

*The Ancient Quarrel:
Philosophy and Literature*

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After earning her PhD, she returned to her alma mater as a member of the Philosophy Department. It was during her tenure at Barnard that, quite to her own surprise, she used a summer vacation to write her first novel, *The Mind-Body Problem*. More novels followed: *The Late-Summer Passion of a Woman of Mind*; *The Dark Sister*, which received the Whiting Writer's Award; *Mazel*, which received the 1995 National Jewish Book Award and the 1995 Edward Lewis Wallant Award; and *Properties of Light: A Novel of Love, Betrayal, and Quantum Physics*. Her book of short stories, *Strange Attractors*, received a National Jewish Book Honor Award. Her 2005 book *Incompleteness: The Proof and Paradox of Kurt Gödel* was named one of the best science books of the year by *Discover* magazine. Her next book, *Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity*, was winner of the 2006 Koret International Jewish Book Award in Jewish Thought. Her latest novel, *36 Arguments for the Existence of God: A Work of Fiction*, was published in 2010.

In 1996 Goldstein became a MacArthur Fellow, receiving the prize that is popularly known as the "Genius Award." In 2005 she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 2006 she received a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Radcliffe Fellowship. In 2008 she was designated a Humanist Laureate by the International Academy of Humanism. Goldstein was named Humanist of the Year 2011 by the American Humanist Association.

LECTURE I. MORALITY AND LITERATURE

Why did he have to do it? Why did he feel he had to go to such lengths as to banish the poets from his city of reason?

Listen, who says he even did do it? Do you think he really meant it when he has Socrates declaring that, should any dramatic poet happen to show up, one fine day in utopia, the first thing that he, in the role of philosopher-king, would do would be to slather the poet with blandishments, praising him as “holy, wondrous and delightful,” and then the next thing he would do would be to hustle that poet as quickly as possible to the nearest border and give him the boot, explaining to the poor artiste, head still dripping with the myrrh with which his exiler had anointed him, that “there is no man of your kind among us in our city, nor is it lawful for such a man to arise among us”? Come on, Plato’s obviously having fun with us here. The Socrates he has banishing literary creativity just happens to be Plato’s own literary creation. Plato couldn’t possibly have intended that mock exile to be taken seriously.

Oh, but I think he did. I think he was entirely serious.

Do you now? Despite the fact that you’ve been warned not to take him always at his word? The man had a lot of playful mischief in him. He wasn’t a professor, you know. He wasn’t an academic philosopher, with a PhD from Harvard, Princeton, or Yale. We obscure the nature of his thinking when we project anachronistic images of professorial decorum onto him, straitjacketing him into hobgoblin-y consistency and grand systemetizing. Yes, he was a serious thinker—who more so?—but his philosophical seriousness lived in gleeful symbiosis with a well-developed sense of fun, an exuberant playfulness toward those familiars of his, Ideas, catching at their consequences just for the sheer loveliness of the logical exercise. He doesn’t always mean to be actually asserting the conclusions of his arguments, not even when it’s his very own Socrates that he has drawing them. That’s one of the reasons he uses the dialogue form, to emphasize the tentative nature of his reasoning, the multiplicity of opposing voices meant to reproduce the interplay of many possible viewpoints, all being given their due, whether the opposing views come from the multitudes in the agora or the multitudes inside one’s own head.

Well, yes, there’s some small element of truth to that, especially the point about those attitudinal multitudes clamoring inside one’s own head, the subcranial cacophony that goes by the name of thinking. But still, this

Platonic dialogue, the one in which he banishes the poets, the *Republic*? It's one of the least tentative of his dialogues. By the time he really gets into it, the other participants of his so-called dialogue are reduced to their simpering formulaic "Yes, Socrates," "But of course, Socrates," "Wouldn't have it any other way, Socrates." Plato's in full asserting mode. And one of the things he asserts is that no poet—especially no good poet—should be allowed to reside inside the city of reason. One-half of you is ready to impose any interpretation other than the bloody obvious one, which is that Plato didn't treat the narrative arts with undo respect. He didn't exalt literature.

But he did exalt it. Even in that blasted passage you can't stop harping on he calls the poet "holy."

Yes, he does, and he means that "holy" just as seriously as he does the banishment. That's what's so disturbing. Plato isn't one of those philosophers who's insensible to deep aesthetic stirrings. There are philosophers who are like that, but Plato wasn't one.

Well, of course he wasn't! How could he have been when he himself was the greatest literary artist in the whole wide Western philosophical canon? The metaphors, the wordplays, the allegories! The settings and the characters. Those moments of drama and heartrending beauty. Just to take one example, that moment when Alcibiades, that darling, dangerous boy, crashes the abstemious party of the *Symposium*, where Socrates and other worthies have been discussing the nature of eros, Socrates just having given an inspired speech explaining how our erotic desires must undergo a reason-directed education, yearning for a particular beautiful boy leading us to yearning for Beauty itself. And now here comes Alcibiades, flush with drink and so adorable, subverting everything that Socrates has just said, describing what it's like to love this particular man, not Beauty itself, but this maddening, reason-besotted Socrates, who refuses to be seduced even by the likes of Alcibiades. This isn't just philosophy. This is art, ambiguity and all, and Plato is a consummate artist. He knows the power of the literary arts intimately, so don't go telling me that he had no use for it.

That's rather the point, though, isn't it. It's because he knows and loves the arts so well, particularly poetry, because he feels its power so intimately, his soul so receptive to its rhythmic pounding, that he casts it out of the city of reason. He feels very bad about having to do so, and he hopes, rather despairingly, that poetry can muster up a respectable philosophical comeback against him and convince him that it shouldn't be

banished: “Nonetheless, if poetry has any argument to bring forward that proves it ought to have a place in a well-governed city, we at least would be glad to admit it, for we are ourselves very susceptible to its charms.” He lavishes his dialogues with artistry, sure, but that doesn’t mean that what he’s producing is art, rather than philosophy. Beauty is a cognitive essential for Plato. Without beauty to startle us into attention, we’d never learn a thing. Beauty is what seduces us, and seduction is what Plato is after. He’s out to seduce us into reason. Of course, he’ll help himself to artistic techniques for the purpose of philosophy, use what art has taught him about the imagination and about beauty’s power of bewitching us into feeling what it would have us feel.

So then what you’re saying is artistic philosophy is okay with Plato, but philosophical art isn’t? Is that it?

Yes, yes, exactly. Artistic philosophy, yes; philosophical art, no.

But then what’s really the difference, when you get down to it, between artistic philosophy and philosophical art? This is getting murky, Rebecca. Artistic philosophy, being artistic, enlists the imagination, allows for the ambiguity of metaphor and allegory, shapes all with an eye toward beauty in order to stir the emotions, even creates characters and enfolds philosophical positions into them. Yes, there are arguments running throughout it, but aren’t there arguments embedded within philosophical art as well? In the limiting cases—when the philosopher has superior literary talents, as Plato or Nietzsche or Wittgenstein did, or, alternatively, when the writer has superior philosophical talents, as, say, George Eliot or Herman Melville or Samuel Beckett did—don’t they merge? And if, in the final analysis, we can’t tell the difference between the two, artistic philosophy and philosophical art, then isn’t it about time you quit this lifelong agony of a dialogue and instead consider that what Plato might just be telling us is that the literary arts must be, just like philosophy, truth-telling, cognitively and morally expansive? It’s art as mindless entertainment, the razzle-dazzle being projected onto the back wall of the cave that keeps us illusion-addled and slack-jawed with distraction; that’s what Plato is denouncing. It’s that kind of art that he’s banishing from his justice-seeking city of reason, not writers with social consciences, telling us tales of pity and terror that wake us up out of our moral stupor so that we can see the full possibility of our lives and the obligations that they carry.

You are so wrong. I wish you were right, but you’re wrong. What Plato had in mind was precisely the timeless masterpieces, of which there just

happened to be rather a lot on display in the Athens of his day. It's those glorious poets that he's running out of Reason Town. It reminds me of that tragic quip by Osip Mandelstam: "Only in Russia is poetry respected. It gets people killed." Plato, too, respected poetry.¹

Are you implying that Plato was a Stalinist?

Ah, if only. If only it were a matter of Stalinism, then I could dismiss Plato's misgivings about art, instead of, as it is, having them play out in this endless back-and-forth, into which I have, with no preamble at all, injected all of you, for which I apologize, dragging you into this internalized Greek chorus that revolves around the problem of whether novels, the art form that I love, being very susceptible to its charms, can be philosophically justified.

This may seem a quixotic problem to you. Who *cares* if novels can or can't be philosophically justified? Novels aren't petitioning any *philosopher* for permission to exist. But I assure you, this question, this very Platonic question, has plagued me continuously, ever since I first found myself, much to my surprise and to the detriment of my then nascent career in philosophy, writing novels. (A young woman in the male-dominated field of philosophy of science: what better way to convince skeptical colleagues that you're truly serious than to write a sexy novel?) Plato, in ancient Athens, referred to "the ancient quarrel" between literature and philosophy, and it's a measure of how prickly the relationship still is that the few professionally trained philosophers who do have serious literary habits, such as the late Iris Murdoch, have, more often than not, vehemently denied any particular overlap between the two pursuits.

James Ryerson wrote about this phenomenon in the *New York Times Book Review* just this past January. Here's how he opened his essay: "Can a novelist write philosophically? Even those novelists most commonly deemed 'philosophical' have sometimes answered with an emphatic no." Ryerson then goes on to quote Murdoch averring, in a BBC interview of 1978, that any occurrence of philosophical ideas in her novels is nothing more than an accident of what she just happens to know. "If I knew about sailing ships," she says, "I would put in sailing ships. And in a way, as a novelist, I would rather know about sailing ships than about philosophy."

As much as I revere Murdoch, I've always found this disclaimer to ring false. How could a moral and metaphysical thinker like Murdoch keep her perspective from seeping into her novels? One would have to take art

1. Mandelstam was prophetic. His own poetry got him killed.

much less seriously than Plato does to get away with that. And of course anyone who has studied Murdoch knows that she doesn't—doesn't take art less seriously than Plato and doesn't manage to keep her moral and metaphysical sensibility from seeping everywhere into her art, into her themes and thick into her characters. Her characters' inner lives—and what else is a character but an inner life?—are engorged by their author's philosophical knowledge. She injects it into the marrow of their being. It's not like adding in one's knowledge of shipbuilding at all, so why would she say that? Why pretend that one's philosophical self, answering no doubt to the proper name of *Reine Vernunft*, Pure Reason, isn't involved in the murk of art? Why pretend that *Reine Vernunft* stands off to the side, holding her nose and patiently waiting it out, while one's literary self goes off on a bender? Why? I think I know why. It's to try to dodge the opprobrium hurled at us by the likes of Plato, the opprobrium of the philosophical profession in general with which we, being philosophers, can't help but sympathize. No wonder then that any philosophically trained and therefore self-agonizing novelist is apt to say that her literary work has nothing to do, not really, with the real doing of philosophy.

After all, we have a field that is expressly designed to think about philosophical problems. It is called *philosophy*. The man who invented this subject as we know it was Plato. It was Plato who recognized the distinctive quality of a peculiarly slippery sort of question. He started out by thinking of this sort of question as it applied specifically to principles of conduct, to morality, but he soon saw how this sort of question emerged in far-flung regions of human thought and concern, and he saw, too, that one of the defining aspects of this sort of question, the philosophical question, is that it seems to elude, in the most maddening way, empirical resolution. That's part of what makes the philosophical so distinctively slippery. These questions present as empirically problematic, meaning that answering them doesn't seem to rest on our laying our hands on any missing facts of the matter. We appear to have all the facts that we're going to get, and yet these problems persist. They're what one might call "factually insomniac." We can't put them to bed with the facts. Instead, what seems to be demanded is a way of casting the facts already at hand into a different arrangement. But how to do this? What techniques can be devised that will allow us to lift ourselves out of our typical ways of seeing the facts and deliver us into a new perspective on them? Because that's what any sort of progress in answering these factually insomniac questions seems to require, if progress *can* be made.

And here's another aspect of these questions that makes them slippery: they are slick with emotions. They tend to put us in the way of wishful thinking of a markedly self-interested sort. Who I happen to be can play a significant role in what I'd like the answers to turn out to be. It's not any old factually insomniac questions that earn the obsessive attention of philosophy, but rather questions probing the self's standing in the world, how it stands in relation to everything that *isn't* the self, which covers rather a wide swath. They're questions that have to do with our trying to get, in the most fundamental sense, our general bearings. They're self-situating. Such questions matter to us, profoundly, in the same way that those very selves matter to us, profoundly, and so we're likely to come at these questions at a slant.

Perhaps this slant is most obvious when it comes to philosophical questions regarding morality, the place where Plato presumably began. One would like, every last one of us, for it to be the case that the answers to universal moral questions turn out to be distinctly favorable to oneself, offering sound justification for the importance of one's getting exactly what one wants. But there are other questions, even those of a more metaphysical sort—that is, asking basic questions about what it is that exists, the ontological furniture of our world—that bear the dual characteristics of being factually insomniac while also self-interestedly tilted. Think, for example, of that old philosophical chestnut concerning freedom of the will: how potentially mortifying it is to have to come to terms with our never acting at all but only being acted upon, if such is indeed the case. Or equally chestnut-y, the question of the self's relationship to, as Yeats put it, this “dying animal.”

Consume my heart away; sick with desire
 And fastened to a dying animal
 It knows not what it is. And gather me
 Into the artifice of eternity.

The artifice of eternity. There's another one of those emotion-slicked metaphysical questions: the nature of time, the ticking away of it entrapping those dying animals to which we are fastened. Is it possible to escape it, that ticking? We'd like to figure that one out. We'd like to figure out all of these self-situating and factually insomniac questions.

But how to do it? What are the techniques that will allow us to see the facts that we have at hand in a new arrangement, given that these

techniques will also have to correct for the self-interested tilt that would, if left to its own, encase each person in a private vision made up of the stuff of wishful fantasizing, for which there is no better image than the one Plato gave us in the Allegory of the Cave? Here is each prisoner chained to his own personal shadow world, which, being generated by his own situation in relation to the shadow-casting fire, will be an irreducibly personal vision, one that will try to do justice to the unique position he holds in his own private reality and will try to fortify him against the terror of what lies beyond his control, another word for which is “reality.” And so it is that each prisoner will have a distinctly different point of view, a different narrative to tell, in which he himself is the center of narrative gravity. In other words, when it comes to these slippery questions, truth is a hard thing to come by. But it is the truth, after all, that the self desperately wants, its very desperation exacerbating the situation that makes truth so hard to come by.

This was the obstacle that Plato saw he was up against. Or rather, not him *per se*, but philosophy, which was to be nothing else than this lifting of ourselves up out of our typical wishful thinking in regard to questions both factually insomniac and self-situating.

What we must do, in the face of this challenge, is to formulate objective grounds for our beliefs—meaning by “objective” here grounds that are not intrinsically attached to any particular point of view, shaped by one’s own particular situation, but are rather grounds that are in principle accessible to all reason-guided points of view. Philosophy’s methodological tool kit, its techniques of logic and conceptual analysis, its laboriously self-critical arguments and thought experiments, has been designed to meet the specifications of objectivity when moving through the tricky intellectual terrain carved out by questions that appear to have answers—and of course this appearance is sometimes challenged—but whose apparent answers are not empirically resolvable, not even in principle. Unlike scientific questions, these questions aren’t resolved by acquiring additional facts of the matter.

It’s an extraordinary leap to come up with this particular notion of objectivity, one that doesn’t deny the reality and the force of the subjective, the thick and viscous atmosphere of our own private sense of ourselves in the world, which private sense we inhabit always, but which deems this private sense both irrelevant to and set-aside-able in the business of philosophy. If there’s no way to objectify your grounds, that is, to make your case compelling to others who are nothing at all like you

except in their embrace of reasoned argument, then sorry, but you're not really taking part in the philosophical conversation.

Plato didn't dismiss the possibility that there are certain truths that can simply seize hold of a person, so that he is, as it were, *possessed*, in the grip of an extraordinary noetic experience, religious, erotic, or aesthetic. Such a one, so possessed, won't be able to articulate objective rational grounds that will enable someone who isn't sharing in the possession—and of course no one else really is—to seize the same truths. And maybe those irrational truths are higher truths. Plato's not saying they aren't; in fact, he sometimes confesses, most notably in the *Phaedrus*, that he thinks that they are. But they're dangerously unreliable, lacking any objective means for assessment. There's good possession, coming from somewhere outside of us, dubbed by him "the gods," and leading to truth, and then there's bad possession, which is nothing more than the delusions of the cave having their way with us—and someone who's in the grip of possession has no means of distinguishing which is which, the good possession from the bad, and is also in such a state as to dismiss anyone who isn't similarly seized, which means anyone who isn't himself.

There's a great deal of conflict over this issue within Plato—in some sense this is the problem of the poet in a nutshell—but philosophy, as a field, with a few notable exceptions (for example, as far as I can make out, Heidegger), ultimately took up one side of Plato's divided soul: philosophy countenances only the sorts of reasons that can in principle make a claim on everyone who signs on to the project of reason, philosophy's project. Philosophical truth is treated as an equal-access good, just as it is in science. Philosophical truth, just like scientific truth is, if accessible at all, accessible, in principle, to anyone who submits to its methods, leaving behind any considerations that make sense only within particular points of view, specially marked by certain features that can make no claim on those whose points of view happen to be deficient in those features—certain emotions, say, or visions, special messages, or cognitive equipment, installed only on some exclusive high-end cognitive models. Forget all such notions of a class system of knowers. Religion, with its tradition of selective revelation, may have use for such an epistemological hierarchy, but philosophy doesn't. Philosophy, like science, is committed to epistemic democracy. The truth that is accessible to some is, in principle, accessible to all, which is why, historically, the two sorts of democracies, epistemic and political, have tended to be linked. See under: the Enlightenment.

No wonder that the field of philosophy, as invented by Plato, was, from the beginning, a curiously gregarious subject. “Dialectic,” the term Plato uses for whatever philosophical technique he most favored at the moment, is pursued in conversation. Many voices, many points of view, all coming at the same arguments, analyzing them, criticizing them, reaching for the grounds that compel acceptance no matter where you are situated within the cave. Philosophy is always searching for the argument that will, as the late philosopher Bernard Williams put it, “stop them in their tracks when they come to take you away.”

Williams was speaking, specifically, of moral arguments, but his words manage to convey something essential about this field of philosophy, as it was invented by Plato, about its stake in establishing the compellingly impersonal point of view concerning questions in which we all have so much personally at stake. The style of the field, striking a pose of purposeful distance, may try hard not to betray that anything particularly personal is at stake, but it is. How can it not be, when it’s all about our trying to get, in the largest sense possible, our bearings, figuring out where we are, the overall ontological setting of this place, and what we are, and what we’re supposed to be doing with what we are, and what it is that’s in store for us, ultimately? It’s precisely because so much is personally at stake here that philosophy imposes its rigorous standards of objectivity.

And what have the literary arts to contribute to any of this? No novel or poem is ever written, or appreciated, by submitting oneself to the objectivity-seeking instruments of rigorous argument and conceptual analysis. On the contrary, the literary arts are, like all the arts, in the business of *moving* us, producing profound emotions. Aesthetic qualities are pathetic qualities, “pathetic” not in the sense of pitiful but in the sense of making us feel, pathos, designed to produce that extraordinary, powerful experience that sometimes issues in ecstatic mutterings about beauty and truth, propositional precipitates that float on the surface of aesthetic experience.

What is more, some of the things that we are made to feel, when in the throes of aesthetic excitation, have everything to do with the sorts of self-situating, factually insomniac questions for which objectivity-seeking philosophy was specifically designed, not only moral questions but those that are usually classified, in philosophy, as metaphysical, dealing with such questions as the nature of the self and personal identity, freedom of the will, consciousness, time. Works of the imagination can’t help implicating themselves, pathetically, that is, by way of emotions, in

matters both moral and metaphysical, never mind those novels that go out of their way to trespass on philosophy's domain, the so-called philosophical novels. All works of imagination are philosophically irritating. They are all philosophical trespassers, inducing in their susceptible readers Pathetic Moralities, Pathetic Metaphysics.

Sometimes a literary work will explicitly address itself to moral or metaphysical matters, its characters, or omniscient narrator, carrying on like a regular philosopher, propounding philosophical positions and arguments. But even in the most philosophically insistent novel—which I am sometimes accused of writing—the aim is never to force a conclusion (that's what philosophy papers and books are for) but rather to force an emotionally rich and ambiguous aesthetic experience upon which float, rather like pond scum, certain moral and metaphysical positions.

A work of imagination, in drawing a reader into its world, draws him into its Pathetic Morality, its Pathetic Metaphysics. To the extent that the reader lives within the imaginative work, he enters these Pathetic Philosophies, feels as if the world were really so. Aesthetic experiences, in full operation, effect that sort of perspectival fact-rearrangement that philosophy proper struggles to bring about by way of argument, yielding us an altogether different sense of the world.

Plato worried that when it comes to slippery philosophical questions, unless objectivity-seeking arguments were vigorously applied as a corrective, the wishful thinking of the self would always have its way, thoughts running their natural course, like water down a mountainside, to pool in narcissistic fantasies. But, in fact, the sense of the world that a work of imagination induces can be quite at variance with private fantasies. That much, at least, you can say for them. They can rip us out of our habitual ways of viewing, which of course doesn't make those alternative viewings right. When a student tells me that he believes that life is totally pointless, and there's no reason to do one thing rather than another, including any acts of compassion as opposed to acts of cruelty, because he has just read and loved Dostoyevsky's book *The Underground Man* and that is how it made him feel, I have to tell you: I'm not so happy, and I quickly try to press some Chekhov on him.

Within philosophy, issues about what *is* the case, ontological matters, are generally said to be quite separate from issues concerning what *ought* to be the case, normative matters, and that you can't derive an *ought* from an *is* has been regarded as gospel in philosophy ever since the gap between

the two domains was espied by David Hume. But this gap isn't much observed in the world of imaginative works, where Pathetic Morality and Pathetic Metaphysics promiscuously intermingle, the sense of what the world is like cohabiting with the sense of how life ought to be lived. But I want to separate these two sorts of issues, the normative and the ontological as they occur in literature, saving the topic of ontology and literature's Pathetic Metaphysics for tomorrow, and speak now, for the remainder of this time, of the Pathetic Moralities that works of the imagination insinuate into us.

T. S. Eliot wrote, in an essay titled "Religion and Literature" (in which he tries to warn his Christian readers to eschew all literature that doesn't promote Christian values), "The author of a work of imagination is trying to affect us wholly, as human beings, whether he is conscious of it or not; and we are affected by it, as human beings, whether we intend to be or not." He's right, to the extent that all works of imagination do provoke what we can call Normative Emotions, feelings that involve, however obscurely, propositions about what ought to be the case.

There are two quite different sorts of Normative Emotions provoked by imaginative works, operating at two quite different levels and differing in their staying power. The first sort I think of as, to quote one of our recent presidents, "That Vision Thing," and it was primarily these visionary sorts of Normative Emotions to which Eliot was referring. This is how life ought to be lived, we'll feel, while in the grip of some novelist's vision of life, or at least our interpretation of his vision of life, because a work of art always has to be sufficiently porous as to allow us in to create our own experience out of it, which means it must push us to feel, without completely determining what it is that we feel. But push us they will—a Goethe or Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky or Dickens or Hardy or Jane Austen or Henry James or Oscar Wilde or George Eliot or E. M. Forster or Proust or Gide or Philip Roth or Ian McEwan—and we'll find ourselves feeling that life should be lived in efforts toward spiritual purification, say, or in large and heroic adventures that test the limits of one's endurance, or in resisting conventionality and living with the originality of a work of art, or in tending our own small domestic sphere, or in blissful communion with the sublime and the beautiful in nature, or in the blissful communion of eros, whether concentrated on one chosen individual or spread out among the varied many, or in thrall to one's own artistic capabilities, or in cultivating one's social refinement, or in throwing off the stifling effects of civilization and returning to the raw authenticity of the

state of nature, or in only connecting, or in ministering to the suffering of the world, and I can go on, and I can also confess that I've been made to feel all of these irreconcilable visionary Normative Emotions, as I'm sure all of you who love works of the imagination have been made to feel them, since to give yourself up to a narrative work is to enter its world, including its Pathetic Morality.

But Normative Emotions of this visionary sort aren't particularly sustainable, rarely lasting well beyond the aesthetic excitation of the particular imaginative work in question—and a very good thing it is, too, this unsustainability, for otherwise people like me, so susceptible to the charms of the novel, would be driven from one sense of how life is to be lived to another, with each novel another Pathetic Morality exchanged, at such a rate as to induce moral whiplash.

But there are other means that literature has for insinuating Normative Emotions in us, quieter, less visionary, but ultimately producing Normative Emotions more sustainable and transportable from inside the aesthetic experience to outside. These Normative Emotions are associated with literature's most powerful means of pathetically engaging us: Character Sympathy.

The sympathetic character is one with whom we feel; that is, of course, the literal meaning of "sympathy," *feeling with*, and this *feeling with* has a normative component. As in our own case, in which we naturally—in fact continuously and compulsively—see the story from our own point of view and in such a way as to interpret that perspective with maximal charity, so we experience the sympathetic character in literature.

This sifting of characters by way of a reaction that is at once emotive and normative is essential to the literary arts. A reader is meant to have an emotional engagement with a work of fiction and to its characters, and a writer, no matter what else she is doing, is almost always attempting to manipulate the reactions of sympathy and antipathy, identification and rejection, approbation and disapprobation—all of which emotions I lump under Character Sympathy. In doing so, the author is pulling us into the novel's moral world, inducing emotions that have normative content. A novel, in manipulating Character Sympathy, can't help but be implicated in questions of morality,² no matter how tightly shut *Reine Vernunft* pinches her delicate nostrils.

2. This dallying of literature in morality was, of course, one of the primary reasons Plato exiled the poet. See the *Republic*, book 3, 386a and 398a.

The techniques of Character Sympathy are many, not least of which is the finessing of point of view. If a novel is written in the first person, or in the third person but closely tied to a particular character's point of view, there is a certain presumption that that character is sympathetic—call it the Sympathetic Persuasion of the Chosen Point of View—and the reader is usually willing to go a long way in this persuasion and exercise maximal charity in interpreting the character. This is an interesting fact about the phenomenology of imaginative reading, and one that writers are quick to exploit, even by confounding it, playing such tricks as the presentation of an unreliable narrator, a trick that works, and it works over and over again—we always fall for it—only because of the Sympathetic Persuasion of the Chosen Point of View. Narrative point of view, all by itself, is a powerful tool for insinuating Normative Emotions.

And now, as an empirical demonstration of the way in which aesthetic experience, even of a relatively shallow sort, induces normative responses, I've produced an appropriately shallow piece of fiction for you. It features two characters, Sophia and Fiona, freshmen dorm mates in some unnamed college, perhaps yours:

Sophia had awoken in middream, thinking of David Hume. The packet of handouts on the is/ought distinction was lying on her quilt, where it had fallen from her hand sometime around midnight. She had told herself that she was only going to close her eyes for ten minutes or so, but she knew from the weak light of dawn seeping through the blinds of her dorm room that hours had passed, and then the thoughts came in quick succession: it was Monday morning; her paper, over which she had been agonizing now for weeks, never getting past the first paragraph, which she had reworked with the obsessiveness born of not knowing what her second paragraph could possibly be, was due today; she knew what she wanted to say. Yes, somehow she knew. The fog of despair suspended over the vortex of her confusion had dissipated, and she sensed not only the second paragraph, but the third and the fourth—yes, even the conclusion!—rising up in precise declarative sentences, of just the sort her professor had recommended in his first handout of the semester: how to write a philosophy paper.

She glanced at the other bed, just to confirm what she already knew. Fiona, her roommate, was still out celebrating the weekend, which for Fiona encroached more and more on the week as the semester progressed.

Sophia reached down to where her Mac was waiting for her on the candy-wrapper-littered floor. She ate when she was nervous, and, never a thin girl, she was already well on her way to fulfilling the freshman twenty. But now she felt buoyant and, bounding without a glance over the crowded field of false starts, launched in with brave heart and clear head, pounding the keys in that forceful staccato that had caused Fiona to momentarily remove her pouting lips from her cell phone and, in a voice as artificially sweetened as the Coke Zeros on which she seemed to subsist, comment that she had never known anyone who typed quite so loudly.

Sophia was just beginning the second paragraph when she heard a faint and dismal tapping on her door. Past experience being a guide to the future, she knew that in the course of the night's partying, Fiona had misplaced her keycard. Sophia got out of bed, padding to the door on her bare feet, Mac resting in the crook of her arm so as not to lose her sentence.

There stood Fiona in the skimpy dress and stiletto heels on which she had tottered out last night. Her makeup had been rearranged. Mascara was on her cheeks, lip gloss on her chin. No, more likely that was caked drool. The fumes of what she must have drunk in the past few hours seemed to be seeping out from her pores. "Slut" was a misogynist word that Sophia wouldn't allow herself even to think about another human being, especially not a roommate, with whom you were supposed to feel some natural kinship, but the way Fiona carried on, night after night, it was as if she were silently pantomiming that word.

Fiona's bleary eye fell on the computer that Sophia was cradling, and she gave a crooked little smile. "Oh," is what she said, but she might as well have said it aloud: "Poor, pathetic Sophia, holed up all weekend with nothing but her stupid schoolwork." Fiona didn't even bother to look Sophia in the eye but staggered past her and collapsed facedown on the bed, on top of all the clothes that she had tried on last night before finally making up her mind on the dress that now rode up over her bare ass. Apparently, it wasn't only her keycard that she had misplaced last night.

Staring at the inert body, Sophia allowed herself the rage she had been resisting all semester. It wasn't so much rage against Fiona as rage against the college, which had fraudulently had all incoming freshmen fill out roommate questionnaires. In good faith, and on a scale of 1 to 5, Sophia had rated herself a 4 in neatness, a 5 in studiousness, and

a 2 in extroversion, but only because she was ashamed to admit she was a 1, and had described herself as a morning person who did not like to study to the sounds of loud music, only to end up with the girl now passed out on the other bed.

David Hume was quoted in the handout on is/ought as having said that reason in itself is perfectly inert, but that wasn't reason lying there on the bed. Or maybe it was, since Sophia looked down at her unfinished sentence and found that she no longer had any idea of how to complete it.

I hope that you were with me here in feeling sympathy for the erstwhile Sophia, taking her philosophy class so endearingly seriously. And, as for Fiona: well, what can one say?

For the first few moments, her eyes still closed, Fiona thought she was back in her bed at home, and that the violent percussion in her head meant that she was running one of those high fevers she used to get when she was little, and that when she would manage to open her eyes—oh, God, not yet—her mother would be sitting there, ready to lay her long, cool fingers on her forehead. There was a man with his hair in flames who used to walk across her room whenever her temperature spiked, his angry eyes telling her that if she spoke a word of him, he'd set the whole room on fire, maybe the whole world, and so to save the world and to save her mother, she had stayed silent, her whole body shaking with the fever and the fear.

Fiona tried to hold on to the fever fantasy, dream-willing herself into thinking she was a sick little girl safely at home, but images were flashing in between the pounding in her head, and she knew that when she opened her eyes, she would see him, whoever the boy in those images was. It was bad, she knew, that she couldn't recall his face, this boy whose desire had picked her out from all the other girls crushed up against the bar last night, the way his eyes had stayed on her, and not brushed her off and gone on to the next girl. He'd let her keep his stare on her, smiling as she went through her moves. That was the best moment. That was always the best moment: the thrill of being seen in that way, knowing how special you had suddenly become to some perfect stranger, almost as if he wanted to know all about you.

And this, always, was the worst moment. He was still out cold, and she grabbed what she found of her clothes, which wasn't all of them,

but her need to get out before he stirred overrode all else, even though her sweater with her keycard in its pocket was lost somewhere in the twisted bedclothes. Fiona dreaded having to wake her roommate, but not as much as she dreaded having to exchange any words with whoever this boy was.

Sophia opened the door, staring in that half-silvered way she had, a one-way mirror like cops use to spy on guilty people, Sophia in her unstained pajamas and unstained eyes carrying her computer, as if it were some sort of talisman to keep her safe from the contagion of Fiona. Fiona could feel the filth of herself from where Sophia was standing, her nose crinkled up as if she were smelling something bad. That's what Fiona was to her roommate: a bed smell in the room. It rose up in Fiona's own nostrils now, the smell that she was to Sophia. She tried to smile, but it didn't come off very well, Fiona's smile, and her eye dropped again to the computer Sophia was clutching, and the rebuke couldn't have been more articulate if Sophia had put it into words, or into that one word that would sum it all up, the thing that Fiona was to her roommate, which was the same thing that she was to the boy in the bedroom she'd just fled, and to boys in other fled bedrooms and to herself right here. And in the harshness of that one syllable's summation, all that she could manage was a sad little "Oh," as she slunk past Sophia and collapsed face first on her bed, feigning instant oblivion, as if she'd passed out cold, feeling her roommate's violated eyes fixed on her bare bottom, which was, she thought, a fitting punishment for both of them.

I hope that you managed to feel, even with this small and stunted example, some slight changes in the motions of sympathy. These motions of sympathy involve a sense of the emerging reality of a character, and in that way they are cognitive, and they involve an emotional engagement with a character, and in that way they are pathetic, working on our emotions. But these sympathetic motions are normative as well; when we are willing to accord a character our sympathy, we take her interests to our heart, wishing her to flourish, feeling her deserving of such wishing.

That these motions of sympathy have normative content is indicated by the fact that they can be blocked when a person's underlying values are ranged strongly against them, so that she experiences Sympathetic Resistance to a particular fictional character, which can vitiate the aesthetic experience, or at least make it quite different from any the author

had intended. My own late mother, for example, would have registered strong Sympathetic Resistance toward Fiona, the sort of young woman she would have described as “lacking all morals.” In fact, my late mother registered strong Sympathetic Resistance to almost all my characters.

But even in such cases of hardened Sympathetic Resistance, it can happen that a writer, manipulating aesthetic techniques at her disposal, can melt the resistance down, motions of sympathy, normatively laden, breaking through. When this happens, the sorts of changes the newly sympathetic reader feels are far more apt to be sustainable than the more fleeting normative emotions of That Vision Thing, more apt to outlive the aesthetic excitation of the particular work that provoked them, which is why it sometimes happens that particular imaginative works produce a felt moral impact, sometimes radiating out to a wide community of readers who become participants in its Pathetic Morality. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is one such extraordinary example, the Sympathetic Resistance overcome within the aesthetic experience of reading that book helping to overcome a Sympathetic Resistance that extended far beyond the reading of that book. Motions of sympathy can entail a moral education.

I wouldn’t want to argue that such moral education is the purpose of works of the imagination. Some have argued for the subservience of the literary to the moral, such as the magnificent George Eliot—which just goes to show that one can hold such an aesthetically utilitarian position and still be a brilliant novelist. “If Art does not enlarge men’s sympathies, it does nothing morally,” she wrote in a letter. “The only effect I ardently long to produce by my writing, is that those who read them should be better able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures.” But personally, I wouldn’t want to argue for the subsuming of the artistic under the moral. Works of narrative art, like all works of art, provide us with powerful aesthetic experiences, pulling us out of ourselves to shiver our naked souls like nothing quite else; that’s quite enough to ask of them. Still, it’s a condition of narrative works working us over that they pull us into their worlds, including their Pathetic Moralities, and this is sometimes good for us.

It’s also sometimes bad for us. The subtle insinuations of Character Sympathy and Antipathy sometimes provoke Normative Emotions that frankly stink, as when stereotypes of certain groups stir up revulsion, making it all the harder to see the full humanity of members of that

group. Charles Dickens defended his antipathetic character Fagin on the highest moral grounds: “Fagin in *Oliver Twist* is a Jew, because it unfortunately was true of the time in which the story refers, that that class of criminal almost invariably was a Jew,” he wrote a gentle Gentile reader who accused him of doing enormous harm to an already despised and vulnerable group in his contemporary Britain. “It appeared to me that to draw a knot of such associates in crime as really did exist, to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid misery in their lives; to show them as they were, for ever skulking uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life . . . it appeared to me that to do this, would be to attempt a something which was needed, and which would be a service to society. And I did it as I best could.” This is an aesthetic utilitarianism to compare with George Eliot’s, the aesthetic in the service of the ethical. Dickens, a proponent of the Enlightenment, who wished to use the Normative Emotions of fiction to reform society, always works Character Antipathy hard, in *Oliver Twist* focusing onto Fagin all the degradation, squalor, avarice, and exploitation of innocence—children for goodness’ sake, orphans!—that required, he believed, radical extirpation in urban Victorian settings in order for Enlightenment ideals of reason to flourish. And by using the stereotype of the Jew that had, of course, so much vitality in his day, he’s able to heighten the Normative Emotions that he’s going after. Fagin is referred to always in the text as “The Jew.” It’s only in direct speech that he’s given his proper name. And this character is meant in every way, including his personal hygiene, to provoke revulsion. His face is “villainous-looking and repulsive, obscured by a quantity of matted red hair,” his fingernails long and curved and black. When Fagin is at chez Fagin he wears “a greasy flannel gown.” And when he goes out, he brings his filth with him. How could he not when filth is his very element? “In the cover of darkness The Jew skulks stealthily along. Creeping beneath the shelter of the walls and doorways, the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved; crawling forth, by night, in search of some rich offal for a meal.” When I said that the Normative Emotions stirred by imaginative works sometimes stink, I meant it. Dickens very effectively deploys the primitive disgust of bad smells, the very neighborhood of Fagin “impregnated with filthy odors,” calling on the repressed, or perhaps not so repressed, memory of the *foetor Judaicus*, the particular ineradicable smell of the Jew, an idea that has a long pedigree in Europe, reaching back to the Middle Ages.

Dickens is a great writer, and *Oliver Twist* is a brilliant work, and presumably none of us in this room is going to be affected by its brilliant working of the stereotype of “The Jew” because we have all moved beyond a place in which we could be so affected by that particular stereotype, thanks in great part to the progress of Enlightenment ideals of rationality for which Dickens, too, was working—all of which is to say that the Pathetic Moralities of literature are not, in themselves, sufficient to do the work of moral philosophy. Normative Emotions, in themselves, are not sufficient to do the work of moral philosophy.

Normative Emotions, without the objectivity-seeking ministrations of moral philosophy, are blind. There are the morally salubrious Sympathetic Expansions of an imaginative work moving us to feel the full sympathetic humanity of others, such as George Eliot or Harriet Beecher Stowe had in mind. But to see that those pathetic responses are salubrious, whereas other pathetic responses, provoked even sometimes by the very same imaginative works, just plain stink, we have to move beyond mere pathetic responses, beyond mere Normative Emotions, to that place of objective reasons in which we can evaluate between them. And that place belongs rightfully to philosophy. To paraphrase that deliciously paraphrasable slogan of Kant’s, if Normative Emotions, without moral philosophy, are blind, moral philosophy, without Normative Emotions, is, if not exactly empty, at least rather meager.

It’s not that philosophy, in the millennia since Plato, hasn’t made any progress in the moral sphere. It’s not that its objectively formulated arguments have revealed nothing to correct the self-interested slant that so favors oneself in one’s own cave-lit ill-sightedness. Philosophy’s progress in the moral sphere has been significant, slowly and arduously, through the accumulation of its arguments, convincing itself and us that the immoral stance—a refusal to recognize, in thought and in action, the normative gravity of each human being—is a species of the irrational.

Yet even with all its demonstrable success, philosophy falls short. The touch of these abstract arguments on us is ghostly faint. Even so extreme a rationalist as Spinoza wrote, “A true knowledge of good and evil cannot check any emotion by virtue of being true, but only insofar as it is considered an emotion.” It’s one thing to reach moral conclusions, and it’s another thing to feel them sufficiently so as to act on them.

Works of imagination, at their ethically pathetic best, make us feel not only the narrative gravity of that poignant complexity, the human being, but their normative gravity as well. That’s not what makes works of

the imagination aesthetically valuable; aesthetic experience is what makes them aesthetically valuable. But quite often that aesthetic experience includes, even as an essential part of its pleasure, the sense of sympathetic expansion.

So should they come to take you away, my friends, oblivious to all that you are that makes what they are doing a monstrous crime against humanity, never mind trying to formulate the argument that will stop them in their tracks. Adolf Eichmann could rattle off Kant's Categorical Imperative quite convincingly. But there are some novels that you might urgently press your oppressors to read.

LECTURE II. METAPHYSICS AND LITERATURE

Works of imagination, I suggested yesterday, can't keep themselves, in their emotionally blowsy way, from barging into the philosophical conversation, somewhat in the fashion of Alcibiades, that bad, bad boy of ancient Athens, barging into the sober discussions of Plato's *Symposium*. "Are you laughing at me for being drunk?" he says as he sashays into the gathering, ribbons dangling from his silken tresses, and prepares to speak his mind about how infuriating it is to love the nonseducibly high-minded Socrates. "You may laugh," he continues, "but I nevertheless know quite well that what I'm saying is true."

Plato doesn't gainsay that Alcibiades speaks the truth, but it's a truth that is disruptive of the project of philosophy as Plato conceived it. And sure enough, after Alcibiades has his say—and what a say it is—things at the symposium disintegrate quickly, everyone, except for Socrates, getting plastered and passing out.

Plato often refers to poets as divinely drunk, stirring us to the depths with their irresponsible profundity, unable to give us an account of how they arrived at these profundities or what they might even mean by them. How can such no-accounts be trusted? So Alcibiades drunkenly proclaiming truths that are disruptive of philosophy is not a bad metonym for the way in which literature engages in philosophy. Literature is the wanton at the symposium.

Still, yesterday I suggested that it's not altogether a bad thing, this wanton presence—not a bad thing, morally speaking. It's true that imaginative works work on our normative attitudes by making us feel, sucking us into their Pathetic Moralities—you'll remember, from yesterday, I'm using the word "pathetic" in this context not to mean "pitiful" but rather to mean "making us feel." *Pathos*. It's a respectable philosophical position, associated with no less a figure than David Hume, that in matters of morality, it's emotions, what Hume called "sentiments," and specifically the sentiments of sympathy, that make the moral difference. As quoted by Sophia, my erstwhile little philosophy student from yesterday, Hume held that "Reason in itself is perfectly inert."

But what about other matters of philosophy, outside of the normative? Works of the imagination, even those that don't present as being particularly philosophical, not to speak of those that do, can't steer altogether clear of these either, and whatever philosophical content they have

to impress on us, they impress on us pathetically. A work of the imagination will not yield its pathetic quality, or it is doomed. Nothing freezes the living marrow of a novel like the brutal onslaught of pure abstract ideas, dispassionately pursued. A so-called novel of ideas (I don't much like that term) or a so-called philosophical novel is one that, if anything, goes further in the direction of offending philosophy, deliberately biting off even more philosophical material and saturating it with those wet emotions from which philosophy was specifically designed to keep us safe and dry.

But it doesn't take a so-called novel of ideas to offend philosophy. To some extent or other, every imaginative work, in pulling us into its world, pulls us in not only to its Pathetic Morality but also to its Pathetic Metaphysics, inducing in us a highly emotional sense of some subset of the following topics, starting with the nature of

1. *reality*, a feel for the world out there, whether, for example, the world is encouraging of our human strivings or utterly indifferent to them or downright hostile; whether it's discernibly patterned or an unintelligible hodgepodge; and a sense of the nature of
2. *the self*, and what constitutes its identity, what makes a person the person that she is, the very substance of character; and a sense of
3. *human agency*, of the scope, wide to narrow to nonexistent, of a person's freedom to act, pressed in by the facts of his own disposition and his situation and accumulated history; and a grappling, too, with the meaning of
4. *suffering*, a topic that impinges much on our feel for reality, our sense of what it's all about, and whether it is such as to offer us any manner of consolation; and a sense, too, of the strength of
5. *human reason*, whether it's up to the task of making sense of these other senses; and a sense of the nature of
6. *consciousness*, the what-it-is-like-to-be-ness of sentience, the in-hereness of a lived life, which it is one of the primary preoccupations of the novel to represent; and much intertwined with this sense of what-it-is-like-to-be-ness, a sense, too, of
7. *time's passage*, of the quality of duration, "the lapse and accumulation of time," which Henry James identifies as the "stiffest problem that the artist has to tackle"; and, connected with time's passage, a grappling with the meaning of
8. *death*, of the struggle to get our heads around the one metaphysical topic that not one of us can altogether ignore, the incredulity

aroused by the fact that we and those whom we love are subject to this radical ontological discontinuity, and how can it be that such a thing as a person, that confounding immensity that literature works so hard to make real to us, impressing us with the sense of its significance, its narrative and normative gravity, how can such a thing as all that simply vanish from the world?

Reality, the scope of reason, the self, consciousness, human agency and free will, time, suffering, death. This is the stuff of metaphysics, and here, too, as with morality, a work of imagination can't help but stake a claim on some subset of these topics, not by arguing any truths about the world, as philosophy does, but by inducing us to feel them.

Pathetic Moralities, I said yesterday, are, at least partly, conveyed through the finessing of points of view, the artful suggestions that some characters are sympathetic and others are not. How are Pathetic Metaphysics conveyed? They are, like Pathetic Moralities, more insinuated than argued, often by way of such global stylistic features as narrative arc, the way causality and time function, the way pieces of the plot fall into place, or don't fall into place, sentence structure and rhythms and repetitions and ellipses, the degree of authorial authority that's struck, that something that we call literary style, the very music of its prose. By such means, and more, an imaginative work's Pathetic Metaphysics makes itself felt, and the Pathetic Metaphysics of some imaginative works are quite counter to our more typical ways of conceiving. They can bring about, pathetically, the sort of radical change in perspective that philosophy proper aims for, seeing the facts arrayed in an altogether different configuration.

There are propositional statements that one can extract, but these propositions don't begin to do justice to what's aroused in us by reading writers like Beckett or Borges, Melville or Dostoyevsky, Virginia Woolf or Gertrude Stein, Kafka or Thomas Mann or Calvino or Coetzee or Kundera, or Proust or Nabokov. What are aroused are Ontological Emotions—the world is fundamentally a certain way, and it makes me feel thus—Ontological Amusement, Ontological Dismay, Ontological Bliss. Ontological Despair, Ontologically Aching, Ontologically Bereft. Ontological Emotions are the metaphysical counterparts to the Normative Emotions I spoke about yesterday.

So, though Kafka and Beckett and Borges and Gertrude Stein may all provoke a sense of the fundamental unintelligibility of the world, of

the way in which it confounds our systems and lays waste to our organizing principles and concepts, those are merely the propositions you can extract; their Pathetic Metaphysics are entirely different from one another, these four brilliant writers, since the Ontological Emotions they arouse are so distinctly different, insinuated by their distinctive styles.

It's not surprising that there are emotions stirred up by these issues of metaphysics, the ultimate nature of reality and all that, since our emotions are typically aroused by an assessment of the way in which the object of our emotion—the thing we love or hate, or fear, or long for—impinges on our own personal project of persisting and flourishing, what Spinoza called our "conatus." The self's interested encounter with both itself and the nonself, with what it makes of the nonself and its assessments of how its own welfare and designs stand to be affected—this is the breeding grounds of the emotions. A sense of the nature of the world at large—stressing, say, the relentlessness of time's passage or the disintegrating fragility of personal identity or an intentionality shot through the fabric of the world that makes final resolutions inevitable, or a cosmic indifference that makes all consolations forced and false—is apt to produce large emotions, which is just the sort of thing art is always going after.

Though aroused through words, the experience of a literary work can't be entirely articulated in words. Ontological Emotions, being at least partly emotions, escape total verbalization. The effect is almost like music, philosophical music. The fusion of the emotional and the propositional is meant to be so thorough, in a work of imagination, as to get us to feel that the world is a certain way by stirring in us the Ontological Emotions that would be suitable responses were we actually to believe that the world is that certain way—which a philosopher might very properly argue is to get things exactly *backward*. But this is art; this is the way art operates, pathetically. So Proust induces in us an Ontological Nostalgia, the product of his quivering sensibility crossed with Henri Bergson's metaphysics of flux, in which he had immersed himself.

Some philosophical works release their Ontological Emotions into the disembodied atmosphere of the work—as Beckett or Borges does. Others gather up the Ontological Emotions into the locus of character, the fusion of the emotional and the propositional playing out in the psyche and drama of character. One might call this the Character Tuck, tucking a philosophical outlook into the whole of the character, knitting it into the peculiarities of individual temperament and individual history. So, for example, the import of Socrates' second speech in the *Phaedrus*

serves as the propositional component of the Ontological Emotion—the Ontological Erotic Ache—that is gathered up into the character of von Aschenbach in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, into the death drama that is precipitated by Aschenbach's laying eyes on the beautiful boy Tadzio.

The technique of Character Tuck might also be called "Flirting Dangerously with the Genetic Fallacy," one of the standard fallacies listed in the stern catalog of argumentative transgressions against which philosophy warns us. The genetic fallacy has nothing to do with genes or DNA; rather, the phrase comes from the original meaning of "genetic," meaning "genesis, origins," and the genetic fallacy rests on assessing a philosophical position by its origins, including the reasons it would occur to a particular person, what it is about his character and situation that would draw him into this philosophical perspective. The Character Tuck, together with the mechanism of Character Sympathy of which I spoke yesterday, can together work to make us feel the character's view of the world or, on the other hand, reject it, for no reason other than how we feel about the character. So, for example, good old Charles Dickens, being a writer with a well-developed sense of responsibility for reforming society, and hence a writer who works Character Antipathy very hard, as I mentioned yesterday, presents in *Hard Times* a Mr. Gradgrind, a retired wholesale hardware merchant and the leading citizen of Cokeville, who becomes a schoolmaster. Mr. Gradgrind believes only in facts and numbers—he's a logical positivist, of a crude sort—who has so little use for what can't be quantified that he calls on one little girl in class as "girl number twenty." He's also a totally inadequate father for his two children. When his favorite child, Louise, emotionally destroyed by a marriage her father had talked her into, on statistical grounds, returns to confront him, entering his study where "the deadly statistical clock ticks at its inexorable pace," she tells him of her despair, reminding him that he had trained her "from the cradle" to be rational only, and then cries out, "I curse the hour in which I was born to such a destiny." So much for logical positivism.

There is, of course, much more to say about these aesthetic techniques of insinuating Ontological Emotions, and how these techniques are deployed in various works of imagination. I'm only touching the surface, but it's enough, I think, to indicate the way in which these techniques work to make of metaphysical considerations and positions things as much to be felt as to be thought.

And works of imagination are able to do this because metaphysical positions—on such fundamental topics as the nature of reality, reason,

the self, free will, consciousness, time, suffering, death—*are*, in fact, things as much to be felt as to be thought. When it comes to metaphysics, to our sense of the world at large, then it seems to me that the relationship between philosophical positions, on the one hand, and emotions, on the other, is not exactly the same as it is in matters of morality. I argued yesterday that Normative Emotions without moral philosophy are blind, whereas moral philosophy without Normative Emotions is, if not empty, then meager. Reason in itself is perfectly inert, and it's Normative Emotions that put some muscle into moral philosophy's conclusions. But when it comes to matters metaphysical, reason is inert in an even stronger sense, not paralyzed in moving beyond its conclusions and stepping up into action, but paralyzed in reaching any conclusions whatsoever. Normative Emotions may be needed to push us beyond moral reasoning, but without Ontological Emotions, there is no metaphysical reasoning at all.

The late physicist Eugene Wigner had a wonderful phrase: he spoke of the Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences, and asked us to consider what the Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics is telling us about nature. I'd like to introduce the notion of the Unreasonable Effectiveness of Ontological Emotions in Imaginative Works, and ask what this Unreasonable Effectiveness is telling us about our metaphysicalizing natures, our attempts to get our bearings.

What it is telling us, I think, is that, despite the millennia of good, hard philosophical work, pursued in the enlightening spirit of what I called yesterday "epistemic democracy," metaphysics remains personal. Your metaphysics—how you get your bearings—is at least as much the result of where your intellectual and emotional dispositions and personal history have deposited you as it is the result of the arguments that you can articulate, which is why metaphysics is fair game for works of the imagination, why works of the imagination are so Unreasonably Effective in insinuating their Pathetic Metaphysics.

In saying that metaphysics is personal, I'm not saying that there aren't any truths of the matter in regard to these questions that metaphysics raises. Frankly, I can't make any sense at all out of a position that holds that there isn't any truth of the matter concerning, say, the nature of the relationship between the self and the body, and the related question of whether the self can survive the body's demise. It either does or it doesn't, and the difference seems to make rather a lot of difference, personally speaking. And so it is, or so it seems to me, with all the questions of existence that metaphysics raises. There are facts of the matter concerning

these raised questions. But, as Hume himself pointed out, deduction, induction, and abduction—those techniques that further the project of objective knowledge, that is, knowledge equally accessible to all who submit to its techniques—can get us quite a lot, but they can't get us everything. In particular, they can't get us what we need in order for us to get, in the most fundamental sense, our bearings. But we are not the sort of creatures—I'm still on the Humean page here—to forego beliefs in the absence of compelling reasons to believe. That's not going to stop us. One's bearings must be gotten, one way or the other. In the absence of answers to what I called yesterday philosophy's factually insomniac and self-situating questions, we nevertheless arrive at beliefs, beliefs that anchor our entire orientation toward reality.

Hume's general MO (he employs it over and over again in his *Treatise on Human Nature*) is first to demonstrate how some fundamental belief—say, the belief in the uniformity of nature that underlies all our scientific reasoning, or our belief in the existence of some self over and beyond the stream of one's individual perceptions, or our belief in an external reality that continues to exist even when we're not perceiving it—can't be, in any way, justified. Then, as his second step, after the philosophical demolition has been accomplished, he turns to psychology, to the working principles of human nature, to explain why we nevertheless believe with a fervor—*vivacity*, he calls it—that skeptical doubts, no matter how compelling, can't touch. As he puts it, nature—our human nature—is too strong for us.

Where I want to depart from Hume—and I suppose it has everything to do with my being a novelist—is that I think the really interesting psychology underlying metaphysics lies not in what we share by virtue of our human nature, the sort of habits embedded in human nature to which Hume likes to point, but rather in what differentiates between us. I say this probably has everything to do with my being a novelist, since if there's anything that characterizes a novelist's sensibility, it is to be dazzled by the varieties in human nature. And the varieties in human nature seem to me to be much in play in matters metaphysical. It's not only our shared human nature that's too strong for us, but our own individually variable natures. A great deal of our metaphysically engaged psychology is a psychology of individual difference, with vivacious core beliefs—those providing the sense of where we are, and what we are, and what we are to do with what we are, and what it is, ultimately, that's in store for us—veering widely from individual to individual, anchoring individual orientations in ways that arguments can't touch, just as Hume argued concerning

shared metaphysical commitments. It's in that sense that I mean metaphysics is personal. There are temperamental differences at play delivering up individually variable vivacious beliefs, or intuitions, temperamental differences that are beyond the reach of philosophy itself to address, even though there is, in fact, no philosophy to be done, regarding these sorts of fundamental, self-situating ontological questions, *without* the animating intuitions that individual temperaments supply, just as there is no science to be done without the animating belief in the lawfulness of nature.

Listen in on two people who have vastly different intuitions about, say, the hard problem of consciousness—that is, the question of how it is that this mass of slimy brain tissue sloshing about in my cranium has an inner life—and you'll witness different philosophical temperaments in play. It's hard for someone, animated by one sort of intuition, to wrap his head around what the other, animated by another intuition, is even saying. Why's he saying that? What is he, stupid, disingenuous, or what? That's the sort of incredulity that the psychology of philosophical differences provokes. It's as if entirely different orientations toward the world are being invoked. It's as if entirely different orientations *are* being invoked, because, yes, entirely different orientations *are* being invoked. The facts at hand are being configured in different arrangements by contrasting philosophical temperaments, which themselves consist of varying attitudes toward a whole cluster of issues of so fundamental a sort that they're protorational. You can't really argue them because one's attitude toward them defines what counts as a good argument for you. It defines one's whole style of reasoning.

One of the most provocative of issues around which different philosophical temperaments form is the attitude toward the whole experience of being mystified, bamboozled, discombobulated. Philosophical problems are of a sort to induce a sense of mystification, at least initially. To understand a philosophical problem is to be, at least initially, flummoxed. For some people, the presence of the mystifying is emotionally inviting, even thrilling; they revel in it and frame propositions about the world that only increase the mystery. For others, it's a fact of life; they put up with it and frame propositions about the world that best accommodate themselves to it; for still others, the idea of the mysterious is intolerable, and they frame propositions about the world that deny it. These contrasts in strategies are natural expressions of temperamental differences.

Another issue that brings out temperamental philosophical differences is the sense of what makes for the best kind of explanation, which is partly

an aesthetic judgment, which means also an emotional one. Does a reductive explanation that leaves no wiggle room provide you the greatest sense of satisfaction, or does it make you feel vaguely disappointed, like seeing the great Oz pulling levers behind the curtain? Is a good explanation, for you, one that sets you off on curlicue ribbons of poetic associations?

Another temperamentally sensitive question is whether you think there can be any explanatory holes in the fabric of the world, brute contingencies, facts that are facts for no other reason than that they are facts, or does this seem to make of the world an intolerable cheat to our intelligence, leading us gleefully down the garden path of intelligibility only to deliver us smack into an explanatory brick wall? Again, there are elements of an aesthetic sensibility that seem to play a role in how one reacts to this question, and one can go through the whole history of philosophy, starting with Plato, sorting out various philosophers according to their proto-rational attitudes toward what Leibniz eventually dubbed the Principle of Sufficient Reason, even though the intuition was in play long before Leibniz named it, very much in play in Plato, not to speak of Spinoza.

And, speaking of Spinoza, what about the attitude toward the limits of human understanding? One might think, like Spinoza, that the fabric of reality is intelligibly complete, that there is an infinite web of explanations and this whole web is itself self-explained, but that we, with our particular cognitive modules, can glimpse but a small part of it. Or this notion of there being reasons—out there in the world—that nevertheless escape *human* reason might strike you as profoundly irritating, an itch we can never scratch. It struck the logical positivists that way. Hume, on the other hand, was amused by unreachable itches. And how do you feel about certainty? Is it your holy grail, a source of chagrin when knowledge falls below the highest standard of indubitability, or does certainty make you feel coerced and caged? Is vagueness a soft comforter you love to snuggle into, or does it make you feel like you've wandered into a swarm of sight-obscuring insects or marched out to do battle armed with a fluffy pillow?

Certainly, one's cognitive skills come into play here, skills that make for cognitive pleasures and cognitive pains. So, for example, does strict logical reasoning, seeing what follows from what, stimulate your pleasure zones, or does it come unnaturally hard and send you screaming from the room, like fingernails on the blackboard? Have you a mind that leaps among poetic associations, or can you not distinguish between a poetic association and one of those fallacies enumerated in logic's blacklist, perhaps the Fallacy of Weak Analogy?

But there are other aspects, not just those in our cognitive makeup, that go into the individually variable responses we have to these temperamentally formative, protorational issues, all of them within wincing distance of that most sensitive issue of all: our limitations, personally and collectively, not only in understanding but in *being*, our attitude toward what lies beyond our control, if, that is, you are even of such a temperament as to allow for there being such things as those beyond your control.

In short, it's the whole of the person, that unity of dispositions and experiences, of sense and sensibility, the very complexity of individuality that novelists struggle to make real, who is brought into play in forming attitudes toward the self-situating, factually insomniac questions raised by such metaphysical topics as reality, the scope of reason, time, consciousness, the self, suffering, death.

Philosopher Colin McGinn, in *Problems of Philosophy*, speaks of distinctive strategies that philosophers typically deploy in the face of philosophical perplexity, a perplexity that typically coagulates around certain philosophically problematic facts, such as the fact of the a priori, or of meaning, or of free will, or of consciousness itself, which last problematic fact, *consciousness*, McGinn treats as the paradigmatic philosophical perplexity. McGinn summarizes his four strategies with the acronym DIME, where the *D* takes the problematic fact and *domesticates* it, identifies it with some nice housebroken facts; the *I* argues that the problematic fact is *irreducible* and *indefinable* and *inexplicable*; the *M* *miraculizes* it and says that it belongs to a different domain, a supranatural order of being; and the *E* simply *eliminates* it and says it is *no fact at all*. I like this notion of different philosophical strategies very much, but I'd like to widen the array of strategies so that they take in not just professional philosophers but all of us, because we all do, one way or another, have our ways of dealing with philosophical perplexity, even if, for some, the preferred ways don't make them suitable practitioners in the profession of philosophy. Also, I'm interested in conceiving of these strategies in such a way so that they reflect on the underlying temperaments that operate beneath, so my list of strategies is somewhat different from McGinn's. But I like the way he summarizes the different strategies with an acronym, and so I'm copying him in that, too. I summarize my strategies, which are six, with the letters NATURE, which, if you are very quick, you have noticed spells out "nature," as in "human."

N is for the strategy of *Naturalizing*. A Naturalizer goes after philosophical perplexity with the intent of making it disappear, philosophically

difficult facts absorbed into “natural facts,” meaning those secured empirically, by either straight observation or scientific explanation. I’m combining under Naturalization McGinn’s two strategies of domestication and elimination, since these are both naturalizing moves, and the naturalizing temperament would be happy with either. Naturalizers are typically irked by philosophical problems. The idea of the incorrigibly mystifying tends to raise their hackles.

So consider the problem that consciousness presents: *Why does it feel like something to be a working brain? How comes this mush in here to give me the world, or at least some subjective version of it?*

Consciousness presents, at least *prima facie*, a certain mystery to us, a mystery that Naturalizers try to naturalize by either identifying the mysterious facts—in this case, the fact of consciousness itself—with purely natural facts or eliminating the fact altogether, which amounts, in this case, to asserting that there is no such thing as consciousness at all. Nowadays, the noneliminative naturalizing answer is usually put in the language of the hardware and the software of the brain. So, going the hardware route, consciousness is nothing more than forty-cycle/second loops of activity between the cerebral cortex and the thalamus. Or, going the software route, consciousness is a blackboard representation, or a common short-term representation, accessible to all the modules of the mind. Or, the Naturalizer might go after the problematic fact by trying to eliminate it by way of natural facts. In the case of consciousness, the Naturalizer might adduce linguistic facts and argue that it is only these natural facts concerning the ways that we speak that give the illusion that there is something called consciousness. Such eliminative techniques were made very popular by Wittgenstein.

In any case, however he does it, a Naturalizer can’t allow a mysterious fact to just lie there and be mysterious. Something has to be done about it, and done about it by way of the sort of natural facts that we know about from either straight observation of the physical world or the extended natural facts we’ve acquired about the physical world through science, like the forty-cycle/second loops of activity between the cerebral cortex and the thalamus. A lot of scientists are Naturalizers, quite naturally, and a lot of philosophers are, too.

The second strategy, the *A* strategy, I call *Aestheticizing*. I was just reading the collected letters of novelist Saul Bellow, recently published. Bellow was for decades fascinated by the anthroposophical writings of Rudolf Steiner. If you’ve read *Humboldt’s Gift*, you’ll remember the

Steiner fascination. In one letter to the British Steinerian Otto Barfield, Bellow writes, "There is the conviction that the law of the conservation of energy is all a mistake." And then he adds, in a parenthesis: "this idea has too many poetic implications to be dismissed." This parenthetical remark wonderfully expresses the Aestheticizing approach. Truth is beauty; beauty is truth. Whereas a Naturalizer breaks out in angry hives in the presence of what seems mystifying, an Aestheticizer tends to revel in mystery. Mystery is a beautiful thing; it provokes an aesthetic response from those primed for such aesthetic responses. A view that opens out into even more mystery is more likely to be true, by the Aestheticizer's lights, and the seductions of language, too, are apt to produce a sense of the true; a phrase of imponderable poetry will deliver more conviction than all the truth tables of propositional logic. For an Aestheticizer, finding truth doesn't have the feel of cleaning something up, as it does for a Naturalizer, but rather the feel of a spiritually enhancing spilling over. Blunt logic can feel like an act of rudeness to an Aestheticizer.

And what has an Aestheticizer to say about consciousness? What *hasn't* an Aestheticizer to say about consciousness? Consciousness is what allows us to partake in the sublime. Consciousness is a sort of soul dust that swirls out from us to enchant all the world with our own phenomenology. Consciousness is the ambient world soul, some of it suctioned off and partitioned into us, who communicate with one another and with the world soul by way of it. That spilling over of an Aestheticizer can reach flood levels on the subject of consciousness.

There are philosophers who are Aestheticizers, though surely not among analytic philosophers. Interestingly, quite a few mathematicians I've known in my lifetime are Aestheticizers, most especially if they're French.

You might think that a so-called philosophical novelist must be an Aestheticizer, but that doesn't follow in the least. Just because the aesthetic takes precedence in her novels, as it must, doesn't mean the aesthetic takes precedence in her philosophical thinking. I, for example, am not by temperament an Aestheticizer, though I often think I'd be a better novelist if I were.

My *T* is for *Theologize*. Theologizers dislike the untidiness of philosophical problems almost as much as Naturalizers do. Something has to be done with these mystifying facts, but instead of absorbing them into natural facts, they're absorbed into the supernatural, which is a super-cleanup operation, with the mystifying features of our world reduced to

just one mystifying feature, the all-mysterious God, which has an arithmetical advantage. And consciousness? “Consciousness is the divine spark within each of us. It signifies not only the touch of God that brings us into being, but, being the divine spark, it is what keeps us always in communion with God.” That sort of thing.

My *U* stands for *Unsolve*. You might think this a poor excuse for a strategy, but actually *unsolving* is hard work in philosophy. What an Unsolver must do is undermine other strategists’ attempts to make the problem go away. An Unsolver insists on the stubborn persistence of the mystifying fact, arguing either that it just can’t be absorbed or that the reputed absorption still leaves the bulge of the mysterious, like the picture of the boa constrictor swallowing the elephant in *The Little Prince*. So, for example, an Unsolver’s work on the problem of consciousness consists in undermining all of the various naturalizing attempts to absorb the fact of consciousness, and an Unsolver will also argue that the Theologizer hasn’t really offered any solution to the problem by dumping it into the one mystery of God, no more than the wielder of the next strategy has, which is my:

R, and stands for *Reification*. A Reifier is totally against absorption, arguing that the mysterious facts constitute a separate domain of facts, in addition to the natural. So, for example, when it comes to the problem of consciousness, a Reifier offers a separate ontological category, disembodied minds, *res cogitans*, as a solution. Cartesian dualism is the reifying response to the philosophical perplexity posed by consciousness.

So we have *NATUR*, and we come now to *E*, which is to *Epistemologize*. This strategy has affinities with the strategy of *Unsolving*. An Epistemologizer will, like an Unsolver, argue for the failure of all the attempts to make the problem go away, to absorb the philosophically problematic fact into other facts, whether natural, theological, or metaphysical. Like the Unsolver, he’ll insist on the defiantly mystifying nature of the problem. But an Epistemologizer is different from an Unsolver in maintaining that there’s nothing inherently mysterious about the problems that happen to stump us; they just happen to stump us because of the cognitive modules that we’ve been bequeathed. The philosophical interest shifts, for the Epistemologizer, from the problems themselves to the cognitive equipment we bring to bear on thinking about these problems. If we want to understand these problems, then the best that we can do is show how there is an unfixable misfit between what our cognitive modules are designed to do and the sort of answers that would make these problems go away. What

philosophical perplexity signals, according to the Epistemologizer, is that we are in the presence of a topic for which our rational apparatus can't do justice to the intuitions that we nevertheless have. So when it comes to consciousness, although it is a physical process—an Epistemologizer will certainly reject any move on the part of an Aestheticizer, a Theologizer, or a Reifier that says it isn't—the cognitive means at our disposal for understanding physical processes are not of a sort for capturing why certain physical processes *feel like something* for those whose physical processes they are. Colin McGinn, an Epistemologizer, writes that trying to explain consciousness as a product of the brain is like trying to explain how you can “get numbers from biscuits or ethics from rhubarb.”

These are the six general strategies deployed by vastly different philosophical temperaments, of which there are many more varieties than merely six. Far more expressive than these general strategies are the individually variable intuitions that swell up out of our temperaments, anchoring our points of view, providing our orientation. Intuitions are the core beliefs we maneuver around; they are what allow us to get our bearings, for bearings *we will get*, one way or the other, if we're not going to succumb to metaphysical vertigo. These core intuitions are the last things we would want to give up, although sometimes we do, under extreme duress. But in general we judge the reasonability of other belief-claims by how well they accord with our core intuitions. Such topics as reality, reason, time, consciousness, free will, suffering, the self, death—philosophical topics that works of the imagination pathetize—attract a wide spread of individually variable intuitions, rising up out of the protorational recesses of sense and sensibility, clustering around the emotionally fraught fault lines where the self contemplates itself in relation to all that is not the self. These core intuitions speak out of the deep places of individuality, and they're more finely attuned to our temperamental differences than the six general strategies that we reach for when we, in our individually variable way, do whatever it is we call reasoning.

Philosophy, as Plato conceived of it, was the attempt to subdue individual natures while we try to get, in the most fundamental sense possible, our bearings. It's not that Plato thought we all share the same common human nature. Only some, those designated the guardians in his utopia, have the sort of nature that makes them fit for philosophy, able to suppress their emotion-tainted points of views and to allow, instead, that their points of view be shaped by the processes of reason, by dialectic. This is the basis of the Noble Lie of Plato's *Republic*, the populace being fed the

fib that the class of guardians actually has a different metal—gold, as it happens—mixed into their substance than do the auxiliaries, who have an admixture of silver, and the farmers and craftsmen, whose substance is mixed with bronze and iron. So although we can't hope for unanimity of points of view across the board, we can hope for it among the philosophically susceptible. Since reality is one, the viewpoint that allows itself to be shaped by reality will be one. Spinoza works this Platonic proposition very hard, arguing, rather wonderfully, that to the extent that we are rational, which is what we ought to be, we will be so similar as to all but share the same identity. True philosophers are all but indistinguishable from one another; the psychology of individual differences can be subdued to the point of erasure. And to some extent this proposition, that the psychology of individual difference can be subdued to the point of erasure, is still the Noble Lie of philosophical practice. It's noble because it promotes the necessary work of sifting through grounds and reasons seeking the objective—accessible to all and compelling to all no matter their temperamental differences—but it is a lie nevertheless.

Works of the imagination call out this lie, the more aggressively philosophical they are, the more philosophical material they tuck into the deep pockets of character and induce in readers, by way of emotions, visions of a world quite at variance with their habitual ways of seeing, the more shrilly they call the lie out. And whether this is the kind of answer that would convince Plato to let the poet back into his city of reason isn't at all clear to me, but nevertheless, as that wanton at the symposium once said, I think that it's true.

So that's my argument. But given my own philosophical convictions, I never feel right just giving an argument without arting it up a bit—a little story, or something else. So I've got something else.

In order to demonstrate the spread of core intuitions, how they vary from one individual to another, and the deep and emotionally alive places out of which they emerge, I've prepared a short audio performance piece, which I call "Intuitions," and with which I want to end these lectures.

SCRIPT FOR "INTUITIONS": AN AUDIO PIECE OF MANY VOICES

Reality

1. Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away.¹

1. Philip Dick, science-fiction writer (1928–82).

2. The concept of *God* is the way in which we understand the incredible fact that what cannot be nevertheless, somehow or other, *is*.²
3. Do what you will, this world's a fiction and is made up of contradiction.³
4. There is no tribunal for knowledge beyond the natural sciences. Matter and energy, space and time. This is what science explains for us. This is what is.
5. There is only mathematics. The concrete and the temporal are projections out of the timeless abstraction of mathematical structures.
6. We are decipherers of the heavenly scrawl.⁴
7. To be is to be the value of a bound variable.⁵
8. Behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern, and we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this. The whole world is a work of art, and we are parts of the work of art. We are the words, we are the music; we are the thing itself.⁶
9. When I embrace the universe, I feel it embracing me back.
10. We must learn to live without the comforting illusion that we know anything at all.

Reason

11. Reason itself is perfectly inert.⁷
12. The eyes of the mind, whereby it sees things and observes, are none other than proofs.⁸
13. There are no sacred propositions. The so-called inviolability of logic is nothing but indolence born of habit.
14. Logic is inviolable. I cannot think myself outside of it and still be *thinking*.
15. There are truths that can't be expressed except by way of paradox. The opposite of a shallow truth is a shallow falsehood. But the opposite of a deep truth is another deep truth.⁹

2. Alfred North Whitehead, philosopher and logician (1861–1947) (quote slightly revised).

3. William Blake, poet and artist (1757–1827).

4. Danielle Blau, poet (1985–).

5. Willard Van Orman Quine, philosopher (1908–2000).

6. Virginia Woolf, novelist and essayist (1882–1941).

7. David Hume, philosopher and historian (1711–76).

8. Baruch (Benedictus) Spinoza, philosopher (1632–77).

9. Niels Bohr, physicist (1885–1962).

16. Reasoning that leads one too far from common sense is probably wrong reasoning. I wouldn't step out on a bridge built on reason's flimsy conditionals. Better to stay on the terra firma of common sense. At least there's good company there.
17. What is common sense but utterly common, and why should reality give itself over to what is common? Reality is too subtle for the coarse-grained categories of common sense.
18. The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing.¹⁰
19. And all our intuitions mock/The formal logic of the clock.¹¹

Time

20. The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once.¹²
21. Time rushes on, impassive and unmarked. It's we who domesticate the flux, parceling it out into countable units so that we can situate ourselves within it: I am young and live in expectation; I am old and nearing the end of my days.
22. People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between the past, the present, and the future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.¹³
23. I force myself to state, if only in one line of unwritten poetry, this moment.¹⁴
24. The past follows us at every instant. What am I, what is this self, if not the condensation of the history that I've lived from the moment of my birth, and even before?¹⁵

Consciousness

25. For something to be conscious means that there is something it is like to be that thing—something it is like *for* that thing to *be* that thing.¹⁶
26. Consciousness is a bag of tricks. The brain is a flimflam artist. You are your own brain's stooge.

10. Blaise Pascal, mathematician and philosopher (1623–62).

11. W. H. Auden, poet (1907–73).

12. Albert Einstein, physicist and philosopher (1879–1955).

13. Albert Einstein.

14. Virginia Woolf.

15. Henri Bergson, philosopher (1859–1941).

16. Thomas Nagel, philosopher (1937–).

27. It *feels* like something to be a brain, but why this should be so, no brain, at least not one of our sort, can fathom.
28. Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spiderweb of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every airborne particle in its tissue.¹⁷
29. I still find it hard to understand how anyone could argue that machines can't exhibit consciousness.¹⁸
30. Consciousness is the spark of divinity within us, our creator's reminder that we are so far from being able to comprehend all that is out there that we can't even begin to comprehend what is within.
31. Consciousness is a disease.¹⁹

Free Will

32. My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will.²⁰
33. A stone thrown through the air would, if conscious, attribute the arc of its trajectory to its own free choice. We are those tossed stones.
34. I must believe in free will. I have no choice.²¹
35. He alone is free who lives constrained by reason.²²
36. We can trace out all the intricacies of the moral universe, but without the capacity to *choose* our decisions rather than have them be chosen, that moral universe is as barred to us as Eden, guarded by the flaming seraph.
37. It is in the rare moments only, moments of being, that we encounter the unified Self and know it in its state of absolute freedom.²³
38. That freedom that is within me no man can take away. It is the source of my dignity, my humanity. You may shackle my body, but the person within me freely condemns you and deems my enslaver more shackled than I.
39. I am condemned to be free.²⁴

17. Henry James, novelist (1843–1916).

18. Iain Banks, science-fiction writer (1954–).

19. Miguel de Unamuno, philosopher and novelist (1864–1936).

20. William James, philosopher and psychologist (1842–1910).

21. I. B. Singer, novelist (1902–91).

22. Baruch Spinoza.

23. Virginia Woolf.

24. Jean-Paul Sartre, philosopher, novelist, playwright (1905–80).

Suffering

40. Let sanguine healthy-mindedness do its best with its strange power of living in the moment and ignoring and forgetting, still the evil background is really there to be thought of, and the skull will grin in at the banquet.²⁵
41. I don't know why we're here, but I'm pretty sure that it's not in order to enjoy ourselves.²⁶
42. Do you not see how necessary a world of pains and troubles is to school an intelligence and make it a soul?²⁷
43. I don't want more suffering. And if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of sufferings which was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that the truth is not worth such a price. I would rather remain with my unavenged suffering and unsatisfied indignation, even if I were wrong.²⁸
44. What presumption to think it incumbent on the universe to offer us any consolation for our troubled lives.
45. I know that God loves me and even in suffering I will rejoice.
46. The whole planet can suffer no greater torment than a single soul.²⁹

The Self

47. What is your substance, whereof you are made, that millions of strange shadows on you tend?³⁰
48. Whatever else I can doubt, I cannot doubt the existence of my self.³¹ There is nothing in all the world I know with more intimacy and certainty.
49. For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other. I can never catch *myself* at any time . . . and never can observe any thing but the perception. If any one upon serious and unprejudic'd

25. William James.

26. Ludwig Wittgenstein, philosopher (1889–1951).

27. John Keats, poet (1795–1821).

28. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, novelist (1821–81).

29. Ludwig Wittgenstein.

30. William Shakespeare, playwright and poet (1564–1616).

31. René Descartes, philosopher and mathematician (1596–1650).

reflexion, thinks he has a different notion of *himself*; I must confess I can reason no longer with him.³²

50. I am a real thing and really exist, but what thing? I have answered: a thing which thinks.³³
51. I have a body and I cannot escape from it. That being the case I would like to call attention to my problem.³⁴
52. I can conceive of myself without this body; what is inconceivable is that I am this body and nothing more.
53. That I am who I am is not only a necessary truth about me but about the whole universe.
54. One of the most misleading representational techniques in our language is the use of the word "I." The self is a shadow cast by the grammar of the first-person pronoun "I."
55. And will this self, which accompanies me everywhere, accompany me past the door of death?

Death

56. Death is a fearful thing.³⁵
57. To himself everyone is immortal; he may know that he's going to die, but he can never know that he is dead.³⁶
59. It is a fearsome thing to love what time can touch.
60. Death is unthinkable. How can that immense intricacy of teeming reality that is a person, all that striving of becoming, simply vanish from the world as if it had never been?
61. The wise man thinks least of all things on death. His life is a continual contemplation not on death but on life.³⁷
62. Nothing is left us but Death. We look to it with a certain grim satisfaction, saying, There, at least, is reality.³⁸ There is the distinguished thing at last.³⁹
63. The eternal silence of these infinite spaces fills me with dread.⁴⁰

32. David Hume.

33. René Descartes.

34. Anne Sexton, poet (1928–74).

35. William Shakespeare.

36. Samuel Butler, novelist (1835–1902).

37. Baruch Spinoza.

38. Ralph Waldo Emerson, essayist and poet (1803–82).

39. Henry James.

40. Blaise Pascal.