

# Interpretation

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# Interpretation

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**Plato's *Second Alcibiades***  
**[Or, On Prayer: Maieutic]<sup>1</sup>**

A Literal Translation

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For Dr. Ronald Feldman, with admiration and gratitude.

*Parvi enim sunt foras arma nisi est consilium domi.*

This translation is based on the Greek text edited by John Burnet (*Alcibiades II* in *Platonis opera*, vol. 2 [Oxford: Clarendon, 1901], 355–75). Where I use alternate readings from the MSS, or privilege MSS readings over emendations that Burnet accepts, I have indicated this in footnotes. I have also closely examined Martin Schanz's earlier Greek edition (*Alcibiades II* in *Platonis opera, quae feruntur omnia*, vol. 6 [Leipzig: Bernard Tauchnitz, 1882], 53–72), which contains an extensive apparatus of textual emendations. In only one instance have I privileged emendation over a MS reading, and this where the text as we have it yields no tolerable sense in any of the MSS (147a1–2).

I thank Travis Smith and Matthew Linck for their careful and thoughtful comments on earlier versions of this translation, which greatly helped me to rethink and revise many passages. I am in their debt. All errors that remain are wholly my own.

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<sup>1</sup> The traditional subtitle may or may not be Plato's own.

*Characters: Socrates, Alcibiades*

[138a]

SOC. Alcibiades,<sup>2</sup> you're on your way<sup>3</sup> to pray to the god?

ALC. Most certainly, Socrates.

SOC. You appear<sup>4</sup> down in the dumps<sup>5</sup> with your gaze on the ground, like you have something on your mind.<sup>6</sup>

ALC. And what might someone have on his mind, Socrates?

SOC. The greatest thing to have on one's mind, Alcibiades, it seems to me. But come, tell me, by Zeus, [138b] do you not think when we

<sup>2</sup> The first words of both *Alcibiades* and *Second Alcibiades* are direct addresses to Alcibiades by Socrates. In *Alcibiades*, the first words are "Child of Kleinias. . ." In *Second Alcibiades*, Alcibiades is addressed by his own name.

<sup>3</sup> *poreuē*: Plato will have Socrates use this word twice again in the dialogue (141a7 and 148a2—the second instance repeats the first almost word for word, and both refer directly back to the question here). The negative will be used five times (once by Alcibiades at 139e9 and four times by Socrates at 142d4, 147e5, 148d8, and 150b8), and is implied twice (once by Alcibiades at 148b1, and once by Socrates at 149c6—see notes 49 and 58, below). The word's massive significance for Socrates's reflections on thinking and argument throughout the Platonic dialogues makes the use—in the first line of the dialogue—pregnant. It evokes the first lines of *Lysis* (203a–b), where the word is used three times in rapid succession. The first time in *Lysis* (also the dialogue's first word), Socrates speaks of his own "way," the second, he speaks of someone else (Hippothales) asking about Socrates's "way." The connections between *Second Alcibiades* and *Lysis* are significant. By contrast with the opening of *Alcibiades* (see note 2, above), and Hippothales's question to Socrates in *Lysis* ("On your way to where, Socrates, and from whence?"—cf. the opening words of *Phaedrus*, which are identical to Hippothales's question except for omitting the word *poreuein*, which is very likely not an accidental omission), there is a subtle emphasis on only where Alcibiades is *going*, to the deliberate neglect of where he is coming *from*.

<sup>4</sup> *phainēi*: It is *apparent* that Alcibiades is "down in the dumps"—in Socrates's phrase, this comes from Alcibiades himself, it shines forth from him. This word will appear again throughout the dialogue, and we should track it carefully. The opening line of *Protagoras* is evoked, in which the "companion" asks Socrates, "*Pothen, o Sōkrates, phainēi?*" ("From where are you appearing, Socrates?"—cf. note 3, above: where Socrates is coming *from* always matters). *Phainein* is not identical with *dokein*, as we will see immediately—*dokein* will be used several times in succession by Socrates in the next few lines, though he will not use *phainein* again until 146e. In the meantime, Alcibiades interjects in the conversation with "*Phainetai*" ("so it appears") three times (139c, 140e, 144c).

<sup>5</sup> *eskuthrōpakenai*: This is the only instance in which Plato uses this word in any of his works. It has a comic heritage (Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 7 and *Ploutos* 756), and perhaps origin; it may be one of Aristophanes's neologisms. "Of sad countenance" (one of LSJ's translations) might be good, given its evocation of Don Quixote. "Dejected" may be very accurate, but not particularly comic. Cf. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.7.2 and *Cyropaedia* 6.2.21.

<sup>6</sup> *sunnooumenos*: The verb and its cognate noun *sunnoia* are used three times in rapid succession here, and then not again in the dialogue. The root word is *nous*—mind—and the prefix *sun* should not be neglected. What this word gestures to is of the greatest philosophical importance.

happen<sup>7</sup> to pray for things both private and public, that the gods sometimes give them and sometimes don't, and to some people, and to others, not?

ALC. Most certainly.

SOC. Doesn't this seem to you to entail many foresights,<sup>8</sup> that one not forgetfully<sup>9</sup> pray for great evils while believing they are good things, and the gods happen to be disposed to give what the person praying happened upon? Like Oedipus<sup>10</sup> who, it is said, prayed instantly that his sons would divide their patrimony in battle<sup>11</sup>: [138c] when he had it, for himself, to pray that his own present evils might somehow be averted, he called down others on top of those already there; whereby they found their completion, and from them came very many and terrible things, that require their own discussion.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *tunchanomen*: To happen, to chance upon. The word and its cognates are critical to the dialogue, and will mostly be translated as "happen" or "fortune" and their cognates. Where it is necessary to translate with another word, this is noted in parentheses, as are instances where "happen" is used to translate another word.

<sup>8</sup> *pollēs promētheias*: "Many foresights" is awkward, but the Greek is awkward. In the singular, *pollē promētheia* means "much foresight," and this is how Plato uses the expression at *Minos* 318e10. The plural here requires consideration(s), and suggests the variety of "foresights" that would be needed to be drawn together to predict the beneficial way in which to pray.

<sup>9</sup> "Forgetfully" translates *lēsetai hauton*. *Lēsetai* is in the middle voice of *lanthanein*, and the expression used here has a subtly different meaning in the middle than the active: where the middle means "forgetfully," the active means "unawares." Alcibiades will later repeat the phrase in which Socrates uses this expression, almost word for word, but among the subtle differences is that he will there use the active voice (148b1–2).

<sup>10</sup> The story of Oedipus begins and ends the dialogue, and casts its shadow on the whole of it (cf. for example 144b11–12). The emphasis here, and at the end, is on the human disposition involved in praying for or interpreting divine things. It should be noted that other stories are available to Plato to illustrate the point Socrates is making here—Oedipus is a deliberate choice (cf. *Laws* 687d10–e4).

<sup>11</sup> Socrates paraphrases the story recounted in Euripides, *Phoenician Women* 66–68; and Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* 1375–96.

<sup>12</sup> "that require their own discussion": This is a literal translation of the phrase *ha ti dei kath' hekasta legein*, which more colloquially means, "which we can't get into here." Socrates seems to use the colloquial meaning at this point, but soon demonstrates that he means it literally (see 143a3).

- ALC. But Socrates, you're talking about a human being when he's mad with rage [*mainomenon*]<sup>13</sup> Does it seem to you that someone composed [*hugiainōn*]<sup>14</sup> would have dared to pray for such a thing?
- SOC. Does it seem to you that madness [*to mainesthai*] is the opposite of sound-mindedness [*to phronein*]?<sup>15</sup>
- ALC. Most certainly. [138d]
- SOC. And some human beings seem to you to be unsound, and others sound-minded?
- ALC. Indeed so.
- SOC. Come then, let us consider who these are. It is agreed that some are unsound, others sound-minded, and others mad?
- ALC. It is agreed.
- SOC. And still others are healthy?
- ALC. They are.
- SOC. So then some others are unhealthy? [139a]
- ALC. Quite so.
- SOC. So then they are not the same?

<sup>13</sup> *mainomenon*: "Mad with rage"—Alcibiades is focused on the "rage" of Oedipus here, and the word he uses is an important one. It is the verbal form of the noun *mēnis*—"rage"—which is the first word in Homer's *Iliad*, and therefore the first word in the Western "canon." That first word speaks of the devastating "rage of Achilles," a rage celebrated as heroic by the Greeks—Alcibiades is not necessarily criticizing Oedipus for the rage he mentions in this context. But the Greek word can also mean "madness" in the sense of insanity, which Socrates will immediately pick up on and turn to.

<sup>14</sup> *hugiainōn*: "Composed" is contextually accurate, compared as the word is here with the temporary condition of being enraged, but the Greek word has the broader meanings of "healthy" in general, and "sound" in general. Socrates plays on this ambiguity immediately. For the rest of the dialogue, this word and its cognates will always be translated by the word "healthy" and its cognates. No other words will be so translated.

<sup>15</sup> *Phronein* and its cognates will always be translated as "sound-mindedness" or a version of "sound"; no other words will be so translated. The privative *aphrōn* and cognates will likewise be translated with versions of "unsound"; no other words will be so translated. *Phronein* permits of meanings other than soundness, and can sometimes be equivalent to "wisdom," but Socrates uses the word here, the first time in the dialogue, as the contrary of "madness" (*mainesthai*). The less equivocal Greek word for "wisdom," *sophia* (and all of its cognates), is entirely absent from the *Second Alcibiades*. It seems therefore best to allow our comprehension of what "soundness" is to expand, if necessary, rather than substitute a different English word should *phronein* seem to meet the bar of wisdom at any point in the dialogue.

- ALC. Well no.
- SOC. And are there some others who happen not to be either?
- ALC. Of course not.
- SOC. For it's necessary that a human being be either sick or not sick?
- ALC. So it seems to me.
- SOC. Well then, do you hold the same thought about sound-mindedness and unsoundness?
- ALC. How do you mean?
- SOC. Does it seem to you<sup>16</sup> only possible to be either sound-minded or unsound, or is there a third condition in between that makes a human being neither [139b] sound-minded nor unsound?
- ALC. Of course not.
- SOC. It's necessary then that the condition be one or the other of these two?
- ALC. So it seems to me.
- SOC. You remember, no, that you agreed madness is the opposite of sound-mindedness?
- ALC. I do.
- SOC. And that there is no third condition in between that makes a human being neither sound-minded nor unsound?
- ALC. I did agree.
- SOC. And can there somehow be two opposites of one thing?
- ALC. Not at all. [139c]
- SOC. Then unsoundness and madness are probably the same thing.
- ALC. So it appears.
- SOC. Then, Alcibiades, if we said that all unsound people are mad, we would speak correctly; for example, if some of those your own age happen to be unsound (and such there are) and even some of your

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<sup>16</sup> Omitting *ei*, with MS T.

elders. For tell me, by Zeus, do you not think that of those in the city the sound-minded are few, and the unsound—whom you call mad—many?

ALC. I do.

SOC. Do you then think we would be pleased [139d] to so long pay the penalty [*dikēn*]<sup>17</sup> of being citizens together with such madmen—that we wouldn't be lashed out at and tossed around, and all the things madmen are used to doing? Observe, you blessed man, whether things might be otherwise.

ALC. How might things be then, Socrates? For [it looks like] they probably aren't as I thought they were.

SOC. So it seems to me as well. But it must be considered in this way—

ALC. What way do you mean?

SOC. I'll tell you. We suppose that some are sick, no? [139e]

ALC. Most certainly.

SOC. And does it seem to you that the sick person necessarily has gout, or fever, or ophthalmia, or doesn't it seem to you that even with out any of these conditions he is still sick, from another sickness? For they are of course many, these are not the only ones.

ALC. They seem so to me.

SOC. Is every ophthalmia thus a disease?

ALC. Yes.

SOC. And every disease thus an ophthalmia?

ALC. Of course not, as far as I'm concerned. But I'm at a loss [*aporō*] as to how I mean that. [140a]

SOC. Well if you turn your mind [*prosechēis ton noun*] to me, “two together will be examining,”<sup>18</sup> and we may happen [*tuchon*] to find [a way].

<sup>17</sup> In other contexts, *dikē* means “justice” more broadly conceived. The word and its cognates are almost entirely absent from the dialogue: this is the first appearance of the word, and it will only appear again toward the end (in a *reprise* at 147a8 and a *presto* at 149e8, 150a7, and 150b2).

<sup>18</sup> Socrates “quotes” Homer (*Iliad* 10.224)—Diomedes's speech to Nestor when he wants to sneak into

- ALC. I'm turning,<sup>19</sup> Socrates, to the extent of my power.
- SOC. Well then, it was agreed by us that all ophthalmia is a disease, but all disease is not, however, ophthalmia.
- ALC. It was agreed.
- SOC. And it seems to me correctly agreed. For even though everyone who has a fever is sick, not everyone who is sick therefore has a fever or gout or ophthalmia, [140b] I think—every such thing is indeed a sickness, but differs in what those whom we call doctors say is its “elaboration.” For they are not all<sup>20</sup> the same, nor do they bear out the same way, but each instead bears out according to its own power. Nevertheless, all of them are sicknesses. Likewise, we suppose that some people are craftsmen, no?
- ALC. Most certainly.
- SOC. And thus cobblers and carpenters and sculptors—and very many others who require their own discussion—have their separate shares [*melē*] of craftsmanship, [140c] and all of these are craftsmen, but those who, taken all together, are craftsmen are not therefore cobblers or carpenters or sculptors.
- ALC. Of course not.
- SOC. In just this way are people also separate with respect to unsoundness, and we call those who have the largest share of it “madmen,” but those who have a bit less, “fools” and “thunderstruck”—while those who wish to speak in more auspicious terms [*euphēmotatois*]<sup>21</sup>

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the Trojan camp. Socrates alters Diomedes's speech: Diomedes speaks of “going together” (*erchomenō*), not “examining together” (*skeptomenō*). The man who accompanies Diomedes is Odysseus.

Diomedes (whose name means “contrivance of Zeus”) is not an incidental choice of Homeric characters, and Socrates will use his example again at the end of the dialogue (150d6–9). He is one of the very few great Homeric heroes for whom, from a standard Greek perspective, everything works out well. He is of course wounded in battle at Troy, like all the heroes, but he faced none of the tribulations that Odysseus did returning home, for example, nor did he meet a fate such as that of Agamemnon, Achilles, or Ajax. He was instead held to have lived a long and full life, and to have founded many cities. He was worshiped as a god after his death.

<sup>19</sup> The translation is awkward, but particularly given the Homeric passage alluded to, with its literal sense of “going,” and given that he drops the “*ton noun*” (mind) in his reply to Socrates, Alcibiades seems almost to speak in terms of physical motion, both in lacking a “way” and in “turning” (i.e., paying attention) to Socrates to find one.

<sup>20</sup> Reading *pasai* with MS T, rather than *pasin* with MS B.

<sup>21</sup> The verbal form of the adjective *euphēmos* is itself a euphemism, literally meaning “to speak well.”

name some “great-souled,” some “good-hearted” [*euētheis*],<sup>22</sup> and still others [140d] “innocent” and “inexperienced” and “dumb-founded.” And you will find many other names if you search them out. Yet all of these are unsoundness, though they differ, just as it was apparent to us that art differs from art, and sickness from sickness. Or how does it seem to you?

ALC. To me, like that.

SOC. Then let’s go back over again from what came before. For evidently at the beginning of the argument it was necessary to investigate who the unsound and who the sound-minded could possibly be. For it was agreed that there are such people—or was it not?

ALC. Yes, it was agreed. [140e]

SOC. Then you suppose that those people are sound-minded who would know whatever is necessary to do and say?

ALC. I do.

SOC. And which ones are unsound—aren’t they the ones who know neither of these things?

ALC. They are.

SOC. Then those who know neither of these things will not be aware when they’re saying and when they’re doing those things that one must not?

ALC. So it appears.

SOC. And that’s just the sort of human being I was saying this Oedipus is, Alcibiades. [141a] And you will find many even now who are not possessed by anger like him, praying for things while not supposing they are evil for themselves, but rather that they are good things. He did not pray like that, nor suppose that he did, but there are others who experience the opposite in these things.<sup>23</sup> For

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but most associated with religious observances, referring to the reverent silence preserved before the sacred—*Euphēmeis* means, in that case, “Hush!” Socrates and Alcibiades will have a brief but important discussion about this term and its implications shortly (143d2–9), and a more lengthy one toward the end of the dialogue (148d–150d).

<sup>22</sup> The term has a range of meanings, from “good-hearted” and “innocent” to “simple-minded” and “naive.” Socrates will use the word in a clearly disparaging sense at 149e5.

<sup>23</sup> Socrates’s words here are ambiguous. They might be heard to suggest that Oedipus, according to

I suppose if the god to whom you happen to be on your way should appear to you first, before you prayed at all, and asked if it was sufficient for you to become tyrant of the Athenians' city; and if you deemed that worthless and not grand enough he would even deliver [141b] all the Greeks; and if he saw you seemed to hold even this to be a trivial thing if it wasn't all of Europe, and consented to this; and consented not only to this, since you would immediately want everyone to perceive that Alcibiades, son of Kleinias, was tyrant—I suppose you would go away extremely pleased, as having obtained the greatest things.

- ALC. I suppose that someone else would too, Socrates, if indeed such things came to pass like that! [141c]
- SOC. But you would not want the territory of all the Greeks and barbarians, and tyranny over them, at the cost of your soul.
- ALC. I suppose not! How could I, if I was destined [*mellōn*]<sup>24</sup> to have no possibility of using them?
- SOC. And if destined to make evil and harmful use of them? Not then either?
- ALC. Of course not.
- SOC. You see then that these are not reliable [*asphales*]: neither to receive lightly what one is given, nor to pray that such a thing come about, if it destines one to be [141d] harmed through these things, or to have one's life taken away altogether. But we could tell of many who desired tyranny before now, and who made serious efforts to attain it for themselves—holding it to be a good thing to obtain—and who have been robbed of their life by plots against their tyranny. But I suppose you have not missed hearing of some things that happened “yesterday or the day before,”<sup>25</sup> when the

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him, supposed that he was praying for something evil *for himself* when he prayed for his sons to fight over their patrimony. But this is not likely to be what he means. His words also contain the possibility that he supposes Oedipus was not even thinking of his own good when he made his prayer—that he was exclusively focused on wishing evil on his sons. That is, that Oedipus prayed, and supposed he prayed, in anger.

<sup>24</sup> *mellōn*: this is the verbal form of the word *melos*, translated as “share” above—i.e., one's lot, or portion of fate. It is an important word and theme in the dialogue, and since its full range of meanings is variously evoked, cannot be translated by the same word every time. Wherever it is not translated by “destined,” the transliterated word will be included in square brackets.

<sup>25</sup> *Iliad* 2.303—the context is significant.

darling of Archelaos of Macedon, who was no less in love with the tyranny than the other one was with his darling, killed his lover so as to become tyrant and a happy man [141e]—but after holding the tyranny for three or four days, he too was plotted against by others, and came to his end. And you see even among our own citizens, and these things we haven't just heard of but have seen for ourselves, [142a] there are those who have desired generalships before now and happened upon it, who are now either exiles from the city or have ended their life. And of them, even those seeming to fare best have gone through many dangers and terrors not only in their generalship, but are also, upon their return home, besieged by a siege of informers no less than they constantly were by their enemies in war, to the extent that some pray that they had never been a general at all rather than been a general. [142b] Obviously if these dangers and labors brought some benefit, there would be an argument for them, but as it is now [*nun*]<sup>26</sup> it's even entirely the opposite. And you will find the same thing concerning children: some have prayed before now to engender them, and having engendered them have been beset by the greatest ill circumstances and pains. Some have gone through their entire life in pain, having children who are bad through and through; others, having decent [*chrēstōn*]<sup>27</sup> children who [142c] were sent ill circumstances and taken from them, were beset no less than the former by bad fortune, and wanted to never have engendered children rather than have engendered them. Nonetheless, with these things and still more like them exceedingly obvious for them to see, it is rare to find someone who, having been given something, held himself back from it; or who, expecting [*mellōn*] to have his prayer answered, refrained from praying. The many would not hold themselves back from being given tyranny or generalships nor many other things [142d] that harm rather than benefit when they're actually there, but would even pray for them if they did not happen to be actually there, and then not long afterward sometimes hold up and recant, unpraying what they first prayed for. For my part, I am at a loss [*aporō*] as to whether such human beings are not truly at fault to

<sup>26</sup> The *nun* is crucial: Socrates is not saying that this has always been the case, or always will be. He is clearly not diminishing courage and braving dangers as such—he is suggesting that they are pointless if put in the service of a futile goal.

<sup>27</sup> This is the same verb as Alcibiades's "useful" at 141c5.

declare that the gods are “responsible for their evils”—“they by themselves by their own recklessness,” or unsoundness, one must say, “have more than their share of pain.”<sup>28</sup> [142e] It is probable, Alcibiades, that that poet was sound-minded, who seems to me to have had some mindless friends, and seeing that they were both doing and praying for things that were not better, though they seemed so to them, made a common prayer for all of them as such: [143a] “King Zeus, the good things [*esthla*],” he said, “whether prayed for or not prayed for, for my part I ask you to give; and what is terrible,<sup>29</sup> even if prayed for, ward off.”<sup>30</sup> Certainly to me, the poet seems to speak nobly [*kalōs*]<sup>31</sup> and without risk of fall [*asphalōs*], but if you have something in mind [*nous*] about this, do not be silent.

ALC. It is difficult to contradict what has been nobly said, Socrates, but I do have this in mind [*ennoō*], that ignorance is responsible for so many evils for human beings when, as it seems, because of it we both do without noticing [143b]—and what is worst of all, even pray for ourselves to have—what is most evil for us. And that is exactly what no one would suppose, but everyone would suppose himself to be adequate to praying for the greatest things for himself,

<sup>28</sup> *Odyssey* 1.32—the context is significant.

<sup>29</sup> Reading *deina*, with all the MSS, rather than *deila* (“the wretched things”) with Buttman’s emendation accepted by Burnet (here and at 148b6). *Deina* here picks up Socrates’s previous mention of the “very many and terrible things [*deina*], that require their own discussion” at 138c4–5.

The statement here compares the “good things” in the noble sense with the “terrible things” in the noble sense, rhetorically eclipsing the possibility of “wonderful” in *ta deina*, and of a possibly broader understanding of *ta agatha*. It is not clear that Socrates understands *esthla* to be equivalent to *agatha*, or *deina* to *kaka*, Alcibiades’s conclusions notwithstanding (cf. 148b1–7): the poet’s prayer may have a too narrow or mistaken interpretation of what is good and evil, for human beings, from a philosophical point of view—he may be throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Cf. *asphalōs* in Socrates’s next line with *episphalē* at *Republic* 497d9–10, and context; and Alcibiades’s “*chalepon*” in response (143a6) with Socrates’s “*chalepa*” at *Rep.* 497d10. These passages resonate with each other.

In the same way, “arts” and “sickness,” for example, are used by Socrates in ways that anticipate an immediate assumption on the part of his listener(s) that the former are good, the latter bad. But these evaluations are not unproblematic or unqualified, for Socrates.

<sup>30</sup> The meter of the poem appears to be “Doric,” or “mixed.” It begins with two dactylic meters, suggesting Homeric epic poetry, then moves into the Doric mode. This form of poetry allowed the poet broad latitude with respect to (i) the type of meter used, which could be changed within a line, and (ii) the number of meters in each line. There are three long “runs” of long syllables throughout the passage—such runs evoke Athenian comedy. The “poem” should be compared most especially with *Laws* 686c7–689e5.

<sup>31</sup> This is the first use in the dialogue of the term *kalos*—beautiful, noble, fine, fair. It is not clear in which way the word is meant, or taken, here. “Nobly” might be better rendered by “Beautifully” here.

not the most evil things. For this would truly be some kind of curse, and not the same thing as a prayer!

SOC. But perhaps, best of men, some man might appear who happens to be wiser than me and you both, who would say that we are incorrect [143c] to condemn ignorance indiscriminately [*eikēi*], if we were not to specify *of what* the ignorance is, and specify that it is in a certain way a good thing for those who have it, just as it is an evil thing for others.

ALC. How do you mean? Is there anything whatsoever for which it is better for the one who has it in any way to be ignorant than to know?<sup>32</sup>

SOC. It seems so to me at any rate—but not to you?

ALC. No indeed, by Zeus!

SOC. But I certainly won't charge you with wanting for your own mother what it is said that Orestes and that Alcmaeon brought about, though some others have, by what they have themselves brought about, gained [*tunchanousi*] what those two did.<sup>33</sup> [143d]

ALC. Hush [*euphēmei*] by Zeus, Socrates!

SOC. Oh, Alcibiades. It's not the person saying that he would not want<sup>34</sup> you to have committed such things whom you must order to hush [*euphēmein*], but much rather someone who might say the opposite,

<sup>32</sup> This is awkward, but it is important to capture the shift in what one “has,” from Socrates’s question to Alcibiades’s reply. Socrates speaks of “having” ignorance; Alcibiades speaks of “having” *a thing*—i.e., a possession—of which one is either ignorant or knows. The referent for Alcibiades’s “in any way” (*hopōsoun*) in his reply is also ambiguous, a crucial ambiguity that I have tried to preserve in translation: Alcibiades assumes somewhat easily that one can possess something “in any way” of which one is ignorant “in any way,” wondering whether this can be better “in any way”; for Socrates, if one is ignorant “in any way” about what one purportedly possesses, one does not possess it “in any way”—one then possesses only one’s ignorance.

<sup>33</sup> Again, awkward, but (i) the sense of gaining and possession needs to be preserved (in fact, “what those two did” translates *ekeinois tauta*—literally, “their things”), as the theme is continually advanced in the dialogue (cf. 144d4–e1), and (ii) the sense of the terrible crime just “happening” (*tunchanein*) through what one has “brought about,” without necessarily intending that consequence, is crucial to what follows immediately: Alcibiades’s dream of tyranny would, if achieved instantly, entail deposing and probably killing his guardian Pericles—a consequence Alcibiades seems not to have even considered (though cf. 144a8). And this to say nothing of the long shadow that the story of Oedipus casts across the whole dialogue, a story specifically evoked again here with the mention of Alcmaeon (whose mention Socrates demonstrates was superfluous to the “principle” of the argument immediately, and twice: 143d7, 144b11).

<sup>34</sup> Reading *etheloi* with MS B, rather than *ethelois* with MS T.

since it seems to you that the deed is simply exceedingly terrible, to such an extent as to be unequivocally [*eikēi*] unspeakable. But do you believe [*dokeis*] that if this Orestes, had he happened to be sound-minded and known what was best to do for himself, would have attempted to bring such things about?

ALC. Of course not. [143e]

SOC. I don't suppose anyone else would either.

ALC. Indeed not.

SOC. Then it looks like ignorance of what is best and being ignorant of what is best is a bad thing.

ALC. So it seems to me.

SOC. So then both for that person and for everyone else?

ALC. I say so.

SOC. Then let us therefore examine this: if you should suddenly be disposed, supposing it to be better—and going to his door, dagger in hand—to ask whether Pericles, your own guardian and friend, was inside, and planning to kill him and no one else; and they say that he's inside—and I'm not saying that you want to do such a thing, but if, I suppose, this seems so to you then, which doubtless nothing prevents someone ignorant of the best from being disposed to somehow believing, inasmuch as he supposes the most evil thing to be somehow the best thing—or doesn't it seem so to you?

ALC. Most certainly.

SOC. Then if on going inside and seeing that very person, [144b] you were ignorant of who he was and supposed him to be someone else, would you still attempt to kill him?

ALC. No by Zeus—it doesn't seem so to me!

SOC. For no doubt it was not the one you just happened upon, but the other himself whom you wanted. Or what?

ALC. Yes.

- SOC. Then even if you went to attack many times, if you were always ignorant of who Pericles was when you were destined to do it, you would never run yourself at him.
- ALC. Of course not.
- SOC. What then? Do you believe [*dokeis*] that this Orestes would ever have set himself upon his mother if he had been ignorant of who she was? [144c]
- ALC. I don't suppose so!
- SOC. For no doubt it was not just any other woman he happened upon first, or someone else's mother, whom he thought to kill, but his own.
- ALC. That's so.
- SOC. Then to be ignorant of such things is a good thing for those so simply disposed and who have such fixed notions [*doxas*].
- ALC. So it appears.
- SOC. So you see that it is "of *what* the ignorance is, and that it is in a certain way a good thing for those who have it," and not an evil thing, as it seemed to you just now?
- ALC. It is likely so. [144d]
- SOC. Nonetheless, if you wish to examine what follows from this, it might perhaps seem strange to you.
- ALC. What exactly, Socrates?
- SOC. That, to say it briefly, it is probable indeed that the possession of the other<sup>35</sup> areas of knowledge [*epistēmōn*], if someone so possesses without reference to what is best, will seldom benefit and mostly harm the one who has it. Look at it like this: doesn't it seem to you to be necessary that whenever we're really about [*mellōmen*] to do or say something, it needs be that we first suppose that we know, or actually do know, [144e] the thing that we are so ready<sup>36</sup> to do or say?
- ALC. It certainly seems so to me.

<sup>35</sup> Knowing who one's parents and guardians are is thus presented by Socrates as on par with these "other areas of knowledge."

<sup>36</sup> *procheirrotērōs*: the word evokes *encheiridion* (dagger) at 143e10, above, and indeed means "ready" inasmuch as it means "with dagger in hand."

- SOC. So then the orators, for example, either by really knowing how to counsel or by supposing they know, counsel us on each occasion, some about both war and peace, some about the walls of a building or constructing harbors—in a word, whatsoever the [145a] city ever does to another city or itself for itself, it all comes from the orators' counsel.
- ALC. You speak truly.
- SOC. See then what follows from these things.
- ALC. I will if I can.
- SOC. For you name people sound-minded and unsound?
- ALC. I do.
- SOC. So then the many are unsound but the few are sound-minded?
- ALC. Just so.
- SOC. So then in both cases you're looking from one thing toward something else?
- ALC. Yes. [145b]
- SOC. And do you call such a person who knows counseling, but without connection to the "whether it is better" and "when it is better," sound-minded?
- ALC. Of course not.
- SOC. Nor, I suppose, that man who knows warring itself, without connection to the "when it is better" and "for how long a time it is better." Or what?
- ALC. Agreed.<sup>37</sup>
- SOC. So then also not if someone knows [about] killing someone, or seizing his money, or making him an exile from his fatherland, without connection to the "when it is better" and "whom it is better"?
- ALC. Certainly not. [145c]

<sup>37</sup> Literally, "Yes" (*nai*), but this does not make sense in English here.

- SOC. So it's that man who knows something of these sorts of things, if attended by knowledge of what is best—and this is clearly the same thing as that of the beneficial—or what?—
- ALC. Yes.
- SOC. And we will declare this one to be sound-minded, and a useful counselor both for the city and himself for himself, but the one not such the opposites of these. Or how does it seem?
- ALC. Like that to me.
- SOC. And what of someone who knows horsemanship or bowmanship, or boxing or wrestling or some other contest, or any other thing [145d] among those things we know by an art—what do you call him who knows what becomes better through this art? The one who, according to the art of horsemanship, a horseman?
- ALC. I do.
- SOC. And I suppose the one who, according to the art of boxing, a boxer, and that of flute-playing, a flute-player, and all the others, obviously, analogously—or is it otherwise?
- ALC. No, like that.
- SOC. Then does it seem necessary to you that the one who has some knowledge of these things be as a result a sound-minded man, or [145e] will we say he falls short by far?
- ALC. By far indeed by Zeus!
- SOC. Then what kind of a regime do you suppose this to be: good bowmen and flute-players, and athletes and the other artists besides, and intermixing with these those whom we spoke of just now, the knowers of warring itself, and killing itself, and orator-men blustering political bluster, and all the others without knowledge of what is best and without knowing when or for whom it is better [146a] to make use of each one of them?
- ALC. A worthless one, for my part, Socrates.
- SOC. And I suppose you would say it, whenever you might see each one of them competing with the others, and “assigning the greatest share” of the regime “to that in which he himself

happens to be strongest<sup>38</sup>—by which I mean, to what becomes best through *that* very art;<sup>39</sup> but most things about what is really best for the city and for himself are utterly off the mark, because, I suppose, he has put his trust in opinion without intelligence. [146b] Such things being so, would we not speak correctly in declaring that such a regime is full of much upheaval and lawlessness?<sup>40</sup>

ALC. Correct indeed, by Zeus.

SOC. And it seemed necessary to us that it needs be that we first suppose that we know, or actually do know, that thing that we are very ready to do or say?

ALC. It did so seem.

SOC. And that if someone does things that he knows or seems to know, and is attended by the beneficial, we hold him [146c] to be profitable both to the city and to his own self?

ALC. How otherwise?

SOC. But I suppose if the opposite of these things, neither to the city nor to his own self?

ALC. Me too.

SOC. Well, does it still seem so to you now, or is it somehow otherwise?

ALC. No, like that.

SOC. And you said that you call the many unsound, and the few sound-minded?

ALC. I did.

<sup>38</sup> From Euripides's *Antiope*, of which only fragments are extant. The passage is quoted at more length, and differently, in *Gorgias* (484e4–7), including having *beltistos* (“best”) where our passage has *kratistos* (“strongest”); and *hēmeras* (“of the day”) where our passage has *tēs politeias* (“of the regime”). Whether the passage in *Gorgias* preserves Euripides's exact words is not known, but it remains entirely in tragic meter (iambic trimeter), whereas *tēs politeias* in our passage definitely interrupts the meter, and is therefore almost certainly an interpolation.

<sup>39</sup> This passage repeats, word for word, the passage at 145d1–2 translated as “what becomes better through this art,” with two exceptions: “better” at 145d2 is “best” here; and *tautēn tēn technēn* (“this art”) at 145d2 is *autēn tēn technēn* (“that very art”) here.

<sup>40</sup> Aside from this word (*anomia*), there is only one other use of any word whose root is connected to the word “law” (*nomos*) in the dialogue—*nomizomena* at 151b2. See note 47, below, for an alternative manuscript reading that yields a possible exception.

- SOC. So then we say once again that the many utterly miss the mark of the best since, I suppose, they in most cases put their trust in opinion without intelligence. [146d]
- ALC. We do say so.
- SOC. Then it is profitable to the many neither to know nor to suppose they know, if they'll be particularly eager to do those things that they know or suppose they know, which in doing they mostly harm rather than benefit themselves.<sup>41</sup>
- ALC. What you say is most true.
- SOC. Do you see then that when I said it was probable that the possession of the other [146e] areas of knowledge, if it is without possessing knowledge of what is best, will seldom benefit and mostly harm the one who has it, I really spoke correctly in saying so, no?
- ALC. Even if it didn't then, it seems so to me now, Socrates.
- SOC. Then it's necessary that the city and soul expecting [*mellousan*] to live correctly cleave simply<sup>42</sup> to this knowledge, just as a sick man does to a doctor, or the man expecting [*mellonta*] to sail safely [*asphalōs*] to some pilot. [147a] For without this [knowledge], by as much more furiously what belongs to the soul wafts near possession of wealth,<sup>43</sup> or strength of body, or any other such thing, by this much more is it necessary that errors [*hamartēmata*]<sup>44</sup> arising from them, as is likely, come about. And he who, possessing what is called both polymathia and polytechnia, but bereft of this knowledge, is led along by each one of the others, will he not quite

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<sup>41</sup> It is also possible to translate the final clause of this sentence in the passive, thus: "which in doing they are mostly harmed rather than benefited."

<sup>42</sup> Socrates makes a little pun: "cleave simply" is *antechesthai atechnōs* (omitting Burnet's comma), the latter word meaning literally "without art." The literal meaning is certainly important here.

<sup>43</sup> The first part of this sentence is highly problematic in the MSS, and yields no tolerable sense. Burnet reads *tuchēs* (chance), with Stallbaum, but the MSS have *psuchēs* (soul). I provisionally follow Sauppe's emendation of the passage instead, which seems to me to cleave closest to the MSS. Burnet's text, following a transposition suggested by Lennep, and Stallbaum's emendation, would read: "For without this [knowledge], by however much more keenly the [wind] of fortune [*tuchēs*] blew in possession of wealth, etc." This does not seem to me to be an unreasonable suggestion, given the prominence of *tuchē* in the dialogue.

<sup>44</sup> This word's verbal form is the root of *diamartanein*, which is translated as "utterly off the mark" at 146a, and "utterly miss the mark" at 146c.

justly suffer much stormy weather, since, I suppose, he is carrying along at sea without a pilot [147b] over the course of a life that is not long? Such that it seems to me to be in line with [*sumbainein*] the words of the poet who, accusing someone somewhere, says that “knowing many crafts, but badly,” he said, “was he knowing them all.”<sup>45</sup>

ALC. What?! And just how is this in line with [*sumbainei*] the words of the poet, Socrates? For it doesn't seem to me to accord with the words spoken at all.

SOC. It's even exceedingly in accord with the words spoken. But he speaks in riddles, best of men, both this one and almost all other poets. For by nature the art of poetry as a whole is a riddling one, and [147c] not every man you happen to meet [*prostuchontos*] has knowledge [of it]. Moreover, in addition to this thing it is by nature, when it lays hold of a jealous man who does not want to display, but rather to conceal his own wisdom from us to the greatest degree, it appears an extraordinarily [*huperphuōs*]<sup>46</sup> difficult thing to understand whatever each of them has in mind to mean [*noousin*]<sup>47</sup> sometimes. For you obviously don't believe [*dokeis*] that Homer, the most divine and wisest poet, did not know that there is no such thing as knowing badly—for he it is who says that Margites knew many [147d] things, “but badly,” he said, “was he knowing them all”—but he speaks in riddles, I suppose, substituting “badly” for “a bad thing,” and “was knowing” for “to know.” It becomes, then—setting the meter aside, but it's what he means—that he was knowing many crafts, but it was a bad thing for himself to know all of them. Clearly, then, if indeed it was a bad thing for himself to know many things, “someone worthless he was happening to be,”<sup>48</sup> if indeed the previously discussed arguments must be trusted. [147e]

<sup>45</sup> From the *Margites*, a mock-epic attributed to Homer, of which very few lines are extant. The name *Margites* comes from *margos*—“mad.” Alcibiades will play on the title with this word shortly (148a9).

<sup>46</sup> The word's root word is the same as for “nature.”

<sup>47</sup> The alternative reading in MS B is *nomizetai*, which would yield, “whatever each of them believes sometimes.” See note 40, above.

<sup>48</sup> The passage translated in quotes is phrased as the second half of a line of dactylic hexameter, the meter of the *Margites* and epic poetry. Socrates makes his criticism sound like the end of a line in Homer. To borrow Alfarabi's comment, with a minor modification, we admire the ease with which Plato invented Homeric speeches (cf. 149d2 and d7–e1, which lines, attributed to Homer, are not in

- ALC. But it seems so to me, Socrates. It would be difficult indeed for me to trust any other arguments, if not these.
- SOC. And it seems so to you correctly.
- ALC. On the other hand, though, it seems to me otherwise.
- SOC. But come, by Zeus!—for you obviously see how great the perplexity [*aporian*] is, and the manner of it, in which you seem to me to share in common. Tossed up and back again, you don't stop at all, but that which seems to you to be so to the highest degree then again gets torn away [148a] and no longer seems as it was—if then even now the god to whom you happen to be on your way, came to appear before you and asked, before you prayed in any way, if it would be sufficient for you if something among those things discussed at the beginning were to come about, and if he ought rather to leave it to you to pray for yourself, what do you suppose would happen with the opportunity—taking the things offered by him, or praying that something come about on your own?
- ALC. But by the gods, I'd have nothing to say to you, Socrates, offhand; but this seems to me to be something mad [*margon*] [148b], since even [our perplexity]<sup>49</sup> is a truly great warning that someone not pray for evil things unawares,<sup>50</sup> believing they are good things, then not long afterward hold up, as you were saying,<sup>51</sup> and recant, unpraying what he first prayed for.
- SOC. So then the poet whom I mentioned at the beginning of the argument knew something more than us, urging us to pray to ward off what is terrible?<sup>52</sup>
- ALC. It seems so to me at any rate.

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any extant manuscript of the *Iliad*).

<sup>49</sup> “Our perplexity” is not present in the text, but is required by the feminine case in the absolute (*kai hōs alēthōs pollēs phulakēs*), which refers back to the *aporia* noted by Socrates at 147e5.

<sup>50</sup> See note 9, above.

<sup>51</sup> Except for being in the singular where Socrates had spoken in the plural, the last part of Alcibiades's sentence repeats what Socrates had said at 142d2–4 almost word for word. Significantly, he omits Socrates's “sometimes” (*eniotē*).

<sup>52</sup> See note 29, above. Here, the manuscripts differ—I am reading *deina* with MS T. MS B has *dēla* (“what is obvious”).

soc. Well then, Alcibiades, [148c] the Lacedaemonians, whether emulating this poet or even through examining themselves, pray a similar prayer at each private and public event, bidding<sup>53</sup> the gods give them noble things joined to the good things for their very own—more than this, no one of them is heard to pray. For that reason they are, up to the present time, human beings who are inferior in fortune to no others, and if it has so happened [*sumbebēken*] that not everything is fortunate for them, it was at least then not the result [148d] of their prayer, it being for the gods, as I suppose, to give what someone praying might happen [to obtain] and their opposites. But I want to describe something else for you, which I once heard from some older men,<sup>54</sup> how a quarrel having arisen between the Athenians and the Lacedaemonians, it was always so happening [*sunebainen*] to our city that whenever a battle came about both by land and by sea, she was unfortunate [*dustuchein*] and never able to prevail; and the Athenians being therefore greatly vexed by these things, and at a loss [*aporoumenous*] [148e] to find something to ward off their present evils by some needed device, and after deliberating it seemed to them that the strongest thing would be sending to Ammon<sup>55</sup> to inquire of him, and what is more before the gods also the wherefore and when of their hostility for which they gave victory to the Lacedaemonians rather than to they themselves, declaring, “Among the Greeks it is we who bring the most and finest [*kallistas*] sacrifices, we have furnished their temples with votive offerings as have no others, we have presented the most lavish and reverent procession to the gods every year, [149a] and we spend more money than all of the other Greeks together; but for the Lacedaemonians’ part,” they said, “they have never yet given care to any of these things, but are so negligently disposed toward the gods that they sacrifice maimed animals on every occasion, and in all other matters are more deficient in honoring than we are, though they possess no less

<sup>53</sup> The word is *keleuontes*, which in this grammatical context strongly suggests that the Lacedaemonians order the gods to give them these things.

<sup>54</sup> Reading *presbuterōn tinōn*, with MS T. Burnet does not like *presbuterōn*, and secludes the word—I am unable to see any reason to do so, and include it.

<sup>55</sup> Ammon is the Greek name of an originally Libyan god, worshiped in Egypt as the supreme god Amun. Ammon's worship was prominent in Cyrene (cf. *Statesman* 257b5–6); elsewhere in the Greek world he was associated with Zeus.

money than our city.”<sup>56</sup> When they had spoken thus, and asked further what they needed to do to find something to ward off their present evils, the prophet responded nothing but this, [149b] for the god clearly did not permit this [inquiry], and having summoned them, declared, “Ammon says this to the Athenians. He declares that the reverent reserve [*euphēmian*] of the Lacedaemonians is preferred by him to all of the sacred rituals of the Greeks together.”<sup>57</sup> He said this, and nothing more. Now, in saying “reverent reserve,” the god seems to me to mean nothing other than this prayer of theirs, for it really is very [149c] different from the others’. The other Greeks, those bringing up bulls with gilded horns, and those giving votive offerings to the gods, were praying for things to happen, begging for good things and begging for bad things, and so hearing how irreverently speaking [*blasphēmoutōn*] they were, the gods were not favorably receiving these lavish processions and sacrifices. So it seems to me there is need of [its] great warning<sup>58</sup> about examining what is to be said and what not, and when. And you will find in Homer other things similar to what has been said. [149d] For he declares that the Trojans making their camp “offer completed hecatombs to the immortals,”<sup>59</sup> and that “the winds brought the smell of sacrifice from the plains into the heavens”<sup>60</sup> — “pleasant, but the blessed gods wanted no share of it, for grievously hated was hallowed Ilium, [149e] to them, and Priam and the people of Priam of the good ashen spear,”<sup>61</sup> so it did not serve them to sacrifice and to complete gifts in vain for gods when they were hated by them. For I don’t suppose that such a thing is of the gods, to be so influenced by gifts, like an evil usurer; and indeed it’s a silly [*euēthē*]<sup>62</sup> thing we say when we deem this to be “excelling” the

<sup>56</sup> The breathlessness of the length of this single sentence should be compared with the economy of speech or silence that is praised in response.

<sup>57</sup> Lamb’s translations of *euphēmia* and *hiera* are excellent in this sentence, and I have borrowed them.

<sup>58</sup> “Its”: picking up, again, the “perplexity” (*aporia*) of which Alcibiades spoke when he spoke of the “great warning” that perplexity was, in itself, at 148b (cf. note 49, above).

<sup>59</sup> In meter, but not in our texts of Homer. The context of indirect speech makes it clear that, if this happens to be in Homer, Socrates has altered Homer’s words, in a way that artfully remains in meter.

<sup>60</sup> Not in meter, but modified from a line in our texts of Homer (i.e., modified to fit Socrates’s account). See *Iliad* 8.548.

<sup>61</sup> In meter, but not in our texts of Homer. As above, the context of indirect speech makes it clear that, if this happens to be in Homer, Socrates has altered Homer’s words, in a way that artfully remains in meter.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. note 22, above.

Lacedaemonians in this respect. For it would be a terrible thing if the gods look to our gifts and sacrifices but not to our soul, should one happen to be pious and just. [150a] Much rather [to this], I suppose [they look], than to these lavish processions and sacrifices, which those who have offended [*hēmartēkotas*] greatly against gods and greatly against human beings, are in no way prevented from holding both privately and for the city, and accomplishing every year; but they, since they're not bribe takers, think all these things beneath them, as the god and the prophet of the gods declare. It is probable indeed that by the gods and by those human beings who have intelligence, justice and [150b] sound-mindedness are given particular honor; and that the ones who know what must be done and said to gods and to human beings are none other than the sound-minded and the just. But I would like to learn from you what you have in mind [*nōi*] about this.

- ALC. But it does not seem to me, Socrates, to be any way other than to you or to the god; for it would not be seemly for me to come to vote against the god.
- SOC. So then you remember affirming your great perplexity [*aporiai*], [150c] lest you pray for evil things unawares, believing them good?
- ALC. I do.
- SOC. You see then how unsafe [*ouk asphales*] it is for you to go to the god when you're praying, where it may happen that, hearing your irreverent speech [*blasphēmountos*], he will not accept your sacrifice at all, and you may happen to come away with something else besides. It seems to me that it is therefore best to keep silent, for I do not suppose you want to use the Lacedaemonian prayer, given your "great-souledness"—for this is really the fairest of names within unsoundness. [150d] It is therefore necessary to wait until one has learned how one must dispose oneself toward gods and toward human beings.
- ALC. Well, when will that time be here, Socrates, and who the teacher? For I believe [*dokō*] it would be most delightful for me to see who this human being is.
- SOC. It is he who cares for you. But it seems to me, just as Homer says that Athena took away the mist from Diomedes's eyes, "that he

might well perceive [*gignōskoi*] both god and man,<sup>63</sup> [150e] so too must the mist that now happens to be there first be taken away from your soul, and then lay your hands on the delights by which “you are likely [*melleis*] to perceive [*gnōsesthai*] both evil and good [*esthlon*].”<sup>64</sup> But for now you do not seem to me capable of it.

ALC. Let him take it away, whether he wants [to call it] the mist or something else; for I have readied myself to flee nothing enjoined by him, whoever that human being is, if I might expect [*melloimi*] to become better. [151a]

SOC. But how amazing is that person’s eagerness for you!

ALC. Then it seems to me to be the strongest thing to put off the sacrifice until that time.

SOC. And indeed it seems to you correctly, for it is safer [*asphalesteron*] than risking such a risk.

ALC. But how [do you respond to this], Socrates? I will bestow this wreath upon you, since you seem to me to have counseled [me] beautifully, [151b] but to the gods we will give both wreaths and all the other customary things when I see that day has come. And it will be not long coming, if they are willing.

SOC. Well I accept this, and may I see myself delightedly accepting anything else that you give.<sup>65</sup> And just as Euripides has made

<sup>63</sup> *Iliad* 5.128. The context is highly significant: Athena is there responding to Diomedes’s prayer by granting it—not, perhaps, without ulterior motive of her own (cf. *Iliad* 5.131–32).

Socrates makes a slight change to the Homeric text, making *gignōskein* optative instead of subjunctive, while retaining the meter. He thereby gives the word an aspirational sense, where in Homer it is jussive.

<sup>64</sup> The passage translated in quotation marks is in meter, and plays off the line just quoted from Homer.

<sup>65</sup> This sentence is awkward in translation, because awkward in the Greek. Lamb suggests that it “seems very unplatonic” (Plato, *Charmides, Alcibiades I and II, Hipparchus, The Lovers, Theages, Minos, Epinomis*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927], 273n1), but I am not inclined to agree. The connection between “delight” and “seeing” has just emerged in a very pointed way in the conversation (cf. 150d4 and e2), which Socrates is putting specific focus on here (cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Introduction, last sentence and context, with Genesis 3:6); and the dialogue as a whole concerns the problem of indiscriminately wishing for or accepting gifts (cf. 142c4–7). In his *Philosophy of Plato*, Alfarabi notes that in *Second Alcibiades*, “he investigated the things that are good in the eyes of the multitude and the things that are gainful in the eyes of the multitude, whether they are truly good and gainful. He also investigated whether the things that are useful in the eyes of the multitude are truly as they believe them to be or not. He explained that they are not, and here he went through all the things that are good gains in the eyes of the multitude.” Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, rev. ed., trans. Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca, NY: Cornell

Creon [say] upon seeing Teiresias wearing his wreaths, and having heard that he received, on account of his art, the first-fruits of plunder from their enemies, “As an omen do I take ⟨your⟩ victor’s wreaths,” he says, “for in a wave we’re caught, as you do know,”<sup>66</sup> so do I for my part take this opinion of yours as an omen. [151c] And I seem to myself to be no less in a wave than Creon, and I wish I might become victorious over your lovers.

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University Press, 2001), 58. Cf. also Alfarabi’s reflection on the oneness of the subject, means, and object of intellection as a completion: *Risālah fi al-‘aql* [Treatise on intellection], ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1938), 16.

<sup>66</sup> Euripides, *Phoenician Women* 858–59. Teiresias is blind (cf. note 65, above, on the prominent place of “sight” in the dialogue), and his “art” is prophecy. In the play, Creon will soon have cause to see that what he takes here as a good omen for victory will come at a terrible personal cost: his son, Menoeceus, must be sacrificed to save Thebes.

It is not clear whether Socrates slightly alters Euripides’s text here—the MSS do not have “your” (*sa*) before “victor’s wreaths,” as do the MSS of the *Phoeniciae*, but every other word is identical to the passage in Euripides. Given the exactitude with which Socrates recites the rest of the words of the passage, and the impact on the meter if the *sa* is not included, I am inclined to believe that it was dropped in the MSS owing to a scribal error. I have therefore included it, but in the chevrons Burnet uses in his Greek edition to indicate the interpolation, and its uncertainty.



## Adam Smith on Rousseau and the Origin of Languages\*

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**Abstract:** Adam Smith's major works are widely thought to constitute a deliberate though implicit rebuttal to the critique of life in modern commercial societies that Rousseau presented in the *Discourse on Inequality*. This article examines Smith's few explicit references to Rousseau, all of which denigrate him in ways that Smith must have known are unsupported at best and insupportable at worst. The analysis focuses on the only topic that elicited a specific substantive criticism of Rousseau: the origin of languages. Both authors seriously investigated this topic, but in strikingly different ways. Rousseau's analysis of the evolution of language is deeper and more philosophically ambitious than Smith's. This may help to explain why Smith mocked Rousseau's proto-Darwinian account of human evolution, but never tried to refute it. The article concludes by suggesting that Smith may have shared Rousseau's understanding of human nature to a greater extent than he wished to acknowledge, and that he may have hinted at this agreement through the traditional technique of esoteric writing.

One can hardly read Rousseau and Adam Smith without being struck by similarities in some of their central interests, as well as by seemingly profound differences in several of their most important conclusions. The differences are especially prominent with respect to the nature of human sociability and the costs and benefits of modern commercial societies. One of Smith's earliest publications included disparaging comments about Rousseau's account of human nature and civilized life in the *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality among Men* (hereafter *Discourse on Inequality* or *Discourse*).<sup>1</sup> Much

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<sup>1</sup> All citations to Rousseau refer to *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, 5 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1959–1995), abbreviated as *OC*. Quotations follow the orthography in this edition.

of Smith's later work is now widely treated as a powerful response to what he saw as Rousseau's challenging critique of commercial society.<sup>2</sup>

This consensus has not gone unchallenged. Paul Sagar, for example, maintains that Smith did not take Rousseau seriously, primarily because "Smith was able to read and absorb Hume's revolutionary contributions [to the debates over human sociability] in the light of which Rousseau's *Discourse* must have paled."<sup>3</sup> From a different perspective, Mark Hulliung emphasizes the paucity of direct evidence that Smith wrote in response to Rousseau, and rejects the verdict, common among Smith scholars, that Rousseau lost a debate in which he did not participate.<sup>4</sup>

This article examines Smith's few explicit comments about Rousseau, focusing on the only topic on which he published a specific substantive criticism of Rousseau's work: the origin of human languages.<sup>5</sup> This criticism appeared in "Considerations concerning the First Formation of Languages" (hereafter "First Formation").<sup>6</sup> Rousseau, who was almost certainly unaware of this essay, composed an extended treatment of the same subject: the *Essay on the Origin of Languages, Where Melody and Musical Imitation Are Discussed* (hereafter *Essay*). This work appeared after Rousseau's death and twenty years after Smith published "First Formation."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Prominent examples include Dennis C. Rasmussen, *The Problems and Promise of Commercial Society: Adam Smith's Response to Rousseau* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008); Ryan Patrick Hanley, "Commerce and Corruption: Rousseau's Diagnosis and Adam Smith's Cure," *European Journal of Political Theory* 7 (2008): 137–58; Ryan Patrick Hanley, *Adam Smith and the Character of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 26–52; Istvan Hont, *Politics in a Commercial Society: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith*, ed. Béla Kapossy and Michael Sonenscher (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 145–58. For additional references, see Paul Sagar, *The Opinion of Mankind: Sociability and the Theory of the State from Hobbes to Smith* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 166n2; Pierre Force, "Rousseau and Smith: On Sympathy as a First Principle," in *Thinking with Rousseau: From Machiavelli to Schmitt*, ed. Helena Rosenblatt and Paul Schweigert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 115–18; Rasmussen, *Problems and Promise*, 6n8.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Sagar, "Smith and Rousseau after Hume and Mandeville," *Political Theory* 46, no. 1 (2018): 50.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Hulliung, "Rousseau and the Scottish Enlightenment: Connections and Disconnections," in *Adam Smith and Rousseau: Ethics, Politics, Economics*, ed. Maria Pia Paganelli, Dennis C. Rasmussen, and Craig Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 32.

<sup>5</sup> All the works cited in this article were either published by Smith or authorized by him for posthumous publication.

<sup>6</sup> Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. J. G. Bryce (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1985), 203–26.

<sup>7</sup> Although the *Essay* was published posthumously, Rousseau had planned to publish it before his death. See *Emile, OC*, 4:672n.

Although their thoughts matured independently, Smith and Rousseau probably began from a common starting point in the work of the Abbé de Condillac. In the *Discourse*, Rousseau expressly ties his discussion of the origin of languages to Condillac's *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* (hereafter *Human Knowledge*). This book, which was published a decade before Rousseau's *Discourse*, presents a hypothetical history of the development of language that has much in common with Smith's "First Formation." Smith obviously knew Rousseau's *Discourse* well, and he owned a copy of *Human Knowledge*.<sup>8</sup> Smith likely took careful account of Condillac's work,<sup>9</sup> as Rousseau certainly did. These three thinkers put similarly conjectural histories to markedly different uses, in ways that illuminate how Smith and Rousseau approached philosophy.

This article analyzes the relevant parts of six texts: Condillac's *Human Knowledge*, Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*, Smith's letter to the *Edinburgh Review* (hereafter "Letter"), Smith's "First Formation," Rousseau's *Essay*, and an essay by Smith on the imitative arts. I will show that Smith was never willing to come to grips with Rousseau's arguments, and that his comments about Rousseau were at best unsupported and at worst insupportable. I will also present evidence that Smith knew that his criticisms of Rousseau were seriously defective.

These conclusions are consistent with the view that Smith's defense of commercial society constitutes an implicit response to Rousseau, but they also present us with a genuine puzzle. However uneasy Smith may have been with Rousseau's fiery eloquence, he was more than sufficiently perceptive to know that he had not even attempted to refute his arguments. I tentatively suggest that Smith may have regarded Rousseau's radical account of human nature as much more plausible than he considered it prudent to acknowledge. Or to put it differently, perhaps Smith believed that his own efforts to promote virtue through moral education were threatened by both the substance and the style of Rousseau's writings. This hypothesis might usefully be tested through a detailed study of the two authors' greatest works on education, *Emile* and *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (hereafter *Moral Sentiments* or *TMS*).

<sup>8</sup> Hiroshi Mizuta, *Adam Smith's Library: A Catalogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 61–62.

<sup>9</sup> See Phillipson, *Adam Smith*, 94–95, 165–66.

## CONDILLAC'S AMBITIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY

Condillac's speculations about the development of languages are at once incidental and central to the purpose of *Human Knowledge*. The book aims to do something that its author claims had never been done, namely, to present a reliable method of acquiring truth, applicable to any matter into which we may inquire. The languages we learn as children constitute a prime source of the infinity of errors to which we are prone, and a reliable method of escaping those errors requires an understanding of how they arise. In Condillac's view, our languages should be analyzed and reconstructed from the ground up in a way that furthers the search for truth rather than obstructing it. His model is mathematics, and specifically arithmetic. *Human Knowledge* offers little concrete detail about the use of this model in reforming nonmathematical languages, but it seeks to make progress toward such a reform.

Condillac admires the revolution that Descartes effected with his demand that we reject all the knowledge we believe we possess and begin again with the simplest ideas we have (2.2.3 §§33–41, 112–15).<sup>10</sup> But whereas Descartes taught that these simplest ideas are innate, Condillac contends that John Locke proved for the first time that innate ideas do not exist. Locke saw that all knowledge originates in sensation, but he fell short because he did not sufficiently explain the fundamental significance of the use of signs in developing the seeds of knowledge (Introduction, 5). Condillac expressly identifies his own goal with Francis Bacon's, namely, the renewal and advancement of the sciences (Introduction, 5; 2.2.3 §44, 115). He expects his speculative history of language to contribute to Bacon's project because this history "will show the circumstances in which signs are imagined; will make known their true sense, and teach us how to prevent their abuse; and it will not leave, I think, any doubt about the origin of our ideas" (Introduction, 4).

Condillac assumes that our ancestors must have begun with what he calls the language of action: cries and gestures naturally or instinctively stimulated by a certain passion. An observer could understand this language because the observer had experienced the same passion accompanied by his own instinctive response. Frequent repetition of such encounters would enable people to use these same cries and gestures in a deliberate way to communicate the sentiments they reflected, as in giving a warning by making sounds or gestures naturally produced by the passion of fear.

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<sup>10</sup> All citations refer to *Œuvres philosophiques de Condillac*, ed. Georges Le Roy, vol. 1 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1947).

Condillac's conjectural history of progress in the use of instituted signs, which leads to conventional languages, begins with two hypothetical children, born after the biblical deluge and separated from their parents before they learned the use of any signs. He stresses that until they began living together, their souls could have had only the most limited operations, scarcely extending beyond perception and very short-lived memories. Once they did begin living together, natural signs would have enabled some communication, and thus served as models for additional signs that they agreed to institute (2.1, 60).

This story is obviously not meant as a serious hypothesis about what must or may have happened in fact. In a footnote, Condillac alludes to a more realistic suggestion found in pagan writers, namely, that the first people were scattered in the forests, remained inarticulate like beasts until some of them joined together for mutual assistance, and only gradually agreed to the use of arbitrary signs to communicate their ideas (*ibid.*, note 1). He refrains from asking how the race would have survived before they began joining together, or how they could have joined together for mutual assistance without a means of making agreements to do so, or why they would eventually have agreed to the institution of arbitrary signs. As we will see, Rousseau addresses all these questions, and Smith apparently does not believe that they need to be raised.

Condillac proceeds by examining and comparing fully developed languages in an effort to imagine how natural signs, the language of action, and the first arbitrary signs might have developed and interacted with one another as groups of people sought to satisfy their needs and wants. This exposition is an example of what Condillac regards as the proper method of pursuing the truth, namely, analysis and reconstruction. It is a particularly important example because it enables us to see that the language we acquire before we can reason carries with it ideas and maxims that we mistakenly take for innate ideas or self-evident truths (2.2.1).

This feature of language is the first cause of our errors, one that has made mankind's current state of knowledge, as Francis Bacon put it, "a hodgepodge built up from many beliefs and many stray events as well as from childish notions that we absorbed in our earliest years" (2.2.3 §44, 115n2, quoting Bacon's *Novum Organum*, book 1, aphorism 97). Mathematics provides a model for reasoning on the basis of clear ideas whose connections have been established by analysis and reconstruction. An effort to think with comparably methodical care more generally, even in the fields of metaphysics and morals, could lead to what Bacon called "a regeneration of science, i.e.,

that it may be raised up in a sure order from experience and founded anew” (ibid., also quoting aphorism 97). In later works, Condillac contributed to the development of modern scientific method.<sup>11</sup> The important point here is that facilitating progress in methodical thinking is the overarching goal of *Human Knowledge*. As we will see, Rousseau and Smith chose different goals for their own works on the evolution of language.

#### ROUSSEAU’S RADICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Rousseau’s *Discourse on Inequality* opens a discussion of the origin of languages with a seemingly modest tribute: “Permit me to briefly consider the obstacles to the origin of Languages. I could content myself here with citing or quoting the Abbé de Condillac’s study of this subject, all of which fully confirms my sentiment, and which perhaps gave me the first idea of it” (OC, 3:146). The next sentence, however, qualifies this testimonial by noting that Condillac assumed what Rousseau questions, namely, “a sort of society already established among the inventors of language” (ibid.). This is not a small difference. Condillac’s hypothesis—that two children so young that they had learned nothing about the use of signs could survive alone and invent a language—is utterly unrealistic. The immediate context of Rousseau’s own discussion in the *Discourse* is a sustained argument that the “pagan” story mentioned in Condillac’s footnote may actually be true.

Rousseau’s brief discussion of the origin of languages tracks Condillac’s story in several particulars. Both of them, for example, contend that the most primitive form of communication must have arisen from instinctive expressions of distress or alarm, and that the next steps would have been to communicate with simple gestures and imitative sounds. Similarly, both emphasize that progress toward the expression of abstract ideas must have been both gradual and filled with false starts and mistaken generalizations. Rousseau’s account is much more condensed than Condillac’s, but that is less significant than the differences in their reasons for taking up the subject.

Condillac is primarily interested in the process through which speech must have evolved because it will throw light on how our languages have incorporated errors from which we can free ourselves through an orderly rethinking of the

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<sup>11</sup> For discussions of Condillac’s influence, see Lissa Roberts, “Condillac, Lavoisier, and the Instrumentalization of Science,” *The Eighteenth Century* 33, no. 3 (1992): 252–71; Léon Rosenfeld, “Condillac’s Influence on French Scientific Thought,” in *Selected Papers of Léon Rosenfeld* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1997), 655–65; M. P. Crosland, *Historical Studies in the Language of Chemistry* (New York: Dover, 1978), 170–71.

matters into which we inquire. Rousseau agrees that our languages are quite defective even with respect to simple nouns such as those used to define biological species. For him, however, the more pressing issue is the relation between the development of languages and the development of societies. Rousseau agrees that our ancestors did not always have speech. He also assumes that our kind may once have lived scattered in the forests, without speech because it was neither necessary nor possible under such circumstances. How, then, can one explain the change from this state of animality to the highly social and intellectual world into which we are all now born?

Like Aristotle, Rousseau recognizes that man alone among the animals possesses speech, or *logos*, through which we can formulate and communicate general ideas in the form of propositions (OC, 3:149–50). But speech and general ideas seem to presuppose each other.

If Men needed speech in order to learn how to think, they needed even more to know how to think in order to discover the art of speech; and even if it were understood how the sounds of the voice came to be taken for the conventional interpreters of our ideas, one would still have to figure out what could have been the interpreters of this convention for ideas that, having no perceptible object, could not be indicated by gesture or by voice, so that it is barely possible to form tenable conjectures about the birth of this Art of communicating one's thoughts, and of establishing intercourse [*un commerce*] between Minds. (147–48)

The problem is that “general ideas can be introduced into the Mind only with the help of words, and the understanding grasps them only by means of propositions.... Therefore one has to state propositions, therefore one has to speak in order to have general ideas” (149–50). How could our ancestors have invented the words needed to grasp general ideas before they grasped those ideas?

Perhaps because he cannot answer this question, Rousseau doubts that Condillac has discovered the key to achieving Bacon's goal of placing all human knowledge on a secure foundation.<sup>12</sup> Rousseau calls the art of communicating one's thoughts, and of establishing intercourse between minds, “a sublime Art which is already so far from its Origin, but which the Philosopher still sees at so prodigious a distance from its perfection that no man is daring enough to guarantee that it will ever be reached” (OC, 3:148).

<sup>12</sup> This is not only an epistemological disagreement. As Mark Hulliung puts it: “Reworked by Jean-Jacques, Condillac's [*Human Knowledge*] becomes the last thing its author intended, a searing indictment of the culture and politics of modernity.” *The Autocritique of Enlightenment: Rousseau and the Philosophes*, rev. ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2014), 63.

Rousseau concludes this discussion by inviting others to discuss a different chicken-and-egg problem: “Which was more necessary, Society already united for the institution of Languages, or Languages already invented for the establishment of Society?” (*OC*, 3:151). Rousseau does not try to solve that problem here, but his invitation suggests that this question is more tractable than the puzzle about the interdependence of speech and general ideas. He will answer the question about speech and society in his *Essay*, but the conclusion he draws in the *Discourse* is that neither human speech nor human sociability is simply natural. “Whatever may be the case regarding [the origins of speech and of society], it is at least clear, from how little care Nature has taken to bring Men together through mutual needs and to facilitate their use of speech, how little she prepared their Sociability, and how little of her own she has put into everything they have done to establish social bonds” (*ibid.*).

#### SMITH ON ROUSSEAU’S *DISCOURSE*

Shortly after the *Discourse on Inequality* was published in 1755, Smith wrote to the new *Edinburgh Review*, which published his letter in the second issue.<sup>13</sup> He urged the journal’s contributors not to confine their attention to books published in Great Britain, and he treated the *Encyclopédie*, five volumes of which had by then appeared under the editorship of Diderot and d’Alembert, as an especially important undertaking. Smith mentioned Rousseau among those who had already contributed “valuable works” to that project (“Letter,” 246),<sup>14</sup> but his comments about Rousseau focus on the *Discourse*.

According to Smith, this work should be classified with those by a group of English writers in “the contentious and unprosperous” branch of philosophy that includes morals and metaphysics: Hobbes, Locke, Mandeville, Shaftsbury, Butler, Clarke, and Hutcheson (“Letter,” 249–50). Smith contends that Rousseau’s ideas derived specifically from Mandeville, with this difference: in Rousseau “the principles of [Mandeville] are softened, improved, and embellished, and stript of all that tendency to corruption and licentiousness which has disgraced them in their original author” (250). Rousseau’s style, he

<sup>13</sup> Adam Smith, “Letter to the Authors of the *Edinburgh Review*,” in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1982), 242–54.

<sup>14</sup> Almost all of Rousseau’s contributions to the *Encyclopédie* dealt with musical topics. The fifth volume, first published in November 1755, contained his entry dealing with political economy, and Smith’s “Letter” was published in March 1756. It is therefore possible that Smith was referring to this entry, rather than to Rousseau’s numerous entries on music. Scholars, however, have not ascertained when Smith would have read this entry or indeed any specific volume. See Ryan Patrick Hanley, “Adam Smith and the *Encyclopédie*,” *Adam Smith Review* 9 (2017): 219.

says, “tho’ laboured and studiously elegant, is every where sufficiently nervous [i.e., vigorous or powerful], and sometimes even sublime and pathetic [i.e., stirring or affecting].” Thanks to this style, “together with a little philosophical chemistry, . . . the principles and ideas of the profligate Mandeville seem in [Rousseau] to have all the purity and sublimity of Plato, and to be only the true spirit of a republican carried a little too far” (251, emphasis added).

Fully a third of the “Letter” is devoted to Rousseau’s *Discourse*, which dwarfs the attention given to any other author. Yet Smith refuses to analyze the work because, he falsely claims, it “consists almost entirely of rhetoric and description” (OC, 3:251).<sup>15</sup> Instead of addressing Rousseau’s analysis, he provides English translations of three passages that celebrate the pleasures and independence of primitive tribal life, and lament the falseness, unhappiness, and lack of true freedom found in modern societies. Smith’s own brief commentary in the “Letter” is the entire textual basis for the claim that Smith later sought to refute Rousseau’s evaluation of commercial society. Oddly, *Moral Sentiments* includes a lengthy critique of Mandeville, without so much as a word about Rousseau.<sup>16</sup> Why would Smith try to refute or correct Rousseau, as so many modern scholars think he did, without ever confronting Rousseau’s arguments directly? This is a serious question that does not have an obvious answer.<sup>17</sup>

Smith’s comments in the “Letter” conclude with the following remark: “I shall only add, that the [*Discourse on Inequality*’s] dedication to the republic of Geneva, of which Mr. Rousseau has the honour of being a citizen, is an agreeable, animated, and I believe too, a just panegyric; and expresses that ardent and passionate esteem which it becomes a good citizen to entertain for the government of his country and the character of his countrymen”

<sup>15</sup> This claim is patently outlandish, as anyone can confirm by reading the *Discourse* in its entirety. Jeffrey Lomonaco argues that the “Letter” was meant to provoke a sense of rivalry and emulation in Scotland that could lead to the systematization and adequate presentation of a science of man derived from Hume, whom the “Letter” never mentions. “Adam Smith’s ‘Letter to the Authors of the *Edinburgh Review*,’” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2002): 659–76. If he is right, might Rousseau be Hume’s (and Smith’s) most serious rival? Rousseau has plausibly been called the founder of the science of man by the eminent anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. See “Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Fondateur des sciences de l’homme,” in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1962). This encomium would surprise anyone familiar only with what Smith says about the *Discourse on Inequality*.

<sup>16</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1982), 308–14.

<sup>17</sup> Dennis Rasmussen explains the silence about Rousseau in *TMS* by noting that Smith frequently refers to other authors with epithets such as “an agreeable philosopher,” rather than by name (*Problems and Promise*, 58–59). *TMS* contains no such references to Rousseau, but it does respond at length and by name to some other authors, including Mandeville (as Rasmussen acknowledges).

(*OC*, 3:254). Thus, Smith treats the *Discourse* itself as an analytically empty rhetorical performance, and concludes, somewhat patronizingly perhaps, by praising Rousseau's rhetorically extravagant expression of patriotism.<sup>18</sup>

Rousseau's enthusiastically hyperbolic dedication is indeed, as Smith says, a "panegyric," unlike the *Discourse* itself, which advances a bold and transgressive philosophic analysis that challenges the traditional view that human beings are political or social animals by nature. Nevertheless, the criteria by which Rousseau purports to evaluate Geneva in the dedication are quite consistent with the political principles he set forth in the *Encyclopédie* (which Smith may have read before composing the "Letter") and in the *Social Contract* several years later.<sup>19</sup> Smith says nothing about those criteria, none of which implies that commercial societies should be rejected in favor of some alternative form of social organization.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Rousseau repeatedly treated the commercial city of Geneva as a model that approximates the best form of civic life that can be achieved in modern Europe. Nor was he averse to actively promoting commercial development as part of an effort to establish healthy political institutions.<sup>21</sup> Rousseau certainly does insist that all modern commercial societies, including Geneva, compare unfavorably in some important respects with prepolitical tribes, and with Sparta and republican Rome. But

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<sup>18</sup> Rousseau anticipated that the dedication might be seen by wealthy and powerful people in Geneva as an effort to stir up trouble for the government, rather than as a pious and innocuous expression of patriotic sentiment. See Rousseau to Pastor Jean Perdriau, Nov. 28, 1754, in *Correspondance complète*, ed. R. A. Leigh (Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1965–1989), 3:55–60; *Confessions*, book 8, *OC*, 1:395. The dedication can more charitably be read as a friendly admonishment addressed to Rousseau's countrymen, as Rousseau suggested it should be read, but Smith does not consider the possibility that he was subtly pointing to some serious shortcomings in Genevan politics.

<sup>19</sup> For analyses of Rousseau's entry in the *Encyclopédie*, see Clifford Orwin, "Rousseau on the Problem of Invisible Government: The *Discours sur l'économie politique*," in *Educating the Prince: Essays in Honor of Harvey Mansfield*, ed. Mark Blitz and William Kristol (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000) (focusing on the intractable conflict of interest between the government and the governed), and Ryan Patrick Hanley, "Political Economy and Individual Liberty," in *The Challenge of Rousseau*, ed. Eve Grace and Christopher Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 34–56 (focusing on the entry's promotion of individual freedom, especially through the preservation of private property with a minimum degree of government interference). For a discussion of the *Social Contract's* analysis of the inherent dangers and beneficent potential of government, see Nelson Lund, *Rousseau's Rejuvenation of Political Philosophy: A New Introduction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 225–37, 242–57.

<sup>20</sup> In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau stresses that the best form of government varies with the circumstances in which a people finds itself. Bk. 3, chaps. 3, 9, *OC*, 3:403, 419.

<sup>21</sup> See *Considerations on the Government of Poland and Its Projected Reformation* (hereafter *Government of Poland*), chap. 13, *OC*, 3:1027 (recommending that Poland give political preferences to cities where competent administration had led to the flourishing of "commerce, industry, and the arts").

he never suggests that any of these lost ways of life could be reestablished in modern Europe.

Rather than investigate the relation between Rousseau's florid dedicatory celebration of Geneva and his pointed critique of civilization itself in the text, Smith stresses what he seems to regard as Rousseau's tarted-up rendition of Mandeville's licentious system. Smith never explains what he means by the "philosophical chemistry" that supposedly helps Rousseau to conjure an illusion of Platonic purity and sublimity from the ideas of the immoral Mandeville.<sup>22</sup> Nor does he explain what he means by the reference, at once ambiguous and vague, to "the true spirit of a republican carried a little too far."<sup>23</sup> One might justly say of Smith's commentary on Rousseau what he falsely says about the *Discourse on Inequality*: that it "consists almost entirely of rhetoric and description" ("Letter," 251).

Ironically, Smith's own juxtaposition of Rousseau and Mandeville appears to involve some dubious *rhetorical* chemistry. He points out that both authors deny that there is in man a powerful instinct that drives him to seek society with other humans for its own sake. He also says that Mandeville imagines that the misery of man's original state drove people into society, whereas Rousseau maintains that "some unfortunate accidents having given birth to the unnatural passions of ambition and the vain desire of superiority, to which he had before been a stranger, produced the same fatal effect" ("Letter," 250). Although this characterization does not capture the complexity of Rousseau's account of the long road to civil society, Smith has identified an important difference between the accounts of nature in Rousseau and Mandeville. But Rousseau's claim about the unnatural basis of the need for political rule is not a mere cosmetic difference produced by a seductive blend of philosophical chemistry and edifying rhetorical devices.

<sup>22</sup> Dennis Rasmussen argues that Rousseau's theory of humanity's natural goodness is the philosophical chemistry to which Smith refers. "Rousseau's 'Philosophical Chemistry' and the Foundations of Adam Smith's Thought," *History of Political Thought* 27, no. 1 (2006): 632–33. Similarly, Charles L. Griswold suggests that in Rousseau "one sense of self-love (*amour de soi*) is purified, so to speak, of Mandevillian associations." *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith: A Philosophical Encounter* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 35. These suggestions are not implausible, but Smith unquestionably left his readers guessing.

<sup>23</sup> Rasmussen interprets this phrase as an expression of Smith's sympathy with Rousseau's critique of commercial society. Dennis C. Rasmussen, "Smith, Rousseau and the True Spirit of a Republican," in Paganelli, Rasmussen, and Smith, *Adam Smith and Rousseau*, 241–59. That is a possible interpretation, but Rasmussen himself acknowledges that it is not obviously correct (*ibid.*, 241–42). I would add that Smith discouraged this interpretation when he suggested that the appeal of the passages he quotes from the *Discourse* arises from Rousseau's misleadingly beautiful picture of savage life, rather than from a recognition of the truth in his bleak description of civilized life.

A century before Darwin, Rousseau argued that we are descended from speechless animals that may have resembled the great apes about which traveling Europeans had reported: we are manifestly distinguished by nature from other animals by our capacity to acquire speech, and thus to become civilized. But our cultural evolution, stimulated by chance events in our environment, has given us a constellation of needs and desires that conflict in many ways with our fundamental ape nature. Human social institutions can manage those conflicts more or less well, but can never eliminate them. All these institutions are fundamentally artificial and forever imperfect. Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of Rousseau's proto-Darwinian account may be, it is not Mandeville dressed up to look like Plato.

Rather than respond seriously to Rousseau's prescient account of human evolution, Smith attributes its appeal to a childish taste for imagining the indolent pleasures of pastoral life ("Letter," 251).<sup>24</sup> Perhaps he did not think a letter about the editorial policies of an obscure new journal was an appropriate forum for a philosophic debate with Rousseau (or with any of the other thinkers on whom the "Letter" passes summary judgment). Fair enough. But we should at least wonder whether Smith genuinely believed that Rousseau is little more than a silver-tongued Mandeville.

#### SMITH ON THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGES

In 1761, two years after *Moral Sentiments* appeared, a short-lived journal called *The Philological Miscellany* published Smith's "First Formation." Beginning in 1767, Smith appended the essay, without explanation and with slightly different titles, to the third and every subsequent edition of *TMS*.

Smith's essay has three parts. First, a conjectural history of the order in which the parts of speech would have been invented. Second, an account of the transitions that grammatically inflected languages have undergone when large numbers of people needed to communicate on a regular basis in tongues they did not acquire in childhood. Third, an assessment of what is lost from the richness of a language when it makes such a transition.

The first section of "First Formation" contains the following reference to Rousseau's discussion of the origin of languages in the *Discourse on Inequality*:

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<sup>24</sup> On Rousseau's prescience, see, e.g., Robert Wokler, "Perfectible Apes in Decadent Cultures: Rousseau's Anthropology Revisited," *Dædalus* 107, no. 3 (1978): 107-34; Lund, *Rousseau's Rejuvenation*, 39-40, 52-60.

It is this application of the name of an individual to a great multitude of objects, whose resemblance *naturally* recalls the idea of that individual, and of the name which expresses it, that seems originally to have given occasion to the formation of those classes and assortments, which, in the schools, are called genera and species, and of which the ingenious and eloquent M. Rousseau of Geneva\* finds himself so much at a loss to account for the origin. What constitutes a species is merely a number of objects, bearing a certain degree of resemblance to one another, and on that account denominated by a single appellation, which may be applied to express any one of them. (204–5, emphasis added)

The footnote corresponding to the asterisk cites a specific passage in the *Discourse*. In that passage, Rousseau makes the same point with which Smith opens “First Formation”: that the first substantive words must have been proper names. Rousseau then says:

But when, by means that I do not understand [*conçois*], our new Grammarians began to extend their ideas, and to generalize their words, the ignorance of the Inventors must have [page break here in the edition cited by Smith] subjected this method to very narrow limits; and as they had at first multiplied the names of individuals too much, for lack of knowing the genera and species, they afterward made too few species and genera, for lack of having considered the Beings in all their differences. (OC, 3:150)

Smith does not explain how people first began to generalize their words; he just assumes that they did it “naturally.” How, exactly, did people who lacked speech identify the shared and distinguishing characteristics of objects and then determine which were relevant to the task of giving them shared or different names? This is a very hard question, which Smith makes no effort to address,<sup>25</sup> although (or perhaps because) he was well aware of its difficulty.<sup>26</sup> The use of the word “naturally” as an explanation is pervasive in “First Formation,” reflecting Smith’s assumption that human beings have always been fundamentally similar to the people of our own time, even before they had conventional languages. This is the most important assumption that

<sup>25</sup> See James Otteson, “Adam Smith’s First Market: The Development of Language,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 19 (2002): 75–77; James Otteson, *Adam Smith’s Marketplace of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 272–73; Stephen K. Land, “Adam Smith’s ‘Considerations concerning the First Formation of Languages,’” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38 (1977): 680.

<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere, Smith acknowledges that “to explain the nature, and to account for the origin of general Ideas, is, even to this day, the greatest difficulty in abstract philosophy.” “The Principles which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries; Illustrated by the History of the Ancient Logics and Metaphysics” (hereafter “Ancient Logics”), in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, 124.

Rousseau refuses to make in the *Discourse*, and Smith does not attempt (here or in the “Letter”) to defend the assumption he makes.

Smith’s supercilious comment obscures Rousseau’s main point, namely, that the process of generalization must have been one of trial and error because it is extremely difficult to ascertain the boundaries that should *appropriately* be assigned between the various classes of beings. The obscurity Smith creates is heightened by the fact that the specific pages from Rousseau that he cites stop part way through the paragraph I quoted above (after “the ignorance of the Inventors must have”). This would discourage a reader who looks up the reference from discovering why Smith’s answer does not respond to Rousseau’s question.

In the next paragraph, Smith assumes without explanation that most objects came to be “arranged under their proper classes and assortments” (“First Formation,” 205). By “proper,” perhaps he means nothing more than “particular” or “distinctive,” rather than “appropriate.” But the ambiguity once again draws the reader’s attention away from what Rousseau stresses, and what Smith acknowledges elsewhere: that even the basic task of sorting natural beings, such as living organisms, into their appropriate classes is a task that has never been accomplished.<sup>27</sup> Smith’s assumption that prelinguistic humans recognized “natural kinds” begs the question posed by Rousseau.<sup>28</sup>

Smith’s allusion to the *Discourse* also conceals the aporia toward which Rousseau’s argument is building: “Which was more necessary, Society already united for the institution of Languages, or Languages already invented for the establishment of Society?” (*OC*, 3:151). Nowhere does Smith address that question. He appears to maintain that speech originates outside society, as when two prelinguistic individuals try to make their mutual wants intelligible (“First Formation,” 203–4), but he does not explain how such a pair could either reenter society or found their own.<sup>29</sup> Instead, Smith is content to assume that once both speech and society exist, they develop alongside each other. That is virtually self-evident, but it does not answer Rousseau’s question about their origins. It is very hard to believe that Smith was unaware

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<sup>27</sup> See “The Principles Which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries; Illustrated by the History of Astronomy” (hereafter “History of Astronomy”), in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, 38.

<sup>28</sup> See Marcelo Dascal, “Adam Smith’s Theory of Language,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 89.

<sup>29</sup> See Eric Schliesser, *Adam Smith: Systematic Philosopher and Public Thinker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 43.

of this fact, or of the fact that he was evading Rousseau's aporia about the genesis of general ideas.

Smith's seemingly incidental comment about the *Discourse on Inequality* reflects a fundamental difference between his reasons for investigating the origin of languages and Rousseau's. Condillac, we recall, was primarily interested in finding a general method for establishing the truth, which would advance the Baconian project of mastering nature for the relief of man's estate. Rousseau is primarily interested in raising radical questions about human nature and human history, questions that do not presuppose the worthiness of the Baconian project. Smith's own goal is harder to pin down, but it is manifestly much more modest than Condillac's or Rousseau's.

The first section of "First Formation" argues that language would have developed through a process of abstraction. Thus, proper nouns would have been among the first words invented, and then naturally extended to similar objects, just as very young children are apt to call any adult Father or Mother. Adjectives would have undergone a similar process. Adjectives are inherently more abstract than nouns, and would have been adopted only after people recognized that green trees and green grass share a common characteristic, as do a dead tree and a dead animal. Smith elaborates this logic all the way through the most abstract or metaphysical words, such as prepositions, numerals, and the first-person singular pronoun. Similarly, he argues that the earliest verbs would have been impersonal, like *pluit* (it rains), while later usages, like *imber decidit* (the rain falls), resulted from artificially abstracting two parts from what is in fact a single event. In an arresting remark, Smith says that this division of the event "is the effect of the imperfection of language" ("First Formation," 216).

An important causal claim in this section of "First Formation" is that the development of languages would have been shaped by a natural love of analogy and similarity of sound. Thus, for example, declensions would have arisen before prepositions were invented, and adjectives would have been given endings copied from the nouns that they modified, "chiefly for the sake of a certain similarity of sound, of a certain species of rhyme, which is *naturally* so very agreeable to the human ear" (208–9, emphasis added). He offers the same kind of explanation for the conjugations of verbs, and for "by far the greater part of the rules of grammar" (211).

These remarks about the imperfection of language and about the putatively natural love for certain kinds of rhyme and analogy may help to explain

why Smith says so little about the very earliest steps toward the establishment of conventional languages. Condillac had gone into great detail about the shift from the natural languages of gesture and instinctive sounds to conventional speech. For his part, Rousseau emphasized the extreme difficulty of accounting for that shift. Smith, however, does not distinguish between natural and conventional languages. The significance of this omission is suggested when Smith says that verbs must have been coeval with the first attempts toward the formation of language. Why? “No affirmation can be expressed without the assistance of some verb. We never speak but in order to express our opinion that something either is or is not” (“First Formation,” 215).

Smith may be right about the order in which various parts of speech came to be used, but is his explanation sound? It is not. On the contrary, it is plainly mistaken, as he well knew. He no doubt puts his finger on the distinctively human ability to state propositions through the use of compositional language. But expressing opinions is not the only reason we speak, as Smith himself explained in the very book to which “First Formation” was appended.<sup>30</sup> Consider just two examples: “Stay away from me!” and “Won’t you join me?” Commands, requests, and questions are not expressions of opinion, and they are frequently easy to convey without the use of conventional language. Infants and nonhuman animals do it all the time. But they can also be expressed verbally, using compositional language. By falsely asserting that speech *only* does what only speech can do, Smith draws our attention away from questions about the nature of prelinguistic communication and about its relation to what he calls the first attempts toward the formation of language.

In the second section of his essay, Smith considers the changes that fully developed languages undergo when linguistically differentiated groups mingle through migration or conquest. He notes that highly inflected tongues, which most or all ancient languages seem to be, are very difficult to master unless one learns them as a child. Faced with a need to communicate across linguistic cultures, people will have strong incentives to use a few prepositions and auxiliary verbs in place of a multitude of inflected forms.<sup>31</sup> Thus, there is an inverse relationship between the complexity of a language’s declensions and conjugations on one hand, and the complexity of its composition, on the

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<sup>30</sup> See *TMS*, 7.4.25, 336. This blatant contradiction may explain why there is no reference to “First Formation” in the editions of *TMS* in which it was included. This is contrary to the standard practice, followed by Smith himself in the *Wealth of Nations*, of referring to an appendix at the appropriate point in the text.

<sup>31</sup> Subsequent research in linguistics has produced evidence consistent with Smith’s analysis. See David M. Levy, “Adam Smith’s Rational Choice Linguistics,” *Economic Inquiry* 35 (1997): 672–78.

other (“First Formation,” 221–22). Smith analogizes the process of linguistic simplification to the process by which mechanical engines are improved as people figure out how to use fewer wheels (223–24).

Increasing the efficiency of machines in this way constitutes an unqualified gain. One might think the same about language, for simplifying the elements of a language makes it easier for adults to learn, and thus more useful to native and nonnative speakers alike. On the contrary, Smith says, the loss of inflections renders a tongue “more and more imperfect, and less proper for many of the purposes of language” (224). But Smith does not deny that the simplification of its elements enhances the efficiency of a language in serving its primary purpose, as it does in the case of a machine.<sup>32</sup>

In the final section of “First Formation,” Smith elaborates on his claim that language has multiple and conflicting purposes. First, the need to rely on prepositions and auxiliary verbs renders discourse more prolix, and thus less elegant. Second, the loss of grammatical inflections renders speech less agreeable to the ear. Third, the absence of inflection makes the meaning of a sentence depend on word order, creating a straitjacket that limits the beauty that can be achieved in speech or writing.

Thus, Smith’s concluding thoughts about the evolution of languages are entirely devoted to considerations of what might be called aesthetic utility. Unfortunately, he does not explain exactly why or to what extent such a loss of beauty and elegance is important. Nor does he suggest that we would on balance be better off if the changes he describes had not occurred. Instead, he ends with another reference to efficiency, pointing out that versification and the creation of agreeable prose structures “must to [the ancients] have been acquirable with much more ease, and to much greater perfection, than it can be to those whose expression is constantly confined by the prolixness, constraint, and monotony of modern languages” (226).

In the book to which Smith appended “First Formation,” he suggests that a natural desire to persuade and direct other people may be “the instinct upon which is founded the faculty of speech” (*TMS*, 7.4.25, 336). That explanation for

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<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere, Smith proposes the same analogy between machines and another kind of human invention, namely, scientific systems, without identifying any losses stemming from the simplification of such systems (“History of Astronomy,” 66). To the extent that one takes these analogies seriously, one begins to suspect that Smith thinks the practical effects of language and science are more important than their contribution to the pursuit of the truth. Might he think the same about what he calls the “contentious and unprosperous” branch of philosophy that investigates morals and metaphysics? See “Letter,” 249.

the origin of languages is fundamentally different from the account in “First Formation,” and it is one that he conspicuously does not consider here (and does not pursue in *TMS*). Nor does he suggest that the evolution of modern languages has made them less useful for the purposes of directing and persuading. As we will see, Rousseau vigorously investigated both possibilities.

#### ROUSSEAU’S *ESSAY ON THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGES*

Rousseau’s brief and conspicuously inconclusive discussion of the origin of languages in the *Discourse on Inequality* is part of an unsettling argument that civilization has imposed costs on mankind that outweigh the gains. But he never suggests that the acquisition of speech has been a similarly bad bargain. On the contrary, the form of tribal society in which he sees the optimal combination of advantages and disadvantages is populated by people with fully developed languages (*OC*, 3:171). The *Discourse* does not discuss the evolution of languages after different linguistic communities began to interact with one another (the focus of “First Formation”), but Rousseau does take up that topic in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages*.<sup>33</sup> There we find an analysis that could almost have been an elaboration of the cryptic comment in *Moral Sentiments* about the instinct to direct and persuade other people.

Unlike the *Discourse*, the *Essay* does not defend the provocative thesis that human beings are asocial by nature in the sense that they could and may have lived for eons without durable social bonds.<sup>34</sup> Instead, it begins with

<sup>33</sup> The *Essay* appears to have originated from a draft note meant for inclusion in the *Discourse on Inequality*, combined with a fragment on the origin of melody. See John T. Scott, “Rousseau and the Melodious Language of Music,” *Journal of Politics* 59, no. 3 (1997): 805n3.

<sup>34</sup> Rousseau does not assert that our ancestors ever did live this way, and he acknowledges that they may not have done so. But he claims that they could and may have done so. See Lund, *Rousseau’s Rejuvenation*, 15 and n9, 56 and n32, 74n62; Christopher Kelly, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” in *The Rousseauian Mind*, ed. Eve Grace and Christopher Kelly (London: Routledge, 2019), 166–69. Our cousins the orangutans can and in some places do live without durable social bonds, although they easily develop complex social relations with their own kind and with human beings when they have an occasion to do so. Some of them can also learn and make use of fairly large human vocabularies, though none has proved able to learn a human language. The possibility that some of our human ancestors lived much like orangutans has not been ruled out by modern science. See Lund, *Rousseau’s Rejuvenation*, 52–60.

I disagree with Victor Gourevitch’s conclusion that “the isolated, self-sufficient, and speechless beings of Part I of the *Discourse* are perhaps most accurately characterized as premises. On the premise of such beings, it is utterly impossible to conceive of how language could have arisen.” “Rousseau’s Pure State of Nature,” *Interpretation* 16, no. 1 (1988): 53. I think he is right to argue that Rousseau does not believe that speech (i.e., the kind of compositional language that requires an understanding of general ideas) could be invented or instituted in a way that would constitute an “absolute beginning” (*ibid.*, 53–55). But the *Discourse* and the *Essay*, taken together, suggest how speech might have gradually “arisen” after isolated and therefore speechless beings, who were nonetheless capable of speech,

the traditional and intuitive assumption that humans are distinguished from other animals by the faculty of speech, which is the first social institution (chap. 1, *OC*, 5:375). “Provided only that there is some means of communication between himself and his kind by which one [man] can act and the other sense, they will succeed eventually in communicating to one another all the ideas they have” (379). This is consistent with the *Discourse*, which acknowledged that nature made an indispensable contribution to human sociability and the establishment of social bonds (*OC*, 3:142, 151). Responding to a critic of the *Discourse*, Rousseau explained that the state of society “follows from the nature of the human race, not immediately as you say, but solely, as I have proved, with the help of certain external circumstances which could have existed or not existed, or could at least have arisen sooner or later, and consequently accelerated or retarded the progression.”<sup>35</sup>

Much of what Rousseau says in the *Essay* about the origin of languages tracks elements of Condillac’s conjectural history. Both agree that the most primitive forms of communication must have arisen from the kind of natural languages we observe in human infants and many other animals. Gestures and imitative sounds would have provided the natural basis for conventional signs, which must have somehow progressed from concrete expressions, such as proper nouns and impersonal verbs, to increasingly abstract concepts.<sup>36</sup> From the beginning, conventional languages would have reflected mistaken assumptions about the world, which were and are often difficult to correct.

Nevertheless, Rousseau announces that he has something new to contribute. “It would then seem that the needs dictated the first gestures and

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developed social relations that called forth the exercise of this faculty. Even in the *Discourse*, Rousseau says only that it is “barely” possible to form tenable conjectures about the birth of speech and that the impossibility of languages having “arisen and been established” by purely human means had “almost” been demonstrated. *OC*, 3:147–48, 151.

I also disagree with Marc F. Plattner, who argues that Rousseau “regarded the state of nature described in the [*Discourse on Inequality*] as approximating a factual, historical account.” *Rousseau’s State of Nature: An Interpretation of the Discourse on Inequality* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1979), 25. Although Rousseau never made such an assertion, Plattner believes that Rousseau’s speculation that there might still be speechless, ape-like people living in the primitive state of nature provides “decisive evidence” for this interpretation (*ibid.*). This inference is mistaken. The possibility that speechless humans *might* today be living in the condition described by Rousseau as the primitive state of nature implies only that he thought such a description *might* approximate “a factual, historical account.”

<sup>35</sup> “Letter to Philopolis,” *OC*, 3:232.

<sup>36</sup> Marcelo Dascal judges the *Essay* a failure, on Rousseau’s own terms, because it bypasses the *Discourse*’s puzzle about the precise relation between the origins of speech and general ideas. “*Aporia* and *Theoria*: Rousseau on Language and Thought,” *Revue internationale de philosophie*, no. 124/125 (1978): 229–33. This judgment would be easier to accept if Rousseau had purported to present what Dascal would consider an adequate theory, or if Dascal had shown how Rousseau could have done so.

the passions drew forth the first articulate vocalizations [*les premières voix*]. Following the track of the facts with these distinctions in mind, perhaps one should reason about the origin of languages quite otherwise than has been done until now” (chap. 2, *OC*, 5:380).<sup>37</sup> These distinctions—between physical needs and moral needs (or passions) and between gestures and articulate vocalizations—provide one of the organizing principles of the *Essay*. The other principal element in the analysis is the interaction between needs and passions on one hand and the physical environment on the other.

Rousseau begins with the assumption, subsequently confirmed by modern science, that mankind originated in a warm climate, and he argues that people would have been dispersed into isolated family groups so long as they remained where such groups could independently gather enough food to get along.<sup>38</sup> External forces, such as a changing climate, which drove people into more straitened circumstances, would have forced them to find new ways of subsisting. The acquisition of new knowledge would have served as both a precondition and an incentive for new kinds of human interaction in which conventional languages would be useful. Thus, Rousseau presents what we can call an economic explanation for the origin of conventional languages, which parallels at a deeper level Smith’s account of the transformation of inflected languages. Commerce is both a cause and an effect of the uniquely powerful human ability to learn and to communicate what one knows.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> On Rousseau’s originality and foresight, see Edouard Claparède, “Rousseau et l’origine du langage,” *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau* 24 (1935): 95–119. In what might be taken as a response to Dascal’s claim (see previous footnote) that the *Essay* is a failure on Rousseau’s own terms, Thomas Robert argues that Rousseau departed fundamentally from Condillac by rejecting the applicability of his analytic method to linguistics. Rousseau does indeed “bypass” the apparently insoluble aporia of the *Discourse* by attributing the source of articulate vocalizations to moral passions, thus avoiding the assumption that general ideas preceded language. Like Darwin and unlike Condillac, Robert suggests, Rousseau in effect treats linguistics as a social science rather than as a natural science. See “L’origine du langage de l’animal humain: Rousseau, Darwin, Saussure,” *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 67 (2014): 203–12.

<sup>38</sup> Although Rousseau could not have known it, the extant gorillas of central Africa (where modern science tells us that the family of human animals originated) show that this would have been possible. For a discussion of the three stages of Rousseau’s conjectured state of nature, which draws on modern discoveries about our primate cousins, see Lund, *Rousseau’s Rejuvenation*, 52–60.

<sup>39</sup> The *Discourse* calls this faculty “perfectibility,” using a term that Rousseau seems to have introduced into discussions of human nature (see *OC*, 3:142; Wokler, “Perfectible Apes in Decadent Cultures,” 127). Victor Gourevitch argues, and I agree, that this describes the state of human beings, from the beginning to the present, as one of “determinate potentialities”: faculties that were once dormant develop in the same order everywhere, not by nature to be sure, but according to nature. Gourevitch, “On Strauss on Rousseau,” in Grace and Kelly, *The Challenge of Rousseau*, 153–54. In Jean Starobinski’s formulation: “Like the establishment of society, language is a late effect of a primitive faculty: it is the result of a delayed blossoming. Natural in its origin, it becomes an anti-nature. The dangerous privilege of man is to have in his own nature the source of powers by which he will

Rousseau's account differs significantly from Smith's (and Condillac's). He begins with a distinction between two different kinds of passion. Everyone has physical needs that must be satisfied in order to survive. In the terminology of the *Discourse*, the fundamental natural passion of self-love (*amour de soi*) serves these needs by leading us to seek food, drink, and protection from threats in the environment. But there are also passions for goods that individuals do not need for survival, which he calls moral needs. These are the social passions, which are ultimately rooted in both self-love and in what the *Discourse* calls natural pity or commiseration. Whereas the *Discourse* argued that self-love would have been the overwhelmingly dominant passion in "nascent man" at the very earliest stage of the state of nature, Rousseau gives the emergent social passions a more prominent place in the *Essay's* conjectural history.

To see why, consider what might have happened if physical needs had been the only stimulus for communication. Where there was sufficient food easily available, people would naturally have dispersed in order to gather it, without requiring contact with other people in order to survive. Faced with scarcity, it would be rational to pursue survival through cooperation, and it would be possible in principle to make use of conventional languages consisting entirely of visible signs, starting with simple gestures, progressing through something like the sign languages designed for the deaf, and culminating with writing. Rousseau maintains that such languages could have been used to establish laws, rulers, arts, commercial relations, and almost everything else that we do with the help of speech (*Essay*, chap. 1, *OC*, 5:378). This did not happen because human beings began by feeling (*sentir*) rather than by reasoning (*Essay*, chap. 2, 5:380; *Discourse*, *OC*, 3:142–43).<sup>40</sup> It must have been moral needs—such as the desire to "move a young heart or repulse an unjust aggressor"—that led people to transform instinctive cries into rudimentary conventions from which languages could develop (*Essay*, chap. 2, *OC*, 5:380–81). Physical needs are pretty much the same for all people at all times, but different social passions become prominent in different circumstances, a fact that Rousseau thinks had significant effects on the origin of languages.

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oppose his nature and Nature itself." Starobinski, "Rousseau et l'origine des langues," in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l'obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 357–58. See also Thomas Robert, "L'anthropologie rousseauiste et l'origine du langage," *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau* 53 (2018): 292–93 (arguing that human perfectibility is "always already in action").

<sup>40</sup> Although the most primitive feelings would have been (and are) sensations or perceptions, languages developed from the expression of sentiments. For a brief discussion, see Terence Marshall, "Epistemology and Political Perception in the Case of Rousseau," in Grace and Kelly, *The Challenge of Rousseau*, 92.

Rousseau distinguishes two types of physical environment, which he broadly characterizes as the South and the North.<sup>41</sup> By the South, he means places in which humans had reasons to congregate but in which it would not be especially difficult to survive. An example would be semi-arid climes in which people had regular contact with significant numbers of other people at water sources. These meetings would not provide much fuel for economic competition in the narrow sense of the term. But they would provoke a desire to attract a specific mate in circumstances where multiple potential mates, and potential rivals, were close at hand. This is the precondition for sexual jealousy, and it is a short step from that passion to the desire to attract admiration and respect more generally. This desire, which the *Discourse* calls *amour-propre*, ultimately drives much of civilized life. Early languages in the South would have been shaped in large part by the need to persuade.

The North comprised environments where the climate was harsher and the earth more niggardly. In these places, economic incentives would have been more important, and early languages would have been marked more by clarity than by charm. Clarity is what one needs above all to conduct the kind of business in which your material interests are at stake, such as cooperating to stave off starvation or warning someone not to touch the food you have acquired. Only in a farce would someone use the same terms to attempt a seduction and to negotiate a prenuptial agreement. Rousseau memorably conveys his central point when he says that the first word in the South would have been *aimez-moi* (love me), and in the North *aidez-moi* (assist me) (*Essay*, chap. 10, 408).<sup>42</sup> Both

<sup>41</sup> These are not precise geographical terms, let alone references to the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, as Mira Morgenstern mistakenly asserts. See *Rousseau and the Politics of Ambiguity: Self, Culture, and Society* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 17–20. For a discussion of the subtlety with which Rousseau distinguishes the North and the South, and qualifies that distinction, see Michael Davis, *The Music of Reason: Rousseau, Nietzsche, Plato* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 26–31, 46–47.

<sup>42</sup> In the *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau says that men “at first gave to each word the sense of an entire proposition [*proposition*]” (OC, 3:149). Richard L. Velkley notes that this implies that humans were thinking “propositionally” before they had words for propositions, and seems to argue that this “completely undercuts” what Rousseau says shortly thereafter about the necessary relationship between speech and general ideas. *Being after Rousseau: Philosophy and Culture in Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 47, 166n36. It is true that the *Discourse* leaves the reader wondering how one could think “propositionally” without general ideas. The *Essay*’s examples of *aidez-moi* and *aimez-moi* help to clarify the matter by calling attention to a kind of proposition that does not presuppose general ideas. Although we can and frequently do use the highly abstract first-person pronoun when articulating such proposals (or “propositions” as we often call them in both French and English), the thoughts they express do not presuppose general ideas. In fact, we can convey the same propositions by saying in a certain tone of voice: “Help!” or “Kiss?” Rousseau’s point in the passages to which Velkley refers is that even the considerable “exertion of genius” (OC, 3:149) by which humans must have first distinguished nouns and verbs does not by itself explain how general ideas and

propositions, or proposals, may be in the imperative mood grammatically, but the human moods they reflect have very different sources.<sup>43</sup>

Rousseau sees residual effects of these different origins in modern languages. Like Smith, he recognizes that languages change when linguistically distinct populations come into sustained contact with each other (*Essay*, chap. 5, 384). But despite such changes, he maintains, modern languages still reflect their disparate origins: “French, English, German are the private languages of men who assist one another, who reason with one another in cold blood, or of quick-tempered people who get angry; but the ministers of the Gods proclaiming the sacred mysteries, sages giving laws to peoples, chiefs leading the multitude, must speak Arabic or Persian” (*Essay*, chap. 11, 409, footnote omitted). These are obviously differences of degree, since all languages can be used both to reason and to persuade without reasoning. But they can help us understand Rousseau’s most fundamental divergence from the mode of analysis undertaken by Smith.

Rousseau contends that speech, poetry, and music were originally the same thing, especially in the South where the earliest spoken languages would probably have arisen. Evidence from modern science is consistent with this claim,<sup>44</sup> and we can observe a legacy of that phenomenon in the tonally inflected languages that are still spoken by many people. As a language became increasingly well adapted to reasoning with complex and abstract ideas, the importance of the musical and persuasive elements in speech would have receded. Over a long period of time, and especially in the North, speech and music would eventually have become separated (*Essay*, chap. 19). Once this happens, it becomes easy to assume, as Smith does, that it would be unnatural to sing in order to persuade or to express any very serious purpose.<sup>45</sup> But it was not always so, Rousseau believes.

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abstract thought eventually emerged. The *Discourse* does not answer that question, but I think Velkey is mistaken to say that the paragraph at OC, 3:150–51 depicts the earliest humans as “simply subhuman” (*Being after Rousseau*, 166n36). Rather, Rousseau treats these animals as undeveloped men, which he confirms a few pages later when he says that even after “the species was already old, . . . man still remained a child” (OC, 3:160), and again when he refers to the budding development of “nascent man” (164–65).

<sup>43</sup> Although Rousseau appears to give the South a privileged place in his account, this is largely a matter of tone and emphasis. This point is made in somewhat different ways in Victor Gourevitch, “‘The First Times’ in Rousseau’s *Essay on the Origin of Languages*,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 11, no. 2 (2014): 132–36, and in Lund, *Rousseau’s Rejuvenation*, 74–77.

<sup>44</sup> For evidence from modern science supporting Rousseau’s thesis, see Lund, *Rousseau’s Rejuvenation*, 79–88.

<sup>45</sup> “Of the Nature of that Imitation Which Takes Place in What Are Called the Imitative Arts,”

According to the *Discourse*, primitive tribal life presents a healthy mean between the indolence of the most ancient way of life and the petulant activity of civilized man's *amour-propre* (*OC*, 3:171). The *Essay* identifies a stage of linguistic development, which occurs at a different point in social development, marked by an optimal blend of intellectual power and persuasive musicality. In Europe, that blend can be found in Homer.<sup>46</sup> Ancient Greek is a Southern language in Rousseau's terminology, and he doubts that Homer knew how to write. Even after writing came to the Greeks, probably through trade with the Phoenicians, Greek remained much more musical and expressive than Northern languages. But it had already begun to lose those qualities: "It was when Greece began to abound in books and written poetry that all the charm of Homer's came to be felt by comparison. The other Poets wrote, Homer alone had sung, and these divine songs ceased to be listened to with rapture only when Europe was covered with barbarians who presumed to judge what they could not experience [*sentir*]" (*Essay*, chap. 6, *OC*, 5:390). Rousseau is well aware that this loss resulted from an important gain in the power of the language. The progress of reasoning led to the perfection of grammatical rules and concomitantly to musical rules involving the calculation of intervals.<sup>47</sup> Gradually, delicacy of inflection gave way to increased clarity of expression. "Once Greece was filled with Sophists and Philosophers it no longer had celebrated poets or musicians. In cultivating the art of convincing, that of stirring [an audience] was lost. Plato himself, jealous of Homer and Euripides, decried the one and could not imitate the other" (chap. 19, 425). This may be hyperbole,<sup>48</sup> but only Homer has become known, almost universally and beginning no later than with Plato, as the preeminent teacher of the Greeks. Rousseau's serious point is that Homer's unmatched cultural influence depended on a linguistic tool that was simultaneously musical and capable of intellectual depth and subtlety.

Rousseau does not imagine that we could recreate for ourselves the linguistic peak of Homer's Greek, any more than we can return to the tribal form of society found in what he calls "the World in the prime of its youth" (*Discourse*, *OC*, 3:171). Rousseau gives less attention than Smith to the

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(hereafter "Imitative Arts"), in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, 190–91.

<sup>46</sup> Neither Homer nor the characters in his epics lived in the kind of prepolitical tribal societies that the *Discourse* treats as the optimal stage of social development.

<sup>47</sup> Like language, music depends for its effects on conventions that vary among societies. See, e.g., Julia Simon, "Listening in Rousseau's Auditory World," in *Rousseau and the Dilemmas of Modernity*, ed. Mark Hulliung (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2016), 121–42.

<sup>48</sup> See Lund, *Rousseau's Rejuvenation*, 79 and n68.

improvements, in terms of linguistic efficiency, that have come about after the separation of music and speech. Instead, we find an air of sad resignation in the *Essay*, as in the *Discourse*. For example, just after concluding that the separation of music and speech eventually deprived music of the moral effects it had produced when it “was doubly the voice of nature” (*Essay*, chap. 19, *OC*, 5:427), Rousseau cautions: “These progressions are neither fortuitous nor arbitrary, they are due to the vicissitudes of things. Languages are naturally formed according to men’s needs; they change and deteriorate as these same needs change” (chap. 20, *OC*, 5:428). What follows is another provocative claim: that the deterioration of European societies is reflected in languages that are not conducive to political freedom because they are ill-suited to effective public oratory. But Rousseau was not quite as fatalistic as he sometimes sounds. If one were familiar only with his *Essay*, one might not guess that Rousseau published the most popular novel of the eighteenth century, a work so beautiful and influential that it transformed him from a celebrated author into the object of a cult.<sup>49</sup> Or that he accepted a request to help promote political freedom in the rather unpromising setting of eighteenth-century Poland.<sup>50</sup> Or that he passionately (and successfully) fought to stop Geneva from establishing a theater, which he thought would prove to be a dangerously attractive engine of corruption.<sup>51</sup>

Rousseau’s most philosophic works, which include the *Discourse on Inequality* and the *Essay*, do not propose political reformations, let alone political revolutions. But we know that he was deeply interested in performing the most important function of a legislator: promoting the health of “*mœurs*, of customs, and above all of opinion,” on which the success of all other laws depends.<sup>52</sup> Rousseau’s reflections on the origin of languages are

<sup>49</sup> See Maurice Cranston, *The Noble Savage: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1754–1762* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 247; Christopher Kelly, *Rousseau as Author: Consecrating One’s Life to the Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 140; Nelson Lund, “A Woman’s Laws and a Man’s: Eros and Thumos in Rousseau’s *Julie, or The New Heloise* (1761) and *The Deer Hunter* (1778),” *Interpretation* 42, no. 3 (2016): 367–436.

<sup>50</sup> See Rousseau, *Government of Poland*; Maurice Cranston, *The Solitary Self: Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Exile and Adversity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 177; Lund, *Rousseau’s Rejuvenation*, 253–57.

<sup>51</sup> See Cranston, *The Noble Savage*, 137, 148; Kelly, *Rousseau as Author*, 127–33; Lund, *Rousseau’s Rejuvenation*, 115–17. Smith was probably familiar with the arguments Rousseau made against those who urged Geneva to introduce this form of entertainment into the city. For an analysis that stresses the similarities between Rousseau’s views and those later adopted by Smith, see Ryan Patrick Hanley, “From Geneva to Glasgow: Rousseau and Adam Smith on the Theater and Commercial Society,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 35 (2006): 177–202.

<sup>52</sup> *Social Contract*, bk. 2, chap. 12, *OC*, 3:394. The word *mœurs* refers to customs or habits that have

linked to that goal because they illuminate the tensions between our uniquely human capacity for abstract reasoning and the moral sentiments on which human social life depends.<sup>53</sup> Misunderstanding that tension, he seems to suggest, will handicap an author who aims to improve the moral sentiments that we all inevitably experience.

#### SMITH AND ROUSSEAU ON MUSICAL IMITATION

In Smith's account, languages evolve as individuals cooperate in satisfying their desires by inventing increasingly abstract and complex conventions, and then modify those conventions in order to increase their usefulness in such cooperation. Rousseau's analysis is consistent with this account, but his proposed explanation is deeper and more elaborate. First, Rousseau's distinction between physical and moral needs enables him to go beyond Smith's focus on communicative efficiency. Second, Rousseau's attention to differences in the relative importance of physical and moral needs in different physical environments provides a richer account of the musicality of language than Smith's assumption that the development of grammatically inflected languages would have been shaped by a putatively natural love of certain kinds of analogy and similarity of sound ("First Formation," 208–11). Third, Rousseau tries to explain how speech could have arisen from a prelinguistic state, whereas Smith simply assumes that savages who had no language would "naturally" begin using sounds to assign names to objects in their environment (203).

To be sure, Rousseau's greater ambition does not necessarily imply that his analysis is more accurate or more useful. Smith, moreover, must have deliberately chosen to take a less ambitious approach. Although he almost certainly knew that Condillac had speculated about the role of music and dance in linguistic evolution, for example, "First Formation" ignores this possibility.

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some kind of ethical or moral quality or effects. (Rousseau, of course, has a broad view of moral phenomena, including almost everything in human life beyond the purely physical.) For an interpretation of the *Essay* as a theoretical exploration of the physical and moral phenomena that must be understood if this special kind of legislative project is to have a chance of success, see Victor Gourevitch, "The Political Argument of Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages*," in *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, ed. Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer, and Hilary Putnam (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 21–35.

<sup>53</sup> For a detailed discussion of the connection between Rousseau's views on language, music, and politics, see Scott, "Rousseau and the Melodious Language of Music."

In “Imitative Arts,” however, Smith offers a very detailed and perceptive analysis of music and dance (as well as painting and sculpture).<sup>54</sup> In the course of his discussion of instrumental music, Smith translates an excerpt from the entry on imitation in Rousseau’s *Dictionary of Music*. Smith introduces his discussion of the entry by calling Rousseau “an Author, more capable of feeling strongly than of analysing accurately” (“Imitative Arts,” 198). That is a gratuitous and strangely fatuous put-down of one of Europe’s most prominent musical theorists, who also composed one of the most popular operas of his century.<sup>55</sup> At least with respect to music, Rousseau was far more capable than Smith of “analysing accurately,” as Smith himself must have been well aware.

Music, says Rousseau in the passage Smith quotes, depicts not only the objects of hearing, but everything that the imagination can represent, from repose to a violent storm or the horror of a frightful desert. Smith objects that instrumental music can have this effect only when accompanied by other indicators of what is being imitated, such as the scenery and poetry provided in operas: “With that accompaniment, indeed, though it cannot always even then, perhaps, be said properly to imitate, yet by supporting the imitation of some other art, it may produce all the same effects upon us as if itself had imitated in the finest and most perfect manner” (“Imitative Arts,” 199).

Smith is certainly right that instrumental music by itself rarely imitates an identifiable kind of object.<sup>56</sup> And his explanation of how it works together with other arts to do so is perfectly plausible. *But Smith’s explanation of music’s imitative power is virtually indistinguishable from Rousseau’s.* Instead of producing an imperceptible image of an object, Rousseau says, the art of the musician substitutes an image of “the movements which its presence would arouse in the mind [Smith’s mistranslation of Rousseau’s *le cœur*] of the spectator” (“Imitative Arts,” 199). As Rousseau’s reference to the “spectator” (*Contemplateur*) suggests, he is discussing the way in which instrumental music combines with visual or verbal cues to produce these effects. Smith omits from his quotation the immediately preceding context, where Rousseau states that music acts on us by “arousing through one sense affections similar to those that can be aroused by another” (*OC*, 5:861). In addition, the

<sup>54</sup> In *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, 176–209.

<sup>55</sup> On the deep connection between Rousseau’s theories of music and language, see Robert Wokler, “Rameau, Rousseau, and the *Essai sur l’origine des langues*,” *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 117 (1974): 179–238; Scott, “Rousseau and the Melodious Language of Music.”

<sup>56</sup> Having elsewhere analogized languages and scientific systems to machines (“First Formation,” 223–24; “History of Astronomy,” 66), Smith now analogizes instrumental musical compositions to scientific systems (“Imitative Arts,” 204–5).

very first sentence of the dictionary entry, which Smith also omits, indicates that Rousseau is specifically concerned here with “dramatic or theatrical Music” (860). What is more, as Smith presumably knew, Rousseau repeats much of this passage in the *Dictionary*’s entry on opera (*OC*, 5:958–59), where he also says that “*as an essential part of the lyric Scene*, whose principal object is imitation, Music becomes one of the fine Arts, capable of painting every picture, of arousing all the sentiments” (948–49, emphasis added).

After giving several vivid descriptions of the objects that music can help us imagine, Rousseau stresses that the musician “will not directly imitate any of these objects, but he will excite in the mind [Smith’s mistranslation of Rousseau’s *l’ame*] the same movements which it would feel from seeing them” (“Imitative Arts,” 199).<sup>57</sup> Smith is quick to acknowledge that Rousseau’s description of the effects of music is “very eloquent,” but he does not acknowledge that he has himself adopted Rousseau’s own explanation of those effects. It could not have been Rousseau’s eloquence that caused Smith’s glaring failure to “analis[e] accurately” what Rousseau wrote in the *Dictionary*. He must have known that he agreed with Rousseau, and he must have deliberately obscured that agreement. It is hard to avoid suspecting that this is part of a pattern that unites all of Smith’s snide comments about Rousseau.

## CONCLUSION

Adam Smith is widely regarded as the father of modern economics. His two great books, *Moral Sentiments* and the *Wealth of Nations*, display the best qualities of the best works in that discipline: focused attention on the pervasive trade-offs inherent in social life and a determination to help human decision-makers make better choices in the face of those trade-offs. His treatment of the origin of languages exhibits these same qualities on a smaller scale. He plausibly explains why a kind of linguistic marketplace would have reduced the use of grammatical inflections, thereby increasing the efficiency with which adults can learn and use new languages. Smith recognizes that this way of facilitating communication caused these languages to become less efficient in a different sense: inflected languages are inherently better tools for the purpose of ornamenting human life with beautiful poetry and prose. Smith’s analysis offers us, his readers, the pleasure of learning something

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<sup>57</sup> Smith’s substitution of “the mind” for Rousseau’s *le cœur* (the heart) and *l’ame* (the soul) cannot plausibly be attributed to a defective knowledge of the French language. The substitution is strikingly consistent with his neglect in “First Formation” of the musical and persuasive elements in human speech.

interesting and plausible about the evolution of languages. That analysis can also assist us in making well-informed decisions about whether and to what extent to invest in the study of an inflected language like ancient Greek, to whose “sweetness” Smith alludes (“First Formation,” 224).<sup>58</sup> In both ways, Smith illustrates the value of economic analysis in a broad sense of that term.

Nobody will mistake Rousseau for a modern economist. But he was even more exquisitely sensitive than Smith to the trade-offs inherent in social life. If one had to identify a single central preoccupation in his works, it might be these trade-offs. Perhaps in part because of this sensitivity, Rousseau is less enthusiastic than Smith about the beneficent potential of market processes, in both the commercial and moral realms. Rousseau is also more philosophically relentless. Unlike Smith, he is intent on rousing at least some of his readers from the slumber, whether dogmatic or just oblivious, in which we so frequently assume that what is merely familiar must be natural. This may help explain why Smith’s principal work on education, *Moral Sentiments*, is a treatise, whereas Rousseau’s treatise on education, the *Emile*, is largely framed as a novel.<sup>59</sup> Their different approaches to education may also help to explain why *The Wealth of Nations* was the eighteenth century’s most influential economic treatise, while Rousseau’s *New Heloise* was the most popular and influential novel of their era.

Smith’s consistently dismissive and misleading treatment of Rousseau is genuinely perplexing. Perhaps it is related to his uncharacteristically vehement denunciation of the claim that Plato’s writings “were intended to seem to mean one thing, while at bottom they meant a very different [thing].” According to Smith, the use of such irony or indirection is something “which the writings of no man in his senses ever were, or ever could be intended to do” (“Ancient Logics,” 122 note \*). It is almost impossible to believe that someone as erudite and perceptive as Smith could have believed this extravagant pronouncement, which disregards centuries of well-attested evidence about the philosophic practice of esoteric writing.<sup>60</sup> And it is impossible to believe that he could have thought David Hume was out of his senses when Hume told a correspondent: “It is putting too great a Respect on the Vulgar, and on their

<sup>58</sup> Unlike Rousseau, Smith does not attribute any significance to the *tonal* inflections in ancient Greek, which may have contributed more to the sweetness of the language than grammatical inflections did.

<sup>59</sup> For a discussion of various ways in which the novelistic form enabled Rousseau to introduce subtleties that advanced his educational purposes, see John T. Scott, “Do You See What I See? The Education of the Reader in Rousseau’s *Emile*,” *Review of Politics* 74, no. 3 (2012): 443–64.

<sup>60</sup> See Arthur M. Melzer, *Philosophy between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

Superstitions, to pique oneself on Sincerity with regard to them. Did ever one make a point of honor to speak truth to Children or Madmen?”<sup>61</sup> Nor is it easy to imagine that Smith naively assumed, as he purports to do, that statements by characters in Plato’s fictional dramas necessarily reflect Plato’s considered philosophic views (“Ancient Logics,” 124–25). Could Smith’s allusion to “the purity and sublimity of the morals of Plato” (“Letter,” 251) possibly refer to the proposals in the *Republic* for political reforms consisting of the expulsion from the city of all residents over the age of ten (540d1–541a7) and for selectively breeding those who remain like livestock (458c6–461b7)?

Such ignorance and naivete is highly implausible. Perhaps Smith deliberately obscured a fundamental kinship with Rousseau, just as he maintained that Rousseau obscured his own kinship with Mandeville. According to one report, Smith *privately* spoke about Rousseau “with a kind of religious respect,” even going so far as to say that his powerful rhetoric “drew the reader into the heart of reason.”<sup>62</sup> This single unverified anecdote can obviously be tantalizing at most. One might test the hypothesis of a Smithian esoteric teaching through a close reading of the *Emile* and *Moral Sentiments*, which most comprehensively set forth the authors’ views on moral education. Whatever the results of such a comparative study might prove to be, it would require a more accurate and insightful reading of Rousseau than Smith ever offered to the public.

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 123. For more detail on Hume’s dissimulations, see *ibid.*, 372n45. See also Peter Minowitz, *Profits, Priests, and Princes: Adam Smith’s Emancipation of Economics from Politics and Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 5–9 (cautiously suggesting that Smith himself may have engaged in esoteric writing, at least with respect to religion).

<sup>62</sup> B. Faujas de Saint Fond, *A Journey through England and Scotland to the Hebrides*, trans. Archibald Geikie (Glasgow: Hugh Hopkins, 1907), 2:246.

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Oliver Precht, *Heidegger: Zur Selbst- und Fremdbestimmung seiner Philosophie*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2020, 312 pp., €26.90.

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This is, in many ways, an astonishing book, one that is hard to put down. Based on a careful reading of the entirety of Heidegger's collected works, as well as the most important secondary literature, Oliver Precht takes up the challenge of showing that Heidegger has been misunderstood. What was his philosophy, as distinguished from his public teaching? What interested him above all? How did he understand himself? For these vitally important questions, Precht suggests, the existing literature comprising thousands of articles and books provides no satisfactory answers.

The book is structured chronologically following the arc of Heidegger's thought as he presented it: from his early phenomenological work, through his political "error" of the 1930s, to the later works, usually read as unpolitical meditations on the contemporary "night of the world" preparing "a new beginning" on the basis of an attitude of "releasement." Some of the most influential early interpretations of Heidegger—developed, inter alia, by William J. Richardson, Werner Marx, and Rainer Schürmann—followed this narrative arc, usually backwards, beginning from Heidegger's late "self-presentation" (cf. 15). These accounts were partially superseded in the 1980s and 1990s by a wealth of studies that came to grips with Heidegger by situating him within broader currents of philosophical and theological thought, including postmodernism, pragmatism, Aristotelianism, Lutheranism, and Derridean deconstruction, while also beginning "from the start," that is, from his earliest writings and lectures published during those decades. As more and more volumes were added to the collected writings—including, crucially, the lectures delivered in 1933–34, as well as the *Black Notebooks*

published between 2014 and 2020—the awe inspired by the “hidden king” (Arendt *dixit*) gave way to dismay, or revulsion, or to chastened attempts to explain both the seemingly complete subordination of his thought to the “revolution” of 1933 and the exculpatory ramblings contained in the infamous *Notebooks*.

Taking stock of these developments, Precht proposes a fresh beginning (31–32). At the very start of his career, when he began to lecture in 1919, Heidegger made a “radical decision” that determined the course of his thinking—and with it, perhaps, of much of twentieth-century culture (cf. 53). This decision concerned the “nature and concept of philosophy.”<sup>1</sup> Regarding all previous conceptions as flawed or exhausted, Heidegger set out to provide a purely philosophical determination of the meaning of philosophy. The obvious circularity of this quest, he argued, had to be squarely faced, for the very use of such terms as “nature” or “concept” already requires philosophy. Indeed, every time we interpret something—which we do all the time, as long as we exist—we are already philosophizing (cf. 18, 62). Nothing more seems to be needed to ground philosophy as a way of life: all it takes is a “leap” into “existence” and its self-interpretation.

This deceptively simple wager had momentous implications. For one thing, Heidegger rejected every alternative conception of the philosophical quest. Philosophy did not arise from wonder, or from the search for a life according to nature, or (say) from radical doubt. Nor could it be understood as a form of science, theory, or wisdom. If it was to survive, philosophy would have to determine itself out of itself, without being the proverbial handmaid of any other power or influence, including science, theology, and politics.

Such is the wager described in the term *Selbstbestimmung* in Precht’s title: Heidegger strives for a wholly self-determining philosophy, which breaks with the entire tradition and needs only itself. And yet, Heidegger insisted throughout his work that his sole concern was with something “other,” namely, the “truth of Being.” This is the main sense of *Fremdbestimmung*, the other key term in the title. Accordingly, Heidegger’s work must be read in two registers. There is, first, the familiar voice returning again and again to the genuine “matter” (*Sache*) of thought, that is, the “truth of Being.” However, murmuring behind, as it were, one can detect the voice of Heidegger interpreting himself, or, more precisely, “disclosing” the true matter that

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, trans. Ted Sadler (London: Athlone, 2000 [1919]), 10.

concerned him both personally and as a kind of herald announcing a new beginning for humanity. For *this* voice, the “truth of Being”—this is Precht’s central claim—is *nothing but Heidegger’s own teaching* (15, 17–18, 60, 187).

The simplest way of interpreting this devastating thesis seems to be this. Every time we read about the “truth” (or the “meaning”) of “Being” in Heidegger we should know that he means the “being” of his own philosophy. Precht knows very well that countless passages suggest otherwise. Thus, Heidegger expressly denies that there is such a thing as his “philosophy” or his “teaching.” This is partly due to the fact that the “matter” of his thought—as he presents it—is radically impersonal: he calls it, for example, “the meaningful” as “immediately given,” or the “event” (*Ereignis*), or the “there is” (*es gibt*), or movement (*kinesis*). All Heidegger does, it seems, is point to “existentiell possibilities” within this general ontological understanding—possibilities such as being “resolved” or “authentic” or “faithful.” Precht takes this to heart (e.g., 87), and yet he insists that there is much more in Heidegger that remains concealed (186–87).

To discover Heidegger’s philosophy (as distinguished from his teaching) one must first lift what he once called the “phenomenological disguise [*Verkleidung*]” covering his thought (293n30). One may then begin to see that, rather than practicing phenomenology, thus attending to the “self-disclosure” of beings, Heidegger ultimately sought the opposite, namely, to “appropriate” beings, and indeed to “master” the world (e.g., 17). His project was, accordingly, “political,” albeit in a rather peculiar and perverse sense.

Precht develops his argument in painstaking detail over hundreds of pages. Here I can follow only a few threads to try to highlight the audacity and originality of his approach, while also pointing to some limitations.

The book follows three main paths towards the “true intention” behind Heidegger’s work (cf. 295n44). First, Precht keeps track of what Heidegger wrote for close to half a century, noting strategic shifts in the meaning of key terms, together with a series of passages where the “systematic” intention of his work can be discerned (186–87). Second, he provides an incisive—and devastating—account of Heidegger’s political views on the basis of the latest research and source materials. Finally, he pieces together Heidegger’s words and deeds to reinterpret what genuinely concerned him, thus essentially reconstructing his oeuvre from a novel perspective. Throughout, Precht follows hints provided by scholars who knew Heidegger personally—notably, Emmanuel Levinas, Leo Strauss, and Karl Löwith—while also drawing on

Derrida's philological detective work. Excursions into the thought of Kant, Hegel, Rousseau, Lévi-Strauss, and other contemporary scholars open further horizons in this impressively rich book, which excellently displays the patient rumination of philosophical works practiced by Heinrich Meier's students.

Who, then, is Precht's Heidegger? It is tempting to respond that he was simply a contemptible human being, who was blind to anything that escaped his monological fixation on "Being." To judge by the evidence adduced in the book, Heidegger may well have been the most ignorant person ever to be counted among the great philosophers (e.g., 134, 300n71, 302n85). Seemingly knowing next to nothing about political institutions, economics, international relations, or other foundational matters (notably Jewish history and culture), Heidegger was also a sinister character. The evidence of his moral obtuseness is overwhelming. Most bizarrely, he claimed that the Shoah was an act of "self-destruction" by the Jewish people (230). He also believed that the suffering inflicted on the Germans during the war was even more extreme than the crimes committed by the Nazis (232, 311n142). However, the gravest crime was not inflicted on a country or people: apparently Heidegger believed that his own "insights" had suffered the worst fate insofar as they were not recognized. Somehow, he thought this was more "uncanny" than the concentration camps and the gas chambers (232–33).

Precht's aim is not simply to condemn Heidegger's conduct as evil or shameless or cowardly. Rather, he seeks to show how his disastrous political involvement was integral to the very "cause" (or "matter": *Sache*) of his philosophy (26).

Heidegger's main interest was to be recognized by future philosophers (18, 113). Since he also believed that all human beings could (and should) become philosophers, his quest for recognition extended to humanity as a whole (18, 23). These convictions gave rise to a unified project, which Precht calls a "philosophical politics" (23, 52). The key to this politics seems to be the decision (previously mentioned) to create a "purely philosophical space," that is, to determine philosophy's theme beyond any conceivable influence (cf. 55). Thus Heidegger decided to turn away from the world in order to appropriate it—and to exclude every other perspective on it (17). Staying in the provinces (both literally and figuratively), his putative "dialogues" with (for example) Japanese thinkers were really monologues, focused on the "*Sache des Denkens*," that is, on his own thought (38). He was singularly uninterested in how human beings actually live, despite all his talk of "being-in-the-world." Political care of the world was wholly alien to him. And he saw no point

in discussing the actual domination (or exploitation) of human beings that robbed them of the “authentic possibilities” he wrote so much about (60).

Similar charges have been made by Emmanuel Levinas and Günther Anders, among others. But no one, as far as I know, has gone as far as Precht in showing just how thoroughly Heidegger’s philosophy revolves around itself—and nothing else. Philosophy for him was not about understanding, or theorizing, or addressing fundamental human questions; it was about waking up from the “drowsiness” of our everyday existence, which he likened to the Platonic cave (e.g., 95). How this liberation may happen is a central question for Heidegger scholarship, usually addressed in terms of a passage—triggered by angst—from “inauthentic” to “authentic” existence, or from prephilosophic to philosophic understanding. On this conundrum, Precht provides extensive evidence that there is simply no such passage. Or rather, *if it exists*, it requires what Heidegger called a “violent laying hold and dragging out” of cave dwellers from their ordinary numbness (95, 111).

The key question here is what kind of liberation Heidegger has in mind. There is no doubt in *my* mind that reading Heidegger can be liberating and even edifying, as generations of readers from every continent can attest. If I understand Precht correctly, he may agree. Yet to read Heidegger for one’s own purposes—say, to sharpen our awareness of how “mortality makes us free,” or to find new layers of meaning in ancient authors—would be to miss what Heidegger really meant. This seems to be a key point for Precht. If we pay close attention to what Heidegger actually said over the decades, we will see just how much of it is “empty rambling” (10–11, 256). Indeed, this is also what Heidegger indicated: namely, the more radically a philosophy grounds itself, “the more purely it soars in turning about itself...press[ing] outward to the brink of nothingness.”<sup>2</sup>

Again, this is not a haphazard result, but the result of a decision Heidegger made. Philosophy had to create its own space without relying on inherited concepts (such as “reason” and “science”) or on borrowed problems (such as the human need for “worldviews” and for divine guidance). But in thus attempting to “disclose” a subject matter for philosophy that is ultimately *not* of this world—namely, Being as distinct from (actually existing) beings—Heidegger was bound to make philosophy circle about itself, becoming something like (bad) poetry. As he struggled to express “Being” in seemingly endless variations to arouse “the people” (*Volk*) out of their animal-like

<sup>2</sup> M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. David F. Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 1:16.

“existence” (cf. 77)—and as he repeatedly failed to educate the youth to follow him (cf. 140)—he began to spew the monstrous claims described above, while completely surrendering his thought to Hitler’s cause (136).

The main lesson of Precht’s study seems to be the following. Heidegger made a radical decision to turn away from the world as it is experienced by ordinary men and women, that is, from the world of those who yearn for the right and the good, or who long for eternity, or who confront evil. This decision led him fatally astray. Blocking any other perspective on the world (beyond his own), he became wholly incapable of thinking politically and thus critically. Every attempt at a “self-grounding” philosophy that ignores the political dimension of human life is bound to fall prey (so to speak) to foreign powers, that is, to the “spirit of the times” or the prejudices of one’s milieu. By abstracting from the interests of humanity represented by the “class of philosophers” (Kant), Heidegger ultimately led his followers into a Platonic cave without an exit, and without a sun (cf. 267).

There is much else in this book that I cannot discuss here, including the central claim that Heidegger’s thought follows a hidden, systematic plan (186–87). Suffice it to say that anyone seriously interested in Heidegger will have to reckon with Precht’s careful and comprehensive study. The range of his approach covering philosophy, theology, politics, history, and poetry in virtually all of Heidegger’s writings (including secondary literature in many languages) is hard to surpass. As someone who has studied and taught Heidegger for several years, I must say that reading this work was disconcerting and even shocking, not least because of Precht’s discussion of the *Black Notebooks*, which were only recently published.

Precht’s critique is far more acute than that developed by Emmanuel Faye, according to which Heidegger’s philosophy is completely “contaminated” by his antisemitic and National Socialist convictions. Such claims, as Precht notes, end up denying that he had a “philosophy” worth discussing; more importantly perhaps, they also presuppose that there is such a thing as an “uncontaminated” philosophy, untouched by history and politics (cf. 25–26). By contrast, Precht attempts an immanent critique that shows how Heidegger’s dream of a self-grounding philosophy, which abstracts from the (human, political) world, reverted dialectically into its opposite, namely, a philosophy in the service of the most brutal regime in living memory.

George Steiner noted long ago that what crippled Heidegger’s humanity was his abstraction from the problem of evil, which in turn was rooted in a

renunciation of theology. Precht's argument seems to be analogous, while focusing more broadly on Heidegger's dismissal of the political dimension of human life. The great irony, of course, is that this dismissal was itself part of a political project to transform human existence on this earth. Whether Heidegger's thought as a whole—beginning with his 1915 dissertation! (cf. 86)—can be understood along these lines remains debatable. I am not convinced. As the author himself notes, the focus of Heidegger's early work is clearly aligned with the idea of science (85). This also suggests that his phenomenological analyses (and interpretations of ancient authors), which can be found in every stage of his thought, can hardly be dismissed as some kind of "disguise" or token "gesture" (*Geste*), unrelated to the core of his philosophy (cf. 103–6). But perhaps Heidegger did care little about practicing phenomenology or "mediative thinking." Perhaps his main "care" *was* to awaken us into recognizing his greatness while transforming our lives. The great merit of Precht's book is to have posed this problem in the starkest terms with the disquieting thesis that Heidegger's transformative project leads to a dead end.



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Michael D. Breidenbach, *Our Dear-Bought Liberty: Catholics and Religious Toleration in Early America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021, 368 pp., \$45.00 (hardcover).

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The role of Catholics in shaping early American political thought is often overlooked. The practice of the Catholic faith was illegal most of the time in most of the British American colonies and nearly all of the Founders were Protestant. They were also heavily influenced by the ideas of Enlightenment thinkers, such as John Locke, who had little regard for Catholic thinking. The view that Catholics played at most an insignificant part in laying the foundations of American political life, therefore, long has seemed quite justifiable.

Michael Breidenbach's recent book asks us to seriously reconsider the common tale. True, Protestant and liberal ideas are crucially important to understanding America, but Breidenbach's history of American Catholics' "dear-bought liberty" shows the extent to which Catholic political thought, particularly among those influenced by French and English Jesuits, was not only consistent with the principles of the American Revolution and the US Constitution, but also did some of the intellectual heavy lifting to bring about their implementation. The principles of religious freedom enshrined in the First Amendment, for example, were anticipated by the toleration acts championed by George Claver and his son Cecil, the founders of Maryland. And it was the Catholic Daniel Carroll who joined the push at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 to ban religious tests for office. He was joined by his brother John Carroll, first Catholic bishop in the United States, and their second cousin Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the lone Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence, in defending the American constitutional order as largely consistent with Catholic doctrine.

As Breidenbach shows with great clarity, the Calverts' and Carrolls' defense of America was based on a conciliarist reading of the Church's magisterial authority. With roots in the thirteenth century, conciliarism predates the Protestant Reformation by nearly three centuries. Conciliarists held that the Church's Ecumenical Councils possess greater authority than papal teachings. Popes, conciliarists held, should be checked by a mixed constitutional order within the Church and their teaching power is limited to faith and morals, not temporal matters that are better dealt with by the reigning monarchs of nations. The Calverts, the Carrolls, and other Catholics in America accepted the conciliarist position while simultaneously aligning it with republican principles. Their comfort in America, then, was based not on tacit approval of Protestantism or liberalism, but on acceptance of Catholic conciliarism. They were indebted not to Calvin or Locke, but to John of Paris.

Briedenbach challenges at least two Catholic counter-narratives of the place of the Church in America. For some, the American Founding is quint-essentially Catholic, even if few recognized it at the time. Orestes Brownson, whose *The American Republic* is representative of this view, went so far as to suggest that America's mission was to revitalize the Church in the modern world. Others, however, hold that America's foundations are tied far too tightly to the ideology of liberalism for the Catholic Church to flourish in the United States. The doctrine of separation of church and state is seen in this view to be particularly pernicious, preventing a truly integrated society. For the first group, America cannot help but be Catholic; for the second, the American Founding must be rejected by Catholics as antithetical to the faith.

Breidenbach's history of Catholics in early America provides a much more nuanced and insightful treatment of the relationship between the American constitutional order and the Catholic faith as understood by prominent Catholics who took part in the Founding. The early chapters follow the efforts of the Calverts to establish an English colony in the New World that would tolerate Catholics. The Calverts had to walk a fine line between British law and Vatican decrees. The English were ready to accuse them of being traitors to the Crown while Ultramontane Catholics were critical of their opposition to the pope's power over temporal affairs. The trickiest business they faced was finding an oath of allegiance that would satisfy the demands of the law without violating the consciences of Catholics wishing to live in their new colony. Conciliarist thought proved a useful tool for moving forward. The Calverts' oath upheld royal prerogative over the affairs of state without committing allegiance to the Church of England. The religious toleration that was

opened by the unique oath of Maryland was later matched by the Maryland Toleration Act, which forbade the deliberate provoking of religious quarrels. Maryland thus “allowed [Anglo] Catholics to test arguments and arrangements about which other Catholics had theorized but that they were unable to implement fully in England” (42). And though these experiments were short-lived, they proved invaluable in helping the generation of Americans charged with building the new political edifice after the Revolution to do so with principles in favor of religious liberty.

As noted, among the members of the Founding generation are the Carrolls. The chapters of Breidenbach’s book that follow their careers are among the most penetrating exegeses of their thought to be found. Breidenbach chronicles their education at Saint Omer’s, a Jesuit college in France, which included heavy doses of conciliarist thinking that helped them make sense of their political circumstances. It simultaneously provided them with reasons to reject attempts at Parliamentary usurpation of colonial rights and papal claims to temporal power. Their education was among the finest that any American received in the mid-eighteenth century, and they were more than prepared to assist their Protestant brethren in responding to the escalating political tensions of the 1770s and the subsequent tasks of building a nation in the 1780s.

Among the highlights of the book is Breidenbach’s depiction of the debates in Congress over the language of what would become the First Amendment to the US Constitution. The proposal was James Madison’s but the account of the debates as recorded in the *Congressional Register* shows the leading role that Daniel Carroll played in supporting and defending the concept of religious freedom. In fact, Carroll’s efforts appear to be deliberately coordinated with Madison’s to preempt anticipated Anti-Federalist objections. This at least is the impression one gets from reading the *Congressional Register*, the author of which was Thomas Lloyd, a Catholic who had also attended school at Saint Omer’s. Breidenbach makes much of the fact that almost “all of what we know about the congressional debates, including the discussion of the First Amendment, comes from a Catholic” (181). That the Carrolls and Lloyd would support the two religious clauses of the amendment is not surprising. Having lived under an established church that was hostile to the practice of the Catholic faith, they had good reasons for supporting the Establishment Clause. Likewise, freedom from impediments to worship would have been attractive given the hostility that they had previously faced. The Catholic Church had much to gain from the First Amendment. And

American Catholics like the Carrolls and Lloyd saw this more clearly than many of their counterparts in Rome.

Reconciling the new situation of Catholics in the United States to promulgated policies of the Church of Rome fell on the shoulders of John Carroll, who quickly rose to a position of prominence after the Revolution. He both promoted the faith in his homeland and explained to Rome the delicate situation the Church faced in America. The potential for growth existed, but the way forward required a new approach. The persecution of heretics and schismatics would do little but confirm to Protestants the political ambitions of the Church. Carroll had to find a way to give the flock of the New World the full authenticity of the faith without being offensive to the republican presumptions of the people. Again, conciliarist ideas were helpful, but only to a point. Taken to an extreme, conciliarism undermines all apostolic authority. Carroll thus “sought a middle path between the radical periphery of conciliarist ecclesiology and the ultramontane vision of the Catholic Church” (201). This middle way proved effective. Rome agreed to create a diocese in the United States, the first to be established in a nonconfessional state since the Protestant Reformation. And Rome’s appointment of Carroll as the first bishop of the new See of Baltimore was made without any official recommendation of the United States government, though it did allow, as a one-time concession, the American clergy to elect Carroll. It was a happy coincidence that the clergy and Rome agreed on the desired outcome.

Breidenbach’s documentation of the Calverts and Carrolls in America is exceptional. The notes are full of primary source references, and one is left wondering why much of this material is not more widely known, such as the Maryland Toleration Act. The one disappointment in this regard, at least for me, is the relatively short shrift given to Suarez and Bellarmine, two Jesuit thinkers with whose works the Carrolls would have been familiar from their time at Saint Omer’s. They are mentioned in passing, but usually as foils for the conciliarist position. One gets the impression that the Carrolls would have rejected their ideas. My own reading of their works leads me to think that the Carrolls would have found much to like in the political thought of Suarez and Bellarmine. Indeed, the so-called middle path established by Bishop John Carroll seems to owe much to the relatively sober writings of the Spanish Scholastics. One can work out a case for religious toleration from their works that would not be as controversial as the more conciliarist positions.

But whether their debt is to Suarez and Bellarmine with the conciliarists or to the conciliarists alone, Breidenbach makes a strong case for showing that

the early American Catholics could celebrate the Revolution, Constitution, and First Amendment not in spite of their faith but because of it. Their arguments are drawn not from Protestant or liberal traditions, but from their own Catholic tradition. They made contributions, not concessions. Breidenbach has opened up a major channel for enlarging our understanding these contributions.



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Hannes Kerber, *Die Aufklärung der Aufklärung: Lessing und die Herausforderung des Christentums*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021, 286 pp., €34.00 (hardcover).

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Although the German writer, critic, and dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) occupies a major position in the canon of German literature, his philosophical significance is less frequently acknowledged. This is particularly true outside of Germany, since only very few authors took up suggestions, such as those by Leo Strauss and Karl Jaspers, that the study of Lessing could be of more than historical relevance. The diversity of literary forms which Lessing employed and the various constellations, from antiquarian research to theological controversies, in which he exercised his polemical talent can be intimidating. To understand them properly requires a lot of contextual knowledge about the relevant fields of knowledge in the eighteenth century as well as about their rhetorical practices. In addition, the fixed notions that ascribe to Lessing the status of one of the most important German *Aufklärer*—“enlighteners”—may well be misleading. For what makes Lessing relevant may in fact be what *distinguishes* him from the standard operating procedures of enlightenment thinking.

The study by Hannes Kerber, a careful analysis of key issues in the debate initiated by Lessing’s controversial publication of the so-called Wolfenbüttel fragments in the years from 1774 to 1778, takes up the challenge of clarifying how Lessing could be said to have served philosophy by defending theological (Protestant) orthodoxy. But before I sketch Kerber’s tightly knit argument, which is based on close readings of extremely subtle polemical interventions by Lessing, an all too brief summary of the relevant events seems to be in order.

After taking up his position as librarian at the ducal library of Wolfenbüttel, Lessing intensified his study of theology, which issued in the publication

of important texts such as the manuscript of Berengar of Tours, a medieval theologian, on the eucharist that he found in the library's holdings. When the well-known Hamburg professor and scholar Hermann Samuel Reimarus died in 1768, he left behind a lengthy manuscript of a book called *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes* (Apology or defense for the rational worshipers of God; first complete publication only in 1972). When Lessing gained access to this manuscript through Reimarus's children (the exact details of how he got to know the manuscript and the extent of his knowledge of it can no longer be reconstructed in a fully satisfactory way), he was in a rather comfortable position: the Duke of Brunswick had exempted him from censorship for all publications drawn from the library. Lessing, after failing to interest publishers like Friedrich Nicolai in printing Reimarus's clandestinely written book, was able to publish a first fragment of it while alleging that he had found it in the library and suggesting it could have been written by Johann Lorenz Schmidt, the famous Wolffian translator of the so-called Wertheim Bible (which had been the cause of one of the most important theological debates in eighteenth-century Germany). While the first fragment, published in 1774, dealt with the toleration of deists and did not receive a lot of attention, the second installment of fragments, dealing with more critical issues of revelation, immediately led to a widespread debate with numerous rebuttals addressed to both the author of the fragments, introduced by Lessing as "the Unnamed Man" (*der Ungenannte*), and to Lessing himself. The first response came from an otherwise obscure schoolmaster called Schumann, but the most persistent and polemical responses were penned by a Hamburg pastor, Johan Melchior Goeze (1717–1786), widely considered a prototypical representative of theological orthodoxy. But this is precisely an evaluation that Kerber duly presents as problematic, showing in the course of his argument that Goeze's version of orthodoxy had in fact moved away from positions once held by the theologians of the Reformation.

The whole quarrel concerning the "fragments" thus entails making sense not only of one man's writings, but of many, or of at least three, main contributors to the debate: Reimarus as the "Unknown Man," Lessing as a self-described "lover of theology, but not a theologian," and Goeze, the supposed "orthodoxist." The following key quotation highlights what is at stake here. Lessing suggests that the debate about Christianity has not yet been concluded:

It is not true that all the objections have already been stated. It is even less true that they have all been answered. A great many of them, at least, have been answered as deplorably as they were stated. To the superficiality and ridicule of the one side, the other has not

infrequently replied with pride and disdain. Great offence has been taken if one side has equated religion with superstition; but the other side has not scrupled to denounce doubt as irreligion, and belief in the sufficiency of reason as infamy. The one party has disparaged every clergyman as a scheming priest, while the other has disparaged every philosopher as an atheist. Thus each side has turned its adversary into a monster so that, if it cannot defeat him, it can pronounce him beyond the law.<sup>1</sup>

This statement provoked Goeze to suggest that Lessing did in fact launch “indirect and direct hostile attacks” against Christianity; and this was seemingly implied in Lessing’s claim that so far there had been neither among the critics nor the apologists of religion anyone who had been attacking or defending Christianity in a way that was adequate to the matter at hand.

Kerber begins with a discussion of the intricacies of the so-called “proof of spirit and power” for revelation (chap. 1, “The Anamnesis of Apologetics”) and offers an extensive discussion of Lessing’s famous distinction between “accidental historical truths” and “necessary rational truths,” according to which the former can never become proofs for the latter (44). Schumann had objected to this argument by suggesting that Lessing thereby only wanted to force revealed religion to be judged by reason or philosophy.

The defense of Christianity against the criticism going back at least to Spinoza took a form encapsulated in the term *Evidenztheologie* (“evidentiary theology”). Whereas contemporary theology sought to support belief in revelation by putting forth certain proofs, including miracles, Lessing was well aware of the fact that earlier Protestant theology had done nothing of the kind. In fact, as Kerber shows, in an extremely subtle and sophisticated argument, Lessing pointed to what he regarded as the “last resort” of belief in revelation, namely the teaching of the *testimonium internum Spiritus sancti*, a teaching that can with equally good reason be regarded as the most secure and also as the weakest safeguard for revelation. Its strength consists in the inability of philosophy to refute its testimonial for revelation as long as theology keeps silent about it. As soon as theology begins to speak about it, however, it is in danger of laying itself open to attacks from philosophy. The question arises whether keeping silent had ever been a viable option for theology.

The second stage of the argument pertains to Lessing’s “restitution of orthodoxy,” whereas the third stage looks at the “reduction of theology.” Since

<sup>1</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, ed. and trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 63–64.

the debate could not be concluded in the form of a scholarly exchange—for the Duke of Brunswick had rescinded Lessing’s privilege of freedom from censorship and expressly forbidden any further publications on the issue without official permission—Lessing had to change tack if he wanted to continue his argument. He therefore reverted to his “old pulpit,” as he called it, namely, the theater, and proceeded to write *Nathan der Weise* as an “epilogue” to the debate.

The most complicated part of Lessing’s procedure may well be the restitution of the old orthodoxy, because it differs markedly from the then current orthodoxy prominently represented by the likes of Goeze. In fact, the Protestant theologian Goeze seems to have been unable to muster the necessary knowledge about church history to understand what Lessing’s point ultimately was. It should be stressed that not a few of Lessing’s contemporaries found it exceedingly difficult to follow his arguments, as they could not fathom the reason why Lessing argued in a more orthodox manner than the orthodoxy of his own day. This kind of irritation would persist through the long reception history of Lessing’s engagement with theology.

In addition to Lessing’s attempts at the restitution of an older form of orthodoxy, he even made use of a key concept derived from Catholic theologians, and especially the Fathers of the church. This was the *regula fidei*, a way of interpreting and presenting the Christian faith that pointed towards something beyond the Bible. The background for Lessing’s provocative move was politically complex. He not only had to keep in mind the legal situation concerning critiques of religion in the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation in which both Protestant and Catholic princes had their own interests at heart. He also had to counter Goeze’s very emphatically formulated notion that Christianity was firmly grounded on the Bible as the word of God in which every letter counted. Lessing, by contrast, was seemingly arguing from a Catholic position when he maintained that the church or Christianity could very well exist and live on even without the written word of God—the letter—that is, the Bible. For, as he argued, the church had already existed before the written texts of the canon, and for this very reason the notion that the spirit is the word, that the Bible is the foundation of Christianity, was untrue and untenable. Lessing thus attacked a principle that Goeze had to defend, namely, the verbal inspiration of the Bible. For on the basis of the dogma of verbal inspiration it was clear that historical Bible criticism in the manner of Spinoza could not be refuted. Only by firmly maintaining the notion of the inscrutability of God would it be

possible to defend revelation against the enlightenment versions of theology which tend to equate Christianity and reasonableness.

Lessing's position, in Kerber's thoughtful interpretation, is at the same time that of a philosopher and of a "lover of theology," not, however, that of a theologian. When Lessing musters his astonishing theological scholarship, he does so in order to strengthen belief against the enlightenment theologians' erroneous notion of theology as a foundational science of belief based on "evidence." Kerber has presented us with the most subtle reading yet of Lessing's contributions to the so-called *Fragmentenstreit*. And while following Lessing's attempts at the restitution of belief in the orthodox manner, Kerber has also offered us the most forceful restitution of Lessing as a philosopher since at least Leo Strauss's abortive attempts to write a book called *Eine Erinnerung an Lessing*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Leo Strauss, "Eine Erinnerung an Lessing," in *Philosophie und Gesetz: Frühe Schriften*, ed. Heinrich Meier with Wiebke Meier (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1997), 607–8.



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Charlotte C. S. Thomas, *The Female Drama*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2020, 310 pp., \$35.00 (hardback).

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Charlotte Thomas sets out in *The Female Drama* to make the case that “the real power and relevance of the *Republic*...is always psychological” (274). The preliminary challenge of the dialogue Socrates recounts in the *Republic* is to persuade Glaucon that justice is truly good for the individual and worthy of any necessary sacrifice to ensure that he rejects the siren call of Thrasymachean justice, the argument that justice is only a word that the strong and ambitious use to manipulate and rule the weak for their own advantage. What matters in Thrasymachus’s worldview is power. Ultimately, Thomas contends, Socrates seeks to persuade Glaucon that it is knowledge of the idea of the good, external to the individual, that should serve as a standard for justice and the best life for the city and the individual. Thomas argues that when Socrates asks Glaucon to permit him to investigate justice in the city, the larger entity, first, and, then, find it by analogy in the smaller unit of the soul, Socrates very logically begins by addressing the male drama most pressing to the politically ambitious Glaucon and his companions in the *Republic*. The male drama is the political drama, the one in which the standard for justice is the proper ordering of the factions and classes that usually contend for power in any city, with the calculative rational element leading the spirited to rule the appetitive part of the city (33–40). In Book IV of the *Republic*, Socrates turns to draw the promised analogy to the soul to demonstrate that the moral efficiency and harmony of the just city has its parallel in the internal psychology of the individual when there is a harmony of the parts of the soul with logos or reason, which Thomas identifies as calculation, harnessing spiritedness to channel and manage appetite or desire in

each individual. This story is familiar to students of the *Republic*. Thomas's argument is, however, that the male drama, the political case for justice in the city and the soul, is preliminary, and fails to explain the real power and relevance of Socrates's argument for the good of justice, which occurs chiefly on the psychological level of the account, and of which Socrates hopes to persuade Glaucon, if not the other interlocutors. The narrative of the male drama of Books II–IV is sufficient, Thomas argues, for explaining the nature of justice for the city and the soul, but “it was insufficient for an inquiry into the nature of the best life for an individual (philosophy) or the ideal constitution (philosophic rule)” (188). The only truly good and hence fully just political arrangement for a city is the one that is governed by philosophers, who have the capacity to generate, nurture, and educate the philosophic soul, and hence perpetuate the good city. The city/soul model could in theory produce harmony or justice internal to the city and the soul but, Thomas argues, it could not train and educate the individuals who could “generate ideas external to oneself,” and thus be in a position to give an explanation of “the ideal constitution.” In other words, the just city in speech of Books II–IV does not generate and nurture the philosophers who have knowledge of the good and so could give an account of what makes the just city good and worthy of perpetuation (188).

In Books V–VII, Thomas contends, we move from the male or political drama to the female drama. It is the female drama, she argues, because in Book V, Socrates is compelled to address the way in which women and children will be incorporated into the just city, but chiefly because this introduction addresses “potentiality” (211), the genesis or creation of the just soul, how the just soul will come into being. The generative quality of the psychological level of the dialogue that the female drama represents is particularly important if the conditions necessary for the just city turn out to be unachievable. The proposals of Book V are often referred to as the three waves because Socrates contends each proposal would be met by a wave of laughter or resistance, each greater than the last, which would threaten to drown or destroy the proposal and hence to destroy the possibility of the just city in speech. The three waves are the necessary (waves 1 and 2) and sufficient (wave 3) conditions for producing this perfectly good and just city or soul. The three proposals address the characteristics in human nature that pose challenges to the achievement of the perfectly just city in speech. Thomas explains that the first wave suggests that if *logos* or reason cannot persuade the city that men and women should be equal and perform the same roles in the city, then the city will be unable to transcend the conventional morality

that imposes differences between women and men and manages erotic longing. The second wave proposes the improbable complete elimination of the private interests that cause faction and discord, in order to establish perfect unanimity with regard to the choices and priorities among the parts of the city. And when Glaucon, having agreed to the conditions of waves 1 and 2, demands that Socrates explain how this city can come into being, Socrates admits in the third proposal, or wave, that the only means for putting the just city into practice is through the unlikely rule of philosophers as kings. Only the philosophers could know and then rule with a view to the external idea of what is just and good for human beings. Thomas thus shows us that Socrates lets Glaucon down gently by offering the female drama as an alternative to perfect political justice. The female drama, as Thomas explains it, is ultimately the psychological story of the potentiality and becoming of the individual philosophic soul. It is the explanation on the level of the psychological that is necessary to explain to Glaucon that the good life, the truly just life he seeks, *is* available to him, if not as a ruler in the just city, then internally, as an individual, through philosophic training and education. Thus, it is not a matter of mere convenience that leads Socrates to introduce the model of the just city as a foundation for understanding the proper order of the just soul. Instead, Socrates intentionally builds the argument from the city to the individual to demonstrate the relationship between the male and the female drama. Thomas identifies the proposals of Books V–VII as the female drama because they show us that the just city can exist only when it dedicates every facet of its becoming and its being entirely to the genesis, training, and education of the philosophers whose reason will rule the passions of their own souls and regulate the appetites and spiritedness of the city in order to perpetuate it as a good regime in light of what is good *per se*.

In part 4, Thomas turns to describe why the education of the philosopher is central to the success of the project of the *Republic*. At the beginning of the dialogue, both Glaucon and Adeimantus believe that if they understand what justice is, they will be qualified to lead a good life and rule the city well. Thomas explains that Socrates articulates the images of the Sun, Divided Line, and Cave to show his interlocutors that there is a higher knowledge of the good itself, attainable through philosophic education, the ascent from imagination to belief, hypothesis, or theory, and finally to intelligibility, or what she calls “noetic insight,” that informs our standards for justice. And this education, Thomas argues, essentially requires the ascent from the conventional or political male drama through the three waves of the female drama, towards knowledge of truth and virtue. Theoretically, it is still the

case that this education must also inculcate a responsible condescension, the willingness to apply the highest understanding of the good achieved by the hypothetical philosopher kings to political rule of the just city. Given the improbability of such a perfectly just city ruled by the wise philosopher kings, however, Thomas concludes that the teaching might instead point us towards the possibility of the sort of philosophic friendship that summons, on the psychological level, those with philosophic potential to reach for knowledge and truth beyond the conventional teachings of any particular city or cave.

Thomas concludes her account of the power of the female drama with two arguments, one of contemporary relevance and one more permanent. The contemporary argument addresses the relevance of Socrates's psychological argument to the political. The truth is that we are more often than not left to contend in political life against the threatened tyranny of the one, the few, and even the many. Thomas suggests that in the absence of a regime governed by the philosophic nature—a highly unlikely prospect—Socrates might be pointing towards the possibility that the best political order is one that privileges the liberty of the individual, which gives those so inclined and educated sufficient space to pursue wisdom privately. Thomas explicitly identifies this option as libertarian. And it is certainly worth speculating whether in the predictable absence of the perfectly good and just political order, one that would recognize and allow wise human beings to rule, Socrates might have settled for the political order that allows the greatest degree of individual freedom of thought and study. In fact, when Socrates introduces democracy in Book VIII of the *Republic*, he concedes that it would be the “fairest” of the regimes; like “a many-colored cloak decorated in all hues,” it would contain all the different kinds of human dispositions (557c–d, Bloom translation). Perhaps such a regime would permit the philosopher to think freely and pursue wisdom. Of course, Athens did not ultimately allow Socrates such freedom. So, perhaps the life of the philosopher will always be most akin to Socrates's image in Book VI (496d–e), that is, the account of the small group of human beings who seek a place where they can lead quiet, just lives in pursuit of wisdom, away from the noise of politics and the city. This image is consistent with Thomas's final reflection that, in the end and regardless of the regime or the times, the *Republic* teaches its students the psychological lesson about how to follow a path that engages with philosophy, so that they can pursue the truest individual freedom and access the full diversity of ideas and knowledge available to human beings.

Let me conclude by saying what a pleasure it is to read Thomas's account of the *Republic*. Reading *The Female Drama* is like taking a small seminar course with the best of teachers, one who has thought through and taught the *Republic* repeatedly for years, as Charlotte Thomas has undoubtedly done. Her study works through the *Republic* in a way that is both familiar and challenging—a way that invites discussion, probably some disagreement about the details and arguments, but one that most of all aims to engage her readers in a conversation about the possibility of a philosophic life.



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WILL MORRISEY

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What if playwrights Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) and William Shakespeare (1564–1616) had met, corresponded, even conversed, thanks to the Florentine’s acquisition of the Makropulos Elixir, mixed by the court alchemist of Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II—a potion imagined by still another playwright, Karel Čapek (1890–1938), granting those who drink it a long-extended life? And what if Shakespeare wrote an unfinished dialogue based on the encounter, completed by his fellow player and trusted friend, Nicholas Tooley? (After all, did not a promising young Plato scholar named Seth Benardete once muse, “Shakespeare could have written dialogues,” to the delight of his teacher, Leo Strauss?) Michael Platt has imagined it so, bringing together “the founder of modern political philosophy” with “the greatest modern poet” in a book animated by the question, can there be a Christian prince?

The year is 1598. Machiavelli is secretary of state for the “Right, Risen, Roman Republic,” having inspired the unification of northern Italy under a regime that has built itself into a naval power in the Mediterranean. He is on a diplomatic mission in England, perhaps to counter Spain, which still controls the Kingdom of Naples. Always looking to enlist “new captains in his unarmed army,” he also seeks an alliance with Shakespeare, whose writings surpass Machiavelli’s own works (Machiavelli admits to himself) in beauty. “In spiritual warfare nothing is more effectual,” and in his declared war on the regnant form of spirituality, Christianity, “the greatest calumny on life,” Machiavelli can use all the allies he can get. Having read Shakespeare’s Roman plays, he detects, or supposes he detects, a potential officer.

Shakespeare replies to Machiavelli's self-written letter of introduction, pleased with the Florentine's flattering but true observation that Shakespeare writes both tragedy and comedy. He invites Machiavelli to attend performances of his *Richard III* and his three plays on Henry VI. He also recommends that Machiavelli read and reread them.

In due course, Machiavelli replies, observing that the English plays complement the Roman plays, with their shared themes of honor and calumny, the violence of political founding, and civil disorder. He is quick to spot a new source of controversy in modern England, "the new division of Christianity" between Catholics and Protestants. He criticizes monarchic regimes because they are dynastic: since "most families are awful to grow up in," "why give rule of public things to a family," which only "magnifies vices more than virtues"? It may be that he brings these themes together, with an eye on the "family" seen in the Trinity. "I do see, howbeit faintly, the coming of a better regime," as the English people exhibit the capacity to discern virtue in their rulers and demand justice when those rulers commit crimes. "Would that their common sense were instituted in a stronger Commons, and if a ruling circle sprang up in it."

Shakespeare concurs with some of this. "How could I not study disorder? After all, there is so much of it. And it is always waiting to rush in. All it takes is one generation to lose the good times, and then slide on to worse," although "in the worst of times, when all seems lost, a rebound occurs," often beginning, as Machiavelli hopes, "with the people." As to Shakespeare's downplaying of Parliament, he calls Machiavelli's attention to the theater in which he puts on his plays. It "give[s] the audience the experience of an ideal Parliament in eternal session, in which all the important features of a political situation, together with their connection to everything above and below politics, are brought into speech, so that deliberation about the nation, sometimes even about the world, goes on in the mind of the audience, as it should in Parliament, in the Privy Council, in the Monarch, and in the soul of every English man facing his public choices"—more than only a Parliament but a mixed regime, consisting of both aristocrats and commoners, "all drawn together in our Theatre, and by my theatre, all made into one audience, all laughing, weeping, trembling, cheering together, and accordingly understanding," in what is now nearly a modern commercial "nation-state." He concludes by wondering if, even with a commercial way of life, men "can live together who do not worship together, as Jew and Christian do not, or at least look up to something beautiful and lofty together?" Where Machiavelli

envied the beauty of Shakespeare's literary style, his art, Shakespeare himself considers beauty in nature, and perhaps in God.

In their next exchange of letters, Machiavelli begins by condemning the conspicuously Christian Henry VI, who "wishes to be loved not feared" and is rewarded only with contempt. Indeed, on further consideration, Machiavelli concludes that Henry wants to be loved only by God, remaining indifferent to the love, the hate, and even the contempt of his fellow men, a ruler who "puts himself above politics" even to the extent of restoring titles and estates to his dynastic enemy, Richard Plantagenet. Unfitted for war, Henry never played sports, practiced with weapons, or learned horsemanship; for Machiavelli, "horse" means warfare and, given Richard's famous battlefield cry, "My kingdom for a horse!"—a line that will reappear for further discussion later—Machiavelli is rehearsing his theme from *The Prince*, that princes of war must replace princes of peace. With "reviling relish," Machiavelli lists Henry's many "sins of political omission," from his failure to defend his (few) political friends (especially his failure to protect his Lord Protector, Duke Humphrey) to his failure as a royal husband to punish his foreign-born queen for her infidelity. "All these omissions add up to omitting to rule," to leaving rule of human things to the wisdom and power of God and His providence.

Shakespeare largely concurs with this analysis, while cautioning against taking it too far. "I have qualified our contempt" for Henry. He may not know horses, "but, surprise, he knows hawking," a sport that figures in his comedy *The Taming of the Shrew*, in which "my hawker Petruchio gentles a mature wild female, named Kate, and with the same means" a falconer would use, "deprivation of sleep and meat." Moreover, Henry "never had the benefit of a father," only "the image of his great father," Henry V—"in everyone's mind for comparison"—and a "nefarious uncle" as his tutor. The "ever-widening span" between young Henry's "sight and his might makes him something like a Fool in court," seeing and saying things impermissible to others but unable to act, "or even to take care of himself." Rulers do need toughness—"not all the anointment in Christendom can change a soul never born to rule"—but Henry does have compassion for his people, and this is what leads to his "one political success," his quelling of a popular rebellion "through clemency and through the recollection of his father." Shakespeare adds, tellingly, "No wonder you missed it; clemency is not a trick of the fox." More, we see that while Machiavelli blames Henry's incapacity on Christianity, Shakespeare attributes that incapacity to the king's nature. This allows Shakespeare to judge him with clemency, as Machiavelli does not and will not.

That last rapier thrust induces Machiavelli to pull back, offering a qualification of his own. "Not that too much vice is virtuous," he cautions, criticizing Henry's queen, Margaret, for her excessive "spirit of revenge." After all, "murder must have a purpose," a political purpose; "she is all fury, no cunning." But here, too, Shakespeare points to a certain subtlety Machiavelli overlooks. Margaret is "not all revenge." When Henry banishes her lover, "we see some tenderness in her, howsoever adulterous," and when her son is stabbed in front of her, "we feel as she feels," never having "expected to suffer with her." "Often that happens in my works. Suddenly someone who could have hardened into a profile, even a cartoon, shows another side or feature, or a downright about-face. As you get to know human beings that happens. As you get to know yourself, that happens." Platt follows Shakespeare's lead here, even as he has Shakespeare deliver that lesson; just when it seemed that the exchange between the two men might turn into a simple battle of wits, he has Shakespeare offer the childless older man some fatherly advice.

There is a larger moral and political problem that Machiavelli also does not see. If Duke Humphrey attempted to overthrow Henry, "as his wife and you urge," he would no longer be himself, no longer "the man we rightly... think most fit of all the magnates to be a king." That is, "he would lose his eligibility in our eyes, and as important, his worthiness in his own eyes." As Plato's Socrates argues, "the same virtue that makes a man best for an office excludes him," the one "most worthy to rule, the philosopher, is least interested in doing so." A ruler by the apparently natural but actually conventional right of heredity may therefore be preferable to the ruler by the natural right of virtue. After all, so many persons suppose themselves naturally fitter to rule than whoever it is that wears the crown. To make partly invisible, counterfeitable virtue the criterion for ruling in practice would be to invite endless civil disorder. Better that the wise man advise the king, serve as Lord Protector, guarding him against such enemies as Humphrey's ambitious wife and the ever-conniving Cardinal Winchester. "It is ambition within bound and in service of the good that is to be lauded, not the over-reaching acquisitiveness you urge in recommending Humphrey seize the Crown, or the infinity of it you desire. That way madness in the soul lies, and chaos in the state."

After Richard Plantagenet's son Edward kills Henry's capable son, also named Edward, on the battlefield, and his ally Gloucester murders Henry (by then Edward's prisoner in the Tower of London), England is left with a king whose sexual desires lead him into an injudicious marriage. Machiavelli sniffs, "The lust of Edward IV unfitted him to be a prince." More politic

choices had been available. Upon reading this, Shakespeare thinks, “Though in your *Prince* you warn not to touch the women, in your plays you teach every man to ‘touch’ all he can.” For you, Machiavelli, “neither fortune nor woman can resist man,” but in the world you envision there can be no stable families to uphold the city. “Families start with sight not touch, with the ardent looks of the young, of Romeo and Juliet.” “Machiavelli in love, impossible.” And so Machiavelli makes the first genuinely political relationship, the reciprocal rule of husband and wife, also impossible. If Machiavelli were ever to watch *Romeo and Juliet*, “I’m afraid he’d set himself to teach one lover to murder the other, and thus effectually prove that love does not, cannot exist, just as he would prove ideal republics are no guide to better states, and even no measure of extant ones.”

Shakespeare keeps most of these thoughts to himself. In his answering letter, he contents himself with making a different remark, one aimed at moderating his correspondent’s claims. “One consequence of the free will my characters manage to exercise...is that others cannot predict it; even the sagacity of the sage is limited by that reality; that’s a hard fact those who are proud of penetrating hard things do not like to acknowledge.” The news of his Lord Protector’s death first makes King Henry faint. But then his realization of his unintentional responsibility for that death “fills him, for once, with spirit,” a possibility neither his enemies nor the play’s audience anticipate. “My characters are always doing something a bit ‘out of character,’ very much like the men and women I know, like myself.” His point to Machiavelli: conscience does not invariably make cowards of us all. Sometimes it makes some of us courageous. “A sense of guilt is not always a disadvantage, and its absence not always an advantage.” Character matters, but it is not quite fate. Equally, the attempt to conquer fate, Fortuna, to satisfy an unlimited desire to acquire by somehow getting “behind” one’s character, manipulating it, “using” one’s virtues and vices, makes too much of freedom.

Shakespeare thus agrees that Henry and Edward are no fit kings, although for different reasons. What of the tyrant who succeeds them, Edward’s father, Richard III? Machiavelli applauds. “In these *Histories* so far, I most esteem this man most,” he exclaims, with redundant emphasis. “I positively exult in Richard’s politic employment of Christian scripture and sentiments,” seen in his seduction of Lady Anne, widow of Henry’s son—“right beside her husband’s coffin,” no less. Machiavelli delights in Richard’s “witty expression” of his prideful contempt for his inferiors, phrases Shakespeare turns that are even better than his own clever formulations in *The Prince*. Still, he faults

Richard for being a bit too open in his blasphemies, a mistake symptomatic of an overall lack of prudence. What is more, “other than gaining the crown, he has no purpose, no plan.” In this, his anti-Christian stance apes the Christian’s inclination to gaze at the lilies of the field, which neither toil nor spin because the joys of the day suffice to him who expects still greater, permanent joys in eternity, needing no plan for that future time, already prepared for him by his Savior. By contrast, Machiavelli does have a plan. While hoping to rid the world of the “moderns” or Christians while radically revising the teachings of the “ancients,” Machiavelli himself would take care to salvage pieces of ancient wisdom, including prudential wisdom, even as he directs them to purposes the ancients did not regard.

Shakespeare takes up the theme of the ancients—specifically, the Romans. “Between us, I do not see Rome, either republic or empire, as wholly superior to our modern Christendom.” Because “the deepest desire of a Roman is to become a statue of himself,” Rome undertook the monumental task of world conquest. Having achieved this, Julius Caesar did indeed “achieve a statuesque immortality.” But “in becoming a god” he lost his humanity. To “despise human life” leads to a reduction of the man to a slab of granite or, if still living, a beast. Caesar’s idolatrous divinity contrasts with Christ’s everlasting life, whereby God became human, died, but continued to live and even to rule. Why is this not the superior ideal?

Ideal it may be, but is it true? Machiavelli replies that the reasoning behind the Earl of Warwick’s autopsy of Duke Humphrey, proving that the Lord Protector was murdered (*2 Henry VI* 3.2.168ff.), should be extended to consideration of claims based on “the body of Christ allegedly crucified and allegedly risen from the dead.” Christians point to miraculous stigmata on their hands, where painters depict nails driven into Jesus’s hands, attaching Him to the Cross. But “only nails through the wrists will hold a body to a cross—unless you believe in miracles. So much for all later stigmata! I and Leonardo know if anatomy were queen of the sciences there would be no theology.” Morally, too, Christianity hangs on dubious assumptions. “What a terrible idea, of a God who would punish whole innocent generations for the deeds of their grandfathers, but this God does not exist.” Fortuna, on the other hand, “hard but not interested in retribution,” shows that men “need princes not saviors,” as “men punish themselves” with their crimes of ignorance and the mental weakness induced by false religion. Shakespeare, Machiavelli confidently or perhaps wishfully asserts, rightly teaches the English to “abhor infamy, dare to reason, and be a man.”

“You say things that other men do not say, only do,” Shakespeare observes. Yet what you say is only “part of knowledge.” “Sometimes, even in politics, men do good things, and sometimes, if rarely, they aspire, even in political life, to the lofty good above them, and thus deserve to be remembered, as Good Duke Humphrey, a statesman though he failed, should be.” Your *Prince* amounts to “the unintended exhibition of your noble soul,” inasmuch as “you aspire to lasting glory, but you do not know yourself”: “I see all your desires in strife, the desire to know the truth, the desire to effect something, and the desire to win immortal fame, all there struggling in you.” Reread your own book, and if by that “you come to understand yourself, you would soon be able to order yourself.”

As for the way you would order the world, into large, centralized states, this too will lead to human self-contradiction. Before Henry VIII and his successful instantiation of your kind of state in England, a rich man gave to a poor man out of charity, a poor man felt gratitude in return. Now, “those taxed to provide will always feel it is too much, and the poor receiving it will feel it is too little”; with such “resentment in both and humiliation of the receiving poor,” will not your strong state weaken? When Machiavelli pointedly ignores this “challenge to self-examination,” he indignantly writes that the teacher of evil lives on, all right, but in the malign effects of his teachings. Scoundrels “will cite your authority for their low crimes, their base betrayals, and even their savage atrocities.” Exercising his own virtue of prudence, however, he decides to wait for a better opportunity to engage Machiavelli at his core, so to speak, “perhaps face to face, on a visit to Stratford.”

He instead more cautiously writes to “suggest that much escapes you.” In “grasping for the effectual,” you blind yourself to “noble failures, and complain of fortune, yours and Cesare Borgia’s and you do not know who to marry”—a theme of the *Odyssey*—“and I doubt you know how to die”—a theme of the *Iliad*. That is, although Machiavelli writes comedies, tragedies and epics remain beyond his reach. And even his most famous comedy, *Mandragola*, is “devoid of merriment,” more smutty than funny.

One of the things Machiavelli admits has escaped him is the reason why crafty Richard III lost his crown so soon after he took it. Shakespeare explains. Having murdered the two young princes in the Tower, Richard seeks an heir; hence his intention to marry Edward’s widow. He can conceive only of a father who will guard his heir, perpetuate his family on the throne, not one who might risk his son for the good of his country. But this is what his enemy, Lord Stanley, does, “risk[ing] his own son for the greater good of

England,” as “one of those Romans you admire” would do. Richard dies in the battle that ensues.

More profoundly, Richard fails as a man. “Feared not loved you say. Well, the truth is Richard like every man wishes to be loved.” But “he finds he cannot love himself, only fear himself.” He grew up “with everyone around him, including his mother, interpreting his shape”—his hunchback—as “a mark of God and expecting evil of him, until he does too.” Despite his ridicule of Christianity, he “swears by St. Paul five or six times,” a sign of misery beneath the mockery. He “thinks himself unloved by God, brought into existence to do evil, to be God’s scourge and minister, and yet notwithstanding, damned for being so, damned from birth exactly as some Protestants hold omniscient God to providentially rule this world, electing few, damning the many.” You, Machiavelli, “share his hatred of God, but not how it began in him. He thought God hated him. He hated God for that” and came to “hate himself.” In his last battle “he was seeking death, as an end to his wretched life.” Is your life any less miserable, Machiavelli?

But to send such a letter would be to go too far, too soon. Shakespeare “sends only a trim draft of the letter he’s rushed into.”

In his reply, Machiavelli denies that he recognizes no noble failures. “I recognized Cesare Borgia.” “His failure to unite Italy, at least Northern Italy and Rome, and drive out the barbarians, was the noblest failure of modern times.” It is this failure that I now seek to expunge, as secretary of state of the Right, Re-Risen Roman Republic. As for the devotees of the Risen God, “No fools are more senseless than those who burn with Christian piety; they make no distinction between friend and foe, allow themselves to be deceived, and ignore injuries; they shudder at pleasure, actually find it in fasts, vigils, penances, scourges, and ordeals; in short, they shrink from life, and prefer death. This is insane.” I admire your works, Will, because I find “no good Christians in them,” except for Henry VI, “an utter disaster.” “He who would not hurt a fly, destroys a kingdom.” As for Richard, his pangs of conscience do indeed bring him down, and that is precisely the problem. If he hates himself, who is responsible for that other than his God? Or rather himself, for believing in that God. “Christianity is the cause of a tyranny as never before on earth,” of tyrants who “must hate every well-formed human being and even hate human life itself. No previous tyrants, wicked as their deeds were, ever did so.” The ancients knew nature; the Christians deny it and in that denial ruin everything they touch.

Shakespeare continues to find Machiavelli's interpretation of his plays too narrow. It is as if Machiavelli were a latter-day Xenophon, but one who never wrote Socratic dialogues. "Xenophon knew Socrates, Xenophon looked up to Socrates. You're no Xenophon." If you were, you would see that Richard's restless night before his last battle, when he is visited in his dreams by the ghosts of all those he's murdered, amounts to "a Socratic self-examination." Machiavelli does not imagine "how a poet might oppose tyranny, working from within, getting the tyrant to confess his misery," as I hope to do "in a play about the Scottish usurper Macbeth." Steeling himself to murder the king, Macbeth will tell himself, "To do this deed, I must not know myself." Do you, Machiavelli, in your intention to murder God, really know yourself? "In hating God you are in some danger of hating the good." If you have concluded from reading *Richard III* that I therein prove the lethality of Christian belief, wait until you have read my second English history tetralogy, the one in which I portray Henry IV, Henry V, and Falstaff. I send you the manuscripts and I also invite you to "resume our conversation, but face to face, in Stratford."

Upon receiving the manuscript, Machiavelli is only the more convinced that he needs to enlist "this vivacious English captain to my cause." Had Henry V "lived only ten years more," he writes, "his reputation would have been glorified by additional conquests, his realm enlarged, his hold on it firmer, his son better educated, and the prospect of his son's rule fairer." Henry's very statements against my teachings and my disciples merely indicate his adherence to those teachings and his status among my disciples, since "those who declare themselves Machiavels have not understood the first thing about my teaching." He is happy to accept Shakespeare's invitation to dine.

In their dialogue over dinner, speaking of the second Henriad, Machiavelli continues his complaints about Christianity. When Shakespeare observes that Richard II is the only king in his Histories to compare himself to Christ, Machiavelli replies, again, that that is exactly the problem with him. "Christ was no ruler. All he teaches is how to lose and then be pitiful, passionate, and poetical about it." This is true of Richard, Shakespeare agrees, "but the question who should rule is not as deep or as deeply engaging as how should we die and dying, live"—the question addressed by Jesus in His crucifixion and resurrection. In his attempt to come to terms with that issue, Richard wins and deserves the audience's sympathy. Having effectively dismissed both Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection as myths, and so passionately that he never notices that the question of death remains real even if Jesus is not, Machiavelli ignores this argument and continues to speak about ruling. In

ruling, “only effectual truths yield benefits,” not poetic images. Richard’s belated Christian maunderings leave the English no choice but to side with Henry Bolingbroke, the future Henry IV, who replaces the Plantagenet line with his own.

He does it by what Shakespeare calls “the deliberately accidental murder of Richard,” an act “inseparable from the justice of the monarchy,” even as Elizabeth I’s beheading of Mary Queen of Scots was inseparable from the justice of her monarchy. Although Richard himself posed no threat to the new dynasty, his adherents did. There are “two goods” which must “be held together, justice and peace,” and “two principles that all rulers must keep together, and all monarchs must keep together, namely, inheritance and virtue.” Shakespeare disagrees with Machiavelli in denying that legitimacy and the authority it lends to power serve merely as covering for power, a fraud that veils force. “Some will remember the piteous and yet desirable passing of the Crown” from Richard to Henry “as an impeachment and removal, some will remember it as an abdication that left the throne unoccupied, and others will remember it as a simple gift from one cousin to another, but all will remember that Richard did participate in it. And that makes it somewhat legitimate and will somewhat obstruct any later claims of wrongful usurpation. Ceremonies matter. One might even call them effectual.” As for Richard’s murder, whereas Machiavelli considers Henry responsible for it (the new king complained about the former king in front of a courtier who took the complaint as a command issued in the form of a hint), Shakespeare reminds him that Henry does not “admire himself [for his cousin’s death], as you do him.”

This brings them to the next, great, Henry. They agree that while spirited Hotspur is a lion, sly Falstaff a fox, Prince Hal is both. By (as Shakespeare puts it, in Machiavelli’s phrase) using the lion and the fox, Hal proves himself the true prince. Yet Shakespeare sees virtues rather than *virtù* in this: “prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice.” That “smells of Socrates,” Machiavelli sneers, the man whose imagining of republics disabled him from founding a real one. “I hope you don’t carry hemlock with you” to our dinner, Shakespeare replies, in mock alarm. Machiavelli zeroes in: Your Henry is not “quite enough of a lion and a fox. He was not cruel enough.” Had he allowed his father to be killed on the battlefield instead of rescuing him, Prince Hal could have been king five years earlier, “started for France five years earlier,” and then, having conquered and absorbed it, set out for Italy, uniting Europe and ruining the papacy for good.

No, Shakespeare replies. “I can hear” Henry V replying to such a suggestion: “What, are we turned Turk, that for our advantage we would see our fathers murdered by our committing omission?” Indeed we should, Machiavelli insists, “for greatness.” No, again, Shakespeare’s Henry answers: “We doubt that greatness comes without some goodness. We know that it does not come from such evil.” Seeing his father in deadly peril, he defends him without hesitation, rightly winning his father’s confidence in his loyalty, at least in the aftermath of the moment. Then and subsequently, Prince Hal proves he can “wait to become king,” although his father begins to doubt it. “Son Hal knows his father better than father Henry IV knows him, his own son.” But this makes your second *Henry IV* play a bit boring, Machiavelli complains. You are right, Shakespeare concedes. The play is about tired old age, undramatic but natural, a condition sons must eventually deal with, as they consider their fathers. Prince Hal will not force nature.

Machiavelli (and his true English captain, Francis Bacon) would. They look for physical means of prolonging physical life—Bacon with his experiments involving the refrigeration of chickens, Machiavelli with his Makropulos potion. Machiavelli tempts Shakespeare by offering him a dose, which Shakespeare declines, saying, “Life would not be better without death. Truly, it would no longer be life.” Perpetual life is what would be tiresome. Machiavelli seems not to appreciate the implications of his own atheism; he denies the God Who offers eternal life while still yearning for such a life. To Machiavelli’s temptation, Shakespeare effectively answers with a counter-temptation: Have the courage of your own convictions, if those really are your own convictions.

The dialogue ends with a consideration of Henry V, a man who overcame temptations. Shakespeare cites Henry’s first soliloquy, which begins with the claim, “I know you all”—Falstaff, Poins, and the rest of his drinking buddies (*1 Henry IV*, 1.2.188–209). This is “plain truth not juvenile excuses.” Henry has “learn[ed] nothing from Falstaff”; he spent time with him because he was biding his own time, waiting to enter the public realm with *éclat*. Indeed, the marshall of France and Welsh Fluellen “have some inkling of what Henry of England is up to.” And Henry knows something even they, even Machiavelli himself, do not: that “the spirit of the men” wins wars, a spirit animated “not so much by their fear of the prince, but their love of him.” To be sure, like founding, war means blood; there will be winners and losers, and that is not simply a matter of power but of the good in the real world, wherein “seeking some good always sacrifices some other.” If “the beautiful, the true and the

good seldom coincide,” then Machiavelli’s attempted use of Shakespeare as a means of lending beauty to his ugly (half) truth amounts to a highly unlikely project, even if, perhaps especially if, Shakespeare were to play along with it.

“Yes,” Machiavelli remarks, “we need to talk of good war, not just war.” Henry, Shakespeare explains, wants to retake France not as a means of reuniting the shards of the Roman Empire but to avoid the evil of civil war in England by redirecting the thoughts and actions of England’s restive aristocrats overseas and to render his foot soldiers obedient. Machiavelli claims that that, too, is Machiavellian, but Shakespeare rejoins that civil war is an evil greatly to be avoided, and that steadying troops “in the face of a fearful adversary”—a danger he faces with them—hardly qualifies as cynicism. Neither “poetic and deluded like Richard II,” nor “malicious and deluded like Richard III,” nor “provoked by injustice like his father, nor by love of fame like Hotspur” (nor, one might add, love of sack like Falstaff), and above all not by acquisition, like you, Machiavelli; Henry’s only possible motivation is duty.

In that case, Machiavelli says, “I don’t understand him.” “Not even Socrates might,” Shakespeare suggests, because Socrates associates political life with convention, mere opinion, which potential philosophers ought to put their strength into overcoming in rational ascent from those borrowed lights. “According to Socrates there is no reason for a philosopher to rule,” and no obligation, either. “To become who you are, you had to fight all opinions.” But Henry is no “ancient,” any more than he is a “modern” in Machiavelli’s sense. “He is the inheritor of a potent model of nobility, one unknown to the ancients, princes and philosophers, of the highest serving the low, of an immortal who not only seeks the good of mortals, like Prometheus, but who suffers for them, even unto joining them in death.”

Machiavelli does not like the sound of that. It sounds like Christ to him, and Shakespeare readily admits it, and with a proto-Nietzschean turn, at that. “Though Christ refused to rule, and even seemed to leave ruling to the Caesars, still he provided a pattern for rulers. Let them be Caesars, but Caesars with something of the soul of suffering Christ.” Ready to sacrifice themselves for the good of their people. Henry is “the greatest man of deeds I can imagine”; “though I love others more, I admire none more than him”—a “great Prince, which we are not, and what is more, he was a greater man” superior to me not in writing, in wit, or in thinking but in the “single-minded active pursuit of the good.”

Shakespeare thus denies Machiavelli's central claim about Christianity, that it unfits men for rule. Shakespeare claims instead that Christianity can make politics better and politicians more effective. Against this, Machiavelli has one last temptation up his antitheological sleeve. "Shakespeare, you are a great prince, but of shadows. You could be one of nations, peoples, and states, indeed the world." "No, it is not for me," Shakespeare quickly answers. It is not my nature. Unlike Henry VI, Shakespeare can choose what to do with his life. No royal inheritance burdens him. He bears only a natural inheritance, to which he intends to give full scope. He has chosen a life of inquiry undertaken through observing men and women and writing plays about them. Many of those persons say not only true and false things but true things at odds with one another. In this, his plays resemble the Gospel: "Everyone who arrives sure of something will find something to keep him sure," as Machiavelli has done, but "only by being alert to contrary truths, might you ever later make your way to unity" by "wrestl[ing] like Jacob with the angel." In the Gospel, "Christ himself is responsible for his bounty and the difficulty arising from it," with some aphorisms saying one thing—"it is harder for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle" to get into heaven—and others saying the opposite—become like a trusting child, and you will be on the way there. Jesus leaves it to His listeners to bring such things together. Jesus poses His own version of the Socratic challenge to undertake philosophizing. To pose such difficulties to his audience is Shakespeare's vocation, his *imitatio Christi*.

Shakespeare has withheld something from the manuscript of *Henry V* he gave Machiavelli to read. It is Henry's prayer on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt, where he prays first to "the God of Battles" to "steel my soldiers' hearts" but then to the Lord, asking forgiveness for his father's part in Richard II's death ("I have built / Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests / Sing still for Richard's soul" [*Henry V*, 4.1.285–301]). Reading this, Machiavelli storms out, "losing forever the chance not only to enjoy lofty things, but from that coign of vantage, come to know all the low things, which he thought he already knew."



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Matthew Linck, *Wakefulness and World: An Invitation to Philosophy*.  
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In *Wakefulness and World: An Invitation to Philosophy*, Matthew Linck provides chapter-length engagements of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel. Each chapter could serve well as a stand-alone introduction to the philosopher whose work it engages, but the chapters also build on one another to tell the counterintuitive story that the intelligibility of the world, while seemingly obvious at first glance, is not so obvious at first thought, and perhaps not even on second thought. And yet, while the book's thesis poses serious questions about the supposed obviousness of the world's intelligibility, Linck does not take the reader on an obscurantist's journey. Questions arise because reasoning leads to them logically, and reasoning answers these questions as reason is able, understanding that these answers may lead to the posing of further questions. In this way the book reads like a detective story, with the protagonist moving from one clue to the next, because while each clue does not contain the fullness of truth that is sought—and so the pursuit must continue—nonetheless each clue has sufficient significance to point one toward the ultimate sought-after end, an understanding of the intelligibility of the world. Indeed, this book could be used as a treatment for misology, as the inquiry modeled in this book is that of one who wants to know truth, and who also knows how to pursue it, because one is a lover of wisdom.

Reading *Wakefulness and World* gives one the experience of taking an independent study with a master teacher. Focusing for a moment on its form, this book is “about” how to read primary sources and how to philosophize. The first chapter starts *in media res*, with the author acting as a guide bringing the reader quickly up to speed, briefly summarizing a bit of Socrates's and

Glaucon's discussion at the midpoint of Plato's *Republic* (1). Immediately following this opening summary, Linck's authorial voice switches seamlessly to that of a fellow companion on a shared intellectual journey: "Let's listen in to their next bit of conversation" (1). For the rest of the chapter, Linck succeeds in moving back and forth between the two modes fairly seamlessly. (He does something similar in the subsequent chapters on Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel, *mutatis mutandis*, as the other philosophers did not write in dialogue form.) The overall effect is teacherly in the best sense, where the reader has the sensation of thinking along with the author as he is simultaneously being guided.

Turning attention to the book's content—assuming (mistakenly but conveniently) for the moment it can be cleanly separated from the book's form—Linck explains high-level concepts and arguments from all the thinkers he engages in a clear, conversational style, relatively free of jargon, while avoiding oversimplification and maintaining a high degree of precision and rigor. In Linck's own concluding summarizing terms: chapter 1 engaging Plato, "Wakefulness," is about "the apprehension of intelligible forms" and "the waking to eidetic sight"; chapter 2 engaging Aristotle, "World," is about "the delineation of the determinate world" and "the deepening of worldly intelligibility in the quest for principles"; chapter 3 engaging Kant, "Sum," is about "the experience of counting" and the unfolding of mathematical thought into the grounds of conscious experience"; and chapter 4 engaging Hegel, "Thought/Being," is about "common sense" and "the overcoming of common sense" (173).

In addition to its other virtues, chapter 1 serves as a kind of corrective or apologetic against reductionist and anti-Platonist strains typical in much of philosophy today. A number of common errors in reading and interpretation plague not only the generally educated reader of Plato, but also, tragically, many trained philosophers and philosophy professors who presumably should know better. One error is to attribute to Plato everything that the character Socrates says in Plato's dialogues. This error is so ubiquitous as to have a name: "the mouthpiece fallacy." Another error is for a reader to engage Plato not directly, but through a secondhand invention—like one of the so-called Platonic theories ("Plato's theory of ideas," "Plato's theory of recollection," etc.)—and then form the impression that one "knows what Plato thinks." Such impressions often make a reader incapable of fruitfully reading a Platonic dialogue (if one ever gets around to doing so). Never mind the fact that most of these so-called Platonic theories are actually Neoplatonic

theories being used anachronistically<sup>1</sup> (though at some level understandably) to reduce the complex cluster of philosophical activity, arguments, and claims present in any given Platonic dialogue down to a ready-at-hand “theory.”

Linck commits none of these fallacies. On the contrary, he models how one *should* engage Plato’s dialogues without reductionism and yet with brevity and clarity. He manages to penetrate quickly to the heart of pivotal themes, claims, and arguments from Plato’s dialogues, and he does so without warping or inaccurately glossing the original material. With tact, and perhaps even invisibly to the neophyte, he even manages to call to task philosophers who think that argumentatively establishing or denying the existence of the forms is the most appropriate initial, persistent, and final response to Glaucon’s<sup>2</sup> first mentioning them. Linck is sympathetic to the reasonableness of such a response, saying “the presumption that there *are* forms to begin with” is something that “we would want to question” (3). But that is a fish to fry for another time. Linck makes clear that the conversation between Socrates and Glaucon, at this point, is really about something else, namely, what to do or conclude in the light of forms being a given. They are a starting point, not a bone of contention. The philosopher is someone who sees forms, and delights in the seeing (2). This is the *definition* of a philosopher (4). Linck summarizes the point as follows: “Understood in this way, philosophy is not premised on proving that there are forms. Philosophy begins with seeing the forms” (4).

Chapter 2, focusing on Aristotle, is just as careful, edifying, and delightful as the chapter on Plato. Linck walks through select passages from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and *Physics* to describe what the world is and what things are in the world by focusing on “nature,” without relying on—and thus, without having to spend time clarifying the meaning of—most of the other typical Aristotelian jargon of substance, accident, actuality, potentiality, and so forth. Part of his method in explaining Aristotle’s account of nature is juxtaposing it with a “fable” Descartes describes in his *Le monde* (51–52). In the Cartesian fable, nature is construed to be “both the moving matter and the laws which such motions obey”; but because of this, “if the world is an aggregate

<sup>1</sup> An anachronistic interpretation is not necessarily an unhelpful one, or even an inaccurate one. Nor is it necessarily the case that Plotinus is mistaken in any given claim he may make, as far as it goes. Nevertheless, neither is it necessarily the case that Plato means all and only what Plotinus says he learned from Plato, nor that Plato is doing all and only what Plotinus thinks Plato is doing in writing his dialogues.

<sup>2</sup> Linck takes care to note that it is not Socrates, but rather “Glaucon” who “is the first person to utter the word [‘form,’ *eidōs*] in the *Republic* and he uses it in this sense [as ‘indicating a class or kind of thing’]” (2).

of colliding bodies, there can be no conception of a principle of rest” (52). On the other hand, in Aristotle’s account, “nature is not understood here [192b21–23] as the totality of moving things (and their laws). Rather, nature here is distinct from the things that move and rest. Nature is what is responsible for their motion and rest” (53). Motion and rest are defined in terms of becoming and fully being, respectively. “The motions that begin in the acorn and the egg come to rest in the active lives of an oak tree and a sparrow” (55). When the oak tree grows or the sparrow flies, what Descartes calls instances of motion, Aristotle instead calls aspects of the activity of being an oak tree or sparrow, because “to be a sparrow means to act—to live—in certain ways. Such activity—activity as the being of a certain (kind of) thing—must be distinguished from motion” (54).

Once more Linck is to be lauded for avoiding ham-fisted and misleading characterizations of a thinker and his work. He does not portray Aristotle as a hard-nosed empiricist protesting the rationalist idealism of his teacher Plato (a common cliché which does disservice to both Aristotle and Plato). When concluding his discussion of being and nature, after recapitulating the differences between artifacts and living beings (88), Linck points out that forms have appeared once again in the course of our inquiry, that “the turn to forms is a second beginning for the philosopher,” and that “this second beginning is the first beginning played in a different key” (89). Because Linck does not advert to facile reflections on similarities or differences between the philosophers he is engaging, he succeeds in writing chapters that can be read as stand-alone treatments that also build on one another when read together.

Linck’s treatment of Kant in chapter 3 is a slight departure from his usual mode of explanation, only insofar as he utilizes (and thus must spend time explaining) Kantian jargon, but Linck is aware of this anomaly, stating later in the introduction to his glossary that Kant is an “outlier...who makes extensive use of philosophical terms inherited from his predecessors” (177). Otherwise the method and approach is the same: engaging a passage from a primary text, considering it carefully, reasoning about it methodically but in a conversational style. This chapter begins with a quotation from Kant about the simple act of counting on one’s fingers (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B15–16), and the bulk of the chapter is taken up with explaining how the possibility of such a simple action relies on *intuition* and *concepts*, and involves necessity (91–92). This chapter, along with the next on Hegel, contains dense argumentation that may strike the more casual reader as discursions that are sometimes harder to follow, but Linck is aware of this, and attempts to assuage

this difficulty with frequent section breaks, with reviews and reminders of covered ground, and, in chapter 4, with narrative reversions—or attempted reversions—to “common sense.” At one point he writes: “Maybe, though, the problem is with us. Maybe we shouldn’t be asking these questions. Maybe the questions themselves create the illusion of a problem about giving a true explanation of knowing” (144). Such comments encourage the reader to persist in places where many readers are probably posing those very questions to themselves. Again, Linck’s teacherly manner is apparent, and appreciated.

Before I began reading *Wakefulness and World*, based on the publisher summary I thought the book might be a good text for an introductory philosophy course. After reading the prefatory pages, that expectation shifted into a higher gear; I thought it might be a good book for sharing with people who want to know what philosophy is, or to demonstrate to friends what it is that philosophers do. Once I had finished the book, I had become convinced that this is a book for audiences of nearly every level of philosophical training—from beginners to specialists—as well as for those with no training at all. To speak to its pedagogical virtues for a moment, being edified by the book myself I saw that its potential uses go beyond introductory courses. I assigned it as one of the texts for a junior-level metaphysics course last semester, for example, and it served well.

When interviewed and asked why the book was subtitled *An Invitation to Philosophy* rather than *An Introduction to Philosophy*, Linck said, “I wanted to avoid the term ‘introduction’ because usually the books that have that heading lay out the fundamental concepts, the basic areas of inquiry that philosophy delves into, and I wasn’t doing that. I didn’t want to do that. Instead, it’s an invitation to participate in the activity of philosophizing and reading philosophical books.”<sup>3</sup> From my reading and use, and from what I have seen among my students, Linck’s book accomplishes its desired end.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sjc.edu/news/tutors-talk-books-matthew-linck-his-new-book-wakefulness-and-world>.

## GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

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