

interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

January 1987

Volume 15 Number 1

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Volume 15 number 1

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Annual subscription rates individual \$15; institutional \$18; student (3-year limit) \$7.50. There are three issues of INTERPRETATION a year.

Address for correspondence INTERPRETATION, Queens College, Flushing, N.Y. 11367, U.S.A.

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Delimiting Philosophy

WILL MORRISEY

The Limits of Analysis. By Stanley Rosen. (New York: Basic Books, 1980. 279 pp.: cloth \$8.95.)

Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy. By Bernard Williams. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985. 230 pp.: cloth \$17.50, paper \$7.95.)

Is 'political philosophy' an oxymoron? If the philosopher loves wisdom, and wisdom is knowledge of the truth, then myths and conventions—along with force the stuff of politics—must go unloved by him. Insofar as a philosopher will defend himself from unlovely nonphilosophers, he may avail himself of politic lies. He will not love lies. His philosophy will be political, superficially—that is, if expressed in public, it will be expressed prudently.

But obviously there is a truth about lies: that they *are* lies. Myths and conventions deserve attention because there is truth to be loved about them. Political philosophy also means love of wisdom about politics.

Only somewhat less obviously, if it is true that human beings are social and political animals, then examining their lies can help us tell the truth about them. In pointing away from the truth, lies and conventions may serve as weather vanes; reverse them, and see where nature is coming from. (Being human, wind-bag politicians have a more-than-meteorological complexity, but the metaphor will serve if not taken too seriously.) Moreover, politics concerns more than force and fraud. It concerns claims about justice, which may not be fraudulent. The weather vane of politics also points to where human nature wants human beings to go.

It is notoriously difficult to trace nature to its origins. Following nature to its ends appears easier, but modern science, emphasizing process, questions this appearance. Whether or not we must end with mere opinions about origins and ends, some contemporary philosophers see that we must at least begin with opinions: the Aristotelian procedure Descartes tried to overcome. In different ways, Stanley Rosen and Bernard Williams intend to guard reason from rationality—in Rosen's words, from "the dream of Enlightenment, or full wakefulness," which "leads us toward the ultimately destructive effort to transform the world into a concept" at the expense of the conceiver, who then "gains his vengeance by *deconstructing* the completed structures of the analyst." Writing more exclusively on ethics, Williams contends that "certain interpretations of reason and clear understanding as discursive rationality have damaged ethical thought itself and distorted our conceptions of it." Both writers seek to rehabilitate (recover and modify) "old notions" (Rosen) and "ancient thought" (Williams).

Stanley Rosen argues that the contemporary emphasis on philosophic analysis neglects synthesis, and overlooks the ‘ground’ of both. He divides his book into five chapters of three, four, five, four, and three sections, respectively—nineteen in all. One might say that Rosen does to analytical philosophy what *Il Principe* does to Christianity, were not Rosen sufficiently respectful of analytical philosophy to refute it on its own terms. This refutation takes three of the five chapters; the results can be summarized, albeit at the expense of details that make the results convincing.

Chapter One concerns the relation of analysis to intuition. “In terms going back to Plato, the ‘What is X?’ question cannot be totally severed from the ‘Who am I?’ question.” In order to analyze X, divide it into its structural elements, one must first perceive it, and not necessarily in the physical way of sense-perceptions. (One ‘sees’ justice in his mind’s eye, or nowhere.) A philosopher must reasonably decide when to start analyzing and when to stop. Analysis by itself cannot tell him *when*. Nor can synthesis. Rosen calls “intuition” the faculty of seeing a unity and of reasonably deciding the limits of analysis and synthesis. Intuition or intelligence cannot be analyzed, because it has no structure. Rather, it is the capacity to perceive structure. Theory means “looking-into”; ultimately, our analysis, our *talking about structures*, must be preceded by a “look-into” them, a silence not violated by “talking-about.” Platonism holds that intuition sees structures “as they are or show themselves, and is thus passive or receptive.” Kantianism holds that intuition participates actively in the way objects show themselves, constructs them according to universal, invariant principles within each human mind, principles called collectively the “transcendental ego.” Analytical philosophers often vacillate between one doctrine and the other. Rosen thus calls for more self-consciousness among contemporary analysts—that is, consciousness of what their analytical ‘selves’ are doing, and consciousness of the ‘self.’

Analysts dislike “psychologism,” by which they mean the intrusion of deceptive individual-subjective illusions into the analytical process. But they go too far, denying the very intuition that alone makes analysis intelligible. This makes no sense, and the attempt to account for intuition by making it into a structure only leads to extreme subjectivism. Contemporary philosophy oscillates between mathematics and solipsism, construction and deconstruction—all subphilosophic. The work of W. V. O. Quine, for example, yields “a doctrine born in the desire for mathematical rigor,” but “terminat[ing] in conventionalism.”

Rosen sees that intuition, being unanalyzable, can be approached only with metaphors. Generally speaking, the Greeks emphasized metaphors of sight, the moderns those of touch, particularly grasp. Aristotle to some extent combines or alternates these metaphors. (The poet Yeats called him, in contrast to Plato, “solider Aristotle”—solider, but not yet a manipulator of material things.) With Descartes, “intuition comes to be understood as sensation rather than as formal

vision”; “since there is no noetic vision of the form, we must constructively grasp that form from sensation and account for it in categories of discursive thinking.” For the moderns, we finally know only what we make. Modern knowledge is manipulative in two ways: it knows how to manipulate; it believes it knows only insofar as it does manipulate. “The object is the project of the thinking subject.” For Kant, this subject is still in some sense permanent, “transcendental,” but as soon as reason itself is called a construction, “philosophy is replaced by historicism or poetry.”

Chapter Two concerns essences, recently much maligned. Rosen argues, however, that “analytical philosophy has not eliminated the traditional notion of essences”; it only believes it has. The modern attempt to define essences by sets of predicates—by propositional speech, by concepts, without intuition—leads to this mistaken denial. “What we need to do is not to dispense with analysis, but to open our eyes” and see that “the unity of the substance is not reducible to the discursive list of its element-predicates.” Essences are the objective or worldly counterparts of intuition; without them, we could never distinguish species, as we could not distinguish between the lion-look and the individual lion, between ‘lion-ness’ and Leo.

Analytical philosophy depends upon the truth of this, although it won’t admit it. It, too, identifies objects by their properties and sorts them out accordingly. “*Reference depends upon intuition*”—intuition of essences. Analysts disguise this from themselves.

The writings of the logician Saul Kripke attempt to evade such Greek lessons by positing the notion of “possible worlds”—worlds different from this one except that they too are governed by the principle of noncontradiction. This attempt to replace nature with *human* creation-from-nothing fails because imagination expressed in human λόγος “lacks the creative power of divine logos.” Λόγος and φύσις are not so easily sundered. Mere humanism cannot mediate the conflict between Athens and Jerusalem.

Rosen is no uncritical admirer of the Greeks. He faults Aristotle for failing to account for individuals. Aristotle’s propositional logic goes too far in the direction of the modern analysts, and allows him to say “nothing rational about individual human beings or events.” For that, one needs an understanding of the distinction between essence and a property of an individual instance of an essence, an existent.

Chapter Three concerns existence and nonexistence. The eighteenth-century German philosophers invented ‘ontology,’ which “means something like ‘science of being.’” Its two prevalent forms in this century—Heideggerian and analytical—both misapply conceptual rigor, although the first then abandons it. As with intuition and essence, Rosen distinguishes between existents, “what is phenomenologically present,” and the sum of the analytical properties of existents. The *science* of being requires that Being “conform to the principle of

noncontradiction.” This establishes possibility, but does not establish actuality, the phenomena themselves. They too, like essence, must at some point be perceived intuitively, not just analytically.

“The religious conception of the radical contingency of genesis combines with Platonic formalism and modern science to produce the contemporary view that logical possibility and hypothetical necessity are equivalent to metaphysics, which in turn makes ‘nature’ dispensable, at least for the philosopher.” Rosen finds this view inadequate, because it loses sight of unity, of being, and loses its way in the many, in existence. Plato’s *Theaetetus* examines the problem of “the aporia intrinsic to the equation of the whole with the sum of its parts,” and presents “rhetorical and poetical”—not analytical—“accounts of the psychology of the philosopher.” This is not *mere* rhetoric, *mere* poetry, but a deeply reasonable response to the problem of the one and the many, a problem that solidier and more scientific Aristotle does not in Rosen’s judgment solve. Analysis is not intelligible unless one sees, and sees as significant, the unity analyzed; “analysis is annihilation unless we can see what we are doing.” Analytical philosophers restrict themselves in principle from seeing what they are doing.

Rosen titles the central section of Chapter Three “Socrates’ Dream.” It is also the central section of the book. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates dreams “of describing the world in terms of an alphabet of simple elements.” Plato never forgets that one must also account for the dreaming as well as the dream, an account requiring a kind of rhetoric that can “address problems . . . not amenable to analytical resolution.” Indeed, “the Platonic dialogue is a daydream of the whole”—contrasting with the writings of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, which “remind us of monologues in search of dialogue.” For Plato, unlike Aristotle and the moderns, “*logos* includes *mythos*” along with analysis. Dreaming “contributes to making [the] unity [of the whole] visible”; therefore, “the logic we require for the analysis of that unity is, so to speak, psychoanalytical rather than mathematical.” The myths of Platonic daydreams combine hearsay, or opinion, with visual/intuitive evidence. The myths may vary from generation to generation, but each points to a unity, a *context* of analysis, which does not vary. Hegel attempts to unify the activities of poetry and mathematics, myth and analysis, but Plato “in my opinion quite intentionally omits to suggest anything like a dialectical logic.” Hegel succumbs to the temptation to try to clarify the picture: “The great difficulty I myself face in developing an explicit account of my own position,” Rosen writes, “is that I am advocating that *we leave the picture blurred*,” and become neither poets nor mathematicians but both, and more—philosophers.

From existence Rosen turns to its negation. The discussion of nonexistence occupies the central pages of the book. Rosen shows that we intuit the counterpart of being, nothingness, and the counterpart of existence, nonexistence. Thus to think of a nonexistent—say, a unicorn—is not to think of nothing at all, inasmuch as we have a concept of unicorns even if the phenomenological world has no unicorns in it. More provocatively, Rosen argues that we can even intuit non-

existents that are self-contradictory. Round squares have no nature, but we can still somehow think of them. This prepares the way for Rosen's later argument in favor of Hegelian logic; the point does not make sense to me, as I personally find the term 'round square' to be sayable but inconceivable. Nonetheless, Rosen's basic point is well taken: "If I am puzzled by nothingness, my puzzlement cannot be resolved by the assurance that I was actually thinking about something, and so was falsely puzzled." We intuit nothingness as well as being, a problem for the Platonic/Aristotelian doctrine that "there is no logical contrary to a concept," that nothingness is mere otherness, that Being and existents alone are thinkable. Rosen here edges closer to Jerusalem than Athens will go.

An elaboration of the problem of nothingness concludes the third chapter, the last on analysis. Here Rosen judges Hegel to be more instructive than the Greeks. If, to use the previous example, a 'round square' is an example of "the altogether not," and if we find this example inconceivable, then in some sense "we must think what we are warned is unthinkable," and, moreover, "we must be able to describe the finite *nothing* since it is delimited, and hence possesses predicates." Hegel designed his "logic of contradiction" to solve this problem. To do this one must look at "the activity of the analyst," at "consciousness." The questions to raise may be: To what extent does nothingness delimit *nature*? Or is nothingness 'merely' a *logical* necessity, not to be found 'out there'? If so, does this not falsify Greek logic insofar as it intends to reflect nature?

Chapter Four concerns what is delimited by nothingness, namely, the Whole. Failure to conceive of the Whole, "something less than a determinate concept, and something more than a vague apprehension," leads to a "mutilation" of experience, a "sharp discontinuity of theory and practice," an exaltation of *l'esprit géométrique* at the expense of *l'esprit de finesse*. Philosophy begins with wondering about the whole, and its "fundamental presupposition" is "the intelligibility of experience." Common sense investigation of politics or physics ("the intention is the same") can lead to the transcendence of common sense—and therefore its preservation, as common-sense understandings often contradict one another. This investigation is governed by one's own consciousness: "We are provided by our very being with measures and intuitions concerning the use of these measures." "Philosophy is the dream, not merely of the whole, but of a rational account of the whole"; although it can never "thoroughly waken into wisdom," it can distinguish between dreaming and wakefulness, being in between them, a day-dreaming. "The whole is the context of dreamer and analyst." In the chapter's remaining three sections Rosen discusses three philosophers "for our own purposes: self-knowledge or philosophical psychiatry." The philosophers are Plato, Fichte, and Nietzsche.

"The Platonic emphasis upon common sense and good judgment serves as the background against which such fantastic doctrines as the Ideas or pure Forms are developed." Balancing sense and non-sense occurs "by means of our tact or sense of the fitting," our *esprit de finesse*, not by means of rules or methods.

("The way in which we come to understand the context, and so the limits, of analysis is more like political judgment than it is like pure theory or technical production. It must be emphasized that I am *not* subordinating analysis to a political doctrine.") Plato's *Sophist* consists of an exploration of universal method, examining *διδάξεις* not *φρονησεις*, analysis not judgment. This 'Cartesian' or protocartesian aspect of the dialogue centers on the Eleatic Stranger's attempt to substitute mathematics for experience, an attempt foreshadowing the actual career of Descartes, first among the several boy-philosophers of modernity. Plato overcomes the extremes of purely mathematical thinking and of sophistry by distinguishing theory, production, and practice while weaving them together "as strands in a web." Plato sees that "we cannot see originals except through images," that direct insight is beyond human capacity, and that we approach originals through the everyday world, whose limits may obstruct but also moderate us. "[S]ophistry is the dream of the whole expressed as the will to power," a "metaphor for the desire to satisfy desire." Without *philosophic* reasonableness—a reasonableness that honors rationality or analytical thinking while keeping it in its appropriate place—"we shall have no alternative but to decide to live on the basis of pleasure," Rosen contends, perhaps omitting the possibility of living on the basis of revealed religion.

"It is a far cry from common sense to Fichte's transcendental or dialectical logic." Fichte accepts the Platonic duality of original and image, but makes the more ambitious claim that one can move from "the domain of images to the domain of originality" by analyzing them. In so doing, the philosopher arrives at "the Absolute," which is not outside of himself but is rather "pure consciousness." "The Absolute, in thinking itself (as in Aristotle) 'creates' the world in its own image (as in Christianity)." The Absolute thinks dialectically, and therefore represents a non-Greek sense of intuition, one that *produces* both subjects and objects. Both theory and practice become production. The Absolute is a sort of vast *method*, itself without definite content but somehow productive of definite subjects and definite objects—a rationalized Creator-God. Fichte depreciates the image-world of subjects and objects; he cannot "offer an explanation of it in its own terms." Fichte's emphasis on consciousness makes him superior to analytical philosophers, but his failure to provide a plausible account of the unity, the connectedness, of the original and the image-world makes his doctrine inferior to Hegel's. To *rationalize* the Creator-God, to make Him into contentless Method, is to confuse him with the nothing out of which He created something. Rosen next turns to Nietzsche.

"Nietzsche presents us with the most powerful and profound attempt to reconcile creativity with nothingness of the past hundred years." He attempts to explain order as "the activity of chaos and not of a separate principle." Order, "significant form," is then purely temporal, temporary. "Aristotle's forms are preserved forever within time by thought thinking itself: the divinization of circularity. Nietzsche replaces the pure intellectual god by Dionysus, or pure think-

ing by the will to power.” Thus *forgetfulness*, the covering-over of chaos by human assertions of order (originating in chaos and eventually returning to it) replaces Platonic recollection. Problem: If art “is worth more than the truth, what is the value of the truth of the doctrine of art?” Rosen suggests that Nietzschean attempt to represent creativity as chaos dissolves any nonimaginary distinction between high and low, noble and base, and thus resembles, of all things repugnant to Nietzsche, a sort of Christian egalitarianism.

Chapter Five concerns the world represented *as* a concept—a representation made in different ways by both Kant and Hegel. This denigration of intuition fails, leading either to extrarational modes of thought, or to ill-advised attempts to resuscitate Enlightenment doctrine. Rosen may have some criticism for one of his teachers, Leo Strauss, and surely for many of Strauss’ students, in contending that *διαίρεσις* is considered a *τέχνη* by the Greeks, and the failure to understand this “leads to an oversimplification of Greek philosophy, and thus to an exaggeration of the difference between classical and modern thought.” Plato himself understands that “the problem of the conceptualization of the world is

already implicit in the philosophizing of the natural consciousness”; the difference between Plato and modernity may be seen in Plato’s acknowledgment that intuition moderates analysis. Kant, for example, observes no such limits. Even his ethical doctrine has a geometric, rule-obeying character. “Kant’s depreciation of happiness,” his strictures against “eudaimonism” in ethics, comport with “his denunciation of dreaming”; “neither is nor can be rule-governed.” ‘Progress’ becomes “the practical version of the infinite progress toward complete scientific truth.” Unfortunately, what Kant calls the Copernican Revolution in morals rests on literally that: a revolution or circularity. We know only what we make, we know for certain only what originates in ourselves and, if we are moralistic subjectivists, we then *posit* this subjectivity as transcendental, the better to reinforce our self-made rules or ‘duties.’

Hegel conceives the phenomenal world as “the self-presentation of the noumenal world.” His dialectical logic can explain change, instability, as Aristotelian logic cannot. Unfortunately, this dialectic represents an attempt to conceptualize the world, doing so in a more profound and fully conscious way than analytical ‘philosophers’ do, but nonetheless doing what they do: trying to transform “traditional rhetoric and dialectic into scientific knowledge.” Hegel’s history of philosophy incorporates nothingness: at the ‘end of history’ when all basic philosophic positions have “presented themselves”—the *Phenomenology of Spirit* attempts to show that this has now occurred—“the result is mutual cancellation.” “The transition from the *Phenomenology* to the *Logic* is then one from nihilism to science. . . .” But at this transition point, Rosen observes, one must have recourse to intuition: “We must now judge, on the basis of the heretofore contradictory results of human experience, *what to do next*.” We are back to Plato. “For modern philosophy generally, and above all for Hegel, the Platonic harmony of opposites is too fragile to be preserved.” Hegel wants to satisfy hu-

man desire, and for all men, not only philosophers. He “intends to fulfill the Enlightenment”—a robust project, not a fragile insight.

Rosen distrusts classical logic insofar as it fails to account for individuation and change. On these matters, he may prefer Hegelian logic. But he remains “a Platonist in this specific sense: poetry, science, or any human activity will corrupt us if it is separated from philosophy. It follows that philosophy will corrupt us if it is transformed entirely into science, poetry, or academic scholasticism.” Philosophy should “preserve the delicate balance between man and the cosmos” in part by balancing what academics now call the various ‘disciplines.’ “As a Platonist, I conceive of philosophy as a dialogue, not a system. We progress in philosophy by clarifying the conditions of the debate.”

Bernard Williams divides his book into ten chapters that are very far from being commandments. He describes it as a specimen of “analytical philosophy,” involving “argument, distinctions,” and “moderately plain speech” except when “technical” language becomes “a necessity.” Because the same could be said of a barroom debate about cars, this will not do as even a superficial description of analytical philosophy. But Williams is something more than an analyst; he is a skeptic, and his skepticism does not stop at the portals of the analytic temple. He intends to question whether any philosopher, analytical or not, can formulate a coherent ethical theory.

While Rosen centrally concerns himself with “Socrates’ dream” of describing the world in terms of an alphabet of simple elements, Williams begins with “Socrates’ question”: “How one should live.” He doubts that philosophy by itself can answer this question. Reason is both less and more powerful than rationalists say. It cannot establish a ‘third term’ above, below, between, or around two desiderata of different kinds. It can help to judge these desiderata, one against the other, by comparison.

[The] assumption that two considerations cannot be rationally weighed against each other unless there is a common consideration in terms of which they can be compared is at once very powerful and utterly baseless. Quite apart from the ethical, aesthetic considerations can be weighed against economic ones (for instance) without being an application of them, and without their both being an example of a third kind of consideration.

But if this is true, then (to continue Williams’ metaphor), what is the meaning of “weighing”? What is the scale? What gravity makes these “considerations” weigh something? If you wish you could give your wife a castle in Spain, find you cannot afford it, and instead bestow a mere ruby pendant, you have adjusted two goods, beauty and economic solvency, on the scale or “common consideration” of ‘the good,’ in particular the good for this husband and wife. Williams admits this in asking, “How has one the most reason to live?” or, What is the good life “for human beings as such?”—of which this is a particular instance, re-

quiring a particular solution. But he doubts that reason can find the human good, or that ethical considerations are a form of knowledge.

The foundation or “Archimedean point” of philosophic ethics is “the idea of rational action.” Williams objects that rational action is not coterminous with ethics because, for example, two individuals with no “shared ethical understanding” may nonetheless agree to ensure one another’s survival. But this objection falsely assumes that survival itself has rational but no ethical status. Heroes, dead or alive, demonstrate otherwise (one way or the other), as there is no reason to suppose a Raoul Wallenberg did not act for the good, and for the good rationally considered. The agreement to ensure mutual survival occurs precisely where the individuals’ “ethical understandings” intersect. Williams devotes a chapter each to Aristotle and Kant, whose very different ethical theories resemble one another in at least one respect: Both set down a foundation for ethics, and call it reasonable. He then critically discusses the more recent ethical theories of contractualism and utilitarianism, as seen in the writings of John Rawls and R. M. Hare, respectively.

Williams identifies the foundation of Aristotelian ethics as human nature teleologically understood. He translates the human end, *εὐδαιμονία*, as “well being,” not happiness, because it is “a matter of the shape of one’s whole life” and not a transitory feeling. He sees Aristotle’s distinction between theoretical and practical reason, and acutely describes Aristotelian virtue as “intelligent disposition.” Dismissing Aristotle’s discussion of virtue as a balance between extremes, he asserts that “the theory oscillates between an unhelpful analytical model (which Aristotle does not consistently follow) and a substantively depressing doctrine in favor of moderation.” He deigns to provide no further arguments to substantiate this charge. He finds a predicament in Aristotle’s emphasis on habituation; individuals cannot be responsible for their characters and amenable to practical reason if they are creatures of habit. This overlooks Aristotle’s suggestion that habit liberates us from passions that run to excess, thereby enabling us to reason practically. Williams agrees that “the formation of ethical dispositions is a natural process in human beings,” and that “it is natural to human beings to live by convention.” But he denies that Aristotle’s psychology adequately provides firm standards for judgment “of one kind of life against others.” Again, this criticism depends too much upon currently fashionable assumptions concerning natural teleology (rejected) and the varieties of ‘behavior’ unearthed by modern anthropologists (uncritically accepted) to satisfy any but those already convinced that modern science supersedes Aristotelianism in every relevant way.

Kant rejects naturalistic arguments in ethics because he regards nature as nonteleological. Instead he tries to ground ethics on human rationality, conceived as universalist lawgiving, the Categorical Imperative. A rational agent is a moral agent, a claim Kant fortifies with his concept of the Transcendental Ego. Williams calls the latter “extravagant metaphysical luggage.” He cannot see any way to continue the Kantian trip without it, because without universal, innate

principles Kantian ethics becomes too theoretical, too abstract. The line between pure and practical reason blurs, with ethical problems treated too much like those of science and mathematics. "The *I* that stands back in rational reflection from my desires is still the *I* that has those desires and will, empirically and concretely, act; and it is not, simply by standing back in reflection, converted to a being whose fundamental interest lies in the harmony of all interests," that is, in universal ethical rulemaking. Kant confuses "reflection" (theoretical or factual deliberation) with detachment. Clearly, much of this resembles Stanley Rosen's critique of analysis. But unlike Rosen, Williams tends more to identify philosophy with analysis: "[W]e can think in ethics, and in all sorts of ways," but "philosophy can do little to determine how we should do so." Williams affably calls this "a skepticism that is more about philosophy than it is about ethics"; Rosen would insist that it is more about analytical philosophy than it is about philosophy.

Rawlsian contractualism fails for reasons similar to those adduced against Kant. Self-interested rational choice from behind Rawls' famed "Veil of Ignorance" 'abstracts' too much and too little: too much, because it ignores experience or, as Williams puts it, history; too little, because "it is hard to see how the question of probabilities can altogether be avoided, or how, if the probability of ending up a slave were small enough, it would not be rational for the parties [behind the 'Veil'] to choose a system involving slavery if it conveyed large enough other benefits." Hare's utilitarianism fails because it cannot avoid the tendency of every utilitarianism, whereby "benevolence gets credentials from sympathy and passes them on to paternalism." We cannot logically derive benevolence from sympathetic understanding because a cruel person equally can 'identify with' his fellow human being; a torturer "certainly *knows*," but his cognitive sympathy yields no benevolence.

In the book's second half, Williams considers ethics more generally, less attempting to refute specific doctrines than to examine certain features common to all or most ethical thought. He agrees with Aristotle that ethical theories "tend to start from just one aspect of ethical experience, beliefs" or "intuitions." He finds this reasonable, but rejects the notion of intuition as a faculty. "It seem[s] to say that these truths [are] known, but there is no way in which they [are] known"; it is "wrong in assimilating ethical truths to necessities." Intuition in this sense, which is not precisely Rosen's sense, means conscience, albeit a secularized conscience. This intuition holds basic moral truths to be self-evident, but founders upon the choppy seas of opposed intuitions.

How then can any ethical theory "have the authority" to resolve a conflict between opposed intuitions? Williams rejects the "Platonic assumption that the reflective agent as theorist can make himself independent of the life and character he is examining." Practical reason differs from theoretical reason because it aims to "help us construct a world that will be our world," not *the* world, "one in

which we have a social, cultural, and personal life.” Between rational theory and mere prejudice lies practical reason or, as Williams prefers, “critical reflection,” which “should seek for as much shared understanding as it can on any issue, and use any ethical material that, in the context of reflective discussion, makes sense and commands some loyalty.” One must ask: *Should seek? Should use?* Whence comes this “shouldness” of ethical thought itself? Williams criticizes the “linear model” or “foundationalist enterprise,” whereby philosophers trace reasons for reasons, back to “a minimal number (preferably one).” He prefers a “wholistic type of model” wherein all intuitions cannot be questioned at once, “justified in terms of (almost) nothing.” But whence then the “shouldness” of should-talk? “The only serious enterprise is living, and we have to live after [and during] the reflection,” Williams avers. But ethics and politics inconveniently insist on not mere life but the good life. Getting from “living” to “should” makes no more, or less, sense than does getting from “rationality” to “should” or from “detachment” to “should.” Without God, teleological nature, or at least the “Transcendental Ego,” “living” or “practicality” offers no non-conventionalist foundation for ethics, and it does no good to pretend that no foundation but “wholism” is needed, as this amounts finally to the same thing: “Our arguments have to be *grounded* in a human point of view; they cannot be derived from a point of view that is no one’s point of view at all” (emphasis added).

Williams rightly criticizes the distinction analytical philosophers draw between ‘is’ and ‘ought,’ ‘facts’ and ‘values,’ or, more precisely, ‘description’ and ‘prescription.’ Using an argument like Rosen’s, he contends that analytical philosophy oversimplifies ethics by failing to consider the analyst himself and the ethical beliefs the analyst brings to his analysis. Analytical philosophy leaves no room for judgments and situations. In its very recourse to language, however, analytical philosophy employs a tool shaped by the ethical intentions of the user and of his social-political order. And this is the only tool available.

Williams extends this critique to all attempts to represent ethics as scientific knowledge. In this he adopts the ‘fact’/‘value’ distinction he previously attacked, albeit in a far more sophisticated form. In scientific knowledge, he writes, there is “ideally” an “absolute conception” or “background” for one’s investigations: “how things are.” But in ethics we attempt to guide actions, not merely find out about things. An outsider describing an alien society may understand its terms of ethical discourse but not use them himself wholeheartedly. Ethical reflection results in no “body of knowledge” in the scientific sense of the phrase. Those *within* a given society know the ethical teachings of the society; in this respect, “the simplest oppositions of facts and values” are wrong. But as soon as they *reflect* upon those teachings, their knowledge is not increased (as it would be in science) but weakened, confused, even destroyed. Here Williams reads his own skepticism into the notion of “reflectiveness,” inadvertently demonstrating on himself his previous criticism of analytical philosophers as insufficiently

self-conscious. Reasoning about opinions may weaken them in some ways, strengthen them in others. Much depends upon the kind of reasoning employed. Analysis by definition dissolves, reduces. Other kinds of reasoning do not.

Williams attacks Socratic reflection on ethics, for reasons similar to those motivating Aristophanes. We do not need more knowledge of ethics, Williams insists. Nor do we need greater strength of will—often the reaction to skeptical corrosion. We need what he calls “confidence,” a social phenomenon to which reason may contribute, as long as we do not suppose that reasoning by itself can establish or construct the social order in which ethical thought can thrive—a supposition, incidentally, that neither Plato nor Aristotle makes. “Confidence” today requires a social order permitting free inquiry, “experiments in living” (J. S. Mill’s phrase), and “some ethical variety.” Williams here proves a more prudent man than many of his colleagues in universities nurtured by political liberty, who, failing to reflect upon the conditions of their own activities, imagine they would prefer to live in some sterner polity, or in no polity at all. Whether *Socratic* reflection, particularly as presented by Plato, deserves this near-equation with analytical philosophy, may of course be questioned. Plato presents Socrates as not only the wisest, but the most just and the best man Phaedo had ever known. Few analytical philosophers inspire such praise from any of their auditors.

Williams sees something of what Plato sees even if he does not see that Plato sees it.

I must deliberate *from* what I am. [T]he desire that our ethical practice should be able to stand up to reflection [does] not demand total explicitness, or a reflection that aims to lay everything bare at once. Those demands are based on a misunderstanding of rationality, personal and political.

Philosophy can assist in these deliberations, this reflection, but it cannot replace “reflective living.” But again, Plato’s Socrates never makes the contrary claim. Philosophy replaces “living” only in the sense that it prepares for “death.” But this ‘death’ means health, indeed a kind of immortality conceived nonliterally. Just too sensible to quite accept conventionalism (including historicism), much too sensible to accept analytical philosophy as the whole of philosophy, Williams also cannot accept God (at all), Kant’s Transcendental Ego, or human nature teleologically conceived (at least to any Aristotelian extent). He is left with polite individualism, intelligent Englishness. One could do worse. One often does.

Williams denies a philosopher can transcend his polity. Plato’s celebrated cave-and-sun imagery amounts to overambitious dreaming. But if this were true, then philosophers could not describe human ‘types’ recognizable in other times and polities. Even without philosophy, human beings transcend their circumstances, although they do not usually see how they do. Not only analysis but intuition enables us to see these types; without that faculty, nonphilosophers could

not portray them, and even language itself would be impossible. The philosopher differs from other types in subjecting the opinions of these language-animals to logic, which Socrates conceives as thought governed by the principle of non-contradiction, of not simultaneously saying and 'unsaying' the same thing. Philosophers do this because they love wisdom, that state of the soul in relation to the cosmos whereby one 'possesses' a rational account of the whole.

Political philosophy begins with the opinions of human beings about their own polity and others. Williams claims that philosophizing only subverts these opinions. One might reply that philosophizing puts opinions in their place, that is, subverts only the grandest claims of the opinionated. Insofar as politics involves deliberation, it suggests the dialogue-form Plato regards as indispensable to the public presentation of philosophy and, symbolically, to philosophic activity as such. When either politics or philosophy succumbs to monologism, it becomes a forgetting and not a 'remembering.' By encouraging the belief that one possesses rather than loves wisdom, it loses sight of wisdom. Williams' objection to philosophizing about ethics might better be stated this way: one can possess practical wisdom, not theoretical wisdom. One need not philosophize to be prudent, nor are philosophers necessarily men and women of practical wisdom. No ethical *theory* will make us prudent. 'Political philosophy' would be an oxymoron if it sought to establish justice. If it seeks the truth about justice, it is not an oxymoron. If prudently undertaken and expressed, political philosophy may not get in the way of justice and of prudent action. Political philosophy will tend to be politic if only to preserve the phenomenon it looks at, as an unusually useful approach to better accounting for the Whole.