding has been disputed by Reyher, who gave subjects posthypnotic suggestions "and in no case did the signal indicating the presence of a hypnotic state occur." (Udolf, *Handbook of Hypnosis*, 171.) Udolf goes on to point out that "the types of suggestions used (e.g., the removal of a shoe, laughing, or examining objects on a tabletop) were neither very difficult nor anxiety producing." (Udolf, *Handbook of Hypnosis*, 171.) Now, it is clear that many alters, when they are out, are fully conscious. However, the task which they would have to perform "post-hypnotically" is extremely complex: alters have to be a different person with different memories and behavioural patterns. This does not seem to tally with what is known about posthypnotic responses, then.

39. See Udolf, *Handbook of Hypnosis*, 164.

40. Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 139.

41. Because the topic at issue here is not trauma, but one specific response to it, I have not endeavoured to define trauma very rigorously. However, my definition is close enough to one given by Bessel A. van de Kolk to be serviceable: "The response to psychological trauma has been described as a phasic reliving and denial, with alternating intrusive and numbing responses." (Bessel A. van der Kolk, "The Psychological Consequences of Overwhelming Life Experiences," in *Psychological Trauma*, ed. Bessel A. van der

Kolk [Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, Inc., 1987], 3.)

42. "Both dissociative and conversion reactions have been related to overwhelming experiences." (van der Kolk, "The Psychological Consequences of Overwhelming Life Experiences," in *Psychological Trauma*, 6.) Later van der Kolk says:

Dissociative processes are mobilized as defenses against severe stress: multiple personalities alternate in the face of further stress and conflicts. MPD illustrates how dissociation, and its resulting loss of memory for the trauma, allows the original distress to be walled off, while leaving the patient with a tendency to react to subsequent stress as if it were a recurrence of the trauma. The patient experiences the emotional intensity of original trauma without conscious awareness of the historical reference. (van der Kolk, "The Psychological Consequences of Overwhelming Life Experiences," in *Psychological Trauma*, 7.)

43. Zick Rubin and Elton B. McNeil, *The Psychology of Being Human* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1981), 126.

44. In general, definitions of dissociation are highly metaphorical, and invoke imagery of physical contact between different parts of the brain. "Two--or more--mental processes can be said to be dissociated if they coexist or alternate without becoming connected or influencing one another." This comes from *The Oxford Companion to The Mind*, ed. Richard L. Gregory (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 197. Beahrs says that "dissociation, in the broadest sense, refers to the mechanism or combination of mechanisms by which two or more collections of mental units can be kept separate from one another." He refers to "dissociation proper, defined by Hilgard (1977) as a condition in which customary roles lose continuity with one another." However, he doesn't appear happy with either of these definitions. "I am not certain that dissociation can be explained any better than existence, consciousness or hypnosis, possibly, like them, calling for acceptance as a basic given." (Beahrs, *Unity and Multiplicity*, 61.)

Aldridge-Morris says that "dissociation includes a 'splitting' of the personality, varies in degree, can be more or less conscious and can operate at different levels in different guises." (Aldridge-Morris, *Multiple Personality*, 73.) I find this quite vague and unhelpful. Similarly: "to dissociate means to sever the association of one thing from another." (Edward J. Frischholz, "The

Relationship Among Dissociation, Hypnosis, and Child Abuse in the Development of Multiple Personality Disorder," in *Childhood Antecedents of Multiple Personality*, ed. Richard Kluft [Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, Inc., 1985], 108.) Putnam is much more technical-sounding, but still doesn't say much:

Dissociation can be defined as a complex psychophysiological process, with psychodynamic triggers, that produces an alteration in the person's consciousness. During this process, thoughts, feelings, and experiences are not integrated into the individual's awareness or memory in the normal way. (Frank Putnam, "Dissociation as a Response to Extreme Trauma," in *Childhood Antecedents of Multiple Personality*, 66.)

Colin Ross, straightforward as usual, claims simply that "there is not a good definition of dissociation." (Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 86.) The definition of dissociation which comes closest to the way I will define it later on is that given by Crabtree:

An individual may have an experience which he wants to forget or a set of fantasies or drives which he does not want to acknowledge. He succeeds in getting rid of them by splitting them off from his conscious awareness. This is called dissociation. However, his success is only partial, for these things continue to exist in his subconscious mind as encapsulated units held back behind a barrier of amnesia. (Crabtree, *Multiple Man*, 35-36.)

45. Charles Rycroft, "Dissociation of the Personality," in *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, ed. Richard L. Gregory (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 198.

46. Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 86.

47. Ernest R. Hilgard, *Divided Consciousness: Multiple Controls in Human Thought and Action* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1977), 1.

48. Hilgard, *Divided Consciousness*, 1.

49. Hilgard, *Divided Consciousness*, 1-2.

50. Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 221.

51. Hilgard, *Divided Consciousness*, 218-219.

52. Hilgard, *Divided Consciousness*, 219.

53. Hilgard, *Divided Consciousness*, 222-223.
54. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #47,
22.
55. Hume, *Treatise*, 252.
56. Hume, *Treatise*, 259.
57. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 79.
58. Theodore Sarbin, "Self-Deception in the Claims of Hypnosis Subjects," in *Self-Deception: An Adaptive Mechanism?*, ed. Joan S. Lockard and Delory L. Paulhus (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1988), 107.
59. Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 99.
60. It should be clear from the foregoing that I disagree almost totally with such a model. However, because this model is essentially irrelevant to what I am saying, and because it is already proclaimed by Bliss to be a model, there is no point in discussing it in depth here. However, the chapter in which the model is elaborated upon is a very interesting one ("A Theory of Hypnosis," in Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 98-116). Of especial interest to me is the way Bliss flirts with the idea which is at the centre of this thesis, that of meaning. If I can ignore his claim that "memory is a component of behavior" (Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 101)--this does not even make sense outside of behaviourism--what he says is interesting: "memories remain distinct and vigorous only when they are reinforced and used--otherwise they fade, recede, and disappear." (Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 101.) I interpret this to mean: memories fade if they are not included in what I have called narrative memory, if they do not form part of the story I tell myself about myself. Bliss also says that "not only is there an internal focus, but its intensity is a function of its meaningfulness. Its significance for the patient plays an important role in determining the degree of his or her fixed focus." (Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 106.) I could not agree more.
61. Although I will not go into it here, I think the fact that we pay greater or less attention to many things at the same time adequately explains what psychologists sometimes term "coconsciousness."
62. It hardly makes sense to say they *cannot* be happening simultaneously. Indeed, to claim this is to be duped by the computer model of the brain, where instructions

must be processed serially. If I experience thoughts as simultaneous, why should I not say that they are so?

63. "MPD patients rarely come for treatment with obvious or overt multiplicity." (Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 93.) This is not to say that *malingerers* do not present themselves for therapy claiming to be multiples.

64. It is hardly surprising that multiples feel the same emotions as many women who have been raped, as the vast majority are in fact girls who have been raped. That is: they feel ashamed and guilty, thinking that they must have somehow provoked the attack, or that they could somehow have prevented it from happening. Because, in their opinion, they failed to stop it, and perhaps even were responsible for it, they feel they are dirty, worthless beings to whom *this sort of thing ought to happen*.

65. See Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 109. "MPD is an elaborate pretending. The patient *pretends* that she is more than one person, in a very convincing manner. She actually believes it herself." (I should mention that Ross uses the questionable practice of identifying the MPD patient with the female pronoun throughout his book, on the grounds that most MPD victims are female. I find this questionable because he also uniformly identifies the therapist with the male pronoun. Does this not perpetuate the very stereotype that the feminist analysis of MPD rails against?) He continues:

Alter personalities are highly stylized enactments of inner conflicts, drives, memories, and feelings. At the same time they are dissociated packets of behavior developed for transaction with the outside world. They are fragmented parts of one person: There is only one person. The patient's conviction that there is more than one person in her is a dissociative delusion and should not be compounded by a *folie a deux* on the part of the therapist. (Ross, *Multiple Personality Disorder*, 109.)

66. Udolf, *Handbook of Hypnosis*, 1.

67. Kenneth Bowers and Thomas M. Davidson, "A Neodissociative Critique of Spanos's Social-Psychological Model of Hypnosis," in *Theories of Hypnosis*, ed. Steven Jay Lynn and Judith W. Rhue (New York: Guildford Press, 1991), 105.

68. Bowers, "A Neodissociative Critique," 106.

69. See Hilgard, *Divided Consciousness*, 216-241.

70. Nicholas P. Spanos, "A Sociocognitive Approach to Hypnosis," in *Theories of Hypnosis*, ed. Steven Jay Lynn and Judith W. Rhue (New York: Guildford Press, 1991), 324.

71. Spanos, "A Sociocognitive Approach," 324.

72. See Bowers, "A Neodissociative Critique," and Aldridge-Morris, *Multiple Personality* for more on this.

73. William C. Coe and Theodore Sarbin, "Role Theory: Hypnosis from a Dramaturgical and Narrational Perspective," in *Theories of Hypnosis*, ed. Steven Jay Lynn and Judith W. Rhue (New York: Guildford Press, 1991), 317.

74. Graham Wagstaff, "Compliance, Belief, and Semantics in Hypnosis: A Nonstate, Sociocognitive Perspective," in *Theories of Hypnosis*, ed. Steven Jay Lynn and Judith W. Rhue (New York: Guildford Press, 1991), 365.

75. Wagstaff, "Compliance, Belief," 370-71.

76. Wagstaff, "Compliance, Belief," 370.

77. Wagstaff, "Compliance, Belief," 371.

78. Wagstaff, "Compliance, Belief," 365.

79. Wagstaff, "Compliance, Belief," 380.

80. Bennett Braun, "Psychophysiologic Phenomena in Multiple Personality Disorder," *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, 26, no. 2 (October 1983): 129.

81. Thurman Mott, "The Role of Hypnosis in Psychotherapy," *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, 24, no. 4 (April 1982): 242.

82. Daniel P. Brown and Erika Fromm, *Hypnotherapy and Hypnoanalysis* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1986), 113.

83. Campbell Perry and Jean-Roch Laurence, "Hypnosis in the Forensic Context: Trial by Fantasy?", *Australian Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, 17, no. 1 (May 1989): 28.

84. Kevin McConkey, "The Construction and Resolution of Experience and Behavior in Hypnosis," in *Theories of Hypnosis*, ed. Steven Jay Lynn and Judith W. Rhue (New York: Guildford Press, 1991), 558.

85. Brian R. Clifford and Jane Scott, "Individual and Situational Factors in Eyewitness Testimony," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 63, no. 3 (1978): 358.

86. Perry and Laurence, "Hypnosis in the Forensic Context: Trial by Fantasy?", 24.

87. Jean-Roch Laurence and Campbell Perry, "Hypnotically Created Memory Among Highly Hypnotizable Subjects," *Science*, 222 (November 1983): 523.

88. Jean-Roch Laurence, "Errors of memory: system failure or adaptive functioning?", paper presented at the 49th Convention of the Canadian Psychological Association as part of a symposium entitled "Errors of memory: system failure or adaptive functioning?" (Chair: J.R. Laurence), Montreal, Quebec, Canada, June 10-12, 1998: 7.

89. Richard J. Ofshe, "Inadvertent Hypnosis During Interrogation: False Confession Due to Dissociative State; Mis-Identified Multiple Personality and the Satanic Cult Hypothesis," *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, 40, no. 3 (July 1992): 127.

90. Ofshe, "Inadvertent Hypnosis," 133.

91. Ofshe, "Inadvertent Hypnosis," 132.

92. This is to be contrasted with gullibility, which is the predisposition towards believing *anything*, whether a new belief tallies with what the subject knows about the world or not.

93. *The Oxford Companion to The Mind*, 222.

94. Peter Reveen, *The Superconscious World* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1987), 20. Reveen uses the word "superconsciousness" to mean "hypnotic trance," feeling that the word "hypnosis," with its etymological link to the concept of sleep, has been the cause of many popular misconceptions.

95. Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 107.

96. Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 107-108.

97. Reveen, *The Superconscious World*, 94.

98. Reveen, *The Superconscious World*, 79. This passage is footnoted as follows: Ian Wilson, *Mind Out of Time*, London, 1981, 101.

99. Reveen, *The Superconscious World*, 70.

100. Reveen, *The Superconscious World*, 73.

101. Reveen, *The Superconscious World*, 73-74.

102. I am not in the least saying that the sexual abuse suffered by MPD patients is fantasized, but only that specific details of it may be. The MPD patient is typically someone whose self-esteem has been shattered by sexual abuse. As all MPD therapists attest, a hallmark of the MPD patient is to test the therapist repeatedly to see if he or she will repeat the abuse the patient suffered at the hands of other caregivers. It is in fact in the patient's best interest to make the abuse as terrible as possible in the therapist's eyes in order to solidify the trust he or she feels for the therapist.

103. See Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 120.
"Personalities sometimes speak the unadorned truth."

104. Reveen, *The Superconscious World*, 21-22.

105. Aldridge-Morris, *Multiple Personality*, 32. The paper he is citing is C.H. Thigpen and H.M. Cleckley, "On the incidence of multiple personality disorder," *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, 32, 1984, 63-66.

106. Crabtree, *Multiple Man*, 31.

107. Crabtree, *Multiple Man*, 31.

108. Crabtree, *Multiple Man*, 33.

109. Crabtree, *Multiple Man*, 31.

110. Bliss, *Multiple Personality*, 217.

Conclusions

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), #6.54, 151.

2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #464, 133.

3. Plato *Republic*, 415, p. 659.

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