

Chapter Six

GREECE'S RELIGION OF BEAUTY

1. *Classical Greece*

Hebrew and European sacred kingship, we saw, differs from the more common divine kingship of the East. They are different responses to the same problem of natural catastrophe, such as the flood. A first response in empires of the East was to trust a divine king or despot claiming magical as well as technological powers. A second, Hebrew response was to trust a superhuman all-powerful God who has anointed a human king. The Hebrews denied the divine pretensions of any human patriarch, and ultimate patriarchal authority was transferred to the supernatural level.

A third, Greek response differs from both natural and supernatural divine kingship. Greek myth also has a flood story. The god Zeus, angered by the violence of a primitive race of mortals, sent a flood to destroy them. Advised by the god *Prometheus*, two mortals, Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha, were spared. To them the Greeks traced their ancestry. But classical Greeks did not react to the flood by enslaving themselves to a human or supernatural lord. They did not put themselves in the hands of any lord. Despite the threats posed by nature, they feared not. Pyrrha and Deucalion survived the flood after nine days on an ark, and created a hard race of humans out of stone, by throwing behind them stones from ruins of the flood. Nature was tamed. Trust in themselves, based on trust in the external environment, distinguished the Greeks from Easterners.



Giraudon/Art Resource, NY

The Torture of Prometheus

According to Greek mythology, Prometheus gave humanity the gift of fire. For this transgression against the god Zeus, Prometheus was chained to a rock, where an eagle (or, in some versions, a vulture) continually preyed on him. This painting of Prometheus, painted in 1868 by French artist Gustave Moreau, is in the Musée National Gustave Moreau in Paris, France.

Microsoft ® Encarta ® Encyclopedia 2002.

Greek self-confidence is seen in its political institutions. The Greeks defended the liberties and laws of its cities in an epic struggle with the Persian empire. As will be recalled from the last chapter, this empire, founded by Cyrus (600-529 B.C.), tolerated cultural diversity more than other ancient empires. The king did not claim divinity, but served Ozmad, a divine embodiment of the good. He respected the religious, linguistic, and cultural independence of subject peoples once they accepted Persian political supremacy. Persian policy was seen in Cyrus' treatment of the Hebrews, whom he allowed to return from Babylonian captivity to their homeland. The only condition was political loyalty to Cyrus in a distant capital.

The Hebrews, concerned more with sovereign rule by their God than rule by sovereign rule by the Hebrews themselves, accepted this condition. But the Greeks were different. They refused to accept

political subjection to a distant imperial capital. It would be a renunciation of citizenship. Since it implies a right to take part in public deliberations, citizenship with the technology of the time required small city-states. Like small towns today, the city-state resisted absorption in a vast multinational society, with one's fate decided by a remote emperor and faceless bureaucracy. Citizenship expanded in classical Athens on an increasingly democratic basis. Yet it had aristocratic origins. Most Greek cities once had kings. But such kings were not despotic kings of the East, where all but the despot are underage children. Greek kingship was more aristocratic than truly monarchical. A Greek king was often elected. Like *Agamemnon* in the *Iliad* by Homer, he was first among equals. He officiated at religious ceremonies, arbitrated disputes, led in battle, but he followed the counsel of autonomous clan heads.

The *Olympians* gods give an idea of aristocratic kingship. The Olympians religion came from the Greek aristocratic classes. The relation of the reigning Olympian Zeus to other gods reflects monarchy softened by aristocratic liberties. Each god has a proper sphere, privileges, and weaknesses. Zeus accommodates himself to them. His concern is to keep peace in his family. He maintains forms of authority by ratifying essential claims of other gods. His patriarchal authority is not absolute as with a all-powerful Creator or all out of nothing. Later Greek myth, influenced by Stoicism, views Zeus as all-powerful. But classical Greeks knew little of the fear of the Lord.

Iphigenia, in Greek mythology, eldest daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. Before the Trojan War, when the Greek forces prepared to sail from Aulis for Troy, a strong north wind held the thousand Greek ships in the harbor. A soothsayer revealed that Artemis, goddess of the hunt, was angry because the Greeks had slain one of the wild animals she protected. The only way to appease the goddess and gain favorable winds for the ship was to sacrifice Iphigenia. Agamemnon, fired by his ambition to conquer Troy, agreed to the sacrifice. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Yet the Greeks did not fully escape the bondage that, socially or religiously, marked prior history. The king presided over equals, gaining authority from their consent. He was not their lord. Council members were also lords. Each had a power of life and death over members of his family. In the Trojan wars *Agamemnon* could not command *Achilles*, his equal, but could put his own daughter *Iphigenia* to death as a sacrifice to gods. In the classical age (fifth century B.C.) fathers abandoned unwanted children,

Iphigenia, in Greek mythology, eldest daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. Before the Trojan War, when the Greek forces prepared to sail from Aulis for Troy, a strong north wind held the thousand Greek ships in the harbor. A soothsayer revealed that Artemis, goddess of the hunt, was angry because the Greeks had slain one of the wild animals she protected. The only way to appease the goddess and gain favorable winds for the ship was to sacrifice Iphigenia. Agamemnon, fired by his ambition to conquer Troy, agreed to the sacrifice. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002.

and Roman fathers had similar rights.

Yet the despotism of the family father was, strangely, the beginning of political liberty. It protected society against the unchecked political despotism of a king. A non-despotic king did not interfere in family affairs; he respected despotic rights of the father in the latter's own domain. The difference between *aristocratic kingship* and truly *despotic kingship* resembles the difference between a kingship acceptable to the philosopher of limited government John Locke and the kingship of the defender of *absolute monarchy* Thomas Hobbes. What is called the *state of nature* depicts life before or at least without political states.

For *Hobbes*, universal war, a *war of all against all*. Human nature is selfish. Since it is impossible by human nature to pursue anything but individual self-interest, what is called *love* is really just another calculation of self-interest. The baby “loves” its parents because it knows where its meal comes from. Two individuals are “in love” because they unconsciously calculate a relationship of trade that is advantageous to each. In the state of nature, each individual pursues his or her maximum self-interest however he or she can, even if it means resorting to theft or murder. Life in the state of nature is dangerous, since no one in a situation of power today knows that he will not be toppled tomorrow. Life is brutish, nasty, and short. Therefore, it is to everyone’s advantage to leave the state of nature by a *social contract* in which one attains the security of living under conditions of law and order. We lay down our individual arms and give a monopoly over them over to the individual whom we choose as king. Since human nature is selfish, we will want this king to have great powers to control all individuals. For we know that any individual who gets a chance will even steal and kill if he perceives that to be the best way to maximize his self-interest. Human beings under conditions of law and order are all like criminals in a prison who will escape and endanger us if given the least chance.

Locke, violence in the state of nature was an occasional risk, not a permanent condition. Most people were sociable, even if there was an occasional rotten apple. Without a state to impartially determine fair punishments, people in the state of nature take the law into their own hands and deal out an injustice that risks being unfair. The victim is both judge and executor of the judgment. (The resemblance to the situation of the United States after the September 11 takes will not be missed. For states are in a state of nature in the international society of nations.) Because our rights are mostly respected in the state of nature, Locke doubted that we would want to bargain away natural liberty for the security of living under despotic law and order. Rather, he believed we would want to negotiate a limited state that is willing to let some criminals escape justice rather than to shackle society as a police state.

We may trace the state of nature and its insecurity to the threat of natural catastrophe instead of (as for Hobbes and Locke) a threat posed by human beings. Hobbes and Locke seem to have projected modern individualism back into a prehistorical state of nature. Since it is hard to verify their claims about the *state of nature* if that state is prehistorical, it is often said that they were not really trying to describe prehistory. The state of nature is then a fiction which is invented to serve as a contrast to the *political state* of law and order. For Hobbes and Locke, thinking about the horrors of the state of nature has the function of throwing us into the arms of the (unlimited or limited) political state.

Yet in some way it still seems that the state of nature was prehistory. By definition, prehistory precedes history, and history is the history of states. Therefore, there were no states in prehistory, just as there are no states in the state of nature. Beyond all fictions, there is a true story to be told about the state of nature, and the first thing to note is that it was much more complicated than either Hobbes or Locke could guess. No single picture of it tells the full story, because it was an evolutionary process with different stages. We have distinguished some main stages in Chapter Two on “Oriental despotism and Paradise Lost.” Hobbes and Locke were pre-Darwinian, pre-evolutionary thinkers who did not think of the state of nature in terms of stage. In fact, it seems that their respective pictures are each approximately true of different stages of the evolutionary process.

Hobbes’ picture of the state of nature is truer of a stage of interaction between herding and agricultural tribes in which the mobility and speed with which a nomadic tribe can strike in times of drought or scarcity poses a constant threat to agriculturalists and to rival herding tribes. Locke’s picture seems truer of a stage in which the plentifulness of water allows herders and agriculturalists to pursue their way of life without attacks on others. Human beings behave as if in a war of all against all in time of *scarcity*, and they show themselves to be more sociable in times of all-around *plenty*. Times of scarcity in

prehistory tend to lead to a controlling despotic state that views all individuals in the state to be essentially criminals, so that the state begins to resemble a prison. Times of plenty in prehistory tend to lead to a state that remains minimal because it must deal only with a few criminals. If this is right, there is not merely one passage from the state of nature to civil society. There is more than one such passage. There are passages of different types. Societies can fall back into a state of nature and then make the passage again at a later date. It is for the archaeologist and anthropologist to tell was when, where, and whether a given type of passage has occurred.

An *Oriental despot* organizes mass labor in public works (dams, roads, fortifications) to protect his subjects from an unfriendly nature. Yet the threat of natural catastrophe is expressed in the threat posed by other human beings. When nature is most cruel, in times of flood and pestilence, individuals are the most cruel to one another.

Aristocratic institutions of pre-classical Greece made Athenian democracy possible. It is easier to extend freedom to many when more than one is free. If a thousand, why not two thousand? Both are a many. From a democratic viewpoint the defense of aristocratic liberties is progressive in its own time. To those who hold that all are free, aristocracy represents progress.



The Acropolis in Athens

Classical Athens has been called a *political work of art*. Athens' victory in the *Median* wars with Persia (479 B.C.) ushered in the classical age, the legendary flowering of the Greek genius. If beauty is balance and harmony, Athens showed a beautiful balance of Eastern *collectivism* and Western *individualism*. Citizens identified with and accepted duties toward a city that protected both their individual political rights and property rights (Hegel 1927xi, Pt 2,2, ch 3). This balance between individual rights and individual duties in the customs of the city seems to differ from the modern morality of private conscience. The citizen, taking part in the life of the city, is guided by traditional rules of practice. Citizens embody the public virtue praised by *Montesquieu*, *public-spiritedness*. The modern world, dominated by anonymous large cities, has lost the Greek-like social ethics of small towns. The modern individual is judgmental, guided by the inner voice of conscience, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau's* infallible and celestial voice (Rousseau, 1762, Pt 4, 600). With the breakdown of traditional customs in market societies, private moral judgment is the absolute standard of conduct. Though this morality of inner duty for duty's sake has roots in Stoicism, Immanuel Kant stated it most clearly. It judges by direct rational moral insight, not by dependence on rational custom or institutions.

Athens has been often idealized. The image of a beautiful balance between the individual and the city, the private and the public, fails to recognize party conflicts that existed from the seventh century B.C. on. A funeral oration attributed to Pericles presents this idealized image. Pericles' praise of Athens was likely more a patriotic plea than description of reality (Janicaud, 1975, 183-85). Yet Pericles' image of Athens is taken from historical reality. It is not the eternal essence of Athens. It is Athens only in one stage and side of its development (but perhaps a most memorable side).



Culver Pictures

Pericles, who took control of Athens in 461 BC, was responsible for making Athens most prominent among the Greek city-states. Pericles built many new structures, including the Parthenon on the Acropolis.

Microsoft ® Encarta ® Encyclopedia 2002.

World history is easily viewed as a series of non-historical national essences, of different *national characters*. The transition from Persia to Greece, or Greece to Rome, is noted, while transitions in each national history are left in the background. The stages of world history become *national spirits*, not *national histories*. Greece becomes classical Athens, Rome becomes the spirit the age of Augustus, and so on. A leap across centuries from Pericles to Augustus might be excused in philosophical world history, but not in specialized history writing. What counts for a philosophy of history in understanding the present is not the rise and decline of Athens, but Athens in its glory. This is the Athens and at once the Greece that remains in our consciousness as an essential phase in our own self-formation, as a still active ghost of something in our own past. Something of classical Athens is lodged, consciously or unconsciously, in each of us.

We must of course avoid uncritical enthusiasm for Greece. Athens' democracy did not assert even the ideal of universal human rights, though individual Athenians (e.g., Astithenes, Democritus, Empedocles, and perhaps Protagoras) did. It suffered from slavery, and failed to integrate even a majority of its residents in the state as citizens. Citizenship was a reward for special services to Athens, and thus was not justified on general principles. Slavery conditioned the citizens' leisure, and thus the existence of a very restricted democracy.

Despite the limitations of classical Greece, however, its achievements have inspired admiration ever since. Its rapid progress was partly due to its backward starting point. The empires of Egypt and Mesopotamia, based on huge river valleys of the East, were further removed than the Greece from the tribal democracy of nomadic hunters and herders.

When the Greeks invaded the Mediterranean in the second millennium--B.C., agrarian city-states and empires had existed in the Middle East for centuries. Greek mountains, making travel difficult, impeded large centralized states and helped preserve traditional tribal independence. When the Greeks came to interact with more advanced cultures to the East (Egyptians, Phoenicians), a still vivid sense of individual initiative helped them take up Eastern culture in a creative way. The very backwardness of Greece was a cause of its sudden preeminence.

The preeminence ancient Greece is in five areas: political life, philosophy, natural science, mathematics, and art. Greece has been a source of *revolutionary renaissances* throughout the history of Western civilization. Repeatedly, a romantic wish to return to classical Greece has, by its inevitable failure, generated something unprecedented in history. Among such revolutionary renaissances are: 1. the marriage of Christian theology and Greek philosophy in the Middle Ages (*St. Augustine*, *St. Thomas*), 2. the Renaissance of the sixteenth century (*Erasmus*), the American and French Revolutions, and German classicism (*Schiller* and *Goethe*).

Western philosophy began in Greece. (We do not say that philosophy began in Greece philosophy in India and China, which is approximately as ancient, began independently of Greece.) Yet philosophers, with their professional bias, easily forget that philosophy was the decadence of classical Greece. It undermined

belief in the Athenian religion of the Olympian gods. It upset a classical balance between private judgment and public tradition in favor of the former. Philosophy was born in Greece as a marginal as subversive force. The first philosophers were outsiders.

Thales (sixth century B.C.) is said to have founded philosophy, after retiring from politics, by the question he asked: "What is the One from which everything comes?" His answer was that *the One* was water, that everything is water in some shape or form. We know that water changes form, now being liquid, now being solid as ice, now being a gas or steam. It seems a short step beyond that to say that everything that seems not to be water is water under some disguise. Other philosophers of the age would say that the one was something else, perhaps air (Anaximenes) or fire (*Heraclitus*). But Thales accomplished the real revolution by being the first to ask the question. An aristocrat from Greek Asia Minor, he fled the advancing Persians.

But it can be argued that the real founder of Western philosophy was someone else. For it appears that Thales, though he asked a philosophical question, had no explicit concept of philosophy. The man who coined the term "philosophy" could be considered the real founder of the discipline, and his name is *Pythagoras*. He distinguished between *wisdom* and *philosophy*. The wise man already has wisdom, while out of modesty the philosopher claims only to strive after wisdom. *Sophia* is wisdom and *philia* is love. Not any kind of love, but rather the love of friendship. (Thus Philadelphia is the city of brotherly love.) It is not the love of desire known as *eros*. It is not the love of Christian charity known as *agape* love. Wisdom is for gods, not human beings. Yet a human being already participates in the wisdom he or she loves. You cannot be on friendly terms with something of which you know nothing.



Culver Pictures

Pythagoras

Considered the first true mathematician, Pythagoras established a movement in 6th-century BC southern Italy that emphasized the study of mathematics as a means to understanding all relationships in the natural world. The followers of this movement, Pythagoreans, were the first to teach that the earth is a sphere revolving around the sun.

Microsoft © Encarta © Encyclopedia 2002

Pythagoras settled in southern Italian city of Croton in the sixth century B.C., where he founded a secret philosophical society apart from the city's public life. He may have been killed in an uprising by the city against Pythagoras' sect. The tradition of secret wisdom was an Oriental one, and most Greeks seem to have been suspicious of it. In Pythagoras's case membership in the sect required strange dress (Oriental robes) and rituals (such as "Don't eat beans"). The test of one's beliefs is how they fare when they are shared with one's compatriots. Greek democracy in matters of belief meant one should not be so arrogant as to suppose that the opinions of your neighbors is unimportant to the truth what you believe. Pythagoras practiced an *elitism* that held little appeal to most Greeks.

But he may well be the greatest genius of Western civilization. It is not only does he have a claim to being the founder of Western philosophy for the good reason that he was a philosopher self-consciously with a concept of what he was doing. Beyond that he is rightly considered to be the founder of *theoretical mathematics and natural science*. These matters cannot be absolutely certain because Pythagoras' life is to some extent shrouded in legend, but it is probable that is responsible for the well-known *Pythagorean theorem* which says that the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the two sides of a right-angle

triangle. Most importantly, Pythagoras seems to have invented the concept of *theory*. He seems to have invited pure or theoretical mathematics, not the *applied mathematics* geometry which the ancient Egyptians already knew about in constructing pyramids.

Theory is contemplative. Theoretical knowledge beholds the truth for its own sake, not for the sake of practical applications. The standpoint assumed in theoretical knowledge is of detached spectatorship. This attitude is sometimes considered *aristocratic* because presumably only aristocrats have the *leisure* for it. (We have already noted that Pythagoras was aristocratic in restricting the circle of his discussion partners.)

Pythagoras may be considered the founder of natural science because he invented the search for constant mathematical laws behind the show of changing sensory events. He did not remain at the level of mathematical theory, but applied such theory in formulating causal laws mathematically. His personal discovery of laws governing music—e.g., reducing a string of a violin by half raises the tone an octave—still stands today, and it points the way to all the discoveries in physics and chemistry ever since. Pythagoras wanted to make the blooming, buzzing and by itself confusing sensory world intelligible by finding *ratios* or proportions underlying those events. Where these events are known *empirically* by the senses, the underlying ratios are known by theoretical thinking.

Every instance of *force* is the same ratio of *mass* to *acceleration*. Every instance of *energy* is ratio of mass to the *speed of light*. Every *atom* is a ratio of electrons to protons, neutrons, and more recently discovered particles. Every *compound* in chemistry today is known as a ratio of atoms to atoms. Even *biology* the *social sciences*, in trying to imitate the natural sciences, are really imitating Pythagoras. Health is a ratio of height to weight, among many other ratios. Cancer is the breakdown of a ratio of cell growth in one tissue to cell growth in other tissues, it is disproportional growth. Proportionate growth maintaining the ratio requires that growth of one *term of the ratio* not grow of proportion to other terms. Rising prices in a free market are a ratio of *supply* to a *demand* that exceeds it. Neurotic symptoms are a one-to-one ratio between the strength of unconscious impulses and the strength of defense mechanisms. The symptom is a compromise in which both the conscious impulses and the defense mechanisms are allowed to express themselves. *Causal laws* are ratios when stated mathematically. We can say qualitatively that fire is caused by combustible material, friction, and oxygen, but a critical mass of oxygen is needed in a ratio to the mass of the combustible material and the amount of friction. All who seek out quantifiable causal laws follow in the footsteps of Pythagoras.

We shall come back to Pythagoras later in this chapter when address the question of personal immortality. All we have said so far about Pythagoras says nothing about his specific philosophical views about the nature of the cosmos and of the place of human beings in the cosmos.

Plato followed Pythagoras' model in forming an Academy after his teacher *Socrates* was executed for challenging traditions of his city. Western philosophy has continued the ambitious Greek tradition decoding the world in ratios, but also used Greek philosophy for defending Christianity. The same Greek philosophical tradition used to justify Christianity by proving the existence of God undermined the poetic Olympian religion. Athens executed its leading philosopher, *Socrates*, in 399 B.C.. The explanation lies in the great difference between Greek polytheism and Hebrew, Christian, and Islamic theism. Philosophy in Athens promoted awareness that no true God could be limited by other gods.

Philosophy, it must be concluded, was more the self-dissolution than glory of classical Greece. The glory lay in its art. The idea of citizenship originated in Greece. Yet its realization has been surpassed by the modern state. Athenian democracy the advantage of being *participatory democracy* because the city state's size was small enough. Larger modern states must content themselves with *representative democracy*. But because modern states exclude far fewer individuals from citizenship, most would agree that the modern

world has surpassed classical Greece in the very political tradition of democratic citizenship which it inaugurated. Yet few citizens in modern democracies directly participate in political life., though participation increases and *political alienation* tends to decrease as one passes from large cities to smaller townships.

Similarly, the potentials of Greek philosophy, according to most, are realized in the modern world as fully or more than in ancient Greece. Many but not all unclear metaphors have been purged from philosophy. Thus where Plato would say that the grass is a *copy* of an eternal greenness that is alone perfectly green, or that the grass *participated* in greenness, we would say today that greenness as an object of thought rather than of the senses, cannot be green at all, and that the grass *instantiates* or *exemplifies* greenness. What instantiation as a relation between sensory individuals and their non-sensory characteristics may not be perfectly clear, but at least we avoid Plato's confusion of instantiation with a relation like copying which occurs between two sensory things. But Aristotle already made progress over Plato in this question, since he suggested that greenness was *true of* the grass. I will let this example suffice. The general point is that Western philosophy is a tradition in which each generation of philosophers recreates philosophy by *critically* appropriating predecessors. Some progress over time is only to be expected even if the seed is in sixth and fifth century B.C. Greece.

A more convincing case can be made for the unsurpassable beauty of classical Greek art than for the unsurpassability of Greek politics, philosophy, natural science, or mathematics. To understand the Greeks and their art we must realize that art was more than art for the Greeks. They did not seek art for the sake of art, but for the sake of understanding. Art, especially sculpture, belonged essentially to their religion, which Hegel called a *religion of beauty*. There is of course art in the Christian religion, but it is accidental in the sense that God for Christians does not essentially reveal himself through works of art. Sculpture was privileged by a religion in which the imagination fashioned the gods in human form. No matter how much we admire the grace of a classical Greek statue, we do not find it within us to worship it as a god. That is perhaps why we cannot produce classical statues which, being more than imitations, surpass those of ancient Greece. For us art is not religious revelation (Hegel, 1927xi, Pt 2.2 ch 2).



Bridgeman Art Library, London/New York

Hermes Holding the Infant Dionysus (about 340 BC) is attributed to the Greek sculptor Praxiteles. Dionysus, the god of wine, had two distinct aspects—ecstasy and violence. The followers of Dionysus often worshiped him in drunken revelry. This statue of him as an infant with Hermes, the messenger of the gods, was originally made for the Temple of Hera at Olympia.

Microsoft © Encarta © Encyclopedia 2002

The Bible is said to be revelation. In fact it is meant to convey an original self-revelation of God through his acts in history. God does not show himself by the sculptor's chisel or poet's imagination. Any god showing its nature in art work is not God, but is an *idol*. It is not divine, not infinite. Even the Greeks sensed the limitation of their gods. An irresistible *fate* seemed to hang over the gods. A shadow of sadness and resignation over the most beautiful classical statues, the face downcast, the expression somber.

Classical Greece is midway between the ancient East and modern West. Hegel thought that the East is based on *substantiality*, cosmic massiveness. The principle of Western culture is individual *subjectivity*, the human right to personal self-expression (Hegel 1927xv, 406).

Individuals detach themselves from a substantial social or cosmic whole by private judgment. Some ancient Greeks already achieved such detachment. Yet superstitious Greek dependence on natural omens showed that self-confident judgment remained limited. Natural disaster destroys naive trust in nature. The Greeks sought to restore trust in nature. Classical Greeks could not return to the naive trust prevailing before natural catastrophe. Once bonds of trust in nature are broken, they cannot be reestablished as before. Instead, the Greeks established a self-conscious, artfully constructed trust. They produced poetically a second nature more beautiful than the first, a humanized nature in which they could feel at home, developing a self-confidence based on a renewed confidence in nature under the power of human-like gods.

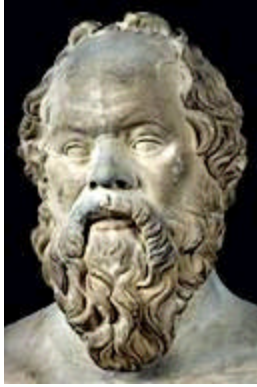
That Greece sought artistic beauty implies, on this interpretation, that a rupture with nature has occurred. We exert ourselves to find beauty in nature by its transformation into art to escape our estrangement from it. We create art because beauty is not found in nature immediately.

Eastern cultures withdrew trust from the ordinary natural world by placing it in a king, God, or mystical release in the Infinite. The Greeks restored trust through art. At least this is the interpretation offered by Hegel. God's separation of the Red Sea to permit the Hebrew escape from Egypt under *Moses* was a rare direct divine intervention in nature. For Greece most natural events were integrated into *myths* about human-like supernatural gods. Thunder and lightning were harmless ravings of *Zeus*, the reigning Olympian. A volcano was the smokestack of a subterranean metal shop run by *Cyclops*, one-eyed monsters serving the Olympians. A mountain range was where Zeus buried giants under masses of clay and stone.

Such myths did not explain nature, but tamed and humanized it by *make-believe*. The triumph of human-like individual Olympians over their more brutish *Titan* predecessors who superficially personified natural forces were an expression of Greek self-confidence and trust in nature. This artfully produced trust is one reason, according to Hegel, why Greek political life was relatively free of despotism. Celebrating human values as divine supposes that their power is not limited to that of human beings, and this may have emboldened Greeks to stand their own and remain free of despotic protectors.

The Greeks, we have said, were closer to Locke than to Hobbes in their view of the state of nature. They were relatively secure in their mythologized environment than the Hebrews were in their, even though no Olympian god was all-powerful. Greece's resistance to despotism may be explained by its artistic creativity (Hegel, 1927xi, Pt 2.1). Nature was transfigured by the charm of tall tales. Art was a partial substitute for technological control of nature.

Eventually technological control is needed by any society if it is to survive. The security won through art is false, subject to repeated natural disasters. The *Greek miracle* was short-lived. Mythical make-believe succumbed to the truth of literal fact. This truth was forced on unsuspecting Athenians by philosophical spoilsports such as *Socrates*. Socrates exposed the contradictions and confusions contained in the myths by questioning and embarrassing ordinary Athenians of his time. Plato, his pupil, tried to create a universal system of philosophy with which to replace changing local myth. Yet the miracle lasted long enough to produce what centuries of *Hellenists* have considered the most beautiful civilization ever created.



Giraudon/Art Resource, NY

Socrates (shown here in a copy of a bust originally attributed to the Greek sculptor Lysippus) was a Greek philosopher and teacher who lived in Athens, Greece, in the 400s BC. He profoundly altered Western philosophical thought through his influence on his most famous pupil, Plato, who passed on Socrates's teachings in his writings known as dialogues. Socrates taught that every person has full knowledge of ultimate truth contained within the soul and needs only to be spurred to conscious reflection in order to become aware of it. His criticism of injustice in Athenian society led to his prosecution and a death sentence for allegedly corrupting the youth of Athens. Microsoft © Encarta © Encyclopedia 2002

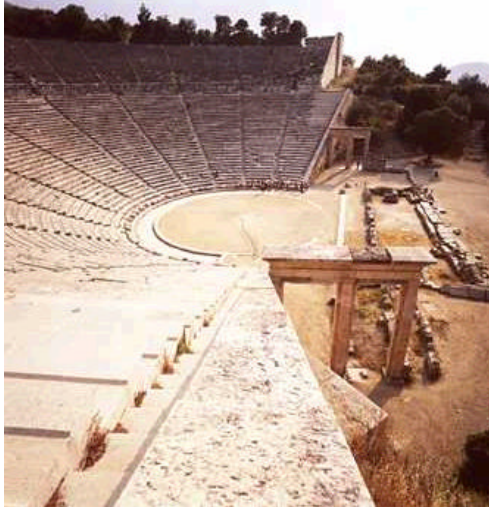
2. Forms of Classical Greek Art

In *classical sculpture*, we shall see, classical Greece reached its highest expression. Statuary embodies the classical ideal, and in Greece *classical art* appears to have achieved a unique flowering. Such art reveals a satisfying correspondence or *harmony* between *form* and *content*, the sensory art work and its meaning.

Symbolic art in Egypt is marked by *disharmony* between the material *artwork* and its *meaning*. The sensory work of art is not a self-contained whole. It points to meaning that it fails to express, of which even the artist is unaware. It opens onto a meaning not yet fully defined. Such art is an unsatisfying riddle still in search of a solution (Hegel, 1927xii, 116-17).

Symbolic art thus fails to reveal its meaning. The search for the meaning comes to a happy conclusion only by crossing the threshold from symbolic to classical art. In classical art, the meaning indefinitely referred to by symbolic art comes to be defined in and through the art object itself. Further, if a creation of a classical work defines what the work refers to, is the self-definition of its meaning, no special *interpretation* is needed. Art ceases to point beyond itself. It satisfies our desire for wholeness of meaning.

The spectator comes to rest in contemplation of the aesthetic object. Kant used the experience of coming to rest in the object to define *aesthetic experience*, the experience of beauty in general. The Greeks invented aesthetic spectatorship directed to human art. On an intellectual level, and directed to nature, Pythagoras called this spectatorship became theoretical contemplation. The idea of spectatorship was realized in the architecture of ancient Greek theaters.



Roger Wood/Corbis
Theater at Epidaurus

The *aesthetic point of view*, contemplating the object as an individual for its own sake, needs to be distinguished from the *cognitive point of view*. From this second point of view, we constantly go beyond the object searching for its causes and effects. It is sometimes difficult for a trained musician to have an aesthetic experience of a musical performance. A violinist may analyze the finger technique that produces the sound instead of listening to the sound itself. In such a situation the cognitive point of view interferes with the aesthetic point of view.

A third point of view is the *acquisitive point of view*. Kant called it *inclination*. From this point of view we possess, use, or consume the object. In still-life we enjoy an apple from the aesthetic point of view. We study the climate which produced the apple from the cognitive point of view. But if we never acted from inclination we would starve. And if we never took the cognitive point of view we would be far less successful in satisfying our inclinations. But we can survive without the aesthetic point of view, which seems to make art a kind of luxury.

Yet art becomes a necessity, itself the object of a strong inclination, to individuals who have been surrounded by it and educated to appreciate it. This is similar to the way in which we have a strong inclination to eat with knives and forks instead of eating by our hands. If we are deprived of knives and forks we suffer from the deprivation, this is the sense in which we *need*. If we are made physically or psychologically ill we need it. If we do not need it, it can only be the object of an idle *desire*. It is clear that some needs are *innate needs* and some are *acquired needs*. The need to enjoy art is, like the need for other things of civilization, an acquired need.

From the moral point of view, which Kant distinguished from the point of view of inclination, we ought to respect the liberty of others as an *end in itself*, never as a mere means to the satisfaction of our own inclination. Other persons have their own ends and inclinations, and we should respect the legitimacy of their pursuits and even lend assistance to them so long as we all stay within the limits of such respect and of our moral duty.

Yet the moral point of view, according to the contemporary German philosopher *Jürgen Habermas*, is contained in the cognitive point of view. He rejects Kant's separation of theoretical reason and practical (moral) reason, since he believes that to pursue truth is to respect the free pursuits of others as the source of possible tests and refutations of our own beliefs. Kant always had difficulty getting people to actually do what they ought to do. Habermas believes that if we pursue science and truth generally, we will realize that verification is a public activity in which we test our own views by seeking the agreement of others. But

another person's agreement with you has no value in confirming your belief if you do not respect the other person's freedom of thought. Thus if we were to pursue truth really well, seeking universal agreement, we would respect the free pursuits of others without even trying. Morality would be automatic.

Great art in the West reveals something significant, its thought *content* values in sensory *form*. Other art entertains or decorates, signifying little. Great art enlightens. We recognize such art because we come away somehow changed by some new insight into ourselves or the world. If we no longer respond to great *museum art in this way, past generations have*. According to Hegel's theory of such art, the great art of the past consists in monuments to a discovery of truth by our ancestors. In beholding such art we bring to life phases of self-education through which our culture has passed. We retravel stages in the construction of our present identity and thus come to know ourselves. Socrates that great commandment of philosophy was: *know thyself*. If Hegel is right, you can progress toward this goal by taking an history of art class.

The construction and reconstruction of logical stages in history is called a *dialectic* by Hegel. The term means approximately the same as *dialogue* in Greek. But where a dialogue is a discussion with contemporary viewpoints, a dialectic is a logically developing sequence of past viewpoints ending the general viewpoint of the present age. All particular contemporary viewpoints dialogue with one another only within the general viewpoint of the age, though certain particular viewpoints may show that the general viewpoint is beginning to crumble, pointing to a new age.

We shall see later than Hegel even believes that God knows himself through human self-knowledge in art. Such a metaphysical interpretation of art was rejected by Ernst Gombrich, one of the most noted art historians of the twentieth century, would only grant that art expresses eras of history. Gombrich is typical of the twentieth century in his skepticism of Hegel's metaphysical pretensions.

Opponents to Hegel's view argue that putting the world's art in logical categories where one is derived from the other runs the danger of forcing art to fit Hegel's dialectical philosophy. Hegel would have replied that the dialectic appearing in his work is a true reconstruction of the dialectic that has constructed itself in actual history, not a subjective fantasy imposed by Hegel on history. The best approach for the student is to see how enlightening Hegel's reconstructions as we approach artworks knowing all that non-philosophical art history can teach us.

Great children's art can enlighten children everywhere. Great art without qualification must be capable of enlightening all human beings across all national and cultural boundaries, at least must be capable of doing so at some stage of their development. If Tibetan Buddhist chants are great art, your horizon can be extended by them as well as by Mozart. Great art is a universal language in which artists can address a *universal audience*.

Suppose a materialist world view is correct. The *referent* of great art, what it is about, is then atoms. Human life lacks purpose in such a world, since it is only a bag of atoms. If by contrast reality is spirit, the spirit is the referent of great art. This will be so even if artists refer to their object under some other description, or are unable to state the object to which they refer. Great art has a referential, cognitive function: it puts us in touch with reality, or at least with something real. Yet it does not convey *discursive knowledge* by subject-predicate statements about reality. The artist does not openly seek to teach. He or she is not didactic. A great artist lures and tricks us into enlightenment before we know what has happened. The main aim is not to entertain, but great art nonetheless teaches by entertaining.

Great art is a quest—more or less successful—for knowledge by *direct acquaintance* with reality as concretely present. If all reality cannot be fully present, great art at its most ambitious fails. Yet it may reveal a finite individual as an expression of all reality, or remind us of all reality without fully revealing it.

Successful classical art is the happy conclusion of the artistic quest. It reveals reality. Of course illusions of success must be distinguished from true success. The revelation of reality under a false description is an illusion of successful classical art. Classical Greek art of the gods itself was perhaps illusory in this way.

Any spirit revealed by classical Greek art is not infinite. It is the individual spirit of a finite god. If the knowledge sought is that of infinite spirit, a finite, surveyable work of art is inadequate.

Sculpture illustrates classical art more clearly than other art forms (Hegel 1927xiii, 40). Classical art refers to the ideal, harmonious spirit of a human being. The Olympian gods share with statuary a human content. Sculpture of a non-human subject, such as animal sculpture or modern abstract sculpture, falls short of being a statue. If animal sculpture is small it consists in figurines, while if it is large like the Sphinx it is closer to architecture.

The Sphinx is non-functional architecture. Architecture in the more common sense—houses, churches—is functional. It depends on a purpose beyond itself, as a house serves to shelter human beings. Non-functional architecture does not chiefly serve to enclose, exhibit, or protect anything beyond itself. Non-functional architecture includes Stonehenge, Egyptian obelisks, the Tower of Babel, and the Eiffel Tower. They are more architectural than statuesque because the form is not human. Because non-functional architecture is useless, it realizes architecture as an art form more than functional architecture.

Non-functional architectural art is symbolic. An obelisk refers, by similarity of form, to a meaning beyond it. Sculpture in the human form is an ideal vehicle for humanistic classical art. Yet the Statue of Liberty, of architectural dimensions, may be more symbolic than classical, since its human form is out of proportion to true human form.

Unlike a statue, the obelisk refers to its object without revealing it. Suppose the obelisk symbolizes a light ray joining the sun god Ra with the earth. The sun in turn may be symbolic of spiritual enlightenment. The obelisk shares a spiritual content with the statue, but lacks a spiritual form. A statue is spiritual with respect to both form and content.

Classical sculpture is not limited to Greece. Despite the stiffness of much Egyptian sculpture, classical statuary can be found in Egypt before Greece. Yet Egyptian statues of the gods are often non-classical. They are often partly animal. An animal figure expresses an intuitive quickness belonging to a non-individualized soul. Yet we attain self-consciousness as individuals by contemplating what is human.

Classical sculpture does not portray living individuals, complete with warts and blemishes; it embodies individuals of ideal beauty. Classical art includes associated classical architecture, such as a Greek temple. Yet the temple is not the center of attention. It displays the statue of a god.

Classical mythology also exists. Greek mythology is classical because it portrays gods individualized as persons, with knowledge and volition. The primitive Titans are superficial personifications of natural forces, expressing a less classical mythology. Classical mythology is in the background of classical sculpture. Sculptors started from the mythology of Greece, proceeding to specify a god or hero of mythical legend with precision and luminous clarity, leaving less to the imagination. Since something is left to the imagination in interpreting classical sculpture, the statues as barbarians saw them were doubtless not full revelations of their subjects. The temple statue brought mythology into focus at a single point.

The Greek historian *Herodotus* (ca 480-425 B.C.) held that Greek poets, the creators of myth, created the Greek gods. He also held that the Greeks took their gods from the Egyptians: the poets creatively assimilated Egyptian material. The sculptors related to poets in a similarly creative way: they defined gods.

Classical statues reveal the god's abiding character. All that is circumstantial is eliminated. The god revealed in the statue is serene, disengaged from action. The pose contrasts with the rigidity of many Egyptian statues, which stand at attention. A Greek god stands insolently at ease. Its weight on one leg, its other leg maintains balance. In pre-classical *archaic statues* this ease is symbolized by a smile. In classical statues the whole body is suffused with life. The smile symbolizing life disappears. The facial expression acquires a contemplative, severe look, and a touch of sadness.

Classical tragedy eventually forced the gods out of absolute statuesque isolation into interaction with other gods and with human beings. Yet in tragedy, Hegel notes, a dissolution of the Greek religion of beauty is underway. The dramatic interaction of gods among themselves and with human beings betrays their finite relative character. Greek sculpture was the high point of the religion of art: the isolation and mutual indifference of the statues expressed the divinity of the gods more than is done by myth or drama. Drama shows the falsehood of these pretensions.

Johann Joachim Winckelmann in the eighteenth century stated the equation between *Greece, beauty, harmony, the idealization of reality, classicism, and sculpture* presented above. In philosophy, he accepted Plato's equation of the *good* with the *beautiful*. He emphasized the value of beautiful art in *moral education*, since beauty inspires imitation. Imitation of the Greeks, he believed, alone permits us to be great and, if possible, to go beyond mere imitation. In this sense, classical Greece is a school to all the world. Winckelmann aimed at a *romantic* and hence finally impossible restoration of classical antiquity. Yet we today avoid uncritical enthusiasm for classical Greece by recalling the incoherence of many gods. Any god worthy of worship, is both all-powerful and all-good. Limited by a Stoic-like Fate hovering above, Greece's gods failed to satisfy this description. Classical architecture about us today is not a return to classical Greek culture, though it honors the Greek experience of beauty as one source of our identity. We know that history cannot go backwards, and that any attempt to go back to an ancient time produces something new and unintended.

A classical statue is frozen in suspended animation. Though reproducing a human form, it is of inanimate matter. Living sculptors withdraw in reverence before the god, a being of stone in which they invest their creativity. The more nearly divine the statue, the less important the sculptor, who is a mere vehicle of revelation. This disappearance of the individual artist before the god whom the art reveals is also found in lyrical choral hymns by *Pindar* (521-441 B.C.). Different selves, singing hymns to the gods, fuse in inner feeling. But in *song* the singer, unlike the sculptor, survives in the work of art. Singers achieve both unison with one another and a sympathetic oneness with the god to whom the hymn is addressed. To address a hymn to a god is to identify with the divine standpoint, formulating the communication so the god will understand and accept it.

The classical Greek religion did not stop with statues and hymns. The Greeks refused to give everything to the gods. Their worship included *animal sacrifices* which were distinctive because human beings celebrating the sacrifice consumed the best part of the meat. They left the bones for the gods. Sacrifice thus was not self-denial. It was a feast of self-affirmation. Since the animal symbolized the god, sacrifice united the human being with the god. But the god was rather sacrificed to us. The result was the religious celebration of living human beings, *living works of art*. A statue is self-alienating for the artist. The feast of sacrifice celebrates our union with the god. The human *art of living* is a revelation of the divine, and Something of this art of living still unites the different Mediterranean cultures today.

Such celebration is already present in pre-classical Greek mystery religions. *Bacchic* and *Eleusinian* mystery cults, which practiced such sacrifices, show an undercurrent of Eastern pantheism. This long known Eastern *Dionysian* element was recalled by Friedrich *Nietzsche* to counter the one-sidedly *Appolonian*

perception of classical Greece presented by Winckelmann. The spirit of Apollo is expressed in the calm detachment of classical statues. The Apollonian spirit also expresses itself in living human beings, living works of art. The athletic heroes of Greek games illustrate this. By self-cultivation artists become their own works of art.

The inarticulate outpourings of Greek *mystery religions* and the sober grace of Apollonian *athletes* are both living artworks. They are opposed as inner feeling and outward form. Their union abandons the opposition of Dionysian and Apollonian spirits for living works of art formed of language: *literature*. Poetry can depend on purely oral tradition; literature is appreciated only by literate readers. Either way, language is both inward and outward. Inner feeling and thought becomes external in words. Unlike sculptors who express their meaning with words, poets interpret their own meaning. Being verbal, literature is already interpretation of its meaning: it is *self-interpretation*.

Today we tend to restrict poetry to lyric poetry. Yet in an older sense there are several *poetic genres*: epic, lyric, drama, the novel, and so on. Greek literature arises from the epic poems of *Homer*, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. An *epic poem* is the story of the formation of a nation's character, often through legendary triumph over foreign adversaries.

Greek epics are marked by a clear distinction between gods and human actors. This is missing in Hindu epics such as the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Ramayana*. These Hindu epics presuppose one pantheistic God openly or secretly manifested everywhere. Though gods may intervene, Greek epic poetry is distinguished from mythology by focusing on the exploits of human heroes. This is a good example of how a civilization's metaphysical world view, its theology and cosmology, gain expression in its art, in this case in its literature. It is impossible to understand the art of a civilization without understanding its metaphysics. The Greeks believed that this world and its are fully real, and that the gods hover over their exploits.

In Indian epics human action is relegated to the background relative to the action of gods. Human heroes are fully real only as the incarnation (avatar) of God, *Brahma*. The hero in these epics is not concerned with conquest of a foreign adversary, such as the native Indian population discovered by the invading Indo-Europeans who subsequently created Hinduism. The Hindu hero *Ajurna*, son of the God *Vishnu*, wrestles with the moral dilemma of taking up arms against kinsmen in an established Hindu society. Heroic action takes a back seat to its justification. Further, the individual hero is seen as an expression or incarnation of a god. Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu, who in turn incarnates the infinite God *Brahma*. Greek coordination of distinct human and divine agents is absent from these Hindu epic poems. The purely human heroism of *Achilles* is absent.

The difference between Greek and Hindu literatures lies in part in the fact that they presuppose and express different metaphysical world views. But if there is metaphysics in literature and in art more generally, an understanding of metaphysics will be required to understand literature and art. Further, if among the different metaphysical beliefs there is a *true metaphysics*, *art criticism* will have to include the criticism of metaphysical beliefs to be complete. This justifies a metaphysical interpretation and criticism of art alongside an understanding of *styles*, *technique*, and so on. This would be true unless a work is nothing but style and technique, being all *form* and no *content*. Some *abstract painting* seems to fall into this category, since we do not know what the painting is about. But it remains possible that it is about something other than the *things* or *persons* in which traditional *representational art* is about.

An external threat to a nation calls for a heroic response. Such a response defines the nation's identity. Epic poetry preserves this response in the memory of the nation. It has a patriotic function. It presents the life and history of a nation.

The poet's individual character does not enter into the epic. The poet withdraws before events of an objective, historical, public nature. The poet's hearers are spectators (but spectators with a favorite team). Beyond any aesthetic value, the epic is educational. It inducts the young into a national tradition. In relating the exploits of heroes, it portrays the total life of the nation. The *Theogony* of Hesiod (eighth century B.C.) is not an epic because it relates a world of gods abstracted from the human world. The saga of generations of the gods unfolds in a parallel world divorced from historical human struggles.

An epic presents values exemplified in the exploits of human heroes. A recounting of these exploits is at once a panoramic view of the nation's whole life (political and economic institutions, domestic life, and religion). A library of national epics is a gallery of national spirits (Hegel 1927xiv, 347).

Unlike tragedy, the epic unfolds slowly, so each aspect of collective life of the nation may be contemplated as in a parade. The epic knows no dramatic haste. Its wordiness and detail seem to us a fault. The *Iliad* contains extensive descriptions of artifacts, and such descriptions seem dry to us; we live in a less poetic age in which tools are mass-produced and impersonal.

In the *heroic age* of the Trojan Wars celebrated by Homer, prose is not distinguished from poetry. Poets who preceded Homer passed on legends of these wars by oral tradition. In a society in which education is still oral, the rhythm and cadence of poetry are aids to memory.

It is in its heroic age that a nation becomes self-conscious. It comes to feel at home in its world. But life is not yet highly regulated. Institutions are not yet taken for granted. The individual knows no private identity and power of judgment over against collective values. Heroic action is naive. It shows simple patriotic feeling and courage, like some heroes of old-fashioned American Westerns who never question received values of law and order, and who are free of psychological complexes.

Nationalism creates a myth of an heroic age in the nation's past. Whether *heroes* really existed depends on what values are true values, and what historical individuals were courageously committed to those values.

The heroic age of a nation is not its earliest stage of development. A people first undergoes a dominant foreign influence which precludes the self-confidence and creative freedom necessary for native poetic self-expression. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, the *United States* was dominated by European culture. The Greeks, as they first reached the Mediterranean, were exposed to Near Eastern culture. This *pre-heroic era* for the Greeks was at first an age in which they had not yet developed political life fixed to the land.

In the heroic age, the political life of the city-state system exists but has not become routine. Social relations are feudal. A feudal king like *Agamemnon* must avoid offending other chiefs; he needs their support in war. In the heroic age obedience to a king is not automatic. It is still a morally charged, motivated more by honor than fear of punishment. In the Hindu epic of the *Bhagavad Gita*, as in the *Iliad*, a hero's participation or nonparticipation in battle is a major theme.

Today an epic poem from a past age holds interest as the story of a nation's rightful struggle and triumph over an adversary in world history. Homer's epics recount a Greek victory over the East symbolized by the Trojans. The German tales of *Siegfried* and his companions hold less interest. They are tales of a declining culture whose heritage most modern Germans renounce. Hebrews and Greeks have greater meaning for the West today.

Homer's epics have meaning for us because of the destiny of Greek culture in the traditional ideology of Western civilization. Greece assumed a world-historical mission against Asia to advance the story of

freedom. It then relayed the chief role in this story to Rome. World history, conceived this way, is a series of heroic struggles celebrated in epic poems. It is not a single protracted epic. An epic is the story of a single hero or band of heroes. World history presents a succession of heroes. The unity of the entire story of freedom is not perceptible in the career of a single hero. It is accessible to us only to thought. The struggle for freedom is not that of one nation; yet it may temporarily be represented by a nation, great man, or woman.

From the educational standpoint, the total life of a nation is the subject matter of an epic. From the literary standpoint, this life is merely a background. Conflict and action take the foreground. *Tragedy* also centers on conflict and action. Epic conflict takes place between different nations, taking the form of war. A tragic conflict occurs between compatriots, and thus assumes the form of *civil war*. Shakespeare's *Henry V*, about the victory at Agincourt against the French, is more epic than tragic. A connected distinction is that epic poetry is concerned with an unambiguous struggle between good and evil, while tragedy is concerned with conflicting goods.

Beyond its patriotic content, an epic is an adventure story. Tragedy focuses on the character of the *tragic hero* and its fateful self-manifestation through action. Epic focuses on unpredictable obstacles on the odyssey along the way to realization of the hero's aim, not the aim in itself.

The character of a tragic hero is marked by extraordinary ambition. The epic hero also rises above the ordinary. Otherwise we could not speak of a hero. But the hero is an all-around individual, embodying all major traits of the people, not dominated by a single passion.

To say that an epic is an *adventure story* is to say that apparently accidental (adventitious) circumstance play a role. An adventure contains surprises which cannot be predicted from the character of the heroes. However, in an adventure story which is also the epic of a nation, situational surprises shape and reveal the character of the people. *Fate* has its place more in epic than tragedy, contrary to common opinion. In tragedy there are no innocent victims: *character is fate*. The fate of the tragic hero only appears due to external accident. *Dramatic haste* shows the inevitable link between character and fate.

The epic hero lives in a more unsettled world where an ever-changing environment holds ever-new surprises (e.g., Ulysses on his seemingly endless voyages in Homer's *Odyssey*). Each detour along the way occasions a separate *episode*.

Yet we must not suppose that the number of episodes can be infinite. If the episodes went on to infinity, the work would fall short of being an epic. It would be impossible to establish single authorship for all the episodes. New writers would come along with no end in sight. The case is quite different with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The personality of the epic poet does not intrude upon panorama which unfolds. But that does not mean that there might be different authors. A classical epic is a single whole, something which an endless soap opera cannot be. The cross-references which bind all episodes together in Homer argue for single authorship.

The *age of epic poetry* (for example, the age of Homer, ninth century B.C.) must be distinguished from the legendary *heroic age* which forms the subject matter of epic poetry. Epic poetry celebrates the heroic age, but is removed from it in time. *Homer* was separated from the *Trojan wars* by centuries.

The heroic age lacks sufficient self-awareness required for its own epic self-celebration. Manners are too coarse to permit such refinement. *Epic poets* participate mentally in the values of a past heroic age. They identify with it and have faith in its greatness.

The point may be illustrated by the United States. The heroic age of the United States, part fabulation and part fact, occurred during the conquest of the *frontier*. If this is true, until the frontier as it receded westward in the nineteenth century,

what we know as the American character today was not yet formed. This seems to be why Americans today seems to identify with the struggle against the frontier more than with the essentially English values represented by a George Washington. But the *Western* as a literary-theatrical genre in novels and motion pictures dates from the twentieth century. That century developed epic poetry in the form of the Western because it still believed in the values of rugged individualism, law and order, hard work, equality of opportunity, and simple faith celebrated in the Western. They were the values that made America great. No one could complain of his or her lot in life as the European masses did because the frontier was there to spell opportunity for anyone who was ready to take it. The frontier did not make us all equal, but it gave everyone the same chance to show whether one was the equal or not of one's neighbor.

A complete *cycle of national history* goes through four stages: 1. a pre-heroic age, 2. an heroic age, 3. an age of epic poetry, and finally 4. an age of *decadence* in which the public no longer sufficiently identifies with the heroic values to celebrate them. Decadence makes for a *national identity crisis*. It may be resolved either by returning to the age of epic, or by embarking on a new heroic age to define new values more relevant to the present. It is possible that the values of the frontier are irrelevant to the present. Many people say that guns, which could be justified in frontier days, are worse than irrelevant in a contemporary urban environment. But they are so widespread in American cities because a continuing frontier mentality says that government cannot protect us, that that an individual needs to rely on him- or herself for self-protection. However, what would the new heroic values look like? What are the main challenges in our lives that frontier values are helpless to overcome?

Some nations have gone through several such cycles. France has seen a heroic age of the *Gauls* against Rome (though the Gauls were defeated), *Roland* against the Arabs, *Joan of Arc* against the English, and the French revolutionaries against Europe. *John Kennedy* proposed a *New Frontier*, implying that the old frontier no longer satisfied a fundamental need for a frontier embedded in the American character since the heroic age of the Old West. Since then the United States seems to have hesitated between, on the hand, decadence and an identity crisis (e.g., *Carter* and *Malaise*) in which frontier heroes are mocked and, on the other hand, a return to an age of epic poetry in which Americans model themselves on frontier heroes (Kennedy and the Moon, Johnson and the Green Berets, Reagan against the Evil Empire, George Bush rounding up international terrorists "dead or alive"). Americans who entered the age of decadence sneered at *John Wayne*. Most of them experienced an identity crisis because they came away with no compelling alternative way to model national character.

One great challenge of our age, it may be said, is to extend a *war on terrorism* into a war on the *world poverty* that is a breeding ground for terrorism. In a world where there are ecological *limits to growth* (Club of Rome, 1972), this might require a marginal reduction of American economic growth rates along with a transfer of economic growth to the poorest countries of the world. But Americans are addicted to economic growth and the highest per capital consumption of energy in the world. Economic markets are an untamed frontier of opportunity in which the man who has what it takes achieves true financial independence. Both admired successful Americans and self-reproachful unsuccessful Americans live off the frontier mentality. To redefine success would be an heroic struggle in America.

Would it really be better for American to become more like Europe, where individuals are protected by the state against unforeseen unemployment or medical expenses, where the state pays for higher education and even for student lodging? For now this may have to remain an unanswered question. Some individuals in Europe are wealthier than others, but the extremes are not nearly so great as in America. It is much more difficult in Europe to go from rags to riches, and if you do you are less likely to be admired as successful are more likely to be suspected of dishonesty. European banks are far less helpful to would-be entrepreneurs looking for start-up capital. In short, there is no European Dream like the *American Dream*. But Europe

may not be the only alternative for America. Heroes create values which cannot be created in committee. At the end of his administration President Eisenhower formed a national commission to define the country's values. America, competing with the Communists, needed values with which to win the hearts and minds of the world's masses. But if values arise as creative and unpredictable individual responses to problems, they may not be forthcoming from existing institutions with their pressures to conform to existing values.

3. Does Epic Poetry Have a Future?

The *Iliad* which celebrates the triumph of the Greeks over King Priam of Troy find justification in Western world history as part of the story of freedom. The Trojan anticipate this struggle. Troy was pre-Greek, was in Asia Minor, and was ruled by a king who protected the population in the manner of an Oriental despot from a citadel fortress. The struggle of West against East was later present in the wars of the ancient Greeks and Persia.

We may wonder what an epic of the future might be. It would depend on future heroic struggles. Though the heroic age of the nineteenth century the American frontier is past, this age has yet to find its Homer. Despite the proliferation of Westerns, the legends of the West have yet to be enshrined in a single nationally acclaimed epic or cinematographic poem. Though the materials lie at hand, the classical American epic has yet to be written. But as time passes, the values of the frontier become less and less relevant to the challenges faced by urban America and the interdependent world of today. The idea of a war on terrorism with the aim of defeating an "axis of evil" or capturing Osama bin Laden "dead or alive" places such a war in the epic context of a struggle of good against evil, ultimately of good guys against bad guys in the Old West. But can new struggles be so easily assimilated to all epic contexts?

A true epic of the future might also depend on a truly new heroic age. The specter of nuclear holocaust dampens enthusiasm for military heroism except possibly for certain terrorist groups. Human rights as the basis of further world history erode the basis of new heroic ages *founded* on nationalism. The contemporary age *often* seems one of dialogue, negotiation, and technical proficiency not heroism. That a future epic would achieve standing in world literature by celebrating nationalistic struggle now seems improbable, though Israel and Palestine might be exceptions. This leaves the door open to epic poetry celebrating moral substitutes for militaristic nationalism, what the American *pragmatist* philosopher *William James* called *the moral equivalent of war*: James, who lived during the Spanish-American War, noted the way in which war is capable of uniting and motivating a nation, and he lamented the difficulty of igniting such energy for peaceful struggles, like President Johnson's *war on poverty* of the 1960's. Could the global ecological struggle, the struggle against global poverty, or the struggle for human rights become a moral equivalent of war? What would a hero capable of capturing the public imagination do in such a war? Could *non-violent heroes* like *Gandhi* or *Martin Luther King, Jr.* become the heroes of the *moral equivalent of epic struggle* in the future?

Most of all, any great epic poetry in the future must depend not just the existence but also the success of a great future heroic struggle. To believe in the future of epic literature is to believe in the future of epic poetry that does not merely live off the success of historical heroic struggles. Nor can it live, like *Star Wars*, off purely legendary or fantastic heroic struggles. The retreat into legendary or purely fantastic struggles seems to reflect a need for epic heroism which is not satisfied by the real world. Could a *war on terrorism*, if successful, satisfy such a need and at and eliminate the legendary or fantastic character of epic heroism in motion pictures?

The contrary of epic poetry is *lyric poetry*. Here poets recover their subjective identity which in epic poetry had been submerged in objective, public events to express inner emotions and responses to events. Lyric poetry shares prehistorical origins

with music and dance. It exists at all stages of civilization, and in all cultures. In ancient Greece, *Pindar* stands out with particular brilliance. The personality of *Homer* so withdraws before epic events that some have wondered whether such a man existed. The question has not been asked about Pindar. He wrote hymns celebrating athletic champions. Yet the athlete was honored by being sung by Pindar as much as Pindar was honored by the privilege of singing his praises.

Such lyric reflects upon, amplifies, and communicates private strivings of the individual, making them public.

Ancient Greek poetry culminates in *classical tragedy* rather than lyric poetry. Modern *individualistic lyric poetry*, in which the poet wallows in his or her own subjective feelings, would have threatened the community ethic of the ancient city. *Oriental lyric poetry*, expressing shared identification with its divine object, seems to lie at the prehistorical basis of all poetry, including epic and Greek tragedy. Historically, tragedy arose from *lyrical ritual chants* taken from the *mystery cult* surrounding *Dionysus*, a god of Oriental origin. The lyricism of the lone individual, which can be found in Shakespearean heroes like *Hamlet*, may be the culmination of modern literature; collective lyricism of chants is the point of departure for classical tragedy.

Epic shows the life of a nation. In traditional lyric poetry, the poet's subjectivity expresses the subjectivity of the group. The traditional lyric poet is the agent of the community's wish to articulate its collective feeling. Modern lyric poetry, on the other hand, can communicate novel or purely eccentric feeling.

Tragedy combines the subjectivity of individual *lyric feeling* and the objectivity of *epic action*. It begins with a *protagonist* emerging from the common feeling of the *chorus* by individual self-assertion in action. Subjectivity does not remain closed in itself or express itself merely in lyrical outpourings. It is released in action and conflict with others. External action is common to drama and the *epic*. But for tragedy action is not an adventure serving an unambiguously good cause, but the exhibition of rare individual *character*. The Greeks produced the first tragic theater in history. In the Orient individual subjectivity is not independent enough of a substantial cosmic absolute of god to assert its own human claims dramatically. Such claims become possible in ancient Greek aristocracy where each clan head, like *Achilles*, had an independent will independent of that of his king or god.

Tragic conflict arises because an individual identifies with a single end with such *passion* that other implied ends are blindly stomped under foot. Sophocles' *Antigone* identifies exclusively with an ancient *family* code of ethics. She is compelled to seek a burial for her treasonous brother in defiance of her uncle and King *Creon*, who represents the newer principle of the *state*. The family is seen as an essentially *non-artificial and hence natural institution* which is governed by an eternal *natural law* assigning *natural rights* to all individuals in the family, like a brother's right to a burial imposing a *natural duty* on a sister. Rights and duties within the state, by contrast, are artificial and hence non-natural. Antigone's identification with family ethics is unswerving, and she destroys herself in her unbending stubbornness.

The state's triumph cancels the ancient sovereignty of the *patriarchal family* in which the family father enjoys a *sovereign life and death power* over all members of the family. The idea that the family is a natural institution with its eternal *unwritten law* doubtless results from the fact that the origin of the family is forgotten in the distant past, while the ancient Greeks still had a collective memory of the origin of states. In fact we know that there is no single family structure that is eternal and everywhere present. Family structures emerge and differentiate themselves in social evolution. They are perhaps not created by the decision of a ruler or legislature, but that does not mean that they are eternal or uniform. In this sense we must say that Antigone was wrong and Creon was right. Family values are important, but the good of the

state in which the family finds a subordinate place according to the constitution and laws of the state is a higher, more comprehensive good. Stubborn one-sidedness makes Antigone representative of Greek tragedy.

Modern tragedy, unlike classical Greek tragedy, culminates in the hero's awareness of guilt, of the limitation and narrowness of his or her aim. The hero grows in awareness, achieving a kind of salvation through *reconciliation* with an inescapable opposing force. This reconciliation softens the tragedy. Modern tragedy (e.g., Shakespeare) is thus less tragic than its Greek model in which the hero frequently dies without an reconciliation, in which the necessary reconciliation is left for the *chorus* to accomplish.

Tragedy, the defeat of finite aims, is justified as a means to learning and reconciliation. It leads to discovery of a higher more concrete truth than the one which the hero first represented. If comedy is drama with a happy ending, modern tragedy is really *tragicomedy*. Modern tragedy exemplified by *Othello*, who before his death recognizes the depth of his error born of jealousy. And *Macbeth* realizes in the end the wages which heedless ambition have earned for him. This awareness of a guilt verging on sin, and the hero's very need for inner reconciliation with the opposing force, are modern, even Christian.

Thus *modern tragedy* thus appears to attain higher insight than *Greek tragedy*. There is a related difference between modern and Greek tragic heroes. The Greek tragic hero identified with a substantial institution such as the family or state; the modern protagonist achieves greater emancipation from institutions, identifying with little beyond his or her own passion, ambition, or psychological complex. Take Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for example. His father, King of Denmark, has been murdered and the murderer sits on the throne with Hamlet's mother. Ancient Greek identification with the family would require resolute action of an individual in such a situation. But instead Hamlet is given to procrastination and soul-searching, and seemingly lost in philosophizing: "to be or not to be...." It is as if the greater alienation or guilt of the modern protagonist facilitated the greater insight and reconciliation eventually achieved (Hegel 1927xv, 562). Hamlet's tragedy lies in the expansiveness of his inner life, which disconnects him from the external action which his situation calls for, but in the end he does avenge his father's murder while seeking reconciliation with Denmark by making sure his country understands his act.

The concept of tragedy is as applicable to biography, current events, and world history as to literature. Suppose you treat a genuine but limited value as if it were unsurpassable. Suppose you deny your other values, and thereby indirectly deny part of yourself. This partial denial of yourself is tragic. *Osama bin Laden*, well-educated and competent in the use of contemporary technology, abstracted and exclusively identified with a form of Islam which excludes globalization under American economic and military leadership. The chorus sees that a reconciliation between Islam and U.S.-led globalization is necessary, but the lesson might never become clear to bin Laden himself. The idea of tragedy has been abstracted from literary works like Sophocles' and Shakespeare's, but it is more general. It is a possible model (alongside epic struggle against obstacles, lyrical escape from them, and comic over-estimation of ridiculous values) for the interpretation of human action. Forms of fiction become alternative models for historical fact.

Hitler interpreted his own action as heroic and ultimately epic. *Charlie Chaplin* saw it as comic. A psychiatrist might interpret it as a lyrical playing out of adolescent fantasies on the stage of world history. For many Germans it was in the end tragic.

Comedy is often considered to be merely entertaining compared tragedy. Yet Hegel has persuasively argued that comedy is really more profound than tragedy (Hegel, 1927xiv, 535). The ends pursued in great tragic action, though limited, arouse the awe of both protagonists and spectators. In Greek tragedy these ends (family, state) command

respect as ethical. In modern Shakespearean tragedy, the ends are more individual. Yet the energy with which protagonists, like forces of nature, pursue even evil ends commands awe. In comic action, by contrast, the ends do not command awe. The spectator has no illusion, even temporary, that they are absolute or ultimate ends. They are trivial. Laughter is caused by the comic character's pretense of attributing absolute importance to vain ends.

An objective judgment of what is comic, like a judgment of what is tragic, depends on knowledge of values. The ignorant may mock ballet, but ballet is not objectively comical. A dramatist from another generation might write a tragedy about the economic decline of the milkman, and if it is not really tragic it may strike us as comical. Great tragedy, like great art in general, assumes universal human values.

In the seventeenth century *Molière* excelled in the portrayal of vain, ridiculous characters, such as the bourgeois gentleman who hired tutors to acquire aristocratic manners (As I have been speaking prose all my life and just did not know it!). The American radio-television personality Jack Benny responded I'm thinking, I'm thinking! to a robber's insistent threat Your money or your life! We laugh at the ridiculousness of taking social class or money to be of infinite value.

The laughter provoked by the high-brow comedy of a *Molière* is not so pure as that provoked by buffoonery, the comedy of a good clown. In *high-brow comedy*, the spectators look down at and laugh at protagonists who take themselves quite seriously. These protagonists are not aware of the laughter they provoke, and that is why they appear ridiculous. But laughter provoked by the ridiculous is mixed with pain. It is impure. We cannot entirely enjoy the spectacle of people making fools themselves. We must also pity them. If the fool is not embarrassed, the spectator is embarrassed for him. Buffoonery permits a pure sort of laughter because the spectator laughs with the protagonist, not at him.

The comedy of *Molière* satisfies a desire to look down on others. Buffoonery, by contrast, is *low-brow comedy*. It flourishes among the simple people. They lay no claim to superior taste or culture. They treat even the weightiest claims lightly, and they laugh the pompous folly which surrounds them.

All drama requires actors who impersonate characters. But the characters of low-brow comedy often are themselves actors, actors who parody various self-important roles in the comedy of life. They prance and parade about in costumes, mocking the upper classes who take themselves seriously. From the start these comic characters rise above all finite ends pursued in life. For they *know* these ends to be finite.

Here is the argument for saying that *comedy* is, despite appearances more profound than *tragedy*. In tragedy, recognition that a finite end is not infinite is won only at the end. The low-brow comedy of a clown starts where tragedy ends. Knowledge of the vanity of finite human pursuits is its point of departure, not its point of arrival. Despite a surface frivolity, such comedy has a very serious purpose. Because the vanity of finite ends is presupposed, not discovered, comedy shows deeper insight than tragedy. A ridiculous character viewed from the standpoint of high-brow comedy appears unintelligent. But a successful clown embodies great wisdom. Wisdom, which is high-brow comedy is reserved for the audience, is now attained by the comic characters themselves. Clowns do not *discover* that finite values like money or social class are not infinite in importance. Rather, they already *know* it. And they teach it to audiences which take their own superior culture and taste to be the one infinite value.

Greek comedy more than Socrates and philosophy, conveyed to the people a critique of the Greek religion, which deified finite gods. Because no great comic writer in Athens was executed like Socrates, laughter appears to be a more successful teacher than sober philosophy. People who suddenly find themselves laughing at themselves despite themselves are more charitable toward the poet responsible for their laughter than toward the philosopher who would coerce them by argument to change their minds.

Low-brow comedy helps prepare the way for the idea of an infinite God by its criticism of those who raise their finite values we know in our experience to the level of ultimate values embodied in the Olympian gods. Infinite value, the final good, lies in the transition of all finite values into one another. It lies in their relativity to one another. But the infinite good must include not only all the limited values that you have experienced, but also those which other individuals have experienced. It must even include the values which the animals, plants, and perhaps even minerals have experienced. As such an unlimited good begins to acquire cosmic proportions, it actually begins to appear as an infinite God which, far from excluding finite values, includes them all

The earliest Greek comedies have not come down to us. The earliest ones we have are by *Aristophanes* (447-385 B.C.). His comedy is not pure buffoonery. It is highly critical of certain types of individual found in the Athens of his time, philosophers irreverent of tradition, sophists, and demagogic politicians. He is identified with a rural way of life threatened by war and Athenian imperialism, and fated to decline through the expansion of trade and cosmopolitan sophistication.

3. *Hermeneutics: The Theory and Art of Interpretation*

...Reformation and post-Reformation Protestant theologians... attempted to base theology on the Bible alone. In its crudest form, this has meant a constant appeal to the Bible to prove theological assertions. With the development of biblical studies, however, this type of theology has become much more sophisticated. The method is, first of all, to establish the biblical text from the manuscripts and variant readings and, next, to subject this text to the closest scrutiny, taking note, for example, of linguistic considerations, literary sources, and historical background. This constitutes the work of *exegesis*, which aims at ascertaining as far as possible the meaning that the writer intended. The theologian must then go on to ask how the original meaning of the text has been developed in the course of doctrinal history, and what it might be taken to mean in the theologian's own time and cultural situation. This step involves hermeneutics, the science of interpretation. Some hold that interpretation is itself a creative, innovative act, not just the transposition of meaning from an ancient to a modern context. Even a transposition intended to reproduce the exact meaning of the original text may result in substantial changes. Twentieth-century German theologian Rudolf Bultmann advocated a method of "demythologizing" on the assumption that the essential meaning of the New Testament is an understanding of human existence that must be disengaged from the mythological language current at the time when the New Testament was written. Bultmann's project involved the translation of this "essential meaning" into the language of modern existentialist philosophy. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

The above examination of some basic concepts surrounding Greek literature provides a good occasion for differentiating types of interpretation. The understanding of a work or *text* begins within *intra-textual voices*. The work first needs to be considered for itself, in abstraction from its *context*. This kind of interpretation is called *formalist interpretation*. It has also been called *New Criticism* because it rejects the old criticism that emphasizes the history surrounding the text. *Inside* the text there may be whole world of voices, and in formalist criticism we do not bother to ask which is the voice of the work's author. We start with a single voice, the voice of a *protagonist* and then proceed to *antagonists* and possible mediators. The text does not express the voice of the protagonist. It turns out that all the voices are interrelated in a *dialogue circle*, so that the voice of the protagonist cannot be understood apart from *the other voices*. *The entire circle of voices comes to be internalized* within each voice. Each character is within himself or herself a conversation between all the characters. When alone each character retraces past dialogues and rehearses future ones.

A text-based critical method known as formalism was developed by Victor Shklovsky, Vladimir Propp, and other Russian critics early in the 20th century. It involved detailed inquiry into plot structure, narrative perspective, symbolic imagery, and other literary techniques.... Beginning in the late 1940s anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, critic Roland Barthes, and other mid-

century thinkers and scholars initiated French structuralism by applying linguistically inspired formal methods to literature related phenomena [viewed as “texts”]. Structuralism attempted to investigate the “structure” of a culture as a whole by “decoding,” or interpreting, its interactive systems of signs. ... The text-centered methods of the formalist critics were also welcomed in the United States because they meshed well with the concerns of so-called New Critics, who focused on the overall structure and verbal texture of literary works.... Like his British contemporary Sir William Empson, [Cleanth] Brooks applied the skill of close reading chiefly to the analysis of ambiguities, paradoxes, and ironies in individual texts. Many New Critics looked at metaphor, imagery, and other qualities of literary language apart from both a work’s historical setting and any detailed biographical information that might be available about the author. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Interpretation which goes beyond the world of the text is *contextual interpretation*. The series of expanding contexts begins with *author intentions*. What was the author trying to do in the text? *Biographical interpretation* understand author intentions in the context of the author’s entire development and life. Was the text an attempt to make good on some in a previous text? Does it represent a new turn in her or his thinking? Is there a character in the text whose voice is at once the voice of the author? The immediate intentions of the author thus refer to his or her past intentions.

Because the author has contemporaries and antecedents within the *art form*, biographical interpretation leads to interpretation through dialogues in the history of the art form. We may call this *art history interpretation* or *literary history interpretation*. To what predecessors is the artist or author replying. To what school of thought does she or he belong? What is her or his relationship to living contemporaries?

Next comes the criticism that places art and literature in the context of the larger society. What social class does the artist represent. Is the artist a conservative, liberal, revolutionary? Does the art or literature have an ideological message? We shall call this *sociological interpretation*. It has been practiced by *Marxists*.

The largest human context in which to place a work or text is world history. The corresponding interpretative method is *world historical interpretation*. The difficulty of such interpretation is that it presupposes accurate knowledge of the meaning of world history. If world history is a story, if it is organized according to some *narrative*, the meaning of the text/work will depend on its place in that narrative. Does the work express the beginning, a middle stage, or the end of that narrative? But different world historians notoriously have different concepts of the narrative of world history.

For *Saint Augustine* in the fourth-fifth centuries, world history is the *Biblical story* of creation, the fall, and redemption. It is the story of God’s mighty acts in history. For *Karl Marx* in the nineteenth century it is story of economic *class struggle* leading in the end to *communism*, a classless society. For *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, it is a story of *emancipation* from bondage and the struggle for civil rights and other *human rights*. For *Friedrich Nietzsche* world history is an endless cycle of *decadence* and true *aristocratic rule* by our natural superiors. For world historical interpretation to be valid, it would have to be preceded by a work of monumental of monumental proportions in world history.

Generally, *professional historians* do not write books on world history, unless they are perhaps meant as elementary textbooks. Historians are highly specialized. Only philosophers have written world histories, and they disagree. This does not mean that valid world historical interpretation is impossible. It means that it is possible only as part of a far more vast enterprise, and that literary interpreters and art historians who are not philosophers and who, more particularly, have not validated some grand philosophy of world history will hardly be sensitive to the attractions of world historical interpretation.

The largest possible context for any text is all reality. If we try to interpret a text in this context we have the *metaphysical interpretation* to which we have already referred. The *Bible* is interpreted metaphysically when it is asserted that it is the revelation of God. For God is said to be the Creator who is

responsible for the existence of everything else. The interpretation thus places the Bible in the context of all reality. The philosopher G.W.F. Hegel also interpreted texts metaphysically. He held that great artistic, religious, and philosophical works were reality's own self-consciousness and, ultimately, the self-knowledge.

When Shakespeare writes that the whole world is a stage, is he in the world or outside the world? Clearly, he is in the world about which he writes. Even more, he is an agent of the world. Just as what an Olympian athlete accomplishes the nation of which he is a citizen itself accomplishes in and through that athlete, so the world thinks about in and through Shakespeare when Shakespeare thinks about the world. What the member or part accomplishes the whole accomplishes through the part. Thus through Shakespeare the world becomes conscious of itself. Hegel believed that every philosopher worthy of the name contemplates all reality, the subject matter of metaphysics, so that any truly philosophical text is the self-thinking and ultimately self-knowledge of reality (of what Hegel called *the absolute*).

The difficulty of metaphysical interpretation, as we have noted, lies in discovering a true metaphysical theory of the world. Metaphysicians notoriously disagree about the nature of reality. A competent metaphysical interpretation of artistic or literary works would require the interpreter to be a metaphysician, and not just an art critic or literary critic. More than that, a successful interpreter would have to be a metaphysician capable of convincing her public as the validity of her metaphysics. Needless to say, successful the metaphysical or art and literary works of the sort that Hegel offers is rare. It has been especially rare in the twentieth century, a century in which only a minority of philosophers believed in the possibility of metaphysical knowledge.

Biographical interpretation, art history interpretation, and sociological interpretation, and world historical interpretation place the work in the context of past and present society. A still further type of interpretation places it in the context of future responses to it, in the light of the history of its reception by future critics and artists. It is *reception history interpretation*. A classical or *canonical work* establishes a tradition of its interpretation, and the work's meaning is augmented by the ways in which future interpreters apply that meaning to future situations of which the author knew nothing. Thus the meaning of the Bible is one thing, while how a preacher applies it to the contemporary world is something else. Contemporary interpreters make the work relevant to us, and this *relevance* is part of the work's reception history.

In the twentieth century, the name of German philosopher *Hans-Georg Gadamer* has been associated with this type of interpretation. *History* for Gadamer is not only a history of novelty and *change*, but more deeply is the continuation of a *tradition* of interpretation in which the text's meaning is conveyed to us from the past. We have no way of knowing what a text means except by placing ourselves in this tradition. The attempt to bypass the work's reception history or tradition of interpretation and return directly to the past to apprehend objectively the author's intentions inevitably fails. The work in itself is what it is for us as we stand in the history of interpreting it. Moreover, since interpretation implies contemporary application and relevance, and since the contemporary situation is always evolving, a work's meaning in one generation may not be exactly the same as its meaning in another generation.

[Hans-Georg] Gadamer [1900-2002] sought to engage past texts in fruitful dialogue with the present by examining different interpretations of literature throughout history; so do German critic Wolfgang Iser and other proponents of Aesthetics of Reception, which examines readers' responses to literature in a cultural and historical context. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

The tradition of interpretation, while showing some continuity, also shows some novelty according to the situation, according to Gadamer. But literary and art history scholars are able to study the whole historical record of interpretation and distill the work's *essential meaning*. They do this by allowing points

in which interpreters differ drop out while essential points in which interpreters agree are reinforced by repeated throughout the reception history. One understands a great painter by reading all the successive generations of art criticism to which that painter has given rise, remembering what the critics agree upon and forgetting what they disagree about.

But, since contemporary works have not yet produced a reception history, it will be impossible to distill their essential meanings, or even to decide whether they have any essential meaning. Some works, falling dead-born from the press, never receive a reception history at all. They are culturally meaningless. A reception history interpreter will favor classical works with his interpretation. These and the works and traditions that sustain our civilization.

Something reception history interpretation objects to is any attempt by the interpreter to return to the past by a faithful, objective rethinking and reliving of original author or artist intentions. Since the theory and art of interpretation is called *hermeneutics*, returning to the past in this way may be called *hermeneutic self-alienation*. You detach your self from your own perspective in order to take the standpoint of the author or artist. Taking someone else's standpoint is generally known as *empathy*. But can you really climb out of your skin to empathize objectively with an author's intentions? Reception history interpretation suggests that we cannot.

However, contrary to reception history interpretation, it is possible to view the objective understanding the alien standpoint of another writer or person as not only possible but even scientific. Using empathy we interpret the words, products, and actions of another person by asking: what would you have intended, thought, or felt if you had said or done that? If an answer comes to mind, it is an *empathetic interpretive hypothesis* that can be tested by the further words and behavior of the person. The hypothesis permits you to deduce and thus predict future words and behavior. If they are not forthcoming your interpretive hypothesis is apparently refuted and you have to look around for another hypothesis.

If this is an accurate picture of interpreting author or artist intentions, such interpretation proceeds by the same *hypothetico-deductive method* common in the physical sciences. The difference is that in the *physical sciences* our hypotheses are about *universal causal laws*, while in the *human sciences* of interpretation we attempt to understand by our hypotheses a the artist or author as an unrepeatable *individual*. This is not to say, however, that interpretation of a work is exhausted by understanding author intentions. It is only to suggest that ever closely understanding of such intentions is possible, though our hypotheses are never infallible. It is to suggest that reception history interpretation does not replace biographical interpretation.

Another method of interpretation may be called *creative interpretation*. It has been practiced in recent decades by the French philosopher *Jacques Derrida*. According to this view, the text is there to be *deconstructed*. Within the most elegant text or system of thought we can always find, if we try, tell-tale signs that all is not well with it. There are always little cracks in the edifice, little contradictions. Normally readers read looking for coherence. Derrida reads looking for expressions of incoherence in the margins. He thinks that written texts testify to the fact that we are forever cut off from knowledge of the author's original intentions. To know Plato's intentions is to sit at his feet and hear his oral exchanges in a concrete context. But all we have are texts, his dialogues. Plato's *speaker meaning* is gone, and what replaces it is our *reader meaning*. Precisely because original speaker meaning is gone, it is *not* there to serve as an objective standard for judging the truth of the reader's interpretation. Each reader plays with the text and uses it as a springboard for his or her own creative interpretations. Each interpretation is really a new text, and so each text potentially occasions countless other texts. The meaning of the text lies in all the creative interpretations to which it gives rise. In reception history interpretation, interpretation of a work conveys a

tradition in which the essential meaning common to all interpretations of works from the same culture is distilled and perpetuated. The essential meaning of a Shakespearean tragedy and of a book of the New Testament is the same to the extent that both works express the same Western Christian tradition. However, in Derrida's method of creative interpretation by deconstruction of the text and by sovereign laughter at it there is no tradition or continuity of interpretation. The history of a text's interpretation is a history of the interpreter's irreverent emancipation from its authority as a classic or as a part of some authoritative *canon*.

[Jacques] Derrida's [1927-]... contends that the traditional... way of reading makes a number of false assumptions about the nature of texts. A traditional reader believes that [1] language is capable of expressing ideas without changing them, that [2] in the hierarchy of language writing is secondary to speech, and that [3] the author of a text is the source of its meaning. Derrida's deconstructive style of reading subverts these assumptions and challenges the idea that a text has an unchanging, unified meaning.... Derrida questions this assumption. As a result, the author's intentions in speaking cannot be unconditionally accepted. This multiplies the number of legitimate interpretations of a text. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Two related methods of interpretation left out of the above list are *official interpretation* and *rational interpretation*. Official interpretation may be called authoritative interpretation. When a text belongs to a canon within a certain community so that it has an authoritative role in that community, officials in that community usually interpret it in a way to influence the behavior of members of the community. Muslim leaders interpret the Koran, Catholic and Protestant clergy interpret the Bible, the Communist Party in the Soviet Union interpreted *Das Kapital*, and the Supreme Court interprets the Constitution.

Rational interpretation arises out of official interpretation. Suppose that a text belongs to the official or semi-official canon of a community, serving as the basis of its legitimacy. Suppose also that the text encounters widespread incredulity in the community under the official interpretation. The community then faces a *legitimation crisis*. Rational interpretation is a response to that crisis. The interpreter practicing rational interpretation searches beneath the official (or literal) interpretation to find a different interpretation which has the advantage of being true. The authority of a legal, religious, or other founding text depends on the general conviction that its message is true. If the text at all costs must express truth, it cannot be allowed to mean what is false. If people no longer believe in the existence of a Creator God, for example, rational interpretation may assert that the *Bible* really holds God to exist under some other description that people today find to be more reasonable. Rational interpretation is close to what Rudolf Karl Bultmann called "demythologization".

[Rudolf Karl] Bultmann [1874-1976], a skeptic in regard to the historical elements of the Bible, believed that the Scriptures, and especially the Gospels, must undergo a demythologization, or reinterpretation, of those mythical elements that have no application or relevance to contemporary concerns. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Rational interpretation salvages the text from threats to its authority as a part of a community's canon. But it assumes that a text's meaning according to the *authors' intentions* may not be its true meaning. It is not its true meaning if the history of science or philosophy subsequent to the text's composition shows that the original authors understood the text to assert false beliefs. As a result rational interpretation interprets texts in the light of present-day perceptions of what is rational. Since what is considered rational changes over time, rational interpretation itself can change. Such interpretation seems reliable only when what is considered rational is no longer controversial and has come to be recognized by a universal consensus. Where this is not the case, rational interpretation becomes *sectarian interpretation*.

4. From Art to Philosophy

The ancient Greek comedy of pure buffoonery frees the individual from every limited value traditionally considered to be weighty by itself, such as the Olympian gods. Such comedy is not common

among ancient Greek comic authors who have come down to us. Perhaps society preserved the works of certain writers and not others for us because they retained reverence for traditional values.

We have all met cynics who laugh at everything that is substantial and divine to others. By his laughter at everything around him, the cynic makes himself into the sole abiding center of events. *Cynicism* arose as a form of detachment from anything artificial, such as the state, or luxuries. The cynic *Diogenes* (413-327 B.C.) is commonly viewed as a follower of *Socrates*. Like other followers, he picked one aspect of Socrates' teaching and made it the center of his own teaching. Socrates enjoyed bursting the bubble of pretentious fools who claimed knowledge they could not back up in argument. Diogenes seemingly was free of all pretension, and according to legend even lived naked in a tub in the midst of Athens. He may be philosophy's first hippy. Not hiding anything, his lantern led him in a vain quest for another honest man equally free of false pretension. Ugly and careless of his personal appearance, he was a living rebuke to the values of classical Greece.

Diogenes of Sinope (412?-323 bc), Greek philosopher, generally considered the founder of Cynicism, an ancient school of philosophy. Born in Sinope (modern Turkey), Diogenes studied in Athens, where he was a disciple of Greek philosopher Antisthenes, who taught that social conventions should be disregarded and pleasure shunned. Diogenes plunged into a life of austerity and self-mortification. He wore coarse clothing, ate plain food, and slept on the bare ground, in the open streets, or under porticoes. His eccentric life did not, however, lose him the respect of the Athenians, who admired his contempt of comfort. Practical good was the chief aim of Diogenes' philosophy, and he did not conceal his disdain for literature and the fine arts. He laughed at men of letters for reading of the sufferings of Odysseus while neglecting their own problems, and at orators who studied how to enforce truth but not how to practice it. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

One day Diogenes visited *Plato's* elegant home. Stomping mud on Plato's fine rugs, he is reported to have looked up to their pained owner with the stinging comment: *All tread on Plato's pride.* When *Alexander the Great* sought the acquaintance of the cynic philosopher and then asked what he might do for him, the reply was that Alexander might perhaps get out of the way of Diogenes' sun. The judgments of a cynic sound harsh when made in the presence of their targets. Yet they may prove comic when they occur behind the back of those targets, for example as a parody of Plato or Alexander.

Diogenes suggests what a pure cynic would be like. Yet he himself was not such a cynic. He could pop the bubble of the rich and famous, but he did so by taking *nature* in its unadorned state most seriously. He lacked all cynicism about his very earnest recommendation of nature over *convention*.

When the city state dissolved, the classical balance between the individual and the political community was upset in favor of free cynical individuals. Free thought laughed down the claim to sovereignty made by anything other than that very freedom of judgment itself. The individual's triumph over a once immortal city is seen in the importance of *individual immortality* in post-classical Greek mystery religions. To *Homer* immortality was a pale imitation of this life, essentially a misfortune. As championed first by *Socrates* it was a consolation for the misfortunes of this life. The idea of immortality is not uniquely Greek. China and Egypt affirmed it. Yet the Greek idea departs from Eastern ideas. In Greece, eternal life was assigned to an immaterial individual soul.

Classical Greek religion was not a *nature religion*. The Olympian Greek gods were not nature gods. They were human-like. The Greeks did not adopt a pre-Greek idea of humanity and then apply it to the gods. Their humanization of the gods presupposed their own original idea of humanity, embodying what philosophers call reason. A human being was now distinct from a purely natural being, and in the post-classical era this concept of humanity expressed itself in a belief in an immortal individual soul. Individual immortality lifts human dignity above that of a natural object such as a piece of wood. A merely natural object is *divisible*, and hence *mortal*, capable of death. To die is to divide. A human being, who is non-

natural, is indivisible and immortal. According to *Plato* the *soul* cannot die: unlike the body, it does not have spatially separate parts into which it can divide (Plato, *Phaedra*, Estienne nos. 78-80). His idea of the soul has influenced popular Christian notions of immortality, even if orthodox Christianity follows the *Hebrews* more than *Socrates* in asserting the embodiment of the soul in an earthly or heavenly body. For Plato, the soul sees true with a single intellectual eye, while the body sees double, each bodily eye telling a slightly different story.



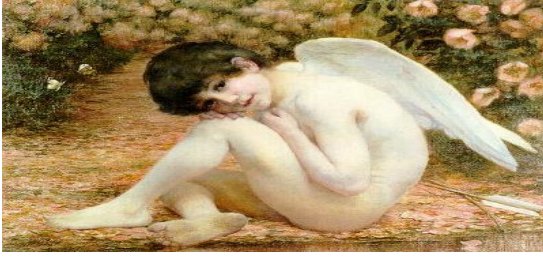
The Mind's
Eye

We may be reserved about the individual soul's immortality based on its indivisibility. Could not the individual soul die by fading away like a flickering flame rather than dividing? Yet a belief in individual immortality, expressing an emerging Western consciousness of human dignity, is a Greek component in our present concept of individual *human rights*. If we believe in the infinite value of an individual human life, we may express our belief by deifying the individual soul to the extent of saying that it is immortal like the gods. In other words, belief in an immortal soul may be a literally false belief to which we nonetheless attach ourselves because it conveys a deeply held belief, which is not explicitly stated, in the infinite worth of every human life. Every human being is unique, and bears unique witness to the truth. No one is replaceable. Thus every individual deserves to be immortal.

By the ethics of respect for human rights, everyone has a right to immortal life to the extent that such a life lies within human control. When, through illness, aging, or accident, an individual human life is cut short, that act of nature is blind, merciless, and never rightful. Respect for the right to life is from the beginning a constant battle against nature, and not just against human aggressors. If in the end nature wins, this means that nature is stronger, but it does not mean that nature suddenly has right on its side. The individual human being is ideally immortal, and ought to live as long as is humanly possible to live as a human being. (It will be noted that what I have just presented is a *rational interpretation* of "The individual human soul is immortal.")

In the dialogue entitled the *Symposium*, Plato does not base immortality on the indivisibility of the soul. He defends a more Eastern concept of depersonalized immortality, in which the individual dissolves into the eternal object of its love. Eros, the love of *desiring* something eventually drowns in *narcissism*, in the love of Reality as one's own infinite self. Plato is a poet as well as a philosopher. He restricted the mythology of gods in the ideal state of the *Republic* (Bk 10, 595-608). Yet in the *Symposium* and elsewhere he uses this very mythology. *Jesus* spoke of the law of love because he addressed the people of the law.

Perhaps *Plato* referred to the gods because he is addressing the people of *sensory beauty*. Yet his aim was to convert them to the appreciation of *supersensory beauty*.



Eros



Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY
Echo and Narcissus

Greek mythological character Narcissus rejected the love of the nymph Echo. In retaliation, the goddess Nemesis caused him to fall in love with himself and he died while pining after his own reflection in a river. The scene is depicted in this work by 17th-century French painter Nicolas Poussin in the Louvre museum in Paris, France.

Microsoft © Encarta © Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Socrates' speech in the *Symposium* gives a more challenging case for immortality than one based on the soul's indivisibility (Plato, *Symposium*, 202-12). Much as Narcissus drowned in his own reflected images, the individual (eros) survives impersonally by fading away into the infinite ocean of beauty (Plato, *Symposium*, 210). The individual soul is desire or desire, but it is immortal only through the satisfaction or death of desire. The individual must die as an individual to be immortal. The individual is immortal by merging with unchanging beauty, the object of love. The concept comes from *Pythagoras*, except for Plato's non-Pythagorean separation of ideal beauty from the cosmos.

A chief assumption underlying classical Greece is that eternal models of individual conduct exist in the world. The statuesque gods of classical Greece are such models. Their beauty attaches us to them. This is the theory of *aesthetic education* developed by the German poet-philosopher *Friedrich Schiller*. We might call it the theory of *aesthetic exemplarism*. Moral education is aesthetic education. The view was also defended by *Shaftesbury* in modern times, but has origins in Greece (Shaftesbury, 1712). It contrasts to Aristotle's view that moral education requires that we attach ourselves to real human role models. The theory of aesthetic education seems to imply that living role models in the real world no longer exist. It seems to imply a lonely romantic longing for a classical city that has been lost.



Friedrich Schiller, 1859-1805

5. Plato's Theory of Universals

The context of Plato's famous theory of *universal forms* (universals) is the belief in aesthetic education found in pre-philosophical Greece. Plato's universal forms are substitutes for the gods. The gods were *individuals* in the natural, sensory space-time world. As such they failed to be abiding models. Only eternal beauty can compensate for vandalization of a beautiful statue. Since the gods were individuals like us, a divinely beautiful statue sculpted by *Pygmalion* could come alive, providing a model for a live human being.

Pygmalion [a sculptor in Roman mythology] hated women and resolved never to marry. He worked, however, for many months on a statue of a beautiful woman, and eventually fell madly in love with it. Disconsolate because the statue remained lifeless and could not respond to his caresses, Pygmalion prayed to Venus, goddess of love, to send him a maiden like his statue. Venus answered his prayer by endowing the statue with life. The maiden, whom Pygmalion called Galatea, returned his love and bore him a son, Paphos, from whom the city sacred to Venus received its name. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Universals cannot come alive in the make-believe world of individual statues. Unlike statues, Platonic universals cannot be vandalized. They are eternal. Yet for that very reason they cannot serve as models for individual human beings. They are viewed as such models by Plato only because he contradictorily views universals to be at once individuals: universal beauty is beautiful, indeed the only thing that is absolutely so (*Symposium*, 210).

I shall argue as a *heuristic dogma* that universals do not exist; that only individuals exist, and that individuals, each being unique and unrepeatable, can be only approximate models for one another. Human beings, finishing with even aesthetic education, ultimately must go beyond external models to create themselves.

Plato's forms were eternal models of beauty as intellectually perceived by philosophers. Temple statues of the gods were pre-philosophical sensory examples of such beauty perceivable by ordinary human beings. But the presentation of sensory models proves deceptive: the gods fell into an interaction with one another and showed themselves to be more *Dionysian* than *Apollonian*. The theory of universals forms served to compensate classical Greece for their loss of any abiding aesthetic forms.



Apollo Belvedere



Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

Dionysus Dionysus, also known as Bacchus, was the Greek god of wine and was celebrated in annual festivals. [The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche contrasted the wild energy and abandon of the Dionysian spirit with the calm serenity of the Apollonian spirit.] Microsoft ® Encarta ® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Let us first consider the case in favor of universal forms. 1. *Universals are either Instantiated or Uninstantiated.* One argument for universals presupposes the emergence of *novelty*. A statue as seen exemplifies beauty. *To exist* in general is to exemplify some particular property, such as beauty. A *universal* is open to *multiple exemplification* by different things, among them *individuals* at different times and places. All individuals exemplify universal properties, but no individuals are themselves exemplifiable properties. They are *ultimate subjects of exemplification*, since they exemplify but are never exemplified. Clearly some universals are exemplified. The grass is green because universal greenness is exemplified by the grass. But if there were no *unexemplified universals* solely open to possible future exemplification, the first human beings could never have emerged.

For something to come into existence is for the *compound universal* of being that thing, e.g., being the Empire State Building, to begin to be exemplified. But in fact human beings have emerged. So the universal referred to by "being human" or "humanity" exists. Humanity must have existed prior to the evolutionary emergence of human beings in order to make this novel emergence possible. Humanity, which was unexemplified at one point in time, comes to be exemplified at a later point in time. Novel emergence is an *accidental state* that happens to a universal. If there are no universals to which accidental states of exemplification and non-exemplification can happen, novelty is unintelligible.

We note that this argument interprets universals as *subjects of change*, sometimes called *substrata* underlying changing states. This strikes some people as odd because Plato, except perhaps in his latest stage of development, described the universal forms as *immutable* or changeless. For the early and middle

Plato only *sense objects* changed. Now Socrates is sitting, and now he is standing. But it is hard to interpret this fact except by supposing that now being seated, a universal, is exemplified by Socrates, and now the same universal is no longer exemplified by him.

The argument from novelty for universals seems to suppose that the *truth* of the statement "Human beings exist" implies a corresponding *fact* to the effect that a universal, being human or humanity, is exemplified. The question raised is this: is it possible to interpret the truth of statements so that it does not presuppose the existence of universals? If this is not possible, it will be hard to avoid the assumption that universals exist. *Nominalists*, who deny universals, will try to show how the assumption can be avoided.

2. *Universals as the Objects of Thinking.* A second argument for the existence of universals notes that each *mental faculty* has its characteristic object. *Consciousness* is relational: it is always consciousness of some *object of consciousness*. Objects of *recollection* are past individual events, things, or persons. Objects of *anticipation* are future events, things or persons. Objects of *sense perception* are present *individuals*, whether events, things, or persons. Objects of *imagination* are individuals—past, present, or future individuals. Or they are entirely outside of space-time, like winged horses which are merely possible individuals to which we *refer* through the *images* which we have of them.) Individuals, each with its own time and place, exemplify universals that can also be exemplified in other times and places.

Thinking is a mental capacity distinct from sense perception, and has its specific type of object, which is a non-individual or universal object. Thinking is a thinking consciousness of a universal object. If an act of thinking exists, its essential relativity to its specific object means that universals also exist. Greenness is a universal because, unlike the grass or any individual, it can, by way of being exemplified, be present in different places at the same time. Yet does this distinct object of thought exist as an *entity* in its own right? Might it not be somehow fictional, perhaps postulated as an *practical presupposition* underlying and enabling *subject-predicate discourse*? Subject-predicate discourse is a virtually universal linguistic practice of *predicating* "universals" of individual *subjects of predication*. But not all the presuppositions that we adopt in order to take part in the practice may be theoretically true. Nominalists might argue that the presupposition that universals exist is made by ordinary human speech, but that does not mean that universals truly exist. Going to church may be to talk as if God exists, but that does not mean he really does.

3. *The Linguistic Argument for Universals.* A third argument for universals is that language contains *abstract names* by which we seem to refer to or name abstract universal entities. Such names include *Abauty@* and *Ablueness@*. Generally, in English an abstract name can be constructed from any adjective by adding "-ness" or "-ity" as an ending. If there is no universal blueness to which *Ablueness@* refers, *Ablueness@* would seem to be a meaningless name. For it would seem to name nothing at all. If abstract names cannot be eliminated from language, there would seem to be a powerful linguistic argument for the existence of universals. We may be right to get rid of abstract names, but in concealed ways they always seem to come back. If we say "The sky is blue" our sentence contains no abstract name. "The sky" is a *definite description* referring (unlike an *indefinite description* like "a star") to one and only one thing, and "blue" is a predicate which is *true of* (truly predicated of) many things. But when we try to explain what we mean by "The sky is blue" we may be unable to avoid saying that it means "The sky exemplifies blueness." And then we find ourselves with abstract names again. *By concrete names* like "Nixon" or "Russia" we *purport to refer* to individuals, but we succeed only if Nixon and Russia exist. Either thinking is much ado about nothing or universal objects exist.

Yet the nominalist might reply that the name "blueness" really refers to this or that particular blueness *under the false description* of being universal blueness. This would be to say that bluenesses are *qualities*

without being universals because each blueness is individual and unique according to its shade and context. But thinking *abstracts from* the full concrete richness of any *particular* blueness by conceiving that blueness under a *general* description that equally applies to other bluenesses. According to this interpretation, thinking does not have a specific object other than individuals. Thinking is a distracted consciousness of individual qualities or other *universal determinations* (e.g., being virtuous, being triangular).

Nominalism holds that any alleged universal quality either does not exist or is in fact a non-universal characteristic, something unique and unrepeatable (Hartshorne, 1971, 33). The fiction of universals enables us to engage in the convenient fiction of *attributing* them to individuals. Universal characteristics as such do not exist, according to nominalists. A universal characteristic of one individual, if it existed, would be open to possible exemplification by another non-universal individual instance. However, every individual instance is distinguished by its unique qualities, characteristics or determinations. Herein lies the *discernibility of non-identical things*. But this is not to say that each thing must be what it is through a unique set of universal characteristics. For each characteristic of a rose may so interpenetrate with its other characteristics that none of its characteristics is a universal characteristic open to multiple exemplification.

Each redness is differentiated from every other redness by the individual that has that redness. It is differentiated by all the other individual characteristics that that individual alone has. Greenness₁ of a person who is sick is, through its context, qualitatively different from the greenness₂ of a plant that is healthy. Only individual characteristics exist. The sickly greenness of a cartoon face is not the healthy greenness of a plant. This illustrates how the greenness of a thing is modified by its unique context.

4. *The Universal as the One in the Many*. We may argue for the existence of universals by starting with that of individuals. Individuals exist. Each individual has its exclusive place in *time* and (at least in the case of material bodies) in *space*, and they have properties. No body can be in two places at the same time. But the properties of individuals are not themselves individuals, since they are not located in time or space. A body as a whole can only be at one place at a time. Part of a body can be in one place and another part in another place, but the whole body cannot be in two mutually exclusive places. Yet a property of a body, such as heaviness, can be found in other bodies in completely different places. Heaviness is not literally “in” any body in the sense that its physical parts are “in” it. It can be exemplified elsewhere by different bodies at the same time. In this seen heaviness is a “one in the many.” However, what is, like heaviness, wholly present in different places at the same time cannot be an individual. It is a universal open to multiple instances.

A criticism of this argument is that it *assumes* but does not *prove* that one heaviness can be in different bodies. If every case of heaviness is individual and unique, there is strictly speaking no “one in the many.” There is just a many, and each heaviness can only be at one place at a time.

5. *Universals as Objects of Intellectual Intuition*. Attribution cannot be claimed without universals to attribute. One argument for universals is based on *intuition*, i.e., on an alleged immediate or direct awareness of universals. What one knows directly, by direct acquaintance, must exist. In developing this argument we enter into a twentieth century school of philosophy, the *phenomenological movement*, that has asserted the purpose of philosophy to be the careful description of what is known by experience or intuition. Ordinary language and commonsense frequently misdescribe what we intuit. Thus sometimes we speak of the *contents* of consciousness, but little reflection is required to see that consciousness is not a box. Consciousness, as the founder of phenomenology *Edmund Husserl* asserted, essentially has objects, but it does not have contents. The objects of consciousness are beyond it, not in it. Consciousness is a presence before objects that *transcend* it.



But consciousness should not be conceived as a *substance* or enduring *substratum* of different states. Concretely speaking, consciousness is always this or that spontaneous *act of consciousness*. Every act of consciousness has some object, but it cannot have merely one object. For consciousness is a contrast effect. For example, you can be conscious of the grass as green only in contrast to the sky as blue. Consciousness of an object is thus always consciousness of other contrasting objects. Objects of consciousness are either simple (e.g., greenness) or compound (e.g., triangularity). *Compound objects* are constructed by a succession of acts of consciousness, of *mental acts*. If we suppose that eternal *simple universals* such as being red (redness) exist, it would be much more difficult to argue that eternal *compound universals* like triangularity (being three-sided + being a figure + being plane + being closed) exist. For compound universals are compounded or constructed by temporal, historical constructive acts of consciousness. They appear to be *mental constructs*. Plato's "eternal" model of the ideal state in the *Republic*, for example, is far too colored by his own life situation as an aristocratic critic of Athenian democracy to be convincing as a truly eternal model.

The relationship of consciousness to its objects is called *intentionality*: consciousness is directed to or intends objects. Some of these objects are in the total *field of consciousness*, and acts of consciousness are aware of them directly or intuitively. We may call them *immanent objects* of consciousness. Other objects are intended without the *intention* being intuitively fulfilled, and we may call them *transcendent objects* of consciousness. Your headache is an immanent objects to you, but to me (barring telepathy) it is a transcendent object. Your present act of consciousness is the active center of your total field of consciousness. Your act of consciousness becomes an object of your consciousness by reflection, but it can occur without being such an object. But your reflective awareness of your original act of realizing you won a race may displace or at least modify that realization.

Bertrand Russell, the twentieth century English philosopher who also defended the reality of universal forms, distinguished between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance. Many things we know only indirectly and by description. For example, until recently we could have only *knowledge by description* of the other side of the moon. Of other things, such as your own feelings, you presumably have *knowledge by direct acquaintance*, although you can of course be mistaken as to what type of feeling your feeling is. If you know something by direct acquaintance, what you have knowledge of surely exists, but you may still know it under a false description, so that your knowledge itself partially false, containing at least one false belief. For example, mistaking infatuation for love you may mistakenly believe you are in love. True knowledge by acquaintance is also knowledge by description, since it implies some classification of what you are acquainted with.

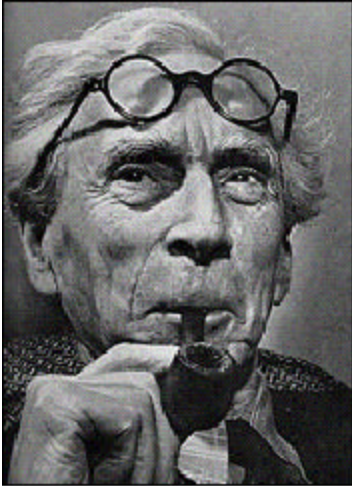


Photo credit: Larry Burrows

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)

Returning now to universals, some people, and notably Edmund Husserl, have claimed that they have direct acquaintance with universals. Try this experiment. Perceive the red rose. You are now having a sense perception, and are *directly* aware of the rose without any intermediary images between you and the rose itself. This is true even though you are not aware of the rose *completely*, since you see it only from one perspective in its surrounding space. There many sides of the rose that you do not directly see in seeing the rose, and in the case of these sides images stand as intermediaries between you and those aspects themselves.

To continue the experiment, now shift your attention from the red rose that you are perceiving to the redness of which this rose is but one example. You are no longer primarily perceiving the rose, but are now primarily thinking its universal redness. Therefore, universal redness, as an object of *intellectual intuition* rather than *sensory intuition*, exists. However, though there is little doubt that you are directly aware of something when you say you are thinking redness, it is not at all obvious that what you are directly aware of is a universal. In saying it is a universal you may be misdescribing it.

If phenomenology is the search for correct description, replacing *theories* about what is experienced with the closest possible attention to what is actually experienced, phenomenology may have to abandon Husserl's *essentialism*, i.e., his *Platonic realism* or belief in universals. For the more faithfully you attend to this particular redness, the redness of this particular rose, the more you may be convinced with practitioners of twentieth century American *color-field painting* that the redness of in painting is never just a self-same general redness plugged into variable positions on the canvass.

Color-Field Painting, a style of American abstract painting that first developed in the late 1940s, when it was characterized by large fields of intense color.... Like all abstract painters, color-field painters rejected the depiction of recognizable forms. But they also rejected all traces of symbolism in painting and felt that even abstract linear form, as in the drip paintings by action painter Jackson Pollock, distracted from the direct experience of pure color, exalted and indescribable. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.



© 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko

/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York./Bridgeman Art Library, London/New York

Untitled by Mark Rothko Abstract expressionist painter Mark Rothko used color to convey emotion. The large, flat rectangles of color in this untitled painting from 1968 are typical of his work. Rothko soaked paint into the canvas, then added thin, transparent layers of paint to create a luminous effect. Microsoft ® Encarta ® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Even when it seems that two rednesses are identical, closer attention often reveals that they are different. Can we prove that no two rednesses can ever be identical, that if we look harder we can always find a difference? The general argument for this view, without requiring you to look eternally for the difference between two rednesses, leans heavily on the concept of *context*. If an object 1. is what it is through all of its properties (and not just through privileged *essential properties*), if therefore 2. it is what it is through any *relational properties* which it has as well as through its *non-relational properties*, if 3. it has relations to objects in its context, if 4. no total context can be exactly repeated, and if 5. the redness before you in a painting is just such an object in a unique context, it would, it seems, follow that that redness is not a universal quality.

Of course even nominalists write and speak as if universals did exist. The presupposition of universals is an enabling presupposition of human discourse. The presupposition is necessary because of the complexity that a totally *nominalistic language* would require. We could not say “The rose is red.” We might try to say something like “Rosiness₉₈₇₅₄ includes Redness₇₆₅₀₉.” Every rosiness and redness would have its own sub number, and no limit could be assigned to the number of sub numbers. But the person who makes such a statement could not be understood by other persons because the unique context that gives one rosiness its identity in the experience of one person would never occur in the experience of another person. Barring telepathy, one person would never know by acquaintance what the other person was referring to. Without presupposing universal concepts, i.e., concepts of universals, there would actually be no way of classifying some objects as rosinesses in contrast to other objects as rednesses. Presumably rednesses have a greater *similarity* to one another than they have to rosinesses.

Bertrand Russell, who believed that universals existed, held that nominalists were obliged to dissolve each universal into a similarity between individual characteristics, but that similarity itself was a universal, so that there was one universal entity that even they could not avoid. However, if we are going to admit one universal, what is the argument against opening the flood gates all the way and admitting millions? A nominalist response to Russell consists in seeing that similarities themselves are individual. The similarity of A to B is not the similarity of C to D. Therefore, an account of unique individuals in a class of rednesses by a Platonic analysis into relations of similarity between its members ends up as a nominalistic analysis of similarity into the various unique cases of similarity.

The possible illusoriness of an entity's intuited qualitative identity is shown by the possible intuited identity of color quality A and B, and of B and C, but without any such intuited identity between A and C. Two colors, if identical to a third, logically must be identical to each other. The intuition of identity between alleged universal qualities A and B, or B and C, is therefore fallible. That a quality is a universal therefore cannot be known intuitively. If we cannot tell the redness of one thing and the redness of something else apart, that does not mean that they are the same universal redness. For an undetected difference may always emerge by a simple argument parallel to the one above. This does not prove that there are no universal characteristics. The rednesses of two different things intuited to be indistinguishable may well be, as far as the present argument goes, a single universal redness. The argument only proves that the intuition of sameness is not sufficient to prove the existence of universals.

Note that if there are no universals, there are no instances either. In a theory of universals, *instances* serve to distinguish one case of universal redness from other. The redness is the same, but the instances are different. But if each redness is in itself qualitatively different from any other redness, different cases of redness are no longer different instances of the same redness. Thus without universal redness instances are not needed to distinguish the different cases. But we will still want to avoid saying that only individual qualities and characteristics exist. Redness is not red. Yet something is red! If it is not an instance of a redness open to multiple instantiation, we may say instead that it is an *exhibitor* of a particular redness. It does not exemplify a universal quality, but it exhibits an individual characteristics.

The world thus seems to consist in individual characteristics and their exhibitors. Before we said that *to be is to have universal properties*. Now we say that *to be is to be an individual characteristic or an exhibitor of such a characteristic*. When to be was to have universal properties, these properties could exist only if they in turn had other properties, so that an *infinite series* of ascending *types* of property unfolds before our eyes. Such a series is implied by Bertrand Russell's *theory of types*. There are individuals, then properties of individuals like being green, and then properties of these properties like being colored, and so on. The grass is green, greenness is a color, and being a color is a kind of sense quality, a kind of sense quality is.... Try to fill in the blank.

This *infinite regress* does not arise if we assume that the *identity* of greenness does not lie in the characteristics it has, but in the characteristic which it is. The classical *definition of identity* says that two things are identical if each has the same set of properties as the other. We now say that two things are identical if and only if each is the same characteristic as the other, or if each exhibits the same characteristic as the other. Exhibitors exist by having characteristics, but characteristics exist by being characteristics. Thus a particular greenness may exhibit a particular characteristic such as being a color quality, but it need not exhibit characteristics in order to exist. Greenness can exist without exhibiting a characteristic of being a color quality. For being a color quality is a compound quality which does not exist until it is compounded by alternating (disjoining) particular colors: being colored is compounded as being either blue or yellow or red or green, and so on. Yet if I contemplate a particular greenness, I do not find in it such a disjunction. I could contemplate that greenness without ever having encountered or noted any redness. Being colored is constructed from observing many different colors and then placing them in alternation. It is not derived from observation of any single color.

If the German poet *Goethe* is right, green, the color of vegetation, symbolizes peace, and it stands in opposition to red, the color of animal blood that symbolizes aggression against peace. Yellow, the color of the sun symbolizing light, is yellowness only as relatedness to blueness, which is the color of the infinite heavens symbolizing the darkness which light penetrates and dissipates. If this is correct, to think of any yellow is to think of some blueness to which it is related as its opposite. But this statement is true only by virtue of the fact that the yellowness is understood in the context of some sunniness. But that context is

contingent. A different yellowness could occur with a different context. Imagine a world in which some yellowness is the color of blood, or a world in which sense impressions exhibit rednesses but in which they are not associated with blood. Or imagine a world in which retina do not respond to green light waves but do respond to red light waves. Rednesses would exist which did not contain the same opposition to greennesses. They would not contain the present opposition of aggressiveness to peacefulness.

Goethe (1749-1832)



Petro Citati explains Goethe's theory in terms of "'the ancient, mysterious hexagon' of colors, dear to the alchemists: yellow: the color closest to light, merry and tenderly stimulating, which expands the heart and soothes the spirit.

Reddish yellow (orange), which gives the eye a sensation of warmth, recalling the sun's rays at sunset.

Violent reddish yellow (red lead), energetic, crude, primitive, which seems to transfix the gaze, enrages animals, and generates an incredible excitement.

Blue: dark, distant, cold, sad.

Bluish red: tender, disquieting.

Reddish blue: constituting an almost unbearable presence.

Green: where eye and ear find true rest.

Purplish red: the color that contains all other colors and cloaks the sovereigns and popes; also the terrible color that will light up heaven and earth at the Last Judgment." [Petro Citati, *Goethe*. New York: The Dial Press, 1974, p. 23.]

If nominalism is true, Plato's belief in immortality including a preexistence and afterlife contemplating exemplary universals is false. Sorting different imperfect sensory squares according to their perfect models may be an ability of infants, even prior to learning language, to form abstract concepts (Plato, *Meno*, 81-86). These concepts resemble, but do not perfectly match, imperfect triangles in this world. The truth that the grass is green becomes an approximation of an abstracted concept of greenness to a unique particular greenness of the grass. And since approximation comes in degrees, we are forced to conclude that truth also comes in degrees.

6. Pythagoras' Theory of Immortality

For Pythagoreans both before and after Plato, the soul is also immortal. Yet their soul, unlike Plato's, is at once bodily. It does not essentially depend on its mortal individual body. When its mortal individual body dies it can discover its immortal cosmic body. The physical cosmos is a macrocosmic community of microcosmic individual souls. The immortality of the soul is the presence of the macrocosm in the microcosm.



Culver Pictures Pythagoras

Considered the first true mathematician, Pythagoras established a movement in 6th-century bc southern Italy that emphasized the study of mathematics as a means to understanding all relationships in the natural world. Microsoft © Encarta © Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

The cosmos is immortal. For later Pythagoreans if not for Pythagoras himself, it is all-encompassing. There is nothing apart from it that could destroy it. At most the Pythagorean *music of the heavens* may become temporarily dissonant. Yet dissonance itself is a revelation of cosmic harmony by its absence.

Philosophy for Pythagoras is born of a desire for immortality, a desire to escape the cycle of individual births and deaths. Yet he does not offer an immortality of escape from the cosmos. Rather, he promises increasing empathetic identification with the eternal cosmic community of perspectives. The individual, realizing immortality gradually, becomes a microcosmic reflection in miniature of the cosmos.

“Microcosm” and “Macrocosm” [are] two philosophical terms, opposite in meaning, used to explain the relationship between man and the universe. The term microcosm denotes the conception of man as a complete world, universe, or cosmos, in miniature, within himself. Macrocosm refers to the idea of the whole gigantic universe outside man's nature. The microcosm concept was utilized by a number of great thinkers ranging from the 5th-century bc Greek philosopher Democritus [as well as Pythagoras] to the 17th-century German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Microsoft© Encarta© Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Philosophy is not, as Aristotle thought (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk 1, 1. 1) just curiosity, wonder, cleverness, or a love of solving riddles. It is homesickness, weariness of travel. The cycle of births and deaths encompasses the games of life. To win honors is to gain a new lease on life. To lose is to die again. Those who live for the honor of winning must prepare for themselves the death of losing.

Since antiquity Olympic games have been supported by merchants selling wares to the crowd, who live and die by the ebb and flow of profit. A Pythagorean philosopher, yesterday's hero or ruined merchant, is detached from honor and wealth. An all-consuming ambition for glory or wealth in the political and economic games of life is the folly of endless births and deaths.



Vanni/Art Resource, NY Ruins at Olympia

The site of the ancient Olympic Games was a sanctuary consisting of temples and buildings to honor the mythological gods of ancient Greece. The games began with a ceremony and sacrifice to the gods. The *exedra*, or sitting area, pictured here is among the ruins at Olympia. Microsoft © Encarta © Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

A Pythagorean philosopher views these games as a non-partisan spectator from the sidelines. The ways of the world are a spectacle beheld from a theoretical point of view. The *explanatory* point of view traces an object's causes and effects; the *theoretical* view loses itself in abstract objects, universal forms, laws, and systems of law, or in the cosmos as a whole. It is the aesthetic point of view raised to the intellectual level, contemplating intellectual rather than sensory objects. If the theoretical point of view were maintained permanently, immortality would be assured. Death touches those who take the practical point of view, the point of view of Eros, desire for chancy necessities of life. The paradox is that we must satisfy our desire for food, water, and sleep to have leisure for theoretical life. The immortality that this life affords is at most an intermittent participation in eternal life.



Dionysius Theatre, Athen. The design of the ancient Greek theatre invented was a physical embodiment of the idea of spectatorship behind Pythagoras' idea of theoretical contemplation.

To take a detached view of oneself is to view of the scale on which one locates oneself. To behold an evolutionary scale from the amoeba to human beings is to imagine ourselves as part of a biosphere, not separate in over-all form from other species. We view ourselves less self-centeredly. To behold a scale of planets from the sun to Pluto is also to view ourselves with greater detachment, not merely as inhabitants of earth. To behold the scale of world powers since ancient Egypt to the present is for the United States to see itself more theoretically.

Listen to the ascending and descending forms of the indicated scales as they sound when built on the pitch of middle c.

Diatonic (Major) Scale

Diatonic (Melodic Minor) Scale

Chromatic Scale

Whole Tone Scale

Pentatonic Scale

Encarta Encyclopedia, © Microsoft Corporation. All Rights Reserved.

Pythagoras modeled the cosmos on musical scales.

To contemplate the scale of all perspectives is to free oneself from domination by any one perspective. Individuals internalize other viewpoints within themselves, becoming microcosms of the macrocosm. Internalizing within itself something of other viewpoints, one becomes a replica in miniature of all viewpoints.

Immortality is retirement from taking sides in the games of the world. A microcosmic perspective is attained that includes all perspectives. The microcosmic individual soul is assimilated to the macrocosmic scale of perspectives; the death of an exclusive perspective releases it into a community of perspectives. The death of the detached individual soul restores the harmony of the world soul.

Throughout history patriots have attained immortality in a communal sense by sacrificing themselves so the nation may endure. Communal immortality is not an impersonal immortality of pantheism and the East. Communal immortality supposes that the individual is essentially a community or dialogue of all passing individual perspectives, walks of life past, present, and future, within the cosmos. Only the cosmos is immortal. Yet immortality through the cosmos is as illusory as that attained through nations unless we

grant that inanimate nature consists in souls with which we can empathetically identify. Immortality is attained by true identification with what is immortal. Our ability to identify with the immortal cosmos will depend on Pythagoras' universal kinship of all things.